

React, respond, renew:

Responding to the workforce challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and looking to the future

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Sector-led improvement: the context for the LGAs Workforce response

The LGA's [Sector led-improvement](#) (SLI) offer was first implemented in 2011, providing an alternative to the former, centrally-led, national performance framework. It encompasses a larger programme of support, which workforce is part of—alongside other programme areas including peer support, leadership, productivity and policy.

SLI is underpinned by the following four key principles:

- councils are responsible for their own performance and improvement
- councils are primarily accountable to local communities
- councils have a collective responsibility for the performance of the sector as a whole
- the role of the LGA is to maintain an overview of performance of the sector and to provide tools and support.

With this approach, SLI positions local authorities as leaders of their own improvement, while providing councils support to address self-identified needs. SLI is based on what we have learnt works for improvement – strong political and managerial leadership, challenge from one's peers, the ability to benchmark performance against others through the use of comparable data and the sharing and spreading of good practice. These core tenants have remained constant features throughout the evolution of improvement offer, as during our COVID-19 response.

The workforce support outlined in parts one and two of this document was delivered as part of the [COVID-19 refocused SLI offer](#). In line with the rising number of cases earlier this year, the LGA rapidly focused its entire support offer to ensure its resources remained best placed to help councils address COVID-19 and the various challenges and consequences of this outbreak.

Recovery and renewal support, such as that outlined in part three, will remain a key feature of the SLI offer over coming years. This summary is written in the context of broader evaluation and development of the SLI offer, including [an independent review of SLI](#), which showed the vast majority councils consider it “the right approach”. This SLI offer will continue to adapt to what councils have told is of importance to them so that it remains best positioned to help address councils' present and emerging needs.

Introduction

News of the COVID-19 virus started to appear on the UK media radar during December 2019. By the new year, reports of something many scientists had long been fearful of now appeared inevitable - a world-wide pandemic was on its way. As the situation developed, the UK Prime Minister announced on 23 March 2020 that we were going into lockdown and that unprecedented measures would be taken to try and slow the spread of the virus. From that moment on, our working lives and our personal lives were significantly changed – for much longer than many of us anticipated.

Within local authorities the challenges were hugely significant. This included the continued delivery of many local services and the identification of which services should pause without negatively impacting the community – enabling the redeployment of staff and prioritisation of resources. Large numbers of staff started working from home, other critical and frontline workers were not able to do so - they quickly established how to continue their roles under strict social distancing rules. Members of the community started shielding, needing additional support. Managers had to swiftly adapt to leading 'blended' virtual teams and to respond to huge volumes of (regularly updating) government guidance.

The LGA established fortnightly surveys across the sector to gather and share key data about how local authorities were responding (in relation to workforce issues) during COVID-19. These fortnightly reports are available via our website here <https://www.local.gov.uk/covid-19-workforce-survey-research-reports>

The headlines from the surveys to date show that service disruption remains an issue for councils with two thirds reporting disruption to overall services. Since 1 March over 10,000 additional staff have been recruited, however, local authorities continue to face pressure due to staff absence, at the height of the pandemic meant nearly two-fifths of staff who are unable to work from home, were unavailable for work through 'self-isolation' or ill health. The number of council staff furloughed during the pandemic was around 12,000. Schools are regularly highlighted as the most disrupted service but social care (both adults and children's), bereavement services and revenue and benefit services are also under a lot of pressure as a result of the combination of increased demand and constraints on resources.

COVID-19 was a shock to the workplace. Local authorities had very little time to plan for lockdown and the requirements that would be placed on them to serve the public through the crisis. It was a scenario very few had fully imagined before we were in it. Throughout the UK economy, including in local government, we had to **react**, to **respond** and we're now moving on to **recover**. Across local government, there is an appetite to do more than just recover, and that is to **renew**, much has been learnt during this time that needs to be reflected upon and given due consideration. Returning to a pre-COVID state is not going to be the reality for most.

Phase 1 – react

Responding to COVID-19

For local government employers and employees, the react stage was critical – many of these teams found themselves right at the heart of the UK’s COVID-19 response.

Staff had to adapt to new and different ways of working, with very little notice. Life became dominated by the news cycle, and the daily government updates. News audiences at the [BBC, Channel 4 and others](#) (traditional news broadcasters) soared.

As we began social distancing, social media became important to us for sharing information and for communicating with friends and family. WhatsApp [reported a 40 per cent increase in usage through March](#) and many of us across local government started to use Microsoft Teams, Zoom and other platforms – [embracing video conferencing](#) in a way many had been reluctant to do in the past.

For those whose jobs could not be carried out at home adapting to the social distancing guidelines was the first challenge, specifically providing regular handwashing facilities, and understanding the needs, correct application – and best place to source – personal protective equipment (PPE). Local authorities continued to deliver front line services such as refuse collection, crematorium services, care work and schools continued to open their doors to priority children and those whose parents and carers were key workers.

Local authorities stepped up to support their communities through the crisis, providing and co-ordinating support for those who were shielding, and delivering food packages and medicines. Our public health teams quickly applied their knowledge to the new epidemiology, reviewing the trends in transmission rate and testing, sharing their expertise and knowledge across the local government workforce. Demands on those working in revenues and benefits dramatically rose as they adapted to new ways of working and had to process new applications for emergency support as well as meeting the existing workload.

The reaction across local authorities was to step up, face the challenges directly, and to support communities. This meant jobs were done in different ways, in difficult circumstances and with little clarity about what the future might hold – all the while against the backdrop of a virus that was taking hold and increasingly spreading fear and anxiety throughout communities.

LGA COVID-19 Workforce guidance – react

As councils grappled with new and unforeseen challenges around COVID-19, information sharing became a critical way that the LGA was able to support councils.

The provision of best practice and guidance are already core elements of the SLI programme so this was ramped up across all areas following the onset of the pandemic. The LGA Workforce team focused on providing best practice, advice and guidance to deal with terms and conditions, government advice and employment law issues.

The key LGA Workforce guidance that supported the work of local authorities during the 'react' phase are linked below:

- [resilience and leadership during COVID-19](#)
- [managing the well-being of front-line staff during COVID-19](#)
- [COVID-19 social care staff well-being](#)
- [remote working top tips](#)
- [employment law FAQs](#)
- [guidance on the coronavirus job retention scheme](#)
- [social work together campaign](#)
- [NJC joint circulars during COVID-19](#) (The National Joint Committee made up of employers and trade unions, covering local government services)
- [adult social care and support](#)
- [information about schools](#)
- [managing the wellbeing for furloughed staff during COVID-19](#) – LGA advice to supporting the engagement and wellbeing of furloughed staff during COVID-19
- [managing the wellbeing of remote working during COVID-19](#) – LGA advice and resource.

There were weekly meetings with [regional directors](#) across England, Wales and Northern Ireland (now fortnightly), and the team supported council HR Director regional network meetings updating when required (usually weekly or twice weekly) feeding back issues to government and relevant agencies. We worked closely with Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and other partners to ensure that high-quality, consistent HR advice was fed into the guidance being provided to the many thousands of independent social care provider-employers. This included advice on redeployment and rewards and the proper use and management of volunteers.

We worked with the Department for Education (DfE) and Social Work England to bring social workers back into the profession to support councils and communities during these difficult times. Our role as convenors of the national employers of teachers and school support staff meant we were well placed to coordinate networks across local authorities to support the initial closures and then re-openings of schools.

This period saw huge amounts of Government guidance issued and updated and required coordination and communication on an unprecedented scale.

Phase 2 – respond

By July 2020 we were deep into the 'respond' phase of COVID-19, with many people used to the strange, new world of lockdown, furlough, homebased working, and spending many weeks living in a world dominated by COVID-19.

Parts of the economy started to reopen, such as non-essential shops, and we were allowed to leave our homes more. Some year groups returned to schools, and lockdown rules slowly started to ease. The 'respond' phase was the period of time where things were more settled after the initial shock of lockdown, slowly moving back towards the world of work before COVID-19, but still (by necessity) very heavily bookmarked by government guidance, health and safety advice, and well-being considerations.

For those currently working towards bringing more staff back into offices and workplaces, we've summarised the government's 'Safe Working' guidance and advice which is available on the [LGA workforce webpages](#).

For employers seeking to establish the right way to go about this phase, it's necessary to understand all the implications of staffing decisions. In early Summer 2020 [CIPD guidance](#) suggesting three questions are asked before moving staff from working at home, back into the office. They were:

- is it essential?
- are they safe?
- is it mutually agreed?

We know that risk assessments are a crucial part of this decision making, and there are many examples of templates that can be used and adapt to different workplaces. Examples good practice are shared via the LGA website in the [COVID-19 Good Council Practice pages](#). There are also various options captured on the [Health and Safety Executive website](#).

By 10 July, the Prime Minister's message to the country was "[to go back to work if you can](#)" - this should be done safely, and within the existing government guidance.

The LGA strongly advise employers to consult with local trade unions through this process, and to keep staff as informed and involved in decision making as possible. Good relationships with local trade union branches are almost always achieved via regular and meaningful discussions which allow effective working relationships to grow. [ACAS](#) have also produced detailed guidance on the sorts of questions staff consultation should be

dealing with around. We recommend that every decision be guided by [Public Health England](#) and [HSE](#) advice.

Respond phase considerations:

Social distancing measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•The challenge to re-open the workplace and still manage the social distancing logistics? impacts on facilities management, and space, workstations without the use of open plan desks, what about communal areas, kitchens, doors, lifts etc• Have you got signs and reminders for staff?
Hygiene measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Providing hand sanitiser and hand washing facilities•Considering a deep clean, and how often?•Checks if a workplace has been empty for some time, for example water supply and air conditioning (risk of legionnaires)
Staff re-induction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Re-integrating people to the workplace•Training on how to keep risks minimal•Ensuring you understand any individual concerns (such as shielding, or living with those who are shielding)
Additional measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Is there a need for PPE, under what circumstances•Have you obtained what you need?•How are managing track and trace requirements?
Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Ensuring decisions you take do not unfavourably impact on groups of staff•Involving all staff in the plans for recovery, it should be inclusive, not exclusive•Ensuring individual risk assessments (where necessary) to take account of additional personal risk (extremely clinically vulnerable and for clinically vulnerable staff)
People issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Managing annual leave and implications of carry-over•Managing teams during this time•Creating space for people to discuss their concerns

The psychological impact of COVID-19:

Everyone will have experienced lockdown differently, whether an individual worked from home, continued to work in critical areas or whether they were furloughed. Each had different challenges. Similarly, there will have been ups and downs to every situation for example for those that live with others or those living alone. The impact of this situation is likely to be felt for some time, and likely to impact in ways we don't yet understand. This all means that well-being is going to be increasingly important in the future. There is likely to be a huge range of factors influencing the well-being of all colleagues including:

- domestic challenges

- carer worries, or children/family members interrupting while working from home
- domestic abuse situations
- impact of isolation
- difficulty sleeping
- financial worries and difficulties, which may have been exacerbated by the pandemic
- dealing with ill-health, either personally or for those they care for
- those who have changed their expectations of work and don't want to return to the workplace
- general anxiety
- anxiety linked to coming out of lockdown
- feelings of helplessness, particularly for front line staff
- dealing with bereavement (both personally and professionally)
- overarching exhaustion, as the adrenalin from the response phase of dealing with COVID-19 starts to reduce
- separation anxiety – not able to visit (particularly those vulnerable) family members
- compassion fatigue.

People have been through a lot of very personal and individual challenges during this time, and employers are needing to be mindful of this as the sector re-shapes workplaces and looks to the future. It's very likely that there will be some very serious, longer term implications for mental health, including PTSD as a result of COVID-19. This is certainly the conclusion that the mental health charity [Mind](#) reached, following a survey of 16,000 young people and adults for their report "[The mental health emergency](#)".

They reported:

- Sixty-five per cent of adult participants with a pre-existing mental health problem said it had become worse during lockdown
- The figure was higher (at 75 per cent among people aged 13-24 with pre-existing mental health problems)

- In addition, 22 per cent of participants above the age of 13 without prior experience of mental health problems said that their mental health during lockdown was now poor or very poor
- Women, people with disabilities, those living in social housing, people with eating disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder, or personality disorders, and frontline workers - were more likely to report that their mental health had declined during the pandemic.

[Mind Chief Executive, Paul Farmer](#) said:

“The coronavirus pandemic is as much a mental health emergency as it is a physical one. The devastating loss of life, the impact of lockdown, and the inevitable recession that lies ahead will leave a deep and lasting scar on our nation’s mental health. Those of us who were already struggling with our mental health have fared worst, but we also know that many people who were previously well will now develop mental health problems, as a direct consequence of the pandemic.”

It is estimated that one in four women and one in six men will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime. Often the workplace may be a victim’s only safe place. However, during lockdown and while working from home, many employees would have faced increased risks of suffering domestic abuse without access to those safe places or support from their employer. The charity [Safe Lives](#) reported significant increased demands on all their services during COVID-19. The LGA provided updated guidance on [Domestic Abuse](#) during this time, and produced a new [guide for employers](#).

As employers, it’s likely we will need to be more cognisant and proactive on issues of staff well-being than ever before.

Research suggests that good organisational leadership and a supportive work culture can have a positive impact on the psychological wellbeing of these staff before, during and after the crisis. The LGA Workforce team has provided [a range of resources to support front line social care](#).

Don’t forget the suite of [wellbeing guides, plus general support and guidance](#) on the LGA Workforce website pages. We anticipate this issue will need more attention than ever both during – and after – COVID-19.

Phase 3 – recovery and renewal

As we move into recovery and renewal, we need to review the response across local government during the “react” and “respond” phases: reflect on what went well, perhaps re-evaluate our structures, practices and assumptions. We may have been surprised about which roles emerged as critical during the pandemic, and it might be that the pandemic revealed either a skills shortage, or the need to re-shape certain roles. Councils are focused on delivering excellent public services to communities, while being as efficient as possible. As the world of work modernises around us, and the demands from local communities evolve – and as we become used to the technology that has enabled us through lockdown – we start to understand that learning from the challenge of COVID-19 and considering ways to future proof local government is the next important step on this journey.

Across local authorities, we’re hearing that recovery alone isn’t enough. The impact and effort in responding to the pandemic has led to many across local government wanting more than simply returning to how things were before. This is why we think the next stage is about more than recovery, it’s about renewal, though that’s a much bigger set of questions to consider.

In mid-June 2020, the [ONS Opinions and Lifestyle survey](#) reported:

- Almost half of adults (43 per cent) reported that there were some aspects of their lifestyle that had changed for the better since the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic
- Of those who reported that some aspects of their lifestyle had changed for the better, over half (56 per cent) said that they were now able to spend more quality time with people they lived with, while 50 per cent were enjoying a slower pace of life and 47 per cent preferred that they were spending less time travelling

Themes that are already emerging about future proofing the local government workforce are:

- leadership - ensuring your leaders are excellent decision makers and communicators
- management skills – managing a flexible, agile/adaptable workforce, and keeping staff motivated
- succession planning – managing attrition rates and an aging workforce
- building and developing effective teams, in a blended and agile workforce
- ensuring jobs are correctly shaped, to deliver the strategy of each local authority

- ensuring you have the necessary behaviours in your workplace, to ensure success
- equality, diversity and inclusion – continuing to make progress across local government, and ensuring the future is inclusive of all the talent in our community
- identification of critical job roles needed for business continuity
- recruitment – particularly into the roles and skills that communities need for the future
- building trust and effective communications.

We are all aware of the impact the pandemic has had on the economy so far, and we can't yet know what that will mean in the future. But we can be sure that this underlines the importance of aligning workforce strategy to your overall business council's objectives. Local communities are going to need to be confident we're getting this right.

Shared issues and values across the public sector workforce

Whilst there is no doubt that the NHS and its workforce are pre-eminent in public perceptions of the response to the pandemic, there is clearly growing respect for all the critical workers across local government, including education and fire, and especially in social care who have been on the front-line of the response. We need to make sure these views are amplified and ensure that they translate into more effective recruitment and workforce development across the sector.

Before the pandemic, much attention was focused on effective integration of public services – especially health and social care in localities. We need to ensure that integration between service partners carries on and so due attention is paid to shared workforce issues including better coordinated workforce planning and common skills and training needs. We also need to work with partners at a national level to examine how competition for potential recruits can be minimised by a sensibly coordinated approach to reward and other terms and conditions. In social care it is clear there is a critical need to ensure a meaningful 'parity of esteem' between the 1.5 million social care workforce and their counterparts in the NHS. We are making a full contribution to the development of a social care workforce plan to sit alongside the [NHS people plan](#) which has been redeveloped in the light of the pandemic. More information about the LGA work on social care reform is [available here](#).

Working with colleagues in the [Care and Health Improvement Programme](#), we have already begun work on a priority plan looking at workforce planning, cultural change and leadership across social care as well as at the level of pay for social care workers compared with NHS equivalents.

The end of the office?

Just as Mark Twain expressed that reports of his death had been greatly exaggerated, it's possible that the same applies to the death of the office. While many have welcomed the increased flexibility and time saved by cutting out the commute, home-based working simply doesn't work for everyone, which we explore further below.

Managing remotely

- tips for managing teams remotely [contained in our blog](#)
- we like these top tips for [managing remote meetings](#) – but there are loads other tips online too
- we are also providing a [webinar on Managing Remotely](#) and will be providing a supplement to go along with the webinar with top tips and advice.

BBC news reported that flexible remote working will be the “new normal” in an [online piece published 22 May](#), and [Mark Richer, the CEO of Starleaf UK](#) was saying in May that three out of five people would like to work from home more often than they did before the lockdown and that one in five 18-34 year olds would move to a different area if they could work from home more often.

A number of local authorities are already considering a move to full home-based working for those that can, so this is a fascinating issue. Our advice is to treat this consideration like any other workforce issue:

- explore the rationale
- project plan
- consider the benefits
- review the risks
- undertake an equality impact assessment
- consult staff.

At the start of the lockdown, [IER ran a survey](#) to see how people were coping working from home, and their results captured an increase in neck, back and other muscular-skeletal complaints (resulting from a lack of good display screen equipment in the home) and that people were exercising less, sleeping less well and drinking more alcohol. Whether or not some of that was a reaction to COVID-19 itself remains to be seen – but this study does help identify some of the issues that need careful consideration.

Of course there are many positives that can be had from remote working and other research from [IES](#) has focused on the benefits gained during the pandemic with this regard. There may be benefits to organisations in terms of costs and productivity too (according to this [Forbes](#) article as one example). Anecdotal evidence across the LGA has employees reporting they feel a greater inclusivity within their teams through online working via [Teams](#)

or [Zoom](#) allowing for collaboration regardless of location. This does provide the potential for opening a wider talent pool from which to appoint in many roles. It's likely too that there are also increasing expectations from staff to be able to work from home, roles that were previously considered "office based" have now had to be done from home, and where that has been successful it may be difficult for an employer to turn back the clock.

Issues to consider:

- Equality – does your home/office working policy consider how home-based working can both exclude but also potential widen the scope for talent?
- Unconscious bias – is the window into a colleague's home always welcome?
- How are informal discussions and ideas sharing/prompting going to happen?
- Are you bringing people together physically, when, where and how often?
- How do you induct new staff and on-board new recruits?
- Equipment, costs, deployment and trouble shooting.
- Investment in technology, IT skills.
- Managing remote teams.
- What does leadership and role modelling look like?
- Change in performance indicators – remodelled to reflect remote working.
- Access to childcare.
- Caregiving responsibilities.

The LGA Workforce Team has a range of services to support the return to the workplace / the new business as usual:

- [TimeWise](#) has additional ideas to help you plan flexible approaches to work. Find out who's doing this already, and what's working. Top tip, our [website](#) contains information about working in this way and you can watch the video on the work [Aylebury Vale council](#) have done on working in a more agile way.
- Mapping the [Employee Experience](#) is key and the LGA is developing staff surveys to help councils better understand the employee experience during COVID-19. These surveys are quickly delivered and the reports and feedback save councils time and

resources.

- Although [HSE provided advice on temporary arrangements for DSE](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic the real standard that they promote for [long term agile/mobile working](#) will be increasingly relevant.
- Other information on 'Guidance on managing the musculoskeletal risks from mobile working' has been produced by the [Chartered Institute of Ergonomics and Human Factors](#).
- Watch out for [digital presenteeism](#) – a growing concern of employees feeling that as they're working from home they should be always online, which clearly doesn't help wellbeing or productivity.

Weighing all those issues up – it's likely the future workplace will be “blended” - a mixture of home-based working (for those roles that allow it) and office-based or face-to-face work. Employers will need to think more strategically about when to travel, when a meeting needs to be face-to-face, how to arrange workspaces and when work is most effectively carried out online.

Employee engagement and internal communications

Of course, as more people continue to work remotely and some workloads remain high, effective internal communications will be crucial. Times of crisis mean it is important that colleagues have more opportunities to communicate and engage. Employees will understandably want to be kept informed about anything which affects their roles, as well as the wider work of the council to combat COVID-19. Clarity and consistency of message, and visible internal leadership, are key to maintaining a motivated workforce in the challenging times ahead.

The LGA has produced a resource on [COVID-19 recovery communication](#) which includes a specific section on [effective internal communication](#) as well as [case studies of effective employee engagement during COVID-19](#).

Responding to the COVID-19 renewal: building organisational development capacity in local government

The LGA and North West Employers are working together to discover the organisational development (OD) and cultural change needs of local government organisations so they can develop guidance and a support offer in the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic. The support programme is delivered with [Roffey Park](#). For more information [see our webpages](#). We are also doing work with Wirral Council on this, and we expect others may look at similar projects.

Recruitment and career changers

Overall the local government workforce has proved resilient and resourceful in meeting the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic but the crisis has laid bare a number of areas where local authorities have difficulty maintaining the ideal level of staffing resource – which is understandable during the pandemic. This is both a challenge to be addressed and an opportunity for local government to promote itself as a career of choice and social purpose to those who may be looking for new employment.

The social care sector is rightly receiving attention for its vulnerability in terms of workforce supply, a situation that is further challenged by changes to migration policy. However, there are also a range of professions and occupations in local government that are also under-resourced. As the economy changes and people are minded or forced to reconsider their career options, local authorities will want to bear these challenges and opportunities in mind. In particular the areas of focus include:

- environmental health and regulatory enforcement
- social work and educational psychologists
- specialist children's services
- commissioners of services
- public health.

Most of these areas will require people to change profession or acquire new qualifications as we know for most there simply aren't enough qualified individuals in the UK workforce.

For other key areas: ICT, legal, planning and building control, we need to encourage existing professionals to work in the local government sector.

<https://www.local.gov.uk/return-work-campaign>

Public Health will be a challenging specialism because of its expanded role post-COVID which is prompting greater NHS recruitment that will need to be coordinated with local government needs though new training opportunities. The country will be on a near permanent pandemic watch with expanded concerns about the overall health of the population and this will lead to expanding roles and responsibilities. The experience so far in this pandemic has shown many increased demands on roles such as environmental health, project coordination, health and safety and HR.

Green jobs

The LGA launched a [major report](#) in June 2020 about the opportunities to create a sustainable recovery – [by creating over a million green jobs by 2050](#) - driven by local experience and expertise. The LGA report argues that as the UK moves toward a net-zero emission future by 2050, research suggests [nearly 700,000 direct jobs could be created in England's low-carbon and renewable energy economy by 2030](#). Councils will want to ensure a consistent pipeline of talent in these key areas and avoid a skills gap through early intervention measures such as funding apprenticeships, upskilling and investment in eco-friendly industries like electric vehicle infrastructure, renewable energy and other low carbon sectors. Our SLI offer includes a dedicated [Climate Change offer](#), which offers resources and [explores green jobs and labour market implications for climate](#) in greater depth.

Social Work Together campaign

COVID-19 has exacerbated many serious issues already present in our communities, including domestic abuse. Councils need the right people to help protect their residents. The Social Work Together campaign can help employers connect with social workers that are currently completing COVID-19 training and who are ready to return to work. Find out more on [LGA's website](#).

[The Return to Social Work programme](#)

The Return to Social Work programme is an initiative developed by the LGA and Government Equalities Office, designed to support councils with social worker recruitment. The scheme will run a national recruitment drive on their behalf and carefully select, retrain and support 200 former social workers to return to the profession.

Councils who sign up to this programme have the opportunity to hire these carefully selected and experienced individuals, who are all committed to getting back to making a real difference to people's lives.

Other Returner programmes: ICT, planning and Legal

Councils who sign up to these free Return to Work programmes will be invited to a networking event, where they can meet our candidates and fill their vacancies with skilled and committed professionals.

Candidates carefully selected to participate in the programme will be a mix of experienced ICT, Planning and Legal professionals who want to return to work after a break, and individuals who wish to change their careers to enter the ICT profession. They will be provided with free, high-quality training to enable them to return to work with confidence and with local government knowledge.

How has the pandemic impacted the equality and diversity of our workforce?

The PHE report '[Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on BAME communities](#)' coinciding with the Black Lives Matter campaign has brought added emphasis to ensuring that the future of local government is inclusive, diverse and champions equality.

For councils wanting further information on what more they can do as employers, we recommend [starting with the information](#) on our website which provides links to additional resources and support.

For a complete root and branch analysis of a council, the [Local Government Equality Framework](#) is tool designed to give an over-arching analysis.

Equality runs through many of the issues outlined in this paper, because equality is about leadership, succession planning, language.

We also suspect that ethnicity pay reporting will come back onto the government agenda after the debates of 2020 – not least because that tool can be used to take a snapshot of the workplace, and start the conversation about why things are as they are, and could be done to improve things. To that end, we intend to run a webinar in the autumn on this subject and we are in the process of updating our equality guides and information.

Recovery and renewal:

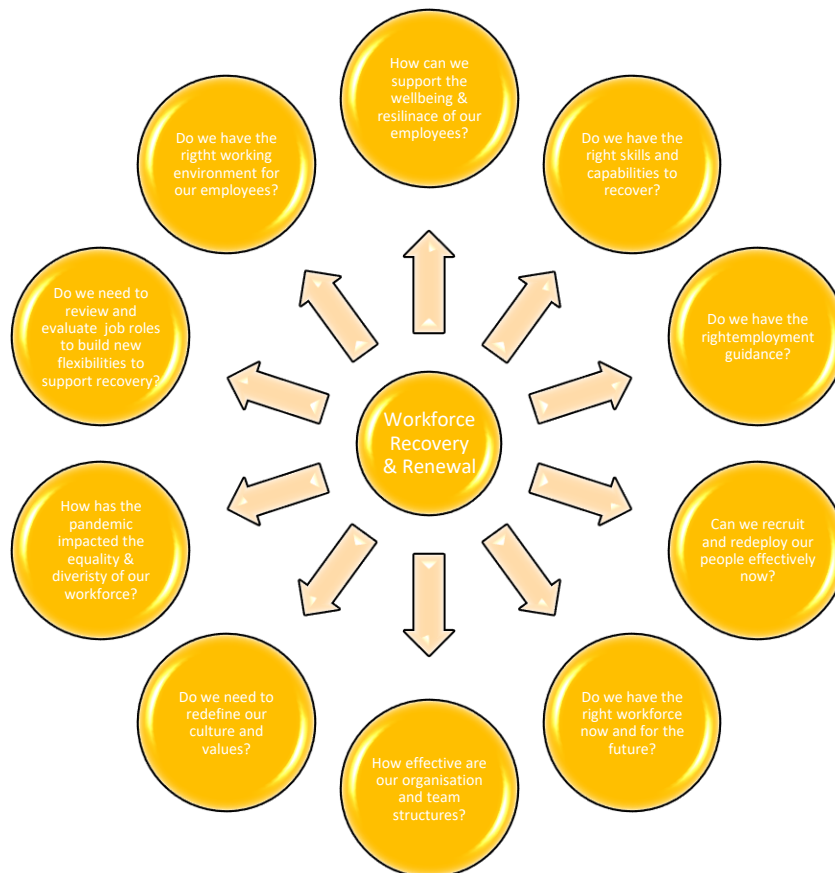
Additional practical support from the LGA Workforce Team

There are of course additional tools and resources that councils can access from the LGA's SLI offer to provide support during recovery and renewal. This includes access to recovery and renewal panels and bespoke remote peer support, which provide councils support around challenges including ensuring sustainable resource and leadership. The graphic below captures the types of questions you might now be asking and thinking about in a workforce context.

Towards the end of this document we explore some of the more practical tools that the LGA Workforce team use to support councils with these issues. We point out where there are guides or advice online, and where additional commercial work might be of interest.

In considering any of these issues, we would encourage you to chat to a member of the team for further information and let us point you in the right direction. You don't need to know the exact solution you need when you approach us – we encourage you to share the issues and let us suggest some solutions, and we take it from there.

Throughout the rest of this document we go into more detail in many of these areas, and set out some of the support, tools and models available in order to renew.



Does local government have the skills and capabilities to recover?

The crisis has caused a channel shift in the way people work, interact and carry out their daily working lives. For many employees this has been a steep learning curve to embrace new technologies, safer working practices and learn how to conduct business / deliver services remotely. For many of the workforce at the front line, dealing with those hardest hit by the pandemic, has required learning new skills in different roles, for some in roles that simply didn't exist before. Flexible re-deployment of staff through skills matching (within and across councils) has been a major success of the crisis – something that's likely to be retained.

As we move into the recovery and renewal phase, council services need to understand what skills the workforce has, how those new skills acquired can be retained and how we can continue to place learning and up-skilling at the heart of what we do. Some councils have successfully introduced skills audits, linked development to apprenticeship programmes and have started to build successful skills and career pathways as a way to show how traditional progression and succession can work across boundaries and professional silos.

Understanding your skill base

Part of the work of the Workforce Planning Project in 2020/2021 is to provide tools and techniques to help councils plan for the future. Through sharing practice, we have a range of skills audit techniques and can undertake a skills review for your team, service or whole council.

Supporting councils to develop career and skills pathways

Career pathways are future-proofing teams and workforces in order to retain sufficient talent to ensure organisations meet their strategic objectives. It ensures that organisations:

- invest in internal succession and progression
- help employees understand why career agility is important
- enable career growth on all levels of the organisation, not just high-fliers
- help leaders and managers do a better job of career coaching
- help leaders and managers understand the importance of being 'talent agents' for their people
- increase visibility of career paths as well as the internal talent supply for leaders and managers

The following support is provided through the LGA's SLI offer:

- An interactive design workshop session delivered either virtually or on-site as appropriate to develop career pathways for specific teams.
- 'Train the Trainer' workshops to enable the council to develop in-house career pathways to support the organisation.

These workshops can be enhanced by employing additional tools such as workforce analytics to identify and focus on critical roles within services.

Apprenticeship support programme

The [LGA's apprenticeships support programme](#) provides a range of practical support and advice for local authorities and their maintained schools on developing and enhancing their apprenticeship programme, including:

- guidance and advice notes
- sharing best practice from around the sector
- webinars on key aspects of managing an apprenticeship programme
- toolkits
- action learning
- on-site support

- regional and national events
- support for developing new standards that are important to the sector.

Workforce planning

By any analysis, workforce planning is going to be an essential part of the “recover/renew” phase. Workforce planning tools allow organisations to consider the workforce implications alongside their strategic direction. So, if, as an employer, you’ve decided where you want to get to, how do you ensure you have the right workforce strategy and the right skills in the right places? What are the potential scenarios, and what are the potential risks?

The LGA Workforce Team can support you through:

- Enabling sharing of best practice and ideas via the [Workforce Planning KHub](#). You can access this to source tools and resources and discuss current workforce planning challenges with like-minded local government colleagues.
- The LGA Workforce Planning Matrix, which enables you to establish the baseline and develop the journey, measure where you are now, and consider where you want to be, can be found in the library of the Workforce Planning KHub.

But for those councils wanting more detailed support in this area, additional bespoke work can be agreed via our commercial offer. As part of the Workforce Planning offer, we can support the design and development of bespoke career pathways for teams and services. **Career pathways** drive succession planning and supports the identification of critical roles. Examples of career pathways that have been developed previously include IT, housing, domiciliary care and finance.

Creating effective organisation and team structures: DMA

As organisations begin to re-think the way that roles are designed and services are delivered, it is worth knowing about the well- established LGA tool that can help with these issues – DMA.

The DMA approach is an [organisational design tool](#) which establishes the number of layers of management that an organisation needs – and the teams within it – to achieve its purposes most effectively, and the decision rights that managers in different layers require to be empowered. It is a proven way of creating an effective organisation and an efficient management structure and has helped organisations save money, led to timely decision-making, clear responsibilities and empowerment of leadership roles.

DMA can be used to look at a particular service area, a whole organisation, a shared service partnership or at creating a new commercial structure. Applying the ‘levels’ approach to the roles in your organisation helps you test, refine, improve or redesign your management

structures to be cheaper and more effective. [Contact us](#) if you'd like more information about this approach.

Develop high performing individuals and teams - emergentics

As organisations increasingly turn to remote work and employees collaborate as dispersed teams, it is even more essential that leaders, managers, team members and individual contributors receive the tools they need to strengthen communication, productivity and engagement. The LGA provides a virtual workshop using the Emergentics profiling tool to offer a blended learning experience that reveals individual and collective strengths, provides practical ways for individuals and teams to work together more effectively and supports strong workplace cultures – with or without a traditional office space.

What are the outcomes?

This workshop empowers attendees to:

- develop self-awareness
- work better as a remote team
- communicate more productively
- strengthen collaboration and team development
- learn to problem solve more effectively.

Job redesign: getting the right roles in the right structure

As critical local services are renewed following the pandemic, the fundamental nature of many of those services will change. It might be that with more emphasis on work being carried out digitally and remotely or that services need to be delivered in a different way, local authorities will want to be confident that job structures and role profiles are accurate and fit for purpose. Some councils will feel this requires changes to role profiles and job descriptions as well as an assessment of the skills requirements. There is likely to be knock-on to recruitment and retention strategies targeting new values and ways of working too. Strong attention will need to be given to equalities issues in designing new roles, to make sure they are inclusive and attract diverse pools of candidates.

Job evaluation: what does it mean, how does it work?

Job evaluation (JE) is a universally recognised process designed to place the jobs in an organisation in a hierarchy of size and complexity in the most objective way possible. Jobs are analysed and measured against a series of standard factors looking, for example, at the level of knowledge required and the typical working conditions. The LGA is the joint custodian with the trade unions of the national JE scheme for local government which is used voluntarily by many councils. We have a wide array of advice and guidance on JE prepared jointly with the trade unions and we keep the guidance under constant review. If we need to prepare any guidance about JE for jobs that are redesigned as a result of COVID-19 we will do so but we are confident that the scheme is robust in dealing with changing jobs and is fully equality-proofed. Our JE advice and guidance is available [here](#).

The LGA also operates a bespoke JE scheme for senior officers and the two schemes allow us to provide JE analysis on a consultancy basis for individual council clients. Rapid JE exercises may become necessary during the period of service reconfiguration that is to come.

We are also planning on doing some 'Introduction to JE' webinars, so we can talk you through the process and answer any questions you might have. Again – we've been working hard to ensure that doing this in an online, virtual way is entirely possible.

In some cases, redesign of services and jobs may require an assessment of the market suitability of pay rates and the contacts named above will be able to help with this. We have also restarted our earnings survey to help with provision of pay data.

Ensuring councils have access to the latest employment law guidance

The recovery and renew phases could well raise particular employment law questions. Employers want to be confident they are making decisions in line with best practice, and employment law and when it comes to renewing local government, there might be questions arising out of service redesign or managing TUPE, or having to handle for example a collective redundancy consultation processes remotely. As part of the LGA Workforce Team, we have the Employment Rights Unit, organises of the (at least annual) Employment Law Update conference and regularly providing guidance to councils. As always, we'll continue to issue the [Advisory Bulletin](#), where we take local authorities through any new and emerging case law and relevant statutory changes. Of course, we are also developing webinars on employment law topics ensuring that we adapt to providing our support in a way that fits the "new normal".

Leadership

COVID-19 really underlined the importance of great leadership, as the situation required the demonstration of great communication skills and having to lead teams working in an emergency response, many of them working from home, many re-deploying or taking on additional/new tasks, many of them on the front line.

The LGA's SLI offer already has a well-established and effective [Leadership programme](#) working in partnership with [SOLACE](#) and as part of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity agenda we will be looking at what Inclusive Leadership means this autumn, as part of our webinar programme.

Senior management – successful recruitment and management

Effective senior management is critical to the success of councils to ensure they deliver cost-effective high-quality services in a safe COVID-19 compliant manner. In this context it is important that elected members are actively involved in recruitment to these key roles and the ongoing management of postholders once appointed.

The LGA's SLI offer provides a range of support to councils to help ensure they get the right people in the right jobs in order to translate the strategic priorities of elected members into operational reality. Support, including how to identify and how to talk about unconscious bias, is available through our leadership and workforce programmes.

We have extensive experience of job design gained by supporting councils at the start of a recruitment process and helping recruiting organisations to understand the importance of developing a job that meets the future needs of an organisation, not just replicating past practice. We can identify and help specify the competencies and skills necessary and ensure that any recruitment process properly assesses candidates against these requirements. This includes the management of assessment centres and the provision of expert advice to elected members at key stages throughout the recruitment process.

Once appointed it is critical that elected members effectively manage the performance of senior staff. The LGA can help design performance management processes and support elected members throughout the appraisal process.

One additional strand we are looking at this year is whether we can better support the leadership skills of middle managers too.

National workforce survey

Councils will additionally need to review their approaches to other aspects of workforce management and development in the new environment. We will be restarting our **annual workforce policy survey** in due course to monitor changing approaches on recruitment, training and so forth. Previous reports are available [here](#).

LGA Workforce webinars programme 2020-2021

As we all continue on this journey of recovering from the shock of the COVID-19 pandemic, and as we start to put the pieces back together and push towards recovery and renewal, we are keen to keep creating the space for interested participants to come together, talk, learn and share ideas. The LGA and our SLI offer has an established history of peer challenge and peer improvement. On a smaller scale we can do this on all workforce issues, bringing together those who want to learn, listen or share.

As we develop that programme will publish more information. To start with, events that would have been face-to-face conferences are going online (for example our annual education conference is being re-designed into three accessible webinars during July and into September).

Our 'Workstation/physical health' webinar took place on 22 July and the slides are available via the Events pages on the [LGA website](#). This webinar was all about offering training and support to councils on preventing and managing joint pain.

Our webinars topic list currently includes:

- COVID-19 the workforce challenges for the next six months – (round table discussion)
- new ways of working – return to work and the blended workforce
- managing performance and productivity
- managing remotely
- senior management performance
- employee health and wellbeing (and wellbeing in schools and trusts)
- introduction to job evaluation
- inclusive leadership
- carers as workers
- adult social care workforce challenges for recovery
- ethnicity pay gap reporting
- workforce planning – using analytics to drive change
- employment law update
- terms and conditions essentials, covering Green Book (local government services) and one covering Grey Book (fire)
- exit payments cap

Our future Sector-led improvement offer

As is outlined throughout this paper, the support we continue to provide to councils (through recovery and renewal) is clearly anchored in the broader context of a comprehensive review of our SLI offer.

All future offers of support are informed by reflections from councils, including those shared in the independent review by Shared Intelligence. In addition to confirming that SLI is seen as the 'right approach' by the prevailing majority councils, this report also highlights that SLI has had an extensive and positive impact on councils' effectiveness, improvement and innovation.

LGA is committed to building on this standard. At the time of writing, we are carrying out further engagements with the sector to ensure our support offer remains current and well suited to councils' needs. With this, it is likely that further elements to this workforce offer will be introduced over the coming year.

Contact us

The [LGA Workforce team](#) works across a number of areas, so feel free to contact us and we can help councils identify the support they need, to solve the challenge they've identified. The team also manages several national collective bargaining groups, working with Trade Unions and other stakeholders across the sector.

Follow us on twitter @LGAWorkforce and sign up to our monthly [Workforce Bulletin](#).