

The Timewise Council concept

The Timewise Council award signifies that a local authority is driving change in flexible working practices for their own workforce and across their wider community. It focuses especially in opening up opportunities for people to access flexible and part-time work at the point of recruitment and to enable career progression, an approach that is backed by evidence of its potential to reduce maternal unemployment, child poverty and gender inequality.

Local Authorities are in a unique position of power and responsibility to make a difference to the working lives of both their employees and residents. Adoption of the London Living Wage and apprenticeships have evidenced the leadership role local authorities are taking as an employer to support residents into work.

But with family living standards falling and the lack of quality part time work a key driver, new approaches are needed to stimulate greater flexibility in local labour markets.

The Timewise Council initiative supports broader economic and social strategies of local authorities. Flexible working also offers opportunities to deliver services more efficiently and so helps local authorities achieve best use of limited budgets. With 2.6 million council employees across the UK, local government has the opportunity to make a real difference to the lives of millions of parents and carers by adopting truly flexible working arrangements.

The Timewise Council model

A Timewise Council is one that has committed to opening up greater opportunities for quality flexible and part time working through both internal and external recruitment processes, capturing the learning of how this has been done and sharing it with other employers in their community.

In working with Timewise to become a Timewise Council, a local authority is making a commitment to affect change in relation to part time and flexible working across three areas:

- **as an employer** to be proactive in the use of flexibility as a way to progress people's careers. Both internally and at recruitment stage too.
- **as an influencer** to share learning and leverage change with local employers
- **as a provider** to explore creative approaches within its employability programmes to help families find the part time and flexible jobs they need

Before seeking Timewise Council status, it is expected that any Council will have identified the strategic goals it is seeking to address through changes in culture, behaviour and practice in relation to flexible working so that the programme's rationale is rooted in organisational strategies and business plans.



This approach to the awarding of Timewise Council status is reflected in an assessment framework which has the following features:

- Measuring ongoing progress against improvement plans rather than setting fixed points of compliance.
- Using a range of evidence to measure progress and develop improvement plans.
- Acknowledging success and challenges across the range of the Council's operations.
- Involving a range of stakeholders in monitoring, evaluation and learning to drive wider changes in flexible employment.

These features are reflected in a simple set of criteria for a Timewise Council.

Timewise and Camden

In 2012 Camden launched an Equality Taskforce to understand the level of inequality faced by particular groups in Camden, consider the role of the council and partners in tackling inequality and recommend solutions.

The report identified a key structural driver for inequality for families is the low rates of maternal employment in the Borough. Over the past eight years unemployment for women has risen by 45% for those aged 25-44 and 61% for those aged 45-59. Evidence has highlighted that this is largely driven by the lack of supply of quality, part-time and flexible jobs in London and London's exceptionally high childcare costs which impose a significant barrier to work. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation have calculated that to achieve a minimum living standard a family with 2 children living in Camden now needs to earn £70,000pa. One wage is no longer enough.

Two key recommendations of the report are that:

- the Council should work with all employers to increase job opportunities for mothers; and
- the Council and its partners should use their buying power and role as employers to tackle inequality, focusing specifically on stimulating more part time and flexible job opportunities

To take this work forward the Council is now working with the Timewise Foundation to become the first Timewise Council. Timewise is currently working with Camden to determine headline criteria required to be able to define itself as the first Timewise Council.

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