

APSE Summer Series Round Table:

Impacts on frontline local government workforce development

1 Context

Following the General Election on 04 July 2024, and the advent of a new Labour government, a round table was convened for APSE Members with responsibility for workforce development. Colleagues examined Labour's 5 manifesto priorities and new proposals set out in the King's Speech, exploring the implications for the local government workforce, across frontline services.

This briefing provides a summary of the current position, an overview of the round table discussion and key asks of the new government.

2 Current position

Through discussion, local authority colleagues, from across the UK, collaborated in shaping a response and a call to action for the new government. Central to the discussion, was a focus on how measures could make it easier for local government to tackle:

- ✓ Recruitment
- ✓ Retention
- ✓ Succession planning
- ✓ Productivity
- ✓ Demand management

During the introductions colleagues were asked if the following statement made them feel hopeful or concerned:

“Labour’s plan will make work pay. We’ll boost wages, make work more secure and support working people to thrive – delivering a genuine living wage, banning exploitative zero-hour contracts, and ending fire and rehire.”

The response was mixed: some expressed a sense of hope that workforce challenges in the sector would be addressed; others didn’t think the narrative would be impactful. Some suggested new measures would create greater budgetary pressures. The key influencing issues were:

- Fairness of pay and treatment (at all levels)
- Competition with the private sector and other public sector bodies
- Attraction and retention
- Promoting and encouraging aspirational behaviour
- Societal value and the wider impact
- Provision of Further Education opportunities within Local Government roles

3 King’s Speech

The King’s Speech outlined significant changes to employment law, through Labour’s plan to ‘Make Work Pay: Delivering a New Deal for Working People’. Although it could be argued that the terms, conditions and benefits, in local government, are better than other sectors, the King’s Speech highlighted initiatives to cement better standards within employment nationally.

Basic rights from Day 1

The introduction of ‘basic individual rights from day one’ will end the requirement for workers to complete two years’ employment before gaining access to basic rights. Within local government the main beneficiaries of this will be contract workers and those who undertake seasonal work. The aim of the legislation is to protect staff against unfair dismissal and permitting a right to parental leave; sick pay; and (potentially) bereavement leave from day one.

Zero hours contracts

It is anticipated that ‘zero hours’ contracts will be banned. Contracts will be required to be reflective of the number of hours regularly worked. Details are pending, but the impact on catering, corporate hospitality services and seasonal teams appears likely.

Fire and rehire

The principle of 'fire and rehire' will be subject to a legal reform. 'Fire and rehire' occurs when workers terms and conditions are unilaterally amended by terminating a contract and rehiring on new terms and conditions. It is anticipated that the current '[Draft code of practice](#)', which was launched in July 2024, will be replaced and strengthened to accommodate this practice under extreme circumstances only, where the alternative would be bankruptcy/mass redundancy.

Equality and pay gaps

Publishing ethnicity and disability pay gaps will become mandatory for employers with more than 250 staff. In addition, those employers will also be required to have a 'menopause action plan' detailing how they will support employees through the menopause.

Rights

There will be a new 'right to switch off' where employees are protected from home becoming a 24/7 office. This could impact on those services that require people to work 'on call' and reduce the flexibility that managers have, which will need to be addressed when the legislation is released.

Legislation will be strengthened to protect whistleblowers, including updating protection for women who report sexual harassment at work.

The time limit within which employees can make an employment claim will be increased from 3 months to 6 months. It is anticipated that the process itself will be reviewed with employment tribunals being digitised to improve accessibility.

Labour is planning to repeal the 'Trade Union Act 2016' and the 'Conduct of Employment Agencies and employment Businesses Regulations 2022' and will enable employees to collectively raise grievances about conduct in their place of work to ACAS. The 'School support staff negotiating body' is also set to be reintroduced.

On the 6 August the Government announced it will repeal the Strikes Act 2023, claiming that the measures "unduly restrict workers' rights" and "undermine good industrial relations". Minimum service levels will be repealed through the Employment Rights Bill, which will be introduced 'within the first 100 days of the new Government' according to the Department for Business and Trade with the Government stating that no employer had used minimum service levels, but that the clauses had inflamed

tensions, rather than helping to resolve industrial action disputes.

4 Manifesto Pledges

The round table explored the impact of Labour's five manifesto pledges under the lens of local government frontline workforce development, providing an opportunity for colleagues to share impacts and current practice from around the UK.

Kickstart economic growth

This pledge is based on the principle that growth is desirable, that the UK should lead as one of the Group of Seven (G7) wealthy nations and that current economic growth models don't work for everyone. There was agreement that this issue is rooted in creating locally relevant "good quality" jobs. Good quality was perceived to mean jobs which have autonomy, purpose and operate within terms and conditions which protect the individual and the organisation. Although it was noted that there were industry variations across the UK, growth of green infrastructure and jobs was perceived to provide a UK wide opportunity. There was acknowledgement that authorities would need to undertake robust scrutiny and due diligence when exercising general powers to undertake commercial activity and that better support from central government, regarding local economic prosperity, would be welcome. Additionally, should the current approach of piecemeal grant funding continue to prevail, smaller authorities with fewer resources will continue to fall behind, unable to access grant systems with complex application processes and matched funding requirements.

Make Britain a clean energy superpower

Most authorities acknowledged that achieving current targets to net-zero would be very difficult to achieve; and that changing the culture/behaviours of the local government workforce is a key challenge as is the transition to green jobs. In terms of the transition to a green economy, it was acknowledged that some service sectors would be easier to change than others. It was agreed that further information about green jobs, in each sector, would be useful, but that local government would be essential in achievement of the net-zero ambitions.

Take back our streets

It was acknowledged that the government's pledge to halve serious violent crime and thereby raise confidence in the police and criminal justice system created opportunities and challenges for council service teams such as parks teams (and friends of parks volunteer groups), community development teams and youth justice. Implications for

street scene; technological innovation; AI; data analytics and planning were also discussed. One round table participant highlighted early signs of governmental policy which could lead to additional resource requirements at a local level.

Break down barriers to opportunity

This pledge places education and training at the heart of equality and sustainable growth. Access to alternative educational routes was seen to be positive and there was agreement that better use could be made of the apprenticeship levy, noting that the government has pledged to amend apprenticeship and the levy. Over and above all other options, colleagues coalesced around the notion of “growing our own” as a means of creating greater synergy between services, departments and partnerships.

“Growing our own. Not being restrictive in silos, give new entrants time to find out where they want to be and where they don't while building skills”

It was agreed that a fresh approach to talent management and progression routes, within local government, would provide opportunity to break down historical, siloed barriers.

Build an NHS fit for the future

Colleagues agreed that the success of the NHS has significant implications for the local government workforce in terms of prevention: the role of climate change in the increasing prevalence of virus and pests leads to the requirement for preventative health services, wellbeing strategies and greater public health campaigning. Additionally, the interdependency between health and social care, creates significant pressures both in staffing older people's and care services and in budgetary terms at a local level.

5 Funding

Undeniably, the policy changes at a governmental level will impact the ways in which the local government workforce responds and is developed strategically. The risk is that the old story of rising demand and diminishing budgets has not been appeased by the King's Speech.

“The speech wasn't forthcoming in declaring new finance for social care”

Although local government has, at its core, a mandate to represent local people, and can innovate and adapt to change, the stretch in capacity will need to be addressed. Straight forward needs-based funding streams would reduce the waste of time spent

on developing funding bid and proposals for publicly funded core work

Asks from the sector to government

The round table concluded that local government would need to tackle the key workforce development challenges of recruitment, retention, succession planning, productivity and demand management to be match fit and able to respond to the strategic development needs of the new administration. To make this possible local government will require:

- Consultation and involvement in central policy
- Reassurance that local contexts are understood well and considered
- Longer term, clearer financial settlements to plan sustainably
- Central investment to support local approach to the local government brand and employer value proposition

APSE Comment

The vast proposed changes detailed in the King's Speech undoubtedly have an impact on employers and on local government services. However, the proposed changes may not be as significant for the local government environment compared with some private sector companies. Recruitment in local government remains a massive issue but there is a possibility that the forced implementation of the proposed measures could level the playing field with the private sector, due to the increased cost in providing better terms and conditions for employees. Coupled with an improved brand and employer value proposition, this might ease recruitment into local government.

APSE's round table discussion was fruitful and positive with many attendees expressing hope that they may see a long-term financial settlement that will allow them to plan and future-proof their workforce strategically. It was also hoped that more training and development opportunities would arise and receive funding for emerging industries, especially within the green economy.

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