

OUTSIDE THE BOX

THE COUNCIL WORKFORCE OF TOMORROW



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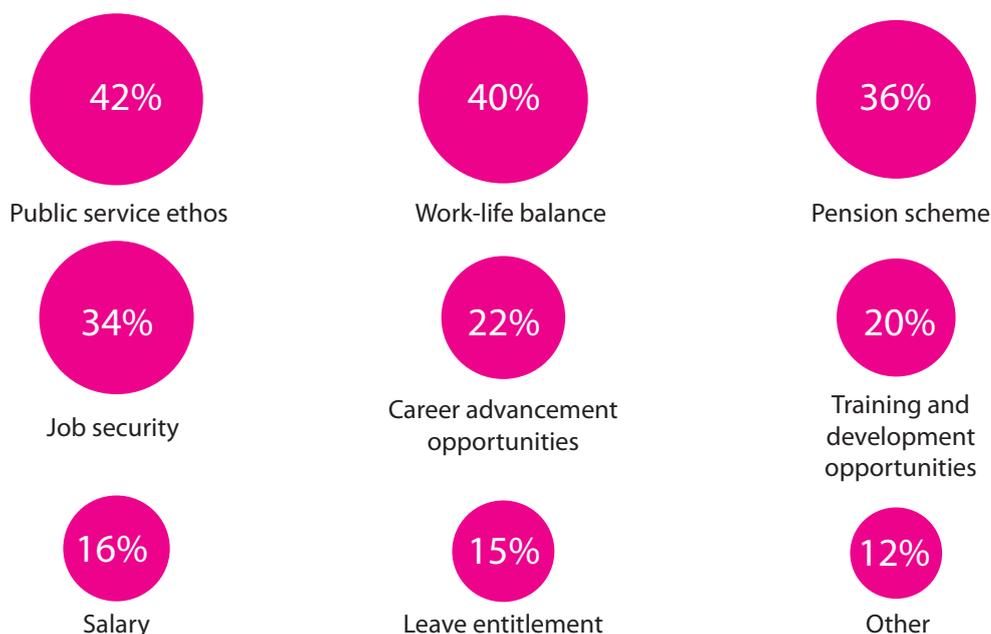
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The council of today has little in common with the big institutions of the past. Prompted by the funding cuts of the last decade, councils have had to transform. As with any organisation, the workforce has been at the heart of these changes.

The local government workforce is increasingly asked to deliver more with less, to use new skills, and to operate in an environment that is constantly evolving. But the benefits of working in local government are not always clear. Reduced job security¹ and changes to the pension scheme² have led many council employees to feel frustrated, demotivated and under pressure.

Local government needs to engage, empower and support its current and future workforce to make sure they are ready to take on the challenges of tomorrow's council. A new set of benefits and advantages needs to be clearly outlined and realised, drawing upon the motivations of the current workforce to serve their community and the public (see Figure 1). In *Outside the Box*, we outline three ways for councils to address this: changing working culture, rebranding the council to become more attractive to potential employees, and shaping and supporting the existing workforce.

FIGURE 1 WHY WORK IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT? (TOP THREE REASONS; N=2,526)



1 LGA, Unison, GMB and Unite (2012). LGPS 2014 – At a Glance. <http://www.lgps.org.uk/lge/aio/17364665> [accessed October 2016]
 2 Office of National Statistics (ONS). Public sector employment, UK: June 2016. <http://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/publicsectorpersonnel/bulletins/publicsectoremployment/june2016> [accessed October 2016]

CHANGING THE COUNCIL'S WORKING CULTURE

People are drawn to local government because they want to contribute to their community, and to help serve the public. But throughout our research we found that the hierarchical culture in councils stifled people's ability to innovate and make a difference.

In this report we explore ways councils can realise the benefits of a less hierarchical culture. A cultural shift towards self-management and empowering all staff to take initiative and make decisions can help people to flourish and feel engaged in their work. We also found that good leadership is increasingly recognised to be about having the right interpersonal qualities and skills, with the ability to motivate and guide a team.

REBRANDING THE COUNCIL

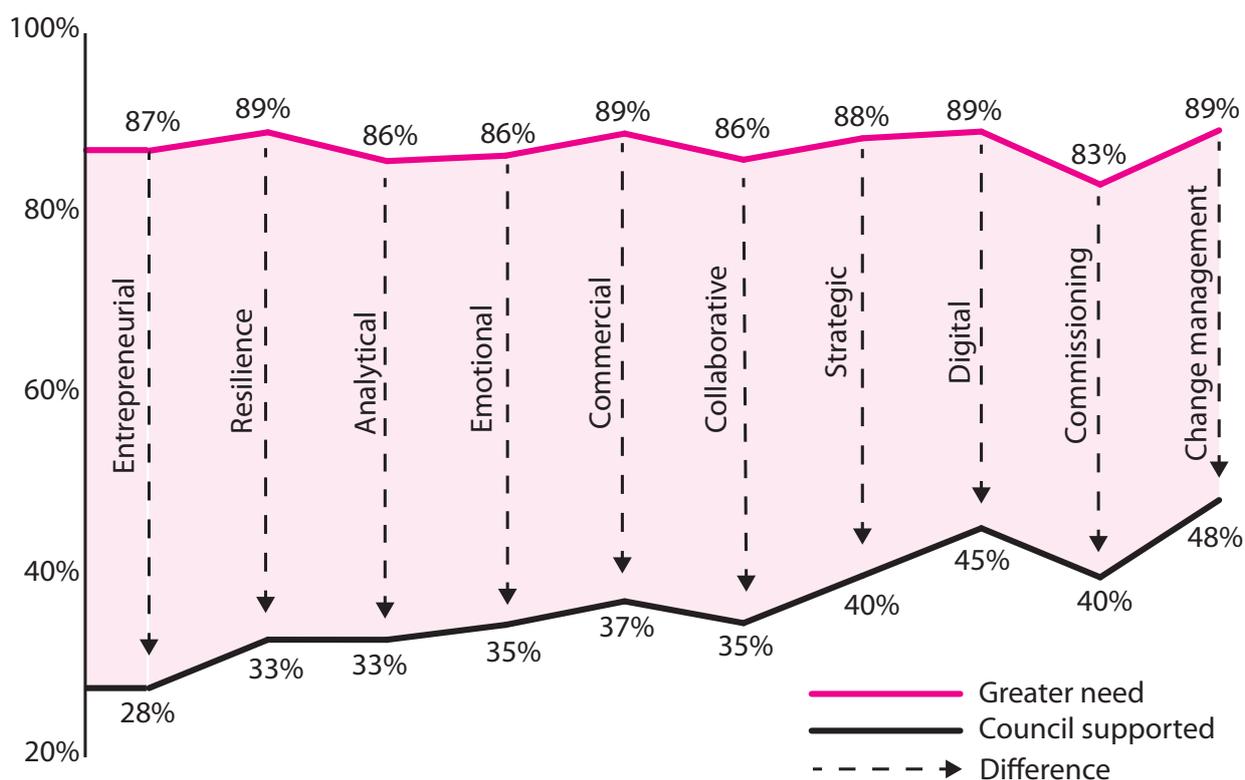
As local government develops a new offer for its workforce it will be essential to attract the best and brightest talent. For a myriad of reasons, however, local government is often negatively stereotyped. This can prevent councils from recruiting from a diverse range of talented staff.

Some councils are re-evaluating how they brand and market themselves to the public and potential employees, becoming much more outward facing. They can do this through becoming more visible online; as well as encouraging the public to visit council buildings by hosting services such as libraries and cafes. They can emphasise their unique benefits: being able to serve the public and offering work-life balance. These marketing strategies should be integrated into each stage of the recruitment process to attract a broader pool of applicants.

SHAPING THE CURRENT WORKFORCE

The current workforce has already undergone considerable change: 93 per cent of our survey respondents told us they had experienced a demand for a greater range of skills since starting their job. But the workforce does not always feel supported to adjust to new skill requirements (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2 DIFFERENCE BETWEEN NEED AND SUPPORT FOR NEW SKILLS (N=2,186)



To make sure the workforce does feel supported, councils can deploy effective approaches to performance management and training which are designed to help people cope with the constant change in local government. For talented staff who may leave for the higher salaries of the private sector, development opportunities will help people to feel fulfilled and satisfied.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

As councils transform it is essential that the way local authorities recruit, retain and develop their workforce is transformed too. Most critically, it is essential that the culture within the council workplace matches the wider changes. A move towards a reduced hierarchy that enables and empowers will be essential to create a supportive space to innovate, to improve services, to streamline processes and to take initiative. It has the potential to establish a workforce that is motivated, productive and happy in their roles.

- Councils should co-produce and implement clear workforce strategies that prioritise increasing autonomy and reducing hierarchy. This should be an absolute priority amongst senior officers and members based on the recognition that nothing has a bigger influence on the quality of service delivery and overall impact than the culture and practices of the workforce.
- Chief executives, council leaders and other workforce leaders in local government should take part in a nationwide forum such as the LGA 'Workforce Partnership Forum' to support the development of council workforce strategies through sharing best-practice, peer challenge and shared sourcing of external advice and assessment.
- Councils should become more outward-facing and engage with the public to counter negative perceptions of working for a council. This must be seen as fundamental to their drive to build a dynamic workforce from a range of professional backgrounds.
- Central government and local authorities should implement mechanisms that reward hard work, initiative and innovation.
- Senior leaders within and outside local government – including elected members – have a responsibility to model and drive forward a culture change.

