

Recruitment and retention challenges – the right people at the right time?

Vale of Glamorgan County Council

April 2026

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Audit snapshot

What we looked at

- 1 We looked at the recruitment and retention challenges that the Vale of Glamorgan Council (the Council) is facing. Including how well the Council understands its challenges, what it is doing in response, and how it reviews the value for money of its approaches.

Why this is important

- 2 Having the right workforce in place is essential for a Council to deliver the services its communities need and to meet its legal duties. To do this the Council needs to employ the right number of employees, with the right skills, at the right time.
- 3 The majority of the Council's day-to-day spending is used to pay for its workforce.
- 4 However, it is facing a number of challenges to recruit and retain people to deliver its services.

What we have found

- 5 We found that the Council understands the challenges it faces and has adopted several approaches, with some successes. But it does not always evaluate whether its different approaches represent value for money.

What we recommend

- 6 We made one recommendation about the Council assessing the value for money of its approaches to its recruitment and retention challenges.

Our findings

Understanding the challenges

The Council has a good understanding of its recruitment and retention challenges, and is successfully using workforce management approaches to ensure a sustainable workforce

- 7 The Council understands its current recruitment and retention challenges. Senior officers understand which roles are more difficult to fill and why. The reasons include:
 - limited awareness of the variety of career options available in local government;
 - poor perception of local government generally as a place to work; and
 - pay scales that are not competitive with the private sector or other parts of the public sector.
- 8 The information the Council collects about its workforce also allows it to understand its recruitment and retention challenges. This includes a performance dashboard with information such as vacancy and turnover rates, which is reported to SLT monthly. HR Business Partners also discuss succession planning at monthly Directorate Management team meetings.
- 9 Being able to access and analyse the right information means that the Council is less likely to miss opportunities to prevent recruitment and retention problems from occurring or getting worse. It also means that the Council is less likely to design short term solutions that do not represent value for money. By understanding which posts are hard to fill and why, the Council also reduces the risk that it targets its resources in the wrong place.

- 10 The Council also understands its use of workforce management approaches such as recruitment freezes, market supplements, fixed term contracts and agency staff, to help ensure a sustainable workforce. Whilst the Council does not have written policies on the use of agency staff or fixed term contracts, officers are clear on why and how to use these approaches. This has included use of fixed term contracts for student placements to deliver specific projects in the planning department. The Council is also looking at ways to reduce its agency spend, such as developing its own agency or bank of staff in social services.
- 11 Senior leaders also have oversight of proposed recruitment activity. Whilst the Council does not have a 'recruitment freeze' in place, its Senior Leadership Team (SLT) considers every vacancy and the case for filling it before recruitment can progress. This gives senior leaders an overview of the Council's recruitment whilst helping the Council respond to its financial position.
- 12 The Council also has a clear process to manage the use of market supplements. It has used them in areas where salaries are lower than other employers. Before a market supplement can be approved and introduced, officers must complete a business case, and the supplement must be reviewed at least every two years.
- 13 By understanding the impact of different workforce management approaches, the Council reduces the risk of negative impacts on its culture and morale.

Addressing the challenges

The Council has taken action to address recruitment and retention challenges, with some success

- 14 The Council has used a range of approaches to address recruitment and retention challenges. These include:
 - grow your own approaches to recruitment, such as apprenticeships, student placements and graduate trainee positions;
 - the use of market supplements in difficult to recruit areas;
 - offering a range of staff wellbeing and reward offers;
 - prioritising leadership and management development to grow its future leaders; and
 - flexible recruitment process in areas that require the Council to act quickly, for example in social services.
- 15 Having a range of approaches to recruitment is likely to increase the Council's ability to attract candidates and retain a motivated workforce.
- 16 The Council has also made various changes to streamline its recruitment and onboarding processes, such as:
 - asking for CVs rather than a detailed application form for some roles;
 - proactively contacting candidates for social services roles early in the process by telephone to help improve recruitment success rates; and
 - creating a microsite for social services recruitment.

- 17 The Council has also taken a range of steps to ensure that its recruitment and retention activity allows them to attract talent from the full diversity of the community. This includes consulting regularly with groups representing people who share protected equalities characteristics, to ensure that the Council's approach to recruitment and retention is inclusive. As part of this, draft job adverts are shared to give them an opportunity to identify any barriers to recruitment, so the Council can address them before adverts are finalised.
- 18 The Council's draft people strategy also includes a section on diversity and inclusion. The Council has diversity indicators and measures performance against these. The Council also provides anti racism training and other equalities training to staff. By having arrangements in place that seek to ensure recruitment from the full diversity of the community, the Council mitigates the risk that it decreases its talent pool and does not deliver its wider equality objectives.
- 19 The Council has worked proactively to develop a positive culture in the organisation and develop its employer brand. The Council has focused its learning and development activity on leadership and management development. It considers this to be an important part of maintaining and developing its culture. The Council also provides a range of wellbeing and reward offers, such as a cycle to work scheme, hybrid working, gym membership discounts and range of discounts in local businesses.
- 20 By taking steps to promote and develop a positive culture in the organisation, the Council reduces the risk that it has a demotivated workforce and high turnover of staff.

- 21 The Council also engages with its workforce on recruitment and retention challenges, and acts on feedback. For example, the Council engaged with various staff networks when developing its people strategy. It also used staff feedback to inform its employee reward programme. The Council also offered wellbeing surveys to staff during the COVID pandemic and more recently undertook a staff survey in 2025. The Council also offers exit interviews to staff who are leaving the organisation, although the number of interviews completed varies across directorates. By involving employees, the Council increases opportunities to find new ideas and solutions to tackle recruitment and retention challenges.
- 22 Senior leaders have good oversight of the Council's recruitment and retention activity and challenges. For example:
- every vacancy must be approved by SLT in consultation with the Leader of the Council, before being advertised;
 - senior leaders are involved in developing the Council's new people strategy;
 - the Council's risk register and directorate business plans include recruitment and retention challenges;
 - SLT receive an HR dashboard quarterly which includes staff vacancy and turnover rates;
 - strategic workforce planning updates are reported to SLT monthly; and
 - the Resources Scrutiny Committee receive sickness absence figures twice a year.
- 23 By ensuring senior leaders have oversight of recruitment and retention challenges, the Council reduces the risk that they are not identified and addressed.

- 24 The Council has also sought to work with others to address recruitment and retention challenges. This includes working with universities as part of its planning graduate trainee and student placement posts. It has also worked with other councils in areas such as internal audit, procurement and environmental health to share staff resources. Within its Shared Regulatory Services partnership, the Council has created new apprenticeships in areas it was finding it difficult to recruit for, such as Environmental Health Officers. By looking for opportunities to share resources, expertise and good practice, the Council increases the likelihood that its approaches provide good value for money.
- 25 The Council is taking steps to increase its use of technology to help address recruitment and retention challenges. This includes using an online platform to advertise a recent senior leadership role, which gave it a wider reach at no additional cost. It has also automated the process whereby SLT approves new vacancies. By making effective use of technology the Council can make the most of opportunities to reduce costs and improve both the efficiency and effectiveness of its recruitment processes.

Reviewing value for money

The Council does not always evaluate the value for money of its approaches to recruitment and retention

- 26 The Council has not formally evaluated whether its different approaches provide value for money. However, it understands that some initiatives are less costly than alternatives. These include developing a bank of social services staff to use instead of agency staff and using an online platform to advertise posts instead of a recruitment agency. However, by not having clear arrangements in place to always monitor and review value for money, the Council is unable to assess if its approaches provide value for money in a timely way.
- 27 The Council learns from its approaches to recruitment and retention and makes improvements as a result. For example, the Council has developed an app to speed up its vacancy approval process, has improved the speed of recruitment processes in social services, and has developed HR dashboards to improve oversight. The Council has also shared its approaches to developing its HR dashboard, and its social services graduate scheme more widely with other councils.
- 28 By implementing improvements and sharing lessons learned, the Council increases opportunities to improve its approaches and improve value for money.

Recommendations

- R1** The Council should develop arrangements to assess the value for money of its approaches to recruitment and retention (**paragraph 28**).

Appendices

1 About our work

Scope of the audit

We looked at the challenges the Council faces in recruiting and retaining staff. This included how well the Council understands the challenges, the steps it is taking to respond to these challenges, and how it reviews the value for money of its approaches.

We did not look at the wider topic of workforce planning.

Audit questions and criteria

Questions

We set out to answer the following questions:

- Does the Council understand its recruitment and retention challenges?
- Is the Council taking action to address its recruitment and retention challenges?
- Does the Council review the value for money of its approaches to address recruitment and retention challenges?

Criteria

We have assessed the Council's arrangements by answering the above audit questions. To help us do that, we have created a set of audit criteria which explains 'what good looks like'. We have used the audit criteria to help us analyse the evidence we collected from our review of documentary evidence and the interviews we conducted.

Our audit criteria were informed by a combination of our knowledge and experience and research into this topic. They were also informed by our conversations with national stakeholders.

Methods

We interviewed senior officers and the cabinet member responsible for developing and delivering the Council's strategic approach to meeting its recruitment and retention challenges.

We also interviewed senior officers from three Council services that have faced acute recruitment and retention challenges.

We also reviewed a range of documents relevant to the audit questions we were seeking to answer.

2 About us

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