

JSCC Discussion Paper – Recruitment and Retention in times of uncertainty

The Council is operating in a period of sustained uncertainty driven by Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), and this can create challenges for recruitment and retention.

In addition to uncertainty around LGR, there are ongoing skills shortages in certain service areas, changing employee expectations of work and less competitive pay (compared to the private sector). All these factors can impact recruitment and retention and it's vital that the workforce has the right skills and abilities to deliver services for North Hertfordshire.

Recruitment and Retention Risks

- **Loss of key skills and experience:** particularly in scarce-skills roles due to uncertainty or external opportunities offering greater perceived stability.
- **Reduced ability to recruit:** as candidates may be cautious about joining an organisation undergoing reorganisation.
- **Increased pressure on remaining staff:** arising from vacancies and delayed recruitment or interim arrangements.
- **Equality impacts:** with part-time staff, carers and those reliant on flexibility at greater risk if workloads are not managed equitably.

What our employees say

We have conducted the first round of stay questionnaires, where senior managers were asked to the factors that most strongly influence their decision to stay working for the Council. The key factors supporting retention based on this data are:

- **Flexibility:** (hybrid working, hours, autonomy) is the most significant retention factor.
- **Meaningful work and job satisfaction:** including seeing projects through and delivering outcomes for residents.
- **Supportive culture and relationships:** including cohesive teams.
- **Job security and pension:** which provide stability when combined with flexibility and leave.

The feedback also indicated some key pressures:

- Limited **time and clarity for development and career progression.**
- Increased **workload and pressure**, including LGR-related activity alongside business-as-usual and risk of burnout.

What can we do?

While uncertainty cannot be removed, its impact can be mitigated through:

- **Clear and honest communication:** regular updates on LGR progress, clearly distinguishing between what is known, unknown and subject to change.
- **Protecting flexibility:** maintaining flexible and hybrid working as a core retention tool.
- **Further developing how we work together:** continued development, considered communication and support for hybrid teams.
- **Development and engagement:** encouraging career and development conversations, help employees prepare for roles in Unitary Councils, and highlight opportunities to retain motivation and skills.
- **Targeted recruitment messaging:** being open about change while clearly promoting flexibility, culture, purpose and support available to our employees.

While uncertainty is unavoidable, its impact can be reduced through clear communication, visible support and continued focus on the factors that matter most to staff: flexibility, meaningful work, supportive management and trust.