



## Written evidence to House of Lords Public Services Committee: Designing a public services workforce fit for the future

### Summary

1. Solace is the representative body for more than 1,600 council chief executives and senior managers working in the public sector in the UK, committed to promoting public sector excellence.
2. We strongly support in the Committee's eight key 'principles for public services reform', especially the vital role of preventative services in reducing inequalities.
3. Our evidence relates to **local government only** and our key points are:
  - a. Local Government is facing a multi-dimensional workforce capacity and capability crisis – a recent Solace survey<sup>i</sup> of council chief executives and senior managers in England found:
    - a third (33%) do not currently have enough staff with the appropriate skills and qualifications to run services properly/to an acceptable standard;
    - 89% are concerned about the pipeline of staff with the appropriate skills and qualifications to work in the most senior roles over the next three to five years.
  - b. Central Government support for the workforce and future leadership development is paltry by comparison to other public services. It cannot be right that local government is the only prominent part of the public sector which does not have significant support and investment to ensure the people we employ today are capable of meeting the challenges of tomorrow.
4. Solace has therefore called for a number of urgent actions to address this situation, specifically that Government should:
  - a. collaborate with the sector to create a workforce strategy for local government, similar to that for teachers, nurses, and civil servants, which seeks to address both short- and longer-term challenges;
  - b. coproduce career frameworks for key professional disciplines experiencing recruitment/retention issues;
  - c. invest a fraction of what is spent in health in education and training for the local government workforce; among other asks (see below).
5. An agreement between the civil service and local government which encourages secondments, shadowing, and work experience opportunities in both directions should also be formalised. This would be especially beneficial for director level and policy teams who would develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of central and local governments' respective roles, as well as valuable insight into the processes, delivery and impact of policy decisions at a national, regional and local level.
6. Doing all of this will also help councils to create more diverse workforces that better reflect the communities they serve, deliver better services and opportunities for their residents, free up valuable resource currently spent on agency staff, and drive up the quantity and quality of collaboration at the local level, and reform services for the better.



7. Organisations are only as good as the people who work for them. So if we are to continue helping the country respond to, and recover from, the pandemic, deliver good local services, and 'level up', we must invest in the workforce and its leadership – for now and the future.
8. We are happy to provide further oral or written evidence to the Committee and facilitate further engagement with chief executives and/or senior officers at local authorities should that be useful for Committee members.

### **Inquiry themes 1 & 2: Recruiting, retaining, and training the public services workforce; and the tools needed to transform service delivery and workforce effectiveness**

9. Three-quarters (74%) of English councils have recruitment and retention problems<sup>ii</sup>.
10. Echoing findings from Solace's workforce survey last summer, more than half (55%) of the respondents to a recent Local Government Chronicle survey<sup>iii</sup> said their council had large or very large workforce shortages. The majority of relevant councils had issues in adult social care (70%) and children's services (64%), while planning was also identified as an area of challenge for more than two-fifths of councils.
11. And almost three-quarters (73%) had concerns about the pipeline of chief executives and senior leaders. Amongst respondents describing themselves as chief executives or members of the corporate leadership team this increased to 85%.
12. The most common factor to be identified as contributing to their council's workforce difficulties was low/uncompetitive pay (71%) followed by excessive workload/stress (52%), while a lack of scope for workforce development was pointed to by almost a third (31%).
13. The sector has an ageing workforce while there is a limited number of candidates with the required skills and experience in certain key professions.
  - For example, Skills for Care estimates<sup>iv</sup> there are approximately 112,000 vacancies at any one time – with recruitment and retention issues increasing as a result of Covid.
  - In council planning departments, only around one in 10 (9%) of staff are under the age of 30 whilst more than a third (35%) are older than 50, according to the RTP<sup>v</sup>.
  - And in environmental health, 31% of senior officers have warned the delivery of some statutory environmental health duties is at risk due to resourcing issues<sup>vi</sup>.
14. At the very top level, at least a third of London's chief executives are expected to have stood down come the aftermath of the 32 London boroughs' all-out local elections in May<sup>vii</sup>.
15. Taken on their own, these shortages point to major pipeline problems within individual professions. But put together councils are collectively facing an extremely worrying workforce crisis – and the impact of Covid cannot be underestimated.
16. We are clear that a failure of Government to acknowledge and address this strategically will only lead to unintended consequences in other parts of the public sector. So it is encouraging the Government has recognised local government's workforce problems, in both its plan for health and social care<sup>viii</sup> and the Levelling Up White Paper<sup>ix</sup>.
17. The Levelling Up White Paper proposal to create Leadership College for Government has the potential to help build local, as well as national, leadership capability across the country. By learning

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together leaders from across public services will be better able to collaborate, and we have already witnessed this through the existing work of the National Leadership Centre.

18. However, we also believe that the Leadership College for Government will also further expose the asymmetry in training and development support given to aspiring public service leaders. If you are a future leader in the health service, military, police or, indeed, the civil service there is an existing framework of significant and purposeful development already available to you. In contrast, there is very little support for the future leaders of local authorities.
19. In all other parts of public service Central Government takes a keen interest in the development of professional leaders, and with spending many times smaller than that spent in equivalent areas of public service we feel the Department for Levelling Up, Communities & Housing could and should play a more significant role to rebalance this.
20. As part of our Spending Review submission<sup>x</sup>, Solace put forward a number of proposals to Government to help address the growing workforce crisis facing councils. These are:

### Overarching

#### 1. Develop a progressive workforce strategy

In addition to developing a workforce strategy for the sector, the Government should also work with Solace (and other sector bodies) to:

- coproduce **career frameworks for key professional disciplines** experiencing recruitment/retention issues (e.g. planners, lawyers, environmental health, and building control) to ensure the development of a thriving pipeline of future leadership candidates with the necessary skills and experience to fulfil key professional roles to a high standard.
  - The professions requiring additional attention/support should be kept under regular review, informed by good data (see '**Research and evaluation**' section under point four below).

### Short-term

#### 2. Create a recruitment campaign

- The Government should lead/support a major (and sustained) advertising and recruitment campaign to promote the benefits of working in local government and the wider local public sector to help **ensure the LG sector has the capacity to deliver** services for its communities to an agreed, acceptable standard – and so to be able to deliver on the Government's ambition to 'level up' places.

#### 3. Invest in education and training

- Government should commit to investing £250m every year in education and training to ensure the local government workforce of today and tomorrow has the right numbers, skills, values and behaviours, at the right time and in the right place(s).
  - £250m represents one sixteenth (or 6%) of what Health Education England spends on educating and training the health workforce each year (£4bn).

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- The money invested should also be linked to a commitment to transformation and creating ‘post-pandemic councils’ that will be fit to meet the future needs/demands of the communities they serve.
  - A post-pandemic council is one which convenes, enables and, where required, delivers in a place working with NHS, community leaders, the voluntary and community sector, businesses, and government to keep its residents safe and creates opportunities to thrive.

### **Pipeline**

#### **4. Create a Local Leadership Academy**

- A Local Leadership Academy should be created to compliment the work of the National Leadership Centre and enable the existing programmes delivered by Solace to be done at scale.
- The Local Leadership Academy should focus on developing leadership in a Place i.e. not just local authority specific. This in turn will help to nurture the talent and relationships needed for successful and inclusive system leadership in a Place in the coming years.
  - A dedicated equality and diversity workstream with a specific focus on creating more a diverse and inclusive senior leadership pipeline – representing the communities they serve.
- For the Local Leadership Academy the Government should match the £10m per annum funding it provides to the National Leadership Centre.

#### **Research and evaluation**

- Government should also invest in a research and evaluation programme, with strong involvement from Solace (and other sector bodies). The data from this will help to:
  - demonstrate which leadership programmes are working well;
  - inform the ongoing development of the Workforce Strategy, including highlighting current/future workforce challenges, overall and by profession;
  - act as an assurance mechanism for Government re: value for money.

#### **5. Set up Local First**

- Similar in concept to Teach First, a newly created Local First organisation would act as training and development programme for high quality graduates and ‘career changers’ who would be otherwise unlikely join a local authority and/or local public sector body.
- The Government should match fund what it invests in Local First (almost £19m a year) over the next six-and-a-half years.

Solace (and other sector bodies) should play a key role in helping to codesign the creation of and then oversee the running of Local First.

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### **The impact**

21. Creating and supporting a local government workforce strategy will remove significant and growing risk that future shortfall and problems with recruitment generally, but especially in leadership positions, will undermine the ability of councils to support this and all future Governments' agendas and deliver better services and opportunities for their residents.
22. It will also free up valuable resource dedicated to managing staff shortfalls and so drive up the quality of services – this will help to reduce inefficient spending on agency staff.
  - There are currently more than 5,800 FTE agency children and family social workers in post at a rate of about 15%<sup>4</sup> - double comparable professions e.g. the 7% of agency staff in adult social care<sup>xi</sup>. The additional cost of employing agency staff is approximately £22,700 per worker per year. This equates to 53% of the average social worker salary and means there is a loss of more than £100m per year that, according to the independent review of children's social care, "could be better spent on frontline activity to support children and families"<sup>xii</sup>.
23. The Local Leadership Academy, with its pan public sector focus, will drive up the quantity and quality of collaboration at the local level, so increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of all local services and driving public sector reform.
24. Creating Local First will help support the Government's Places for Growth programme, delivering a more geographically diverse Civil and Public Service that will better serve the public and ministers. It would also replicate the injection of dynamism that Teach First has engendered in education.
25. All of this should be underpinned by a truly sustainable multi-year funding settlement for local government in order to help drive a fundamental shift in spending on social infrastructure, with a specific focus on community-led prevention and early intervention initiatives. A strong local government sector will help to improve peoples' life chances, address inequalities and disparities, and build short and long term community resilience.

### **Inquiry theme 3: The changes needed to the structure of the workforce, particularly to enable better integration between services**

26. Solace is fully in favour of reform and creating a more integrated public sector system.
27. Councils, and local authority chief executives in particular, play a crucial and unique role in convening and galvanising other local public service partners, as well as private and third sector organisations, to address issues and bring together disparate funding streams in a place. This has been displayed in abundance throughout the course of the pandemic.
28. One key area Solace is currently focused on is better integration between the health and care systems, in particular in regard to addressing the wider determinants of health. Solace supports the move towards greater integration and Integrated Care Systems.
29. And we recently published a report with the NHS<sup>xiii</sup> which highlights excellent examples of joint working between local authority, health and third sector partners at a local level. But, as that report says, we can and must go further.
30. We have been supportive of the Government's integration white paper, and in particular the proposal to create a single accountable person in a place to help ensure closer links are forged between health and care systems.<sup>xiv</sup>



31. The potential for local government to make a real, positive difference to the people and places we serve is immense, but it will only be by working together with health, voluntary and community sector partners, and playing to our respective strengths, that we will be able to deliver meaningful change by catalysing local economies, driving up the quality of life for our residents, improving public health, and addressing inequalities.
32. In addition, Government should work with Solace and the LGA to agree a Declaration of Local Government Reform which sets out the principles of good leadership and governance that underpins significant spending and capability, and provides assurance that investment is appropriately targeted.

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## References

- <sup>i</sup> [Press release: Spending Review must address local government workforce crisis, Solace, 29 September 2021](#)
- <sup>ii</sup> [Workforce planning, Local Government Association, 2021](#)
- <sup>iii</sup> [Widespread workforce shortages revealed, Local Government Chronicle, 16 February 2022](#)
- <sup>iv</sup> [Social Care Leaders: vision for a future workforce strategy, Skills for Care, 2021](#)
- <sup>v</sup> [Resourcing the Planning Service: Key trends and findings; RTP1, 3 June, 2021](#)
- <sup>vi</sup> [Environmental health workforce survey report: local authorities in England, CIEH, April 2021](#)
- <sup>vii</sup> [Where is the next generation of council chiefs? Local Government Chronicle, 11 November 2021](#)
- <sup>viii</sup> [Build Back Better: Our plan for health and social care, HM Government, September 2021](#)
- <sup>ix</sup> [Levelling Up the United Kingdom White Paper, HM Government, 2 February 2021](#)
- <sup>x</sup> [Spending Review submission, Solace, September 2021](#)
- <sup>xi</sup> [The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England, Skills for Care, 2021](#)
- <sup>xii</sup> [The case for change: The independent review of children's social care, June 2021](#)
- <sup>xiii</sup> [Delivering together for residents: How collaborative working in places and communities can make a difference, Solace and NHS England and NHS Improvement, September 2021](#)
- <sup>xiv</sup> [Joining up care for people, places and populations, Department for Health & Social Care, February 2022](#)

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