

West Midlands Workforce Strategy for Local Government

2022 to 2027



Foreword

Time to try something different

“Local Government affects the lives of every citizen and is involved in nearly every aspect of our communities. In the West Midlands, councils small and large provide essential services that range from supporting our most vulnerable children and adults, educating the next generation, maintaining highways, providing housing, collecting waste, to supporting businesses to grow and thrive. Protecting the environment, keeping parks and open spaces accessible and enjoyable for all, shaping the look and feel of local areas and working with agencies to keep us safe are important for our quality of life and the scale of what our 33 Councils do is immeasurable. The Covid Pandemic has really demonstrated the scale and impact of what we can do ‘locally’ and was seen by our communities, who connected with us in a way they had never done before.

Behind all that Local Government achieves is ‘our’ workforce in the Region – over 62,000 permanent employees (excluding our schools staff) and thousands of temporary workers. They are ‘Local Government’ and put simply, are not just our workforce, but also part of the communities we

serve. As a Region of 33 independent councils and as employers we have a rich history of collaborating on workforce issues, particularly through WME, which is our own independent Employers Organisation, owned by Councils for Councils. The workforce challenges we face individually as Councils are growing and have been highlighted in many national reports. This is an issue we can no longer solve in isolation, because otherwise we can often end up competing with each other to the detriment of the whole sector. Post pandemic, is the time when we now urgently need to come together and work towards delivering an ambitious but achievable Workforce Strategy for our West Midlands Local Government Workforce That is something we have been working on with colleagues from councils across the West Midlands and we hope you will find the Strategy and the new WMTemps offer is relevant for your own organisation.

**Cllr Ken Meeson, Chair WME
Elected Member Management
Board (Mayor, Solihull MBC)**



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1. Introduction

The West Midlands is a diverse region with a permanent local government workforce of circa 62,059 (excluding schools' staff) and a total workforce spend of £836m annually. The sector also spends a further £126m each year on temporary agency workers - 15% of our total workforce.

In 2021 our councils highlighted a range of concerns around agency services that were shared by many and which no one council working alone could solve. WME then explored these concerns in more detail through consultation events with councils, providers and temporary workers. It was clear that the problems highlighted required an innovative approach, and one that offered councils a chance to have greater control over agency provision and to move the reliance from temp to perm as a means of creating greater stability in the workforce.

WME realised that just improving agency services could only resolve some of the issues, but a strategic solution could offer far greater benefits to individual councils and the sector in our region. Working with stakeholders WME developed this first West Midlands Workforce Strategy set around 5 priorities. It is underpinned by a strategic partnership with Opus People Solutions who have been awarded the contract to provide a West Midlands 'regional' agency service through a single provider framework.

This West Midlands Workforce Strategy for Local Government is intended to complement and work alongside our councils' existing People Strategies and Workforce Plans to help address the permanent and temporary workforce issues that are interlinked, and not resolved by councils acting independently. The Strategy is ambitious and is intended as a medium to long term plan, and its success is wholly dependent on councils in the West Midlands making a commitment to support the Strategy and use the regional agency service and by doing so, work collaboratively with WME, each other, and with Opus People Solutions to make positive changes.



"At Birmingham City Council, we welcome the West Midlands Workforce Strategy for Local Government. By working together as a region of councils, we have a real opportunity to develop a stronger public sector workforce, that can address the growing complex needs and challenges faced by our communities and work in unity to create positive change."

**Cllr Tristan Chatfield, WME Board Vice Chair
(Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources,
Birmingham City Council)**

2. The starting point

West Midlands Employers is the Regional Employers' Organisation for 32 membership councils. Our vision is to **"advocate, build and champion people centred organisations for a resilient and diverse public sector workforce that benefits everyone in the West Midlands"**

We provide a range of core membership services to our shareholder councils alongside a portfolio of shared services that councils can choose to access. West Midlands Employers is a trusted and credible partner in the Region and delivers high quality services that offer both value for money and organisational improvements.

Annually councils contribute to a Regional Workforce Priorities Fund of £100k which is used to create capacity to deliver against targeted priorities and tackle themes which no one council can address on their own and have a symbiotic impact on the regional local government workforce.

In 2020 a priority emerged to explore how we can address some of the challenges councils experience in relation to their temporary workforce; both directly with access to agency workers, but also the underlying need to reduce the reliance on temporary workers.

WME created an initial 'task and finish' group of subject matter experts to explore the issue and as a result formalised the 'Regional Agency Project' as well as discussing options with providers in the marketplace to understand the issues from the provider perspective.

3. The current challenges

As a Region we need to take greater control of agency provision and the relationship this has with our permanent workforce to move from a passive to 'collaborative interventionist' approach. We ideally need to stop competing with each other within the region, and the market-place created by so many providers has wider challenges that you have told us you want to address to stabilise the permanent workforce and improve the access to temporary workers.

If councils commit to working collaboratively, then through a single regional agency provider and our existing WMJobs services, we can ensure our councils compete with a strong regional identity and a local government voice. This then enables them to compete strongly with other regions and other sectors by reducing the internal competition within the region.

There are three main drivers for change.

1. Efficiency

The ambition is to only use temporary workers where there are short-term resource needs, reducing total agency spend year on year. We need to ensure a detailed understanding of the whole local government workforce and factors impacting on it, working collectively to stabilise the permanent workforce by long term workforce planning to address skills shortages.

2. Effectiveness

The ambition is to deliver whole system improvements to how organisations manage their temporary resource, with regional autonomy over agency providers. To ensure the total cost of the temporary workforce is understood and managed effectively by improving the recruitment, onboarding, performance management and conversion to permanent roles of temporary workers.

3. Equilibrium

The ambition is to stabilise the permanent workforce in the Region to ensure there is a deep understanding of the equipoise between the agency market, recruitment and other employment factors in the sector and region. Councils are addressing many of these through individual workforce strategies, but many issues are such that no one Council can solve them, and in many cases, actions can negatively impact on other initiatives or other councils in the region.



The current approach to agency provision across the region, alongside 32 Councils progressing individual workforce plans has created a market by which agencies and councils are operating in competition with each other, exacerbating a current skills shortage, higher churn of temporary workers, low satisfaction levels with agency workers, and a higher workload for managers.

Many councils in the region currently in contract for agency provision, do so through a neutral or master vend model. This is often a procurement led solution that drives initial 'cost' down but does not address the hidden costs this creates throughout the system. Those councils not in contract provision are also exposed to additional risks around compliance and have limited visibility over price.

These drivers for change, 'efficiency, effectiveness and equilibrium' can act as opposing forces in temporary workforce provision and this strategy seeks to address

them with specific actions, ensuring appropriate governance and monitoring is in place to track outputs and outcomes.

No one council alone can address the challenges highlighted in this Strategy, and a Regional Workforce Partnership approach will offer individual services to councils but within an overarching strategy that looks at the whole region temporary agency economy; increasing collaboration, reducing competition, and looking at factors to stabilise the permanent workforce; reducing the reliance on agency provision both for individual councils and across the region.

This Strategy is intended to complement and work alongside councils' existing People Strategies and Workforce Plans and address the permanent and temporary workforce issues that are interlinked and are not able to be resolved by councils acting individually.



4. Who is this Strategy for?

The challenges that councils have told us about, through a series of consultation workshops and surveys, can be considered as four inter-related pillars of impact, the council, its managers, the temporary workers and the local community. This presents an opportunity for councils to reimagine how they plan, manage, and use the temporary workforce.

What's in it for the council

We aim to deliver greater efficiency over agency provision and will work to stabilise the permanent workforce. We will redesign the approach to workforce data and planning to support long-term stability, develop an inclusive talent pipeline for the Region, help reduce the year on year need for agency provision, and in partnership with the agency provider aim to deliver significant efficiency savings by 2027 for councils participating in the agency service.

The savings and benefits will vary by council, but as part of the service engagement process we will provide savings and benefits modelling to inform and support local decision making.

What's in it for managers

We will standardise and improve the approach to placing temporary workers, increasing quality, and reducing inefficiency. We will free up manager capacity by reducing time spent on recruiting and onboarding temporary workers and in managing poor performance. We will establish clear performance measures, service level agreements and support for managers to achieve this.

What's in it for temporary workers

We will listen to our temporary workers, who represent 15% of the total local government workforce, to make their experience of working within our sector better, seeking opportunities to provide non pay benefits to them, embedding the principles of organisational justice, and improving services by ensuring temporary workers have a positive experience.

What's in it for the local community

We aim to ensure the local economy and citizens benefit through greater social value via the provision of temporary workers, by ensuring our workforce is diverse and represents the people we serve. We aim to recruit local people to fill local roles and there is a commitment to investing in skills development in the local area and treating them well in the role.



"I believe that by collaborating, we will be in a stronger position to address the workforce challenges which we all face, as 33 Councils, in the years ahead. Many of these challenges are complex and inter-related and no one Council can address them in isolation. Together as a Local Government sector we have a real opportunity to find innovative solutions to benefit the whole West Midlands Region"

[Cllr Gwilym Butler, WME Board member for Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin](#)



5. Your Vision & Priorities

The vision for the West Midlands Workforce Strategy for Local Government is to **“work together as the West Midlands Region to deliver improvements and efficiencies across the local government workforce that benefit our community, organisations, employees and our temporary workers”**.

Focussing on efficiency and effectiveness we aim to achieve equilibrium.

We have consulted widely across the Region, we have carried out two detailed data analysis exercises and spoken with managers, employees, and temporary workers in 6 workshops and had regular engagement with an (Agency) Service User Group (SUG). We have shaped and led the development of the Regional Workforce Partnership - working closely with a Board of subject matter experts, and we have consulted throughout with Directors of HR.

To deliver the vision for the partnership we will focus on five priorities.



“The strength of Local Government comes from our workforce working daily alongside our communities, which we have seen demonstrated over the past 2 years in responding to the pandemic. We welcome the opportunity to collaborate with other Councils across the region to ensure Local Government remains a competitive employer, attracts the best talent and provides fulfilling work with career opportunities”

Cllr Tony Jefferson, Leader Stratford on Avon Council and WME Board Members for District Councils



Priority 1

To complement Council workforce strategies to stabilise the permanent workforce.

You told us you want:

- To understand how the regional agency market is distorting the permanent workforce and ability to recruit and retain to roles.
- To promote and establish a stronger brand for working in Local Government in the West Midlands, with targeted joint campaigns for hard to fill roles, reducing the need for agency workers.
- To increase the diversity of the Local Government workforce, ensuring the permanent workforce represents the communities which we serve.
- To develop a regional approach that attracts and recruits employees from abroad (for hard to fill roles) and provides a support network to these employees.
- To have clear talent pipelines of apprenticeship programmes and graduate programmes that help ensure Local Government attracts the best talent in the Region.
- To have local opportunities for local people that benefits the local economy as the largest public sector employers in your community.
- To enhance existing reward and benefits offers to employees to ensure there is a 'total reward' package for the Local Government workforce in the Region, to ensure we remain an employer of choice and attract the best talent.
- To have a collaborative approach to understanding emerging workforce challenges – specifically relating to pay, benefits and hard to fill areas.

We will:

- Educate the sector on the shift to more ethical practices to transform their temporary resourcing solutions.
- Agree a programme of recruitment campaigns each year for priority 'hard to fill' roles, working with partner organisations to deliver and fund these.
- As a strategic partnership, work with councils to do a diagnostic health-check temp recruitment processes to secure candidates faster and improve workforce planning.
- Establish and strengthen the employment brand of the Region, seeking to produce films and interactive content for Councils to use and collectively promote.
- Establish support for Councils to recruit employees from abroad for hard to fill roles and ensure employees are proactively supported through regional networks in moving to the Region to address skills gaps and strengthen our permanent workforce.
- Explore opportunities to collaborate on apprenticeships and graduate programmes that can be accessed by all Councils and offers an opportunity for smaller organisations to benefit from these.
- Agree a clear programme of professional areas that require talent and career pathways and pilot approaches in these.
- Establish clear data and metrics to understand the Local Government workforce impact on the local economy and take appropriate actions to ensure there are direct benefits of the workforce on local citizens.
- Explore options to enhance existing council reward and benefits packages (for both hard to fill roles and all employees), where possible negotiating offers and deals with private sector organisations to demonstrate social value.





Priority 2

To deliver efficiency savings and improved service delivery for Councils

You told us you want:

- A whole workforce solution that offers real value for money across your whole 'pay bill', which is transparent, with no fees or hidden costs associated with it.
- To be able to move good temporary workers to permanent roles with no financial fees to your Council after 12 weeks and this to be seen as success criteria for working with agencies.
- To Implement, manage, and review caps on agency spend in appropriate professional areas, for example Childrens Services.
- Flexibility for off-contract work, where agencies cannot fulfil appropriate candidates for a role and wider access to second tier agencies to broaden the supply chain.
- To develop a regional approach to talent management with talent initiatives for hard to fill roles and ensure access to a range of graduate programmes, apprenticeships, and entry to work programmes.
- Better management information for your Councils which is comparable to other organisations, which includes pay benchmarking information.
- A single point of contact for all agency provision to ensure continuity and the ability for managers to build relationships and for the agency to develop an understanding of their needs.
- Consolidated invoicing to increase efficiency and capacity in finance teams.
- An improvement to the experience of temporary workers as integral and valued members of the workforce, to promote temp to perm and conversion opportunities.

We will:

- Ensure you have a direct relationship and account manager with the agency provider with an enhanced SLA for service provision, including a focus on inclusion and diversity.
- Provide access to a full suite of performance indicators to enable councils to benchmark progress.
- Establish a Strategic Regional Agency Board that will monitor and review the delivery of the Regional Workforce Strategy and within that retain oversight of the Regional Agency Provision.
- Work closely with the Regional Agency to promote the benefits to temporary workers of converting from temp to permanent roles [guaranteeing no cost to Councils after 12 weeks] in response to Councils' needs, and closely monitor and report on data relating to this.
- Establish an appropriate framework within the partnership for managing the governance of agency caps (including the existing Childrens Services Memorandum of Understanding) and proactively review and manage this.
- Work with you to reduce and minimise your off contract spend so that you are securing best value through your 'call off contract' and ensure any off contract spend is managed through an 'exceptions' process.
- Ensure there is no fee after 12 weeks for Councils making agency workers permanent
- Work with Councils to refine recruitment processes to support temp to perm workers.
- Provide consolidated invoices for all agency provision monthly and ensure clearly itemised details are provided on timesheets and agency workers costs; improved data to support local financial management.



Priority 3

To deliver economic and social value for the communities of the West Midlands

You told us you want:

- To make sure local people and local agencies can provide temporary workers to the Council, ensuring money stays in the local economy and with local people where possible, and you want better data to demonstrate this.
- An agency provider to have a good understanding of the Council, its structures, labour market and local nuances to understand your communities' local needs.
- Your workforce to reflect the diversity of the communities you serve and to be able to monitor and track this data for temporary workers.
- A strong ethos of social value in how you engage temporary workers, working with people in the community to help provide skills training and development to those in temporary roles. To help those that want to, in securing permanent employment.
- To ensure people in temporary roles are treated well and have a positive experience working for the Council.

We will:

- Create a local hub in the West Midlands for the WME Regional Agency to be co-located with the West Midlands Employers team, maximising local and sectoral knowledge (NB; This will only be possible once sufficient sign-up to the service is secured).
- Work with local recruiters to build strong local supply chains which are shared and monitored through a Regional Agency Board and in individual participating Council account management meetings.
- Develop a 'training offer' that is available to temporary workers within the regional agency service provision, and accredited where possible, around skills development to help them secure permanent roles, with monitoring and reporting on take-up per local area
- Tackle and address poor agency behaviours in the supply chain, seek to introduce a whole Region agency margin rate, reducing the incentive to move candidates between Councils, thus offering local workers stability, reducing 'agency churn' and resources to manage such.

Priority 4

To improve the management of temporary workers

Your temporary workers told us they want:

- To reduce the time taken by managers to hire and appoint temporary workers by having better quality, work ready candidates provided by agencies, who have been shortlisted with interviews arranged for them.
- Consolidated arrangements for DBS checks.
- Managers to independently process and onboard temporary workers with easy to use systems.
- To build a pool of suitably qualified and experienced temporary workers for hard to fill roles.
- A performance management process for temporary workers, so that poor performing workers are not placed in other Councils.
- An ability for managers to provide feedback on the performance of temporary workers and their experience of the agency provision.

We will:

- Provide hiring managers with a shortlist of suitable, work ready and pre-screened candidates for interview, that meet their requirements.
- Work with the agency and councils to establish and monitor a performance process for temporary workers to ensure poorly performing candidates are not moved around councils; with training for all managers to understand and use the process (recognising that job performance management is a council responsibility).
- Support the improvement of local recruitment policies, including clear performance management guidance, steps, and options for hiring managers (via an agency service handbook); ensuring dialogue on worker performance concerns with the provider.
- Ensure the regional agency provides support and advice through a WMTemps Helpdesk that is located within the Region, with Monday to Friday 9 till 5pm online support available.
- Require the agency to provide appropriate out of hours service support as part of their Framework Agreement.



Priority 5

To improve the experience of temporary workers

Your temporary workers told us they want:

- To have a high quality and consistent induction and onboarding process for agency workers into Local Government and to your Council.
- To be treated as employees with appropriate benefits, recognising the services they provide are often alongside your permanent employees.
- A mechanism to raise complaints and concerns about managers or fellow employees which affords them a degree of protection.
- To have access to wellbeing and support schemes, recognising much of the work they do can be stressful and emotional.
- To have a proactive agency that supports them throughout the work cycle and not just the appointment process and where they feel valued and supported by the agency.

We will:

- Establish clear processes for the onboarding and induction of agency workers, through the creation of a single onboarding portal, which will offer virtual induction and training modules with bespoke elements depending on the Council they are working for.
- Conduct end of placement feedback surveys with all agency workers to understand how we can improve their experience, recognising they are often part of the community we serve.
- Provide a clear programme of high quality training opportunities for all agency workers.
- Explore consistency in approaches to holiday pay for all temporary workers who have short term completed multiple placements through WMTemps, to reflect our commitment to those in our workforce and community.
- Establish a mechanism for temporary workers to raise concerns or complaints that can be investigated by the relevant Council.
- Explore options for a basic Employee Assistance Scheme made available to all temporary workers that are deployed through the Regional Agency Provision to support individuals.
- Ensure a valued and supported agency approach that supports retention.



Your priorities and our commitments are captured in the high level summary below, outlining our vision, the drivers for change, what we currently do and aim to do differently, and the potential resulting benefits.

The West Midlands Workforce Strategy and the WMTemps Resourcing Solution

Our VISION

Our vision for the West Midlands Workforce Strategy is to work together as a region to deliver improvements and efficiencies across the local government workforce that benefit the community, organisations, employees and temporary workers

Why we need change now

Over the last few years, councils across the West Midlands have been experiencing challenges with their temporary workforce. These challenges range from recruiting to hard to fill roles, inflated prices from agencies as a result of councils competing with each other for workers as well as the private sector, and poor-quality in temporary workforce and agency provision.

By working together and having a regional approach to managing our temporary workforce alongside our permanent workforce strategies, we believe we can make improvements to our temporary workforce that will bring real benefits to our councils and the region.

No one council acting alone can address the workforce challenges within local government and by adopting a regional collaborative approach, we can offer individual service solutions to councils linked to an overarching strategy that works across a whole region temporary agency economy.

What are we doing

Bringing strategic value to our customers by transforming the way we procure and manage temporary workers via a resourcing solution that also supports and invests in a regional strategy - tackling whole workforce improvements

What we'll do differently

As a sector we want to have greater control over agency provision and the relationship this has with our permanent workforce - to move from a passive to a 'collaborative interventionist' approach. **There are 3 key drivers for change ->**

Efficiency

The ambition is to only use temporary workers where there are short-term resource needs, reducing total agency spend year on year and the reliance and associated supply and demand issues, reducing competition led rate increases

Effectiveness

The ambition is to deliver whole system improvements to how organisations source and manage their temporary workforce, with regional autonomy over agency providers

Equilibrium

The ambition is to stabilise the permanent workforce to ensure there is a deep understanding of the equipoise between the agency market, recruitment, and other employment factors in our sector and our region

Benefits

Better visibility and control of the temporary workforce

Achieved through thorough and transparent data and information at all levels

Reduction in utilisation of Temporary Workers

Achieved through better oversight of workforce as a whole with management of volume placements

More Effective & Efficient Agency Service Provision

Achieved through common single point of entry and engagement approaches, onboarding and HR policies

Local workers and suppliers

Achieved through focus on volume and spend in the local market with local providers

Greater satisfaction for Managers and Temporary Workers

Achieved through effective feedback and management processes which are two-way

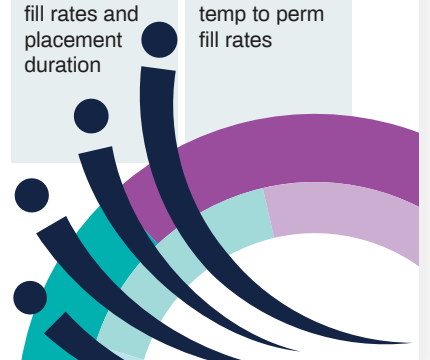
Better quality provision of temporary workers

Achieved by monitoring and managing fill rates and placement duration

Contribution to Permanent Workforce

Achieved by monitoring and actively managing temp to perm fill rates

For further information please contact info@wmemployers.org.uk





How we will deliver the Strategy

The ambitions within this Strategy are significant and have the potential to deliver real service improvements, reduce overall costs for temporary agency workers, and add social value for the region. To achieve this will require the commitment of councils in the West Midlands to participate in the regional agency service and work collaboratively with each other and WME to drive change.

Following an open procurement WME has established a single provider framework for Regional Agency Services and awarded the contract for supply to Opus People Solutions. Together WME and Opus will work in a strategic partnership to provide regional resourcing solutions to our councils, and uniquely, to also work together to achieve the ambitions of the West Midlands Workforce Strategy for Local Government. This new WME service will work in synergy with other existing and established WME services such as WMJobs, our leadership and coaching service, and HR support services where necessary to support the ambitions within the Strategy that impact the whole workforce.

The single provider framework will enable councils to commission temporary agency service via a 'call-off contract'. WME and Opus will work closely with councils

during any engagement phase to provide detailed cost and benefit modelling, support to draft a local business case and other support required to enable participation. A detailed service implementation plan will ensure a smooth transition from any current provider to the regional service.

WME has established a governance approach to working in a strategic partnership with the regional agency provider that ensures the region benefits from a service rebate which in turn is reinvested in the priorities within the Workforce Strategy. Councils commissioning the regional agency service will participate in a Regional Agency Board and have influence over how the rebate will support delivery and priorities within the West Midlands Workforce Strategy.

The Strategy has an overall delivery plan of 5 years from April 2022 until March 2027. We recognise that many councils are committed to existing contracts, so their participation would be staggered. In its first year we will work closely with those trailblazer councils able to be early adopters of the service, to pave the way and demonstrate proof of concept.

It is important to acknowledge that only with significant levels of council participation will some of the more ambitious elements of the Strategy be achievable, but every service success starts somewhere.

In February 2022 WME established a regional agency service



To find out more about this service and access to the West Midlands Agency Framework contact info@wmemployers.org.uk



South Staffordshire Council



CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL

