

London Borough of Merton

**Report and recommendations arising from the
scrutiny review the recruitment of young
people.**

May 2008

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Acknowledgements:

The Corporate Capacity Overview and Scrutiny Panel would like to express its thanks and appreciation to all those who contributed to this review, through preparing information, attending meetings to answer questions and to all the people who took time to contact us with their comments and views.

Contents

Foreword by chair	
Summary of recommendation	
Introduction	1
The problems facing the council	2
Recruiting young people	5
Retaining young people	14
Conclusion	19

Foreword by chair

Both national and local data has shown that the average age of local government employees is increasingly leading to an ageing workforce. This phenomenon is exacerbated by the difficulty in recruiting younger people to work in local authorities at all levels of the organisation.

An ageing workforce means that almost two thirds of the workforce is set to retire over the next 15 years. This coupled with poor recruitment rates of younger people means that there will be a smaller pool from which to draw talent to replace senior managers as well as falling numbers of people to undertake all the other jobs on offer at the authority. This is not the only problem facing the council, which also faces a skill shortage in a number of service areas, and an under-representation of young people in comparison with the makeup of the local population.

The task group identified that there is work taking place to address this problem however, there were a number of gaps in the current thinking and a number of initiatives had failed to come to fruition. The task group want to ensure that the council has a workforce that is well-placed to overcome the challenges that face the borough and hope that the recommendations included in the report go some way to support this thinking.

The task group has throughout been mindful that encouraging more young people to work for the council is not an end in itself. The council will best serve its residents by seeking to employ and retain talented, motivated and committed staff. Although younger people are particularly underrepresented, the task group hopes that through strengthening Merton's ability to recruit and retain younger people, it will be to the benefit of all staff regardless of age. I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this review, both internally and externally; all evidence has been greatly appreciated.

I, and my colleagues, would also like to particularly thank the dedicated support we have received from the Scrutiny Team, in both collating evidence and preparing the draft report. While this report is the first published by the Corporate Capacity Panel, the task group commenced its work as part of the previous Way We Work Overview and Scrutiny Panel. I would therefore like to thank those colleagues who contributed to this report but no longer sit on the Panel.

The recruitment and retention of young people is an area of concern that must be addressed with both urgency and timeliness. As Chair of the task group I hope that our work will support the council to take action by recommending a number of practical proposals to be taken forward across the organisation.

Councillor Richard Williams
Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Corporate Capacity Panel

Summary of recommendations and observations

Problem facing the council	
R1	The council should improve data analysis in order to accurately capture the problems facing the council.
Recruiting young people	
R2	The council should identify possible internship placements across the council and develop support for managers to implement and attract candidates.
R3	The Council should consider publishing a short booklet that can be circulated to schools to outline the various work options available to them at them at the Council.
R4	The council should explore ways to encourage the wider promotion of council activities to young people as a means to encourage young people to consider local government as a possible career opportunity and highlight the range of careers available. The council can promote its work through things such as citizenship classes and democracy week.
R5	The council should ensure that it supports managers to (1) write job descriptions creatively and use language that young people can relate to where appropriate. (2) Consider how it markets itself when engaging young people in all areas of the organisation (3) ensure that job titles are clear and understandable and (4) ensure that person specifications do not unnecessary preclude young people of people from other sectors from applying.
R6	The council should develop a timetable of work-related courses that can be incorporated into job descriptions to (1) make jobs more attractive to younger people and (2) ensure recruitment timetables do not miss opportunities to register on courses for development.
R7	The Council should recognise the particular benefits derived from developing a broad experience base at the early stages of a person's career through general experience and/or specific schemes and programmes. Steps should be taken to ensure these are weighted accordingly in the short-listing process.
R8	The Council should ensure that the benefits of the programmes detailed in the report (such as apprenticeship schemes and the NGDP) are effectively promoted across the council so managers are aware of how the schemes operate and the benefits it can bring.
R9	Increased consultation should take place with current young employees to ensure any limiting constraints in job descriptions/person specifications are removed and ensure that the jobs offered will be attractive to a younger audience.
R10	The council should develop a cross-departmental apprenticeship scheme that will actively address the challenges facing the authority. This scheme must be universally adopted across the council to ensure a consistent approach.
R11	The council should consider developing a job site aimed specifically at young people looking for their 'first job'. This initiative could be explored as a partnership with key partners including NHS, Fire, Police and Third Sector.
R12	To increase the attractiveness of jobs and peoples development the council should explore the possibility of working with its public sector partners (Police, NHS, Fire) to offer secondments or placements within the different organisations. This will also support future managers in their understanding of partnership working. This initiative could also be

	<p>extended to shared services and possibly the private sector.</p> <p>This recommendation as a strong link with R18 to support the retention of staff.</p>
R13	The council should ensure that there are appropriate entry-level jobs to complement initiatives to recruit younger people.
O1	<p>Observation</p> <p>The group considered that the timing of job advertisements is important in recruiting young people. The council should explore this further and where jobs are suitable for school leavers recruitment activities should be aligned accordingly.</p>
O2	<p>Observation</p> <p>It is important that the time of processing applications is monitored to ensure that the council does not loose out to other employers. This is applicable to all vacancies across the organisation.</p>
Retaining young people	
R14	The council should ensure that it captures effective data through all surveys (Exit interviews, staff surveys, appraisals etc) in order to allow it to consider a full range of factors that may influence younger employees (as well as other employees) to leave the council and analyse it effectively. Additionally, effective analysis of this data should take place such as combining a range of indicators rather than treating them in isolation.
R15	<p>In light of R11 the exit interview online form needs to be revised before its introduction in July 2008 in order to capture data effectively. (1) It needs to ensure balanced results using a four-point scale. (2) It should be designed to effectively explore hypotheses the council has for people leaving such as salary and learning development. (3) It must ensure that it effectively captures free text data to allow it to be analysed.</p> <p>Trends arising from the exit interviews should be reported to the corporate capacity panel on a 6-monthly basis.</p>
R16	Former participants of the various schemes/programmes should be consulted on how to improve the process for future cohorts in order to improve their experience, bring a greater benefit to the council and improve the retention rate of participants.
R17	The council should adopt a cross-departmental approach to development. This should include an increase in secondments or internal placements, and the opportunity to work on different projects across the council in order to diversify experience and breakdown departmental silos. (This links with R12 and could be incorporated in a partnership approach).
R18	To retain talented people (and provide clear opportunities for younger people to aspire to) the council should explore the issues related to progression within the organisation. Following this analysis where problems exist the council should develop a plan to offer appropriate opportunities to support talented officers to secure promotion or move horizontally within the authority or with partner organisations in line with R12.
R19	The council should outline core experiences and skills needed for career progression. In consultation with both senior managers and young people the council should identify means to achieve these and incorporate them into development plans.
R20	Younger employees should be consulted on what they see as effective learning and

	development in order to increase their skill base. This should be linked with the R19.
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Following a presentation at the Way We Work Overview and Scrutiny Panel in February 2008 on the progress made following the age discrimination act, the panel agreed to establish a task group to explore the issue of employing young people and report back to the panel in May 2008.
- 1.2 Although the panel felt that some progress was being made it was considered that a task-group could add some additional thinking to the problem of recruiting young people.
- 1.3 The review had a primary focus on recruiting young people. However, the group also felt it was important to consider the retention of young people as this is closely related to recruitment. The report also links to talent management as much of the literature combines this with recruitment and retention and a number of the recommendations will be applicable for the development of the entire workforce.
- 1.4 There is a wide range of literature and best practice focusing on the issues of recruiting and retaining young people. However, there are fewer examples of some specific considerations that the group felt were important. Therefore, this report presents recommendations based on evidence, interviews and observations.
- 1.5 This report has a deliberate focus on recruiting and retaining young people. However, there are other important factors that must be acknowledged alongside this issue. Firstly, the effect of issues such as ethnicity, gender and disability will need additional action and a targeted response and secondly, all recruitment irrespective of age, should ensure that the person is either qualified already or will be supported to do their job effectively.
- 1.6 The review has considered a wide range of evidence and has made a number of observations¹ and a number of recommendations for possible improvements.

¹ Observations have been included where the good have not identified enough local evidence to make a recommendation but feel, from considering other evidence, that it important to highlight this as a potential issue.

2. The problem facing the council

- 2.1 The need to recruit and retain more young people is due to a combination of four factors; an ageing workforce, a potential skills shortage, an under-representation of young people in comparison with the population of the borough and, a lack of entry-level jobs for young people.

Ageing workforce

- 2.2 The IDeA² have identified that across the sector, more than a third of the local government workforce is due to retire over the next 15 years as nearly two thirds of the local government workforce are aged 40 and over. The proportion of those under 25 is only seven per cent, compared to 17 per cent in the wider economy. Councils must consider how to attract and keep both young and older workers. Figure 1 shows that this problem facing the entire local government workforce, not just Merton.

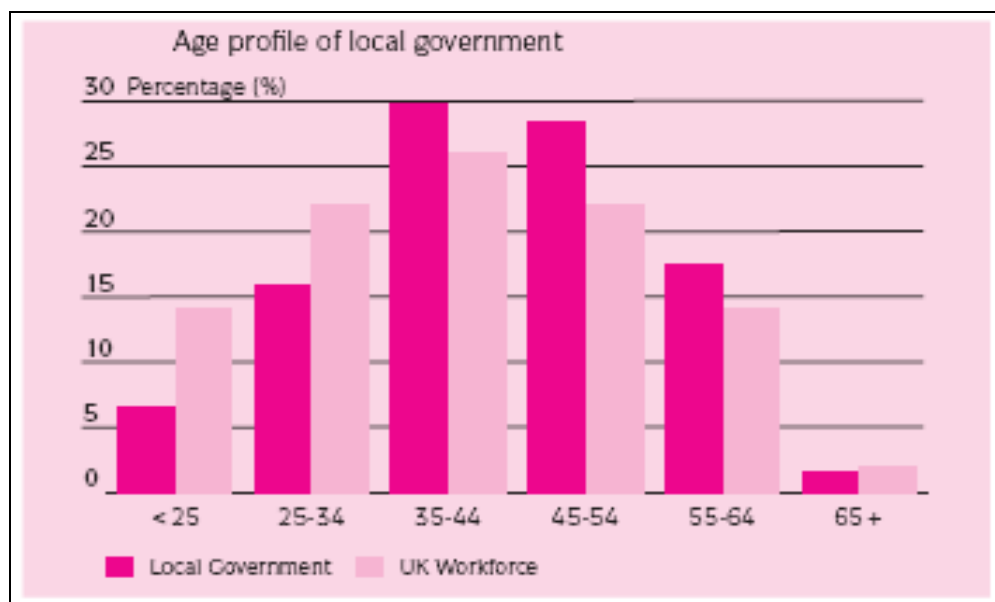


Figure 1 – Age profile of Local Government (Source: NLGN, 2008:14)

- 2.3 The IDeA suggest that a review of processes and policies may prove to be the easiest part of dealing with an ageing workforce but a significant shift in thinking is required both on the part of employers and potential employees.
- 2.4 Merton's workforce development plan³ identifies that the age profile within Merton continues to be a significant area of concern and with under representation of younger people and over representation of the over forties age groups.

² <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=5145197>

³ http://intranet/workforce_dev_plan_2007.pdf

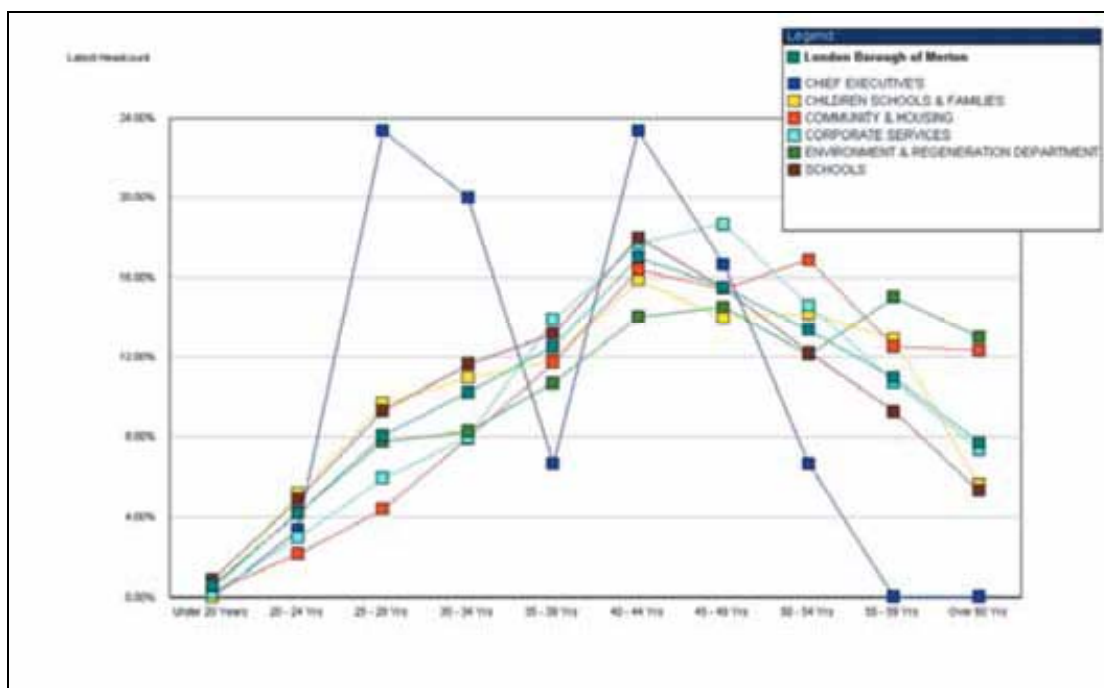


Figure 2 - Age profile of LBM departments

2.5 Figure 2 shows the age profile for all the departments across the council and includes the council's average figure. This illustrates that the concern runs across the organisation although the problem is starkest for Environment and Regeneration, and Community and Housing.

2.6 Looking at both graphs together it shows that Merton's workforce is largely reflective of the national profile. However, it is important to note that in some departments Merton's age profile peaks later than the national average and in community and housings case the age profile of employees plateaus between the ages of 40-55.

Skills shortage

2.7 Local government is also facing a skills shortage in a number of areas. The IDEa have outlined a 'top 10' list of problem areas⁴:

- Building surveying
- Teaching
- School crossing patrol
- Educational psychologists
- Occupational therapy
- Trading standards
- Environmental health

⁴ <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelD=6589650>

- Social care
- Planning
- Building control

2.8 The skills shortage currently affects a number of employment areas and these should be targeted but there is also a need to develop new managers and officers to fill the gaps that will appear in the next few years.

Under-representation

2.9 Data presented above shows that younger people are under-represented across the workforce. It is also believed that the percentage of young people employed by the Council is also under-represented in comparison to the borough's population. Data presented to the panel in February⁵ (table 1) attempted to highlight this issue however, the figures used cannot be compared due to the different ranges they are representing. This data needs to be amended before any statements can be made regarding workforce representation.

	Economically active in the borough. (ONS population Survey April 2006 to March 2007).	Employed in the Council
Age 16 - 19	25.6%	0.68%
Age 20 - 24	78.1%	3.69%

Recommendation 1

The council should improve data analysis in order to accurately capture the problems facing the council.

2.10 Overall, it is clear that the council faces a number of problems that need to be addressed through a focus on recruiting and retaining young people. The sections below consider these challenges and present a number of recommendations for possible improvements.

⁵ Taken from the report presented to Way We Work overview and scrutiny on 7 February 2008. http://www.merton.gov.uk/democratic_services/ds-agendas/ds-reports/_7000-7999/7325.pdf

3. Recruiting young people

3.1 The Council has already made a commitment to attracting younger people to work for the Council and the workforce strategy has presented a number of aims:

- Engaging with the workforce of the future: more involvement with schools at careers and industry days, providing careers information to younger people and promoting the work and employment opportunities of the Council.
- Increasing the use of Modern Apprenticeship Schemes: consider requiring Departments to identify a specified number of vacancies for MAS every year⁶
- Participation at college/university job fairs, particularly those that offer qualifications in areas of particular concern
- Encourage the remodeling / conversion of posts to relate to specific workforce issues.
- Continue working with the National Graduate Development Programme (NGDP)

3.2 When comparing the age of new starters to the age of leavers in figure 2 it shows that in general the Council is recruiting younger people to replace both the young and older leavers.

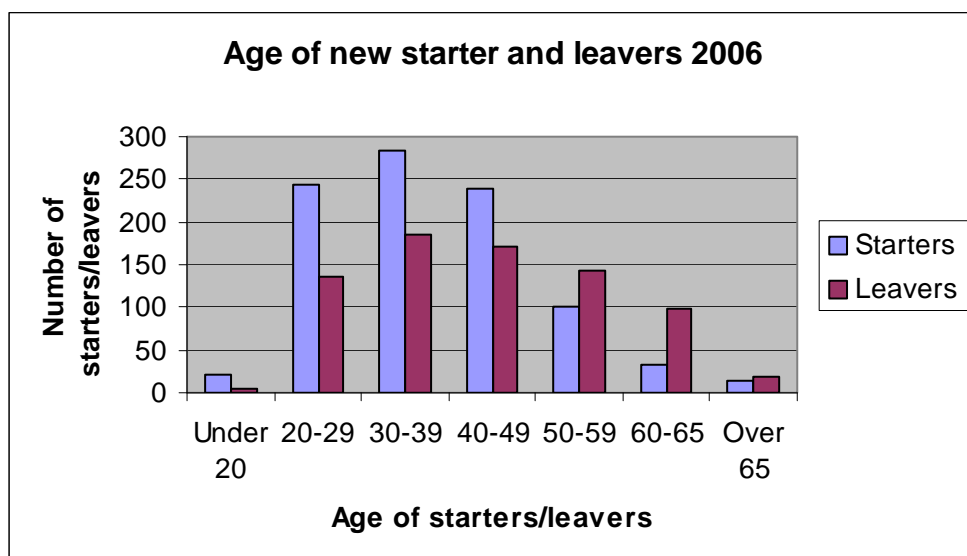


Figure 3: Age of new starters and leavers 2006

3.3 It is also important to recognise that young people enter the local government workforce with different levels of experience and capabilities. For example:

- There are 16/18 year old school leavers who are looking to start work;
- Graduates with a good understanding of local government but with little experience.

⁶ http://intranet/modern_apprenticeships

- Young people under 30 who are looking to move to secure a higher salary/more responsibility.

The focus of this report is to examine the recruitment of young people based on age, alongside the differences outlined above consideration needs to take into account other factors such as gender, ethnicity and disability. Nonetheless, it is important to understand these different levels and develop employment opportunities and workforce development appropriately and the report is set within this context.

- 3.4 There is a perception that younger people choose not to work in local government for a number of reasons. This may be true for some of the areas mentioned above but it could be argued that in general, especially amongst graduates there is a seemingly healthy appetite for working in local government.
- 3.5 As the Guardian⁷ states 'The public service ethos seems to have increased rather than withered during the New Labour years' and that this may 'be a reflection of value change among younger generations: a more issue-based cohort may be as ready to work in the public sector as to travel on an environmental gap year or to boycott certain products'.

Internship/Placement Schemes

- 3.6 Increasing numbers of graduates achieving good degrees has resulted in higher levels of competition for jobs in all sectors. In turn this means that graduates increasingly need more experience to get the jobs they want⁸.
- 3.7 This increased competition can be evidenced within our own workforce. All the graduates who completed the NGDP at Merton had to undertake further study or undertake voluntary internships to 'boost' their CVs before being awarded a position through the scheme. This suggests that there is a market for internships amongst the graduate population, this should be recognised by the Council and an internship programme should be developed.
- 3.8 There are a number of organisations, both in general terms and within specific policy areas, who can support the council in developing internship programmes; for example, the London Sustainability Exchange⁹ have developed a scheme that helps harness the skills and enthusiasm of the next generation of sustainability professionals by providing links to employers across the public, private and NGO sectors.
- 3.9 The council already works with the American university, Worcester Polytechnic Institute as part of their Interdisciplinary and Global Studies Division that provides placements for students to undertake work across the organisation. This has proved a successful scheme and the students have proved value for money¹⁰. This is an example of a scheme that could be replicated with institutions from the UK.

⁷ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2008/jan/23/publicsectorcareers.socialtrends>

⁸ For example see <http://www.get.hobsons.co.uk/news/Job-hunting/484>

⁹ http://www.lsx.org.uk/whatwedo/internship%20scheme_page3145.aspx

¹⁰ For more details visit: <http://www.wpi.edu/Academics/Depts/IGSD/index.html> - This page also shows some of the projects students have been involved in.

- 3.10 Ultimately, at a graduate level there are individuals who are willing to work in the public sector although these are still fewer than those willing to work in the private sector. The Council should take this market into account and ensure that it offers appropriate opportunities to recent graduates and final year students (alongside national graduate schemes) either through internships or full time positions.

Recommendation 2

The council should identify possible internship placements across the council and develop support for managers to implement and attract candidates.

- 3.11 Despite the above, there is still a difficulty in employing young people because many still hold the view that local government is not always an exciting or innovative place to work¹¹. The Council should therefore work to address this issue. And there are a number of examples where local government can be promoted positively and creatively to young people of all abilities.

Promoting the council as a preferred career choice and reducing negative perceptions

- 3.12 The IDeA have developed a brochure¹² that highlights the various roles within local government on a national basis. It outlines why local government is important and how working in local government can be a rewarding career. The council should consider producing a similar brochure aimed at young people within Merton and include testimonials from staff about the work they do and detail the opportunities for school leavers, further education leavers and graduates. This could be shared amongst schools and colleges within the borough and describe the options available to them when applying.

- 3.13 There are many things that are interesting and challenging about working in local government but younger people are often not exposed to this. The Council should explore ways to encourage the wider promotion of council activities to young people in order to encourage young people to consider local government as a possible career opportunity. There are a number of means through which this can take place beyond career days such as through citizenship classes or democracy week.

Recommendation 3

The Council should consider publishing a short booklet that can be circulated to schools to outline the various work options available to them at the Council.

Recommendation 4

The council should explore ways to encourage the wider promotion of council activities to young people as a means to encourage young people to consider local government as a possible career opportunity and highlight the range of careers available. The council can promote its work through things such as citizenship classes and democracy week.

¹¹ IDeA workforce strategy (<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/aio/7634217>)

¹² <http://www.lgcareers.com/publications/local-government-careers-brochure/>

3.14 For all recruitment purposes the council should develop a stronger link between the branding/image of the council and the language used in advertisements. This is of particular importance to counter the negative perception that some young people hold of local government. In particular:

- The group felt that job adverts didn't effectively sell job opportunities at the council. As such it was felt that the recruitment team needed to ensure that managers are equipped to write job adverts and descriptions creatively.
- Similarly the language used for appropriate job adverts should be written in a style that young people could relate to and which highlights the positive and challenging aspects of working in local government.
- The council should consider how it markets itself to young people across the authority. For example, if the council is offered the opportunity to present at a career day they should consider who is best placed to deliver the presentation/hold the workshop and engage with younger people.
- The group felt the observations in other research¹³ regarding job titles was applicable. As such the council should ensure that job titles are clear and straightforward and have an instant appeal to younger people.
- The council must ensure that they do not preclude younger people or people from other sectors from applying for jobs by for example, asking for unnecessary experience in local government within person specifications.
- The group also felt that the council could reassess where it advertises job adverts across the borough.

Recommendation 5

The council should ensure that it supports managers to (1) write job descriptions creatively and use language that young people can relate to where appropriate. (2) Consider how it markets itself when engaging young people in all areas of the organisation (3) ensure that job titles are clear and understandable and (4) ensure that person specifications do not unnecessarily preclude young people or people from other sectors from applying.

3.15 Another way of increasing the attractiveness of working at the council to young people is to align job offers with clear job specific training and development. A first step to address this could be the establishment of a Timetable of work related courses (both national and local).

3.16 This would enable managers and recruitment to identify possible links to courses that could form part of the job description and in turn, increase their attractiveness to young people. It would also ensure that course deadlines would not be missed in the recruitment process.

Recommendation 6

The council should develop a timetable of work-related courses that can be incorporated into job descriptions to (1) make jobs more attractive to younger

¹³ NLGN (2008)

people and (2) ensure recruitment timetables do not miss opportunities to register on courses for development.

Graduate Schemes

- 3.17 The Council has pursued a number of graduate programmes including the NGDP¹⁴ and London Treasurers Graduate Finance Scheme¹⁵.
- 3.18 The NGDP, which has been the most publicised, is facilitated by the IDeA to attract graduates into local government. Councils are asked to participate by hosting at least one candidate on a fixed-term contract for two years. It is intended that the candidate will remain within the host authority or if not the wider local government workforce.
- 3.19 The Council initially recruited through the NDGP in 2001 although only took one candidate. The second recruitment was in October 2006 when they employed three candidates which was an above average number for a Council Merton's size.
- 3.20 The scheme has been largely successful. From the three members of the 2006 cohort all have secured jobs; two with Merton and one with a neighbouring borough. Following the success of the scheme two more candidates will be recruited in 2008.
- 3.21 The aim of the scheme is to retain participants within the council following completion and this is discussed later in the report. However, strategies to retain NGDP participants should extend to attract participants of the scheme who have left other authorities and are looking for a their next job. The council has currently recruited two former NGDP participants from other authorities. Ultimately the council should view the NGDP (and other relevant programmes) as an accreditation and weight it accordingly to increase this number across the Council.

Recommendation 7

The Council should recognise the particular benefits derived from developing a broad experience base at the early stages of a person's career through general experience and/or specific schemes and programmes. Steps should be taken to ensure these are weighted accordingly in the short-listing process.

Recommendation 8

The Council should ensure that the benefits of the programmes detailed in the report (such as apprenticeship schemes and the NGDP) are effectively promoted across the council so managers are aware of how the schemes operate and the benefits it can bring.

Recommendation 9

Increased consultation should take place with current young employees to ensure any limiting constraints in job descriptions/person specifications are removed and ensure that the jobs offered will be attractive to a younger audience.

¹⁴ www.ngdp.co.uk

¹⁵ <http://www.financethefuture.co.uk/>

Trainee/Apprentice Schemes

- 3.22 Elsewhere, some service areas are running trainee schemes aimed at attracting younger people into local government. The Housing department have recently recruited a number of people on a trainee scheme and the trainees provided the group with answers to a number of questions:
- 3.23 **How did you find out about the scheme?**
- 'I saw it advertised on the internal staff Notice board, as I was already working as a temp for Merton Council. I was struggling to find a permanent job as I have little qualifications and hardly any experience, as I left school halfway through my A levels'.
 - 'I found out about the scheme when I saw the job advertised. I had heard about this type of scheme before and had applied for a similar job with Wandsworth council'.
- 3.24 **Do you get additional benefits other than the job (e.g. are you studying for a qualification)?**
- 'I am being sent on a CIH [Chartered Institute of Housing] course. As well as this, I'm getting the experience behind me, as well as being a trained visiting officer, which is vital in today's society'.
 - 'Yes there are additional benefits with being in post as a trainee, I am just about to start doing my Chartered Institute of Housing level 2 course work and I think we may possibly also have the chance to do an NVQ in housing. There is no doubt that this post opens up many opportunities for young adults'.
- 3.25 **Where did you see the advertisement? Did they promote it within schools as an alternative to university?**
- 'I saw it on the internal staff Noticeboard. I did not see it advertised anywhere else, though. I can see it being a great alternative to University. It is a great compromise for those who cant decide between University and Apprenticeships, etc'.
 - I saw the post advertised on the Jobs go public website. As I wasn't at school at the time of application I am not sure if it was advertised within schools or universities.
- 3.26 The scheme has so far proved successful. As such the council should identify and support other departments where a trainee scheme would be appropriate.
- 3.27 Apprenticeship schemes¹⁶ are becoming a popular way of attracting young people into the workforce and consequently there is a range of best practice across both the private and public sectors.

¹⁶ For example see:

<http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk/>

<http://www.employersforapprentices.gov.uk/index.cfm?action=Links.default>

<http://www.kent.gov.uk/jobs-and-careers/jobs/work-placements/kent-success-apprenticeships.htm>

<http://www.communities.idea.gov.uk/c/10344/doclib/get-file.do?id=513834>

<http://www.hackney.gov.uk/apprenticeships.htm>

- 3.28 For example Hackney have a well-publicised apprentice scheme and offer apprenticeships in business administration, customer services, parks, youth work, health and social care, e-business and highways.
- 3.29 The council has previously attempted to establish an apprenticeship scheme working with connexions but this failed to take-off, as placements weren't available for possible apprentices. Apprenticeships could be an important tool in addressing the challenges facing the authority, as such it is crucial that future schemes involve a robust planning process working across departments and in partnership with both the 14-19 manager in CSF and connexions. A complete toolkit should be developed to support managers and placements should be identified and secured before apprentices are recruited. Ultimately, the council should recognise the benefits of apprenticeships and increase work to establish a cross-departmental scheme to help address the problems facing Merton.
- 3.30 The council is currently in the discussion stages of developing a recruitment strategy for young people which will establish partnership working with Children Schools and Families (CSF) and their 14-19 Strategy Manager, local schools and colleges, Connexions, Kingston Merton Education Business Partnership, to create an awareness of employment opportunities in the council. This strategy is intended to incorporate a number of actions outlined in this report including the apprenticeship scheme.
- 3.31 As with many initiatives there will be financial implications and additional issues raised by implementing an apprenticeship scheme. The largest concern is relating to the finite amount of vacancies across the organisation and the possibility of saturating a service area due to the limited opportunities once qualified.

Recommendation 10

The council should develop a cross-departmental apprenticeship scheme that will actively address the challenges facing the authority. This scheme must be universally adopted across the council to ensure a consistent approach.

Use of technology

- 3.32 The group also considered the suggestion of using 'www.youtube.com' or 'www.facebook.com'. Both these mediums are low cost and have a number of plus points however; the group did not feel that these would be an effective way to recruit younger people. However, there are opportunities within Merton to use such media that could benefit recruitment but the Council should make a clear demarcation between social sites such as youtube.com and professional use of video¹⁷.

¹⁷ The Big Think (<http://www.bigthink.com/>) is an example where modern media spans a social and professional barrier.

- 3.33 Using websites as a communication is a useful method to promote opportunities and keep information in one safe place. Kent County Council have developed a new micro-site aimed at young people called 'Your First Job'¹⁸. This site includes details of relevant opportunities for young people within the authority such as Apprenticeships, plus more general information about access to employment. This type of approach could be considered by the council as part of a wider partnership recruiting scheme.

Recommendation 11

The council should consider developing a job site aimed specifically at young people looking for their 'first job'. This initiative could be explored as a partnership with key partners including NHS, Fire, Police and Third Sector.

- 3.34 In summary, there is a wide range of work taking place however, the profile of such schemes need to be raised across the council and packages to support managers consider the possibilities for new schemes should be developed and promoted.

Working in partnership

- 3.35 This report has already discussed the importance of working in partnership internally, specifically the relationship between Human Resources, the 14-19 Manager and connexions in establishing apprenticeship schemes.
- 3.36 However, local government is changing with an increase in external partnership working at all levels with partners such as the NHS, Police, Fire and Third Sector¹⁹. Consequently, understanding of partnership working will be an important element for managerial posts in Local Government²⁰. At one of the scale Herefordshire has employed a joint chief executive for both the council and primary care trust²¹.
- 3.37 Additionally, it has been suggested²² that some partner organisations are a more attractive career choice for young people. A possible solution has been to offer joint opportunities with partners at a national scale for graduate schemes. However, this can be advanced locally for both new and existing employees at all levels of the organisation in order to address recruitment issues.

Shared services

- 3.38 An increase in shared services also offers an opportunity to explore links with other authorities to increase career development of young people and also the attractiveness of jobs.
- 3.39 The ability to work on joint projects with a number of local authorities is an attractive prospect. Additionally, linking with retention issues the ability to move between authorities, as part of secondments will facilitate talent management.

¹⁸ www.kent.gov.uk/yourfirstjob

¹⁹ <http://www.merton.gov.uk/lsp>

²⁰ ODPM (2005:71) <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/142151.pdf>

²¹ http://www.hsj.co.uk/insideknowledge/herefordshire_public_services_trust.html

²² NLGN (2008:30-34)

Link with private sector

- 3.40 Similar to the initiatives above the council should consider exploring possibilities to link with relevant private sector organisations to offer job swap/secondment opportunities. This will benefit the council by diversifying the experience of employees and increase the possibility of attracting employees from other sectors into the local government workforce. This initiative has strong links to the retention of employees.

Recommendation 12

To increase the attractiveness of jobs and peoples development the council should explore the possibility of working with its public sector partners (Police, NHS, Fire) to offer secondments or placements within the different organisations. This will also support future managers in their understanding of partnership working. This initiative could also be extended to shared services and possibly the private sector.

This recommendation as a strong link with R18 to support the retention of staff.

Timing of applications

- 3.41 The group observed that the timing of job advertisements and the recruitment process were important.
- 3.42 Firstly, it is important that entry-level jobs are advertised at the right time to attract the right audience. For example, if a job were suitable for a school leaver it would be better to advertise towards the end of the academic year than in the middle.
- 3.43 Secondly, there is a need to ensure that applications attracting young people are processed quickly to ensure preferred candidates accept positions. Speaking with some officers it was felt that if applications take too long to process the council losses out to other employers.

Observation 1

The group considered that the timing of job advertisements is important in recruiting young people. The council should explore this further and where jobs are suitable for school leavers recruitment activities should be aligned accordingly.

Observation 2

It is important that the time of processing applications is monitored to ensure that the council does not loose out to other employers. This is applicable to all vacancies across the organisation.

Lack of entry level jobs

- 3.44 Through discussions with officers the group were informed that there were a limited number of entry-level positions across the council that exacerbates the problems of recruiting young people. This observation was supported through conversations with current graduates who commented that from working in the authority and looking at the jobs available they would have found it hard to secure a position with the authority if they didn't enter through the graduate scheme.

- 3.45 The group felt that any steps to increase the recruitment of young people would be held back by a limited number of entry-level positions. As such, steps should be taken to ensure that these are created, either through apprenticeships or a process of job remodelling.

Recommendation 13

The council should ensure that there are appropriate entry-level jobs to complement initiatives to recruit younger people.

4. Retaining young people

- 4.1 LBM workforce strategy identifies that the retention of employees under 30 years of age has become worse as the turnover has increased in each of the three age groups up to 29 years of age.
- 4.2 Although efforts have been made to attract younger staff to Merton, retention of this demographic continues to be problematic. However, it was recognised that arguably, turnover of staff will be higher at the younger end of the scale due to reasons such as ambition, flexibility and difficulties in internal career advancement. It is therefore important that the Council can respond to such turnover and recruit similar or better individuals.
- 4.3 It is important that the council retains employees where there is a low demand for the job. However, where there is a high demand replacing an employee with someone of a similar age should be viewed as an opportunity. However, the Council must assure younger people are able to apply for and win these jobs.
- 4.4 Compared with 2006, 2007 saw a marked increase in leavers across younger employees²³.

	2006 leavers	2007 leavers
Under 20	4	14
20-29	135	229

- 4.5 Figure 4 shows that currently there is a fairly even spread of leavers across the whole range of ages.

²³ Taken from the report presented to Way We Work overview and scrutiny on 7 February 2008.
http://www.merton.gov.uk/democratic_services/ds-agendas/ds-reports/_7000-7999/7325.pdf

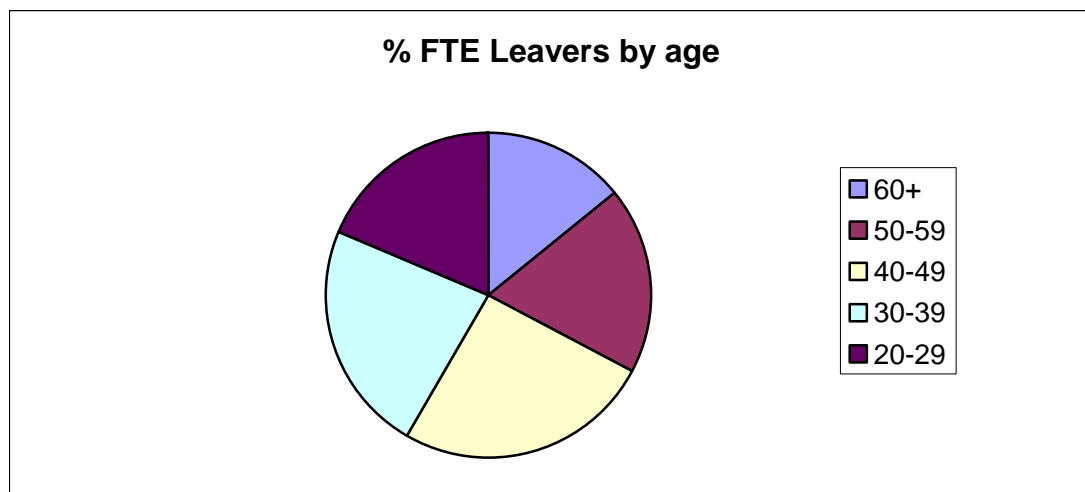


Figure 4: % FTE leavers by age 2006

- 4.6 Although the 2006 employment profile states that salary may be a large motivation for leaving, figure 4 suggests only a very small correlation between age and salary at leaving. Moreover, if the anomalies - those earning an abnormally high amount - are discounted then there is no evidence of any correlation. This suggests that the final salary has little or no influence on the leaving age²⁴. Consequently, there may be other motivations for younger people to leave the authority other than salary. However, further analysis must be undertaken.
- 4.7 The Council recognises that exit interviews are an important means to understand the motivations behind people leaving and reported to the way we work panel on 6 May²⁵. However, there still remains a need to take a more proactive approach to ensuring staff complete exit interviews or the online forms as the pilot received less than a 50% completion rate. There is also a need to amend the form to ensure that it is balanced, at the moment it asks users to rate a question either excellent, good, satisfactory or poor. This means there are 3 positive and one negative, instead it should read something similar to; Very Good, Good, Poor, Very Poor. It was also felt that as exit interviews are a key source of data the questions on the form did not effectively explore the main challenges/hypotheses outlined above in order to highlight clear areas for action.
- 4.8 The Council stated that there were issues surrounding the analysis the free text data. It is possible to put processes in place to make this analysis relatively easy and expertise should be sought from elsewhere across the council.

²⁴ Further analysis has shown that the removal of the anomalies produces a lower correlation with a correlation coefficient of $R^2 = 0.0224$ and when focusing on employees with less than 15 years service the correlation is even lower with a coefficient of $R^2 = 0.0075$.

²⁵ http://www.merton.gov.uk/council/committee.htm?view=event&event_id=2787

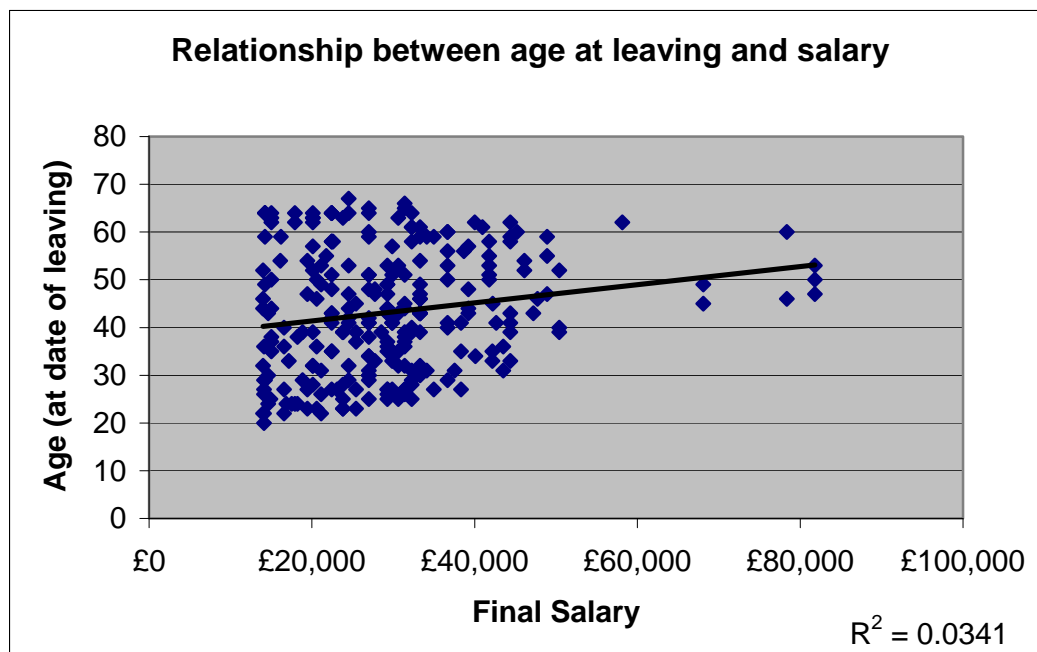


Figure 5: Correlation between age at leaving and salary

- 4.9 However, despite the limited take up the exit interview pilot did identify two main trends. 33% rated career prospects in Merton as Poor and, 13% rated learning and development opportunities as poor. This compares to either a 7% or 0% poor response for other questions.
- 4.10 Finally, it is vital that the exit interview results are comparable with wider all workforce data to allow for effective and accurate analysis.

Recommendation 14

The council should ensure that it captures effective data in order to allow it to consider a full range of factors that may influence younger employees to leave the council and analyse it effectively. Ultimately it should combine a range of indicators rather than treating them in isolation.

Recommendation 15

In light of R11 the exit interview online form needs to be revised before its introduction in July 2008 in order to capture data effectively. (1) It needs to ensure balanced results using a four-point scale. (2) It should be designed to effectively explore hypotheses the council has for people leaving such as salary and learning development. (3) It must ensure that it effectively captures free text data to allow it to be analysed.

Trends arising from the exit interviews should be reported to the corporate capacity panel on a 6-monthly basis.

- 4.11 Having invested in the development of NGDP participants (and other graduate scheme participants) it is important that the council retains them where appropriate. Speaking with former participants of the NGDP scheme²⁶ the group felt that a number of small changes could be made to the way the scheme was run in order to improve the experience of participants, ensure the council receives value for money, and increase the retention rate.

Recommendation 16

Former participants of the various schemes/programmes should be consulted on how to improve the process for future cohorts in order to improve their experience, bring a greater benefit to the council and improve the retention rate of participants.

- 4.12 Development should not just be focused on training. Younger members of staff should be offered opportunities to widen their experience and skill base to increase both their ability to do their job and also improve career prospects. Opportunities to work outside their remit on different projects should be identified. This would support both the nature of the workforce and provide objectivity to various problems.
- 4.13 To progress within local government it is important that younger people have the relevant experience. For example, one of the main experiences needed to progress in local government is working with or having exposure to councillors. However, this opportunity for this is limited in many areas across the authority and ways to overcome this should be explored.

Recommendation 17

The council should adopt a cross-departmental approach to development. This should include an increase in secondments or internal placements, and the opportunity to work on different projects across the council in order to diversify experience and breakdown departmental silos. (This links with R12 and could be incorporated in a partnership approach)

- 4.14 There is a hypothesis presented by a number of studies, observations²⁷ and conversations with officers in Merton that career development can often be hindered by a lack of opportunities to naturally progress within the organisation and are effectively forced to leave in order to secure promotion or career advancement. This problem may also be exacerbated when age and length of service are also considered²⁸. Analysis of this hypothesis has not taken place within Merton so it is unclear whether this is a problem. This could become an issue that must be addressed and action should be taken²⁹ to analyse workforce data and data arising from exit interviews to consider the extent of this problem.

²⁶ Three graduates were recruited in October 2006 on a two-year fixed term contract. Two graduates have secured permanent jobs with Merton and one has moved to a neighbouring borough.

²⁷ NLGN, 2008:53

²⁸ NLGN, 2008:15 citing CMI 'motivation matters'

²⁹ There is a link between the opportunities that partnership secondments and shared services outlined in paragraph ? in providing a solution to this problem.

Recommendation 18

To retain talented people (and provide clear opportunities for younger people to aspire to) the council should explore the issues related to progression within the organisation. Following this analysis where problems exist the council should develop a plan to offer appropriate opportunities to support talented officers to secure promotion or move horizontally within the authority or with partner organisations in line with R12.

- 4.15 It is important that the council effectively develops young people to fill the gaps that will be left by an ageing workforce. Equally, It should also be possible to identify core competencies or experiences³⁰ that young employees need to gain to improve their chances of progression. The council should outline these core experiences and competencies and in consultation with both senior managers and young people identify means to achieve these and incorporate them into development plans in an effort to increase retention rates.
- 4.16 In discussion with younger members of staff the group were informed that they had not been consulted in setting these competencies and development plans. As such HR should engage both senior managers and those younger people already employed by the council in order to (1) ensure buy-in to future initiatives and, (2) meet the expectations of both parties.

Recommendation 19

The council should outline core experiences and skills needed for career progression. In consultation with both senior managers and young people the council should identify means to achieve these and incorporate them into development plans.

Recommendation 20

Younger employees should be consulted on what they see as effective learning and development in order to increase their skill base. This should be linked with the R19.

³⁰ For example see <http://www.communities.idea.gov.uk/c/10344/doclib/get-file.do?id=673249> and ODPM (2005:85) <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/142151.pdf>

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 This review has outlined the problems faced by the council due to an ageing workforce and it is clear that this problem needs to be addressed. Although the Council has some plans that are currently being pursued the task group has identified a number of further initiatives that should be explored.
- 5.2 Possibly the key area for action is to ensure the effective capture and analysis of workforce data in order to explore the key areas of concern and guide the development of clear actions to address these problems. In terms of recruitment the council must improve how it 'sells' its jobs to a younger audience (at all levels of entry) and harnesses the knowledge of existing employees. One of the main issues surrounding retention focuses on development opportunities offered to staff throughout their careers both in terms of promotion and skills.
- 5.3 The wider changes in local government are opening up new opportunities for the recruitment and retention of staff. This report has highlighted the possible benefits of working in partnership with both our public sector partners within Merton as well as other local authorities.
- 5.4 Finally, this report has identified a clear relationship between recruitment and retention to the extent that applying the recommendations to improve recruitment will increase the retention rate of existing employees and vice-versa. Equally, although this report has had a primary focus on age many of the recommendations are applicable to the entire workforce and should be treated as such.
- 5.5 Overall, the task group hopes that Cabinet will accept the recommendations presented in the report and that these will be turned into actions that will contribute to the addressing the problems facing the council.