

COVID-19 Workforce Survey

Research Report

6 May 2020



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Summary

Background

This is the first in a series of bi-weekly surveys of all councils in England, Wales and Northern Ireland collecting key workforce data on how the sector is responding to COVID-19. An online survey is emailed to heads of human resources, or a nominated contact, in councils from England, Wales and Northern Ireland on alternate Wednesdays. The data requested relates to the week ending the preceding Friday. The intention is that this collection is the single national source through which such data is gathered and it will, as appropriate, be shared with government departments and others in addition to providing comparator information for councils.

This report relates to the survey sent out on 6 May. The overall response rate was 61 per cent, and covered around a third of the total workforce.

Key findings

- Some 76 per cent of councils reported recruiting additional staff (of any type including casual, agency, contingent, etc) since 1 March 2020 (pre-lockdown). In total 6,696 additional staff had been recruited: the median number of staff per authority was 16 and the mean was 46.
- Twenty-five per cent (56 authorities) recorded deaths in service since lockdown. A total of 85 deaths were reported (cause not specified).
- Sixteen per cent of councils reported that they had furloughed at least one member of staff. In total there were 4,612 staff furloughed in the week ending 1 May 2020, which was 0.8 per cent of the current workforce. Of those councils that had furloughed staff, the median number furloughed was 76 and the mean was 132 but this varied considerably across different types of authority. The main reason given was that the service had stopped (55 per cent) or that funding had stopped (40 per cent).
- Some 87 per cent of councils had redeployed at least one member of staff. In total there were 16,970 staff redeployed in the week ending 1 May 2020, which was 3 per cent of the current workforce. The median number of staff redeployed was 55 and the mean was 89.
- More than nine out of ten councils (91 per cent) reported that they had at least one member of staff unavailable for work. In total there were 39,784 staff unavailable for work in the week ending 1 May 2020, 7 per cent of the current workforce. The median number of staff unavailable for work was 55 and the mean was 205.
- Nearly two-fifths (39 per cent) of staff were unavailable through 'self-isolation' and 30 per cent were unavailable due to 'Non-COVID sickness'.

The pattern varied across authority types, in London boroughs 16 per cent of staff were unavailable due to 'confirmed/suspected COVID'.

- When asked whether individual services had enough staff to run them normally or not, the service most badly affected was schools: over a quarter of single tier and county councils reported they were operating with severe disruption due to staffing numbers. Also badly affected were adults and children's services, with a third and a fifth of councils respectively reporting moderate disruption.
- When asked to assess the council overall, in terms of whether there are enough staff to run services normally or not, just over a quarter (27 per cent) of councils report moderate or severe disruption.
- Finally, councils were asked about the availability of personal protective equipment (PPE) and COVID-19 testing for staff. Nearly four-fifths (77 per cent) reported they had about the right amount of PPE or more than they needed; while 19 per cent had less than they needed. Nearly nine out of ten councils (87 per cent) said all or most of the staff who need testing can access it; ten per cent said it was available to some or none of their staff who need it.

Introduction

Councils face significant challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has required a joined-up approach between government departments, health agencies, local resilience fora and national agencies like the Local Government Association (LGA), all working with and trying to support councils. The LGA, National Association of Regional Employers (the collective body comprising all the regional employers organisations) and PPMA (the membership association for HR and OD professionals in the public sector) joined forces to coordinate an approach to workforce data collection in the sector.

To provide councils with the intelligence to effectively compare progress and plan locally, regionally and nationally a short workforce survey was sent out to all heads of human resources in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Findings from the survey will give councils a stronger position to build capacity in partnership with others; give the LGA and associations the evidence needed to ask government for support and resources; and help shape government thinking as we emerge from lockdown.

Methodology

On the 6 May, the LGA's Research and Information Team sent an online survey to all heads of human resources in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (a total of 372 councils). The survey was in the field for one week. A total of 227 councils responded, which is a response rate of 61 per cent.

and provide a breakdown of responses by authority type and region. Whilst these results should strictly be taken as a snapshot of the views of this group of respondents, rather than representative of all heads of human resources, this level of response means that the results are likely to provide a good indication of the position of the sector more widely.

Type of authority	Total number	Number of responses	Response rate %
District	188	112	60
County	25	15	60
London borough	33	23	70
Metropolitan district	36	19	53
Unitary	57	39	68
Welsh unitary	22	17	77
Local government districts (NI)	11	2	18

Table 2: Response rate by region

Region	Total number	Number of responses	Response rate %
Eastern	50	39	78
East Midlands	45	35	78
London	33	23	70
North East	12	10	83
North West	41	23	56
South East	70	26	37
South West	33	22	67
Wales	22	17	77
West Midlands	33	9	27
Yorkshire and Humber	22	21	95
Northern Ireland	11	2	18

Technical notes

- Where tables and figures report the base, the description refers to the group of people who were asked the question. The number provided refers to the number of respondents who answered each question. Please note that bases vary throughout the survey.
- Throughout the report percentages in figures and tables may add to more than 100 per cent due to rounding.

COVID-19 Workforce Survey: week ending 1 May 2020

This section contains analysis of the full results from the survey.

Size of local authority workforce

Workforce as at 1 March 2020

In order to establish a baseline, councils were asked the number of staff employed by the council on the 1st March 2020, pre-lockdown. The councils that responded to the survey employed 557,530 staff or approximately 35 percent of the total local government workforce.

184 single tier and county councils have responsibility for schools. As it is not always possible to separate out school-based staff from human resources (HR) systems, a supplementary question was asked to determine how many returns included school-based staff.

Of the 115 councils that responded to the survey and had responsibility for schools, 26 (23 per cent) reported that their return included school-based staff. For expediency this report doesn't separate those that included/excluded schools-based staff as it was felt that it would add significantly to the burden on councils returning the data and would have little effect on the overall findings.

Recruitment since 1 March 2020

Councils are at the forefront of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to continue to deliver vital services to their communities they have had to be flexible in how they deploy their workforce in order to increase capacity in high demand services or to fill gaps in services caused by the pandemic.

One option available to councils is the recruitment of additional staff. To understand the scale of recruitment, councils were asked whether they had recruited additional staff (of any type including casual, agency, contingent, etc) since 1 March 2020.

Of the councils that responded 173 (76 per cent) reported recruiting additional staff, in total 6,696 additional staff had been recruited since the 1 March 2020. The median number of staff per council was 16 and the mean was 46.

Table 3: Has the council recruited additional staff (of any type including casual, agency, contingent, etc since 1 March 2020)?

	No	%	Total	Median	Mean
County	12	80	1292	83	108
District	75	67	658	8	9
Local government district (Northern Ireland)	1	50	2	2	2
London borough	18	78	1592	64	94
Metropolitan borough	18	95	724	48	66
Unitary	36	92	1751	44	73
Welsh unitary	13	76	677	28	68
English single tier	72	89	4067	52	78
All councils	173	76	6696	16	46

Base: all respondents (227 councils – 15 counties, 112 districts, 2 local government districts, 23 London boroughs, 19 metropolitan boroughs, 39 unitary, 17 Welsh unitary, 81 English single tier)

Current headcount as at 1 May 2020

Total headcount for those councils that responded has increased by 1 per cent since the 1 March 2020 and now stands at 564,226 on the 1 May 2020.

Table 4: Change in headcount from 1 March – 1 May 2020

	At 1 March	At 1 May	% change
County	99303	100595	1
District	51984	52642	1
Local government district (Northern Ireland)	3390	3392	0
London borough	69362	70954	2
Metropolitan borough	103234	103958	1
Unitary	129838	131589	1
Welsh unitary	100419	101096	1
English single tier	302434	306501	1
All councils	557530	564226	1

Base: all respondents (227 councils – 15 counties, 112 districts, 2 local government districts, 23 London boroughs, 19 metropolitan boroughs, 39 Unitary, 17 Welsh unitary, 81 English single tier)

Death in service

Councils were asked to provide details on the number of staff that have died in service since 24 March 2020 (lockdown). Of the 223 councils that answered this question 56 (25 per cent) recorded a total of 85 deaths in service as of 1 May 2020. Councils were not asked the cause of death, so this figure relates to all causes not only COVID-19 deaths.

Table 5: Since 24 March when lockdown started, how many local authority staff, if any, have died in service?

	No. deaths	No. of councils recording 1 or more deaths
County	11	10
District	9	8
Local government district	0	0
London borough	22	12
Metropolitan borough	15	7
Unitary	22	14
Welsh unitary	6	4
English single tier	59	44
All councils	85	56

Base: all responding to question (223 councils – 15 counties, 112 districts, 2 local government districts, 23 London boroughs, 19 metropolitan boroughs, 36 unitary, 16 Welsh unitary, 78 English single tier)

Furloughed staff

Councils were asked to provide details of staff that were furloughed in the week ending 1 May 2020. Of councils that answered the question 35 (16 per cent) reported that they had furloughed at least one member of staff.

In total there were 4,612 staff furloughed in responding councils in the week ending 1 May, 0.8 per cent of their current workforce. Of those councils that had furloughed staff the median number was 76 and the mean was 132 but this varied considerably across different types of authority.

	No. of councils	% of councils	Total no. staff	Of those councils with furloughed staff	
				Median	Mean
County	3	23	1074	266	358
District	20	18	1688	52	84
Local government district	0	0	0	-	-
London borough	2	9	139	70	70
Metropolitan borough	1	6	3	3	3
Unitary	5	14	1432	167	286
Welsh unitary	4	25	276	14	69
English single tier	8	10	1574	167	241
All councils	35	16	4612	76	132

Base: all responding to question (218 councils – 13 counties, 111 districts, 1 Local Government Districts, 23 London Boroughs, 18 Metropolitan Boroughs, 36 Unitary, 16 Welsh Unitary, 77 English single tier)

Reason staff were furloughed

The 35 councils that had furloughed staff in the week ending 1 May 2020 were subsequently asked to indicate the reason the member of staff had been furloughed, 34 were able to provide the reason or reasons.

In the week ending 1 May 2020, 55 per cent of staff were furloughed as the 'Service had been stopped' and 40 per cent of staff furloughed as 'Funding had stopped'. The pattern varied across authority types, in London Boroughs 35 per cent of staff were furloughed due to 'shielding' in Metropolitan Boroughs this figure was 33 per cent.

Table 7: For those staff furloughed, what is/are the reason/s?					
	Funding has stopped	Staff are shielding	Caring responsibilities	Service has been stopped	Other reasons
	% staff	% staff	% staff	% staff	% staff
County	79	0	0	21	0
District	2	4	1	92	2
Local Government District	-	-	-	-	-
London borough	45	35	19	0	0
Metropolitan borough	0	33	0	67	0
Unitary	59	3	0	37	2
Welsh unitary	5	7	10	78	0
English single tier	58	4	1	35	1
All councils	40	3	1	55	1

Base: all responding to question (34 councils – 3 counties, 20 districts, 0 Local Government Districts, 2 London Boroughs, 1 Metropolitan Boroughs, 5 Unitary, 3 Welsh Unitary, 8 English single tier)

Redeployed staff

Councils were asked to indicate the number of staff that had been redeployed in the week ending 1 May 2020. Of councils that answered the question 167 (87 per cent) reported that they had redeployed at least one member of staff.

In total there were 16,970 staff redeployed in the week ending 1 May, 3 per cent of the current workforce. The median number of staff redeployed was 55 and the mean was 89.

	No. of councils	% of councils	Total no. staff	Median	Mean
County	13	93	2362	179	169
District	79	81	3217	24	33
Local government district	1	100	190	190	190
London borough	18	90	2234	118	112
Metropolitan borough	14	93	2720	165	181
Unitary	26	93	3118	81	111
Welsh unitary	16	100	3129	170	196
English single tier	58	92	8072	115	128
All councils	167	87	16970	55	89

Base: all responding to question (191 councils – 14 counties, 97 districts, 1 local government districts, 20 London boroughs, 15 metropolitan boroughs, 28 unitary, 16 Welsh unitary, 63 English single tier)

Unavailable for work

Councils were asked to indicate the number of staff that were unavailable for work in the week ending 1 May 2020. Of councils that answered the question 176 (91 per cent) reported that they had at least one member of staff unavailable.

In total there were 39,784 staff unavailable for work in responding authorities in the week ending 1 May, 7 per cent of the current workforce. The median number of staff unavailable for work was 55 and the mean was 205.

Table 9: No. of staff unavailable for work (week ending 1 May)

	No. of councils	% of councils	Total no. staff	Median	Mean
County	13	100	5379	400	414
District	81	84	2390	19	25
Local government district	1	100	178	178	178
London borough	18	100	3302	137	183
Metropolitan borough	18	100	11997	590	667
Unitary	31	91	10002	246	294
Welsh unitary	14	100	6536	283	467
English single tier	67	96	25301	256	361
All councils	176	91	39784	55	205

Base: all responding to question (194 councils – 13 counties, 96 districts, 1 local government districts, 18 London boroughs, 18 metropolitan boroughs, 34 unitary, 14 Welsh unitary, 70 English single tier)

Reason staff were unavailable for work

The 176 councils that reported that they had at least one or more member of staff unavailable for work in the week ending 1 May 2020 were subsequently asked to indicate the reason the for them being unavailable, 129 (73 per cent) were able to provide the reason.

In the week ending 1 May 2020, 39 per cent of staff were unavailable through 'self-isolation' and 30 per cent of were unavailable due to 'Non-COVID sickness'.

Reasons for self-isolation included being in an at-risk group, because the staff member believed they were symptomatic or because the staff member shared a household with someone who was symptomatic.

The pattern varied across authority types, in London boroughs 16 per cent of staff were unavailable due to 'confirmed/suspected COVID'.

Table 10: For those staff currently unavailable for work, what is/are the reason/s?

	Non-COVID sickness	Confirmed/Suspected COVID	Self-isolation	Caring for dependents/at risk relative/someone who is sick	Other reason
	% staff	% staff	% staff	% staff	% staff
County	36	6	35	3	21
District	28	3	52	8	10
Local government district	-	-	-	-	-
London borough	43	16	36	3	2
Metropolitan borough	27	7	37	3	26
Unitary	31	11	33	9	15
Welsh unitary	24	2	49	3	22
English single tier	31	10	35	6	18
All councils	30	7	39	5	19

Base: all responding to question (129 councils – 8 counties, 70 districts, 0 local government districts, 10 London boroughs, 12 metropolitan boroughs, 20 unitary, 9 Welsh unitary, 42 English single tier)

Service disruption

When asked whether individual services had enough staff to run them normally or not, the service most badly affected was schools: over a quarter of single tier and county councils reported they were operating with severe disruption due to staffing numbers. Also badly affected were adults and children's services, with a third and a fifth of councils respectively reporting moderate disruption.

When asked to assess the council overall, in terms of whether there are enough staff to run services normally or not, just over a quarter (27 per cent) of councils reported moderate or severe disruption.

Table 11: Please select the status of the services to the show if there are enough staff to run the service normally or not.

	Base	Operating normally	Operating with minor disruption	Operating with moderate disruption	Operating with severe disruption
	No. councils	% councils	% councils	% councils	% councils
Adult social care (directly employed)	104	22	38	32	9
Bereavement services	152	53	31	13	3
Children's services	103	38	34	22	6
Environment health	189	50	36	12	3
Household waste (doorstep collection)	173	50	30	16	4
Housing and homelessness services	193	48	36	12	4
Planning	197	54	31	14	1
Public Health	121	57	29	10	4
Revenue and Benefits	188	56	26	13	5
Schools	81	20	30	23	27
Trading standards	100	50	32	17	1
Overall council	208	28	46	25	2

Base: all responding to question and category applicable to the council, categories presented varied by authority type.

Availability of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Councils were asked to indicate whether they had enough of the correct type of PPE for those staff that needed it. A total of 186 (82 per cent) answered the question, of which nearly four-fifths (77 per cent) reported they had about the right amount of PPE or more than they needed; while 19 per cent had less than they needed.

Table 12: At present, do you have enough of the correct PPE for those local authority staff who need it or not?

	More than we need	About what we need	Less than we need	We don't need it
	% councils	% councils	% councils	% councils
County	15	62	23	0
District	5	70	18	7
Local Government District	0	0	100	0
London borough	6	89	6	0
Metropolitan borough	6	81	13	0
Unitary	0	74	24	2
Welsh unitary	-	-	-	-
English single tier	2	79	18	1
All councils	4	73	19	4

Base: all responding to question (186 councils – 13 counties, 88 districts, 1 local government districts, 18 London boroughs, 16 metropolitan boroughs, 50 unitary, 0 Welsh unitary, 84 English single tier)

Availability of testing

Councils were also asked to indicate whether staff who needed it were able to access testing or not. A total of 198 (87 per cent) answered the question, of which nearly nine out of ten councils (87 per cent) said all or most of the staff who need testing can access it; ten per cent said it was available to some or none of their staff who need it.

Table 13: And would you say that, currently, the staff who need testing are able to access it or not?

	All the staff that need testing can access it	Most of the staff that need testing can access it	Some of the staff that need testing can access it	None of the staff that need testing can access it	None of our staff need testing
	% councils	% councils	% councils	% councils	% councils
County	62	23	15	0	0
District	81	7	5	1	5
Local government district	100	0	0	0	0
London borough	48	43	10	0	0
Metropolitan borough	67	22	11	0	0
Unitary	62	22	12	2	2
Welsh unitary	-	-	-	-	-
English single tier	60	27	11	1	1
All councils	70	17	9	1	3

Base: all responding to question (198 councils – 13 counties, 95 districts, 1 local government districts, 21 London boroughs, 18 metropolitan boroughs, 50 unitary, 0 Welsh unitary, 89 English single tier)

Annex A: Questionnaire

COVID - 19 Workforce Collection

Q1.1 Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. If you would like to see an overview of the questions before completing the survey online, you can access a PDF here: <upload a link to the PDF>

You can navigate through the questions using the buttons at the bottom of each page. Use the 'previous' button at the bottom of the page if you wish to amend your response to an earlier question.

If you stop before completing the return, you can come back to this page using the link supplied in the email and you will be able to continue where you left off. To ensure your answers have been saved, click on the 'next' button at the bottom of the page that you were working on before exiting.

All responses will be treated confidentially. In order that councils do not get multiple requests for such data, the Local Government Association will share the data provided by you in this survey in confidence with the following organisations:

- Other councils (including in LG Inform, via sign-in)
- Regional employers' organisations
- Welsh Local Government Association
- Northern Ireland Local Government Association
- Relevant government departments
- Welsh Government
- Northern Ireland Assembly
- All local resilience fora (LRFs) - through the medium of the LRF dashboard

- Bain and Company (purely for the purpose of updating the LRF dashboard)

Any information that is published or shared outside of that arrangement will be aggregated, and no authority will be identified without your consent. The information used within the LGA will be held and processed in accordance with our [privacy statement](#); and we will not share it with the organisations listed above unless we have ensured they have the right controls in place to use your information responsibly and only for the reasons for which we have given permission. We are

undertaking this survey in line with the legitimate interests of the LGA in supporting and representing authorities. It will also:

- allow you to compare key data with other authorities
- minimise the number of data requests you respond to from other organisations
- assist in recovery planning, workforce testing and risk profiling, and
- help the LGA evidence our government asks for support and resources.

If you have any queries or problems, please contact roopal.shah@local.gov.uk.

Q2.1 How many staff did you have on 1 March 2020 (that is, the usual headcount before COVID-19)?

Please enter a whole number without a comma or decimal place

	Number of staff (headcount)
Headcount of staff at 1 March 2020	

Q2.2 Do the figures you are providing for this return includes or excludes school staff?

- Includes schools staff
 - Excludes schools staff
 - Don't know
-

Q2.3 Have you recruited any additional staff (of any type including casual, agency, contingent etc) since the 1 March?

- Yes
- No

Q2.4 How many additional staff have you recruited? (this question is only seen if answered YES in 2.3)

Please enter a whole number. If you do not know please leave blank.

	Number of staff (headcount)
Additional staff	

Q2.5 Since 24 March when lockdown started, how many local authority staff, if any, have died in service?

Please enter the number of staff. If none, please enter "0". If you do not know please leave blank.

	Number of staff (headcount)
Number of staff died in service	

Q3.1 How many staff, if any, do you currently have in the categories below?

Please enter the headcount. If none, please enter zero. If you do not know please leave blank.

	Number of staff (headcount)
Number of staff furloughed	
Number of staff redeployed (either internally or externally)	
Number of staff unavailable for work	

Q4.1 For those staff furloughed, what is/are the reason/s? (this question is only seen if a number was entered for number of staff furloughed in Q3.1)

Please provide the number of staff furloughed broken down by reason. If zero, please enter "0". If you do not know please leave blank.

	Number of staff (Headcount)
Funding has stopped	
Shielding (or relevant health reasons)	
Caring responsibilities	
Service has been stopped	
Other	

Q5.1 For those staff currently unavailable for work, what is/are the reason/s? (this question is only seen if a number was entered for number of currently unavailable for work in Q3.1)

Please provide the number of staff unavailable broken down by reason.

If zero please enter "0". If you do not know please leave blank.

**Self-isolating can be due to any of the following: .*

- *Being in an at risk group*
- *Believe they are symptomatic*
- *Share a household with someone who is symptomatic*

	Number of staff (Headcount)
Non-COVID sicknesses	
Confirmed / Suspected COVID	
Self-isolation	
Caring for dependents/at-risk relative/someone who is sick	
Other	

Q6.1 Please select the status of the services to the show if there are enough staff to run the service normally or not.

	Operating normally	Minor disruption	Moderate disruption	Severe disruption	Don't know	Not applicable
Adult social care (directly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bereavement services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children's services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Environmental health	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Household waste	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Housing and homelessness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Planning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Public health	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Revenue and benefits	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Schools	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Trading standards	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q6.2 In summary, how would you assess the council overall, in terms of whether there are enough staff to run services normally or not?

- Operating normally
- Minor disruption
- Moderate disruption
- Severe disruption
- Don't know

Q7.1 At present, do you have enough of the correct PPE for those local authority staff who need it or not?

- More than we need
 - About what we need
 - Less than we need
 - We don't need it
 - Don't know
-

Q7.2 And would you say that, currently, the staff who need testing are able to access it or not?

- All the staff who need testing can access it
- Most of the staff who need testing can access it
- Some of the staff who need testing can access it
- None of the staff who need testing can access it
- None of our staff need testing
- Don't know

Q8.1 Please enter the details of the person nominated to provide this data for your authority or amend the details we hold below if necessary.

○ Name _____

○ Authority _____

○ Job title _____

○ Email address _____

Q9.1

Once you press the 'Submit' button below, you will have completed the survey.

Many thanks for taking the time to complete this survey. You are in control of any personal data that you have provided to us in your response. You can contact us at all times to have the information changed or deleted. You can find our full privacy policy here: [click here to see our privacy policy](#)



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