

Local Government Capacity Survey – Building Control

Research Report

October to December 2023



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Summary

Background

As part of the drive to improve workforce information, the Local Government Association (LGA) has collected quantitative and qualitative workforce data across different service areas, including building control. This report is part of that work, and additionally in response to heads of building control highlighting challenges in recruiting, developing and retaining staff across all building control disciplines, and the increasing pressures facing building control teams.

This survey was conducted in partnership with Local Authority Building Control (LABC), who also recognise the importance of evidence for this purpose.

All heads of building control (or equivalent position) in district and single tier councils in England (296 in total) were asked to complete an online survey between October and December 2023. A few councils responded on behalf of them and another authority which meant the number of councils who could have participated was 275. The final overall response rate was 51 per cent (139 councils). By council type, the response rate was highest from metropolitan districts (64 per cent / 23 councils) and lowest from districts (43 per cent / 62 councils).

Regionally, response was highest from Yorkshire and Humber councils (73 per cent / 11 councils) and lowest from the East Midlands (38 per cent / 14 councils).

Key findings

- As of 1 October 2023, there were almost 2,700 staff employed in building control related roles by English local authorities. The average council employed approximately nine building control staff in terms of both headcount full-time equivalent.
- Just over 1,700 staff were estimated to be in post across England, at an average of six per council, whilst almost 700 posts were vacant, at an average of two per council.
- Average vacancy rates for local authorities based on these findings demonstrate that one in four building control posts across England were vacant as of 1 October 2023, rising to one in three assistant / trainee surveyors.
- Nearly all councils said difficulties recruiting staff with the right skills or experience was one of the main reasons for having vacancies for a long period of time.
- Four fifths of respondents said they found it very or fairly difficult to recruit principal surveyors / building control surveyors and three quarters said they found it very or fairly difficult to retain principal surveyors / building control surveyors.

- On average, local authority building control teams had a turnover of approximately 15 per cent. Nearly half of councils said turnover had increased over the last three years.
- Two thirds of respondents said one of the main reasons for employees leaving the service was for money, and a half (51 per cent) noted it was due to retirements.
- Three fifths of councils said staff who left to take up agency work did so because pay is higher for agency work.
- A quarter of councils said they used agency staff very often and were heavily reliant on them and the service would run inadequately without them.
- About 330 agency staff were estimated to have been employed by local authority building control teams on 1 October 2023, with a full-time equivalent of approximately 210. On average, one agency staff member was employed by building control teams per council.
- Two fifths of all respondents said they used agency staff and interims because recruitment exercises didn't generate enough candidates with the required skills (the number appointable with required experience was low).
- A little more than two fifths of all respondents said, in their opinion, using agency staff in the last three years was very or fairly successful.
- Councils across England spent an estimated £4.2 million on building control team training in 2022/23, at an average of approximately £14,000 per council.
- Almost 170 apprentices were employed by local authority building control teams, of which approximately 120 (around 72 per cent) were employed in graduate apprenticeships.
- Two thirds of all respondents said they were not at all or not very confident they have enough principal surveyors / building control surveyors to maintain the building control service adequately over the next year.

Introduction

As part of the drive to improve workforce information, the Local Government Association (LGA) has collected quantitative and qualitative workforce data across different service areas, including building control.

This report is part of that work, and additionally in response to heads of building control highlighting challenges in recruiting, developing and retaining staff across all building control disciplines, and increasing pressures facing their teams. This survey was conducted in partnership with Local Authority Building Control (LABC), who also recognise the importance of evidence for this purpose.

Methodology

The survey was conducted by the LGA's Research and Information Team using an online questionnaire. An email containing a unique link was sent to heads of building control (or equivalent position) in all district and single tier councils in England (296 in total). A few councils responded on behalf of their own and another authority, which meant the number of respondents who could have participated was 275.

The survey was available to complete online between October and December 2023. The final overall response rate was 51 per cent (139 councils).

Data has been weighted to make it representative of all councils in England on the basis of type and region. The number provided for the base for the tables below refers to the **unweighted** number of respondents who answered each question.

Because not all councils responded to the survey, numerical figures had to be imputed for those councils which did not respond, in order to calculate national estimates. This was done by calculating the numerical figures for each respondent council as rates relative to their population, taking the averages of these rates for each region and authority type, and attributing the relevant averages to non-respondent councils, before multiplying them by the non-respondent councils' populations. This allowed the LGA to estimate national figures for England, even though not all councils in England participated.

Response rate

Table 1 shows, by council type, the response rate was highest from metropolitan districts (64 per cent / 23 councils) and lowest from districts (43 per cent / 62 councils).

Regionally, as shown in Table 2, response was highest from Yorkshire and Humber councils (73 per cent / 11 councils) and lowest from the East Midlands (38 per cent / 14 councils).

Table 1: Response rate by type of authority

Type of authority	Total number	Number of responses	Response rate %
District	145	62	43
London borough	32	19	59
Metropolitan district	36	23	64
Unitary	62	34	55

Table 2. Response rate by region

Region	Total number	Number of responses	Response rate %
Eastern	42	18	43
East Midlands	37	14	38
London	32	19	59
North East	12	7	58
North West	36	16	44
South East	67	26	39
South West	28	15	54
West Midlands	28	12	43
Yorkshire and Humber	15	11	73

Notes

Where tables and figures report the base, the description refers to the group of people who were asked the question and the number in brackets refers to the number of respondents who answered. Please note that bases vary throughout the survey, as not all respondents answered all questions.

Where the response base is less than 50, care should be taken when interpreting percentages, as small differences can seem magnified. Therefore, where this is the case in this report, the non-percentage values are reported, in brackets, alongside the percentage values.

The results are often broken down into two groups, with shire districts as one group and single tier councils combining to form the second group. This is because district councils are usually much smaller than single tier councils. Presenting the results in this way means they can be viewed in the context of organisation size.

Throughout the report, percentages in figures and tables may add to more than 100 per cent due to rounding.

Local government capacity survey – building control

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

Outsourced and shared services

Respondents were asked if their building control team was outsourced. Table 3 shows nearly all (93 per cent) of councils said that their building control team was not outsourced. For those councils that said their building control team is outsourced, this was to another council or to companies such as Capita. Those councils that answered that their team was outsourced were taken to the end of the survey.

Table 3. Is your building control team outsourced?

	Districts %	Single tier %	All councils %
Yes	10	3	7
No	90	97	93

Unweighted base: all respondents (139 respondents)

Respondents were asked if any part of their building control team was shared between more than one authority. Just over three quarters (77 per cent) of respondents said their building control team is not shared – see Table 4. This varied by type of council: 63 per cent of district councils said their building control team is not part of a shared service, 94 per cent of single tier councils said the same.

Table 4. Is any part of your building control team a shared service between more than one authority?

	Districts %	Single tier %	All councils %
Yes	37	6	23
No	63	94	77

Unweighted base: all respondents (130)

Staff numbers and status

Staff budgeted for at 1 April 2023

Respondents were asked to provide the number of building control posts, in full-time equivalent (FTE), for which their council had budgeted, as at 1 April 2023. The definition of building control staff in this question, and all following questions, excluded non-technical administrative staff working in building control departments. The information provided by respondents was used to estimate an overall total FTE of budgeted building control staff across England, as well as an average number of building control staff per council, by authority type and overall. Staffing levels for councils which did not respond to the survey or to these questions were estimated based on the average levels reported by respondents of the same region and authority type, weighted according to their resident population.

As Table 5 shows, councils across England were estimated to have budgeted for approximately 2,560 technical building control staff for the 2023/24 financial year. This equated to an average of nine building control staff per council, a figure that was higher among single tier (at 11 building control staff) than among district councils (at seven building control staff). By role, principal and assistant or trainee surveyors were the most common roles budgeted for, whilst heads of building control and team leaders were the least numerous, at fewer than one per council (this was as a result of shared services across multiple councils).

Table 5. In total, how many posts were budgeted for within the building control team on 1 April 2023? England total and average (mean) per council

	Estimated England total	Districts	Single tier	All councils
Total	2,560	7	11	9
Head of Building Control / Building Control Manager	230	1	1	1
Team Leader	260	1	1	1
Principal Surveyor / Building Control Surveyor	1,240	3	5	4
Assistant / Trainee Building Control Surveyor	360	1	1	1
Other technical building control staff	470	1	2	2

Unweighted base: all respondents (118). Note: estimated budgeted staff numbers for England have been rounded to the nearest ten. This may cause the figures not to add up precisely to the total.

Building control staffing numbers

Respondents were asked to report the number of building control posts at their council as of 1 October 2023, both in terms of headcount and FTE. This included both filled and vacant posts. Their responses were used to estimate overall levels of local authority building control staff across England, as well as averages overall and by council type. Staffing levels for councils which did not respond to the survey or to these questions were estimated based on the average levels reported by respondents of the same region and authority type, weighted according to their resident population.

Table 6 and Table 7 display the results for this question, demonstrating that, as of 1 October 2023, there were approximately 2,680 staff employed in building control roles by English local authorities. Because many of these staff were part-time workers, this was an estimated full-time equivalent of 2,670. The average council employed around nine building control staff in terms of both headcount and FTE. Single tier councils tended to have significantly higher numbers of building control staff on average than district councils.

Table 6. Total building control staff headcount at 1 October 2023. England total and average (mean) per council

	Estimated England total	Districts	Single tier	All councils
Total	2,680	7	11	9
Head of Building Control / Building Control Manager	250	1	1	1
Team Leader	300	1	1	1
Principal Surveyor / Building Control Surveyor	1,190	3	5	4
Assistant / Trainee Building Control Surveyor	350	1	1	1
Other technical building control staff	580	2	2	2

Unweighted base: All respondents (107). Note: estimated total staff numbers for England have been rounded to the nearest ten. This may cause the figures to not add up precisely to the total.

Table 7. Total building control staff FTE at 1 October 2023. England total and average (mean) per council

	Estimated England total	Districts	Single tier /counties	All councils
Total	2,670	7	11	9
Head of Building Control / Building Control Manager	240	1	1	1
Team Leader	260	1	1	1
Principal Surveyor / Building Control Surveyor	1,290	3	6	4
Assistant / Trainee Building Control Surveyor	380	1	2	1
Other technical building control staff	490	1	2	2

Unweighted base: All respondents(117). Note: estimated total staff numbers for England have been rounded to the nearest ten. This may cause the figures to not add up precisely to the total.

Breakdown and vacancy rates

Respondents were asked to provide a breakdown of their FTE building control posts according to whether staff were present in the post (including those on annual leave or sick leave). Table 8 and Table 9 show that just over 1,700 staff were estimated to be present in post across England, at an average of six per council, whilst around 690 posts were vacant, at an average of two per council.

Smaller numbers of posts either had an incumbent who was long-term absent, or another status applied: as Table 10 and Table 11 show, there were an estimated 170 roles of the former status and 100 roles of the latter. Because of the small numbers reported, it was not possible to calculate averages per council for these categories.

Table 8. Number of filled FTE posts where the staff member is present (this includes those on annual leave and short-term parental leave or sick leave) on 1 October 2023? England total and average (mean) per council

	Estimated England total	Districts	Single tier /counties	All councils
Total	1,710	5	7	6
Head of Building Control / Building Control Manager	160	1	1	1
Team Leader	170	0	1	1
Principal Surveyor / Building Control Surveyor	820	2	4	3
Assistant / Trainee Building Control Surveyor	200	1	1	1
Other technical building control staff	380	1	2	1

Unweighted base: All respondents - Head of Building Control (125), Team Leader (91), Principal Surveyor (130), Assistant Building Control Surveyor (94), Other building control (110). Note: estimated total staff numbers for England have been rounded to the nearest ten. This may cause the figures to not add up precisely to the total.

Table 9. Number of vacant FTE posts (even if covered by agency staff or interims) on 1 October 2023? England total and average per council

	Estimated England total	Districts	Single tier	All councils
Total	690	2	3	2
Head of Building Control / Building Control Manager	60	0	0	0
Team Leader	60	0	0	0
Principal Surveyor / Building Control Surveyor	340	1	1	1
Assistant / Trainee Building Control Surveyor	120	0	0	0
Other technical building control staff	110	0	0	0

Unweighted base: All respondents - Head of Building Control (52), Team Leader (56), Principal Surveyor (85), Assistant Building Control Surveyor (70), Other building control (62). Note: estimated total staff numbers for England have been rounded to the nearest ten. This may cause the figures to not add up precisely to the total.

Table 10. Number of FTE posts where the staff member is absent though long-term parental leave or long-term sickness on 1 October 2023?

	Estimated England total
Total	170
Head of Building Control / Building Control Manager	30
Team Leader	10
Principal Surveyor / Building Control Surveyor	100
Assistant / Trainee Building Control Surveyor	20
Other technical building control staff	10

Unweighted base: All respondents - Head of Building Control (44), Team Leader (44), Principal Surveyor (49), Assistant Building Control Surveyor (45), Other building control (43). Note: estimated total staff numbers for England have been rounded to the nearest ten. This may cause the figures to not add up precisely to the total.

Table 11. Number of FTE posts of another status on 1 October 2023?

	Estimated England total
Total	100
Head of Building Control / Building Control Manager	0
Team Leader	20
Principal Surveyor / Building Control Surveyor	30
Assistant / Trainee Building Control Surveyor	40
Other technical building control staff	0

Unweighted base: All respondents - Head of Building Control (41), Team Leader (43), Principal Surveyor (42), Assistant Building Control Surveyor (42), Other building control (41). Note: estimated total staff numbers for England have been rounded to the nearest ten. This may cause the figures to not add up precisely to the total.

Dividing the reported numbers of posts vacant by the total number of FTE posts provided vacancy rates for each type of position for each council. Table 12 shows the average vacancy rates for building control staff posts, overall and by council type and role type. This demonstrates that approximately 26 per cent of FTE roles were vacant on 1 October 2023. This rate was very similar between district councils and single tier councils. By type of role, the vacancy rate was lowest among senior and other roles, and was highest among assistant building control surveyors, at 35 per cent.

Table 12. Building control staff post vacancy rates at 1 October 2023

	Average (mean) vacancy rate %
Total	26
Districts	26
Single tier	27
Head of Building Control / Building Control Manager	21
Team Leader	25
Principal Surveyor / Building Control Surveyor	28
Assistant / Trainee Building Control Surveyor	35
Other technical building control staff	24

Unweighted base: All respondents (61).

Respondents were asked over the last three years for which group of staff did they most often have vacancies. Table 13 shows just under nine out of ten (81 per cent) of all responding councils most often had vacancies for principal surveyor / building control surveyor in the last three years. Both district and single tier councils reported this post had vacancies most often.

Table 13. Over the last three years, for which groups of staff do you most often have vacancies?

	Districts %	Single tier %	All councils %
Head of Building Control/ Building control manager	11	15	17
Team leader	7	16	16
Principal Surveyor / Building control surveyor	75	53	81
Assistant/trainee building control surveyor	25	20	29
Other building control staff	9	8	11
No vacancies are difficult to fill	14	2	9

Unweighted base: all respondents (127). Note: respondents could tick more than one option.

Respondents were asked to report the single vacancy over the last three years that they found or were finding most difficult to fill. Two thirds (64 per cent) of respondents said they found principal surveyor / building control surveyor to be the single most difficult vacancy to fill, see Table 14. By type of council, 64 per cent of district councils said they found filling principal surveyor/building control surveyor vacancies most difficult to fill, compared to 63 per cent of single tier councils.

Table 14. Over the last three years, what is the single vacancy you found/ are finding most difficult to fill?

	Districts %	Single tier %	All councils %
Head of Building Control / Building control manager	2	8	5
Team leader	2	14	7
Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor	64	63	64
Assistant/trainee building control surveyor	7	5	6
Other building control staff	7	4	6
No vacancies are difficult to fill	19	5	12

Unweighted base: all respondents (129).

Respondents were asked for how long they had or have had this vacancy. Just over one third (38 per cent) said they had had the vacancy for a year or more but less

than three years. Sixteen per cent said that they had the vacancy for less than six months.

When broken down by districts and single tier councils, a quarter of all district councils said they had had the vacancy for a year or more but less than three years, 23 per cent said they had had the vacancy for less than six months. Half (50 per cent) of all single tier councils said they had had the vacancy for a year or more but less than three years. See Table 15.

Table 15. For how long did you have / have you had this vacancy?

	Districts %	Single tier %	All councils %
Less than six months	23	10	17
Six months or more but less than a year	18	14	16
A year or more but less than three years	27	50	38
Three years or more but less than five years	13	15	14
Five years or more	2	6	4
Don't know/not applicable	17	6	11

Unweighted base: all respondents (128).

Table 16 shows the main reason why respondents have had the vacancies for this long. Respondents could choose more than one option. Nearly all respondents said difficulties recruiting staff of the right skills / experience was one of the main reasons, and this was also seen when the data is broken down by districts and single tier councils.

Table 16. What are the main reasons why you had / have had the vacancies for this long?

	Districts %	Single tier %	All councils %
Overall council recruitment freeze / managed vacancy policy	10	20	15
Pending a restructure	5	14	10
New appointments unable to start quickly	5	0	3
Cost of recruitment has delayed it	7	6	6
Difficulties recruiting staff of the right skills/experience	100	94	96
Others	36	32	34

Unweighted base: all respondents (127). Note: respondents could tick more than one option.

Over half (56 per cent) of all respondents said that their council have not made use of consultants in order to undertake projects what would have previously been undertaken by in-house staff. See Table 17.

Table 17. In the last three years, have you made use of consultancy or not, in order to undertake projects that would previously have been undertaken by in-house staff?

	Districts %	Single tier %	All councils %
Yes	33	55	43
No	67	44	56
Don't know	0	1	1

Unweighted base: all respondents (129).

Respondents were asked what sort of consultancy work was undertaken, and their responses are provided below:

- Plan checking (22 respondents)
- Site inspections (13 respondents)
- Surveying (12 respondents)
- Building control agency staff, to cover various staff vacancies (10 respondents)
- Structural engineering (9 respondents)
- Specialist projects (5 respondents)

- Fire safety (2 respondents)
- Other (5 respondents).

Recruitment and retention of staff

Recruitment

Respondents were asked over the last three years how easy or difficult it was to recruit permanent staff in building control roles. Four fifths (79 per cent) of respondents said they found it very or fairly difficult to recruit to the post of principal surveyor / building control surveyor. Two fifths (40 per cent) of respondents said they found it very or fairly difficult to recruit the post of assistant / trainee building control surveyor, see Table 18.

When broken down by type of council, three quarters (73 per cent) of district councils said they found it very or fairly difficult to recruit permanent principal surveyors / building control surveyors. Table 20 shows 85 per cent of single tier councils said they found it very or fairly difficult to recruit permanent principal surveyors / building control surveyors.

Table 18. Over the last three years, how easy or difficult has your council found it to recruit permanent staff for each of the following roles in building control? (All councils)

	Head of Building Control/Building control manager %	Team leader %	Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor %	Assistant/trainee building control surveyor %	Other building control staff %
Very or fairly difficult	29	28	79	40	30
Very difficult	21	24	69	21	15
Fairly difficult	8	4	10	19	15
Not very difficult	5	4	3	14	22
Not difficult at all	2	2	1	11	5
Don't know / not recruited	64	65	18	34	43

Unweighted base: all respondents - Head of Building Control/Building Control Manager (124), Team leaders (106), Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor (127), Assistant/trainee building control surveyor (120), Other building control staff (115).

Table 19. Over the last three years, how easy or difficult has your council found it to recruit permanent staff for each of the following roles in building control? (District councils)

	Head of Building Control/Building control manager %	Team leader %	Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor %	Assistant /trainee building control surveyor %	Other building control staff %
Very or fairly difficult	23	18	73	42	24
Very difficult	16	16	59	19	9
Fairly difficult	7	2	14	23	15
Not very difficult	2	5	2	11	22
Not difficult at all	2	2	0	12	6
Don't know / not recruited	73	74	25	6	47

Unweighted base: all respondents - Head of Building Control/Building Control Manager (65), Team leaders (57), Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor (67), Assistant/trainee building control surveyor (63), Other building control staff (62).

Table 20. Over the last three years, how easy or difficult has your council found it to recruit permanent staff for each of the following roles in building control? (Single tier councils)

	Head of Building Control/Building control manager %	Team leader %	Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor %	Assistant /trainee building control surveyor %	Other building control staff %
Very or fairly difficult	35	40	85	39	36
Very difficult	27	34	79	23	22
Fairly difficult	8	6	6	16	14
Not very difficult	8	4	4	18	22
Not difficult at all	2	3	1	11	3
Don't know / not recruited	55	54	10	33	38

Unweighted base: all respondents - Head of Building Control/Building Control Manager (58), Team leaders (49), Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor (60), Assistant/trainee building control surveyor (56), Other building control staff (53).

Retention

Respondents were asked over the last three years how easy or difficult their council has found it to retain permanent staff in building control roles. Three quarters (74 per cent) of respondents said they found it very or fairly difficult to retain the post of principal surveyor / building control surveyor. Table 21 shows 42 per cent of councils responded they found it very or fairly difficult to retain assistant/trainee building control surveyor posts.

By type of council, Table 22 shows just under three quarters (70 per cent) of district councils said, over the last three years, they have found it very or fairly difficult to retain business principal surveyor / building control surveyor. An even greater proportion, 79 per cent, of single tier councils responded that they found it very or fairly difficult to retain principal surveyor / building control surveyor posts (see Table 23).

Table 21. Over the last three years, how easy or difficult has your council found it to retain permanent staff for each of the following roles in building control? (All councils)

	Head of Building Control/Building control manager %	Team leader %	Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor %	Assistant /trainee building control surveyor %	Other building control staff %
Very or fairly difficult	40	38	74	42	31
Very difficult	22	19	40	22	14
Fairly difficult	18	19	34	20	17
Not very difficult	17	8	12	13	18
Not difficult at all	25	36	6	25	29
Don't know / not recruited	25	36	6	25	29

Unweighted base: all respondents - Head of Building Control/Building Control Manager (123), Team leaders (98), Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor (125), Assistant/trainee building control surveyor (110), Other building control staff (107).

Table 22. Over the last three years, how easy or difficult has your council found it to retain permanent staff for each of the following roles in building control? (District councils)

	Head of Building Control/Building control manager %	Team leader %	Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor %	Assistant /trainee building control surveyor %	Other building control staff %
Very or fairly difficult	39	36	70	40	31
Very difficult	15	13	39	21	12
Fairly difficult	24	23	31	19	19
Not very difficult	16	4	14	22	21
Not difficult at all	20	23	10	12	21
Don't know / not recruited	25	36	7	25	28

Unweighted base: all respondents - Head of Building Control/Building Control Manager (63), Team leaders (54), Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor (66), Assistant/trainee building control surveyor (58), Other building control staff (58).

Table 23. Over the last three years, how easy or difficult has your council found it to retain permanent staff for each of the following roles in building control? (Single tier councils)

	Head of Building Control/Building control manager %	Team leader %	Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor %	Assistant /trainee building control surveyor %	Other building control staff %
Very or fairly difficult	41	41	79	45	31
Very difficult	30	27	41	23	16
Fairly difficult	11	14	38	22	15
Not very difficult	19	11	9	17	25
Not difficult at all	15	10	6	13	15
Don't know / not recruited	26	37	5	24	30

Unweighted base: all respondents - Head of Building Control/Building Control Manager (59), Team leaders (44), Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor (59), Assistant/trainee building control surveyor (41), Other building control staff (48).

Labour turnover

Respondents were asked what their building control team's current turnover rate was. This was based on employees who left the authority voluntarily or involuntarily in the 12 months to 1 October 2023. Table 24 shows the average turnover rate per council, both overall and by council type. This demonstrates that, on average, local authority building control teams had a turnover of approximately 15 per cent. The figure was similar for single tier councils, at 16 per cent, and district councils, at 13 per cent.

Table 24. Current building control team turnover rate – average (mean) overall

	Average turnover rate
Average per council – overall	15
Average per council – District	13
Average per council – Single tier	16

Unweighted base: all respondents (132).

Respondents were asked whether their turnover rate had increased, stayed the same or decreased over the previous three years. As Table 25 shows, just under half of respondents (49 per cent) said that their turnover rate had increased over this period, whilst 35 per cent said that it had stayed the same and 12 per cent said it had decreased. The turnover rates were similar for district and single tier councils.

Table 25. Has your turnover rate changed or not over the last three years?

	Districts %	Single tier %	All councils %
Increased	48	50	49
Stayed the same	41	27	35
Decreased	6	18	12
Don't know	5	5	5

Unweighted base: all respondents (127).

Respondents were asked what the main reasons have been given for employees leaving the service: two thirds (66 per cent) said the main reason was for more money. Retirement was the second most popular reason for leaving the service, 51 per cent for all councils, 49 per cent for districts and 52 per cent for single tier councils, see Table 26.

Table 26. What have been the main reasons given by employees for leaving the service?

	Districts %	Single tier %	All councils %
For more pay	59	72	66
Retirement	49	52	51
Requirement to be registered	38	42	40
To work in a different sector (private or other parts of the public sector)	34	32	33
Workload	18	32	24
Better career opportunities	14	25	20
For career change	14	13	14
Travel	5	10	7
Relationship with line manager/leadership	3	3	3
More flexibility (e.g. more home working; less rigid working patterns)	2	3	2
Personal commitments e.g. caring responsibilities	31	3	3
Member officer relations	6	0	3
Other	11	12	11
Don't know	8	0	4

Unweighted base: all respondents (124). Note: respondents could tick more than one option.

The following 'other' responses were given:

- Fully funded company car
- Lack of ability to recruit team
- Ill health and death.

Respondents were asked if any of their permanent staff left to take up agency work in the 2022/23 financial year. Table 27 below shows nearly nine out of ten (86 per cent) of respondents answered that none of their permanent staff left to take up agency work, while ten per cent said they did. A similar pattern was seen in districts and single tier councils.

Table 27. In 2022/23, did any of your permanent staff leave to take up agency work?

	Districts %	Single tier %	All councils %
Yes	9	12	10
No	89	83	86
Don't know	2	5	3

Unweighted base: all respondents (128).

Those respondents that said some of their permanent staff had left to take up agency work were asked if any reasons were given for preferring agency work. Table 28 below shows two thirds (67 per cent) of them said staff had left because pay is higher for agency work. A third (37 per cent) said it was because the workload is lower for agency work, and 31 per cent said it was due to the greater flexibility of work.

Table 28. What reasons, if any, did those staff give for preferring agency work?

	Districts %	Single tier %	All councils %
Pay is higher for agency work	34	84	67
Workload is lower for agency work	34	28	37
Greater flexibility of work	34	28	31
Less professional risk	0	14	6
Didn't want a permanent role	0	0	0
Better career progression	0	0	0
Other	17	0	9
Don't know	17	14	15

Unweighted base: all respondents who reported permanent staff leaving to take up agency work (14).

Note: respondents could tick more than one option.

A “mini restructure” was given as an ‘other’ reason for preferring agency work.

Respondents were asked what action, if any, they had taken to help with recruitment and retention issues generally in their building control team. Table 29 below shows a little more than half of all respondents said their council paid for registration, 54 per cent said their council offered flexible working hours and 53 per cent said their council offered a hybrid working location. Similar findings were also seen in

responding district and single tier councils. In district councils 54 per cent said payment of professional fees.

Table 29. What actions, if any, have you taken or are you taking to help with recruitment and retention issues generally in your building control team?

	Districts %	Single tier %	All councils %
Payment for registration	61	54	58
Flexible working hours	52	56	54
Hybrid working location	55	51	53
Payment of professional fees	54	37	46
Market supplements or other pay augmentation	40	51	45
Apprenticeships	37	45	42
Career frameworks/career grades	42	34	37
Agency staff	25	37	31
Organisational redesign	15	27	21
Personal development offers	18	15	17
Retention payments	13	20	16
Government training schemes	12	17	14
Relocation packages	10	12	11
Targeted recruitment campaigns within the sector	10	15	13
"Golden hellos"	12	7	10
Job redesign	9	17	13
Graduate programme	12	12	12
Targeted recruitment campaigns outside the sector	0	8	4
Secondments	1	10	6
'Refer a friend' scheme	6	3	5
T-levels	0	0	0
Creating a specific recruitment pipeline through education partnerships	0	3	1
Other (please specify below)	1	5	4
None of the above	10	5	8
Don't know	0	0	0

Unweighted base: all respondents (127). Note: respondents could tick more than one option.

The following ‘other’ responses were given:

- Local Authority Building Control (LABC) trainee scheme
- Currently considering other options including market supplements, or also growing their own with promotion of previous support staff to building control assistant roles and provision of training
- Job re-evaluation
- Fully reassembling a new building control team following the complete collapse of the service one year previously.

Respondents were asked which, if any, forms of collaboration with other councils their building control team undertakes to help address recruitment challenges. Table 30 shows, half (57 per cent) of all respondents said they did none of those mentioned in the table. This was also mirrored when the data is broken down by type of authority. A little more than one tenth (14 per cent) of all respondents said they undertook shared services or collaborated on a plan checking service. Fifteen per cent of single tier councils said they collaborated with other councils for pooling specialist knowledge.

Table 30. Which, if any, of the following forms of collaboration with other councils does your building control team undertake to help address recruitment challenges?

	Districts %	Single tier %	All councils %
Plan checking service	12	15	14
Shared services	18	7	13
Pooling specialist knowledge	7	15	11
Shared posts	7	5	6
Shared use of agency staff	1	2	2
Other	7	12	10
None of these	58	55	57

Unweighted base: all respondents (126). Note: respondents were able to select more than one option.

The following ‘other’ responses were given:

- Partnership plan checking
- Structural checking
- Cross boundary working
- Previously pooled knowledge, however, the better surveyors are leaving in April 2024

- In the past, offered assistance with plan checking for authorities with vacancies. However, more recently most authorities do not have spare resource to assist neighbouring ones.
- We have requested site inspection support from an adjacent authority, but they have never been in a position to provide this.
- We were operating a shared service with neighbouring authorities for part of the area until March 2023: this has now been dissolved and the service brought back in house.
- Informally offer technical and legislative support.

Agency staff

Respondents were asked over the last three years how often would they say they made use of agency staff in their building control team. A quarter (27 per cent) of all councils said they used them very often, they were heavily reliant on them and the service would run inadequately without them. Two-fifths (44 per cent) said that they had never used them. When the data was broken down by type of respondent, half (54 per cent) of district councils said that they had never used them. More than one third (38 per cent) of single tier councils said that they were heavily reliant on them (see Table 31).

Table 31. Over the last three years, how often would you say you make use of agency staff in your building control team?

	Districts %	Single tier %	All councils %
Very often - we are heavily reliant on them, and the service would run inadequately without them	17	38	27
Fairly often - we regularly rely on them to ensure the continuous smooth-running of the service	3	11	7
Not very often - we use them occasionally for specific tasks or at points of increased demand or low capacity	26	18	22
Never	54	34	44

Unweighted base: all respondents (128).

Respondents were asked if their use of agency staff changed or not over the last three years. Table 32 below shows half (52 per cent) of all respondents said their use of agency staff over the last three years has stayed the same. A little under a third (29 per cent) of all respondents said their use has increased. When the data is broken down by type of respondent, single tier councils (34 per cent) were more

likely than district councils (25 per cent) to say that their use of agency staff had increased.

Table 32. Has your use of agency staff changed or not over the last three years?

	Districts %	Single tier %	All councils %
Increased	25	34	29
Stayed the same	52	53	52
Decreased	8	8	8
Don't know	15	5	10

Unweighted base: all respondents (120).

Respondents were asked to report the number of agency staff employed in a building control related role by their local authority, both in terms of headcount and full-time equivalent. The agency staff figures reported by the respondents have been used to estimate an overall total for the number of building control agency staff across England, as well as an average per council, both overall and by authority type. Agency staff levels for councils which did not respond to the survey or to these questions were estimated based on the average levels reported by respondents of the same region and authority type, weighted according to their resident population

Table 33 shows the results for this question, demonstrating that around 330 agency staff were estimated to have been engaged by all English local authority building control teams on 1 October 2023, with a FTE of approximately 210. This equates to approximately 13 per cent of building control headcount and 8 per cent of building control full-time equivalent. On average, one member of agency staff was employed by building control teams per council.

Table 33. How many agency staff did you have in place in your building control team on 1 October 2023? England total and averages per council

	Estimated England total	Districts	Single tier	All councils
Headcount (No.)	330	1	1	1
Headcount (%)	13%	-	-	-
FTE (No.)	210	0	1	1
FTE (%)	8%	-	-	-

Unweighted base: all respondents - Headcount (137), Full-time equivalent (129). Note: estimated total agency staff numbers for England have been rounded to the nearest ten.

Respondents were asked what they used agency staff and interims for. Table 34 shows that two fifths (20 per cent) of all respondents said they used them when a recruitment exercise didn't generate enough candidates with the required skills (the number appointable with required experience was low). Thirty-five per cent said they used agency staff when a recruitment exercise didn't generate enough candidates (the number available for interview generally was low). When looking at the data broken down by type of respondent, district councils (18 per cent) were more likely to use agency staff to cover long term absence in the team than single tier councils (8 per cent).

Table 34. In general, for what reasons do you use agency staff?

	Districts %	Single tier %	All councils %
Recruitment exercise didn't generate enough candidates with the required skills (number appointable with required experience was low)	33	47	39
Recruitment exercise didn't generate enough candidates (number available for interview generally was low)	33	38	35
Lack of capacity to recruit immediately/to cover during recruitment exercise	15	30	22
Reduce backlog (for example, plan checking)	13	23	18
To cover long-term absence in the team	18	8	14
To meet unprecedented demand	10	13	11
Specialist knowledge was not available in-house	5	21	12
To cover short-term absence in the team	5	6	5
Post was to cover short-term work/specific task only	3	2	3
Other	27	17	22
Don't know	20	13	17

Unweighted base: all respondents (114). Note: respondents were able to select more than one option.

The following 'other' responses were given:

- To provide a service
- Site inspection
- Inadequate wages to attract permanent staff.

Respondents were asked, using an open question, if they had any more information on issues that have led them to use agency staff over the last three years. Fifty-three responses were provided covering the themes below:

- **Staff shortages:** 19 councils felt, due to retirement (sometimes due to the new Building Safety Act)/ management restructure/lack of qualified officers in the field/high staff turnover – temporary staff were simply needed to fill gaps.

- **Recruitment and retention issues:** councils felt they were unable to attract or recruit experienced permanent staff, and retain them. Some gave reasons for this, which included the need for a better pay package (the salary and benefits were poor for their posts), or there had been a freeze on recruiting to vacant posts permanently, or that there were stresses around volume of work in the job. These recruitment and retention issues were identified by 19 councils.
- **Used during high demand work period or particular levels of work:** 10 councils said they were used to enable existing staff to attend training or deal with backlogs in certain areas of work.
- **Use only as a last resort:** eight councils explained that using agency staff was expensive and led to variable quality and inequalities (since they are paid more than existing staff). They felt long term stability is needed, and therefore only used agency staff as a last resort.
- **Not had to use agency staff:** seven councils said this.
- **Long-term absence:** seven councils said it was used to cover mid- to long-term absence.

Respondents were asked, in general, how successful or not was the result of using agency staff in the last three years, in their opinion. A little more than two fifths (43 per cent) of all respondents said in their opinion it was very or fairly successful. See Table 35. Single tier councils (49 per cent) were slightly more likely to say that using agency staff was successful compared to district councils (37 per cent).

Table 35. Generally, how successful or not was the result of using agency staff in the last three years, in your opinion?

	Districts %	Single tier %	All councils %
Very or fairly successful	37	49	43
Very successful	7	8	8
Fairly successful	30	41	35
Not very successful	19	21	20
Not successful at all	7	1	4
Don't know	37	28	32

Unweighted base: all respondents (105).

Respondents were asked, in an open question, their opinion on the impact of using agency staff on the delivery of the building control service or outcomes, and 68 councils responded to this. Responses were put into themes and can be seen below:

- **Costs/expense:** 22 respondents commented on the cost and expense of agency staff, including the points that agency staff are paid more than existing staff which causes resentment with existing staff, that agency staff are simply

a waste of money, and that the high costs of agency staff significantly impacts the budget.

- **Use of agency staff creates issues/problems created make service vulnerable:** 21 respondents described the negative impact of using agency staff, including their lack of experience, the risk of them leaving at short notice, the lack of consistency in quality between different agency staff, experiences of poor reliability and timekeeping, their lack of local knowledge and, that any problems with their work come to light once agency staff have gone and leave permanent staff having to resolve them.
- **Varying quality of agency staff:** 18 respondents reported the poor knowledge and competency of agency staff
- **Lack of commitment:** 11 respondents described the lack of investment in the work or future of service that agency staff have compared to permanent staff, which creates low morale in the team. (11 respondents)
- **Using agency staff has maintained running of service:** 11 respondents recognised that agency staff had, however, been crucial to maintaining the service at times, and reported how they got work done, reduced backlogs, allowed existing staff time for training, and allowed more site visits to be undertaken.
- **Generally good/positive experience overall:** eight respondents reported other positive experiences, for example, agency staff provided flexibility, improved efficiency and increased morale in team. Some also said they made a big difference to the workload of existing staff and brought fresh expertise and ideas.
- **Rarely or never used:** Seven respondents said they rarely or never used agency staff, or had only done so as one-off.

Expenditure on agency staff and interims

Respondents were asked to provide their expenditure on agency staff and interims, both for the 2022/23 financial year and for the six months from 1 April to 1 October 2023. The figures provided by respondents have been used to estimate a total expenditure for building control teams across England, as well as an average per council for districts, single-tier councils, and councils overall. In addition, the estimates for 1 April to 1 October 2023 have been multiplied by two to produce an approximate projected figure for total expenditure across the 2023/24 financial year.

As Table 36 shows, councils across England were estimated to have spent over £12 million on agency staff and interims in the 2022/23 financial year. This equated to an average of around £41,000 per council, with districts spending less on average than single-tier councils (£27,000 compared with £59,000). For the period from 1 April to 1 October 2023, councils were estimated to have spent a little over half this figure, at around £7.3 million. Converting this into projected figures for 2023/24, this suggests an estimated total expenditure for the financial year of around £14.5 million, an increase on the previous financial year. The projected increase applied to both types of council, although single tier councils were projected to increase at a much faster

rate on average than district councils.

Table 36. For the 2022/23 financial year, what was the expenditure on agency staff and interims for the building control team?

	Estimated England total	Average (mean) for Districts	Average (mean) for Single-tier and county councils	Average (mean) overall
2022/23 financial year	£12,273,000	£27,000	£59,000	£41,000
1 April to 1 October 2023	£7,254,000	£15,000	£36,000	£25,000
2023/24 financial year (projected)	£14,508,000	£30,000	£73,000	£49,000

Unweighted base: all respondents - 2022/23 (122), 1 April to 1 October 2023 (118). Note: these figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.

Respondents were asked how easy or difficult their council found it to recruit agency staff or interim roles in building control over the last three years. Table 37 shows a third (35 per cent) of all responding councils said they found it very or fairly difficult to recruit agency staff for principal surveyor / building control surveyor roles. Thirteen per cent of responding councils said they found it very or fairly difficult to recruit agency staff for head of building control / building control manager roles.

Table 38 and Table 39 shows the finds broken down by districts and single tier councils. Single tier councils had greater problems recruiting agency staff for principal surveyor / building control surveyor roles. In districts, 23 per cent said they found it very or fairly to recruit agency staff for principal surveyor / building control surveyor roles, compared to half (50 per cent in single tier councils).

Table 37. Over the last three years, how easy or difficult has your council found it to recruit agency staff for each of the following roles in building control? (All councils)

	Head of Building Control/Building control manager %	Team leader %	Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor %	Assistant/trainee building control surveyor %	Other building control staff %
Very or fairly difficult	13	7	35	9	6
Very difficult	9	6	15	3	5
Fairly difficult	4	1	20	6	1
Not very difficult	3	2	8	4	4
Not difficult at all	0	0	5	1	1
Don't know	84	91	51	86	89

Unweighted base: all respondents - Head of Building Control/Building Control Manager (115), Team leaders (106), Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor (115), Assistant/trainee building control surveyor (113), Other building control staff (109).

Table 38. Over the last three years, how easy or difficult has your council found it to recruit agency staff for each of the following roles in building control? (District councils)

	Head of Building Control/Building control manager %	Team leader %	Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor %	Assistant /trainee building control surveyor %	Other building control staff %
Very or fairly difficult	8	2	23	4	2
Very difficult	6	2	2	0	2
Fairly difficult	2	0	21	4	0
Not very difficult	2	2	8	2	2
Not difficult at all	0	0	8	2	2
Don't know	90	96	61	93	94

Unweighted base: all respondents- Head of Building Control/Building Control Manager (60), Team leaders (59), Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor (60), Assistant/trainee building control surveyor (62), Other building control staff (59).

Table 39. Over the last three years, how easy or difficult has your council found it to recruit agency staff for each of the following roles in building control? (Single tier councils)

	Head of Building Control/Building control manager %	Team leader %	Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor %	Assistant /trainee building control surveyor %	Other building control staff %
Very or fairly difficult	18	14	50	14	11
Very difficult	12	12	30	6	8
Fairly difficult	6	2	20	8	3
Not very difficult	4	2	9	7	6
Not difficult at all	0	0	2	0	0
Don't know	78	85	39	79	82

Unweighted base: all respondents -: Head of Building Control/Building Control Manager (55), Team leaders (47), Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor (55), Assistant/trainee building control surveyor (52), Other building control staff (50).

Training and qualifications

Respondents were asked what proportion of their staff have a professional building control qualification. Table 40 shows 89 per cent of respondents said all head of building control / building control managers have professional building control qualifications. Three quarters (73 per cent) of respondents said all team leaders had building control qualifications and half (52 per cent) of respondents said all principal surveyor / building control surveyors had them. Half (50 per cent) of respondents said none of their assistant / trainee building control surveyors had building control qualifications and 46 per cent of all respondents said the same for other building control staff.

Table 41 and Table 42 show this data broken down by districts and single tier councils. They show that district councils were more likely to report that staff in their posts were all qualified. For example, in districts 79 per cent reported all team leaders have building control qualifications and 58 per cent reported all principal surveyor / building control surveyors had them. In single tier councils, the respective figures were 68 per cent and 44 per cent.

Table 40. What proportion of your staff have professional (building control) qualifications? (All councils)

	Head of Building Control/ Building control manager %	Team leader %	Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor %	Assistant /trainee building control surveyor %	Other building control staff %
All – 100%	89	73	52	14	11
Between 75% and 99%	0	3	20	7	7
Between 50% and 74%	0	4	14	6	6
Between 25% and 49%	0	1	10	3	8
Less than 25%	0	0	0	8	9
None	8	7	3	50	46
Don't know	3	12	0	12	13

Unweighted base: all respondents - Head of Building Control/Building Control Manager (111), Team leaders (74), Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor (120), Assistant/trainee building control surveyor (87), Other building control staff (82).

Table 41. What proportion of your staff have professional (building control) qualifications? (District councils)

	Head of Building Control/ Building control manager %	Team leader %	Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor %	Assistant /trainee building control surveyor %	Other building control staff %
All – 100%	87	79	58	19	6
Between 75% and 99%	0	3	13	5	8
Between 50% and 74%	0	0	13	10	6
Between 25% and 49%	0	0	12	0	10
Less than 25%	0	0	0	7	6
None	9	11	2	51	47
Don't know	4	6	0	7	17

Unweighted base: all respondents - Head of Building Control/Building Control Manager (57), Team leaders (37), Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor (65), Assistant/trainee building control surveyor (46), Other building control staff (42).

Table 42. What proportion of your staff have professional (building control) qualifications? (Single tier councils)

	Head of Building Control/ Building control manager %	Team leader %	Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor %	Assistant /trainee building control surveyor %	Other building control staff %
All – 100%	91	68	44	9	16
Between 75% and 99%	0	2	29	10	6
Between 50% and 74%	0	9	15	2	6
Between 25% and 49%	0	3	8	6	6
Less than 25%	0	0	0	8	11
None	7	2	4	49	46
Don't know	2	17	0	16	8

Unweighted base: all respondents - Head of Building Control/Building Control Manager (54), Team leaders (36), Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor (55), Assistant/trainee building control surveyor (41), Other building control staff (40).

Respondents were asked if they have a training and development plan, with an agreed budget specifically for the building control team. Table 43 shows half (54 per cent) of all councils said that they did have a training and development plan with an agreed budget, 45 per cent said that they did not.

District respondents (58 per cent) were slightly more likely to report they had a training and development plan with agreed budget than single tier councils (50 per cent).

Table 43. Do you have a training and development plan, with an agreed budget, specifically for the building control team?

	Districts %	Single tier %	All councils %
Yes	58	50	54
No	42	49	45
Don't know	0	1	1

Unweighted base: all respondents (124).

Respondents were asked if they have a successional training programme: this is a programme of structured development and training opportunities centred around a clear succession plan. Table 44 shows two thirds (62 per cent) of all respondents do not have a successional training programme. Thirty-six per cent said yes, they do have successional training programme.

Districts were more likely to have a successional training programme, with two fifths (40 per cent) reporting one, compared to less than a third (32 per cent) of single tier councils.

Table 44. Does your council have a successional training programme? That is, a programme of structured development and training opportunities centred around a clear succession plan

	Districts %	Single tier %	All councils %
Yes, we have a successional training programme	40	32	36
No, we do not currently have a successional training programme	60	64	62
Not sure	0	5	2

Unweighted base: all respondents (124).

Respondents were asked to provide their authority's net expenditure on training for their building control team employees (defined as the gross expenditure excluding training subsidies and grants, excluding any sums related to the apprenticeship levy), for the 2022/23 financial year. The figures provided by respondents have been used to estimate the overall expenditure on building control team training across England, as well as averages per council, both overall and by authority type. As Table 45 demonstrates, councils across England spent an estimated £4.2 million on building control team training in 2022/23, at an average of approximately £14,000

per council. Expenditure was higher among single-tier or county councils, at £23,000, than among district councils, at £7,000, for this period.

Table 45. What was the net expenditure by your authority on building control team employee training in 2022/23? England total and averages per council

	Estimated England total £	Districts £	Single tier £	All councils £
Net expenditure	£4,231,000	£7,000	£23,000	£14,000

Unweighted base: all respondents (87). Note: figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.

Respondents were asked to provide the number of staff employed in apprenticeships by their local authority's building control team. They were also asked to report how many of these were graduate apprenticeships. Separately, they were asked for the number of staff employed in other training programmes. The figures reported by respondents were used to calculate estimates for total numbers of building control apprentices, graduates and other trainees across England, as well as averages per council, both overall and by council type.

Table 46 shows the results for this question. This demonstrates that an estimated 170 apprentices were employed by local authority building control teams, of which approximately 120 (around 72 per cent) were employed in graduate apprenticeships. An additional estimated 690 staff were employed as a part of other training programmes. These figures equated to relatively small numbers of apprentices and graduates per council, at around one apprenticeship and less than one graduate apprenticeship per council on average. These figures were higher for single-tier councils than for district councils.

Table 46. Number of building control staff on apprenticeships and training programmes. England total and averages per council

	Estimated England total	Districts	Single tier /counties	All councils
Apprenticeships	170	<1	1	1
Graduate apprenticeships	120	<1	1	<1
Graduates as a % of apprenticeships	72%	68%	75%	72%
Other trainees	690	2	3	2

Unweighted base: All respondents: apprenticeships (133), graduate apprenticeships (122), other graduates (135). Note: estimated total agency staff numbers for England have been rounded to the nearest ten; and numbers by type of council have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Future plans

Respondents were asked if they have a specific building control workforce plan, Table 47 shows two thirds (61 per cent) of councils do not currently have a building control workforce plan, with 33 per cent saying that they did have a building control workforce plan.

Single tier councils were more likely to have a building control workforce plan, with 37 per cent reporting they had one, compared to 29 per cent of district councils.

Table 47. Does your council have a specific building control workforce plan?

	Districts %	Single tier %	All councils %
Yes, we have a building control workforce plan	29	37	33
No, we do not currently have a building control workforce plan	62	59	61
Don't know	9	4	7

Unweighted base: all respondents (124).

Respondents were asked what workforce actions, if any, they were undertaking within their building control team during 2023/24. One third (37 per cent) of all respondents said they are recruiting more staff overall in 2023/24, 30 per cent said that they were making no substantive changes to staffing numbers, see Table 48.

Districts were much more likely to be introducing apprenticeships (23 per cent) than single tier authorities (16 per cent and 7 per cent respectively).

Table 48. Which, if any, of the following workforce actions are you undertaking within your building control team during 2023/24?

	Districts %	Single tier %	All councils %
Recruiting more staff overall	32	42	37
Making no substantive changes to staffing numbers	35	25	30
Reducing use of consultants or agencies	16	25	21
Introducing apprenticeships	23	16	20
Recruiting more staff in specialist roles	11	22	17
Increasing apprenticeships	15	14	14
Reducing staff numbers overall (through managing vacancies)	3	16	10
Recruitment freeze	8	13	10
Increasing use of consultancy	3	7	5
Introducing graduate entry	3	9	6
Making redundancies	0	7	3
Increasing use of agency staff/interims	0	5	2
Reviewing the agency service provider	0	4	1
Decreasing apprenticeships	0	0	0
Don't know	10	9	9
Other	15	16	15

Unweighted base: all respondents (118). Note: respondents could select more than one option.

The following 'other' responses were given:

- Upskilling / development opportunities
- Local Authority Building Control (LABC) training
- Restructuring to make permanent positions more desirable.

Respondents were asked if they had undertaken any projections of staffing numbers they will need in the future years to meet anticipated demand for their building control team. Table 49 shows half (51 per cent) said that they had not undertaken any projections, with just under half (45 per cent) saying that they had. When the

data was broken down by type of respondent it can be seen that single tier councils (52 per cent) are slightly more likely to have undertaken projections compared to district councils (40 per cent).

Table 49. Have you undertaken any projections of the staffing numbers you will need in future years to meet anticipated demand for building control team?

	Districts %	Single tier %	All councils %
Yes	40	52	45
No	59	42	51
Don't know	2	6	4

Unweighted base: all respondents (124).

Required increase in capacity needed to meet anticipated demand

Those who had undertaken projections were asked to specify the increase in the FTE of their building control team that they would need in future, in order to meet anticipated demands. Because only a small number of respondents were able to provide an answer to this question, there was insufficient data to estimate totals across England or averages by authority type. Instead, a simple average of the figures provided was calculated. It should be noted that these averages are not necessarily representative of councils overall, only of the subset of councils which were able to provide this information.

As Table 50 shows, respondents anticipated needing an increase of approximate 1.7 FTE per council within the next one to two years. This increased to an average of 2.2 per council in three to five years, and 2.5 FTE per council in six to ten years.

Table 50. Please write in the estimated increase on 2023/24 FTE you will need in the following time periods to meet anticipated demand.

	Average (mean) overall
1-2 years	1.7
3-5 years	2.2
6-10 years	2.5

Unweighted base: all respondents who said they had undertaken projections of staffing numbers needed to meet anticipated demand- 1-2 years (78), 3-5 years (57), 6-10 years (45).

Capacity to deliver services

All respondents were asked how confident or not they were that, over the next year, their council will have enough of the right staff (in terms of numbers and skills) to maintain the building control service adequately. Table 51 shows that, for each post, more than a third of councils were not confident they had enough staff to run their service adequately. Moreover, the post for which councils had least confidence was principal surveyor / building control surveyor, with two thirds (62 per cent) saying they were not at all or not very confident that they would have enough of the right staff.

Table 52 and Table 53 show the breakdown by type of council. For both types of council, they are least confident that they have enough posts for principal surveyor / building control surveyor. In particular, three-quarters of single tier authorities said this.

Table 51. How confident or not are you that, over the next year, your council will have enough of the right staff (in terms of numbers and skills) to maintain the building control team adequately? (All councils)

	Head of Building Control/Building control manager %	Team leader %	Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor %	Assistant /trainee building control surveyor %	Other building control staff %
Not at all or not very confident	33	40	62	40	35
Very confident	31	11	9	8	10
Fairly confident	31	41	28	40	47
Not very confident	18	21	30	24	27
Not at all confident	15	19	32	16	8
Don't know	5	8	1	11	8

Unweighted base: all respondents - Head of Building Control/Building Control Manager (119), Team leaders (79), Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor (122), Assistant/trainee building control surveyor (103), Other building control staff (88).

Table 52. How confident are you that, over the next year, your council will have enough of the right staff (in terms of numbers and skills) to maintain the building control team adequately? (Districts councils)

	Head of Building Control/Building control manager %	Team leader %	Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor %	Assistant /trainee building control surveyor %	Other building control staff %
Not at all or not very confident	36	31	51	37	32
Very confident	34	15	15	9	13
Fairly confident	24	48	32	44	46
Not very confident	22	19	25	24	22
Not at all confident	14	12	26	13	10
Don't know	6	6	2	10	8

Unweighted base: all respondents - Head of Building Control/Building Control Manager (62), Team leaders (39), Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor (65), Assistant/trainee building control surveyor (52), Other building control staff (45).

Table 53. How confident or not are you that, over the next year, your council will have enough of the right staff (in terms of numbers and skills) to maintain the building control team adequately? (Single tier councils)

	Head of Building Control/Building control manager %	Team leader %	Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor %	Assistant /trainee building control surveyor %	Other building control staff %
Not at all or not very confident	29	48	74	41	56
Very confident	29	6	3	7	7
Fairly confident	38	35	24	36	49
Not very confident	13	23	35	25	32
Not at all confident	16	25	39	19	5
Don't know	3	11	0	13	8

Unweighted base: all respondents - Head of Building Control/Building Control Manager (58), Team leaders (41), Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor (58), Assistant/trainee building control surveyor (52), Other building control staff (43).

Respondents were asked what their biggest workforce challenge at the moment was, and those that had an outsourced building control team or a shared service were also asked this. Responses to this question are broken down into the themes below. A total of 125 councils responded:

- **Staff retention and the new various challenges for councils specifically associated with the new building safety regulator (BSR) regime and registration requirements:** sixty two respondents said the new competency assessment/registration requirements for staff to become licensed practitioners and to get workforce validated and registered mean that many older staff are taking early retirement as they are not keen to sit exams for a job they have already been doing for years and older staff prefer to leave rather than attempt the registration process. Issues also exist around the costs of registration, and who pays? Some authorities suggested they were unwilling to do so, and some noted that staff need time for learning and training/younger staff need support to train for BSR registration.
- **Future recruitment /staff age profile/succession management:** forty-nine respondents said scarcity of qualified and experienced staff and lack of experience/ageing profile of existing staff/ageing teams/retirements

approaching for older staff/lack of applicants for jobs and lack of suitably experienced applicants.

- **General staff retention and capacity issues:** twenty-six respondents said poor pay, terms and conditions have made it difficult for staff to stay.
- **Salaries:** low wages and private sector competition was felt by 24 respondents.
- **Legislation changes and lack of clarity:** twenty respondents felt there is a lack of clarity about the Building Safety Act changes, the general implications of registration, the new building control regime and new legislation. All of this is necessary to thoroughly check and enforce compliance – and some authorities felt it risks making the aspiration to improve standards of compliance and building safety more difficult to achieve than under current arrangements. Training while doing day job adds burden and the April 6 deadline provides insufficient time to achieve competency. Some authorities reported a lack of resources to support new regime and suggested the registration requirement has been made by those with no understanding of the business.
- **Finances:** eleven respondents said cuts to posts due to council finances/budget freezes, bans on temporary staff and a simple lack of resources to train trainees are big challenges.
- **Workload pressure:** ten respondents mentioned current staff are overworked and have a lack of time to complete their existing workload as well as new training.
- **Staff morale:** Workplace stress, long term sickness, unsettled teams and/or low morale was felt by nine respondents.

Respondents were asked if there was anything else about workforce capacity and the use of agency staff they would like to share. Those that had outsourced building control teams or a shared service were also asked this. Fifty-eight councils responded to this question, with answers covering the themes below:

- **Staffing:** Over half of respondents (29) noted concerns around staffing. These covered: the numbers retiring, the decreasing numbers of surveyors driving increases in salaries which councils can't afford to fund, the vacancies which need to be covered often by overpriced and under-skilled agency staff, problems in councils where their corporate policies do not allow use of agency surveyors or restrict use of them, building control services becoming reliant on temporary or agency staff to deliver government building safety aims, resentment from permanent staff about the salaries paid to agency staff, the problems caused by when staff are recruited from other councils which leaves their previous council struggling, the lack of investment in recruitment, and the need for vacancies to be covered by overtime working by existing staff and the negative impact of that.
- **Staff new validation and registration requirements:** Twenty-two respondents raised the issue of validation and registration requirements, and that they are becoming a catalyst for staff to leave the profession or retire early, as they are worried about registration and competency assessments. Councils reported losing significant numbers of experienced and qualified staff

due to the introduction of the registration process and the use of exam techniques on staff who have been successfully doing the job for many years. There is a smaller pool of available qualified staff as result, and councils flagged that there will be a lack of staff qualified for risk-based inspections by 1 April 2024. Some respondents noted that April 2024 does not allow enough time to get staff accredited, forcing staff to leave or for them to need a transitional period for staff beyond April. There are significant concerns that there will be a lack of registered buildings inspectors in 2024.

- **Investment needed:** Eight respondents cited the lack of investment in the service, the need to value the service more, or felt that additional government funding is needed to support building control. Several councils noted that there is no resilience in the service.
- **Salaries:** Eight councils noted the intense private sector competition. Private sector companies were seen to pay more, and councils were struggling to pay better salaries or offer other benefits.
- **Skills/knowledge gap/succession planning:** Several councils (six) noted that it was difficult to train new apprentices as a result of knowledge gaps in their team. Others noted these gaps affect the competency validation of all surveyors, which will ultimately reduce the number of experienced surveyors working within building control, thereby reducing the quality of training being passed to junior surveyors. The 'Catch 22' of needing capacity to grow capacity in sector was noted.
- **Staff burnout:** Six councils noted the increasing workloads and stress of existing staff.

Annex A: Questionnaire

We are collecting information to understand the capacity within building control teams, to assist councils and for discussion with central government.

Several of the questions list groups of staff where councils have previously identified they have experienced issues with capacity. We would be grateful if you could provide information for each of these groups, where possible.

For councils with a shared building control team, a single return is sufficient. Please write in the councils with which you share the service at the start of the questionnaire.

Please amend the details we have on record if necessary.

- Name
- Authority
- Job title
- Email address

Is your building control team outsourced?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please tell us which posts are outsourced with whom.

Is any part of your building control team a shared service between more than one authority?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please write in which parts and the names of the authorities that share the building control team with you.

Staff numbers and status

In total, how many posts were budgeted for within the building control team on 1 April 2023?

Please include all directly employed council staff (including partly-qualified and trainee staff), whether the post is filled or not.

Please write in a full-time equivalent (FTE): for example, two posts in which both people work half-time counts as one post. Write '0' if there are no budgeted staff.

Where the same post conducts multiple job roles, or is a shared post between multiple councils, please use a rough estimate of the proportion allocated to each role. Please include staff based in service directorates.

- Head of Building Control/ Building control manager
- Team leader
- Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor
- Assistant/trainee building control surveyor
- Other building control staff – for example, technicians, technical administrators, structural or fire engineers but **exclude** non-technical administrative staff

FTE posts

And how many (in FTE) were classified under each of the following categories on 1 October 2023?

Please include all directly employed staff (including partly qualified and trainee staff).

Directly employed staff are all permanent, temporary and fixed-term staff, but exclude agency staff.

Column headings:

- Head of Building Control/ Building control manager
- Team leader
- Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor
- Assistant/trainee building control surveyor
- Other building control staff – for example, technicians, technical administrators, structural or fire engineers but **exclude** non-technical administrative staff

Row headings:

- FTE of filled posts where the staff member is present (this includes those on annual leave and short-term parental leave or sick leave)

- FTE of filled posts where the staff member is absent though long-term parental leave or long-term sickness (even if covered by agency staff or interims)
- FTE of posts that are vacant (even if covered by agency staff or interims)
- Other (please specify)
- Total FTE posts at 1 October 2023
- Total headcount at 1 October 2023 (please enter a whole number without a comma or decimal place)

Please specify the other category of staff you identified which make up the total.

Over the last three years, for which groups of staff do you most often have vacancies?

Please tick all that apply.

- Head of Building Control/ Building control manager
- Team leader
- Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor
- Assistant/trainee building control surveyor
- Other building control staff – for example, technicians, technical administrators, structural or fire engineers but **exclude** non-technical administrative staff
- No vacancies

Over the last three years, what is the single vacancy you found/ are finding most difficult to fill?

Please tick one box only.

- Head of Building Control/ Building control manager
- Team leader
- Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor
- Assistant/trainee building control surveyor
- Other building control staff – for example, technicians, technical administrators, structural or fire engineers but **exclude** non-technical administrative staff
- No vacancies are difficult to fill

For how long did you have / have you had this vacancy?

- Less than six months
- Six months or more but less than a year

- A year or more but less than three years
- Three years or more but less than five years
- Five years or more
- Don't know/not applicable

What are the main reasons why you had / have had the vacancies for this long?

- Overall council recruitment freeze / managed vacancy policy
- Pending a restructure
- New appointment unable to start quickly
- Cost of recruitment has delayed it
- Difficulties recruiting staff of the right skills/experience
- Other (please specify)
- Don't know

In the last three years, have you made use of consultancy or not, in order to undertake projects that would previously have been undertaken by in-house staff?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

What sort of consultancy work was undertaken?

Recruitment and retention of staff

Over the last three years, how easy or difficult has your council found it to recruit permanent staff for each of the following roles in building control?

Please tick one on each row

Column headings:

- Very difficult
- Fairly difficult
- Not very difficult
- Not at all difficult
- Don't know / not recruited

Row headings:

- Head of Building Control/ Building control manager
- Team leader
- Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor
- Assistant/trainee building control surveyor

- Other building control staff – for example, technicians, technical administrators, structural or fire engineers but **exclude** non-technical administrative staff

Over the last three years, how easy or difficult has your council found it to retain permanent staff for each of the following roles in building control?

Column headings:

- Very difficult
- Fairly difficult
- Not very difficult
- Not at all difficult
- Don't know / not recruited

Row headings:

- Head of Building Control/ Building control manager
- Team leader
- Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor
- Assistant/trainee building control surveyor
- Other building control staff – for example, technicians, technical administrators, structural or fire engineers but **exclude** non-technical administrative staff

What is your building control team's current turnover rate?

Please base this on employees who left the authority either voluntarily or involuntarily in the 12 months to 1 October 2023 (including retirements, resignations, dismissals or redundancies). It should be calculated on headcount terms, not full-time equivalent terms. The sum is headcount of employees that have left, divided by the total number headcount, and then multiplied by 100.

Has your turnover rate changed or not over the last three years?

- Increased
- Stayed the same
- Decreased
- Don't know

What have been the main reasons given by employees for leaving the service?

- To work in a different sector (private or other parts of the public sector)
- For more pay
- Relationship with line manager/leadership

- Better career opportunities
- For career change
- More flexibility (e.g. more home working; less rigid working patterns)
- Retirement
- Personal commitments e.g. caring responsibilities
- Travel
- Workload
- Requirements to be registered
- Member-officer relations
- Other (please specify)
- Don't know

In 2022/23, did any of your permanent staff leave to take up agency work ?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

What reasons, if any, did those staff give for preferring agency work ?

- Didn't want a permanent role
- Pay is higher for agency work
- Less professional risk
- Workload is lower for agency work
- Greater flexibility of work
- Better career progression
- Other (please specify)
- Don't know

What actions, if any, have you taken or are you taking to help with recruitment and retention issues generally in your building control team?

Please tick all that apply

- Market supplements or other pay augmentation
- Relocation packages
- Targeted recruitment campaigns within the sector
- Targeted recruitment campaigns outside the sector
- Career frameworks/career grades
- Personal development offers
- "Golden hellos"
- Job redesign
- Flexible working hours
- Retention payments
- Organisational redesign
- Secondments
- Apprenticeships

- T-levels
- Agency staff
- Government training schemes
- Creating a specific recruitment pipeline through education partnerships
- Graduate programme
- 'Refer a friend' scheme
- Payment of professional fees
- Payment for registration
- Hybrid working location
- Other (please specify below)
- None of the above
- Don't know

Which, if any, of the following forms of collaboration with other councils does your building control team undertake to help address recruitment challenges?

Please tick all that apply.

- Shared posts
- Pooling service knowledge
- Shared services
- Shared use of agency staff
- Plan checking service
- Other (please specify)
- None of these

Agency staff

We know that one of the ways of dealing with recruitment and retention issues is through the use of agency staff or interims, and the following questions ask about this in more detail, about your building control team.

Over the last three years, how often would you say you make use of agency staff in your building control team?

- Very often - we are heavily reliant on them, and the service would run inadequately without them
- Fairly often - we regularly rely on them to ensure the continuous smooth-running of the service
- Not very often - we use them occasionally for specific tasks or at points of increased demand or low capacity
- Never

Has your use of agency staff changed or not over the last three years?

- Increased
- Stayed the same
- Decreased

- Don't know

How many agency staff did you have in place in your building control team on 1 October 2023, in terms of:

- Headcount
- Full-time equivalent

In general, for what reasons do you use agency staff?

Please tick all that apply.

- Recruitment exercise didn't generate enough candidates (number available for interview generally was low)
- Recruitment exercise didn't generate enough candidates with the required skills (number appointable with required experience was low)
- To cover short-term absence in the team
- To cover long-term absence in the team
- Post was to cover short-term work/specific task only
- Reduce backlog (for example, plan checking)
- To meet unprecedented demand
- Lack of capacity to recruit immediately/to cover during recruitment exercise
- Specialist knowledge was not available in-house
- Other (please specify)
- Don't know

Please add any more information you have about the issues that led you to use agency staff over the last three years.

Generally, how successful or not was the result of using agency staff and interims in the last three years, in your opinion?

- Very successful
- Fairly successful
- Not very successful
- Not at all successful

What, in your opinion, has been the impact of using agency staff on the delivery of the building control service or on outcomes?

For the 2022/23 financial year, what was the expenditure on agency staff for the building control team?

Please answer using whole pounds, for example 1000 rather than 1k

- Expenditure on agency/interim staff in 2022/23
- Expenditure on agency/interim staff from 1 April to 1 October 2023

Over the last three years, how easy or difficult has your council found it to recruit agency staff for each of the following roles in building control?

Column headings:

- Very difficult
- Fairly difficult
- Not very difficult
- Not at all difficult
- Don't know / not tried

Row headings:

- Head of Building Control/ Building control manager
- Team leader
- Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor
- Assistant/trainee building control surveyor
- Other building control staff – for example, technicians, technical administrators, structural or fire engineers but **exclude** non-technical administrative staff

Training and qualifications

What proportion of your staff have professional (building control) qualifications, if any?

For example, a degree in engineering , or certification through RICS, CABE or CIOB. Please tick one box on each row

Column headings:

- All – 100%
- Between 75% and 99%
- Between 50% and 74%
- Between 25% and 49%
- Less than 25
- None
- Don't know

Row headings:

- Head of Building Control/ Building control manager
- Team leader
- Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor
- Assistant/trainee building control surveyor

- Other building control staff – for example, technicians, technical administrators, structural or fire engineers but **exclude** non-technical administrative staff

Do you have a training and development plan, with agreed budget, specifically for the building control team?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Does your council have a successional training programme? That is, a programme of structured development and training opportunities centred around a clear succession plan.

- Yes, we have a successional training programme
- No, we do not currently have a successional training programme
- Not sure

What was the net expenditure by your authority on building control team employee training in 2022/23?

This is the gross training expenditure minus training subsidies and/or grants. The figures entered here should exclude any sums related to the apprenticeship levy or SR20 New Burdens funding.

Please round to the nearest whole pound, and enter 'DK' if you do not know.

How many apprentices do you have in building control roles, if any?

Please write in headcount

Of these, how many staff do you have on a graduate apprenticeship scheme, if any?

Please write in headcount

How many staff do you have on other training programmes in the building control service, if any (For example any LABC Learning / Education?)

Please write in headcount

Future plans

Does your council have a specific building control workforce plan, or not?

- Yes, we have a building control workforce plan
- No, we do not currently have a building control workforce plan
- Don't know

Which, if any, of the following workforce actions are you undertaking within your building control team during 2023/24?

Please tick all that apply.

- Making no substantive changes to staffing numbers
- Recruiting more staff overall
- Making redundancies
- Reducing staff numbers overall (through managing vacancies)
- Recruitment freeze
- Recruiting more staff in specialist roles
- Increasing use of consultancy
- Increasing use of agency staff/interims
- Reducing use of consultants or agencies
- Reviewing the agency service provider
- Introducing graduate entry
- Introducing apprenticeships
- Increasing apprenticeships
- Decreasing apprenticeships
- Other (please specify)
- Don't know

Have you undertaken any projections of the staffing numbers you will need in future years to meet anticipated need for capacity in the building control team, or not?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Please write in the estimated increase on 2023/24 FTE you will need in the following time periods to meet anticipated demand.

Please write in the additional number of FTE needed. Enter 'DK' if you do not know.

- 1-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-10 years

Capacity to deliver services

How confident or not are you that, over the next year, your council will have enough of the right staff (in terms of numbers and skills) to maintain the building control team adequately?

Column headings:

- Very confident
- Fairly confident
- Not very confident
- Not at all confident
- Don't know

Row headings:

- Head of Building Control/ Building control manager
- Team leader
- Principal Surveyor/ Building control surveyor
- Assistant/trainee building control surveyor
- Other building control staff – for example, technicians, technical administrators, structural or fire engineers but **exclude** non-technical administrative staff

What is your biggest workforce challenge at the moment?

Is there anything else about workforce capacity and use of agency staff you would like to share with us?



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