TALENT MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND
2023 - 2025

AND ACTION PLAN

lgsc

CONTENTS

> " *The Local Government Talent Management Strategy outlines how Councils aim to plan for, resource and develop employees to reach their potential and to meet the challenges and opportunities over the coming two years. It is a strategy to fundamentally support Councils achieve their vision, corporate aims, and values by shaping the culture to drive high performance through the organisation's talent pool.* "

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background the Talent Management Strategy

This Talent Management Strategy has been developed in partnership with key stakeholders in local government.

1.2 Overview of the Talent Management Strategy

The Talent Management Strategy provides a framework for workforce development across the local government sector and supports individual councils in achieving their corporate vision and objectives. It is a comprehensive approach to integrating all talent management activity in supporting delivery of council objectives.

1.3 Objective of the Talent Management Strategy

'To ensure all employees have the right skills to embrace significant organisational change, through embedding a culture of ownership, empowerment and decision making at all levels of the organisation.'

Local Government will have:

- *Flexible, resilient individuals who are ready for the next challenge.*

- *A sector that is an Employer of Choice for talented individuals.*

- *Employees who are not only skilled for the present but for the future.*

- *A sector that can respond quickly, effectively and fairly to changing circumstances.*

1.4 Context for the Talent Management Strategy

The SOLACE led Local Government Equality and Diversity Strategy identified talent management as one of its key strategic objectives stating:

The removal of any perceived barriers to progression to senior roles in Local Government is an important area of work. The Strategy will support the work of the Talent Management Task and Finish Group which has been set up to:

- *Scope the understanding of talent management within the sector.*

- *Develop a concise definition of talent management and a model of best practice.*

- *Develop a talent management strategy for the sector which provides a robust approach to succession planning, talent acquisition, identification, and development.*

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION... *CONTINUED*

A study by the University of Birmingham into what it means to be a 21st Century Public Servant *21-century-report-28-10-14.pdf (birmingham.ac.uk)* identified nine key attributes needed which include the need for people 'to be recruited and rewarded for generic skills as well as technical expertise and identifies that people will 'build careers which are fluid across sectors and services'. This Talent Management Strategy aligns with this level of change.

Consequently, local government needs to manage the risk of not having people with the right skills and behaviours to take Councils forward. The recent baseline data survey (see **Appendix 1** for the Key Findings and Recommendations of the Baseline Data Survey) identified that there are many examples of good practice where these situations have been effectively managed but this Talent Management Strategy aims to go a step further and put in place a coordinated approach across local government to make it fit for the future.

As a result of the pandemic Councils have seen a shift to alternative delivery models which will continue, with people adapting to take on broader roles which require different skills and behaviours. Councils need to be planning and making sure they have developed employees with the skills and behaviours for the future as well as the present.

In an increasingly competitive market for talent, if local government wants to drive improvements it needs to attract talented people and demonstrate real career development opportunities in a challenging and engaging environment.

SECTION 2

MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE OF THE TALENT MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

2.1   Governance Arrangements

2.1.1   Local Government Equality and Diversity Group

The SOLACE led Local Government Equality and Diversity Group is responsible for agreeing the overall direction of the Talent Management Strategy ensuring that it aligns with the vision and objectives of local government.

2.1.2   Oversight and Support

Management and governance of the Talent Management Strategy, in the form of centralised administration, facilitation and support for research, is provided by the Local Government Staff Commission.

2.1.3   Working Groups

Working Groups which are representative of the sector will be established to progress key elements of the Talent Management Strategy.

2.1.4   Monitoring Progress

The Commission will provide regular reports to the Equality and Diversity Group for dissemination.

> "The Talent Management Strategy focuses on planning for, resourcing and developing people but recognises these processes do not operate in isolation and that to succeed in these areas Councils need to operate in an inclusive environment with effective human resource and organisation development policies and procedures operated consistently across organisations."

SECTION 3

TALENT MANAGEMENT STRATEGY THEMES AND PRIORITIES

This Section provides an explanation of the themes and priorities of the Talent Management Strategy (the Strategy). Full details of the priorities and agreed Action Plan which will support the implementation of the Strategy are set out in Section 4.

1 PLAN **2 RESOURCE** **3 DEVELOP**

3.1 Plan

It is important that local government plans and establishes what sort of talented people are needed now, and in the future to deliver services. Links should continue to be strengthened with the University of Birmingham's research on the 21st century public servant,' given the parallels to the Northern Ireland context.

Further work is needed to develop an understanding of how Councils are supporting and resourcing communities to further develop and use their talent to fulfil ambitions around community empowerment.

3.1.1 *Workforce Planning*

Workforce planning is the process of ensuring that Councils have the right people, with the right skills, in the right place at the right time. It includes analysing the current workforce, determining future workforce needs, identifying the gap between the present and the future, and implementing solutions so the organisation can deliver its strategic vision.

3.1.2 *Succession Planning*

This is a key component of talent management involving an understanding of the critical roles within Councils, the current occupants of those roles and their likely career moves, and the pool of available talent who could fill the roles in the future.

In this rapidly changing local government environment it is however unlikely that Councils would look for 'like for like' successors for posts. This strategy therefore supports councils to identify and develop potential successors to take up the challenges of the senior roles within local government.

3.1.3 *Talent Deployment*

Talent deployment is where Councils use talent in the most efficient and effective way. Ensuring effective talent deployment within local government is always important, but it has been particularly vital during the Covid-19 pandemic.

SECTION 3

TALENT MANAGEMENT STRATEGY THEMES AND PRIORITIES... *CONTINUED*

3.2   Resource

Resourcing processes will ensure that local government gets and keeps the talent it needs.

3.2.1 Talent Acquisition (Recruitment and Selection)

Councils need to ensure consideration is given to opportunities and measures to promote (or remove possible barriers to) equal opportunity for employment. But critically maintaining fairness and consistency, being mindful of government initiatives and legislative change and ensuring compliance to Codes of Practice by appointing on merit.

Councils need to consider linking each role to a Competency Framework to ensure that included in the selection criteria are behaviours that have been identified as key to future success. These will then be measured using the most appropriate assessment tools and encourage an Assessment Centre approach.

3.2.2 Onboarding and Employee Engagement

Councils will take steps to retain talented people and enable them to give of their best, valuing their contribution. These will include:

Onboarding

New recruits need to understand the employer Council, the culture, the people and what's expected of them in their role, so an effective onboarding programme will increase employee commitment and job satisfaction.

Employee engagement

It can't assume that employees will want to work for the Council for life, so it is important to make them part of the journey and make the job interesting. Employees will be fairly treated with dignity and respect in the workplace. In addition, Councils are encouraged to have effective performance management systems and appropriate use of disciplinary, grievance and capability procedures.

- **Reward and Recognition**
  It is acknowledged that local government is still working through a large number of legacy issues including aligning terms and conditions across the workplace. The research indicated that workloads have increased and staff roles have become overloaded. There is an opportunity to create a more uniform approach to reward and recognition across local government.

- **Work life Balance and Agile Working Practices**
  Local Government is committed to supporting flexible, agile workforce and will maintain a comprehensive package of work life balance options. Prior to the pandemic, flexible working uptake was slow, but there are indications that many employees will wish to continue some degree of homeworking (or flexible working in general) following the pandemic.

- **Health and Well-Being**
  Councils already deliver comprehensive programmes of health and well-being and acknowledge that this is a strategic talent management lever.

> *The current period of accelerated change means it's more important than ever for us to think ahead. We need to attract talent. I strongly support the interventions in this Talent Management Strategy that helps us to do this.*
>
> *Chairperson, Solace NI*

TALENT MANAGEMENT STRATEGY THEMES AND PRIORITIES... *CONTINUED*

3.2.3 Performance Management

High performance is the first component in identifying talent. In assessing performance, two dimensions are important:

- *what has been delivered and the outcomes achieved*
- *how outcomes have been achieved*

Local government performance management systems with an equal emphasis on how outcomes have been achieved should provide a good basis for understanding current and past performance.

3.3   Develop

Although talented employees may have been assessed as having the capacity to move into roles of greater complexity, ambiguity, and scale in the future, they may not yet have the full capability required for those roles. Through the Talent Management Strategy an integrated approach to development will be adopted including:

3.3.1 Development Centres

Development Centres will be designed and implemented to support succession planning and the building of high standards of competence across the local government competency framework. There will be a mechanism to objectively assess employees against competency indicators and use data gathered to produce focussed development plans.

3.3.2 Training

There is a need to review and re-shape a comprehensive programme of learning and development across local government that is linked to the local government competency framework. The learning interventions will aim to provide employees with specific skills and competencies they need to achieve Councils' values, strategic outcomes and priorities.

Training interventions will be evaluated to ensure that investment will add value and build a strong base for the future of local government using the most efficient methods of delivery whilst maintaining quality standards and maximising ease of access.

3.3.3 Mobility: Placements and Secondments

The planned movement of employees within, across and outside Councils to gain varied job experiences is an effective strategy in career and capability development. For high potential talent, this is particularly effective, as these individuals are often looking for 'an experience' which provides new opportunities for career growth.

3.3.4 Mentoring

A mentoring programme will be promoted as a valid and sustainable method of learning. The mentoring scheme will provide continuous development to mentors to strengthen and extend the adoption of these interventions.

3.3.5 Leadership and Management Development Programmes

Local government leaders need to be equipped for the emerging challenges and to be able to lead growth and reform. This will require Councils to focus on talent management and leadership at all levels across the organisations, not just on senior managers.

SECTION 4

THE TALENT MANAGEMENT STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

A sectoral approach to talent management will facilitate the promotion and deployment of employees throughout local government. This has clear benefits for developing both individual and organisation they work in and impacting the communities they serve.

Strategy Theme	Action to be taken regionally	Action to be taken by Councils	Action to be taken by Managers	Action to impact on the community
1. PLAN				
Workforce Planning: To ensure Councils have the workforce capacity and capability it needs to meet its objectives now and into the future.	Engage with Solace NI to review potential leadership positions which are likely to become vacant over the next 3 years. Engage a Workforce Development consultant (and other partners e.g. Trade Unions, APSE, SOLACE UK etc) to work with Solace NI to explore scenarios for re-designing the 'shape and size' of organisations to address recruitment challenges.	Councils undertake a skills analysis to fully understand the skills mix within their organisations to determine whether this can meet their future strategic aims. Consider how digitalisation interventions can assist and enhance workforce planning approaches within the Council.	Managers understand the workforce planning cycle can develop new behaviours and ways of working that promote a collaborative approach across the Council.	Leaders engage and connect with the wider public sector to demonstrate how talent management is critical to delivering business improvement.
Succession Planning: A strategy to support Councils to identify and develop potential successors.	Succession planning pilot completed, reviewed and evaluated with model used and adapted for other areas within local government.	Development plans in place for those in succession planning pilot. Monitor the reduction in external recruitment advertising costs.	Monitoring the number of roles for which succession has been planned are filled internally.	
Talent Deployment: The process of drawing on talent to fill critical workforce gaps.	In dialogue with trade unions consider how some of the potential barriers to developing a more system wide approach to talent management (e.g. different terms and conditions) can be overcome. Share examples of 'what went well' during the Covid-19 pandemic.	Identify and report on existing barriers to the effective deployment of talent in Councils.	Identify the number of employees who have been deployed to participate in critical projects, short term placements or long term positions.	

SECTION 4

THE TALENT MANAGEMENT STRATEGY ACTION PLAN... *CONTINUED*

Strategy Theme	Action to be taken regionally	Action to be taken by Councils	Action to be taken by Managers	Action to impact on the community
2. RESOURCE				
Talent Acquisition *(Recruitment and Selection):* Sourcing external talent or identifying internal talent with the capacity to be successful in critical roles in the future.	Develop an educational / promotional campaign that promotes local Councils and the multitude of careers/ opportunities on offer. Refresh the Local Government Competency Framework for the sector. Investigate more innovative methods of recruitment with monitoring of results/success. Identify where targeted programmes to attract talent have been successful and distil this learning.	Preboarding - review the effectiveness of the recruitment process and the applicant experience. Increase in the number of applicants for senior positions. Increase in the number of senior positions being filled first time. Provide greater opportunities for people, including extended work experience placements, pre-employment training, graduate recruitment and an increased number of a varied range of apprenticeships.		Create a new careers portal promoting hard to fill local government careers. Promote awareness of local government as a good employer with opportunities for progression. Consider how social media can be utilised to promote the employer brand, generating interest in the Council as an employer and enhancing talent attraction.

> *Our people really matter. Each individual employee can make a major difference. Talent management is about providing the right environment and support for everyone to make that difference. Local government in Northern Ireland has talented and committed employees. By empowering people, we will make them and, in turn, local government the best we can be.*
>
> **Chairperson, LGSC**

SECTION 4

THE TALENT MANAGEMENT STRATEGY ACTION PLAN... *CONTINUED*

Strategy Theme	Action to be taken regionally	Action to be taken by Councils	Action to be taken by Managers	Action to impact on the community
2. RESOURCE				
Onboarding and Engagement: The process of helping 'new' employees become fully integrated, engaged, and contributing members of the organisation.	Work with SOLACE to consider actions to address the factors impacting long hours' culture.

Explore with trade unions alternative approaches to the reward package offered in local government.

Work with SOLACE to address the factors impacting long hours' culture.

Develop a 'model' agile working policy.

Continue to deliver a regional programme of health and well-being as part of the mental health strategy.

Develop a model onboarding process for the local government sector.

Develop a pilot apprenticeship programme in a key area and work collaboratively to roll this out. | Carry out regular employee surveys and then work with managers to celebrate and build on strengths as well as put into place improvements.

Commit to supporting flexible, agile workforce and will maintain a comprehensive package of work life balance options.

Carry out regular equal pay audits.

Develop model policies enhancing flexible working arrangements.

Develop tailor made programmes for groups such as job sharers, temporary employees, promoted employees, transferred employees, remote and hybrid workers. | Identify the number of employees who have a flexible working arrangement.

Ensure the performance management process is supportive of the emerging and evolving needs of the Talent Management Strategy. | |
| **Performance Management:** Ensuring robust systems are in place to identify and measure talent. | | Develop a performance management process that measures both performance and potential and develops a set of indicators to assess high potential. | Develop line managers to ensure they recognise the role they have in nurturing and developing talent. | |

SECTION 4

THE TALENT MANAGEMENT STRATEGY ACTION PLAN... *CONTINUED*

Strategy Theme	Action to be taken regionally	Action to be taken by Councils	Action to be taken by Managers	Action to impact on the community
3. DEVELOP				
Talent development: Making a targeted investment in the development of employees to build their capability for future roles.	Pilot a development centre programme aimed at aspiring leaders. Review and re-shape a comprehensive programme of learning and development across local government that is linked to competency frameworks. Develop a model training evaluation system that links to succession planning and talent deployment. Roll out a mentoring programme in conjunction with the wider public sector as part of a leadership development programme. Roll out a programme of coaching training to build a culture of coaching within Councils. Development of a public sector wide leadership development programme.	Identify the number of employees who have participated in the development centres and who state that the development centre has contributed to career development. Pilot development programme where a secondment to another sector/service area is built into the learning. Determine 'key' areas and create a development programme which would build capacity in these areas. Get employees involved in driving performance/continuous improvement and shaping culture using engagement surveys and pulse surveys. Provide more blended learning approaches to meet the needs of an increasingly hybrid/remote workforce.	Identify the number of employees who have participated in Interchange. Identify the number of employees who state that 'mobility' placements have contributed to career development. Identify the number of employees who participated in coaching and mentoring programmes and those who state that coaching and mentoring has contributed to their development. Monitor satisfaction with development programme identifying employees who state their capacity building/ development programme has contributed to career development.	

> *Talent Management in Local Government means having systems and plans in place that ensure that we plan for, attract, recruit and select, retain and develop our employees to meet present and future needs. We need to plan, make sure we recruit people with the skills and behaviours we need and then retain them and help them grow.*

APPENDIX ONE

KEY FINDINGS OF TALENT MANAGEMENT BASELINE DATA SURVEY

A baseline data survey was completed with seven Councils returning information, this survey information and input from the Group has determined the following as key findings.

- *All Councils seem to have adopted an inclusive approach to talent management - developing talent with a broad-based focus on skills development to meet future organisation needs. No Council has adopted an exclusive approach to talent management, which is focused on a small number of individuals.*

- *No one organisation has a sophisticated 'end to end' talent management strategy in place. Many have various elements in place which, when combined, could potentially create a more comprehensive approach to talent management.*

- *Talent management is being driven by academic research within the sector, skills shortages and changes resulting from the pandemic.*

- *There is some overlap between workforce planning and talent management practices across the Councils.*

- *There are few examples of robust performance management practices linking directly to a talent management strategy/approach.*

- *Public sector cannot always compete with private sector salaries, so we need to understand and promote what makes us an attractive employer and be clear about the skills and behaviours that we want to attract.*

- *There appears to be a willingness for collaborative working to develop 'talent management schemes' to develop skills and build capacity.*

- *Further work is needed to identify if the wider public sector is willing to engage with local Councils on a collaborative basis to co-design programmes which would build talent.*

- *Learning may be able to be drawn from the New Zealand State Services Commission, which is implementing a system wide approach to talent management across all state services, including*

the implementation of a Talent Management Toolkit and Talent Management Information System, which provides access to a large, shared database of talent from across the State services and beyond, as well as the development of a common assessment and development approach for leaders to ensure the capabilities of all leaders are measured against the same standards. Leadership and Talent | Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission

- *Links could be developed with the University of Birmingham research on the 21st century public servant in terms of the development of capacity building programmes. 21-century-report-28-10-14.pdf (birmingham.ac.uk)*

- *Continue to engage with partners such as Solace, APSE, LGA etc. to identify best practice and solutions for the sector.*

- *The rapid change to working remotely has provided the sector with an opportunity to review how we structure ways of working.*

- *There are a number of inhibitors to talent management within the sector including:*

  - *Protection issues by those who see increased talent as a threat.*

  - *Legal issues around selection/development opportunities.*

  - *Section 75 issues.*

  - *The existence of 'long hours' culture which impacts on poor work life balance is seen as a barrier to career progression by females in particular (UU Research 2021).*

> *Fundamentally, talent management is about how local Councils ensure they have the diverse leadership and talent they need that will give them the best chance of working with communities to support them to improve their life outcomes.*

> "Talent management is 'how we do things around here'. The principles and practices of talent management are integrated with wider organisational culture with collective responsibility."

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