

# Creative local and national collaboration – a deep dive into the Essex County regional landscape for Planning recruitment and retention'

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# Introductions

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# Evidencing the problem

- RTPI – State of the Profession 2023
  - 82% of local authority planners said their employer had difficulties hiring planners in the last 12 months and 68% saw competitive salaries as a key difficulty for local authorities
  - 25% of Planners left the public sector between 2009 – 2020
  - The remuneration of planners in real terms has been in sharp decline. If salaries had followed inflation since 2005, the median planner should be making close to £50,000 annually, as opposed to the actual value of £33,000
  - According to recent research by RTPI, 87% of planners feel that social media is responsible for spreading misinformation around local planning issues.
- PUBLIC PRACTICE - RECRUITMENT AND SKILLS REPORT: PUBLIC SECTOR PLACEMAKERS 2023
  - Over 66% of respondents reported that their team lacks the capacity to meet strategic goals beyond their minimum statutory responsibilities. Plans to move – 7% Retire, 8% change profession, 14% leave public sector.
  - Diversity is improving but a long way to go
- Local Government Workforce Survey January 2023
  - more than half (58 per cent) of all county, district and unitary councils said they were experiencing difficulties recruiting planning officers. The hardest to recruit roles are senior/principal/team leader
- **Evidence coming soon - Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities – Skills Survey to all local planning authorities. Closed Sept, no results yet**

# PAS Research

- Interviewed 30 Planners who had recently left local government
  - mix of those who had left for the private sector (developers/consultancies/housebuilders) and those who had taken up agency or interim work within the public sector.
- [Published @HouseyRousey blog](#)
- 100% of respondents who had gone into the private sector stated they would return to local government in the future, if the reasons for leaving were redressed.
- Reasons for leaving local gov
  - Salary difference - was between £20-£35K, and for some, that meant a 25% - 45% pay increase
  - (89%) reason given was a lack of career progression from mid roles such as 'senior planner, principal, deputy team leader' into the next step of more managerial and leadership roles.
  - High caseloads and burn-out (89% said it was a motivator)
  - Shift in risk appetite – 70% of respondents said that before the pandemic, they were not considering a move to the private sector or agency, 86% of agency & interim respondents stated they felt secure that there was available work from local councils to negate the loss of a permanent contract

# How and why did the project start

- Entrenched difficulties over decades to recruit and retain (Town) Planners
  - Fit for the Future report July 2022
  - Essex HR Practitioner group discussions
  - We needed a change in direction, not more of the same
  - Maldon DC and LGA conversations to seek collaborative approach
  - Art of the possible, no longer accepting the status quo
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# National and Local Partnership working

- Building on previous experience of collaboration and delivering support – Maldon DC and LGA
  - Support of MDC Leadership Team for the project as well as EELGA and the LGA for the benefit of Essex County
  - Recognition of mutual interest in achieving success and sustainable outcomes – national benefit and local change
  - Collaboration of skills sets, experience, resources and knowledge
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# The Project

- Previous regional Memorandum of Co-operation – 2018
  - Developing an evidenced-based business case for change, seeking solutions for Planning
  - All Essex councils invited to participate – HR and Planning leads
  - Two virtual workshops and an in person workshop in November 2022 exploring workforce challenges and the scope of the project
  - Workforce data requested from councils as employers
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## Continue...

- March workshops to share initial employer data findings and to discuss possible solutions
  - Engagement with stakeholders
  - Briefings provided to Essex CEX forum and Planning Portfolio Member group
  - Essex Planning employee survey
  - Stakeholder engagement including RTPI, EPOA, PAS
  - Learning from the experience of others
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# Initial outcomes sought

- Gain political and strategic support and consent for new collaborative approaches to Town Planning workforce challenges
  - Create an understanding of key workforce data across Essex and what that means in practice
  - By enabling capacity across the region, the development of innovative and supported processes to enable successful recruitment and attraction; retention and engagement focussing on hard-to-fill roles in Planning as well as enabling the foundation for a further focus on skills development
  - Develop collaborative working creating efficiencies and developing Town Planning resilience
  - The development of career pathways, talent pools and sustainable solutions and finding workforce best practice that could be implemented across Essex
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# Top level findings

- Vast variances of job role titles
  - Extremely 'tight' services, with very little flex
  - Agency use – use unsighted between councils, very expensive, demanding on internal resources
  - Lack of time and capacity to focus for change a large factor
  - Potential (and desire) for career pathways
  - Pay isn't everything!
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# Top 5 reasons for attraction

- The job role / duties
  - Location
  - Career progression
  - Flexible working hours
  - Job security
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# Concerns

- Age group 30 to 34 most at risk of 'flight'
  - Also, age groups 50 to 54 and 60 to 64 (perhaps retirement in mind?)
  - Flexible working overwhelmingly the most valued benefit for all staff across all genders/ age groups
  - Second most valued benefit for 20 to 29 group was employer investment in their capabilities
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# Benefits ranking

1. Flexible working / hybrid working
  2. Pension scheme
  3. Annual and bank holidays
  4. Flexitime (more than one day per month)
  5. Annual holidays (more than 30) plus bank holidays
  6. Payment of one professional fee
  7. Flexitime (one day per month)
  8. Pay (8<sup>th</sup>!!!)
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# Outcomes to date

- Tangible deep dive understanding workforce data across Essex Planning with comprehensive report and suite of potential solutions
  - Existing County wide collaboration structures helpful
  - Focus of attention by Essex CEX
  - Fuelled and supported the conversations about working together in Essex
  - Demonstrated the opportunity to focus on intractable issues
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# Challenges and lessons learned

- Reluctance to reveal employer data in some cases = patchy responses in key areas
  - Speed in decision-making and maintaining focus
  - Communication and engagement is key and we made assumptions
  - Feedback by workshop participants not always happening
  - Capacity of officers to look at the issues strategically when immersed in frantic day to day delivery
  - Changing Essex Council landscape
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## Next steps for Essex

- EPOA lead identified for the recruitment and retention workstream
  - Building the base of support
  - Development of strategic solutions by ECC recruitment team offered to all Councils
  - Focus on developing an agency framework for Planning roles with the aim of removing the divide and rule
  - Potential development of a secondment portal for Essex
  - Work still very much in progress
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# Next steps for LGA

- Solutions document transferable across most services
  - Skills Pathways Hubs Programme across 5 occupational shortage areas:
    - Legal
    - CE
    - Digital & ICT
    - Finance
    - Environmental Health
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# Contact details

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**Any questions for us?**

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