

Public Services Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Designing a public services workforce fit for the future

Wednesday 23 March 2022

3.05 pm

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Members present: Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top (The Chair); Lord Bichard; Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth; Lord Davies of Gower; Lord Filkin; Lord Hogan-Howe; Baroness Pinnock; Baroness Pitkeathley; Baroness Sater.

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Questions 51 - 59

Witnesses

I: Jon Rowney, Executive Director, Corporate Services, Camden; Joanne Roney OBE, President, Solace, and Chief Executive, Manchester City Council.

Examination of witnesses

Jon Rowney and Joanne Roney.

Q51 The Chair: Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to this meeting of the Public Services Committee of the House of Lords, where we are looking at what sort of workforce we need for the public service sector in the next period—not just the next few months but the next few years.

We have two panels. With the first panel, we are particularly thinking about how we make sure that we design a public service workforce that will be fit for the future, knowing what we know now about the change in population and in demographics and what the ambition of much of the public sector has been about integration, working together and being more citizen focused.

I am delighted to have with us Jon Rowney, who is the executive director at Camden Council here in London, and Joanne Roney, who is here essentially as president of Solace, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives, but who is also, in her day job as it were, chief executive of Manchester City Council. When thinking about public services, it is very important to get the local government perspective, so we are very pleased to see both of you. Members of the Committee will come in to

ask supplementary questions that you may not have been warned about, but two people of your capabilities will not be thrown by that.

Let me start by asking what models and techniques you use to approach workforce planning. Who is going to start? Jon, do you want to start as you are in the room?

Jon Rowney: I am happy to start and thank you for inviting me here today.

In thinking about the role of local government and our approach to workforce planning, it is important to recognise to start with that councils are place-based organisations. We have a particular kind of democratic mandate and a sense of being a strong leader of place. Through the pandemic, and even before that, we have found how important it is to have a deep knowledge of our local communities, and we have developed different models of services accordingly.

Our experience in Camden has been that you can have the biggest impact when you develop models that are highly participative but also highly networked. Over the last few years, we have seen a real sense of purpose, which is values led, in terms of what we are looking to achieve. It is critically important to have a workforce that feels comfortable operating in that highly participative and networked way and which feels diverse and representative of the community it serves.

You asked about models and techniques. I believe it is critical to know the data on your workforce profile, and many local authorities will have that. It is important to understand the baseline. That can cover a range of issues such as where you are in local employment, your ethnicity breakdown and what your pay-gap data looks like. It is important to have that kind of strong grip on your data. There is real value in being as open and transparent as you can be about your workforce profile, to understand where you are now and where you want to go.

On workforce planning, understanding your approach to development and retention feels important. With leadership and management responsibilities and opportunities, how do you create an environment where there are learning opportunities for your workforce? We have done stuff in Camden such as focusing on stay interviews rather than exit interviews, because it is about how to develop a workforce that feels valued and supported. Over the last few years, we have also run a series of Pulse surveys. They gauge the view of the workforce and take a bit of a temperature check. We have used them to unpick issues such as equality, inclusion and well-being. There are ways in which you can test where your workforce is to understand how you need to develop as an organisation.

Finally, before I stop, I think that part of workforce planning is about how you give a voice to your workforce throughout the organisation to build up a sense of inclusion, belonging and feeling valued. That feels important too.

Joanne Roney: Thank you for the opportunity to present to the committee. I am sorry that I am not there in person. It would be nice to be having this conversation face to face.

If I may, I would like to start with a little bit of a perspective from Solace about the national position on why this conversation is so crucial at this time. Then maybe I can add a little bit from Manchester. Solace did a survey of the 1,600 chief executives in local government and 33% said that they did not feel they had the right number of staff with the right skills to be able to deliver a good standard of service, which is quite a shocking statistic. It got worse when we asked about the future pipeline, when 89% of chief executives said that they were concerned about the future workforce.

Those were the two statistics that stood out for us and made us start to think as an organisation about what is going on in local government. You have just heard some good examples there from Jon, and I can say that Manchester takes a similar approach to workforce planning. Our approach identifies the age of our workforce: the average of the workforce in Manchester council is 47 and our resident age is 36, so we already know that we have a challenge here in attracting young people into the workforce, as well as having that timebomb of an ageing population in the workforce leaving and the need to develop talent from within. My second point is about turnover. We have had examples of turnover in children's services being as high as 17% at one stage. I am happy to say that it is much lower now. We average around 6% within an annual turnover of staff of around 9%.]

Workforce data, on the point that Jon made, is very important. The approach to using that data to look at the retention, attraction and development of staff, particularly to address the point about ensuring that your staff represent the population you serve, is key to workforce planning. My point is that some parts of local government do this very well, particularly in the care sector and education services, but I do not think there is a consistent, uniform model of workforce planning across all of local government.

The Chair: That is interesting. Can you say a little bit more about workforce retention? Is that a problem at the moment?

Joanne Roney: If I could start with a little bit from Manchester, I think that retention is a growing problem. A recent survey showed that one-third of chief executives left London councils in one year. That is a high level of top talent drain from the city. Retention, linked with age profile, is clearly an issue for us but, equally, retention has been a challenge in some of the lower pay grades, particularly in the care market. We have seen wages comparable with the hospitality sector—or indeed other areas. I make the point, though, that pay was not the number one feature in our workforce survey or indeed the national survey. Jon made a point, and he may say more on it, about how staff feel about the organisation: what are their opportunities for progression; can they move

out of silos into other career pathways; do they feel valued; is the culture of the organisation good?

Coming out of Covid, I was delighted to have our staff survey show that, despite all the challenges we have been through as an organisation, through austerity, Covid and various other issues, 65% of staff say that it is a great organisation to work for and is actively engaged to help shape the future of our workforce. However, I think we need to pay a little bit more attention not just to recruitment to public service as a career of choice—and I say that passionately as I started my career as 16 year-old apprentice—but to training, development and retention.

The Chair: Jon, do you want to add anything?

Jon Rowney: I agree that retention is beyond pay; it is about how you can position yourself as an employer. As we move out of the pandemic, where some groups of staff have benefited from increased flexibility and had the ability to work at home and to balance work with their caring responsibilities, we have found that there is an expectation in the market about how people can hold on to the benefits they experienced through that period while we remain a place-based organisation. I think that local government will need to develop what that might feel and look like for an employer, more than perhaps we are at the moment—but we are still developing that thinking.

The Chair: I have several colleagues who want to come in, Lord Bourne first.

Q52 **Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth:** My question follows that theme and a point that Jon made. Like all great ideas, stay interviews, which I had not heard about before, seem very obvious. Has anything come up in that interview process that has surprised you and led you to alter your practices in Camden? Joanne may have some parallel thoughts from Manchester.

Jon Rowney: One thing that came across very strongly in some of our stay interviews was around learning and development opportunities that sit outside the day job, and the ability to get more involved in corporate projects.

We have launched recently what we call our inclusive innovation network. It is a network of individuals from across the organisation who want to get involved in new projects that sit outside their day jobs. We have tried to build a network of change-makers, and we are asking those change-makers to spend 20% of their time outside their normal day-to-day responsibilities contributing to different corporate projects. That idea is still in its relatively early days, but it has generated huge amounts of enthusiasm and excitement within the workforce because they can see that the organisation is investing in their learning and development. It has been a valuable experience.

From a leadership perspective, it means that the organisation has to commit to that kind of approach, but we have found that it strengthens people's sense of belonging to what the organisation is trying to achieve.

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: That is very interesting. Joanne?

Joanne Roney: I agree with all of that, and I may have a couple more examples.

One thing we have done in Greater Manchester, in recognising the shrinking talent pool in some of our services, is to reach agreement across a range of local authorities on comparable salaries and terms and conditions of employment. We have stopped poaching each other's staff, which was a ridiculous waste of money. We pool resources and invest in training and development and joint apprenticeships and so build a wider collaborative workforce, rather than poaching—and I think that more could be done in that space.

The second thing is absolutely the point Jon made about the retention interviews that we do. When we hear that somebody has another job somewhere, we have a stay interview, asking, "What will it take to stay?" In all cases, it is about an expanded scope of role or the opportunity for personal and professional development. Again, it is about having flexibility in your workforce so that you can deploy people more effectively, not always within the council. Certainly the work we have done with our health colleagues in particular has been very good at expanding capacity for people to stay within Manchester but maybe work somewhere else in the system and grow personally.

My third point is the need for some targeted interventions. For our black, Asian and minority ethnic employees, we have a very targeted approach about giving them access to leadership development, which they would not have had normally in their roles. We put a targeted programme in to encourage them to break through to leadership opportunities that existed but which they may have felt they were not quite ready for.

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: Fascinating. Thank you very much indeed.

Q53 **Lord Bichard:** Both of you have touched upon two things that we have thought about quite a lot. One is how we get more local lived experience into the workforce. You have touched on that, Jon, and it would be interesting to know whether you have done anything that you would like to draw our attention to, which has worked. Secondly, particularly to Joanne, I really liked the idea in the Solace paper of local leadership academies, which I regard as merely a development of Total Place but none the less very important if we are going to get integration, which we have talked about quite a lot. Joanne may like to elaborate on that idea. Jon, would you like to say something on local lived experience?

Jon Rowney: I will highlight two things that we have tried to do at Camden. One is that we have developed a Camden talent pool, which is a deliberate attempt to employ local residents who have a deep knowledge

of their community and borough but who are also on the end of council services. We have developed, particularly for our entry-level roles, a pool of applicants who come from within our communities.

Lord Bichard: Do you encourage them to apply?

Jon Rowney: Yes. We try, where we can, to go to that pool first and foremost, before opening it up to others.

Lord Bichard: That is interesting. Do you invest in the talent pool so that they can develop the skills that get them ready?

Jon Rowney: There is some support at the moment, particularly with CV writing, and we have job hubs within the borough as well. That is linked to our employment support model, where we help applicants do that.

Baroness Pitkeathley: Can I just be sure? Will some of them be your service users?

Jon Rowney: Many of them will be in receipt of universal services. I am not able to say if they are receiving particular support.

Lord Bichard: But they live locally.

Jon Rowney: They do live locally, yes, within the borough.

The second thing that we have started to pilot is what we would probably describe as values-based recruitment. Rather than making appointment decisions purely based on experience, qualifications and skills, we have run recruitment processes, particularly in the care services, that are more about people's ability to empathise and provide support and care rather than necessarily falling back on an individual's CV. We have found that particularly powerful. Many who have been involved in that process, such as observers or panel members, have been service users as well. They have fed into consideration of the recruitment processes. There are two different examples.

Lord Bichard: That would require you to invest a bit in your recruitment panels, which you have done.

Jon Rowney: Absolutely. The final part is that we have also looked at citizen scientists and community researchers. These are local residents trained and employed by the council, who will often carry out engagement and participation on the council's behalf. They have been incredibly valuable in helping us to develop policy as well. Particularly in that area, it is very important that that is part of a wider participative agenda within the organisation.

Lord Bichard: That is helpful. Thank you very much. Joanne, do you have anything to add or elaborate on the local leadership academy?

Joanne Roney: Yes—and I think the roots of this are in Total Place, so you should absolutely acknowledge your contribution in this. It is increasingly evident that local government is at the heart of systems

thinking and leadership in local places, whether that is economic or health and care systems. This proposal from Solace comes as part of the pipeline.

Again, going back to the study, we recognised that only 10% of planners in the country are aged under 30. We are faced with major government initiatives around levelling up and reform of planning, and we have big national agendas around health and social care integration, systems change and systems leadership. I have been in this business for about 400 years, and when I see the skills that are needed and will be needed moving forwards, I think of a leadership academy that would help develop the skills that are required to do public sector reform, public service reform, systems leadership and place-based cross-organisational delivery. It seems to me that nothing of that ilk that exists.

The submission that we put in was for some recognition that for £250 million, which is one-sixth of what is spent in the NHS, local government could start to address the pipeline skills gaps and work collectively with central government to start to put together—and it could be virtual—virtual academies to develop the understanding and the skill sets that are needed for us to lead across boundaries and to reform our systems. Wearing my Manchester hat, clearly, that was a key part of Greater Manchester’s devolution ask back in 2014. The work we have done around public sector reform has developed skills and talents outside the usual silos that public servants work in. There is an evidence base to say that you can make faster progress when you put development of talent alongside the ambitions, and that is what the proposal is asking for.

Q54 Baroness Pinnoch: I ought to say that I am a councillor still. This is a follow-up from Joanne’s comment about apprenticeships. It is a “grow your own” question, which you have explored in the sense of local leadership and so on that you have been describing, and the values-based stuff and all that—but you have to get them in in the first place. The question is: how useful are apprenticeships for local government? There is a plethora of skills that are needed in different roles. Are there opportunities to collaborate with local universities that have taken on degree apprenticeship courses? Is that an opening that will help to bring people into local government so that you can then develop them in the way that you have described? I think Joanne is the person to answer that.

Joanne Roney: Hello again, and good to see you, Baroness Pinnoch.

Baroness Pinnoch: Yes. It is a long time ago, but we will not go there.

Joanne Roney: A long time indeed. You are absolutely right. I genuinely say this from a personal perspective. As I said, I started my career as a 16 year-old and I have had the most wonderful career in local government. If I had my way, there would be thousands of me operating—and quite right, too. Local apprenticeships are incredibly important. They are how we end up with a workforce that represents the communities that we serve. We need to do more about apprenticeships

across all aspects of public service, and we should do more about apprentice pathways giving people the opportunity to experience different aspects. There is the national graduate scheme, which is very effective. We could do more about local government apprenticeships.

We have had great success where we have done collaboration with universities. For example, for children's social workers we have a pipeline of talent from school to university to newly qualified social worker, straight into the workplace as part of their training and development to complete their professional qualification. It strikes me that we have some skills pathways that are that clear for some parts of public service but not the same for others. For me, they are absolutely crucial.

My final point on this is that I talk from the perspective of having gone through a career from the age of 16 but, increasingly, we need adult apprenticeships to change their careers, and to see local government as a place where they can come and add value. I would like to see perhaps more joint work with government about making us a career of choice for adult apprenticeships.

Baroness Pinnock: That is fabulous, thank you very much. I know our Chair wants to move on, so unless Jon has something desperately to add to that, we will leave it there. Thanks very much, Joanne. It is good to see you.

Q55 **Lord Filkin:** In a sense, I think we will violently agree with much of what you have said so far, but I would like to turn the question to perhaps a more challenging one, which you have already begun to touch on. It is arguable that transforming public services will be crucial to coping with workforce shortages and getting better outcomes. In other words, we are unlikely just to be able to throw more money or more bodies at the growing demand that is coming. Taking that as an assumption, I think the key question therefore is: how can workforces be developed, trained and involved to help transform such services? As well as the excellent HR practice that you have talked about, the developmental for transformation is arguably fundamental. Could you talk about that? Should we give Jon a go first and give Joanne a chance to get her breath?

Jon Rowney: So is this about how we can continue to develop our workforce?

Lord Filkin: No, it is a question with a sharper focus. It is a question about the transformation of public services, which is arguably fundamental. If that is true, and let us assume it is, what does that imply is required for the development, involvement and training of workforces? In other words, it is not just making them better for today's job but thinking about how you develop a workforce that supports transformation and is capable of developing and running transformed services.

Jon Rowney: At the heart of the approach when we think about transforming public services, being purpose-led is incredibly important, and thinking about what we are here to achieve. When we look back at the pandemic and the lessons learned from Covid, we saw from public

service delivery its ability to mobilise its workforce across councils, voluntary sector organisations and statutory partners to work together to deliver services in a way that probably was not envisaged a year ago. I think that we have seen an incredibly agile approach, and at the heart of that agile approach was that public services were focused on problem solving in a way that has not necessarily always been the case.

That has meant a few things for our workforce. Joanne touched on the requirement and the importance of taking a systems view. The ability to work with significant amounts of uncertainty at times was a challenge. Working almost in the grey was an area in which many public servants rose to the challenge.

As we think about transforming services in the future, it feels as if across the public sector we will have to work in a much more networked way than we have previously. I think we will have to work in a way where we are much more agile and fleet of foot. The leadership challenge there is about how to hold an organisation and its workforce so that it feels psychologically safe. As part of that, the challenge is how we empower our front-line officers to feel empowered to make decisions. They are some of the things that we will want to think about as we go forward.

Joanne Roney: I have three quick points. First, we could do better with the money that we currently spend. We have 112,000 vacancies in the care sector and 5,800 agency workers. About 15% of the children's service workforce is agency and 8% of the adult care service is agency. We pay more for agency than we would pay were we retaining, developing and growing our own. My start point on this is: let us make public service a career of choice and encourage more people into the market. That may mean that we need to be more flexible in some of the packages that we offer and the work that we do—and those were some of the points that we have touched on earlier. When we look at what we are currently spending our resources on, I do not think workforce planning has been at the heart of that as much as it should be. We could probably get better value from the resources that we have.

Jon made the point about what we learnt through Covid, which goes on to my second point. We did an extensive amount of work with retired staff coming back in to work as volunteers. We had a lot of community and voluntary sector capacity that was unleashed, for relatively small amounts of money, to encourage people to come in and contribute. Again, for me, workforce planning could be broadened, through this leadership academy that we are talking about, into being able to make use of all the resources that are required when you are transforming the system. It is not all about, "Give local government more money so that we can recruit more staff". We need to be smarter about the flexibility and capacity that exists in our places and have a workforce strategy that can buy in different bits of capacity when needed in a more commercially effective way. I definitely think that the future workforce strategy planning through ICSs gives us an opportunity to do that, and more

certainty of funding for community and voluntary sector organisations and volunteers is part of that as well.

My first point is that, as well as asking for additional investment from government, to be matched by local government, for an academy, asking for us to look at existing spend and whether we could do something different, collectively across the system, with what is already being spent.

Lord Filkin: That would be, I am sure, attractive to government when it is thinking about it. You said there were three points. The first one, if I have understood it correctly, was being better with the money we have at present. Have you opened up the other two?

Joanne Roney: My second was to be more flexible in the nature and type of work that we have. We still have fairly traditional contracts in local government, and we need to ask why people would choose to work in an agency rather than have a job within a local authority. What is the attraction that agencies offer that we are not offering? I think that goes to the kinds of work packages that we offer and the flexibility of our employment.

My third one was the academy again. Let us think differently about widening capacity within our places through voluntary and community groups in particular.

Lord Filkin: Good, thank you. Do you want to say anything about professional boundaries, professional defensiveness or other forms of defensiveness?

Joanne Roney: I see less of the defensiveness. I see that there are still silos, and it is incredibly difficult to change career. It is not easy to shift your career from, say, an early-years schools setting to become a child social worker. There is no fast-track pathway for you to do that—it is about going back to college, back to learning. So there is something there about the professional bodies working with us on future workforce and pipeline planning that can enable people to switch careers more easily or to be more fluid between different roles within local government.

Lord Filkin: That is interesting because, classically, when I entered local government, the only way into local government was through a profession, into a management role. That obviously is not how central government works. I am not claiming that central government is a model of excellence for a second, but is there further we should go on recognising that it is not simply a professional skill that you need to be able to transform services or to relate well to the public and involve them?

Joanne Roney: In a workforce strategy we need a bit of both, do we not? Clearly you need some degree of professionalism and expertise; in highways engineering or social care there is definitely expertise. What I am saying is that sometimes it is difficult to switch careers between Civil Service or local government or different professional bodies. I would like to look to see whether there are ways we could make it easier to switch

careers and entry levels into professional expertise; but we also need more of the place-based, systems leadership skill sets developed in our workforce, which is not about technical competence—it is generic skill competence, which is what Jon mentioned earlier. Maybe we need to move to recognising that it is the skills, attitudes and competencies that are needed in a workforce plan, not the professional silos.

Lord Filkin: I am sure that is true. Is there something to be learnt by looking at other organisations or sectors? Transformation of services is not just a challenge for local government. It is happening across society. I imagine that there is some learnt experience about how you create a culture in which transformation is seen as the fundamental goal, not transformation for itself but to get more productivity or better outcomes. Do we need to look at others for some learning?

Joanne Roney: Absolutely. My best learning has come from abroad or from the private sector. The premise of the Solace proposition is that we create a learning academy that would enable us to access learning from different parts of the organisation, and for that to be both Civil Service and local government, to interact and interchange to develop those skills, to break down those silos and to think differently. I would be completely supportive of us not just learning from ourselves but learning from others and taking best practice globally.

Lord Filkin: Just one small detail of challenge on the academy, which I think is a lovely idea. A number of us did the Cabinet Office top management programme 400 years ago, like you. The beauty of that was that you had civil servants, local government, private sector and voluntary sector all in the same room, talking about societal opportunities and challenges. That seemed to me to be incredibly fertile when I did it. Should that not be part of your academy thinking?

Joanne Roney: I would love that to be part of the academy thinking, but I would like it to be formalised more effectively, to be joint between central government and local government, to be open to a wider cohort and more embedded in the expectation for local government workforce planning. That is exactly the model that worked very well.

Q56 **Baroness Sater:** I have one quick question. Joanne, I just picked up on the volunteering and the volunteers that came forward. There were a lot of them, as we know. Have you been looking at how you can encourage and reach out, perhaps go to some of those volunteers and say, "Is there a possibility that this could be a future role or career for you? How could you make that transition?"

Joanne Roney: We most definitely did. Absolutely one of the successes was that, post-Covid, all the contacts that we made, we followed up with a number of the volunteers and, if we could, we would support them into permanent roles here. We had some successes with that. That was particularly true when we reached into some communities that are under-represented in our organisation.

The other bit that really worked was bringing the community and the voluntary sector alongside us in delivery of services, and formalising and continuing that. There is a range of services that are completely run now by the voluntary and community sector, and that is quite right; we have commissioned, them, effectively, to do that. Yes, there was lots of learning from that, and we are still working on that now. Our Ukrainian response is, again, led by the community and the voluntary sector, with us standing in support. It is not me deploying my workforce to that at the same quantum and volume, but knowing that we have an army of people there.

We also give every employee in Manchester three days of volunteering time for my staff to get into communities and do work to support communities, to build resilience and to make those connections. That is exactly the type of thing that I am talking about—workforce planning extending to understanding capacity in our places and having strategies to pull all of that in as we address some of the challenges we have.

The Chair: Jon, you talked about that a little bit too.

Jon Rowney: Yes. We had a very similar experience to Joanne, in that there was a wealth of volunteers. How do you maintain their commitment and willingness to engage? Similarly, we are looking at further opportunities that our workforce can have in our community, but also that bank of volunteers, too. We have had very similar experiences.

Q57 Lord Bichard: The example that Joanne gave of how the system makes it very difficult to move, say, from being an early-years teacher into children's social work is one that we should reflect on, because it is an example of the professions getting in the way of delivering the kind of public service that we want to see delivered. In the Solace paper, you talked about a local first equivalent of Teach First. You could adjust that, could you not, to pick up a point like that? Again, in 20 seconds, do you want to elaborate on the local first idea?

Joanne Roney: I agree that that is really where we should be moving to. We should be recognising that, with professional bodies and others, we could find faster pathways through to a high level of expertise, with career changes to promote that fluidity. Going back to my statistics, as I was saying, if I only have 10% of planners under 30 in the UK, what are doing now to attract people to the planning profession? It is a three-year journey to become a qualified planner, and I need them in two or one, if I am going to deliver levelling up at scale. The same would be true in a number of professions. That is the point of academy—to develop leadership skills and also, like Teach First, to develop the future workforce.

Q58 Baroness Pitkeathley: You have both given some wonderful and exciting examples of what is going on in your local patches, but I want to ask you about workforce planning at different levels of government, national and regional as well as your local experience. I was very struck, Joanne, that you said there was no consistent model. Is there a model

that could go across all those different levels, or is what you are talking about essentially something that has to be done in your local level and cannot be applicable nationally? I am very interested in your views on that. Do you want to start, Jon?

Jon Rowney: In developing that multi-tier level, there is probably an acknowledgment that each different tier of government has a role to play but, I suspect, a slightly different role. The example that I draw on is in the care market. Camden at a local level would find it difficult to influence the employment market in isolation, but at a subregional or pan-London level there is enough influence and a sufficiently large number of employers to start to engage with the market to shape it in employment practices and the attractiveness of the sector. Although, at that subregional and regional level, you could start to engage and shape, I still think that there would be an important role at a local level in employment and ensuring that staff were fully engaged and knowledgeable of the local community. It would be a combination; a local authority in itself could not do it—you would need a multi-tiered approach.

Baroness Pitkeathley: What about movement of staff across levels and the flexibility thereof, or not?

Jon Rowney: We saw that a little bit during the pandemic. At Camden we oversaw a redeployment hub of staff from across different local authorities in London to support the pan-London mortuary service. That was more tens of people than it was anything bigger. It did work, and we were able to respond and move resources around. That role was made easier by the fact that there was a clear purpose and something to tackle and address. In the absence of that, that type of approach probably becomes a little bit trickier. In those pan-London arrangements, having a clear sense of purpose first feels important.

Baroness Pitkeathley: A common enemy, as it were.

Jon Rowney: Indeed.

Joanne Roney: I completely agree with what Jon said there, and I will give a couple of additional points. The statistics I have given you so far have come from a survey that we have done. It is interesting that there is no online data available around workforce capacity in local government as an ongoing tool that could be looked at, studied and examined. That is my point: I do not think there is a standard model for how we collect data or evidence data. That makes it difficult for us to even talk to younger people about career opportunities, because we are not modelling data around matching vacancies to capacity, people, FE provision or university provision.

My first point is, let us have some common datasets around workforce planning. My second point is, let us use that data to have a line of sight regionally and locally and across partner agencies, so that we have a

shared understanding of where we may have future pipeline pressures or capacity gaps.

My third point is that we have opportunities with things like combined authorities that are being created to look to see what can be done at local and regional level—and I think it is both local and regional—to put the capacity in the right place for the right purpose. An example is that we have a number of staff in the combined authority in Greater Manchester who are deployed out to support individual parts of Greater Manchester on individual projects when it is needed. We develop the specialism at the combined authority so that we do not all need to have a specialism back in our individual local authorities. There are models around putting capacity into regions as well as local that could be deployed more effectively. It goes to the point about making best use of existing resources, not always needing more.

- Q59 **Lord Hogan-Howe:** Going back to something Jon said earlier about agency pools, it intrigued me—I think it is in the Solace evidence as well—that the public service tends to buy back the people they trained for a premium. You positioned it as: how do you get people to be attracted to work for local authorities or public service rather than the agencies? I suppose I am intrigued by how local authorities could arrange their work in a way that would fit that need. It is usually either urgent, a skills gap, or the recruitment is too slow. That is usually what you are trying to fill. If I look at my experience, police-wise, we could not buy back our own staff because we were limited by public policy on abatements of pensions. You mentioned that as an example. I wonder if there are any other structural problems in creating a pool that you can use flexibly.

Joanne Roney: You have identified some of the barriers there. Pension is one. As I said, it goes to the reform that is needed in our approach to attracting people, and work patterns for people. If you had told me two years ago that I would have 7,700 staff working remotely and services would still continue, I would not have been able to imagine that, in truth. Some of this is us recognising the significance of workforce planning, building on what we have learnt from Covid, lessons we have learnt from elsewhere, and having a more agile, flexible working offer to people that does not get tied up with bureaucracy that limits the capacity to bring people in short term, fixed term, or for short periods at points of capacity. I do not think we are as agile as we could be. We are still on a journey in local government.

Lord Hogan-Howe: In principle, there is nothing to stop us doing that, is there? I say “us”—the public service generally. That is exactly what the agencies are doing, is it not?

Joanne Roney: There is a pension barrier, and there is a national terms and conditions point. It is at the margins—but maybe we could go bolder and braver in some of those areas.

Lord Filkin: Could Joanne amplify a little bit more about the pensions barrier and the terms and conditions barrier? You have touched on two

rocks in the road. If we were being really radical, what would we do about those rocks?

Joanne Roney: This is dangerous territory, when you ask me to be radical.

Lord Filkin: Nobody is listening.

Joanne Roney: We could be a little bit less rigid around some of the requirements to work nine to five, Monday to Friday, and that shift pattern culture. That does not fit with modern young people. We could be clearer about offering short-term contracts for people without necessarily needing them to be employed as companies that we re-employ back. There is something about allowing people to take flexible retirement, which we do, but then we do not necessarily use that flexible retirement to bring them back into the organisation to maybe take on the mentoring or supporting of their successor. We could do more about apprenticeships.

The pension issue is clearly a difficult one. There are also conditions around severance for people who have left their careers, which prevent them from coming back into local government. At the end of the day, our pension is an attractive offer for a career in local government. I personally would not want to necessarily mess around with the pension offer. Given that the pay differential is bigger between the public and private sector, the pension is a hugely significant part of why a career in local government is attractive to people.

We all need to take a reflection, after what we have learnt from Covid, and think about our workforce in future being more agile, younger and more attracted to careers here. It is perhaps about making sure that we are not putting barriers in ourselves around the hours of work, the terms of work or the ability to expand your career by moving around the organisation, rather than coming to do one job without a career development path in front of you. Some of it is within our gift, to think differently, and Jon started the session talking about some of the things that Camden has done that perhaps need to be exemplified across the whole of local government.

Lord Filkin: We have had evidence previously that, if you really want to maximise the potential of digitisation—and I am not equating transformation with digitisation; digitisation is clearly part of a transformation—you would not have the sort of workforce we have at present. You would try to get in very much younger, geekier people, and have an environment where they were empowered to drive change rather than feeling that they were facing enormous bureaucratic resistance. I know about some of this through my family so I will not go into too much detail. Do you have any comments on that?

Jon Rowney: Undoubtedly, a digital way of working offers huge opportunities. However, there are two things that I am particularly mindful of. One is digital exclusion. We have seen throughout the

pandemic that not everybody has access not only to digital devices but to digital connectivity as well. Solving and addressing both of those is incredibly important.

On service delivery, undoubtedly digital presents a real opportunity. However, I would always suggest, with service transformation, putting residents and citizens at the heart of service design, working from that starting point, and then thinking about what digital opportunities are afforded as part of that human-centred experience. That feels really important. Therefore, I would start from that perspective and then work in to the opportunities from digital.

Lord Bichard: I want to reinforce the point you made right at the beginning about the talent pool, because it is a very attractive idea, not least when, as a result of the pandemic, we have identified a raft of people who are prepared and interested enough in their community to get involved. It seems to me—I am asking you to agree with me, really—that we ought not to lose their names and that we should be trying to develop their involvement. It is not just young people, as Lord Filkin says—there are quite a lot of older people in that talent pool who we are currently not using enough. Therefore, we should be trying to find ways of them continuing to make their contribution not just to public services—before Jill picks me up, quite rightly—but to other voluntary agencies as well, who are suffering real difficulties in getting staff. I think the talent pool idea is a really interesting one.

Jon Rowney: Absolutely. There is a sense of active citizenship that we have seen—and that is where we start to think about how a council engages with its community. But it is also about deliberative processes and approaches that we have used that could start to address quite knotty policy issues. We have recently run citizens' assemblies on the climate crisis, as an example. What has come out of those is stuff that the council can do by itself, some stuff that we expect of partners, and also some commitments on what citizens and communities can do as part of that. To your point, holding on to that sense of participation and citizenship feels very powerful.

The Chair: We have come to the end of our time. Thank you to both Jon and Joanne. It has been a fascinating hour. As ever, local government is at the forefront of thinking about new ways of doing things. Even though it will not be happening everywhere, it is very good that we have had the good examples this afternoon. Thank you very much indeed.