

Local Government Capacity Survey - IT

Research Report

October 2023 to January 2024



Date: 02/10/2024	Version 2 – Table 19 corrected to include percentages
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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 council service areas, including IT services. This report is part of that work, and additionally is in response to Heads of IT highlighting challenges in recruiting, developing and retaining staff across all IT disciplines, and increasing pressures facing IT teams.

This survey was conducted in partnership with SOCITM, who also recognise the importance of evidence for this purpose.

All Heads of IT (or equivalent position) in all English councils (317 in total) were asked to complete an online survey between October 2023 and January 2024. The final overall response rate was 30 per cent (86 councils). By council type, the response rate was highest from unitaries (37 per cent / 21 councils) and lowest from Metropolitan districts (11 per cent / four councils).

Regionally, response was highest from West Midlands (37 per cent / 11 councils) and lowest from the North East (17 per cent / 2 councils).

Key findings

- Two fifths of all respondents said they were not at all or not very confident they have enough applications and systems officers to maintain the IT service adequately over the next year.
- As of 1 October 2023, there were approximately 24,750 staff employed in IT related roles by English local authorities, estimated from the data.
- Average vacancy rates for local authorities based on these findings, demonstrate that approximately 18 per cent of IT posts in councils across England were vacant as of 1 October 2023.
- Councils across England were estimated to have spent over half a million pounds on agency staff / contractors for IT in the 2022/23 financial year and were expecting it be higher in 2023/24.
- Just over 18,000 FTE staff were estimated to be in post across England, at an average of 57 per council, whilst almost 2,000 posts were vacant, at an average of seven per council.
- Around a third of all responding councils said the vacancy they had found most difficult to fill in the last three years was for a technical / operational / architectural officer.
- Thinking of their most difficult to fill vacancy, over half of all respondents said difficulties recruiting staff of the right skills / experience was one of the main reasons they had that vacancy for six months or more.

- Two thirds of respondents said they found it very or fairly difficult to recruit technical/ operational / architectural officers generally, and a little under half of all responding councils said they found it very or fairly difficult to retain permanent technical/ operational / architectural officers.
- On average, local authority IT teams had a turnover of approximately 9.8 per cent. A quarter of all respondents said the main reason given for employees leaving was for more pay.
- 780 agency staff were estimated to have been employed by local authority IT teams on 1 October 2023, with a full-time equivalent of approximately 780. On average, two agency staff were employed by IT teams per council.
- The post to which most councils (a third) said they found very or fairly difficult to recruit agency staff / contractors was technical / operational / architectural officer.
- More than a half of all responding councils have a training and development plan, with an agreed budget specifically for the IT service.
- An estimated 460 apprenticeships were employed by local authority IT teams, of which approximately 110 (around 24 per cent) were employed in graduate apprenticeships.
- Respondents anticipated needing an increase of approximate 4.1 FTE per council within the next one to two years.

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 IT services.

This report is part of that work and, additionally, is in response to Heads of IT highlighting challenges in recruiting, developing and retaining staff across all IT disciplines, and the increasing pressures facing IT teams. This survey was conducted in partnership with SOCITM, 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 IT (or equivalent position) in all English councils (317 in total). A few councils responded on behalf of themselves and another authority, which meant the number of councils who could have participated was 286.

The survey was available to complete online between October 2023 and January 2024. The final overall response rate was 30 per cent (86 councils).

Data has been weighted to be more 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 actual (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 unitary councils (37 per cent, 21 councils) and lowest from Metropolitan districts (11 per cent, four councils).

Regionally, as shown in Table 2, response was highest from West Midlands (37 per cent, 11 councils) and lowest from the North East (17 per cent, two councils).

Table 1: Response rate by type of authority

Type of authority	Total number	Number of responses	Response rate %
District	143	50	35
County	19	6	32
London borough	31	6	19
Metropolitan district	36	4	11
Unitary	57	21	37

Table 2. Response rate by region

Region	Total number	Number of responses	Response rate %
Eastern	44	14	32
East Midlands	32	10	31
London	31	6	19
North East	12	2	17
North West	30	10	33
South East	64	20	31
South West	28	10	36
West Midlands	30	11	37
Yorkshire and Humber	15	4	27

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 unweighted 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 and county councils combining to form the second group. This is because district councils are usually much smaller than both single tier and county councils. Presenting the results in this way means they can be viewed in the context of organisation size and budget.

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

Throughout the report, where an average is provided, it refers to the mean.

Local government capacity survey - IT

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

Outsourced and shared services

Respondents were asked if their IT team was outsourced. As Table 3 shows, nearly all councils (94 per cent) said that their IT team was not outsourced. Those councils who said that their IT team was outsourced were taken to the end of the survey.

Table 3. Is your IT team outsourced?

	Districts %	Single tier /counties %	All councils %
Yes	6	6	6
No	94	94	94

Unweighted base: all respondents (86)

Respondents were asked if any part of their IT team was shared between more than one authority. Nearly nine out of ten (82 per cent) of respondents said their IT team was not shared – see Table 4. Eighteen per cent said their IT team was part of a shared service. Of the responding councils, 76 per cent of district councils said their IT team was not part of a shared service, and 89 per cent of single tier or county councils said the same.

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

	Districts %	Single tier /counties %	All councils %
Yes	24	11	18
No	76	89	82

Unweighted base: all respondents (80)

Staff numbers and status

Staff budgeted for at 1 April 2023

Respondents were asked to provide the number of IT related posts, in full-time equivalent (FTE), for which their council had budgeted, as of 1 April 2023. Their responses were used to estimate overall levels of local authority IT 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.

As Table 5 shows, councils across England were estimated to have budgeted for just over 18,000 IT staff for the 2023/24 financial year. This equated to an average of 57 IT staff per council, a figure that was considerably higher among single-tier and county councils (at 93 IT staff) than among district councils (at 24 IT staff). By role, the most numerous IT posts were technical, operational or architectural officers, whilst heads of IT services were the least numerous, at close to one per council.

Table 5. In total, how many posts were budgeted for within the IT team on 1 April 2023?

	Estimated England total	Districts (average)	Single tier /counties (average)	All councils (average)
Total	18,010	24	93	57
Heads of IT services	450	1	2	1
Digital officers	1,470	2	7	5
Cyber officers	640	1	3	2
Applications and systems officers	4,770	6	24	15
Technical, operational or architectural officers	5,950	8	30	19
Project managers and officers	1,650	1	9	5
Other specialist IT team staff	3,090	3	17	10

Unweighted base: all respondents (82). 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.

Respondents were asked if there were any functions or areas of expertise that they felt were essential to the IT team but they did not have due to funding constraints. Two thirds (66 per cent) of all respondents answered yes, there were functions or areas of expertise they did not have due to funding constraints. See Table 6. Just

under two thirds (59 per cent) of district councils answered yes and three quarter (74 per cent) also said yes.

Table 6. Are there any functions or areas of expertise that you feel are essential to the IT team, but that you do not have due to funding constraints?

	Districts %	Single tier /counties %	All councils %
Yes	59	74	66
No	32	26	29
Don't know	9	0	5

Unweighted base: all respondents (80)

Those respondents who answered 'yes' were asked what functions or areas of expertise they felt were missing. Fifty-two councils responded to this question, and they identified the areas of expertise below:

- Cyber security - officers and managers (17 responses)
- Business/transformation/strategy/ management related (16 responses)
- Data related (14 responses)
- Project management (8 responses)
- Architecture related (7 responses)
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) (6 responses)
- Adoption of tech/training staff (4 responses)
- Database administrator (DBA) (4 responses)
- System developers/development resources (3 responses)
- Automation/Robotic Process Automation (RPA) (3 responses)
- Logistical support (3 responses)
- Network specialists/network engineers (3 responses)
- Platform related (3 responses)
- Other (3 responses)
- Web/App design (2 responses)
- Cloud Infra specialisms (1 response)
- Geographic Information System (GIS) (1 response).

IT staffing numbers

Respondents were asked to report the number of IT posts at their council as of 1 October 2023, both in terms of headcount and full-time equivalent (FTE). This included both filled and vacant posts. Their responses were used to estimate overall levels of local authority IT 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 7 and Table 8 display the results for this question, demonstrating that, as of 1 October 2023, there were approximately 24,750 staff employed in IT-related roles by English councils. Because some of these staff were part-time workers, this was equivalent to just over 18,000 full time equivalents.

Table 7. Total IT staff headcount at 1 October 2023.

	Estimated England total	Districts (average)	Single tier /counties (average)	All councils (average)
Total	24,750	27	89	57
Heads of IT services	460	1	2	1
Digital officers	1,650	3	7	5
Cyber officers	660	1	3	2
Applications and systems officers	4,800	7	23	15
Technical, operational or architectural officers	6,000	8	29	18
Project managers and officers	1,750	2	9	6
Other specialist IT team staff	9,430	4	16	10

Unweighted base: All respondents (82). Note: estimated total staff numbers for England have been rounded to the nearest ten. This may cause the figures not to add up precisely to the total.

Table 8. Total IT staff FTE at 1 October 2023.

	Estimated England total	Districts (average)	Single tier /counties (average)	All councils (average)
Total	18,010	24	92	57
Heads of IT services	460	1	2	1
Digital officers	1,430	2	7	5
Cyber officers	630	1	3	2
Applications and systems officers	4,770	7	24	15
Technical, operational or architectural officers	5,960	8	30	19
Project managers and officers	1,650	1	9	5
Other specialist IT team staff	3,110	3	17	10

Unweighted base: All respondents (82). Note: estimated total staff numbers for England have been rounded to the nearest ten. This may cause the figures not to add up precisely to the total.

Breakdown and vacancy rates

Respondents were asked to provide a breakdown of their IT posts in FTE according to whether staff were present in the post (including those on annual leave or sick leave) or not. Table 9 and Table 10 show that just over 15,300 staff were estimated to be in post across England, at an average of 48 per council, whilst just over 2,000 posts were vacant, at an average of seven per council.

Smaller numbers of posts either had an incumbent who was long-term absent, or another status applied: as Table 11 and Table 12 show, there were an estimated 380 roles of the former status and 210 roles of the latter. Because of the small numbers reported, it was not possible to calculate averages per council for these categories.

Table 9. How many (in FTE) were filled 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?

	Estimated England total	Districts (average)	Single tier /counties (average)	All councils (average)
Total	15,350	19	80	48
Heads of IT services	390	1	2	1
Digital officers	1,200	2	6	4
Cyber officers	570	1	3	2
Applications and systems officers	3,890	5	21	12
Technical, operational or architectural officers	5,290	7	28	17
Project managers and officers	1,350	1	7	4
Other specialist IT team staff	2,670	3	15	8

Unweighted base: All respondents (77). Note: estimated total staff numbers for England have been rounded to the nearest ten. This may cause the figures not to add up precisely to the total.

Table 10. How many (in FTE) were vacant (even if covered by agency staff or interims) on 1 October 2023?

	Estimated England total	Districts (average)	Single tier /counties (average)	All councils (average)
Total	2,070	3	10	7
Heads of IT services	40	0	0	0
Digital officers	180	0	1	1
Cyber officers	60	0	0	0
Applications and systems officers	570	1	3	2
Technical, operational or architectural officers	540	1	2	2
Project managers and officers	310	0	2	1
Other specialist IT team staff	380	1	2	1

Unweighted base: All respondents (23). Note: estimated total staff numbers for England have been rounded to the nearest ten. This may cause the figures not to add up precisely to the total.

Note: Due to the small number of respondents, any conclusions taken from this question must be interpreted with caution.

Table 11. How many (in FTE) were posts where the staff member is absent though long-term parental leave or long-term sickness on 1 October 2023?

	Estimated England total
Total	380
Heads of IT services	40
Digital officers	50
Cyber officers	0
Applications and systems officers	110
Technical, operational or architectural officers	130
Project managers and officers	0
Other specialist IT team staff	50

Unweighted base: All respondents (23).

Note: Due to the small number of respondents, any conclusions taken from this question must be interpreted with caution.

Table 12. How many (in FTE) were posts of another status on 1 October 2023?

	Estimated England total
Total	210
Heads of IT services	0
Digital officers	0
Cyber officers	0
Applications and systems officers	210
Technical, operational or architectural officers	0
Project managers and officers	0
Other specialist IT team staff	0

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

Note: Due to the small number of respondents, any conclusions taken from this question must be interpreted with caution.

Dividing the reported numbers of vacant posts by the total number of FTE posts provided vacancy rates for each position for each type of council. Table 13 shows the average vacancy rates for IT staff posts, overall and by council type and role type. This demonstrates that approximately 18 per cent of FTE IT roles were vacant on 1 October 2023. This rate was slightly higher among district councils than among single-tier and county councils. By type of role, the vacancy rate was lowest among heads of IT services, followed by technical, operational or architectural officers. The role types with the highest average vacancy rate were project managers and officers, at 32 per cent.

Table 13. IT staff post vacancy rates at 1 October 2023

	Average (mean) vacancy rate %
Total	18
District	22
Single-tier or county	14
Heads of IT services	10
Digital officers	21
Cyber officers	16
Applications and systems officers	18
Technical, operational or architectural officers	15
Project managers and officers	32
Other specialist IT team staff	21

Unweighted base: All respondents (23).

Note: Due to the small number of respondents, any conclusions taken from this question must be interpreted with caution.

Respondents were asked for which group of staff, over the last three years, they most often had vacancies. As Table 14 shows, just under a third (30 per cent) of all councils reported they most often had vacancies in the last three years for technical / operational / architectural officers. This was followed by 20 per cent saying they most often had vacancies for applications and systems officers. This was also seen when the data is broken down by district and single tier or county councils.

Table 14. Over the last three years, for which groups of staff do you most often have vacancies?

	Districts %	Single tier /counties %	All councils %
Heads of IT services	4	5	5
Digital officers	9	7	8
Cyber officers	7	15	12
Applications and systems officers (for example, for revenues and benefits/adult social care/planning systems)	19	20	20
Technical / operational / architectural officers	38	24	30
Project managers/officers	8	11	10
Other specialist IT team staff - but excluding administrative staff, business intelligence/insight staff or data analysts	9	17	3
No vacancies	6	0	2

Unweighted base: all respondents (81) respondents could tick more than one option

The following 'other' responses were given:

- Software developers / software development manager
- Geographic Information Systems (GIS)
- Service desk staff
- Data officers
- Data architect.

Respondents were asked to report the single vacancy over the last three years that they found or were finding most difficult to fill. One third (38 per cent) of respondents said they found technical, operational or architectural officers' vacancies as the single most difficult to fill (see Table 15). Single tier and county councils were more likely to report technical, operational or architectural officers' vacancies as most difficult to fill (48 per cent) compared to district councils (29 per cent).

Table 15. Over the last three years, what is the single vacancy you found or are finding most difficult to fill?

	Districts %	Single tier /counties %	All councils %
Heads of IT services	6	0	3
Digital officers	2	3	2
Cyber officers	11	4	7
Applications and systems officers (for example, for revenues and benefits/adult social care/planning systems)	22	16	19
Technical/ operational / architectural officers	29	48	38
Project managers/officers	3	1	2
Other IT team staff - but excluding administrative staff, business intelligence/insight staff or data analysts	10	28	12
No vacancies	17	0	9

Unweighted base: all respondents (80).

The following ‘other’ responses were given:

- Software development manager
- Contract and commercial
- Apprentices
- Developers
- Data architect
- Webmaster.

Respondents were asked for how long they had had this vacancy. More than a third (35 per cent) said the vacancy had lasted for a year or more. Single tier or county councils were more likely (40 per cent) to report their most difficult to fill vacancy had been for a year or more compared to district councils (29 per cent). See Table 16.

Table 16. For how long did you have, or have you had this vacancy?

	Districts %	Single tier /counties %	All councils %
Less than six months	23	29	26
Six months or more but less than a year	27	21	24
A year or more but less than three years	29	40	35
Three years or more but less than five years	0	2	1
Five years or more	0	0	0
Don't know/not applicable	21	7	14

Unweighted base: all respondents with a vacancy (70).

Table 17 shows the main reason why respondents felt they had had the vacancy for this long. They could choose more than one option. Over four-fifths (83 per cent) said that difficulties recruiting staff of the right skills or experience was one of the main reasons, and this was also seen when the data was broken down by type of council. Nineteen per cent of respondents said that the main reason was pending a restructure.

Table 17. What are the main reasons you feel you have had the vacancy for this long?

	Districts %	Single tier /counties %	All councils %
Difficulties recruiting staff of the right skills/experience	79	87	83
Pending a restructure	19	19	19
Overall council recruitment freeze / managed vacancy policy	7	20	14
Cost of recruitment has delayed it	13	0	6
New appointments unable to start quickly	5	0	2
Others	21	23	22

Unweighted base: all respondents with a vacancy of six months or more (70).

The following ‘other’ responses were given:

- Difficulties competing with market salaries
- Unable to be financially competitive in the job market
- Pay grades don’t match market rates
- Managerial and staff time to keep up with the market
- Pay, location and hybrid working conditions
- Local government reorganisation.

Two thirds (63 per cent) of all respondents said that they made use of consultants in order to undertake projects what would have previously been undertaken by in-house staff. See Table 18.

Table 18. In the last three years, have you made use of consultancy organisations or directly employed contractors or not, in order to deliver projects that would previously have been undertaken by in-house staff?

	Districts %	Single tier /counties %	All councils %
Yes	59	68	63
No	41	32	37

Unweighted base: all respondents (81).

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

- Specific project support, project governance and project management
- Infrastructure
- Architecture and platforms
- Digital strategy, business management, restructure and website development
- Cyber security
- Technical transformation programme
- Microsoft 365
- Data - analytics/maturity
- Cloud configuration/migration.

Recruitment and retention of staff

Recruitment

Respondents were asked how easy or difficult it was, over the last three years, to recruit permanent staff in IT roles. Two thirds (67 per cent) of respondents said they found it very or fairly difficult to recruit technical, operational or architectural officers. Half (52 per cent) said they found it very or fairly difficult to recruit applications and systems officers and a further 42 per cent said cyber officers – see Table 19.

For every post, single tier and county councils were more likely than districts to report it was very or fairly difficult to recruit. See Table 20 and Table 21. In particular, three-fifths (58 per cent) of single tier/county councils said it was difficult to recruit cyber officers, compared to a quarter (24 per cent) of districts.

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 IT? (All councils)

	Very or fairly difficult %	Very difficult %	Fairly difficult %	Not very difficult %	Not difficult at all %	Don't know / not recruited %
Heads of IT services	25	12	13	10	8	57
Digital officers	40	7	33	10	0	50
Cyber officers	42	24	18	3	2	53
Applications and systems officers	52	23	29	14	2	32
Technical/ operational / architectural officers	67	41	26	8	4	21
Project managers/ officers	29	10	19	17	6	48
Other IT team staff	28	6	22	25	6	41

Unweighted base: all respondents: Heads of IT services (78), Digital officers (71), Cyber officers (78), Applications and systems officers (75), Technical operational / architectural officers (80), Project managers / officers (74) Other IT staff (77).

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 IT? (District councils)

	Very or fairly difficult %	Very difficult %	Fairly difficult %	Not very difficult %	Not difficult at all %	Don't know / not recruited %
Heads of IT services	17	12	7	7	4	70
Digital officers	33	10	23	5	0	62
Cyber officers	24	24	0	2	0	73
Applications and systems officers	44	20	24	15	0	41
Technical/ operational / architectural officers	63	37	26	9	4	25
Project managers/ officers	20	3	17	17	0	63
Other IT team staff	17	2	15	19	2	62

Unweighted base: all respondents: Heads of IT services (39), Digital officers (36), Cyber officers (39), Applications and systems officers (37), Technical operational / architectural officers (41), Project managers / officers (35) Other IT staff (39).

Table 21. 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 IT? (Single tier and county councils)

	Very or fairly difficult %	Very difficult %	Fairly difficult %	Not very difficult %	Not difficult at all %	Don't know / not recruited %
Heads of IT services	32	13	19	12	12	44
Digital officers	46	3	43	16	0	38
Cyber officers	58	23	35	4	4	33
Applications and systems officers	58	25	33	13	4	24
Technical/ operational / architectural officers	73	47	26	7	4	16
Project managers/ officers	37	16	21	16	12	35
Other IT team staff	39	10	29	30	10	20

Unweighted base: all respondents: Heads of IT services (39), Digital officers (36), Cyber officers (39), Applications and systems officers (38), Technical operational / architectural officers (39), Project managers / officers (39) Other IT staff (38).

Retention

Respondents were asked how easy or difficult their council has found it, over the last three years, to retain permanent staff in IT roles. The post for which the greatest proportion of authorities said they found it difficult to retain staff was technical / operational / architectural officers. A little under half (48 per cent) of respondents said they found it very or fairly difficult to retain them. Table 22 also shows 35 per cent of councils found it very or fairly difficult to retain applications and systems officers.

Table 23 and Table 24 shows the breakdown by type of council. Overall, single tier and county councils were more likely than districts to report it has been very or fairly difficult to retain staff in the last three years across all posts. The only exception was

for head of IT services, where nearly a quarter (23 per cent) of districts said it was difficult, compared to 14 per cent of single tier and county councils. The post identified as difficult to retain by the greatest proportion of both single tier/county councils and districts was technical / operational / architectural officer. Over half (57 per cent) of single tier and county councils and 40 per cent of districts reported this.

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 IT? (All councils)

	Very or fairly difficult %	Very difficult %	Fairly difficult %	Not very difficult %	Not difficult at all %	Don't know / not recruited %
Heads of IT services	18	2	16	23	39	19
Digital officers	17	1	16	21	25	37
Cyber officers	24	11	13	18	25	33
Applications and systems officers	35	6	29	25	24	15
Technical/ operational / architectural officers	48	21	27	20	18	14
Project managers/ officers	19	8	11	25	21	36
Other IT team staff	15	5	10	30	23	32

Unweighted base: all respondents: Heads of IT services (73), Digital officers (67), Cyber officers (70), Applications and systems officers (72), Technical / operational / architectural officers (77), Project managers / officers (72) Other IT staff (70).

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 IT? (District councils)

	Very or fairly difficult %	Very difficult %	Fairly difficult %	Not very difficult %	Not difficult at all %	Don't know / not recruited %
Heads of IT services	23	4	19	17	29	31
Digital officers	14	3	11	10	24	53
Cyber officers	14	11	3	7	16	63
Applications and systems officers	21	2	19	25	23	31
Technical/ operational / architectural officers	40	15	25	20	16	24
Project managers/ officers	6	0	6	16	21	57
Other IT team staff	3	0	3	18	21	58

Unweighted base: all respondents: Heads of IT services (37), Digital officers (34), Cyber officers (34), Applications and systems officers (35), Technical / operational / architectural officers (39), Project managers / officers (33) Other IT staff (35).

Table 24. 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 IT? (Single tier and county councils)

	Very or fairly difficult %	Very difficult %	Fairly difficult %	Not very difficult %	Not difficult at all %	Don't know / not recruited %
Heads of IT services	14	0	14	30	50	7
Digital officers	22	0	22	33	25	20
Cyber officers	33	11	22	27	34	5
Applications and systems officers	49	10	39	26	24	0
Technical/ operational / architectural officers	57	28	29	20	21	2
Project managers/ officers	30	14	16	32	20	18
Other IT team staff	27	10	17	43	25	5

Unweighted base: all respondents: Heads of IT services (36), Digital officers (33), Cyber officers (36), Applications and systems officers (37), Technical / operational / architectural officers (38), Project managers / officers (38) Other IT staff (36).

Labour turnover

Respondents were asked what their IT 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 25 shows the average turnover rate per council, both overall and by council type. This demonstrates that, on average, local authority IT teams had a turnover of 9.8 per cent. This was slightly higher among district councils, at 10 per cent, than among single-tier and county councils, at 9.5 per cent.

Table 25. Current IT team turnover rate

	Average turnover rate
Average per council – overall	9.8
Average per council – District	10.0
Average per council – Single tier / county	9.5

Unweighted base: all respondents (81).

Respondents were asked whether their turnover rate had increased, stayed the same or decreased over the previous three years. As Table 26 shows, just over half of respondents (53 per cent) said that their turnover rate had stayed the same over this period, whilst 30 per cent said that it had increased and five per cent said it had decreased. When broken down by type of authority, district and single tier or county councils showed similar findings.

Table 26. Has your turnover rate changed or not over the last three years?

	Districts %	Single tier /counties %	All councils %
Increased	36	25	30
Stayed the same	50	57	53
Decreased	4	6	5
Don't know	9	13	11

Unweighted base: all respondents (80).

Respondents were asked the main reasons which have been given for employees leaving the service: the most common reason, given by a nearly three quarters (70 per cent) of respondents, was for more pay. This was also the most common reason in districts (70 per cent). In single tier and county councils, there were three main reasons given by similar proportions of councils: 63 per cent identified for more pay, but also 68 per cent said retirement, and 70 per cent said for better career opportunities. See Table 27.

Table 27. What have been the main reasons given by employees for leaving the service?

	Districts %	Single tier /counties %	All councils %
For more pay	70	63	70
Better career opportunities	42	70	51
Retirement	25	68	43
To work in a different sector (private or other parts of the public sector)	29	17	25
Workload	14	32	19
For career change	20	10	17
More flexibility (e.g. more home working; less rigid working patterns)	10	14	12
Travel	7	6	6
Relationship with line manager/leadership	5	3	4
Personal commitments e.g. caring responsibilities	5	2	4
Member officer relations	2	0	1
Other	18	18	18
Don't know	7	0	4

Unweighted base: all respondents (77). Note: respondents could select more than one option.

The following 'other' responses were given:

- Further cuts in budget and redundancy
- Health issues
- Restructuring
- End of fixed term contracts

Respondents were asked if any of their permanent staff left to take up agency or interim work in the 2022/23 financial year. Table 28 below shows one in ten (10 per cent) of all respondents said permanent staff left to take up agency / contractor work. Three quarters (75 per cent) of respondents answered that none of their permanent staff left to take up agency or contractor work. This was also seen when data was broken down by districts councils and single tier and county councils.

Table 28. In 2022/23, did any of your permanent staff leave to take up agency / contractor (employed through an agency) work?

	Districts %	Single tier /counties %	All councils %
Yes	6	13	10
No	81	67	75
Don't know	13	19	15

Unweighted base: all respondents (81).

Those respondents who answered that their permanent staff had left to take up agency or interim work were asked if any reasons were given for preferring this work. Table 29, below, shows just over a four-fifths (81 per cent) of respondents with staff who had left for agency work said they had done so because pay is higher for agency or contractor work. Half (58 per cent) said their staff preferred agency or contractor work because of greater flexibility of work, followed by 41 per cent saying workload is lower for agency or contractor work. When the results are broken down by type of council, they showed similar findings.

Table 29. What reasons, if any, did those staff give for preferring agency or contractor work?

	Districts %	Single tier /counties %	All councils %
Pay is higher for agency / contractor work	100	71	81
Greater flexibility of work	74	50	58
Workload is lower for agency / contractor work	39	50	45
Better career progression	39	29	32
Didn't want a permanent role	0	0	0
Less professional risk	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0
Don't know	0	0	0

Unweighted base: all respondents who reported permanent staff leaving to take up agency or interim work (17).

All respondents were asked what action, if any, they had taken or were taking to help with recruitment and retention issues generally in their IT team. As Table 30 below shows, 55 per cent of all respondents mentioned flexible working hours and 49 per cent mentioned apprenticeships. Similar findings were also seen for single tier or county councils. In district councils, 41 per cent said job redesign.

Table 30. What actions, if any, have you taken or are you taking to help with recruitment and retention issues generally in your IT team?

	Districts %	Single tier /counties %	All councils %
Flexible working hours	53	55	55
Apprenticeships	34	65	49
Job redesign	41	44	42
Organisational redesign	31	39	35
Secondments	17	47	32
Market supplements or other pay augmentation	27	31	29
Personal development offers	21	35	28
Career frameworks/career grades	18	31	24
Agency staff	9	25	17
Targeted recruitment campaigns within the sector	16	12	14
Targeted recruitment campaigns outside the sector	5	13	9
Graduate programme	2	16	9
Government training schemes	9	7	8
Relocation packages	5	6	5
Retention payments	2	9	5
T-levels	0	11	5
Creating a specific recruitment pipeline through education partnerships	4	4	4
"Golden hellos"	7	0	3
'Refer a friend' a scheme	2	2	2
Other (please specify below)	11	11	11
None of the above	12	0	6
Don't know	2	2	2

Unweighted base: all respondents (81). Note: respondents could select more than one action.

The following 'other' responses were given:

- Role-based training to develop skills for new cloud-based environments

- Recruitment campaigns
- Very limited in options due to financial constraints.

Respondents were asked which, if any, forms of collaboration with other councils their IT team undertook to help address recruitment challenges. As Table 31 shows, 64 per cent of all respondents said that they undertook none of the methods mentioned in the table. This was also mirrored when the data is broken down by type of authority. Fourteen per cent of all respondents said that they undertook shared services, but district authorities were more likely to do this.

Table 31. Which, if any, of the following forms of collaboration with other councils does your IT team undertake to help address recruitment challenges?

	Districts %	Single tier /counties %	All councils %
Shared services	18	9	14
Pooling specialist knowledge	15	11	13
Shared posts	4	0	2
Shared use of agency staff	2	0	1
Other	9	21	15
None of these	66	63	64

Unweighted base: all respondents (80). Note: respondents were able to select more than one option.

The following 'other' responses were given:

- Broad regional working and learning
- Links between network organisations
- Meeting with other authorities in our region to share experiences
- Sharing collateral from code through to policies
- Shared procurement
- Shared system development.

Agency staff

Respondents were asked how often they would say they made use of agency staff or contractors in their IT team over the last three years. Half (50 per cent) of respondents said “not very often” (in other words, that they used them occasionally for specific tasks or at points of increased demand or low capacity) – see Table 32. Nearly a third (31 per cent) said they had never used agency staff or contractors in this period. A tenth (10 per cent) said that they used agency staff or interims fairly often (they regularly relied on them to ensure the continuous smooth running of the service). When the data was broken down by council type it could be seen that single tier / county councils were much more likely to use agency staff / contractors very often: sixteen per cent report they are heavily reliant on them and the service would run inadequately without them, compared to two per cent of districts.

Table 32. How often would you say you make use of agency staff / contractors (employed through an agency) in your IT team?

	Districts %	Single tier /counties %	All councils %
Very often - we are heavily reliant on them, and the service would run inadequately without them	2	16	9
Fairly often - we regularly rely on them to ensure the continuous smooth-running of the service	11	9	10
Not very often - we use them occasionally for specific tasks or at points of increased demand or low capacity	53	47	50
Never	33	28	31

Unweighted base: all respondents (81).

Respondents were asked if their use of agency staff had changed or not over the last three years. Table 33 below shows half (54 per cent) of all respondents said their use of agency staff or contractors over the last three years has stayed the same. Nearly a fifth (22 per cent) of all respondents said their use has increased. When the data is broken down by type of respondent, two thirds (63 per cent) of all district respondents and 45 per cent of single tier or county councils said their use of agency staff or contractors has stayed the same.

Table 33. Has your use of agency staff or contractors changed or not over the last three years?

	Districts %	Single tier /counties %	All councils %
Increased	13	24	18
Stayed the same	63	45	54
Decreased	14	31	22
Don't know	11	0	6

Unweighted base: all respondents (81).

Respondents were asked to report the number of agency staff employed in an IT related capacity 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 agency staff across England, as well as an average per council, both overall and by authority type.

Table 34 shows the results for this question, demonstrating that around 780 agency staff were estimated to have been employed by local authority IT teams on 1 October 2023, with a full-time equivalent of approximately the same amount. This equates to approximately 3 per cent of headcount and 4 per cent of full-time equivalent. On average, two agency staff were employed by IT teams per council. This figure was higher among single-tier and county councils, at an average of four per council, than among districts, at an average of one per council.

Table 34. How many agency staff or contractors did you have in place in your IT team on 1 October 2023? England total and averages per council

	Estimated England total	Districts (average)	Single tier /counties (average)	All councils (average)
Headcount (No.)	780	1	4	2
Headcount (%)	3	4	4	4
FTE (No.)	780	1	4	2
FTE (%)	4	4	4	4

Unweighted base: all respondents (84) Note: estimated total number of agency staff numbers for England have been rounded to the nearest ten.

Respondents were asked what they used agency staff or contractors for. Table 35 shows that over half (59 per cent) of all respondents said they used them when specialist knowledge was not available in-house. Fifty four per cent of respondents said they used agency staff / contractors to undertake or support delivery of a project

(including backfill of someone working on a project). When looking at the data broken down by type of council, there was little difference between them.

Table 35. In general, for what reasons do you use agency staff / contractors?

	Districts %	Single tier /counties %	All councils %
Specialist knowledge was not available in-house	58	60	59
To undertake or support delivery of a project (including backfill of someone working on a project)	51	58	54
Recruitment exercise didn't generate enough candidates with the required skills (number appointable with required experience was low)	23	21	22
Recruitment exercise didn't generate enough candidates (number available for interview generally was low)	13	25	19
Lack of capacity to recruit immediately/to cover during recruitment exercise	22	17	19
To cover short-term absence in the team	7	19	13
Reduce backlog	10	16	13
To cover long-term absence in the team	12	9	11
To cover short-term work/specific task only	8	5	6
Other (please specify)	17	35	26
Don't know	5	3	4

Unweighted base: all respondents (69). Note: respondents could select more than one option.

The following 'other' responses were given:

- Backfill for another member of staff who was acting up in another vacant position
- Lack of budget to maintain market rates for non-agency staff

Respondents were asked if they would like to add anything else that led them to use agency staff or contractors over the last three years. Thirty one councils provided a

response and are put into the themes below:

- Niche specialisms or skills needed - this expertise not available in house (11 responses)
- Lack of permanent team capacity - exhaustion post COVID-19, or lack of resource to meet deadlines/backlogs/increased workloads (nine responses)
- Difficulty recruiting - lack of specialist skills in house/lost expertise/low pay structure - private sector competition regarding pay (nine responses)
- Never used agency staff (five responses)
- Agency staff expensive (two responses)
- Austerity/limited resources has resulted in limited use of agency staff (two responses)
- Variable quality of agency staff (one response)
- Unable to train existing staff so agency more cost effective (one response)
- Agency staff also hard to recruit (one response)

Respondents were asked in general, in their opinion, how successful or not the result of using agency staff or contractors in the last three years was. Just over a half (57 per cent) of all respondents said in their opinion it was very or fairly successful, see Table 36. Single tier and county councils were slightly more likely to say using agency staff was successful (61 per cent) compared to district councils (55 per cent).

Table 36. Generally, how successful or not was the result of using agency staff or contractors over the last three years, in your opinion?

	Districts %	Single tier /counties %	All councils %
Very or fairly successful	55	61	57
Very successful	19	14	16
Fairly successful	36	47	41
Not very successful	12	11	11
Not successful at all	5	5	6
Don't know	28	22	25

Unweighted base: all respondents (72).

Respondents were asked, in their opinion, what has been the impact of using agency staff or contractors on the delivery of the IT service or outcomes – 50 councils responded to this question. Responses were put into themes and can be seen below:

- Mixed or partial success, or sporadic or short term gain - can lead to additional work for permanent staff to pick up, loss of knowledge, continuity and skills gap when agency staff leave (19 responses)

- Positive for completion of key projects or outcomes/helped resolve staff capacity issues and work pressures at peak periods/brought experience, skills which didn't exist in current team (18 responses)
- Little or minimal difference (5 responses)
- Used as a last resort for very specific projects (2 responses)

Expenditure on agency staff and interims

Respondents were asked to provide their expenditure on IT 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 across England, as well as an average per council for districts, single-tier and county councils, and councils overall. 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 37 shows, councils across England were estimated to have spent almost £55 million on IT agency staff and interims in the 2022/23 financial year. This equated to an average of around £172,000 per council, with districts spending considerably less on average than single-tier and county councils (£71,000 compared to £281,000).

For the period from 1 April to 1 October 2023, councils were estimated to have spent well over half this figure, at around £35 million. Converting this into projected figures for 2023/24, this suggests an estimated total expenditure for the financial year of almost £70 million, a substantial increase on the previous financial year that was reflected among both district and single-tier and county councils.

Table 37. For the 2022/23 and 2023/24 (part) financial year, what was the expenditure on agency staff and interims for the IT team?

	Estimated England total	Average (mean) for Districts	Average (mean) for Single-tier and county councils	Average (mean) overall
2022/23 financial year	£54,545,000	£71,000	£281,000	£172,000
1 April to 1 October 2023	£34,913,000	£56,000	£168,000	£110,000
2023/24 financial year (projected)	£69,827,000	£112,000	£337,000	£220,000

Unweighted base: all respondents (64) 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 contractor roles in IT over the last three years. As Table 38 shows, over a third (36 per cent) of all responding councils said they found it very or fairly difficult to recruit agency technical, operational or architectural officers, with 18 per cent saying the same for recruiting applications and systems agency staff.

Table 39 and Table 40 show the findings broken down by council type. A greater proportion of single tier / county councils found it difficult to recruit agency staff or contractors in technical, operational and architectural officers posts (45 per cent) compared to districts (27 per cent). They were also more likely to report that it was very or fairly difficult to recruit agency staff or contractors in applications and systems officer roles (25 per cent compared to 12 per cent respectively).

Table 38. Over the last three years how easy or difficult has your council found it to recruit agency staff/contractors for each of the following roles in IT? (All councils)

	Very or fairly difficult %	Very difficult %	Fairly difficult %	Not very difficult %	Not difficult at all %	Don't know / not recruited %
Heads of IT services	3	0	3	2	6	89
Digital officers	9	1	8	4	1	86
Cyber officers	11	6	5	6	2	82
Applications and systems officers	18	6	12	3	2	76
Technical/operational / architectural officers	36	12	24	10	3	51
Project managers/officers	15	8	7	10	7	68
Other IT team staff	3	0	3	2	6	89

Unweighted base: all respondents: Heads of IT services (73), Digital officers (71), Cyber officers (76), Applications and systems officers (74), Technical operational / architectural officers (77), Project managers / officers (74) Other IT staff (73).

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

	Very or fairly difficult %	Very difficult %	Fairly difficult %	Not very difficult %	Not difficult at all %	Don't know / not recruited %
Heads of IT services	3	0	3	2	5	91
Digital officers	10	3	7	4	3	83
Cyber officers	8	3	5	2	0	90
Applications and systems officers	12	7	5	2	4	82
Technical/ operational / architectural officers	27	14	13	10	4	60
Project managers/ officers	13	5	8	5	7	75
Other IT team staff	6	3	3	3	0	92

Unweighted base: all respondents: Heads of IT services (37), Digital officers (37), Cyber officers (37), Applications and systems officers (37), Technical operational / architectural officers (38), Project managers / officers (36) Other IT staff (35).

Table 40. Over the last three years, how easy or difficult has your council found it to recruit agency staff/ contractors for each of the following roles in IT? (Single tier and county councils)

	Very or fairly difficult %	Very difficult %	Fairly difficult %	Not very difficult %	Not difficult at all %	Don't know / not recruited %
Heads of IT services	3	0	3	3	6	88
Digital officers	8	0	8	3	0	89
Cyber officers	13	9	4	9	4	74
Applications and systems officers	25	5	20	5	0	70
Technical/ operational / architectural officers	45	11	34	10	2	43
Project managers/ officers	18	12	6	15	6	61
Other IT team staff	18	0	18	14	6	61

Unweighted base: all respondents- Heads of IT services (36), Digital officers (34), Cyber officers (38), Applications and systems officers (37), Technical operational / architectural officers (38), Project managers / officers (37) Other IT staff (38).

Training and qualifications

Respondents were asked if they had a training and development plan, with agreed budget specifically for the IT service. As Table 41 shows, just over half (54 per cent) of all councils said that they did have a training and development plan with an agreed budget, whilst 45 per cent said that they did not.

A greater proportion (63 per cent) of single tier or county council respondents said they had a training and development plan with an agreed budget compared to district councils (46 per cent).

Table 41. Do you have a training and development plan, with agreed budget, specifically for the IT service?

	Districts %	Single tier /counties %	All councils %
Yes	46	63	54
No	53	37	45
Don't know	2	0	1

Unweighted base: all respondents (81).

Respondents were asked if they had a successional training programme: this is a programme of structured development and training opportunities centred around a clear succession plan. As Table 42 shows, nearly three quarters (71 per cent) of all respondents did not have a successional training programme. A quarter (24 per cent) said that they did have such a programme.

Data broken down by district councils and single tier or county councils showed a similar pattern, see Table 42.

Table 42. Does your council have a successional training programme that includes IT service? That is, a programme of structured development and training opportunities centred around a clear succession plan.

	Districts %	Single tier /counties %	All councils %
Yes, we have a successional training programme	23	24	24
No, we do not currently have a successional training programme	77	65	71
Not sure	0	11	5

Unweighted base: all respondents (81).

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

Table 43 shows the results for this question. This demonstrates that an estimated 460 apprenticeships were employed by local authority IT teams across England, of which approximately 110 (around 24 per cent) were employed in graduate

apprenticeships. An additional estimated 60 staff were employed as a part of graduate schemes outside of apprenticeships. These figures equated to around one apprenticeship and less than one graduate per council on average. These figures were higher for single-tier and county councils, at an average of two apprenticeships and just under one graduate per council.

Table 43. Staff on apprenticeships and graduate programmes.

	Estimated England total	Districts (average)	Single tier /counties (average)	All councils (average)
Apprenticeships	460	1	2	1
Of which, graduate apprenticeships	110	0	0	0
Graduates as a % of apprenticeships	24	33	20	24
Others on graduate programmes	60	<1	<1	<1

Unweighted base: all respondents (76). Note: estimated total agency staff numbers for England have been rounded to the nearest ten.

Future plans

Respondents were asked if they had a specific IT workforce plan. As Table 44 shows, three quarters (75 per cent) of councils did not have an IT workforce plan at the time of completing the survey, with 21 per cent saying that they did have such a plan.

Single tier / county councils were much more likely to have a workforce plan than districts (32 per cent compared to 11 per cent respectively).

Table 44. Does your council have a specific IT workforce plan, or not?

	Districts %	Single tier /counties %	All councils %
Yes, we have an IT workforce plan	11	32	21
No, we do not currently have an IT workforce plan	85	65	75
Don't know	4	3	4

Unweighted base: all respondents (81).

Respondents were asked what workforce actions they were undertaking within their IT team during 2023/24. Just over a third (36 per cent) of all respondents said that they were increasing apprenticeships during the financial year, whilst 32 per cent said that they were making no substantive changes to staffing numbers, and another 29 per cent said that they were recruiting more staff in specialist roles – see Table 45.

Districts were most likely to say that they were making no substantive changes to staffing numbers in 2023/24 (33 per cent); while the greatest proportion of single tier or county councils, 58 per cent, said that they were increasing apprenticeships.

Table 45. Which, if any, of the following workforce actions are you undertaking within your IT team during 2023/24?

	Districts %	Single tier /counties %	All councils %
Increasing apprenticeships	14	58	36
Making no substantive changes to staffing numbers	33	30	32
Recruiting more staff in specialist roles	22	36	29
Reducing use of consultants or agencies	17	36	26
Recruiting more staff overall	22	25	23
Recruitment freeze	9	33	21
Making redundancies	9	24	17
Reducing staff numbers overall (through managing vacancies)	14	20	17
Introducing apprenticeships	10	24	17
Increasing use of agency staff/interims	5	17	11
Increasing use of consultancy	7	6	6
Reviewing the agency service provider	7	5	6
Introducing graduate entry	2	10	6
Decreasing apprenticeships	3	5	4
Outsourcing the IT Team	0	3	1
Becoming a shared service	2	3	3
De-coupling a shared service	0	2	1
Other	14	24	19
Don't know	5	0	2

Unweighted base: all respondents (76). Note: respondents could select more than one option.

The following 'other' responses were given:

- Work currently underway by consultants to determine what ICT structure is needed in the authority
- Radical restructure

- In-source of IT services from managed services contract
- Increased pooled resourcing through partnerships.
- Doing more secondments within the team.

Respondents were asked if they had undertaken any projections of staffing numbers they would need in the future years to meet anticipated demand in the IT team. Table 46 shows two thirds (63 per cent) said that they had not undertaken any projections, with 35 per cent said that they had. When the data was broken down by type of respondent, the pattern was similar.

Table 46. Have you undertaken any projections of the staffing numbers you will need in future years to meet anticipated demand in the IT team, or not?

	Districts %	Single tier /counties %	All councils %
Yes	36	33	35
No	62	65	63
Don't know	2	2	2

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question (81 respondents).

Respondent that had said that they had undertaken projections were asked to specify the increase in the FTE of their IT team that they would need in future, in order to meet anticipated demands. Because an insufficient 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 47 shows, respondents anticipated needing an increase of approximate 4.1 FTE per council within the next one to two years. An average of an additional 3.3 per council was estimated as necessary in three to five years, and 1.3 in six to ten years.

Table 47. 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	4.1
3-5 years	3.3
6-10 years	1.3

Unweighted base: all respondents that had undertaken projections (33).

Respondents were asked if there was likely to be funding to meet the anticipated demand for the IT team. Two fifths (42 per cent) said that there was not likely to be enough funding, whilst 41 per cent said they didn't know. When the data was broken down by district councils and single tier or county councils, the results were very similar – see Table 48.

Table 48. Is there likely to be funding to meet that anticipated demand for the IT team?

	Districts %	Single tier /counties %	All councils %
Yes	16	18	17
No	40	43	42
Don't know	43	38	41

Unweighted base: all respondents (79).

Respondents were asked if there was anything else they would like to add about having enough funding to meet the anticipated demand in IT. Forty responses were received and were grouped into the following themes:

- Not enough funding - funding pressures and increased service demand are challenging (21 responses)
- Static or reduced staff numbers, with a focus on staff reduction (11 responses)
- Currently reviewing demand (five responses)
- Budgets and salaries not in line with the private sector, causing issues (three responses)
- Reactive staffing and one-off funding instead of planned funding not being sustainable (two responses)
- Recruitment issues, with poor quality candidates (two responses)
- Staffing considered on a project-by-project basis, so staff are temporary additions to the team (two responses)
- Growth plan in place to recruit more staff (one response).

Capacity to deliver services

Respondents were asked how confident or not they were that, over the next year, their council would have enough of the right staff (in terms of numbers and skills) to maintain their IT service adequately. As Table 49 shows, two fifths (46 per cent) of all respondents said they were not at all or not very confident they would have enough applications and systems officers to maintain their IT service adequately over the next year.

Looking by type of council, the post which most district councils were not very or not at all confident about was cyber officers (50 per cent), followed by project managers or officers (42 per cent). See Table 50.

More than half of single tier and county councils had concerns about a number of posts: technical/operational/architectural officers (51 per cent), project managers/officers (52 per cent), applications and systems officers (53 per cent) and other IT staff (61 per cent). See Table 51.

Table 49. 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 IT service adequately? (All councils)

	Heads of IT services %	Digital officers %	Cyber officers %	Applications and systems officers %	Technical/ operational / architectural officers %	Project managers/ officers %	Other IT team staff %
Not at all or not very confident	12	29	44	46	45	38	31
Very confident	40	10	9	8	8	8	6
Fairly confident	43	52	41	44	46	36	50
Not very confident	5	14	29	36	27	27	18
Not at all confident	7	15	15	10	18	11	13
Don't know	4	10	6	2	1	18	12

Unweighted base: all respondents - Heads of IT services (80), Digital officers (69), Cyber officers (74), Applications and systems officers (79), Technical operational / architectural officers (80), Project managers / officers (72) Other IT staff (73).

Table 50. 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 IT service adequately? (District councils)

	Heads of IT services %	Digital officers %	Cyber officers %	Applications and systems officers %	Technical/ operational / architectural officers %	Project managers/ officers %	Other IT team staff %
Not at all or not very confident	18	32	50	39	38	42	24
Very confident	33	7	10	10	10	2	9
Fairly confident	44	48	28	47	49	33	43
Not very confident	11	21	35	30	26	37	10
Not at all confident	7	11	15	9	12	5	14
Don't know	5	13	12	4	2	23	24

Unweighted base: all respondents - Heads of IT services (41), Digital officers (34), Cyber officers (36), Applications and systems officers (41), Technical operational / architectural officers (41), Project managers / officers (34) Other IT staff (36).

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 IT service adequately? (Single tier and county councils)

	Heads of IT services %	Digital officers %	Cyber officers %	Applications and systems officers %	Technical/ operational / architectural officers %	Project managers/ officers %	Other IT team staff %
Not at all or not very confident	7	18	38	53	51	52	61
Very confident	48	12	9	6	6	13	4
Fairly confident	42	55	53	41	43	39	57
Not very confident	0	8	24	43	27	18	27
Not at all confident	7	18	14	10	24	16	12
Don't know	3	7	0	0	0	14	0

Unweighted base: all respondents - Heads of IT services (39), Digital officers (35), Cyber officers (38), Applications and systems officers (38), Technical operational / architectural officers (39), Project managers / officers (38) Other IT staff (37).

Respondents, including those who had their IT service outsourced, were asked what their biggest workforce challenge at the moment was. Seventy one councils responded to this question, which are broken down into the themes below:

- **Recruitment and staff retention:** difficulty recruiting those with appropriate expertise – councils need the right skills to support digital transformation. Some mentioned the low salary levels offered by local government for the skills demanded make it difficult to recruit and also retain staff. In addition, some mentioned lack of flexible working arrangements which doesn't encourage applicants. (36 responses)
- **Workforce numbers, resource and capacity:** reductions in workforce numbers, redundancies, recruitment freezes, insufficient existing workforce and retirements all affect resilience and succession planning. (21 responses)
- **Budget challenges and financial constraints whilst delivering both existing and increasing demands:** unrealistic expectations of IT service in context of resource and financial challenges. (18 responses)

- **Upskilling staff** - upskilling and developing knowledge of new systems required, qualified developers needed, the need to remove under-performing staff, and a lack of training budget to upskill. (14 responses)
- **Digital transformation and pace of change** – examples included the speed of changes in areas like cyber, AI, data, and noted the lack of resources and skills to keep up with this. Recognition of the need to raise council awareness of the challenge, resources and skills needed to deal with this. (13 responses)
- **Reliance on contractors.** (two responses)
- **Setting clear priorities and business goals.** (one response)

Respondents, including those who had reported having outsourced IT services, were asked if there was anything else about workforce capacity and the use of agency staff that they would like to share. Twenty-seven councils responded to this question, which are broken down into the themes below:

- **Upskilling and training:** a number of councils expressed a preference now to upskill or train existing staff, have a 'grow your own' approach, or run apprenticeship degree programmes, and use significant resources on upskilling – including mentioning that a majority of employees are older, and that new skills are needed (for example, in artificial intelligence). (Seven responses)
- **Issues with recruitment, retention and succession planning:** councils repeated that workforce stability is needed, staff retention is difficult, retirements are upcoming, unsuitable candidates are applying, and salaries are too low compared to private sector, all causing recruitment, retention and succession planning difficulties. (Five responses)
- **Budgets and funding:** capacity for innovation is limited and existing IT infrastructure has not been invested in or developed for years, leading to inefficient services; more central government support is needed. (Four responses)
- **Agency staff useful for specific projects:** these staff are beneficial to fill a gap or provide specific expertise when missing in an existing team. (Four responses)
- **High cost of agency staff:** using these staff creates budget issues due to their high cost. (Three responses)
- **Too much focus on agency staff, and more focus needed on financial reality.** (Three responses)

Annex A: Questionnaire

We are collecting information to understand the capacity within IT 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 IT team, a single return is sufficient. Please write in the councils with which you share the service at the start of the questionnaire.

By 'IT team' we mean the team of IT services professionals who are responsible for digital, data (exclude data scientists and analysts, but include those on systems and reporting), IT projects, systems applications and infrastructure – whether or not they are located in a central team (for example, including any IT staff in other service teams).

Please amend the details we have on record if necessary.

- Name
- Authority
- Job title
- Email address

Is your IT team outsourced?

- Yes
- No

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

Is any part of your IT 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 IT team with you.

Staff numbers and status

In total, how many posts were budgeted for within the IT 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.

- Heads of IT services
- Digital officers
- Cyber officers
- Applications and systems officers (for example, for revenues and benefits/adult social care/planning systems)
- Technical/ operational / architectural officers
- Project managers/officers
- Other specialist IT team staff – but **excluding** administrative staff, business intelligence/insight staff or data analysts

Are there any functions or areas of expertise that you feel are essential to the IT team, but that you do not have due to funding constraints?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

What are the essential functions/areas of expertise which you feel your IT team is missing?

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 and interims.

Column headings:

- Heads of IT services

- Digital officers
- Cyber officers
- Applications and systems officers (for example, for revenues and benefits/adult social care/planning systems)
- Technical/ operational / architectural officers
- Project managers/officers
- Other specialist IT team staff – but **excluding** administrative staff, business intelligence/insight staff or data analysts

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 contractors)
- 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.

- Heads of IT services
- Digital officers
- Cyber officers
- Applications and systems officers (for example, for revenues and benefits/adult social care/planning systems)
- Technical/ operational / architectural officers
- Project managers/officers
- Other specialist IT team staff – but **excluding** administrative staff, business intelligence/insight staff or data analysts
- None of the above

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

Please tick one box only.

- Heads of IT services

- Digital officers
- Cyber officers
- Applications and systems officers (for example, for revenues and benefits/adult social care/planning systems)
- Technical/ operational / architectural officers
- Project managers/officers
- Other specialist IT team staff – but **excluding** administrative staff, business intelligence/insight staff or data analysts
- 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 organisations or directly employed contractors or not, in order to deliver 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 IT?

Please tick one on each row

Column headings:

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

Row headings:

- Heads of IT services
- Digital officers
- Cyber officers
- Applications and systems officers (for example, for revenues and benefits/adult social care/planning systems)
- Technical/ operational / architectural officers
- Project managers/officers
- Other specialist IT team staff – but **excluding** administrative staff, business intelligence/insight staff or data analysts

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 IT?

Column headings:

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

Row headings:

- Heads of IT services
- Digital officers
- Cyber officers
- Applications and systems officers (for example, for revenues and benefits/adult social care/planning systems)
- Technical/ operational / architectural officers
- Project managers/officers
- Other specialist IT team staff – but **excluding** administrative staff, business intelligence/insight staff or data analysts

What is your IT 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
- Member-officer relations
- Other (please specify)
- Don't know

In 2022/23, did any of your permanent staff leave to take up agency / contractor (employed through an agency) work?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

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

- Didn't want a permanent role
- Pay is higher for agency / contractor work
- Less professional risk
- Greater flexibility of work
- Workload is lower for agency 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 IT 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
- 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
- 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 IT team undertake to help address recruitment challenges?

Please tick all that apply.

- Shared posts
- Pooling service knowledge
- Shared services
- Shared use of interims
- 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, for key areas of IT teams.

Over the last three years, how often would you say you make use of agency staff or interims in your IT 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 / contractors changed or not over the last three years?

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

How many agency staff / contractors did you have in place in your IT team on 1 October 2023, in terms of:

- Headcount
- Full-time equivalent

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

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 audit backlog
- To undertake or support delivery of a project (including **backfill** of someone working on a project)
- Lack of capacity to recruit immediately/to cover during recruitment exercise
- Specialist knowledge was not available in-house
- Other (please specify)

Please add any more information you have about the issues that led you to use agency staff / contractors.

Generally, how successful or not was the result of using agency staff / contractors 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 IT service or on outcomes?

For the 2022/23 financial year, what was the expenditure on agency staff / contractors for the IT 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/contractors for each of the following roles in IT?

Column headings:

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

Row headings:

- Heads of IT services
- Digital officers
- Cyber officers
- Applications and systems officers (for example, for revenues and benefits/adult social care/planning systems)
- Technical/ operational / architectural officers
- Project managers/officers
- Other specialist IT team staff – but **excluding** administrative staff, business intelligence/insight staff or data analysts

Training and qualifications

Do you have a training and development plan, with agreed budget, specifically for the IT service?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Does your council have a successional training programme that includes the IT service? 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

How many apprentices do you have in IT service 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 graduate programmes in the IT service, if any?

Please write in headcount

Future plans

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

- Yes, we have an IT workforce plan
- No, we do not currently have an IT workforce plan
- Don't know

Which, if any, of the following workforce actions are you undertaking within your IT 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
- Outsourcing the IT Team
- Becoming a shared service
- De-coupling a shared service
- 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 demand for IT services, 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 IT service adequately?

Column headings:

- Very confident
- Fairly confident

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

Row headings:

- Heads of IT services
- Digital officers
- Cyber officers
- Applications and systems officers (for example, for revenues and benefits/adult social care/planning systems)
- Technical/ operational / architectural officers
- Project managers/officers
- Other specialist IT team staff – but **excluding** administrative staff, business intelligence/insight staff or data analysts

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?



Local Government Association

Local Government House
Smith Square
London SW1P 3HZ

Telephone 020 7664 3000
Fax 020 7664 3030
Email info@local.gov.uk
www.local.gov.uk

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