

Local Government Capacity Survey – Environmental Health

Research Report

October to December 2023



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Summary

Background

As part of the drive to improve workforce information, the LGA has collected quantitative and qualitative workforce data across different service areas, including environmental health. This report is part of that work, and in response to Heads of Environmental Health Services highlighting challenges in recruiting, developing and retaining staff across the different environmental health specialisms, and increasing pressures facing environmental health teams.

This survey was conducted in partnership with the Association of Chief Environmental Health Officers (ACEHO), who also recognise the importance of evidence for this purpose.

All principal environmental health officers (or equivalent positions) in English local councils with responsibility for environmental health (296 in total), were asked to complete an online survey between October and December 2023. The final overall response rate was 36 per cent (106 councils). This survey did not include county councils, as they do not provide environmental health services. By council type, the response rate was highest from unitary authorities (48 per cent) and lowest from metropolitan district councils (22 per cent). Regionally, response was highest from councils in the South East (45 per cent) and lowest from councils in the East of England (27 per cent).

Key findings

- As of 1 October 2023, there were an estimated 7,170 staff employed in environmental health roles by English local councils. The average council employed approximately 24 environmental health staff in terms of headcount.
- As of 1 October 2023, there were an estimated 6,550 FTE staff employed in environmental health roles. The average council employed approximately 22 FTE environmental health staff.
- Around 5,360 environmental health staff were estimated to be in post across all councils, at an average of 18 per council.
- Approximately 860 posts were vacant, at an average of four per council.
- As of 1 October 2023, the average vacancy rate for local councils was approximately 13 per cent of environmental health posts.
- Food safety officers and environmental protection officers were the roles councils were most likely to report as having vacancies (both 73 per cent).
- The most difficult vacancies to fill were food safety officer roles (39 per cent).
- Forty-eight per cent of councils had had their most difficult to fill vacancy for one year or more.
- Eighty-four per cent of councils found recruiting environmental protection officers

on a permanent basis very or fairly difficult. Seventy-five per cent reported the same regarding food safety officers.

- Fifty-three per cent of councils found retaining environmental protection officers very or fairly difficult and 50 per cent reported this regarding food safety officers.
- On average, local council environmental health teams had a turnover rate of approximately 11 per cent in the 12 months to 1 October 2023 -.
- Turnover rate, 12 months prior to 1 October 2023, had increased across 39 per cent of councils.
- Sixty-five per cent of respondents said the main reason for employees leaving the service was for better pay.
- Sixty-four per cent of councils said they used agency staff very or fairly often in their environmental health team; and 52 per cent of councils reported that their use of agency staff had increased over the previous three years.
- An estimated 570 agency staff were employed by local authority environmental health teams in England on 1 October 2023, with an FTE of approximately 380. On average, eight agency staff were employed by environmental health teams per council.
- English councils spent an estimated £20.7 million on environmental health agency staff in the 2022/23 financial year. This was an average of £70,000 per council.
- At the time of the survey councils were predicted to spend £20.9 million on environmental health agency staff in the 2023/24 financial year. This was an average of £71,000 per council.
- The most common workforce action councils had taken within their environmental health team was reducing the use of consultants or agencies (42 per cent).

Introduction

As part of the drive to improve workforce information, the LGA has collected quantitative and qualitative data related to workforce capacity. Accordingly, the LGA has conducted a survey of English local councils in order to collect key workforce data. This report presents the data from the LGA's local government workforce capacity survey, specifically about their environmental health services.

This survey was conducted in partnership with the Association of Chief Environmental Health Officers (ACEHO), who also recognise the importance of evidence for this purpose.

Principal environmental health officers (or equivalent position) in all English councils (296), excluding county councils which do not provide environmental health services, were asked to complete an online survey between October and December 2023. The final overall response rate was 36 per cent (106 councils).

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 chief environmental health officers (or equivalent position) in all English district councils, London boroughs, metropolitan districts and unitary councils (296 in total).

The survey was available to complete online between October and December 2023. The final overall response rate was 36 per cent (106 councils).

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

Because not all councils responded to the survey, numerical figures had to be imputed for those councils which did not respond. This was done by calculating the numerical figures for each respondent council as rates relative to 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 totals for each figure across England, even though not all councils in England participated.

Response rate

Table 1 shows, by council type, the response rate was highest from unitary authorities (48 per cent) and lowest from metropolitan district councils (22 per cent).

Table 1: Response rate by type of authority

Type of authority	Total number	Number of responses	Response rate %
District	164	56	34
London borough	33	12	36
Metropolitan district	36	8	22
Unitary authority	63	30	48

Regionally, as shown in Table 2, response was highest from councils in the South East (45 per cent) and lowest from councils in the East of England (27 per cent).

Table 2: Response rate by region

Region	Total number	Number of responses	Response rate %
East	45	12	27
East Midlands	35	12	34
London	33	12	36
North East	12	4	33
North West	35	11	31
South East	64	29	45
South West	27	10	37
West Midlands	30	11	37
Yorkshire and the Humber	15	5	33

Notes

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

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

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

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

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

Local government capacity survey – environmental health

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

Outsourced and shared services

Respondents were asked whether their environmental health team was outsourced. No respondents reported that their council had an outsourced environmental health service.

Table 3: Is your environmental health team outsourced?

	Districts %	Single-tier %	All councils %
Yes	0	0	0
No	100	100	100

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - districts (54), single-tier (49), all councils (103)

Nineteen per cent of respondents reported their environmental health team was shared with one or more other councils. There was a notable difference in the percentage of district councils (28 per cent) which shared their environmental health team when compared with the percentage of single-tier councils (8 per cent) which did this.

Table 4: Is any part of your environmental health team a shared service between more than one authority?

	Districts %	Single-tier %	All councils %
Yes	28	8	19
No	72	92	81

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - Districts (54), Single-tier (49), All councils (103)

Staff numbers and status

Staff budgeted for at 1 April 2023

Respondents were asked to provide the number of posts, in full-time equivalent (FTE), which their council had budgeted for, as of 1 April 2023. The information provided by respondents was used to estimate an overall total number of FTE environmental health staff across England, as well as an average number of environmental health staff per council, by authority type and overall.

As Table 5 shows, councils across England were estimated to have budgeted for 8,040 environmental health staff for the 2023/24 financial year. This equated to an average of 27 environmental health staff per council. This figure was higher among single-tier councils (34 per council) when compared to district councils (22 per council). Across all councils, the most common roles were environmental protection officers (seven per council), followed by food safety officers (six per council), and housing officers (five per council). Councils had on average two health and safety officers and one animal control or welfare officer, and head of service.

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

	Estimated England total	District councils	Single-tier councils	All councils
Total	8,040	22	34	27
Head of Service for Environmental Health	230	1	1	1
Food Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)	1,590	5	7	6
Health and Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)	440	1	2	2
Environmental Protection Officers (including heads and team leaders)	1,780	7	8	7
Housing Officers (including heads and team leaders)	1,410	4	7	5
Animal Control / Welfare Officers (including heads and team leaders)	300	1	1	1
Other environmental health team staff – but excluding administrative staff	1,170	3	7	5

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - District councils (54), Single-tier councils (48), All councils (102). Note: estimated budgeted staff numbers for England have been rounded to the nearest ten. This may cause the figures to not add up precisely to the total. Averages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

Environmental health staffing numbers

Respondents were asked to report the number of environmental health posts at their council as of 1 October 2023, both in terms of headcount and FTE. This included both filled and vacant posts. Their responses were used to estimate overall numbers of local council environmental health 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 shown on Table 6, as of 1 October 2023, there were roughly 6,550 FTE environmental health staff posts in councils in England. The average council employed approximately 22 FTE environmental health professionals. Single-tier councils (31 per council) tended to have higher numbers of FTE staff on average than district councils (15 per council). The group of staff with highest FTE were food safety officers, environmental protection officers, and housing officers (all five per council). There was an average of one head of service, health and safety officer, and animal control or welfare officer per council.

Table 6: Total environmental health staff FTE at 1 October 2023, England total and average (mean) by type of council.

	Estimated England total	District councils	Single-tier councils	All councils
Total	6,550	15	31	22
Head of Service for Environmental Health	220	1	1	1
Food Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)	1,500	4	7	5
Health and Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)	420	1	2	1
Environmental Protection Officers (including heads and team leaders)	1,620	4	7	5
Housing Officers (including heads and team leaders)	1,370	3	7	5
Animal Control / Welfare Officers (including heads and team leaders)	270	1	1	1
Other environmental health team staff – but excluding administrative staff	1,150	2	7	4

Unweighted base: all respondents - District councils (56), Single-tier councils (50), All councils (106). Note: estimated budgeted staff numbers for England have been rounded to the nearest ten. This may cause the figures to not add up precisely to the total. Averages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

As shown on Table 7, as of 1 October 2023, there was an approximate total headcount of 7,170 environmental health professionals working in local councils. The average council employed approximately 24 environmental health professionals.

Single-tier councils (33 per council) tended to have more environmental health staff on average than district councils (17 per council). The most common environmental health roles were food safety officers and environmental protection officers, with an average of six per council. There was an average of four housing officers per council and two health and safety officers.

Table 7: Total environmental health staff headcount at 1 October 2023. England total and average (mean) per council.

	Estimated England total	District councils	Single-tier councils	All councils
Total	7,170	17	33	24
Head of Service for Environmental Health	240	1	1	1
Food Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)	1,700	4	8	6
Health and Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)	510	1	2	2
Environmental Protection Officers (including heads and team leaders)	1,820	5	8	6
Housing Officers (including heads and team leaders)	1,260	3	5	4
Animal Control / Welfare Officers (including heads and team leaders)	360	1	2	1
Other environmental health team staff – but excluding administrative staff	1,150	2	7	4

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - District councils (38), Single-tier councils (33), All councils (71). Note: estimated budgeted staff numbers for England have been rounded to the nearest ten. This may cause the figures to not add up precisely to the total. Note: estimated total staff numbers for England have been rounded to the nearest ten. This may cause the figures to not add up precisely to the total. Averages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

Breakdown and vacancy rates

Respondents were asked to provide a breakdown of their environmental health posts in FTE according to whether staff were present in the post (including those on annual leave or sick leave), vacant, long-term absent, or of another status.

Tables 8 shows that there were 5,360 environmental health staff estimated to be in post across local councils in England, at an average of 18 per council. Single-tier councils had an average of 25 present environmental health staff and district councils had 13. Meanwhile, Table 9 shows that there were around 860 vacant FTE posts, at an average of four per council. There was an average of four vacant FTE posts in single-tier councils and two FTE vacant posts in district councils.

Table 8: 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? England total and average (mean) per council.

	Estimated England total	District councils	Single-tier councils	All councils
Total	5,360	13	25	18
Head of Service for Environmental Health	200	1	1	1
Food Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)	1,250	3	6	4
Health and Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)	330	1	2	1
Environmental Protection Officers (including heads and team leaders)	1,330	4	6	5
Housing Officers (including heads and team leaders)	1,070	2	5	4
Animal Control / Welfare Officers (including heads and team leaders)	240	1	1	1
Other environmental health team staff – but excluding administrative staff	940	1	5	3

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - District councils (50), Single-tier councils (45), All councils (95). Note: estimated budgeted staff numbers for England have been rounded to the nearest ten. This may cause the figures to not add up precisely to the total. Averages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

Table 9: How many (in FTE) were vacant (even if covered by agency staff) on 1 October 2023? England total and average (mean) per council.

	Estimated England total	District councils	Single-tier councils	All councils
Total	860	2	4	4
Head of Service for Environmental Health	10	<1	<1	<1
Food Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)	150	<1	1	1
Health and Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)	60	<1	<1	<1
Environmental Protection Officers (including heads and team leaders)	220	<1	1	1
Housing Officers (including heads and team leaders)	250	1	1	1
Animal Control / Welfare Officers (including heads and team leaders)	20	<1	<1	<1
Other environmental health team staff – but excluding administrative staff	140	<1	1	1

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - District councils (35), Single-tier councils (36), All councils (71). Note: estimated budgeted staff numbers for England have been rounded to the nearest ten. This may cause the figures to not add up precisely to the total. Averages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

Smaller numbers of posts either had an incumbent who was long-term absent, or an 'other' status applied. Table 10 shows there were an estimated 320 FTE environmental health posts where staff were long-term absent either through parental leave or sickness. Table 11 shows that 20 FTE posts had an 'other' status. Because of the small numbers reported, it was not possible to calculate averages per council for these categories.

Table 10: 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	320
Head of Service for Environmental Health	10
Food Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)	100
Health and Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)	30
Environmental Protection Officers (including heads and team leaders)	70
Housing Officers (including heads and team leaders)	40
Animal Control / Welfare Officers (including heads and team leaders)	10
Other environmental health team staff – but excluding administrative staff	60

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - District councils (20), Single-tier councils (22), All councils (42). Note: estimated budgeted staff numbers for England have been rounded to the nearest ten. This may cause the figures to not add up precisely to the total.

Table 11: How many (in FTE) were posts with another status on 1 October 2023?

	Estimated England total
Total	20
Head of Service for Environmental Health	0
Food Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)	0
Health and Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)	0
Environmental Protection Officers (including heads and team leaders)	0
Housing Officers (including heads and team leaders)	10
Animal Control / Welfare Officers (including heads and team leaders)	0
Other environmental health team staff – but excluding administrative staff	10

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - District councils (8), Single-tier councils (9), All councils (17). Note: estimated budgeted staff numbers for England have been rounded to the nearest ten. This may cause the figures to not add up precisely to the total.

Dividing the reported numbers of posts vacant by the total number of FTE posts provided vacancy rates for each type of position for each council.

Table 12 shows the average vacancy rates for environmental health staff posts, overall and by council type and role type. This demonstrates that approximately 13 per cent of FTE environmental health roles were vacant on 1 October 2023. This rate was 14 per cent among district councils and 12 per cent among single-tier councils. By type of role, the vacancy rate was highest among housing officers (18 per cent). In contrast, head of service positions had the lowest vacancy rate (5 per cent).

Table 12: Environmental health staff post vacancy rates at 1 October 2023

	Average (mean) vacancy rate %
Total	13
Head of Service for Environmental Health	5
Food Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)	10
Health and Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)	14
Environmental Protection Officers (including heads and team leaders)	13
Housing Officers (including heads and team leaders)	18
Animal Control / Welfare Officers (including heads and team leaders)	8
Other environmental health team staff – but excluding administrative staff	13
Single-tier councils	12
District councils	14

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - District councils (35-56), Single-tier councils (36-50), All councils (71-106). Note: Averages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

Respondents were asked, over the previous three years, for which groups of staff they most often had vacancies. The two groups of staff councils most often had vacancies for were food safety officers and environmental protections officer (both 73 per cent). Following on, 44 per cent of councils reported that housing officer vacancies were difficult to fill, and 30 per cent reported the same for health and safety officers. Fifteen per cent of respondents stated that animal control or welfare officer vacancies were difficult to fill. Heads of Environmental Health Services was the vacancy councils were least like to report were difficult to fill (10 per cent).

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

	Districts %	Single-tier %	All councils %
Food Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)	78	68	73
Environmental Protection Officers (including heads and team leaders)	77	68	73
Housing Officers (including heads and team leaders)	39	50	44
Health and Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)	26	35	30
Animal Control / Welfare Officers (including heads and team leaders)	15	14	15
Head of Service for Environmental Health	11	6	10
Other	15	14	13
No vacancies	2	0	1

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - Districts (55), Single-tier (48), All councils (103)

Thirteen per cent of respondents stated an 'other' group of staff most often had vacancies over the previous three years. Below is a list of the most common 'other' responses that were given by respondents:

- Enforcement officers
- Port environmental health officers
- Pest control officers
- Noise and antisocial behaviour (ASB) officers
- Licensing officers
- Contaminated land or planning consultations officers
- Generalists

Following on from the previous question, respondents were asked which single vacancy their council found most difficult to fill over the previous three years. Similar to the responses to the questions above, food safety officer positions were most likely to be considered difficult to fill (39 per cent). Moreover, this appeared to be slightly more common among district councils (47 per cent) than single-tier councils (31 per cent). Twenty-seven per cent of councils reported that environmental

protection officer vacancies were the single role most difficult to fill, 16 per cent stated this about housing officers, and 4 per cent of respondents said this about animal control or welfare officer positions. No respondents reported that health and safety officers or the head of service vacancy was the single most difficult to fill.

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

	Districts %	Single-tier %	All councils %
Food Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)	47	31	39
Environmental Protection Officers (including heads and team leaders)	29	26	27
Housing Officers (including heads and team leaders)	11	22	16
Animal Control / Welfare Officers (including heads and team leaders)	3	4	4
Health and Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)	0	0	0
Head of Service for Environmental Health	0	0	0
Other	8	13	10
No vacancies	3	4	4

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - Districts (55), Single-tier (49), All councils (104)

Ten per cent of respondents said that an 'other' vacancy was the single most difficult to fill over the last three years. Below is a list of the most common 'other' responses that were given by respondents:

- Trading standards officers
- Pest control officers
- Noise and antisocial behaviour (ASB) officers
- Licensing officers
- Out of hours officers
- Trainees
- Generalists

Respondents were asked for how long they had had their single most difficult vacancy to fill, which they had selected in the previous question. Twenty per cent of councils reported that it was for less than six months, and 27 per cent stated it was for six months or more but less than a year. In total, 47 per cent of councils' single most difficult post was vacant for less than one year. Thirty-eight per cent of councils had their single most difficult to fill vacancy for a year or more, but less than three years, 9 per cent stated it was three years or more but less than five years and 1 per cent said it was for five years or more. In total, 48 per cent of councils' single most difficult to fill vacancy was for one year or more.

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

	Districts %	Single-tier %	All councils %
Less than one year	46	48	47
One year or more	48	48	48
Less than six months	21	18	20
Six months or more but less than a year	25	29	27
A year or more but less than three years	36	40	38
Three years or more but less than five years	10	8	9
Five years or more	1	0	1
Don't know / Not applicable	6	5	5

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - Districts (55), Single-tier (48), All councils (103)

Respondents were asked for the main reasons they had these vacancies for the amount of time they had reported in the previous question. The most common reasons given were difficulties recruiting staff of the right skills or experience (96 per cent). This was followed by a pending restructure (12 per cent), and an overall council recruitment freeze or managed vacancy policy (10 per cent).

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

	Districts %	Single-tier %	All councils %
Difficulties recruiting staff of the right skills/experience	95	97	96
Pending a restructure	10	13	12
Overall council recruitment freeze / managed vacancy policy	6	13	10
New appointment unable to start quickly	0	2	1
Cost of recruitment has delayed it	2	0	1
Other	15	20	17
Don't know	0	0	0

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - Districts (40), Single-tier (37), All councils (77)

Seventeen per cent of respondents stated an 'other' reason why it had taken as long as it did to fill their single most difficult to fill vacancy. Below is a list of the most common 'other' responses that were given by respondents:

- Salary limitations
- Lack of qualified environmental health officers
- Councils located in London or South East being unable to offer wages that match the cost of living

Respondents were asked whether or not, in the last three years, they had made use of consultancy in order to undertake projects that would previously have been undertaken by in-house staff. Eighty per cent of councils stated that they had done this, and 20 per cent had not.

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

	Districts %	Single-tier %	All councils %
Yes	83	77	80
No	17	23	20
Don't know	0	0	0

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - Districts (55), Single-tier (49), All councils (104)

Respondents whose councils had made use of consultancy to undertake projects which would previously have been undertaken by in-house staff were asked what kind of consultancy work was undertaken. Eighty-one councils responded to this question, which are broken down into the themes below:

- **Food safety and hygiene:** Fifty-six respondents reported the kind of consultancy work undertaken was related to food safety.
- **Environmental protection:** Thirty-four respondents stated that consultancy work undertaken was environmental protection.
- **Air quality:** Eighteen respondents reported that they had made use of consultants to undertake air quality monitoring.
- **Housing:** Fifteen respondents said that the kind of consultancy work undertaken was related to housing.
- **Planning:** Ten respondents reported that planning consultations were the kind of consultancy work undertaken.
- **Noise:** Six respondents reported that noise and nuisance work was the kind of work consultants had undertaken.

Recruitment and retention of staff

Respondents were asked how easy or difficult their council found it to recruit permanent staff for different roles in the environmental health team over the previous three years. The type of environmental health roles which were most difficult to recruit for were environmental protection officers (84 per cent). A high proportion also reported that food safety officers were very or fairly difficult to recruit permanently (75 per cent). A similar percentage reported this about housing officers (56 per cent) and health and safety officers (49 per cent). Twenty per cent reported that animal control or welfare officers are difficult to recruit permanently and 12 per cent said the same regarding the head of service. Thirty-three per cent stated an 'other' kind of environmental health officer was difficult to recruit.

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

	Head of Service for Environmental Health %	Food Safety Officers %	Health and Safety Officers %	Environmental Protection Officers %	Housing Officers %	Animal Control / Welfare Officers %	Other environmental health team staff - Excluding admin staff %
Very or fairly difficult	12	75	49	84	56	20	33
Not very or not at all difficult	24	13	5	10	16	11	21
Very difficult	3	46	24	46	31	7	11
Fairly difficult	9	29	25	37	25	13	22
Not very difficult	14	9	4	7	12	7	14
Not difficult at all	10	3	1	3	4	3	7
Don't know / not recruited	64	13	46	7	28	70	46

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - All councils (104)

The following table breaks down the data from Table 18 for single-tier councils. Responding single-tier councils were most likely to report that environmental protection officer roles were very or fairly difficult to fill permanently (79 per cent). The second most difficult roles to fill were food safety officers (67 per cent), followed by housing officers (62 per cent). Forty-eight per cent of respondents stated that health and safety officers were difficult to recruit permanently and 25 per cent reported the same regarding animal control or welfare officers. Two per cent of single-tier councils found it very or fairly difficult to recruit a head of service. Thirty-seven per cent stated an 'other' kind of environmental health officer was difficult to recruit.

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 the environmental health team? (Single-tier)

	Head of Service for Environmental Health %	Food Safety Officers %	Health and Safety Officers %	Environmental Protection Officers %	Housing Officers %	Animal Control / Welfare Officers %	Other environmental health team staff – Excluding admin staff %
Very or fairly difficult	2	67	48	79	62	25	37
Not very or not at all difficult	26	19	7	13	10	11	22
Very difficult	0	33	22	46	27	7	13
Fairly difficult	2	33	26	33	35	18	24
Not very difficult	13	16	7	11	8	7	35
Not difficult at all	13	2	0	2	2	4	20
Don't know / not recruited	73	15	45	8	28	64	18

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - Single-tier (49)

The following table provides the data from Table 18 for district councils. Responding district councils were most likely to report that environmental protection officer (87 per cent) and food safety officer (82 per cent) roles were very or fairly difficult to fill. A similar percentage of district councils reported that housing officer and health and safety officer (both 51 per cent) positions were very or fairly difficult to recruit for permanently. District councils (21 per cent) appeared more likely than single-tier councils (2 per cent) to report that the head of service position was difficult to recruit someone permanently for. Fourteen per cent of district councils reported that it was difficult to recruit animal control or welfare officers permanently and 30 per cent stated the same about an 'other' type of environmental health worker.

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 the environmental health team? (Districts)

	Head of Service for Environmental Health %	Food Safety Officers %	Health and Safety Officers %	Environmental Protection Officers %	Housing Officers %	Animal Control / Welfare Officers %	Other environmental health team staff - Excluding admin staff %
Very or fairly difficult	21	82	51	87	51	14	30
Not very or not at all difficult	23	7	3	8	22	10	21
Very difficult	6	57	26	46	35	7	10
Fairly difficult	15	25	25	41	16	7	20
Not very difficult	15	3	2	4	16	8	15
Not difficult at all	7	4	2	4	6	2	6
Don't know / not recruited	57	11	46	5	27	76	50

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - Districts (55)

Respondents were asked, over the last three years, how easy or difficult did their council find it to retain permanent environmental health staff across different roles. Respondents were most likely to report that it was very or fairly difficult to retain environmental protection officers (54 per cent) and food safety officers (50 per cent). Thirty-seven per cent reported that it was difficult to retain housing officers and 26 per cent of respondents reported that is difficult to retain health and safety officers. A similar proportion reported this regarding the head of service position (16 per cent) and housing officers (12 per cent). Twenty-six per cent of respondents highlighted that an 'other' position was very or fairly difficult to retain.

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

	Head of Service for Environmental Health %	Food Safety Officers %	Health and Safety Officers %	Environmental Protection Officers %	Housing Officers %	Animal Control / Welfare Officers %	Other environmental health team staff - Excluding admin staff %
Very or fairly difficult	16	50	26	54	37	11	26
Not very or not at all difficult	64	46	60	43	40	48	51
Very difficult	3	15	10	17	9	2	7
Fairly difficult	13	35	16	36	28	10	19
Not very difficult	18	28	36	31	23	25	30
Not difficult at all	45	18	24	12	17	23	20
Don't know	20	4	14	3	23	40	23

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - All councils (104)

The following table provides the data in Table 20 for single-tier councils. Single-tier councils were most likely to report that environmental protection officers were very or fairly difficult to retain permanently (51 per cent). A similar percentage reported that food safety officers (42 per cent) and housing officers (41 per cent) were difficult to retain permanently. Thirty per cent of responding single-tier councils reported that health and safety officers were difficult to retain. Eleven per cent reported this about animal control or welfare officers and 8 per cent in relation to a head of service. Thirty per cent of respondents from single-tier councils reported that an 'other' position in the environmental health team was difficult to retain permanently.

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 environmental health? (Single-tier)

	Head of Service for Environmental Health %	Food Safety Officers %	Health and Safety Officers %	Environmental Protection Officers %	Housing Officers %	Animal Control / Welfare Officers %	Other environmental health team staff - Excluding admin staff %
Very or fairly difficult	8	43	30	51	41	11	30
Not very or not at all difficult	66	53	57	45	29	42	46
Very difficult	0	10	8	14	9	0	9
Fairly difficult	8	32	22	37	32	11	21
Not very difficult	15	30	36	35	18	18	30
Not difficult at all	51	23	21	10	11	24	16
Don't know	26	4	13	4	29	47	24

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - Single-tier (49)

The following table provides the data in Table 21 for district councils. The two most common roles for which the environmental health team found it most difficult to retain staff were food safety officers (57 per cent) and environmental protection officers (56 per cent). Thirty-one per cent stated that housing officers were very or fairly difficult to retain permanently, followed by 24 per cent having stated this about heads of service, and health and safety officers (22 per cent). Twelve per cent reported that animal control or welfare officers were difficult to retain and 23 per cent of respondents from district councils reported this about an 'other' position in the environmental health team.

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 environmental health? (Districts)

	Head of Service for Environmental Health %	Food Safety Officers %	Health and Safety Officers %	Environmental Protection Officers %	Housing Officers %	Animal Control / Welfare Officers %	Other environmental health team staff - Excluding admin staff %
Very or fairly difficult	24	57	22	56	32	13	23
Not very or not at all difficult	61	40	63	42	51	55	55
Very difficult	6	19	11	20	8	4	5
Fairly difficult	18	38	11	36	23	8	18
Not very difficult	21	26	36	28	28	32	31
Not difficult at all	40	14	26	13	23	23	24
Don't know	16	4	16	2	17	33	22

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - Districts (58)

Respondents were asked what their environmental health team's current turnover rate was. This was based on employees who left the authority voluntarily or involuntarily in the 12 months prior to 1 October 2023. Table 24 shows the average turnover rate per council, both overall and by council type. This demonstrates that, on average, local council environmental health teams had a turnover of approximately 10 per cent. This was 11 per cent among district councils and 12 per cent among single-tier councils.

Table 24: Current environmental health team turnover rate

	Average turnover rate %
Average per council – overall	11
Average per council – single-tier	12
Average per council – district	10

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - District councils (57), Single-tier councils (41), All councils (98)

Respondents were asked whether their turnover rate had changed in the last three years. Thirty-nine per cent of respondents reported that this rate had increased and the same percentage (39 per cent) stated that it had stayed the same. Thirteen per cent said that their turnover rate had decreased over the last three years.

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

	Districts %	Single-tier %	All councils %
Increased	39	40	39
Stayed the same	36	43	39
Decreased	18	7	13
Don't know	8	11	9

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - Districts (54), Single-tier (46), All councils (100)

Respondents were asked to report the main reasons they had been given by their environmental health employees for leaving. The most common reason for leaving given was for more pay (65 per cent). The second most common reason for employees to leave was for better career opportunities (43 per cent), closely followed by retirement (41 per cent). The next most common reason was to work in a different sector (29 per cent). Staff leaving to work in a different sector appeared to be more common in single-tier councils (40 per cent) than in district councils (15 per cent). Similar proportions reported the reason given by staff for leaving was either for a career change (24 per cent) or due to the workload (23 per cent). Fifteen per cent of respondents reported that employees left because of travel, closely followed by the 14 per cent of councils which mentioned personal commitments. Fewer than 10 per cent of respondents reported that their environmental health employees left because they wanted more flexibility, a better relationship with their line manager or leadership, or member-officer relations.

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

	Districts %	Single-tier %	All councils %
For more pay	63	67	65
Better career opportunities	38	49	43
Retirement	33	50	41
To work in a different sector (private or other parts of the public sector)	15	40	27
For career change	26	22	24
Workload	18	29	23
Travel	8	22	15
Personal commitments e.g. caring responsibilities	16	12	14
More flexibility	4	9	6
Relationship with line manager/leadership	4	6	5
Member-officer relations	2	4	3
Other	16	11	14
Don't know	9	2	6

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - Districts (55), Single-tier (48), All councils (103)

Fourteen per cent of respondents stated an 'other' main reason given by employees as to why they have left the service. Below is a list of the most common 'other' responses that were given by respondents:

- Relocation
- To become an agency/temporary worker
- Demands of shift patterns and out of hours work
- Increase in working hours.

Respondents were asked whether, in the 2022/23 financial year, any of their permanent staff left to take up temporary work. Nine per cent reported that staff left to take up temporary work. In contrast, 78 per cent reported that none of their environmental health staff did this.

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

	District %	Single-tier %	All councils %
Yes	6	12	9
No	81	76	78
Don't know	13	12	12

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - Districts (55), Single-tier (49), All councils (104)

Respondents who reported that employees had left to take up temporary work were asked what reasons were given by staff for this. The most common reason was that there was greater flexibility of work (41 per cent). Thirty-eight per cent reported that employees left for temporary work because the pay would be higher. Eight per cent stated that staff left to take up temporary work because: they did not want a permanent role, the workload is lower for agency work, and that there is less administration for agency work. Given the base size for this question is low, any conclusions taken must be viewed with caution.

Table 28: What reasons, if any, did those staff give for preferring temporary work?

	Districts %	Single-tier %	All councils %
Greater flexibility of work	0 (0)	65 (4)	41 (4)
Pay is higher for agency work	54 (2)	29 (2)	38 (4)
Didn't want a permanent role	23 (1)	0 (0)	8 (1)
Workload is lower for agency work	23 (1)	0 (0)	8 (1)
Less administration for agency work	23 (1)	0 (0)	8 (1)
Less professional risk	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Better career progression	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Other (please specify)	46 (2)	49 (3)	48 (5)
Don't know	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - Districts (4), Single-tier (6), All councils (10). Note: the frequency is in brackets next to the percentages.

Respondents were asked what actions their councils had taken in order to help with recruitment and retention issues in their team. Seventy-three per cent of councils

had offered staff flexible working. This is followed by 61 per cent which had offered apprenticeships. However, this was significantly more common in single-tier councils (75 per cent) than in district councils (45 per cent). The third most common action councils had taken was to make use of agency staff (43 per cent). Forty per cent of councils provided career frameworks or grades. Single-tier councils (51 per cent) appeared more likely to have taken this action than district councils (31 per cent). This was followed by councils having provided personal development offers (33 per cent). A similar percentage of local authorities had taken any of the following workforce actions: an organisational redesign (28 per cent), created or maintained a graduate programme (26 per cent), offered secondments (24 per cent), used targeted recruitment campaigns within the sector (23 per cent), used market supplements or other pay augmentation (22 per cent), and offered job redesigns (21 per cent). Thirteen per cent of councils offered 'golden hellos' and fewer than 10 per cent had taken any of the other workforce actions listed in Table 29.

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

	Districts %	Single-tier %	All councils %
Flexible working	75	72	73
Apprenticeships	45	75	60
Agency staff	39	48	43
Career frameworks/career grades	31	51	40
Personal development offers	38	28	33
Organisational redesign	28	28	28
Graduate programme	22	31	26
Secondments	20	30	24
Targeted recruitment campaigns within the sector	25	21	23
Market supplements or other pay augmentation	29	14	22
Job redesign	23	18	21
Relocation packages	20	6	13
'Golden hellos'	13	2	8
Creating a specific recruitment pipeline through education partnerships	4	12	8
Targeted recruitment campaigns outside the sector	4	10	7
Refer a friend scheme	4	4	4
Retention payments	1	6	4
Government training schemes	0	4	2
T-levels	0	0	0
Other	10	9	9
None of the above	0	2	1
Don't know	0	0	0

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - Districts (55), Single-tier (48), All councils (103)

Nine per cent of respondents stated an ‘other’ method used to combat issues with recruitment and retention issues in their environmental health team. Below is a list of the most common ‘other’ responses that were given by respondents:

- Grow your own programme
- Graduate or new starter development

Respondents were asked which forms, if any, of collaboration with other councils’ environmental health services their team undertook to help address recruitment challenges. The most common form of collaboration was pooling specialist knowledge (33 per cent), followed by sharing services (17 per cent). This practice was more common among district councils (25 per cent) when compared to single-tier councils (8 per cent). Eight per cent of councils shared posts and 5 per cent shared the use of agency staff with other councils. Councils were most likely to report that they had not used any methods of collaboration with other councils (48 per cent).

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

	Districts %	Single-tier %	All councils %
Pooling specialist knowledge	31	35	33
Shared services	25	8	17
Shared posts	11	4	8
Shared use of agency staff	6	4	5
Other	13	18	15
None of these	47	48	48

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - Districts (54), Single-tier (48), All councils (105)

Fifteen per cent of respondents stated an ‘other’ method used to collaborate with other councils to help address their recruitment challenges. Below is a list of the most common ‘other’ responses that were given by respondents:

- Shared coordinator for training
- Secondments
- Paying for specific tasks to be undertaken.

Agency staff

Respondents were asked how often, over the previous three years, their council had made use of agency staff in the environmental health team. Sixty-four per cent of respondents reported that their council made use of agency staff very or fairly often. Twenty-nine per cent of respondents reported that they did not make use of agency staff very often and 7 per cent never used them.

Table 31: Over the last three years, how often would you say you make use of agency staff in your environmental health team?

	Districts %	Single-tier %	All councils %
Very or fairly often	57	72	64
Not very often or never	43	29	36
Very often	27	35	31
Fairly often	30	36	33
Not very often	36	22	29
Never	7	6	7

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - Districts (55), Single-tier (49), All councils (104)

Respondents were asked if their council's use of agency staff had increased or decreased over the last three years. Fifty-two per cent of councils reported that the use of agency staff has increased, and 14 per cent stated that it decreased. Thirty-one per cent of respondents reported that agency staff use had remained the same over the last three years. Sixty-two per cent of single-tier councils reported that their use of agency staff had increased and 44 per cent of districts stated this.

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

	Districts %	Single-tier %	All councils %
Increased	44	62	52
Stayed the same	38	24	31
Decreased	14	14	14
Don't know	4	0	2

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - Districts (55), Single-tier (49), All councils (104)

Respondents were asked to report the number of agency staff employed in an environmental health team by their local council, 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.

On the 1 October 2023, there were an estimated 570 agency staff working as environmental health professionals in local councils. Eight per cent of those working in environmental health teams in local councils were agency staff. On average, there were two agency staff working in environmental health teams per English council. Single-tier councils had an average of three agency staff in their environmental health team in comparison to one in district councils. There were an estimated 380 FTE agency staff working in environmental health roles in local councils. Six per cent of FTE staff working in environmental health teams in councils were agency staff. There was an average of one FTE agency member of staff working in environmental health teams per English council.

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

	Districts	Single-tier	All councils
Headcount (No.)	230	340	570
Headcount (%)	8	8	8
Headcount (Average No. per council)	1	3	2
FTE (No.)	120	260	380
FTE (%)	5	6	6
FTE (Average No. per council)	1	2	1

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - District councils (60), Single-tier councils (47), All councils (107). Note: estimated total agency staff numbers for England have been rounded to the nearest ten. estimated average agency staff numbers per council for England have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Respondents were asked what the reasons were that they used agency staff. The most common reason among all councils was to reduce the workload backlog (60 per cent). The next two most common reasons were that the recruitment exercise did not generate enough candidates with the required skills (43 per cent) and the recruitment exercise did not generate enough candidates (30 per cent). This was closely followed by the percentage of councils which reported that agency staff have been used to cover short-term work or a specific task only (29 per cent). Twenty-five per cent reported that agency staff were used as a consequence of a lack of capacity to recruit immediately or to cover during a recruitment exercise. Similar percentages reported that they had made use of agency staff for the following reasons: to meet

unprecedented demand (21 per cent), to cover long-term absence in the team (20 per cent), and to cover short-term absence in the team (17 per cent).

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

	Districts %	Single-tier %	All council %
To reduce the workload backlog	59	60	60
Recruitment exercise didn't generate enough candidates with the required skills	47	38	43
Recruitment exercise didn't generate enough candidates	28	33	30
Specialist knowledge was not available in-house	33	27	30
To cover short-term work/specific task only	33	24	29
Lack of capacity to recruit immediately/to cover during recruitment exercise	25	25	25
To meet unprecedented demand	23	19	21
To cover long-term absence in the team	30	10	20
To cover short-term absence in the team	19	14	17
Other (please specify)	10	23	16

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - Districts (53), Single-tier (48), All councils (101)

Sixteen per cent of respondents stated an 'other' reason why they had made use of agency staff. Below is a list of the most common 'other' responses that were given by respondents:

- To keep some posts open during a service review
- To clear a food safety work backlog

Respondents were asked to add any more information they have about the issues that led them to use agency staff over the last three years. Sixty-two councils responded to this question, and gave answers which are broken down into the themes below:

- **Manage the backlog and workload:** Thirty-one respondents stated that agency staff were used to clear the backlog. Many respondents mentioned

that as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a large backlog of food safety inspections. There was also an increased workload to manage, in part due to Ukrainian refugee host inspections. Agency staff were also hired to maintain the service as some councils reported not having enough staff to deal with the general workload.

- **Recruitment challenges:** Nineteen respondents stated that agency staff were hired as their council had difficulties in recruiting permanent staff. One issue in recruitment was a lack of qualified or experienced candidates. Other councils mentioned that they were unable to offer a competitive wage, especially, when compared with the private sector.
- **Lack of specialist knowledge:** Seventeen respondents reported that their council had made use of agency staff for the environmental health team because there was a lack of in-house specialist knowledge of certain key areas, in particular, food safety.
- **Officers leaving the service, long-term vacancies, or long-term absences:** Nine respondents reported that agency staff were made use of to cover a long-term vacancy which they had been unable to fill. Respondents also mentioned that agency staff had been hired when experienced officers had retired, which many have done since the pandemic.

Respondents were asked how successful or not was the result of using agency staff in the last three years. Seventy-seven per cent of respondents reported that it had been very or fairly successful. However, the majority of respondents had said it was fairly successful (58 per cent) rather than very successful (19 per cent). Moreover, 14 per cent said it was not very successful and a further 4 per cent reported that it had not been successful at all.

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

	Districts %	Single-tier %	All council %
Very or fairly successful	74	80	77
Not very or not successful at all	22	14	18
Very successful	19	19	19
Fairly successful	55	61	58
Not very successful	16	12	14
Not successful at all	6	2	4
Don't know	4	6	5

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - Districts (53), Single-tier (48), All councils (101)

Respondents were asked what the impact of has been using agency staff on the delivery of the environmental health service or on outcomes. Ninety-three councils responded to this question, and gave answers which are broken down into the themes below:

- **Stop-gap:** Forty-three respondents reported that agency staff helped fill a short-term gap in their capacity and the service could not manage without them. Others also stated that while it was helpful in the short-term it would be more beneficial to have permanent member of staff to increase capacity in the first place.
- **The cost of agency staff:** Thirty respondents stated that agency staff are very expensive which means they are having a negative impact on budgets. Councils also mentioned that agency staff do not offer good value for money.
- **Variable quality of skills of agency staff:** Twenty-six respondents stated that the quality of agency staff could vary. Some made a positive impact in their role while others were not of a good enough quality.
- **Lack of consistency and continuity:** Sixteen respondents reported that agency staff are more likely to leave at short notice. As a consequence, they are less personally invested in the environmental health service long-term.

Respondents were asked how much their council spent on environmental health agency staff in the 2022/23 financial year. Councils were estimated to have spent over £20 million on agency staff in the 2022/23 financial year. This means the average spend during this period per council was approximately £70,000. The average spend for single-tier councils was £92,000, compared with £53,000 for district councils. Respondents were also asked to give their expenditure on agency staff from 1 April to 1 October 2023. This figure was then doubled to estimate a figure for the 2023/24 financial year. The estimated spend for all councils in England in 2023/24 was over £20 million, similar to the estimated spend in 2022/23. The predicted average spend on agency staff across all English councils was £71,000. The predicted average spend for single-tier councils was £103,000 compared to £45,000 for district councils.

Table 36: For the 2022/23 and 2023/24 (part) financial year, what was the expenditure on agency staff for the environmental health team? England total and average (mean) per council.

	Estimated England total	Districts	Single-tier	All councils
Expenditure on agency staff in 2022/23	£20,726,000	£53,000	£92,000	£70,000
Expenditure on agency staff in 1 April to 1 October 2023	£10,437,000	£22,000	£51,000	£35,000
Estimated expenditure on agency staff in the 2023/24 financial year	£20,874,000	£45,000	£103,000	£71,000

Unweighted base: all councils (100) Note: estimated budgeted staff numbers for England have been rounded to the nearest thousand. This may cause the figures to not add up precisely to the total.

The survey asked respondents how easy or difficult their council had found it to recruit agency staff for each of the different roles in the environmental health team over the previous three years. Much as with permanent staff (see Table 18), councils were most likely to say it was very or fairly difficult to recruit agency staff to fill the role of a food safety officer (55 per cent). Forty-six per cent of councils reported it was very or fairly difficult to recruit agency staff for environmental protection officer roles. Thirty-one per cent of respondents stated that housing officer roles were very or fairly difficult to recruit agency staff for. Followed by 16 per cent having reported that it was very or fairly difficult to recruit agency staff for health and safety roles, then 7 per cent of councils which reported this regarding animal control or welfare positions, and 1 per cent for the head of service role. Eleven per cent reported that an 'other' environmental health team role was very or fairly difficult to recruit agency staff for.

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

	Head of Service for Environmental Health %	Food Safety Officers %	Health and Safety Officers %	Environmental Protection Officers %	Housing Officers %	Animal Control / Welfare Officers %	Other environmental health team staff - Excluding admin staff %
Very or fairly difficult	1	55	16	46	31	7	12
Not very or not at all difficult	8	33	7	20	16	3	5
Very difficult	0	18	8	17	10	4	2
Fairly difficult	1	37	8	29	21	3	10
Not very difficult	6	16	3	13	16	2	2
Not difficult at all	2	17	4	7	0	1	3
Don't know	91	12	77	34	52	90	83

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - All councils (101) Note: this question was asked to all councils, including those who stated they had not used agency staff. It is likely that many of these councils would have selected "Don't know".

The following table provides the data in Table 37 for single-tier councils. Single-tier councils were most likely to say it was very or fairly difficult to recruit agency staff to fill the role of a food safety officer (52 per cent). Forty-two per cent of single-tier councils reported it was very or fairly difficult to recruit agency staff for environmental protection officer roles and 33 per cent stated this about housing officer roles. Fifteen per cent reported that it was very or fairly difficult to recruit agency staff for health and safety positions. Six per cent of councils stated that animal control or welfare positions were difficult to recruit agency workers for, and 1 per cent said this about the head of service role. Fourteen per cent reported that an 'other' environmental health team role was very or fairly difficult to recruit agency staff for.

Table 38: Over the last three years, how easy or difficult has your council found it to recruit agency staff for each of the following roles in the environmental health team? (Single-tier)

	Head of Service for Environmental Health %	Food Safety Officers %	Health and Safety Officers %	Environmental Protection Officers %	Housing Officers %	Animal Control / Welfare Officers %	Other environmental health team staff - Excluding admin staff %
Very or fairly difficult	2	52	15	42	33	5	14
Net very or not at all difficult	4	34	6	17	13	2	6
Very difficult	0	19	11	18	15	3	5
Fairly difficult	2	33	4	24	18	3	9
Not very difficult	4	20	4	12	13	2	2
Not difficult at all	0	14	2	5	0	0	3
Don't know	93	15	79	41	54	93	81

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - Single-tier (49)

The following table provides the data in Table 37 for district councils. Fifty-seven per cent of district councils stated it was very or fairly difficult to recruit agency staff to fill the position of a food safety officer. Fifty per cent reported it was very or fairly difficult to recruit agency staff for environmental protection officer roles. Thirty per cent stated this about housing officer roles along with 17 per cent of districts councils which reported that it was very or fairly difficult to recruit agency staff for health and safety roles. Eight per cent of district councils stated that animal control or welfare positions were difficult to recruit agency workers for, and none said this about the head of service role. Fourteen per cent reported that an 'other' environmental health team role was very or fairly difficult to recruit agency staff for.

Table 39: Over the last three years, how easy or difficult has your council found it to recruit agency staff for each of the following roles in the environmental health team? (Districts)

	Head of Service for Environmental Health %	Food Safety Officers %	Health and Safety Officers %	Environmental Protection Officers %	Housing Officers %	Animal Control / Welfare Officers %	Other environmental health team staff - Excluding admin staff %
Very or fairly difficult	0	57	17	50	30	8	11
Not very or not at all difficult	12	33	7	24	19	5	5
Very difficult	0	16	6	16	6	5	0
Fairly difficult	0	41	11	33	24	4	11
Not very difficult	7	13	2	14	19	2	3
Not difficult at all	5	20	5	10	0	3	2
Don't know	88	10	76	26	51	87	85

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - Districts (52)

Future plans

Respondents were asked if their council had a specific environmental health workforce plan. Twenty-seven per cent reported that they had a workforce plan for environmental health staff, while 68 per cent stated their council did not.

Table 40: Does your council have a specific environmental health workforce plan, or not?

	Districts %	Single-tier %	All councils %
Yes, we have an environmental health workforce plan	24	34	27
No, we do not currently have an environmental health workforce plan	71	62	68
Don't know	5	4	4

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - Districts (53), Single-tier (49), All councils (102)

Respondents were asked what workforce actions their council were undertaking within the environmental health team during the 2023/24 financial year. More common than any workforce action taken, 44 per cent of councils said they have made no substantive changes to staffing numbers. Forty-two per cent of councils stated that they are reducing the use of consultants or agencies. Thirty-one per cent of councils stated they have introduced apprenticeships and 28 per cent said they have increased the number of apprenticeships. Increasing apprenticeships was more common among single-tier councils (38 per cent) than among district councils (18 per cent).

Twenty-three per cent of respondents reported that their council has introduced a recruitment freeze and a similar percentage stated they are introducing graduate entry (22 per cent). Nineteen per cent of councils reported they were reducing overall environmental health staff numbers however 17 per cent reported the opposite of this. Moreover, 12 per cent of councils were recruiting more staff in specialist roles. Fewer than 10 per cent of councils reported that they were making redundancies (6 per cent), reviewing their agency service provider (6 per cent), increasing the use of agency staff (5 per cent), increasing the use of consultancy (4 per cent), and decreasing apprenticeships (1 per cent).

Table 41: Which, if any, of the following workforce actions are you undertaking within your environmental health team during 2023/24?

	Districts %	Single-tier %	All councils %
Making no substantive changes to staffing numbers	51	36	44
Reducing use of consultants or agencies	44	40	42
Introducing apprenticeships	32	31	31
Increasing apprenticeships	18	38	28
Recruitment freeze	16	31	23
Introducing graduate entry	18	26	22
Reducing staff numbers overall (through managing vacancies)	10	28	19
Recruiting more staff overall	14	20	17
Recruiting more staff in specialist roles	16	8	12
Making redundancies	6	6	6
Reviewing the agency service provider	7	6	6
Increasing use of agency staff	5	4	5
Increasing use of consultancy	5	4	4
Decreasing apprenticeships	0	2	1
Don't know	6	0	3
Other (please specify)	16	30	23

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - Districts (51), Single-tier (47), All councils (98)

Twenty-three per cent of respondents stated an 'other' workforce action they had undertaken in the 2023/24 financial year. Below is a list of the most common 'other' responses that were given by respondents:

- Restructure
- Staff development or upskilling
- Service review
- Work experience opportunities
- Improving diversity of staff
- Pay review

Respondents were asked if they had undertaken any projections for the staffing numbers they would need in future years to meet anticipated demand for environmental health services. Thirty-two per cent of councils reported that they had undertaken staffing projections while 65 per cent said that they had not. Twenty-five per cent of district councils reported that they have undertaken staffing projections compared with 40 per cent of single-tier councils.

Table 42: Have you undertaken any projections of the staffing numbers you will need in future years to meet anticipated demand for environmental health services, or not?

	Districts %	Single-tier %	All councils %
Yes	25	40	32
No	75	45	65
Don't know	0	6	3

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - Districts (54), Single-tier (49), All councils (103)

Respondents were asked to specify the increase in the FTE of their environmental health 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.

Respondents anticipated needing an increase of approximately 1.8 FTE per council within the next one to two years, a further 0.9 per council in three to five years, and 0.4 in six to ten years.

Table 43: Please write in the estimated increase on 2023/24 FTE you will need in the following time periods to meet anticipated demand

	All councils
1-2 years	1.8
3-5 years	0.9
6-10 years	0.4

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - All councils (28)

Capacity to deliver services

Respondents were asked how confident they were that their council would have enough of the right staff to maintain their environmental health service adequately over the next year. Respondents were least likely to report they are not very or not all confident about their head of environmental health services (8 per cent). Councils were much more likely to be not very or not all confident about having enough of the right staff in the following roles: protection officers (49 per cent), food safety officers (44 per cent), and health and safety officers (41 per cent). Sixteen per cent of respondents reported that they were not very or not at all confident about having enough of the right staff for “other” types of environmental health worker.

Table 44: 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 environmental health service adequately? (All councils)

	Head of Service for Environmental Health %	Food Safety Officers %	Health and Safety Officers %	Environmental Protection Officers %	Housing Officers %	Animal Control / Welfare Officers %	Other environmental health team staff - Excluding admin staff %
Very or fairly confident	85	56	55	51	40	56	58
Not very or not at all difficult	8	44	41	49	39	20	16
Very confident	51	10	13	15	9	19	15
Fairly confident	34	46	42	36	32	37	42
Not very confident	5	36	34	35	26	15	11
Not at all confident	3	8	8	14	13	4	5
Don't know	6	0	4	0	21	25	26

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - All councils (104)

The following table provides the data in Table 44 for single-tier councils. Single-tier councils were most likely to report they are not very or not at all confident about their environmental protection roles (49 per cent). This was closely followed by the percentage who were not very or not all confident about: food safety officers (44 per cent), health and safety officers (42 per cent), and housing officer roles (39 per cent). Single-tier councils were least likely to be not very or not all confident about their head of service position (9 per cent). Sixteen per cent of respondents stated that they were not very or not at all confident about having enough of the right staff for “other” types of environmental health worker.

Table 45: 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 environmental health service adequately? (Single-tier)

	Head of Service for Environmental Health %	Food Safety Officers %	Health and Safety Officers %	Environmental Protection Officers %	Housing Officers %	Animal Control / Welfare Officers %	Other environmental health team staff - Excluding admin staff %
Very or fairly confident	85	56	58	51	34	54	60
Not very or not at all confident	9	44	42	49	37	18	16
Very confident	52	9	14	16	5	21	11
Fairly confident	33	47	44	36	29	32	49
Not very confident	5	39	34	31	25	18	9
Not at all confident	4	5	8	17	13	0	7
Don't know	6	0	0	0	29	28	24

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - Single-tier (49)

The following table provides the data in Table 44 for district councils. District councils were most likely to report they were not very or not at all confident about environmental protection roles (50 per cent). This was followed by 44 per cent per cent of district councils having stated that they were not very or not all confident about having the right amount food safety officers. Forty per cent stated that they were not very or not at all confident that they had enough of the right health and safety officers and the same percentage stated this about housing officers. Seventeen per cent of respondents stated that they were not very or not at all confident about having enough of the right staff for “other” types of environmental health worker.

Table 46: 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 environmental health service adequately? (Districts)

	Head of Service for Environmental Health %	Food Safety Officers %	Health and Safety Officers %	Environmental Protection Officers %	Housing Officers %	Animal Control / Welfare Officers %	Other environmental health team staff - Excluding admin staff %
Very or fairly confident	86	56	52	50	46	57	55
Not very or not at all confident	8	44	40	50	40	20	17
Very confident	50	11	12	14	13	17	19
Fairly confident	35	45	40	36	34	41	36
Not very confident	5	33	33	39	27	13	12
Not at all confident	2	11	7	11	13	8	4
Don't know	7	0	8	0	14	22	28

Unweighted base: all respondents who answered this question - Districts (55)

Respondents were asked what their biggest workforce challenge was at the moment, those that had responded their environmental health service is outsourced or a shared service were also asked this question. Ninety-seven councils responded to this question, which are broken down into the themes below:

- **Recruitment and retention:** Sixty-three respondents reported there was a lack of quality staff with suitable experience and skills. There was also not enough skilled and qualified staff available to recruit.
- **Succession planning:** Twenty-two respondents mentioned they have an ageing workforce and that their team is not properly prepared for the retirement of experienced staff.
- **Financial challenges and limited resources:** Seventeen respondents stated that financial pressures had limited their ability to properly resource their environmental health service.
- **Limitations on developing and training staff:** Fourteen respondents reported that the lack of capacity in their team meant that they were unable to train and develop new and existing staff.
- **Increased workload and service demand:** Thirteen respondents said that while their workforce capacity had stayed the same or reduced there was increasing demand on their environmental health service.
- **Salary:** Thirteen respondents stated that they cannot offer a competitive salary in comparison to the private sector. Councils also reported that the local government pension is no longer attractive enough to encourage officers to stay with the service.

Respondents were asked if there was anything else about workforce capacity and the use of agency staff they would like to share. Forty-eight councils responded to this question, which are broken down into the themes below:

- **Issues with agency staff:** Seventeen respondents said there were issues with using agency staff. These issues included the high cost of hiring them, quality and experience, and difficulties managing them.
- **Recruitment and retention:** Nine respondents reported that it has become increasingly difficult to recruit experienced staff as many now work as agency staff. Councils also find it difficult to retain them as agency work and the private sector offers better remuneration.
- **Short-term solution:** Eight respondents said that agency staff had, in the short-term, filled gaps in the service but given the cost they are not a long-term solution.
- **Training, development, graduates, and apprenticeships:** Eight councils stated that they are making more use of apprenticeships and newly qualified officers. More inexperienced professionals were being recruited and trained

up. One difficulty with this approach has been that there is a lack of capacity among experienced officers to deliver training and develop new staff.

- **Finances:** Seven councils said that a lack of funding and financial strength has limited their ability to adequately resource their environmental health service as they cannot afford to offer wages at a similar level to the private sector.

Annex A: Questionnaire

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. You can navigate through the questions using the buttons at the bottom of each page. Use the 'previous' button at the bottom of the page if you wish to amend your response to an earlier question.

If you stop before completing the return, you can come back to this page using the link supplied in the email and you will be able to continue where you left off. To ensure your answers have been saved, click on the 'next' button at the bottom of the page that you were working on before exiting.

All responses will be treated confidentially. Information will be aggregated, and no individual or authority will be identified in any publications without your consent. Identifiable information may be used internally within the LGA but will only be held and processed in accordance with our privacy statement. We are undertaking this survey to aid the legitimate interests of the LGA in supporting and representing authorities.

If you would like to see an overview of the questions before completing the survey online, you can access a PDF [here](#).

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

By 'environmental health team' we mean the team or teams of professionals who are responsible for air quality, pest control, animal welfare, contaminated land, food safety, health protection, private sector housing conditions, noise and other nuisances, pollution control, public health, and health and safety – whether or not they are located in a central team. But not include those responsible for licensing.

Please amend the details we have on record if necessary.

- Name
- Authority
- Job title
- Email address

Apart from internal audit, revenues and benefits, and posts mainly concerned with exchequer services, is your environmental health team outsourced?

- Yes
- No

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

Is any part of your environmental health 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 environmental health team with you.

Staff numbers and status

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

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

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

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

- Head of Service for Environmental Health
- Food Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Health and Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Environmental Protection Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Housing Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Animal Control / Welfare Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Other environmental health team staff – but excluding administrative staff

FTE posts

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

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

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

Column headings:

- Head of Service for Environmental Health
- Food Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Health and Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Environmental Protection Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Housing Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Animal Control / Welfare Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Other environmental health team staff – but excluding administrative staff

Row headings:

- FTE of filled posts where the staff member is present (this includes those on annual leave and short-term parental leave or sick leave)
- FTE of filled posts where the staff member is absent through long-term parental leave or long-term sickness (even if covered by agency staff)
- FTE of posts that are vacant (even if covered by agency staff)
- Other (please specify)
- Total FTE posts at 1 October 2023
- Total headcount at 1 October 2023 (please enter a whole number without a comma or decimal place)

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

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

Please tick all that apply.

- Head of Service for Environmental Health
- Food Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Health and Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Environmental Protection Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Housing Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Animal Control / Welfare Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Other environmental health team staff – but excluding administrative staff
- 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.

- Head of Service for Environmental Health
- Food Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Health and Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Environmental Protection Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Housing Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Animal Control / Welfare Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Other environmental health team staff – but excluding administrative staff
- No vacancies are difficult to fill

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

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

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

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

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

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

What sort of consultancy work was undertaken?

Recruitment and retention of staff

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

Please tick one on each row

Column headings:

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

Row headings:

- Head of Service for Environmental Health
- Food Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Health and Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Environmental Protection Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Housing Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Animal Control / Welfare Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Other environmental health team staff – but excluding administrative staff

What is your environmental health 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 work?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

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

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

What actions, if any, have you taken or are you taking to help with recruitment and retention issues generally in your environmental health 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 environmental health 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, and the following questions ask about this in more detail, for key areas of environmental health teams.

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

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

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

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

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

- Headcount
- Full-time equivalent

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

Please tick all that apply.

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

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

Generally, how successful or not was the result of using agency staff 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 environmental health service or on outcomes?

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

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

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

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

Column headings:

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

Row headings:

- Head of Service for Environmental Health
- Food Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Health and Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Environmental Protection Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Housing Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Animal Control / Welfare Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Other environmental health team staff – but excluding administrative staff

Future plans

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

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

Which, if any, of the following workforce actions are you undertaking within your environmental health 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
- Reducing use of consultants or agencies
- Reviewing the agency service provider
- Introducing graduate entry
- Introducing apprenticeships
- Increasing apprenticeships
- Decreasing apprenticeships
- Other (please specify)
- Don't know

Have you undertaken any projections of the staffing numbers you will need in future years to meet anticipated demand for environmental health 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 environmental health service adequately?

Column headings:

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

Row headings:

- Head of Service for Environmental Health
- Food Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Health and Safety Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Environmental Protection Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Housing Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Animal Control / Welfare Officers (including heads and team leaders)
- Other environmental health team staff – but excluding administrative staff

What is your biggest workforce challenge at the moment?

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



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