

REPORT TO: Corporate Policy & Performance Board

DATE: 6 September 2022

REPORTING OFFICER: Operational Director, Policy, People,
Performance & Efficiency

PORTFOLIO: Leader

SUBJECT Resourcing the Council – current challenges.

WARD(S): Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To provide the Board with an overall view of the resourcing challenges currently face by the Council, their impact, implications, and options.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Board note the report and the actions being taken to mitigate the challenges.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Given the size of the Council workforce and the diverse range of roles required to deliver a complex array of services, there has always been a need to fill vacant roles, review existing roles, and create new posts. In all cases, such activity results in a requirement to recruit one or more members of staff, either externally in the local labour market, or internally. Internal recruitment normally results in a further vacancy arising.
- 3.2 Since the start of the 2021/22 financial year, the number of Council service vacancies submitted for advertisement has increased significantly. To provide some comparative context, in 2016/17 the number of vacancies advertised was 343. In 2021/22 that had risen to 610. A summary of the 610 vacancies is attached at Appendix 1.
- 3.3 In itself, this rise in numbers has created a significant challenge as the Council's recruitment service is not resourced at a level sufficient to manage workflow of such volumes. This has created delays in service provision, which remain prevalent.
- 3.4 A number of key reasons can be cited for the increase in volume:

- Increase in staff numbers as the organisation has expanded, i.e. the addition of Leisure Services and 4 x Care Homes to the Council's establishment across the period 2016 to 2019.
- A general trend away from Local Government as an employer of choice, anecdotally attributed to the poor perception of roles and static pay levels resulting from government austerity measures. This has created a more competitive labour market between Councils.
- Some roles becoming increasingly demanding and challenging due to increased regulation, e.g. Children's Social Care work, resulting in higher than average turnover levels.
- Sector specific challenges, for example the Department for Health & Social Care – Adult Social Care Workforce Survey of December 2021 - indicated that 81.3% of respondents in the North West are finding recruitment more challenging. Vacancies across the Adult care sector are noted to have increased by 45,000 across England between 2019/20 and 2020/21.
- The Council being required to recruit additional roles to undertake health related work, such as those required in the One Halton programme, health type roles in Children's Services (early intervention), and nursing roles in Care Homes.
- The Council being required to recruit additional roles to facilitate the delivery of contracts that the Council has entered into, such as delivery of the Work Programme and similar, in the Employment, Learning & Skills Service.

3.5 Combined with increased demand, a failure to attract candidates to some roles results in re-advertising and repeat recruitment activity.

3.6 In addition, there has been a trend towards lower numbers of applicants for posts, lower quality applications, and successful candidates rescinding the offer of a post prior to taking up a role – usually because an alternative employment offer has been received from a different employer.

3.7 Situations are also arising where the Council finds itself having to withdraw offers of employment to successful candidates due to the failure of pre-employment checks. This was once a rare occurrence, but is now becoming more common.

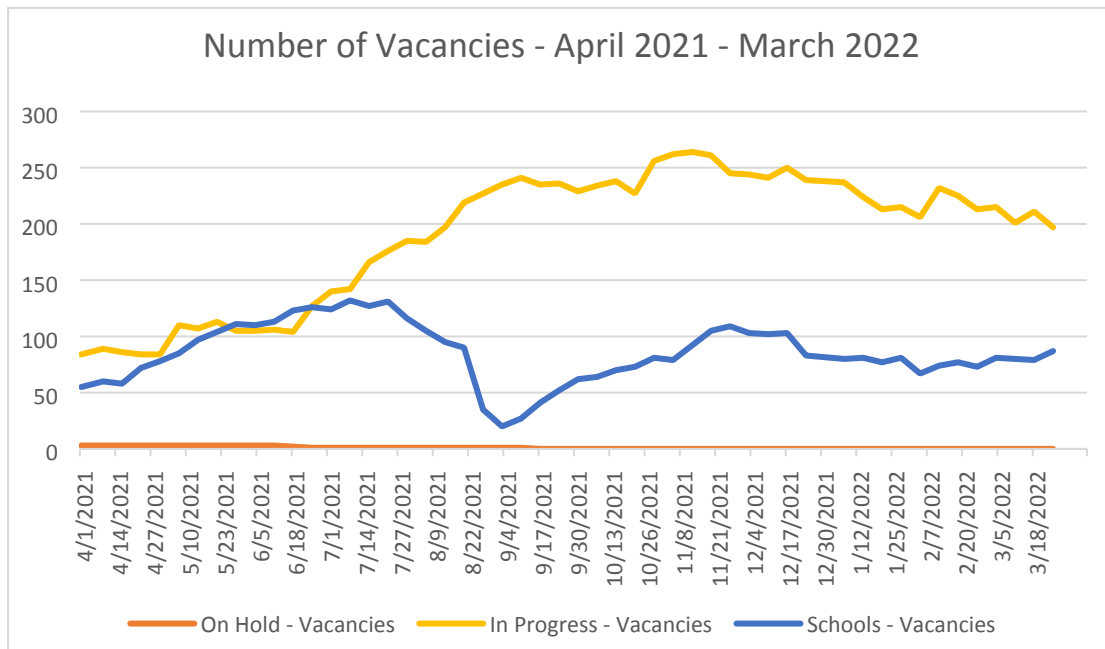
3.8 The recruitment service also processes recruitment for schools on a chargeable SLA basis. 45 schools have bought the recruitment service

for the 2022/23 SLA year. In 2021/22 the service processed 378 school recruitments, and whilst the costs of this are covered by schools, it creates issues in workflow as many school recruitments need to be completed between May and September in time for the start of the new school year.

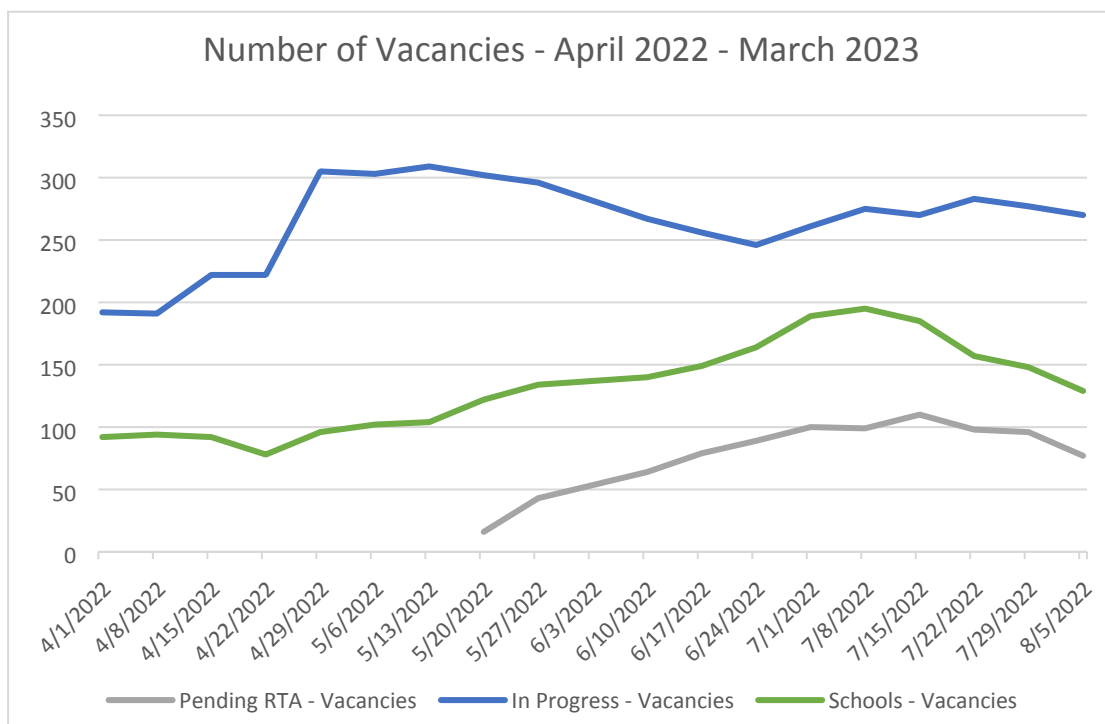
- 3.9 Revised legislation was enacted in April 2020, under the auspices of the Government's 'Good Work Plan', which emerged from the 2018 Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices. One key element of this was the introduction of the requirement to issue a contract of employment on or before the first day of employment. Hitherto, this requirement was to be met within six weeks of the employment start date.
- 3.10 In operational terms, this provides the Council with a shortened window within which to complete a recruitment exercise. In the case of school recruitment it means that all contracts must be issued before the first day of the new school year in September and this has served to create a bottleneck of work in the recruitment service in the June to August period, adversely affecting recruitment to Council services. Previously the school contracting work could be spread to mid-October.
- 3.11 At the time of writing (5th August 2022), the measure of workflow in the recruitment service is as follows:

Council Service Recruitment IN PROGRESS	Vacancies – 270 (187 in pre-employment check stage)
Council Service Recruitment WAITING	Vacancies – 77
School Recruitment IN PROGRESS	Vacancies – 129 (93 in pre-employment check stage)

- 3.12 The trend of vacancies for the 2021/22 Financial Year is represented in the graph below:



3.13 The trend of vacancies for the 2022/23 Financial Year to-date is represented in the graph below:



3.14 It should be noted that the upswing in vacancies is not unique to Halton Council. At the current time, both public and private sector employers are seeing a similar impact across their organisations.

3.15 All Local Authorities in the Liverpool City Region are reporting recruitment issues and certain post types continue to provide the highest level of challenge across the city region, namely social worker

roles, caring posts in the adult care sector, nursing posts in the adult care sector, technical and professional roles across a broad range of service areas, and more recently administrative type posts.

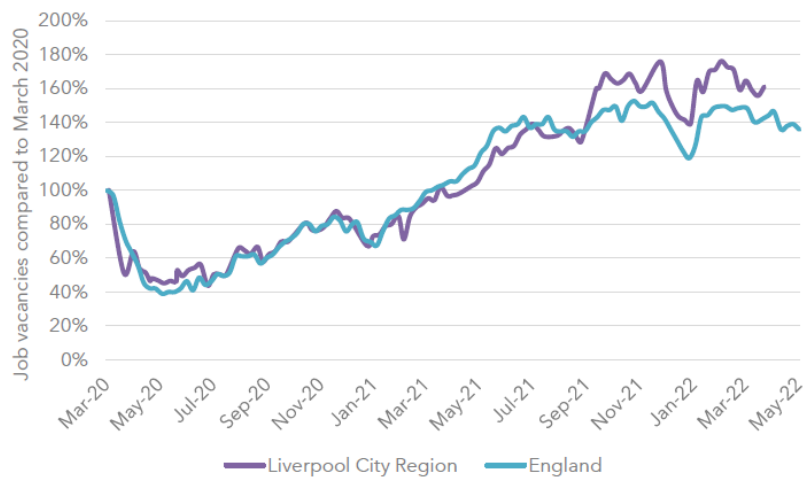
3.16 The general vacancy situation within the UK economy has shifted quite starkly since COVID restrictions began to be relaxed in late 2021. The Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development Labour Market Outlook: Summer 2022 was published on 15th August 2022. Key messages within it are:

- 47% of employers have hard-to-fill vacancies. These are most common in education (56%), transport and storage (55%), and the voluntary sector (53%).
- The proportion of employers planning on making redundancies is below pre-pandemic levels at 13%. Employers' focus on retention and training demonstrates their desire to get more from their existing employees in the face of recruitment challenges.
- The top response planned by employers to recruitment and retention difficulties is to upskill existing staff (41%), followed by advertising more jobs as being flexible (35%). Raising wages comes in third at 29%.

3.17 When considering sub-regional economic data for the Liverpool City Region, the number of job vacancies advertised on line continues to remain at historically high levels. In early April, there were around 19,000 vacancies in the Liverpool City Region, which is 61% higher than pre-pandemic levels.

3.18 The number of vacancies in the Liverpool City Region has grown faster than the national average (54% above pre-pandemic levels), as shown below:

Change in online job vacancies since March 2020



Source: ONS Online Job Advert Estimates, 2022; LCR Insights, 2022

- 3.19 In a local context, the latest available ONS statistics show that the employment rate in Halton stands at 76%, compared to 74% in the Liverpool City Region and 75% nationally. Whilst this is very positive in socio-economic terms, it points to additional restrictions on the available pool of labour.
- 3.20 Such employment statistics go some way to explaining why the number of available candidates in the market place appears to have reduced, but other factors are also prevalent and it is reported by Deloitte that circa 570,000 people who were in, or forecast to enter the labour market in 2019, are not a part of it at the current time;
- ONS data shows an estimated 2m people in the UK suffering from self-reported long COVID at the beginning of June 2022.
 - The pandemic seems likely to be a major factor in the decision by more than 50,000 people of working age to retire recently. This is exemplified by a 35% rise in retirement applications to the NHS Pension Scheme in 2022 so far.
 - Student numbers have surged, with uncertainty and dire predictions of job losses during the pandemic encouraging more young people to stay on in full-time education. Leading to estimates that roughly 100,000 people may be in education today for such reasons.
 - The effect of the pandemic, and of Brexit, on people coming to work in the UK and on foreign workers who were already here. The data is incomplete, but HMRC reports that between June 2019 and June 2021 the number of EU nationals on UK payrolls fell by just over 170,000.

- 3.21 The outlook remains unclear with rising inflation, economic uncertainty, and a possible recession likely to bring about further dynamic change in the labour market in the coming months.
- 3.22 A revised approach to attracting candidates to Council roles is to be explored. At this point in time the HR Service has the following measures under consideration;
- A specialist market assessment of the current vacancies by a recruitment partner, to consider alternative routes to market depending on the post type. The results of this may inform differential methods of recruitment marketing for different types of posts.
 - Re-designing the recruitment process (application stages particularly) to engage and give a commitment to potential candidates earlier in a recruitment process – this may be through new routes such as social media platforms, or in-person events to speculatively secure potential new recruits.
 - Increased establishment of apprenticeships, by ‘freezing’ the budget against vacant posts and using that budget to pay an apprentice salary, then ‘unfreezing’ the post and advertising it at the end of the apprenticeship term.
 - Enhanced succession planning within the organisation (aligned with the Council’s Organisational Development Strategy).
 - Establishing multi-grade (career grade posts) to make posts more attractive to potential applicants and promote retention through development over the long-term.
- 3.23 In addition to the above, the Council is engaged in a strategic programme of work with the other five LCR Council’s, headed up by the Chief Executive of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, designed to consider the high level challenge of resourcing the local government sector more generally in the short, medium and long-term.
- 3.24 Considering all of the above points and the challenge of continuing to deliver services, where managers of Council services cannot achieve their desired outcome through the normal recruitment route, either because no viable candidates are presented or because their request is in a queue, alternative means of resourcing are sought. One of these is the engagement of an agency worker.
- 3.25 The use of agency workers has been a route available to managers for several years. Peripheral resourcing is generally accepted as a good HR and management practice to fill short term gaps. The Council has a

procured contract with a neutral vendor (MatrixSCM) to procure agency workers as efficiently as possible.

- 3.10 In 2015/16, the Council's Management Team directed that a review of agency worker usage should be undertaken as part of the Council's Efficiency Programme. At that time spend was circa £4.5m p.a. In 2016/17, following the implementation of more robust controls and processes spend reduced to £2.2m.
- 3.11 Spend in the financial year 2021/22 reached £8.3m. Of this £5.1m has been through the Matrix contract, with the remainder being off-contract spend. The off contract spend occurs for a number of reasons; namely the requirement cannot be fulfilled through the Matrix contract, or the requirement sits within a legacy arrangement that came into the Council as part of the inward transfer of care homes (TUPE).
- 3.12 Of the £8.3m agency spend in 2021/22, there is an element of public health and care related work that was directly associated with the COVID-19 response and could be termed exceptional. This is circa 20%.
- 3.13 In respect of agency worker usage and contract management, the Council's Internal Audit Service had an audit scheduled for Q3 of 2022/23. This will focus on high usage areas.
- 3.15 The obvious option is to reduce reliance on agency workers, however for the reasons outlined in this report above, this is a challenging task. Nevertheless, this reduction in reliance and the stabilising of the Council's permanent workforce is identified as a key corporate priority to be pursued throughout the remainder of 2022/23.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 As the options and considerations outlined in the report above are pursued, there may be a requirement to amend one or more Council policy. Should this be the case, that amendment will take place in line with prescribed Council procedure.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 As outlined in the report above, there are several financial influences present. The existence of large numbers of vacancies has the potential to reduce spend overall, however the need to fulfil service demand shifts that funding to other resourcing options – such as agency worker engagement.

- 5.2 There are potential cost implications attached to the options outlined at 3.22 above. These will however be considered on a case by case basis within the context of return on investment and more effective engagement of quality candidates at an earlier stage.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

Adequately resourcing the services that contribute to this corporate priority with the right calibre and level of skill and ability is an important element of the Council's approach to resourcing.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

Adequately resourcing the services that contribute to this corporate priority with the right calibre and level of skill and ability is an important element of the Council's approach to resourcing.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Adequately resourcing the services that contribute to this corporate priority with the right calibre and level of skill and ability is an important element of the Council's approach to resourcing.

6.4 A Safer Halton

Adequately resourcing the services that contribute to this corporate priority with the right calibre and level of skill and ability is an important element of the Council's approach to resourcing.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

Adequately resourcing the services that contribute to this corporate priority with the right calibre and level of skill and ability is an important element of the Council's approach to resourcing.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 7.1 This report illustrates that a key risk to the Council currently is the under-resourcing of services as a result of failure to attract and retain suitably qualified and skilled employees. Such under-resourcing leads to sub-optimal service delivery and demand going un-met.

- 7.2 To a certain extent, risk is mitigated by the use of peripheral workforce (agency), however the wrong balance between agency to permanent workforce leads to additional expense and may result in lower levels of coherence within teams and services. As such, it is imperative that this usage is reduced to acceptable levels.
- 7.3 The risks that have emerged as a result of changing labour market dynamics are recorded and monitored through the Council's Corporate Risk Register.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken on any new policy as a direct result of any specific action plan implementation, if required.
- 8.2 The Council must comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) outlined in the Equality Act 2010. PSED requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities. This includes the recruitment and employment of staff.
- 8.3 In respect of the issues covered in this report, the Council has robust measures in place to ensure that discrimination has no place within its recruitment and employment procedures. The approach is based on competency, regardless of an individual having one or more of the 'relevant protected characteristics' outlined in the legislation (these being - age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation). The Council also has a voluntary protected characteristic pertinent to 'carer' status.
- 8.4 The Council became an accredited 'Disability Confident Leader' in 2019 and has recently secured accreditation for a further 3 years. Employment practices form part of the assessment.
- 8.5 It is appreciated that socio-economic influences continue to change the profile of communities. In view of this, and in the process of reviewing and revising the Council's approach to recruitment marketing and attracting potential employees, regard will be given to how we may more effectively engage with potential employees within the protected characteristic groups.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

- 9.1 None

Recruitment summary across Council Services – 2021/22

Service Area	Positions
Administration Shared Services	41
Administration Officer	21
Senior Administration Officer	5
Clerical Officer	14
Team Support Manager	1
Audit and Operational Finance	3
Audit and Investigations Manager	1
Client Finance Officer	1
Recovery Officer	1
Care Homes	17
Assistant Manager - Care Homes	1
Care and Support Worker - Days	1
Care and Support Worker - Nights	1
Care Assistant	5
Care Assistant - Days	1
Care Assistant - Nights	1
General Assistant	2
Registered Manager- St Lukes Care Home	1
Registered Nurse	1
Registered Nurse - Days	1
Senior Care Assistant Nights	1
Kitchen Assistant	1
Care Management	22
Advanced Social Worker - Complex Care	1
Community Care Worker	11
Social Worker	5
Social worker - Complex Care	1
Social Worker (Continuing Health Care)	2
Social Worker (Prevention and Assessment)	2
Chief Executives Office	1
Chief Executive	1
Children In Care Services	12
Admissions Officer	1
Casual Residential Child Care Worker	4
Practice Lead - Children In Care	1
Residential Child Care Worker	2
Social Worker - Foster Care	3
Social Worker (Children in Care/Care Leavers)	1

Children In Need and Child Protection	12
Senior Community Support Worker	1
Social Worker (Children in Need)	7
Social Worker- Contact and Referral Team	3
Social Worker- Disabled Children Services	1
Children's Safeguarding	1
Conference and Reviewing Manager	1
Commissioning	17
Assistant Behaviour Analyst	12
Behaviour Practitioner	2
Practice Manager - Positive Behaviour Service	1
Principal Manager	1
Senior Behaviour Analyst	1
Community	70
Casual Support Worker - Day Services	11
Day Services Officer	7
Support Worker - Day Services	6
Support Worker - Halton Supported Housing	46
Community & Environment	1
Operational Director - Community & Environment	1
Contact Centre	1
Contact Centre Advisor	1
Early Years Team	1
Early Years Complex Needs Support Worker	1
Education and School Improvement	5
Education Data Analyst	1
School and Setting Improvement Officer	3
Specialist Teaching Assistant - Sensory Impairment	1
Employment, Learning and Skills	50
Adult Learning and Skills IT Tutor	1
Advisor (Employment Coach - JETS Programme)	2
Advisor (Restart Programme)	17
Advisor/Key Worker	2
Apprenticeship Support Skills Broker	1
Casual Home Tutor	3
Employment Liaison Officer	6
ESF Funding Development Officer	2
Information, Data & Support Officer	4
Quality and Learner Experience Manager	1
Restart Programme Self-employment Advisor	2
Support Internship Job Coach	2
Team Leader - Restart Programme	4
Vocational & Employability Trainer	2

Work and Health Programme Team Leader	1
Environmental Health	1
Environmental Health Officer	1
Financial Management	12
Finance and Budget Management Officer	1
Finance Officer	2
Purchase to Pay Officer	1
Rating Officer	1
Revenues Officer	4
School Finance Officer	2
Senior Finance Officer	1
Halton Direct Link	11
One Stop Shop Officer	7
One Stop Shop Officer - Internal	3
One Stop Shop Team Leader	1
Hardware and Software Development	2
Senior Administrator ICT (EUC-Service Desk)	1
Senior Administrator-ICT (Data Centre)	1
Health Improvement	1
Health Improvement Specialist	1
Highways	2
Senior Engineer- Highway Schemes & Major Maintenance	2
Inclusion 0-25 Service and Special Educational Needs	8
Assistant Educational Psychologist	2
Education Welfare Officer	1
PEP Lead for Children In Care - Primary	2
PEP Lead for Children In Care - Secondary	1
SENDSTART Team Manager	1
Senior Educational Psychologist	1
Independent Living	2
Care and Support Worker - Nights	1
Community Care Worker	1
Intermediate Care	1
Assistant Manager - Intermediate Care	1
Investment and Development	9
Business Improvement & Growth Officer	1
Principal Surveyor	2
Project Officer (Mersey Gateway Regeneration Plus)	2
Project Support Officer	1
Regeneration Project Officer	1
Senior Planning Officer	1
Surveyor	1
Legal Services	3

Group Solicitor	1
Licensing Manager	1
Licensing Officer	1
Leisure Services	56
Casual Fitness Advisor	2
Casual Leisure Attendant	10
Casual Operations Manager	5
Casual Receptionist	6
Casual Swimming Instructor	6
Centre Assistant	2
Cleaner - Leisure Services	1
Divisional Manager - Leisure Services	1
Fitness Advisor	1
Leisure Attendant	20
Receptionist - Kingsway Leisure Centre	1
Receptionist - Brookvale Recreation Centre	1
Library Services	11
Area Manager (Libraries)	1
Library Floor Manager	3
Library Information Assistant	7
Logistics	8
Casual Client Driver/Attendant	6
Reception Officer (Transport)	1
Shift Mechanic	1
Mental Health	10
Advanced Social Worker	5
Housing Solutions Offender Coordinator	1
Social Worker	3
Support Worker - Women's Centre	1
Mersey Gateway	3
Chief Executive (Mersey Gateway Environmental Trust)	1
Conservation Officer (Mersey Gateway Environmental Trust)	1
Non-Executive Director (Mersey Gateway Crossings Board)	1
Open Space Services	18
Apprentice Registration Officer	1
Casual Civil Ceremonies Celebrant	3
Casual Worker - Open Space Service	8
Cemetery Worker	1
Compliance Officer	1
Park Worker	2
Streetscene Worker	2
Policy, People, Performance and Efficiency	5
Apprentice Resourcing Officer	1

Business Performance Officer	1
Organisational Development & Performance Support Assistant	1
Payroll Reconciliation Officer	1
Recruitment & Resourcing Officer	1
Prevention and Assessment	11
Commissioning & Development Manager	1
Occupational Therapist	2
Practice Manager	4
Principal Manager	1
Senior Service Development Officer	1
Service Development Officer	1
Social Worker	1
Property Services	16
Caretaker	1
Casual Cleaner	4
Casual Cleaner Plus	1
Cleaner	5
Cleaner Plus	4
Facilities Management Building Officer	1
Public Health	5
Advanced Project Support Officer	1
Breastfeeding Support Worker	3
Casual Breastfeeding Support Worker	2
Consultant in Public Health	3
Health Check Officer	2
Health Improvement Practitioner - Feeding Halton	1
Health Improvement Practitioner - Stop Smoking	2
Health Improvement Specialist	3
Information Officer (Sure Start to Later Life)	1
Interim Director of Public Health	1
Lifestyle Advisor	5
Pest Control Operative	1
Pest Control Team Leader	1
Practice Manager - Health Improvement (Adult Healthy Lifestyles)	1
Practice Manager - Health Improvement (Start Well)	1
Project Officer - Testing (Public Health)	1
Public Health Intelligence Officer	2
Specialist Dietician	1
Specialist Dietitian	1
Casual Children's Health Trainer	2
Revenues and Benefits	1
Benefits Officer	1
School Meals Catering	55

Assistant Cook	1
Catering Supervisor	8
Kitchen Assistant	44
Mobile Catering Supervisor	1
School Meals Assistant Manager	1
Service Improvement	2
Senior Technical Officer	1
Systems Analyst (Client Applications - Care)	1
Sport and Recreation	6
Casual Centre Assistant	4
Centre Assistant	1
Community Sports Coach	1
Stadium and Catering Services	11
Bookings and Health & Safety Officer	1
Casual Stadium General Assistant	9
Grounds and Maintenance Officer	1
Team Around The Family / Locality Services	26
Carers Assessment and Support Officer	1
Children & Families Early Years Worker	3
Children and Young Peoples Tracking Services Officer	1
Deputy Day Care Manager	1
Early Help Family Worker	11
Early Help Officer	2
Early Help Parenting Co-ordinator	1
Early Years Practitioner	4
Senior Early Help Officer	2
Traffic, Risk and Emergency Planning, Health and Safety	7
School Crossing Operative	7
Urgent Care	10
Advanced Practitioner	7
Community Learning Disability Nurse	2
Customer Care Officer	1
Waste and Environmental Services	13
Casual Centre Assistant	3
Centre Assistant	1
Community Centre Supervisor	1
Community Engagement Officer	1
Environment Project Assistant	1
Waste and Recycling Driver/Chargehand	2
Waste and Recycling Operative	4
Grand Total	610