

REPORT TO: Corporate Policy & Performance Board

DATE: 7th November 2023

REPORTING OFFICER: Head of HR Operations

PORTFOLIO: Corporate Services

SUBJECT Resourcing the Council – challenges.

WARD(S): Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To provide the Board with an overall view of the resourcing challenges currently faced 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 Due to the scale and diverse nature of roles within the Council to deliver a complex array of services, there has been and will always be a need to fill vacant roles, review current roles, and create new posts to meet the demands of service delivery. This requires the need to attract and recruit talent, either externally in the local labour market, or internally. Internal recruitment normally results in a further vacancy to backfill.
- 3.2 The number of Council service vacancies requested for advertisement has increased significantly and consistently since 2021/2022. For comparative context, in 2016/17 the number of vacancies advertised was 343, in 2021/2022 was 610 and in 2022/2023 that had risen to 678. A summary of the 678 vacancies is attached at Appendix 1.
- 3.3 The continued rise in vacancy numbers has created a substantial challenge as the Council's recruitment service is not substantively resourced at a level sufficient to manage workflow of such volumes. Temporary resource has been added to mitigate against any delays in service provision, which remain prevalent.
- 3.4 A number of key reasons can be cited for the continued increase in volume:

- A sustained drift away from Local Government as an employer of choice remains problematic in attracting and retaining talent in the organisation, 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 and widens the gap with other sectors.
- Some roles becoming increasingly demanding and challenging due to increased regulation and demand, e.g. Children's Social Care work, resulting in higher than average turnover levels and increased vacancy numbers, increasing agency usage and destabilising the substantive workforce.
- The Council responding to changing services and recruiting to roles to undertake health related work, such as those nursing roles in Care Homes.
- The Council being required to recruit additional roles to facilitate the delivery of continued contracts that the Council has entered into, such as delivery of the Work Programme and similar, in the Employment, Learning & Skills Service, as well as key corporate projects such as the Transformation Programme.

3.5 The failure to attract candidates to some roles results in re-advertising and repeat recruitment activity. This is similar for backfilling vacancies where internal recruitment has taken place contributes to the increased recruitment activity.

3.6 In addition, there is still a continued 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 Additionally there remain situations 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.

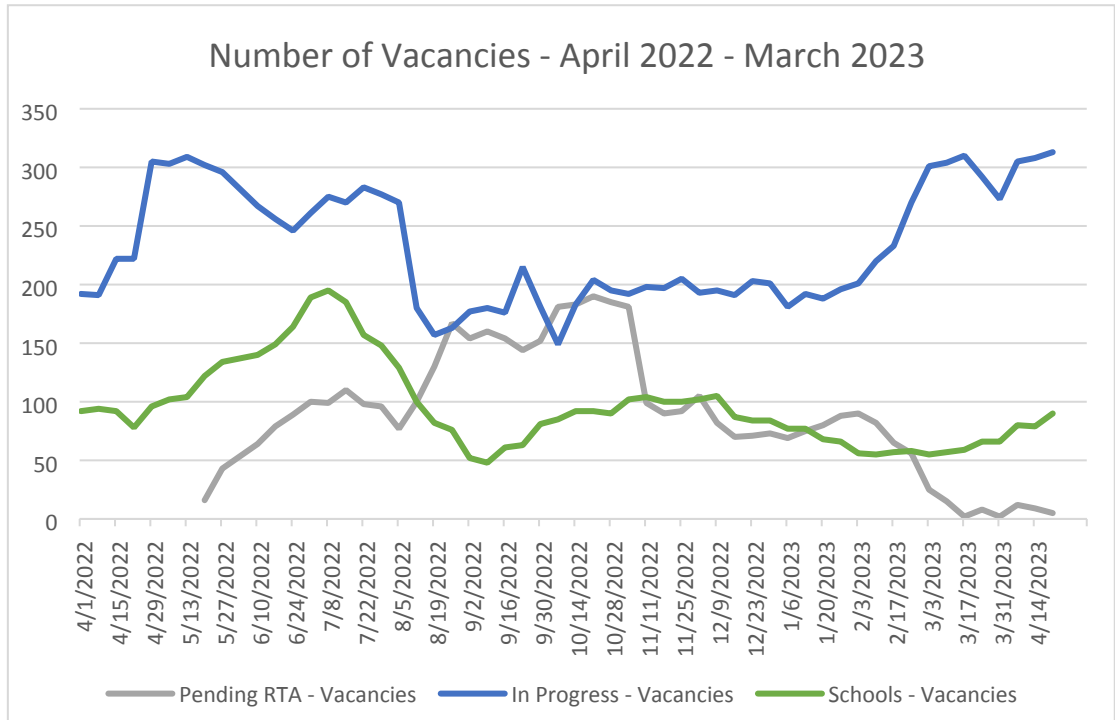
3.8 The recruitment service also processes recruitment for schools on a chargeable SLA basis. 44 schools have bought the recruitment service for the 2023/24 SLA year. In 2022/23 the service processed 362 school recruitments, and whilst the costs of this are covered by schools, it creates issues in workflow as many school recruitments need to be

completed between May and September in time for the start of the new school year.

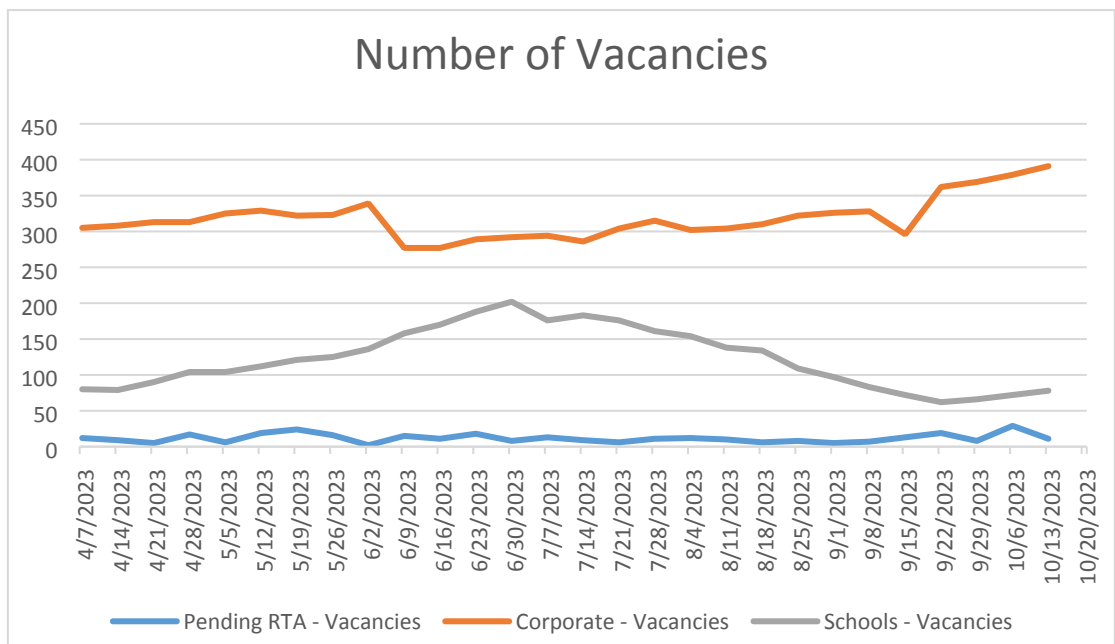
- 3.9 The Board has previously been advised that revised legislation was enacted in April 2020, under the auspices of the Government's 'Good Work Plan', which emerged from the 2018 Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices. One key element of this was the introduction of the requirement to issue a contract 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 adding to the workflow in pre-employment.
- 3.10 In operational terms, this provides the Council with a shortened window within which to complete a recruitment exercise. This can be largely managed in corporate recruitment, but 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 continues to create a bottleneck of work in the recruitment service and Pay and Pensions in the June to August period. This affects recruitment to posts in Council services and places pressure on the recruitment team.
- 3.11 At the time of writing (16th October 2023), the measure of workflow in the recruitment service is as follows:

Council Service Recruitment IN PROGRESS	Vacancies – 391 (135 in pre-employment check stage)
Council Service Recruitment WAITING	Vacancies – 2
School Recruitment IN PROGRESS	Vacancies – 78 (22 in pre-employment check stage)

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



3.13 The trend of vacancies for the 2023/24 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 continue to see a similar impact across their organisations throughout all services.

3.15 All Local Authorities in the Liverpool City Region are continuing to report 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 and service industry type posts.

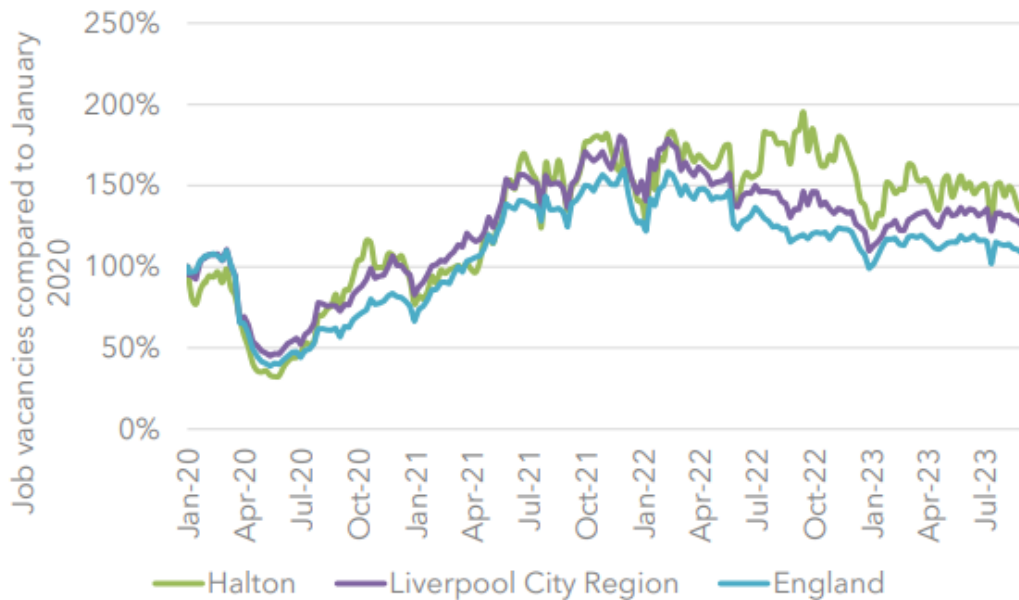
3.16 The general vacancy situation within the UK economy has shifted and remained since COVID restrictions began to be relaxed in late 2021. The Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development Labour Market Outlook: Summer 2023 was published on 14th August 2023. Key messages within it are:

- 50% of employers have hard-to-fill vacancies. A similar level expects significant problems in filling these roles over the next six months. These are most common in education (56%), transport and storage (54%), manufacturing (54%) and utilities (51%).
- Almost three-quarters (73%) of employers plan to recruit in the next three months. Recruitment intentions remain highest in the public sector (83%). It's noteworthy that public sector employers (43%) anticipate significant problems in filling roles which is higher than private sector (24%) and voluntary sector (21%) employers.
- The proportion of employers planning on making redundancies has risen from last year to 19% from 13%. This has risen from 12% last quarter to 20% this quarter for public sector.
- Employers' focus on retention and training demonstrates their desire to get more from their existing employees in the face of recruitment challenges with 64% of employers making counter offers. This is more prevalent in private sector as it is evident the public sector is less able to make counteroffers to retain staff.
- The top response planned by employers to recruitment and retention difficulties is to upskill existing staff (49%), followed by increasing salaries (44%) and to increase duties of existing staff (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 mid-September, there were around 15,700 vacancies in the Liverpool City Region, which remain 33% higher than pre-pandemic levels. At the same time there were around 1,000 vacancies in Halton, which is +46% higher than pre-pandemic levels.

- 3.18 The number of vacancies in the Liverpool City Region continues to remain at historically high levels and has grown faster than the national average (+12% pre-pandemic levels) as shown below:

Change in online job vacancies since January 2020



Source: ONS Online Job Advert Estimates, 2023; LCR Insights, 2023

- 3.19 In a local context, the latest available ONS statistics show that the Halton has seen progress over recent years, closing gaps with national average. Employment rate in Halton stands at 75% a slight increase from last year (74.8%), and compared to 74% in Liverpool, however below national levels of 76%. Whilst this is very positive in socio-economic terms, it points to additional restrictions on the available pool of labour.
- 3.20 The above data demonstrates one of the reasons why the number of available candidates in the market place appears to have reduced, but other factors are also prevalent;
- ONS data shows an estimated 2m people in the UK suffering from self-reported long COVID as at March 2023.
 - Employee jobs recovery following COVID-19 has varied with the main gains being in health and social work, professional, and scientific and technical activities.
 - 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 Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development Migrant Workers and Skills Shortages in the UK report 2023 evidences a reduction of EU Nationals working in the UK from 2.6 million (early 2020) to 2.4 million (late 2022). Albeit it is reported the number of non-EU workers rising from 1.5 million to 1.9 million over the same period.
- The data shows a consequence of Brexit is the migrants arriving to work in the UK are typically qualified to degree level or above. This however perpetuates the challenges in filling unskilled roles.
- The outlook remains unclear with rising inflation, economic uncertainty, and a cost of living crisis possibly bringing about further dynamic change in the labour market in the coming months and possible years.

3.21 A revised approach to attracting candidates to Council roles is taking place and continues to be explored. At this point in time the HR Operations Division has recently implemented;

- Re-designing the recruitment process (application stages particularly) to streamlined applications to CV's to make it easier for candidates to apply.
- Engaging 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 visibility at graduate events and job fairs promoting opportunities within Halton.
- Establishing multi-grade (career grade posts) to make posts more attractive to potential applicants and promote retention through development over the long-term.
- Working with Directorates with specific and focused recruitment campaigns such as 'Adults Always on', 'Indeed' coupled with engaging managers earlier on in the recruitment process fosters informal on-boarding of new recruits.
- Pre-employment checks have been reviewed and streamlined where appropriate and safe, such as the removal of medical screening by default for all positions.
- Supporting specific grant funded recruitment campaigns for efficient and timely turnaround, such as the Children's Social Work Academy.

- More recently there has been learning from prior senior recruitment, with in-house assessment centre facilitation to reduce spend on the commissioning of external expertise.
- 3.22 Further developments are taking place to enhance Halton's branding and Employer Value proposition with the HR Operations Division working in partnership with the Transformation Delivery Unit to promote the Council becoming an employer of choice. This also includes enhanced succession planning within the organisation (aligned with the Council's Organisational Development Strategy).
- 3.23 In addition to the above, the Council continues to be 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.
- 3.26 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.
- 3.27 Spend in the financial year 2022/2023 reached £13.8m. Of this £8.5m 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).
- 3.28 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 2023/24. Furthermore work is currently being undertaken to on board care homes onto Matrix to reduce off contract agency spend.

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 is an accredited 'Disability Confident Leader' and has been since 2019. 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 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

None identified.

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

- 10.1 None

Appendix 1

Recruitment summary across Council Services – 2022/23

Service Area	Positions
Administration Shared Services	39
Administration Officer	23
Clerical Officer	10
Senior Administration Officer	5
Team Support Manager	1
Audit and Operational Finance	2
Audit and Investigations Manager	1
Recovery Officer	1
Care Homes	23
Assistant Manager - Care Homes	1
Care and Support Worker - Days	1
Care and Support Worker - Nights	1
Care Assistant	5
Care Assistant - Days	2
Care Assistant - Nights	1
General Assistant	2
Nurse Consultant	1
Registered Manager- St Lukes Care Home	1
Registered Nurse	1
Registered Nurse - Days	3
Registered Nurse - Nights	3
Senior Care Assistant Nights	1
Care Management	29
Advanced Social Worker - Complex Care	1
Community Care Worker	15
Kitchen Assistant	1
Social Worker	6
Social worker - Complex Care	2
Social Worker (Continuing Health Care)	2
Social Worker (Prevention and Assessment)	2
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	9
Senior Community Support Worker	1
Social Worker (Children in Need)	6

Social Worker- Contact and Referral Team	1
Social Worker- Disabled Children Services	1
Children's Safeguarding	2
Conference and Reviewing Manager	1
Specialist Teaching Assistant - Sensory Impairment	1
Commissioning	40
Assistant Behaviour Analyst	12
Casual Support Worker - Day Services	16
Day Services Officer	8
Housing Solutions Advisor	1
Practice Manager - Positive Behaviour Service	1
Principal Manager	1
Senior Behaviour Analyst	1
Community	61
Behaviour Practitioner	2
Casual Support Worker - Halton Supported Housing	12
Support Worker - Day Services	7
Support Worker - Halton Supported Housing	40
Contact Centre	1
Contact Centre Advisor	1
Early Years Team	1
Early Years Complex Needs Support Worker	1
Education and School Improvement	4
Education Data Analyst	1
School and Setting Improvement Officer	3
Employment, Learning and Skills	57
Adult Learning and Skills IT Tutor	1
Advisor	2
Advisor (Employment Coach - JETS Programme)	1
Advisor (Restart Programme)	22
Advisor/Key Worker	2
Apprenticeship Support Skills Broker	1
Employment Liaison Officer	6
ESF Funding Development Officer	3
Information and Data Manager	1
Information Data & Support Officer	4
JETS Programme Team Leader	1
Quality and Learner Experience Manager	1
Restart Programme Self-employment Advisor	2
Support Internship Job Coach	2
Team Leader - Restart Programme	5
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	16
One Stop Shop Officer	9
One Stop Shop Officer - Internal	6
One Stop Shop Team Leader	1
Hardware and Software Development	2
Senior Administrator ICT (EUC-Service Desk)	1
Senior Administrator-ICT (Data Centre)	1
Highways	2
Senior Engineer- Highway Schemes & Major Maintenance	2
Inclusion 0-25 Service and Special Educational Needs	13
Assistant Educational Psychologist	2
Casual Home Tutor	3
Education Welfare Officer	1
Educational Psychologist	2
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	2
Intermediate Care	1
Assistant Manager - Intermediate Care	1
Investment and Development	7
Business Improvement & Growth Officer	1
Principal Surveyor	2
Project Officer (Mersey Gateway Regeneration Plus)	1
Project Support Officer	1
Regeneration Project Officer	1
Surveyor	1
Legal Services	2
Licensing Manager	1
Licensing Officer	1
Leisure Services	53
Casual Centre Assistant	2
Casual Fitness Advisor	2
Casual Leisure Attendant	10
Casual Operations Manager	5

Casual Receptionist	6
Casual Swimming Instructor	9
Centre Assistant	1
Divisional Manager - Leisure Services	1
Leisure Attendant	15
Receptionist - Kingsway Leisure Centre	1
Receptionist - Brookvale Recreation Centre	1
Library Services	9
Area Manager (Libraries)	2
Library Floor Manager	3
Library Information Assistant	4
Logistics	8
Casual Client Driver/Attendant	6
Reception Officer (Transport)	1
Shift Mechanic	1
Mental Health	10
Advanced Social Worker	4
Housing Solutions Offender Coordinator	1
Social Worker	3
Support Worker - Women's Centre	2
Open Space Services	20
Apprentice Registration Officer	2
Casual Civil Ceremonies Celebrant	3
Casual Worker - Open Space Service	8
Cemetery Worker	1
Compliance Officer	1
Park Worker	2
Streetscene Worker	3
Place, Planning and Provision	1
Youth Justice Service Education Worker	1
Policy, People, Performance and Efficiency	7
Apprentice Resourcing Officer	1
Business Performance Officer	1
Casual Children's Health Trainer	2
Organisational Development & Performance Support Assistant	1
Payroll Reconciliation Officer	1
Recruitment & Resourcing Officer	1
Prevention and Assessment	18
Advanced Practitioner	6
Commissioning & Development Manager	1
Customer Care Officer	1
HSAB Support Officer	1
Occupational Therapist	1
Practice Manager	4
Principal Manager	1

Senior Service Development Officer	1
Service Development Officer	1
Social Worker	1
Property Services	18
Caretaker	1
Casual Cleaner	4
Casual Cleaner Plus	1
Cleaner	7
Cleaner Plus	4
Facilities Management Building Officer	1
Public Health	38
Advanced Project Support Officer	1
Breastfeeding Support Worker	3
Casual Breastfeeding Support Worker	2
Consultant in Public Health	4
Director of Public Health	1
Graduate Environmental Health Practitioner/ Environmental Health Officer	2
Health Check Officer	2
Health Improvement Practitioner - Feeding Halton	1
Health Improvement Practitioner - Stop Smoking	2
Health Improvement Specialist	4
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
Pupil & Teaching Support	1
Early Years Complex Needs Support Worker	1
Revenues and Benefits	1
Benefits Officer	1
School Meals Catering	58
Assistant Cook	1
Catering Supervisor	8
Kitchen Assistant	47
Mobile Catering Supervisor	1
School Meals Assistant Manager	1
Service Improvement	3
Senior Technical Officer	1

Systems Analyst (Client Applications - Care)	2
Sport and Recreation	11
Casual Centre Assistant	8
Centre Assistant	2
Community Sports Coach	1
Stadium and Catering Services	10
Casual Stadium General Assistant	9
Grounds and Maintenance Officer	1
Team Around The Family / Locality Services	28
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	10
Early Help Officer	2
Early Help Parenting Co-ordinator	1
Early Years Practitioner	5
Head of Behaviour Support	1
Senior Early Help Officer	3
Traffic, Risk and Emergency Planning, Health and Safety	7
School Crossing Operative	7
Urgent Care	1
Advanced Practitioner	1
Waste and Environmental Services	12
Casual Centre Assistant	3
Centre Assistant	1
Community Engagement Officer	1
Environment Project Assistant	1
Waste and Recycling Driver/Chargehand	2
Waste and Recycling Operative	4
(blank)	16
Chief Executive	1
Chief Executive (Mersey Gateway Environmental Trust)	1
Commissioning Manager	1
Community Bridge Builder	2
Community Learning Disability Nurse	3
Conservation Officer (Mersey Gateway Environmental Trust)	1
Early Years Officer: Data Analyst	1
Non-Executive Director (Mersey Gateway Crossings Board)	1
One Halton - Project Manager	2
One Halton - Senior Programme Manager	1
Operational Director - Community & Environment	1
Programme Manager (Halton and Warrington PMO)	1
Grand Total	668