

Attracting Young Talent into Local Government: A Digital Solution

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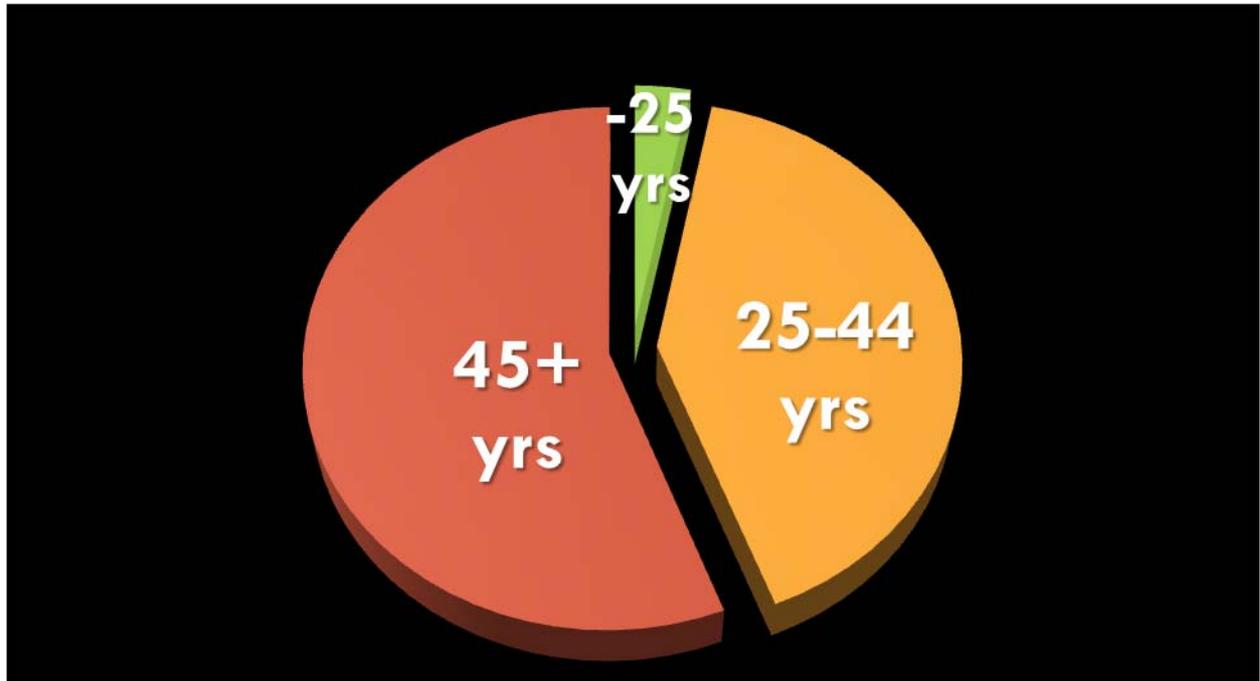
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Introduction

The objective of this project was to give consideration to the fact that Local Government has an ageing workforce – as at April 2019 only 3.1% of the workforce across the West Midlands were aged under 25 and 56% were aged 55 and over - and in line with the LGA Workforce Focus Report (April 2019), consider the HR priorities of the future specifically with regards to recruitment and retention, and the need to promote local government as an employer of choice.

Age profile for local authorities across the West Midlands. April 2019.

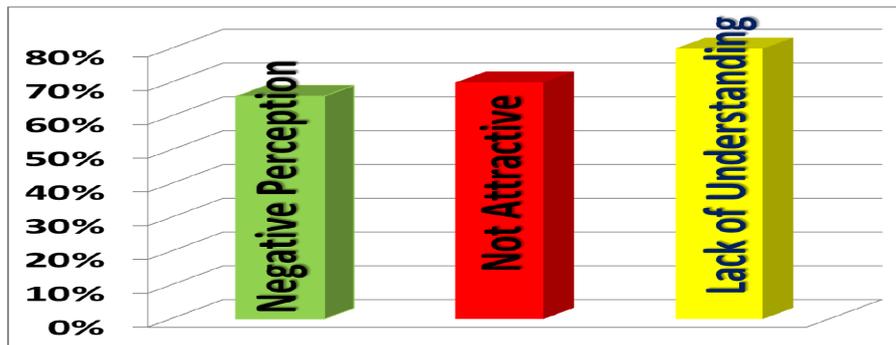


In undertaking this project it was recognised that young people are not attracted to local government and information on jobs and careers is not easily accessible or on one digital platform.

Methodology

In 2013 an article in The Guardian stated 'more must be done to promote Local Government as a career for young people and in order to attract young talent councils need to think about their reputation'. Little has changed since this report was published and this was the starting point for our research.

Primary research with heads of HR in the West Midlands showed that 70% said local government was not seen as an attractive employer and 80% said there was a lack of understanding of the local government offer. All acknowledged that they faced 'difficulties in attracting and recruiting young people to their organisation':



Thirty three young people both within and outside local government, a recruitment specialist and a current Chief Executive were interviewed to help us gain first hand knowledge and a greater understanding of the issues faced and the relevant areas of focus.

Research findings

Our research identified a need to promote local government as an employer of choice and identified four main issues currently being faced by local government:

- The ageing workforce
- A lack of appeal to young people
- The negative perception of local government
- Currently no single national access point for careers and jobs.

The young people (age 17-24) we surveyed told us that they perceived local government to be 'Old fashioned, Stuffy, Office based and Not interesting'. We asked this group about their expectations when researching companies and looking for employment and they told us they expected:

- Virtual tours of offices / environment to 'bring the role to life'
- To understand how the role brings value or benefits the organisation and the wider community – the 'sense of purpose'
- Information on the possible career pathways / progression and a move away from the 'stereotypical roles within local government'
- An organisation that embraced digital technology and provided information that was to the point and easily accessible.

This research was further supported by wider government research; Outside the Box, the Council Workforce of tomorrow report, 2016, which indicated that: 65.9% of local authorities saw their greatest barrier to recruitment being a 'negative perception of local government' and the LGA Workforce Focus report 2019 which recognised the need for increased

recruitment and retention and advised that 'more can be done to enhance the image of local government ...and make it an employer of choice'.

Furthermore, a Millennial Survey Report (2014) by Acas stated that 'millennials wanted to work for organisations that fostered innovative thinking, developed their skills and made a positive contribution to society'

A survey by CV Library 2018 conducted with 545 young people, showed that 56% would not consider applying to an organisation with no internet presence and an article in People Management magazine, 2018, said 'a compelling on line presence is now essential for attracting young talent'.

We found some good examples of an internet presence at a local level e.g. Birmingham, Liverpool and West Sussex local authorities, but nothing national or joined up. Internet searches for local government jobs took us to private recruitment company sites e.g. LG Jobs – which is part of Jobs Go Public' or The Guardian recruitment page. The first actual site for local government jobs was number seven on the internet search and this was for local government jobs in Scotland or Ireland depending on the search engine used.

We realised that other public sector organisations have a strong internet presence and searches for 'The Army jobs' or 'NHS jobs' takes you straight to their jobs and careers page on the first search. Furthermore, not only are these sites easily accessible and informative but they are uncomplicated to navigate and succinct in demonstrating what they can offer.

We understood that Generation Z and Millennials had never known a world without the internet and that technology fuelled every aspect of their lives and according to TechRadar (an online technology publication), '74% of young people are likely to engage with an organisation that provides video's, blogs and social media posts' as part of it's recruitment – in other words, it entertains them'.

The LGA Productive People report, 2019, encompassed all of this by saying 'Build for future generations as they need to be led to the types of jobs we have and need skills for'.

Given that young people had already told us that they wanted to access information about the employer and its offer quickly and easily and coupled with the fact that there was currently no single access point for local government jobs available nationally we devised our solution.

Recommendations:

The creation of a modern, single National Digital Website accessible via one search option and showcasing the Local Government Brand and offer including:

- What we do (the services we offer to our public and communities)
- What we offer (recognition and rewards)
- Our jobs and careers

This website could act as a national funnel, drawing in young talent and expanding back out and signposting to individual government organisations for local job searches as well as marketing the brand of Local Government as a whole.

This website could be developed and potentially hosted from within an existing web platform e.g. the existing Local Government Association site and the platform would specifically target young people by incorporating YouTube videos, links to other websites such as The National Apprenticeship Website and allow an individual to register an interest in jobs by category or geographical location and to receive alerts on available opportunities.

The website would be specifically designed to attract the target group of under 25's by making the site visually attractive, digitally enhanced and containing branding and language which incorporated young people's preferences.

The strapline 'Local Government Touches the Lives of everybody everyday' is already used within the LGA website – it captures the essence of what local authorities do, but also reflects feedback that young people are attracted to having a sense of purpose and for them to see how their work contributes to others. We would plan to incorporate this strapline to showcase what we do and bring this sense of purpose to life. In doing so we could reduce the negative perception of local government and move towards becoming more appealing not just to young people but to everyone.

Screen shot of the concept website:



This website shows 3 sections:-

What we do – showing the diverse range of services that local government provides and video's to bring it to life e.g. a 'journey to work' demonstrating how we add value and our sense of purpose.

What we offer - information about the benefits of working within Local Government but including such areas as voluntary work and agile working to appeal to younger talent.

Careers - information on key local government jobs as well as career pathways and the diversity of roles.

There could be additional functionality too including job searches via an interactive map linking back to local authority sites to allow applications for local job opportunities.

Our concept website could allow individuals to register an interest and receive alerts for job opportunities based on their communication preferences – email, WhatsApp and the like. We envisage that the outflow of registered personal details would be direct to contact sites and based on geographical preferences and could result in further transmission to relevant local government job sites.

In terms of the overall content, our solution could utilise existing information already available and provide one platform pulling together all of the best practice and resources currently available.

The key to the success of this solution is recognising the need to reach out to our target audience and ensure that young people know that the platform exists. Promotion at both a local and national level would be essential and we recommend the following options:

- Direct links to where young people currently look for jobs and careers information – on line sites such as Unifrog, All About School Leavers, Rate my Apprenticeship and the National Careers Service.
- Utilising the LGA as our national voice to promote the site and work with councils on reviewing the content keeping it fresh, interesting and relevant
- Provide videos on YouTube and other social media platforms
- Developing a toolkit for schools / careers advisors / training providers promoting the site and the opportunities available.
- Encouraging attendance at careers fairs, youth club events and interaction with schools and universities to 'spread the word'
- Offering work placements and work experience and encouraging peer to peer communication and promotion
- Sponsoring local events as a way of advertising the site
- Utilising existing forms of communication within the council to publicise the site e.g. the website address on the side of refuse trucks or as a footer on letters to residents.

Conclusion

John Henderson, Chief Executive of Staffordshire County Council has fully endorsed this concept and believes there is a gap in the local government recruitment strategy that this website would fill. John was happy to go on record and plead with any potential 'investors' that this was an ideal opportunity and starting point for addressing the imbalance of our ageing workforce whilst providing an ideal entry point for local government jobs and careers.

Councils already understand that having a balanced workforce will enable them to meet future service delivery needs and to support this we need to attract and retain young talent. These young people need to be drawn to us as an employer of choice and recognise that working for local government offers a unique opportunity to make a difference and have a purpose in doing so.

This website would allow an opportunity for promoting the local government brand, facilitate engagement with those young people who may not have considered working with us beforehand and demonstrate that we have embraced technology whilst showcasing what we can offer. In addition, it supports councils in maximising the opportunity to attract young talent by offering a national digital platform.

In researching and developing this concept website our project group couldn't really understand why it didn't already exist! We were passionate that this concept is not only highly relevant but very much needed. It's a simple, uncomplicated idea that has the potential to reach out to young talent nationally and the return on investment - both in terms of financial commitment and reputationally – is easy to see. All it would take is a collective commitment to develop the website, promote it and utilise every opportunity to engage with and attract young talent into local government.

Acknowledgements

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