

Improving home improvement services

Challenges in recruitment
and retention

A Good Home Network briefing



Introduction

Key challenges

This briefing outlines key resource challenges in recruitment and retention, staffing structures and accessing funding that local authorities face in delivering home improvement services.

This is a summary of the first meeting of the Good Home Network. A longer account of the meeting is available at ageing-better.org.uk/good-home-network

What is the Good Home Network?

The Good Home Network is a hub for active learning connecting people across England who are exploring ways to improve poor quality homes in their area.

The Centre for Ageing Better set up the Good Home Network, in partnership with Foundations, to help local authorities ensure people in their communities can live independently, safely and with dignity in their own homes.

Find out more:

Visit ageing-better.org.uk/good-home-network or email goodhomenetwork@ageing-better.org.uk



Recruitment and retention

Growing talent

Issues

It is difficult to recruit staff with experience delivering the Disabled Facilities Grant across various roles resulting in staff shortages, the need to train people up or upgrade posts and delays in service delivery.

There are particular issues with recruiting surveyors and occupational therapists (OTs). Skills for Care workforce data published in September 2022 showed vacancy rates for OT posts in adults' services departments at 11.3% (up from 8.9% the previous year)¹.

And when these services have to be commissioned externally, service delivery can be reduced due to the high cost of buying in external expertise.

Local authorities are competing against agencies/private sector on pay and incentives. With the cost-of-living increase, people can no longer afford to take on a job below certain a salary level and it is harder for local authorities to attract people based on the nature of the role and the pull of altruism.

¹ Skills for Care, The workforce employed by adult social services departments in England, 2022 <https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Adult-Social-Care-Workforce-Data/Workforce-intelligence/documents/The-workforce-employed-by-adult-social-services-departments-England-2022-Final.pdf>



11.3%

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Solutions

- ✓ Grow talent by attracting graduates and considering apprenticeships.
- ✓ Re-grade certain hard-to-fill roles so that they are more competitive and attractive.
- ✓ Ensure job ads better promote the benefits of working for local authorities – job security, more generous pensions and the benefits of working for the local community.

Staffing structures

Bringing teams together

Issues

There is no one-size-fits-all model. Some local authorities outsource their local Home Improvement Agency and others have an in-house Home Improvement Agency.

A 2019 audit of Home Improvement Agencies showed over 50% were in-house (compared to 10% in 2004), 25% were managed by private companies and 11% by housing associations (compared to 78% in 2004)² and the proportion of in-house agencies has continued to grow since then.

Individual teams such as OTs within a wider home improvement team can be fragmented which can affect their ability to work effectively.

Buy-in from local and regional decision-makers and more national coordination or support, can help a local area to make changes to staffing structures that bring teams together and improve the services they offer.

² Foundations, unpublished research, 2019

Solutions

- ✔ Bring fragmented teams into the same structure – a single local authority directorate or a Home Improvement Agency.
- ✔ Co-locate staff and provide time and space for multi-disciplinary teams across housing, health and social care to come together to support integrated working and a customer-centred approach.
- ✔ Coach staff forming these teams to work effectively together.
- ✔ Use any restructure to address staffing issues – including regrading posts – by engaging with local decision-makers at key moments.



Accessing funding

Working together

Issues

With growing demand and increasing costs, some areas do not have sufficient Disabled Facilities Grant budget to support eligible people within a given budget year. Local authorities then have to manage their allocation through methods such as prioritisation of the most urgent cases and creating waiting lists as well as working to identify other funding sources to complement their Disabled Facilities Grant allocation. Other areas have not been able to use their full Disabled Facilities Grant allocation.

The increase in building costs of between 12–20% make it difficult to work within existing budgets. To

compound this issue, Foundations' annual Disabled Facilities Grant delivery snapshot shows an increase in the number of larger complex cases (with 54% of cases now over £5,000 compared to 43% in 2018/19) putting additional pressure on funding.³

Discretionary grants allow areas to provide agile and flexible services but some areas fear promoting them too widely to cope with demand while others are seeing their discretionary grants allocation removed as part of local authority budget pressures.

³ Foundations, DFG Performance Report, 2021/22
www.foundations.uk.com/library/dfg-performance/

Solutions

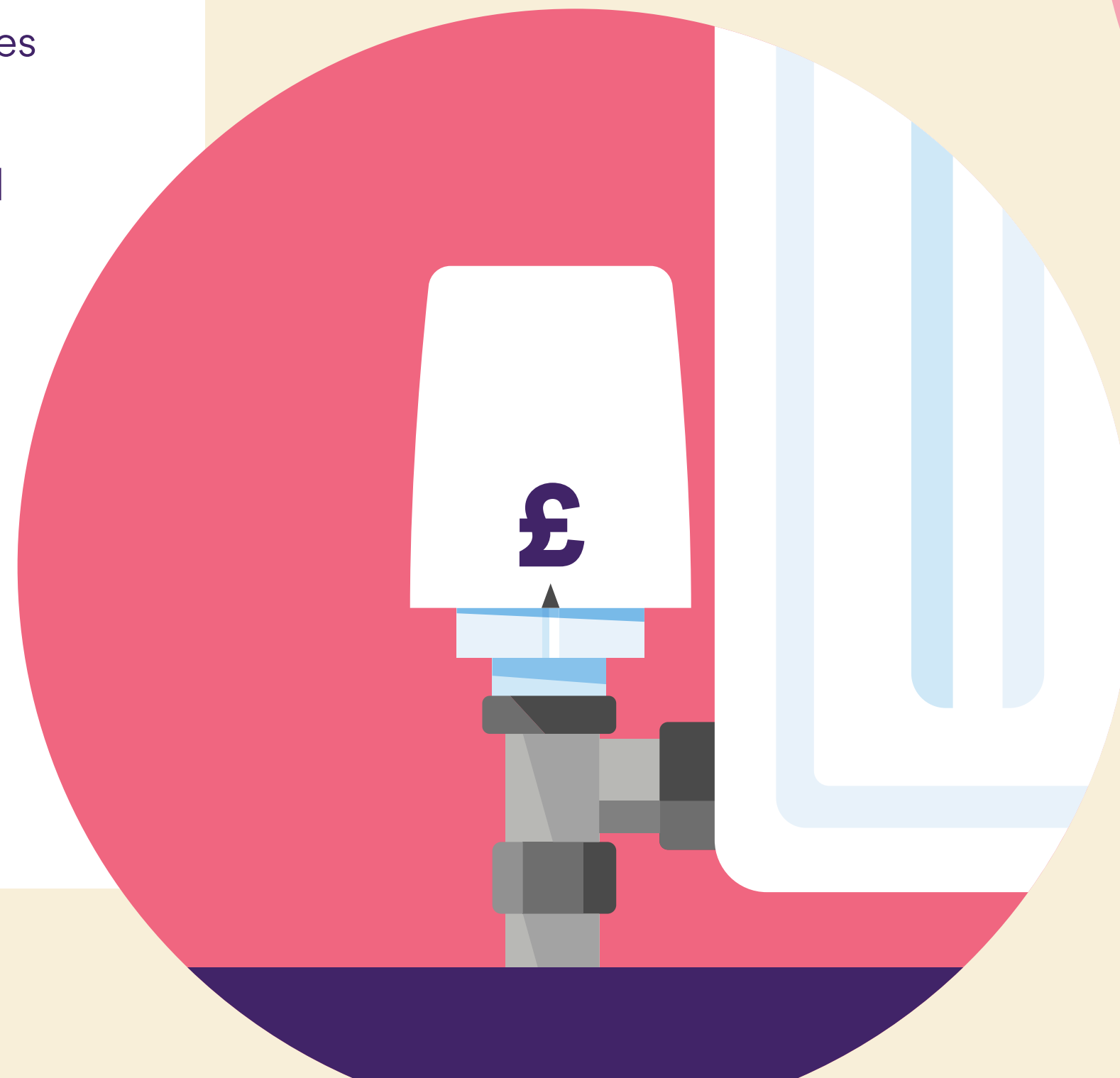
- ✓ Work together across county councils and district councils to maximise budgets, share resources and adapt roles.
- ✓ Exploit local government reorganisations to bring teams together, influence new structures and capitalise staff salaries.
- ✓ Run time-limited projects to clear an underspend by the end of the year to gain the flexibility to increase staff numbers.
- ✓ Explore whether Home Improvement Agencies from adjacent areas coming together could provide more cost-effective models for high-cost adaptations through economies of scale.



Conclusions

How to achieve change

- ✓ Identify, create and maintain links with key people – local integrated care board, the Better Care Fund, the A&E Board and others. This can help diversify funding sources and support proposals.
- ✓ Identify and nurture champions and changemakers to encourage support and ensure high level buy-in.
- ✓ Show impact, for example the amount of money it is possible to save in areas such as adult social care or health, to build the case for change.
- ✓ Keep talking to bordering authorities to explore the potential for shared services and specialist staff.
- ✓ Feed back lessons learned from other areas or services to teams and decision makers.



Further resources

- > LGA support for workforce planning www.local.gov.uk/our-support/workforce-and-hr-support/workforce-planning
- > RICS apprenticeships www.rics.org/surveyor-careers/contribute/employ-an-apprentice
- > RCOT apprenticeships www.rcot.co.uk/degree-level-apprenticeship-occupational-therapy
- > Skills for Care – Developing your workforce www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Developing-your-workforce/Developing-your-workforce.aspx
- > Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) delivery: Guidance for Local Authorities in England www.gov.uk/government/publications/disabled-facilities-grant-dfg-delivery-guidance-for-local-authorities-in-england

For more information please visit ageing-better.org.uk/good-home-network or contact goodhomenetwork@ageing-better.org.uk





Let's take action today for all our tomorrows.
Let's make ageing better.



This briefing is part of our work on **Homes**
and is freely available at ageing-better.org.uk

The Centre for Ageing Better creates change in policy and practice informed by evidence and works with partners across England to improve employment, housing, health and communities. Ageing Better is a charitable foundation, funded by The National Lottery Community Fund.

