



London Councils case study: developing a people analytics network to share expertise and experience

London Councils is a lobbying organisation that promotes the interests of London's 32 borough councils and the City of London. A public organisation, London Councils operates across political parties to deliver services on behalf of the public, by ensuring that its member authorities have the correct resources, freedoms and powers to deliver their services for residents and local businesses.

London borough councils have faced the biggest financial challenge of any part of the public sector since 2010. Spending Review 2015 confirmed further funding reductions of around 30% in real terms over the next four years, on top of cuts to core funding of over 40% since 2010. Fundamental changes to the way services are delivered will be necessary to deliver the savings required.

London Councils offers a number of services to support London boroughs to meet the challenges they face during this period of change. This includes supporting professional networks, one of which is the Workforce Planning and HR Metrics group that enables HR professionals working at London boroughs to explore people data and share ways of using it to improve performance.

The London Directors of HR sponsor a number of council network groups. We have recruitment, pay and employee relations and OD networks and we wanted to develop a network to work together on workforce planning and in particular the

benchmarking of HR data and that's why the group came together.'

Mark Porter, Operational HR Manager, OneSource and chair of the London Councils Workforce Planning Group.

The group consists of the HR professionals in each council who are responsible for or use HR data most frequently. They are often technical experts with an understanding of the specific measures and technology their council has access to which can provide them with people data. The group meets quarterly at London Councils.

'Most group members are the HR metrics expert or lead within the councils; either performance people, on the HR side; or sometimes people who are involved with the payroll system. Meetings usually start with a presentation, often from one of the group's members on a new system or application and move onto discussing upcoming issues on data collection and presentation. At our most recent meeting the Department for Education attended to receive feedback on changes they are proposing to one of their statutory surveys.'

The meetings are lively and a good place to share ideas.'

Tessa Mapley, HR Metrics Service Lead, London Councils

For many HR managers one of the biggest challenges can be developing business confidence and buy-in. By encouraging the use and benchmarking of HR data, the network enables HR professionals to facilitate evidence-based decision-making and helps them to make their organisations more effective.

Benchmarking: developing standards and improving practice across London boroughs

London Councils conducts a range of benchmarking surveys which have been developed using the shared expertise of the Workforce Planning network. In addition to enabling benchmarking and analysis at a regional level, the surveys promote the local collection and use of best practice HR metrics.

'Working with London Directors of HR, London Councils had already developed an HR metrics survey and there was interest in expanding this. With the support of the Directors of HR network, we compiled a list of all the HR metrics in use locally. A subgroup of the Workforce Planning network met and, using the list as a basis, produced draft sets of HR metrics for benchmarking. These included many of the metrics from the original survey with others added to give greater insight. The subgroup also produced draft definitions and guidance for the surveys. The group's drafts were shared with the Workforce Planning network to produce the sets of HR metrics questions now in use.'

Tessa Mapley, HR Metrics Service Lead, London Councils

Regular review and monitoring by the Workforce Planning network ensures the definitions are kept relevant and up-to-date. This also led to the development of an appendix included with survey results providing comments from survey contributors adding context if required, and letting other users know if they have been unable to follow guidance in the calculation of any of their metrics.

'We are lucky because the members of the Workforce Planning network have in-depth expertise in HR metrics, years of experience and practical know-how and are generous in sharing this with the network and the survey service. We are also supported by the Directors of HR network and we have a designated Director lead for HR Metrics who champions our survey and benchmarking work and gives us invaluable feedback and advice.'

Tessa Mapley, HR Metrics Service Lead, London Councils

Focusing on performance

The benchmarking of HR data from the London region enables evidence-based decision-making on key issues. It empowers individual councils, groups of councils and the region as a whole to assess performance and drive improvement.

Councils can compare their performance on HR indicators ranging from the reasons why staff leave to diversity in the workforce, HR casework and sickness absence. Each council can see where its performance sits in relation to the others and they can share policy/procedure development and innovations that work.

Online tools provide systematic analysis of data and offer instant, up-to-date outputs that would take weeks to produce manually. They offer a cost effective solution to collecting and processing large quantities of benchmarking data.

'We use an online tool which has been set up to conduct our HR metrics surveys. Boroughs input their own data locally and can generate sophisticated results, reports and scorecards each with their own council's branding. This has reduced the manual processing of the data and enabled instant reporting and updating of results outputs.'

Tessa Mapley, HR Metrics Service Lead, London Councils

When resources are limited and reducing, sharing best practice and ideas is an important way that councils can be more cost effective and improve performance - learning from the best performers among their comparators and not having to come up with their own solutions in isolation.

'We use the benchmarks at a local level at Havering and at Newham not only to continually assess and improve performance in day-to-day HR activities but also to focus on emerging priorities.'

Mark Porter, Operational HR Manager, OneSource

'The fact that all London boroughs subscribe to the HR Metrics Service and participate in providing data is testament to its value and success. Sharing and benchmarking HR metrics supports our continuous improvement, both as individual councils and as a region. Having the service and the network in place also enables us to quickly access London-wide data to provide insight and evidence to

support the development of new strategies.'

Jon Turner, Divisional Director of Human Resources at Harrow Council – Lead Director of HR for the HR Metrics Service.

'The London HR Metrics Service is recognised across the regions for producing some of the most highly reliable and relevant data and analysis. Key London-wide facts and figures are available and can be used to support London's case on the wider national stage that includes Government departments, Parliamentary Select Committees and other decision-making bodies. It has been utilised by the national employers to maintain and build the reputation of the sector.'

Selena Lansley – London Councils, Head of London Regional Employers' Organisation

Tackling real business issues

The network also works collectively to explore issues that they all face. For example, the recruitment and retention of staff in specialised roles that are often in high demand and low supply.

'I am in regular contact with the Director lead for HR Metrics and once a year I attend a Directors of HR network meeting to talk about the work of the group, the things that we've delivered, and find out from them what they want the group to deliver next year. One of the key issues this year was difficulty in recruiting children's social workers that had led to an over reliance on agency workers. There is high demand for these roles and agency worker rates had become inflated adding to costs for councils.'

At the request of the network the HR Metrics Service surveyed councils on agency pay rates for children's social workers and produced an analysis of the rates across London. The London Directors

of HR used this information as part of a project to broker a 'memorandum of understanding' (MOU) to be signed off by Chief Executives, Directors of Children's Services and Directors of HR across London. The MOU sets standardised pay rates across London for agency workers and an agreement not to go above those rates. At present there are 27 councils of 33 that have signed the MOU. Councils are now working collaboratively to manage the market and not compete with one another.'

Mark Porter, Operational HR Manager, OneSource

This demonstrates the clear financial benefit in using HR data to inform and enable collaboration across stakeholders, particularly within public services – further cost saving measures are also being developed across London, particularly with regards to managing workforce reductions to retain talent and avoid the potentially significant cost of redundancies.

Skills to be an HR analyst

'An HR analyst needs a combination of skills. It's good if they have some background knowledge or understanding of the organisation but it's also important that they have good knowledge of the systems they will be using to collect and analyse data. They will also need expertise in data analysis and in presenting data to different audiences so it can be understood and used effectively. There is also an important role for HR analysts in working with other HR professionals to identify and define HR metrics for which good collectable data is available and which provide useful insight.'

Tessa Mapley, HR Metrics Service Lead, London Councils

HR analysts who develop a sense of curiosity about the workforce, and want

to ask questions of data and explore its relationships, correlations etc., can discover new things about their workforce and potentially find ways of increasing performance.

'HR metrics people should be playful. If you get a bit of spare time, run some reports and compare things, see if you get a correlation. Sometimes you come up with a new insight.'

Tessa Mapley, HR Metrics Service Lead, London Councils

HR analysts need to be able to communicate and present data in a way which is clear and usable by functional leads within the business.

'I think another important role of the Workforce Planning group is sharing ways of presenting data, communicating what your data is telling you and understanding the context, or the reasoning behind it. If you get the story right, and you understand it, people take your data more seriously as well.'

Mark Porter, Operational HR Manager, OneSource.

Sharing ideas with other public service providers

Having solved some of the practical challenges London Councils is in a good position to share ideas and demonstrate the benchmarking processes and systems it uses to other public service organisations including a recent presentation to the Civil Service.

'Benchmarking is something we can all benefit from. There is potential to reduce costs in the public sector if we are able to look at our data more closely and make good use of it.'

Tessa Mapley, HR Metrics Service Lead, London Councils