



Guide to better recruitment

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Purpose

This guide offers actionable steps for councils to broaden their recruitment reach and successfully secure talent. It is intended to complement your existing local recruitment strategy and HR guidance.

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Six steps to better recruitment

Avoid unconscious bias

- Unconscious bias is a big issue in recruitment, and it can lead to overlooking the best person for a job. If you are aware of it, you can consciously overcome it.

Adverts and role profiles

- Writing great job adverts and role profiles is your first step to finding a diverse range of excellent candidates. A well-written advert helps you reach a wider talent pool and makes a positive first impression.

Sourcing candidates

- Instead of just waiting for people to apply, you need to actively go out and find them. One of the best ways to do this is by using digital platforms like LinkedIn, as the vast majority of job seekers use this to find jobs.

Screening candidates

- The screening process is about more than just reading applications and shortlisting; it's about being open-minded to find the best talent.

Selection

- Although standard practice, interviews might not always be the best way to assess candidates' true potential, especially for technical roles. To get the best from a wider range of candidates, offer alternative selection methods.

Candidate experience

- The candidate experience starts the moment someone sees your vacancy and continues well after they accept the offer. It's a key part of your brand and can make or break a hire.

Avoiding unconscious bias

Ensure everyone has a fair chance



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Avoiding unconscious bias during recruitment

Unconscious bias is a big issue in recruitment, and it can lead to overlooking the best person for a job. It's an automatic process where your brain makes quick judgements based on your background and experiences.

While you can't eliminate it, you can manage it with the right policies and procedures.

An inclusive recruitment process ensures everyone has a fair chance to show their best self.

- **Check for hidden bias.** The language you use can have a big impact on who feels welcome to apply. Review your advert, role profile and other communications for any hidden bias that might unintentionally put people off.
 - **Avoid gendered language.** Words like "assertive" or "dominant" often have a masculine feel, while "empathetic" or "supportive" can feel more feminine. Tools like [Textio](#) can help you audit your ad to ensure it speaks to the widest possible audience. Sometimes you may disagree with the outputs of the decoder, but it can be really handy to ensure the correct balance.
 - **Appeal to introverts and neurodiverse candidates.** Words like "fast-paced" and "agile" might not appeal to people who prefer a more thoughtful and structured environment. Focus on concrete skills and tasks instead, such as "can explain technical concepts clearly".
 - **Review for racial and cultural bias.** Racial and cultural bias is still a significant issue in recruitment. This can be subtle, appearing in colloquialisms or references to specific cultural norms that might confuse or put off a diverse range of candidates. Be mindful of language that could have a negative connotation or is overly specific to one culture.
- **Blind shortlisting.** Bias can come into play when reviewing applications. A candidate's name, age, or photo can all influence a recruiter's opinion. Blinding a CV or application by removing identifying information and focusing only on experience and training can help remove this bias and ensure a fair process.



Adverts and role profiles

Your first step to finding a diverse range of excellent candidates



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Key principles for adverts and role profiles

Job adverts and role profiles are your first impression.

Use these key principles to ensure your listings are specific, candidate-focused, and highly readable; driving applications from the right people.

Best practice

- **Be specific, not generic.** Job seekers want to know what they'll be doing in this specific role. Avoid generic job descriptions and focus on the actual mission of the role. Consider adding a “week in the life of” section to accentuate the realities of the role.
- **Focus on skills, not sector experience.** Resist the temptation to look for candidates who have performed the exact same role in a similar organisation. Most skills are highly transferable, and opening roles to all backgrounds - especially for specialist and hard-to-fill positions - brings in valuable, diverse perspectives and widens your talent pool.
- **Prioritise the job, not the organisation.** Don't make candidates read a long paragraph about how great your organisation is before they get to the job details. That information is best used as supporting content.
- **Keep it clear and concise.** Use short, clear sentences, and break up text with bullet points to make it easy to read. This is crucial for accessibility. Avoid jargon, buzzwords, and empty phrases that can confuse or deter applicants.
- **Use common job titles.** Avoid making up job titles. Candidates aren't searching for them, and they can be off-putting. Also, don't use a well-known job title and then completely change the responsibilities and skills.
- **Include a “week in the life of...” blog.** Bring the role to life by describing an example week for the postholder. This is an excellent way to help candidates from different sectors understand the role's realities and how their transferable skills apply.

What to include in your advert and role profile

Focus on the specific elements that turn interest into applications.

Follow this guide to ensure your advert includes all the high-impact details job seekers look for.

The basics

- **Salary information is not optional.** Not only does including a clear salary or pay scale significantly increase application rates, it is overwhelmingly desired by job seekers, improves transparency, reduces the gender gap and attracts diversity.
- **List only the essential requirements.** Don't create a long wish list. Remove any unnecessary requirements. Be clear about the "Minimal Viable Essentials" for the role, aiming for no more than 8 essential criteria per category (Experience, and Skills/knowledge). Anything else is a bonus.
- **Advertise the benefits and social impact:** Emphasise the many benefits of local government and the social impact of the work to attract candidates whose drivers may be beyond money.
- **Mention flexibility.** Be clear about the role's location and whether remote or hybrid working is possible. Embracing remote work can help you tap into a much wider talent pool.
- **Be transparent about your culture.** Include a statement about your commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and flexible working options. You can also mention the availability of reasonable adjustments for employees.
- **Informal pre-application** Invite applicants to have a chat with the hiring manager or recruiter before they submit their applications.
- **Link to more information.** Instead of long paragraphs about the council or borough, link to external content like your corporate website, a blog post or a video. This makes the ad more concise and gives interested candidates an easy way to learn more.

Focus on readability and accessibility

The format of your advert and role profile is just as important as its content.

The document's structure is what makes it accessible to people using assistive technology like screen readers.

This applies equally to all formats, whether the adverts and role profiles are on a webpage, in a word processed document, or in a presentation.

Text and readability

- **Use proper headings.** Use the built-in heading styles (Heading 1, Heading 2, etc.) in your document, and make sure that you nest them correctly. Screen readers use these to help people navigate the document, just like a table of contents. If you don't use them, your document may be impossible to navigate properly.
- **Don't use italics for emphasis.** Italics reduce readability, especially for users with dyslexia or other visual impairments, and they are often not conveyed by screen readers.
- **Don't underline text.** Underlining also causes problems with readability and should be reserved for links to avoid confusion.
- **Use plain English.** Use simple, clear language, avoid jargon and acronyms. Write in short sentences and paragraphs, breaking up long blocks of text.
- **Font choice matters.** Your choice of font directly affects readability, which impacts people with visual impairments, dyslexia, ADHD, and other learning disabilities by making content easier to understand and navigate. Use a readable, sans-serif font such as Arial, Helvetica, Lato, Montserrat, Open Sans, Roboto or Verdana. These fonts are designed for clarity and legibility on both screens and in print.
- **Line spacing matters.** Correct line spacing helps improve readability by giving the eye room to track from one line to the next, preventing text from appearing crowded or blurry. Line spacing should be at least 1.5 times the font size, and paragraph spacing should be at least 2 times the font size, creating a clear gap between paragraphs.

Consciously design for accessibility

Pay close attention to the layout and design.

Poor or incorrect use of tables, images, colour and links could mean that your advert and role profile are impossible for some people to read.

Layout and design

- **Don't use tables for layout.** Don't use tables to organise text or images into columns. This can make the information confusing and unreadable for people using assistive technology. Tables should only ever be used for tabular data.
- **Use alt text for images.** If you use images in your document, make sure they have alt text. This is a short description that screen readers can read aloud. However, if an image is purely for decoration, the alt text should either be empty (Google Docs and Slides, etc) or marked as decorative (Microsoft Word and PowerPoint, etc). This is so that the user is aware that it is unimportant. (Examples of decorative images include a border around a page, a generic stock photo that doesn't add any information, or a swoosh line for design purposes.)
- **Complex images or charts.** If your document contains an organisation chart or similar which requires more than a short description, you may need to provide a longer text description or a link to a data table.
- **Don't rely on colour alone.** Never use colour as the only way to convey meaning. For example, don't use red text to mean "important" without also making it bold or using another way to highlight it.
- **Check the colour contrast.** Always ensure there is sufficient contrast between the background and text. You can use a simple tool like [Colour Contrast Analyser](#) to check this if you're not sure.
- **Ensure your links are descriptive.** Links should tell the user exactly where they'll go if they click on them. They should make sense when taken out of context of the surrounding text. For instance, use "learn more about our services". Never use "click here"!

Help candidates to succeed from the start

Empower your applicants by providing resources that help them navigate the recruitment process.

Sharing these guides can reduce candidate anxiety and ensure you see the very best version of every applicant.

Guidance for applicants

- [What to expect when applying to work in local government](#) - A high-level overview of the process to help demystify how councils hire.
- [10 ways to fail a local government job application](#) - Common pitfalls to avoid during the initial application stage.
- [Crafting your winning local government supporting statement](#) - Advice on how to demonstrate minimal viable essentials and transferable skills.
- [Crafting your winning CV](#) - Tips on how candidates can best present their experience and training.
- [How to be a STAR at your local government interview](#) - A guide to using the STAR technique to demonstrate concrete skills and tasks.

Sourcing candidates

Finding the right talent



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Actively seek ways to find and attract candidates

Instead of just waiting for people to apply, you need to actively go out and find them.

One of the best ways to do this is by using digital platforms like LinkedIn, as the vast majority of job seekers use this to find jobs.

Maximise your reach

- **Create persona profiles.** Consider the candidates you are trying to reach, their motivations, and where they are online. This will help to mindfully design an effective marketing strategy.
- **Beyond the job board.** Don't rely solely on job boards. You need to actively engage with potential candidates on professional platforms like LinkedIn. This means joining relevant groups, publishing content, and engaging with potential candidates directly.
- **Use LinkedIn to its full potential.** Platforms like LinkedIn allow you to use advanced searches to identify potential candidates and reach out to them directly with personalised messages. You can also use the platform to showcase your culture and highlight employee success stories to attract passive candidates who aren't actively looking for a new role.
- **Harness your network.** Encourage your current employees to share job opportunities within their own networks. You can also build a talent community by engaging with people who might be a good fit for future roles, even if you don't have an immediate vacancy.
- **Host a webinar.** Be creative and host a webinar to demystify local government for candidates from other sectors and help make the application process more personal.
- **Proactive follow-up.** If you have had contact with a potential candidate but not received an application close to the closing date, follow up personally and offer support.
- **Incomplete applications:** If your online system allows, ensure it is configured to regularly prompt people who have started but not completed their application.

Target diverse talent pools

Proactively seeking diversity requires moving beyond mainstream recruitment channels.

By deliberately advertising on specialist platforms and engaging with specific community job boards, you can break down barriers and connect with untapped talent that traditional methods often overlook.

Job board / community	Focus / target audience
BMEJobs	Black and Minority Ethnic professionals
DisabilityJob	Inclusive employment for people with disabilities
Diverse Jobs Matter	Multi-sector platform for all underrepresented groups
Ethnic Job Site	Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic talent
Evenbreak	Job board for disabled candidates
Ex-Military Careers	Veterans and ex-military personnel
FindaJob (DWP)	The UK Government's platform for job seekers
LGBTJobs	Connecting LGBT+ talent with inclusive employers
Mumsnet	Parents, often targeting flexible and family-friendly roles
NeurodiversityJobs	Candidates who are neurodivergent (eg, Autism, ADHD)
Restless	Job seekers in their 50s, 60s and beyond (age diverse)
Stonewall Proud Employers	Employers committed to LGBTQ+ inclusion
UKBlackTech	Connecting Black professionals with technology roles
WomenTech (formerly AdasList)	Advancing women and minorities in technology roles



Screening candidates

Keeping an open mind gives access
to a more diverse set of candidates



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Focus on expanding the pool

Once applications are submitted, the screening stage is crucial for identifying top talent - and avoiding unconscious bias.

Apply these principles to ensure your review process is generous, open-minded, and focused on potential rather than just a perfect match, helping you welcome a wider range of candidates.

Find hidden potential

- **Be a generous marker.** When reviewing applications, don't be a tough critic. Be a generous marker to include a wider range of candidates, as some might not perfectly match the job description but have the right attitude and potential to be future stars.
- **Be open-minded.** Candidates are often applying for a role to develop their career by taking on a more senior position or pursuing a career change. This means that their experience might not exactly match the role profile. Focus on transferable skills in order to open the door to a broader range of candidates who might be overlooked by a narrow search.
- **Welcome candidates from different sectors.** Actively seek diverse talent from outside the public sector to bring in fresh perspectives, innovation and ways of working, not just from a technology standpoint, but also in terms of service and general working practices.

Selection

Get the best outcome for your candidates



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Selection works both ways

The interview process should be designed to help every candidate perform at their best.

By focusing on preparation, diverse panels, and accommodating different needs, these guidelines ensure your interviews are inclusive, reduce bias, and lead to the most accurate assessment of talent.

Interview basics

- **Inclusive interview panels.** Having a mixed-gender, mixed-ethnicity, and mixed-age interview panel can help create a more comfortable environment, allowing all candidates to perform at their best.
- **Prepare your panel.** Make sure everyone on your interview panel is fully briefed in advance. Ensure they know the role and what you are looking for in potential candidates, the format of the interview, the questions and who is asking which ones, and how the scoring mechanism works. This will ensure they are comfortable and set up for success.
- **Share questions in advance:** Giving candidates the questions beforehand can reduce anxiety and allow them to prepare thoughtful answers.
- **Provide a quiet space:** For those who might be sensitive to noise or distractions, offer a quiet room for the interview.
- **Allow for different communication styles:** Understand that some candidates may prefer written communication, or may take longer to process information and respond verbally. Give them the space and time they need.
- **"Anything else?"** Ask candidates: "Is there anything you wish we'd ask you that demonstrates your talents that we haven't yet covered?" This is a supportive way to give them a chance to shine..

Remember, the process is a two-way street - candidates are also assessing you. By making the process more flexible and accommodating, you signal that your organisation is inclusive and welcoming.

Get creative with selection

Although standard practice, interviews might not be the best way to assess a candidate's true potential, especially for technical roles.

This is particularly true for neurodiverse people who may not be comfortable with traditional interview formats.

To get the best from a wider range of candidates, offer alternative methods for selection.

Creative alternatives to interviews

Consider using alternative methods to see how people think and work. These approaches can also be more accessible for neurodiverse candidates, allowing them to showcase their skills in a more practical way. Examples include:

- **Assessment centres.** A structured series of exercises (group and individual) evaluated by multiple assessors over a period of time (eg, half a day).
- **Hackathons.** Time-limited competitive events where candidates collaborate to solve a real-world problem or build a prototype.
- **Role-playing.** Candidates act out realistic workplace scenarios (eg, managing a difficult conversation, presenting a proposal).
- **Problem-solving exercises.** Tasks that require candidates to analyse data, identify key issues, and present a solution, often done individually.
- **Practical assignments.** Candidates perform a task directly relevant to the job role, e.g., writing code, designing a marketing brief, or analysing a financial report.
- **Portfolio / project review.** Candidates present past work or projects, explaining their process, challenges, and outcomes.
- **Skills auditions.** A brief session where the candidate demonstrates a specific skill, such as a presentation, training session, a language ability, or using a piece of equipment.



Candidate experience

Applying for your vacancy must be a positive experience from the start



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Create a positive experience for all

The candidate experience starts the moment someone sees your vacancy and continues well after they accept the offer.

It's a key part of your brand and can make or break a hire.

Communicate, communicate, communicate...

- **Good communication is essential.** Good communication is vital at every stage. Acknowledge every application either personally or with an automated email.
- **Keep candidates in the loop.** Proactively notify candidates of any delays in shortlisting, scheduling, or final decisions, providing a new estimated timeline.
- **Provide personal feedback.** Make a personal phone call to give clear and constructive feedback to both successful and unsuccessful interviewed candidates. This builds positive relationships and leaves a good impression.
- **Pre-boarding partnership.** View the new hire as a partner. Stay in regular contact after they accept the offer and before they start to build trust and ensure a smooth process.
- **Design a positive experience.** Ensure every interaction reflects your values. Be flexible with interview times to accommodate health, medical, or caring responsibilities to make candidates feel valued.
- **Structured onboarding.** Think beyond the first day. Create a plan to introduce them to colleagues, discuss team culture, and invite them to events. Provide a clear list of contacts for essential IT and HR setup.
- **Proactively manage internal delays.** Take ownership of the process. If internal teams are causing delays, intervene immediately. Slow responses can lead to candidate frustration and risk losing the hire.



Conclusion

Let's sum up this guide



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Checklist to better recruitment – steps 1 to 3

Avoid unconscious bias

- Audit your language.** Use tools like [Gender Decoder](#) to check job adverts.
- Blind CVs.** Remove identifying information (name, age) during application review.

Adverts and role profiles

- Include salary.** Always provide a clear salary or pay scale.
- Focus on essentials.** List only the minimal viable essentials (max 8 per category).
- Emphasise impact and flexibility.** Highlight social impact and remote / hybrid working options.

Sourcing candidates

- Be proactive.** Actively engage on platforms like LinkedIn; use advanced searches for passive candidates.
- Target diversity.** Advertise on specialist job boards and communities (eg, Evenbreak, UKBlackTech).

Checklist to better recruitment – steps 4 to 6

Screening candidates

- Be generous.** Be an open-minded and generous marker to widen the pool for candidates with potential.
- Focus on skills.** Prioritise transferable skills and welcome talent from outside the public sector.

Selection

- Use alternatives.** Supplement interviews with practical methods like assessment centres or hackathons.
- Be inclusive.** Use diverse interview panels and offer accommodations (eg, quiet space, pre-shared questions).

Candidate experience

- Communicate proactively.** Notify candidates of any delays and follow up on incomplete applications.
- Provide feedback.** Give clear, personal phone feedback to all interviewed candidates.
- Partner post-offer.** Maintain regular contact after the offer to ensure a smooth pre-boarding and onboarding process.