

PPMA EXCELLENCE IN PEOPLE  
MANAGEMENT AWARDS



2026

# PPMA EXCELLENCE IN PEOPLE MANAGEMENT AWARDS

## WINNERS

Awards Evening Dinner  
Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2026  
The Hilton Birmingham Metropole NEC

## Celebrating Our Winners

Congratulations to all the **winners of the PPMA Excellence in People Management Awards 2026**. Being recognised at this level is a significant achievement and reflects the dedication, innovation and impact of your work across the public sector.

This year's entries showcased an outstanding breadth of talent and commitment, making the judging process both inspiring and highly competitive. We extend our sincere thanks to everyone who submitted an entry, as well as to our judges for their time, insight and expertise in selecting this year's winners.

We would also like to thank our award sponsors for their continued support — your contribution plays an important role in celebrating and recognising excellence in people management.

To all our winners, this recognition is a testament to the difference you are making within your organisations and communities. We are proud to celebrate your achievements.



Sandra Farquharson  
PPMA President,



Julie Biggs  
PPMA Talent Programme &  
Awards Manager

## The Judging Process

Our judging panel is made up of senior leaders from across Local and Central Government, the Third Sector and the Private Sector. We are delighted to welcome several new judges this year, alongside a number of returning judges from 2025 who bring valuable continuity and experience.

Each judge is highly respected within their profession and recognised as an expert in their field, bringing insight, integrity and a wealth of knowledge to the **PPMA Excellence in People Management Awards**.

Judges are assigned to categories in groups of three to four and are provided with a detailed scoring framework aligned to the criteria outlined in the application materials. Each judge independently reviews submissions, identifying shortlisted entries, highly commended nominations and their chosen winner, supported by clear rationale.

Where there is any disagreement regarding the winning entry, our independent Awards Adjudicator reviews all submissions within that category, alongside judges' scores and comments, to make a final decision.

You can read more about our judges below.

### JUDGES BIO'S



## Award Showcase Webinar Series

Each of our shortlisted entries is invited to take part in our **Award Showcase Webinar Series**, held later in the year.

Throughout September and October, we host a series of webinars offering participating organisations the opportunity to share more detail about their award submissions, showcase their work and highlight best practice with peers across the sector.

These sessions are consistently well attended and provide valuable opportunities for **peer learning, knowledge sharing and celebrating success**.

You can view the 2025 series below.

[\*\*PPMA Awards 2025 Webinar Series\*\*](#)

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## Thank you to our Judges

**Juliette Alban-Metcalf**

Chief Executive  
Real World Group

**Claudia Beaumont**

Strategic HR Business Partner  
Wiltshire Council  
PPMA Joint Peer Winner 2025

**Sam Betts**

Assistant Director – HR & OD  
Salford City Council  
PPMA Ambassador

**Julie Biggs**

Awards & Talent Programme Manager  
PPMA

**Trudy Birtwell**

Director of Learning  
Solace

**Swati Bisht-Rawat**

Head of Talent, Performance & Innovation  
Westminster City Council  
PPMA Ambassador

**Natasha Brown**

Vice President  
PPMA

**Steve Davies**

Treasurer & Past President  
PPMA

**Rebecca Davis**

Chief Executive  
West Midlands Employers

**Sandra Farquharson**

Director of HR & OD  
Hackney Council  
PPMA President Elect

**Cheryl Graham**

HR Director & Regional Employer  
Secretary London Councils  
PPMA Joint Peer Winner 2025

**Heather Jameson**

Editor  
The MJ

**Akddus Khan**

Strategic Workforce Partner  
Oldham Council  
HR Rising Star Winner 2025

**Rebecca Lea**

Head of Workforce Collaboration  
Greater Manchester Combined  
Authority  
PPMA Ambassador

## Thank you to our Judges

### **Victoria Lee**

HR Consultant & Coach  
PPMA Ambassador

### **Molly Lucas**

Senior Organisational Development Asso  
Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames  
One to Watch Winner 2025

### **Clive Mallon**

Organisational Development Manager  
Somerset County Council  
PPMA Ambassador

### **Nichola Mann**

Service Manager – People & OD  
Brentwood Borough Council &  
Rochford District Council  
PPMA Vice President

### **Hannah Mason**

Head of Resourcing & Relations  
Central Bedfordshire Council  
PPMA Peer into the Future 2024

### **Gordon McFarlane**

Director of HR & OD  
London Borough of Newham  
PPMA Past President

### **Marie Mettam**

HR Consultant & Change Advisor  
PPMA Ambassador

### **Maxine O'Mahoney**

Chief Executive  
Breckland Council

### **Pam Parkes**

Commissioner, Birmingham City  
Council & PPMA President 2024-26

### **Barry Pirie**

Sponsorship Manager, PPMA

### **Nimisha Patel**

Senior HR Consultant, OneSource  
PPMA Ambassador

### **Neisha Porter**

Head of OD & Internal Comms  
Richmond & Wandsworth Councils  
PPMA Ambassador

### **Helen Scott**

Executive Director  
UHR

### **Chris Twigg**

Chief Executive  
Inner Circle Consulting

### **Steve Walker-Whitehead**

Director of People, Equality & OD  
London Borough of Hounslow  
PPMA Vice President

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## Apprentice of the Year

The PPMA **Apprentice of the Year Programme** celebrates the exceptional talent, dedication, and impact of apprentices working across the public sector. The programme provides a platform for apprentices to showcase their achievements, share their learning journeys, and demonstrate the valuable contribution they make within their organisations and communities.

Open to apprentices at a range of levels, the programme recognises those who have shown outstanding commitment to their development, applied their learning in meaningful ways, and made a positive difference in their role.

This year's finalists represented an impressive standard of excellence, highlighting the strength of emerging talent within the sector and the important role apprenticeships play in building the future workforce.

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[www.ppma.org.uk](http://www.ppma.org.uk)

# Apprentice of the Year 2026

Intermediate/Advanced Apprenticeships (Levels 2 & 3)

**WINNER**

Fazal Mehmood, Salford City Council



Higher/Degree Apprenticeships (Levels 4 to 7)

**WINNER**

Harvey Cook, Lincolnshire County Council



**ORACLE**



The PPMA **One to Watch Programme** celebrates early-career HR and OD professionals who are already showing exceptional promise. The programme supports participants to develop confidence, resilience, and key professional skills.

This year's finalists highlighted the strength of future talent across the public sector.



The PPMA **HR Rising Star Programme** recognises HR and OD professionals who are demonstrating strong potential to progress into senior leadership roles. Through a series of assessments and development activities, participants build confidence, strategic thinking, and leadership capability.

This year's finalists represented the very best of emerging leadership talent within the public sector.

**One to Watch 2025  
WINNER**

**Molly Lucas  
The Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames**



**HR Rising Star 2025  
WINNER**

**Akddus Khan,  
Oldham Council**



Penna

## Peer into the Future

The PPMA **Peer into the Future Programme** is a flagship leadership development programme designed for HR and OD professionals operating at a strategic level or aspiring to senior roles. It combines expert insight, best practice, and real-world experience to support participants in developing their leadership capability and strategic impact.

Through a series of interactive modules, participants are given the opportunity to step back from day-to-day pressures, reflect on key workforce challenges, and learn alongside a national peer network. This year's finalists represent outstanding forward-thinking professionals who are shaping the future of people management across the public sector.

**Peer into the Future 2025/26  
WINNER**

**Rachel Jones  
Herefordshire Council**



**Peer  
into  
the  
future**



## Thank you to all of our Award Sponsors

A sincere thank you to all of our Awards Sponsors for your valued support. Your commitment helps us celebrate and showcase the outstanding work happening across the public sector.

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## Supporting Our Chosen Charities

This year, we were proud to support two important causes selected by our President for 2026: the **British Heart Foundation** and **Alzheimer's Society**.

The **British Heart Foundation** is the UK's leading heart charity, funding groundbreaking research into heart and circulatory diseases — the world's biggest killers. Their work helps save lives, improve treatments and provide vital support to those affected.

**Alzheimer's Society** is the UK's leading dementia charity, offering support to people living with dementia and their families, while also funding research to find better treatments and, ultimately, a cure. Their work ensures that no one faces dementia alone.

Both charities play a crucial role in improving lives and supporting communities across the UK. We are honoured to support their work and raise awareness of the incredible impact they make.

A huge thank you to everyone who donated prizes and to those who gave so generously. We will be announcing the total amount raised shortly.

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MANAGEMENT AWARDS





# Local Government News, Views and Jobs

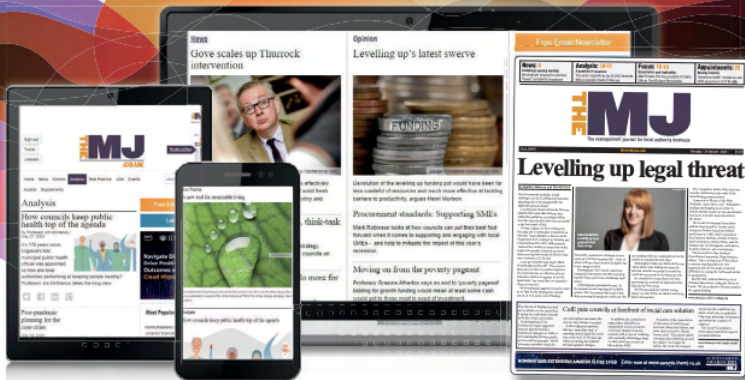
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To find out more contact either **James Smith** at [james@spacehouse.co.uk](mailto:james@spacehouse.co.uk) / 07545900599  
or **Brad Harrison-Thompson** at [brad@spacehouse.co.uk](mailto:brad@spacehouse.co.uk) / 07922420987

# **Best Creative Concept Recruitment Campaign**

This award recognises a creative and impactful recruitment campaign that has successfully attracted and engaged talent. Entries should demonstrate a clear concept and provide evidence of measurable outcomes.

## **SHORTLISTED**

**Fostering Southwest and Penna**

**Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust**

**Salford City Council**

**Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council**



**THE MJ**

## JUDGES COMMENTS

**Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council** impressed judges with a **highly effective and innovative partnership approach** to supporting people into employment, delivering a comprehensive wraparound programme that addresses real barriers to entry.

The *Community Recruitment Events* campaign reimaged traditional recruitment by creating an **inclusive, community-led experience**, tackling issues such as digital exclusion, low confidence and financial hardship. Delivered in accessible venues and supported by a wide range of partners, including the Department for Work and Pensions, the initiative brought together employers, support services and residents in a coordinated and welcoming environment.

Judges praised the programme's **clear understanding of participant challenges**, alongside its commitment to **training managers as well as candidates** and embedding inclusive practices. Thoughtful innovations, such as the introduction of a "Quiet Hour," demonstrated a strong focus on accessibility and responsive design.

Supported by **strong, inclusive communications and effective use of media channels**, the campaign successfully engaged a broad and diverse audience. The impact was both clear and measurable, with significant attendance and outcomes including job offers, apprenticeships, training placements and wider community benefits.

Overall, the programme stood out for its **collaborative delivery, innovative approach and tangible results**, making a meaningful and lasting difference within the community.

**Best Creative Concept  
Recruitment Campaign**

**WINNER**

**Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council**

**Highly Commended**

**Fostering South West and Penna**

**THE MJ**

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## **Best Candidate Experience**

This award recognises an innovative and inclusive approach to recruitment and selection that delivers a positive and engaging experience for candidates. Entries may showcase a specific campaign or an organisation-wide approach, demonstrating clear benefits for both candidates and the organisation.

### **SHORTLISTED**

**Connect2Hackney / London Borough of Hackney**

**Real World Group & The Christie NHS Foundation Trust**

**Royal Borough of Kingston and London Borough of Sutton**

**SIS, The Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) with Penna**

**Southwark Council**

**Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council**

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money  
matters**

## JUDGES COMMENTS

**SIS, The Secret Intelligence Service (MI6), in partnership with Penna**, delivered a **highly impactful and innovative approach to improving diversity and inclusion** within a traditionally complex and secretive recruitment process.

Recognising the barriers faced by women and candidates from ethnic minority backgrounds — including lack of transparency, stereotypes and imposter syndrome — the campaign reimagined the candidate journey. By increasing touchpoints, providing greater support and building confidence at every stage, it transformed what was once a daunting process into a more **accessible, engaging and inclusive experience**.

Judges praised the campaign's **strong employer branding** and the use of **positive action initiatives** to challenge long-standing perceptions and traditional recruitment approaches. The results were both **tangible and measurable**, with improved attraction of under-represented groups, reduced candidate attrition, and a significantly enhanced candidate experience.

While focused in scope, the initiative stood out for its **creativity, clarity of purpose and ability to drive meaningful, lasting change**.

## **Best Candidate Experience**

**WINNER**

**SIS, The Secret Intelligence Service (MI6)  
with Penna**

**Highly Commended**

**Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council**

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# **Best Organisation Development Programme**

This award recognises an outstanding OD programme that has driven continuous improvement and delivered measurable benefits for services, customers, and communities—from strategy and implementation through to evaluation and ongoing development. benefits for both candidates and the organisation.

## **SHORTLISTED**

**Islington Council**

**London Borough of Barking and Dagenham**

**London Borough of Sutton**

**Norfolk County Council**

**Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames**

**Salford City Council**

## JUDGES COMMENTS

**Salford City Council** was recognised by judges as a **worthy winner**, demonstrating clear and lasting impact on communities through its *Step into Salford* programme.

This pioneering organisational development initiative is transforming how the council creates **inclusive employment pathways** for residents facing barriers to work. Co-designed with local communities, including young adults, care leavers and partner organisations, the programme takes a **holistic and innovative approach** to recruitment and workforce development.

Judges highlighted the programme's **tangible outcomes**, including placing individuals into meaningful roles, generating significant social value, and equipping managers with the skills to support inclusive recruitment. Its focus on **breaking down systemic barriers** and embedding equality has driven both immediate results and long-term cultural change.

More than a recruitment initiative, *Step into Salford* is a **catalyst for wider transformation**, influencing city-wide priorities and positioning the council as an employer of choice. The programme stands out for its **sustainable impact, community focus and commitment to social mobility**, creating real opportunities and changing lives across Salford.

**Best Organisation  
Development Programme**

**WINNER**

**Salford City Council**

**Highly Commended**

**London Borough of Sutton**

# Best use of Data and Technology Award *Sponsored by Matrix*

At Matrix, we're proud to be a long-standing partner of the PPMA, supporting the vital work in championing excellence and innovation across public service HR.

We are especially pleased to sponsor **Best Use of Technology and Data Award** at this year's PPMA Excellence in People Management Awards. A category that recognises organisations using data and digital tools not just to improve operations, but to deliver real, meaningful impact for their workforce and communities.

Harnessing technology and data in public services is central to our own mission at Matrix – helping organisations build smarter, more agile workforces that are fit for the future. Through our solutions, we support local authorities and public bodies to overcome workforce challenges, unlock potential, and connect more people to work.

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#PPMAHR2026



# **Best use of Technology and Data**

This award recognises how organisations have effectively used data or technology to improve service delivery and/or workforce performance. This may include the implementation of new systems, tools, or innovative approaches that have delivered measurable impact.

## **SHORTLISTED**

**Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority**

**Leicester City Council**

**Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)**



## JUDGES COMMENTS

**Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority** was recognised by judges for delivering a **clear, impactful and well-evidenced transformation** in workforce systems through the implementation of IRIS Cascade.

In response to rapid organisational growth and increasing operational risk, the Authority replaced fragmented manual processes with a **scalable, data-driven HR and payroll solution**. This enabled a step change in organisational effectiveness, supporting stronger governance, improved compliance and enhanced workforce planning.

Judges were particularly impressed by the **measurable outcomes achieved**, including significant efficiency gains in payroll processing, automated workflows for key compliance activities, and the introduction of **real-time dashboards** to support proactive decision-making. These improvements have strengthened audit readiness and increased leadership confidence in workforce data.

The programme stood out for its **structured approach to implementation**, with a strong focus on engagement, user-centred design and sustainable adoption. While not the most innovative in concept, the initiative delivered **substantial and practical improvements**, enabling the organisation to manage growth more effectively and release capacity for higher-value HR activity.

Overall, this entry demonstrated **clear strategic alignment, strong delivery and tangible organisational impact**, making it a deserving winner.

# **Best use of Technology and Data**

**WINNER**

**Cambridgeshire and Peterborough  
Combined Authority**





# Congratulations to all the winners

Indeed is the leading UK job site<sup>1</sup> and a global hiring and matching platform. We connect jobseekers with public sector opportunities. Our simple and powerful tools help you source, screen, and hire faster, supporting the UK public sector in creating efficient talent attraction strategies.

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<sup>1</sup> SimilarWeb, Total Visits, June 2024

# **Best Workforce Transformation / Change Initiative**

This award recognises organisations that have successfully led workforce transformation, delivering improved services for customers and communities while enhancing the employee experience. Entries should demonstrate effective engagement, change management, and measurable impact.

## **SHORTLISTED**

**Buckinghamshire Council**

**Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS)  
Gloucestershire County Council**

**London Borough of Hounslow**

**Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council**

**Runnymede Borough Council and Real World Group**

The Indeed logo is displayed in blue text within a white circular background. The logo consists of a stylized blue 'i' with a curved line above it, followed by the word 'indeed' in a lowercase, sans-serif font.

## JUDGES COMMENTS

**Runnymede Borough Council, in partnership with Real World Group,** delivered a **transformational, whole-system approach** to organisational development, achieving one of the most significant turnarounds in local government within a 12-month period.

Faced with a Best Value Notice highlighting serious concerns around leadership, culture and governance, the Council implemented a **highly adaptive, insight-driven programme** that placed workforce engagement and inclusive leadership at its core. Judges praised the **breadth of organisational reach and depth of systemic change**, spanning leadership capability, cultural renewal and strategic alignment.

The programme stood out for its **flexibility and responsiveness to real-time data**, embedding continuous listening and empowering employees to shape the future culture. Strong cross-organisational commitment, leadership visibility and collaboration — including with Trade Unions — supported a unified and inclusive approach to change.

The results were **compelling and externally validated**, with the Best Value Notice lifted within 12 months, improved employee engagement, strengthened leadership confidence and highly positive feedback from the Local Government Association. The initiative has established a new cultural baseline, embedding sustainable behaviours and continuous improvement across the organisation.

Overall, this entry demonstrated a **comprehensive, impactful and sustainable transformation**, setting a benchmark for organisational development and cultural change within the public sector.

**Best Workforce Transformation /  
Change Initiative**

**WINNER**

**Runnymede Borough Council and  
Real World Group**

**Highly Commended**

**Rhondda Cynon Taf  
County Borough Council**

The Indeed logo is displayed in blue text within a white circular background. The word "indeed" is written in a lowercase, sans-serif font, with a blue arc above the letter "i".

**indeed**



## Putting people first is always a **winning** strategy.

We're proud to sponsor the **Best Health & Wellbeing Initiative** award, recognising organisations that put people at the heart of what they do. Supporting health and wellbeing isn't just good practice, it's essential to building resilient, high-performing and supportive workplaces.

This award celebrates those making a real difference, driving positive change and literally improving lives. We couldn't be more thrilled to champion organisations who are shaping healthier working environments where their people can flourish.



# Best Health & Wellbeing Initiative

This award recognises a health, safety, and/or wellbeing initiative that has delivered a significant positive impact on workforce engagement, commitment, and overall wellbeing, through creative and innovative approaches.

## SHORTLISTED

**Leicester City Council**

**London Borough of Harrow**

**Norfolk County Council**

**Walsall Council**

**Westmorland and Furness Council**

**Wigan Council**

The logo for Tile Hill, featuring the text "TILE HILL" in a bold, sans-serif font. The letter "I" in "HILL" is replaced by a stylized human figure with a green head, a blue body, and a red base, all within a circular frame.

**TILE HILL**

## JUDGES COMMENTS

Norfolk County Council was recognised as the clear winner for its Workplace Wellbeing Strategy 2023–2026, delivering a comprehensive and transformative approach to employee health and wellbeing.

Developed through extensive staff engagement and supported by strong Executive leadership, the strategy has shifted the organisation from a reactive approach to a proactive, structured and evidence-based framework. Judges praised the clear strategic vision, alignment with HSE benchmarks, and the measurable, long-term impact demonstrated across the workforce.

The initiative brings together a wide range of accessible resources and support, including e-learning, wellbeing sessions, Mental Health First Aid networks and the highly effective 'My Wellbeing Plan', which supports employees with health conditions, disabilities and caring responsibilities. Strong communication channels and high levels of engagement have ensured excellent reach across the organisation.

By embedding wellbeing into leadership behaviours, policies and everyday practice, Norfolk County Council is creating a culture where employees are supported to thrive, feel valued and perform at their best. The strategy stands out for its innovation, inclusivity and sustained impact, setting a benchmark for workplace wellbeing across the public sector.

# **Best Health & Wellbeing Initiative**

**WINNER**

**Norfolk County Council**

**Highly Commended**

**Westmorland and Furness Council**

**TILE HILL**





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# **Best Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Programme / Initiative**

This award recognises organisations or partnerships that have fostered a diverse, equitable, and inclusive culture across their workforce and/or wider community. It celebrates initiatives that support the attraction, retention, and development of diverse talent, as well as collaboration and engagement that drive meaningful, lasting impact.

## **SHORTLISTED**

**Buckinghamshire Council**

**CMP Solutions on behalf of The King's Fund**

**London Borough of Hackney**

**London Borough of Newham**

**Salford City Council**

**Westmorland and Furness Council**

**Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council**

## JUDGES COMMENTS

**London Borough of Newham** delivered an outstanding and impactful initiative through its **Developing Diverse Leaders (DDL) programme**, a flagship equality, diversity and inclusion intervention designed to address under-representation at senior levels and drive meaningful cultural change.

Developed in response to workforce data, the programme takes a **targeted and strategic approach** to removing systemic barriers to progression, supporting high-potential employees from under-represented backgrounds at a critical stage in their careers. Judges praised the **strong alignment with organisational priorities**, as well as the visible commitment from senior leadership to embedding inclusive leadership as a core capability.

The nine-month programme combines **experiential learning, peer coaching and strategic project work** within a psychologically safe, trauma-informed environment. This innovative approach enables participants to build confidence, challenge imposter syndrome and develop the skills needed to succeed in senior leadership roles.

Judges were particularly impressed by the **clear and measurable impact**, with significant increases in confidence to apply for senior roles, alongside tangible progression outcomes including promotions, acting-up opportunities and leadership of strategic projects. The programme also strengthened organisational trust, engagement and the visibility of diverse role models within leadership pipelines.

Overall, the DDL programme stands out for its **thoughtful design, strong delivery and demonstrable outcomes**, delivering both individual progression and wider cultural transformation. It represents **best practice in inclusive workforce development**, creating lasting benefit for employees, organisations and the communities they serve.

# **Best Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Programme / Initiative**

**WINNER**

**London Borough of Newham**

**Highly Commended**

**Buckinghamshire Council**

**Salford City Council**

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# CIPD



# **Best Employer & Trade Unions / Employee Partnership**

This award recognises effective and collaborative partnerships with trade unions and employee groups that deliver positive outcomes for the workforce, the organisation, and the communities they serve.

**SHORTLISTED**

**Oxfordshire County Council**

**Sheffield City Council**

**CIPD**

## JUDGES COMMENTS

**Oxfordshire County Council** was recognised by judges for delivering a **highly effective and progressive partnership** with UNISON, setting a benchmark for collaborative working across the public sector.

Built on **mutual respect, transparency and shared values**, the partnership places the voices of both staff and management at the heart of decision-making. Through structured engagement, co-designed working groups and alignment with the council's people and culture strategy, the initiative has created a **strong culture of trust, accountability and joint ownership**.

Judges highlighted the partnership as a **“blueprint” for effective trade union collaboration**, praising its forward-looking approach and its ability to move beyond reactive solutions to deliver **sustained, strategic change**. The co-designed model has strengthened relationships across the organisation and driven meaningful improvements in both policy and practice.

The impact has been clear and measurable, including reductions in recruitment appeals and long-term vacancies, increased diversity of applicants, and a significant decrease in agency reliance — delivering substantial financial savings alongside improved workforce outcomes.

Overall, this partnership stands out for its **evidence-based approach, strong leadership and tangible results**, demonstrating how effective collaboration with Trade Unions can deliver lasting organisational and service improvements.

**Best Employer & Trade Unions /  
Employee Partnership**

**WINNER**

**Oxfordshire County Council**

**Highly Commended**

**Sheffield City Council**

**CIPD**



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Caroline Wheller, Commercial Development Manager

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# **Best Learning & Development Award**

This award recognises the impact of learning and development in enhancing skills, capability, and performance, and its contribution to effective service delivery across individuals, teams, and the wider workforce.

## **SHORTLISTED**

**London Borough of Barking and Dagenham**

**London Borough of Newham Council**

**Norfolk County Council**

**Plymouth City Council**



**Commercial  
Services Group**

## JUDGES COMMENTS

**London Borough of Barking and Dagenham** was recognised by judges for delivering an **outstanding and impactful Learning and Development programme** within its Adults Care and Support service, demonstrating clear purpose, ambition and measurable outcomes.

The programme was co-designed with staff and delivers an **inclusive, flexible and blended approach to learning**, supporting clear career pathways and progression opportunities. Judges highlighted the strength of the programme's design, alongside its ability to respond directly to organisational need and improve both individual capability and service delivery.

Particularly impressive was the **tangible impact on vulnerable residents**, with evidence of improved safeguarding outcomes, reduced delays in complex casework and stronger multidisciplinary working. The initiative also demonstrated a **significant contribution to equality, diversity and inclusion**, alongside high levels of staff engagement and development.

Externally recognised by the Care Quality Commission as an **exemplar Learning and Development initiative**, the programme has been achieved without significant financial investment, instead building sustainability through the development of internal expertise and a strong learning culture.

Overall, this submission stood out for its **clear vision, strong evidence of impact and long-term sustainability**, delivering meaningful improvements for both the workforce and the communities they serve.

**Best Learning & Development  
Award**

**WINNER**

**London Borough of Barking and Dagenham**

**Highly Commended**

**Norfolk County Council**



**Commercial  
Services Group**

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## **Best Talent Programme**

This award recognises organisations that are developing future-ready talent through effective, evidence-based strategies. It celebrates approaches that enhance capability, support internal mobility, and address current and future workforce challenges.

### **SHORTLISTED**

**London Borough of Newham**

**Richmond and Wandsworth Councils and Bailey & French**

**Stevenage Borough Council**

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## JUDGES COMMENTS

**London Borough of Newham** demonstrated a **comprehensive and strategic approach to workforce and succession planning**, delivering a broad programme of talent management initiatives that address workforce challenges at every level of the organisation.

In response to significant skills shortages and a lack of succession planning, the council implemented an **evidence-led programme** aligned to its workforce strategy, focusing on building internal capability, strengthening leadership and creating sustainable talent pipelines. Judges praised the **breadth and depth of activity**, including the introduction of a new leadership framework, succession planning toolkit and cross-directorate Talent Working Group.

The programme has delivered **clear and measurable outcomes**, including a 22% reduction in agency reliance, alongside the successful launch of levy-funded learning programmes supporting over 150 learners and creating new apprenticeship and graduate opportunities. These initiatives have enhanced internal mobility, strengthened workforce capability and improved organisational resilience.

While judges noted a desire for further insight into long-term vacancy reduction, the submission stood out for its **scale, structure and tangible impact**, demonstrating a strong commitment to developing talent and future-proofing the workforce..

# **Best Talent Programme**

**WINNER**

**London Borough of Newham**

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# **Best Partnership / Collaboration**

This award recognises effective collaboration between two or more organisations that has delivered improved, joined-up services. It celebrates partnerships that demonstrate strong leadership, shared purpose, and measurable impact across organisational boundaries.

## **SHORTLISTED**

**Durham County Council, North East Ambulance Service, Durham Constabulary, County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust, Tees Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust, and County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service**

**Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA)**

**London Borough of Newham / Adecco**

**Sheffield City Council**

**Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)**

**West Midland Employers with Tribepad**

The Zellis logo is located in the bottom right corner of the page. It consists of the word "zellis" in a bold, lowercase, sans-serif font. Above the letter "i" is a small orange triangle pointing to the right. The logo is set against a white circular background that overlaps the bottom edge of the main white rounded rectangle.

## JUDGES COMMENTS

**West Midlands Employers, in partnership with Tribepad,** delivered an **innovative and highly effective approach to regional recruitment** through the WMTribe initiative.

Judges highlighted the programme's **strategic, partnership-led model**, moving beyond traditional supplier relationships to create a collaborative, shared service that delivers recruitment at scale. With strong governance, stakeholder engagement and a focus on continuous improvement, WMTribe has enabled organisations to modernise and streamline their hiring processes.

The impact has been **significant and measurable**, with thousands of hires supported, substantial reductions in administrative burden and recruitment costs, and notable improvements in time-to-hire and candidate experience. Judges praised the initiative for delivering **faster, fairer recruitment** while strengthening organisational resilience across the region.

WMTribe stands out as a **scalable and sustainable model**, demonstrating how partnership working can transform recruitment practices and deliver better outcomes for public services and the communities they serve.

## **Best Partnership / Collaboration**

**WINNER**

**West Midland Employers with Tribepad**

**Highly Commended**

**Sheffield City Council**

**Welsh Local Government Association  
(WLGA)**

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# **Best Public Sector HR & OD Team of the Year 2026**

This award recognises a public sector HR and OD team that has demonstrated outstanding impact beyond day-to-day practice. The winning team will be seen as a role model for excellence, showcasing innovation, collaboration, and measurable success.

## **SHORTLISTED**

**Solutions on behalf of University of Manchester**

**Leicester City Council**

**London Borough of Newham**

*The Strategic Centre for Talent, Learning and Organisational Development*

**Sheffield City Council**

**Somerset Council**

**Westmorland and Furness Council HR & OD Team**

**Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council**



## JUDGES COMMENTS

**Leicester City Council** impressed judges with a **highly innovative and impactful approach to workforce planning**, delivering significant improvements in both organisational efficiency and employee outcomes.

Faced with financial pressures and the risk of redundancy, the council implemented a **skills-based redeployment model**, prioritising internal talent and focusing on transferable skills to retain critical knowledge and capability. Judges praised the **strength of the data and evidence presented**, alongside the clear and compelling narrative demonstrating success.

Developed through strong cross-organisational collaboration, including partnership with Trade Unions, the initiative enabled more effective workforce planning, reduced recruitment costs and strengthened service continuity. The approach also enhanced employee morale by providing clear pathways for redeployment and career progression.

The results were **substantial and measurable**, including a 90% retention rate for at-risk staff and significant financial savings. This initiative stands out as an **exemplar of how investing in and developing the existing workforce** can deliver long-term benefits, supporting both organisational resilience and sustainable public sector careers.

**Best Public Sector HR & OD  
Team of the Year 2026**

**WINNER**

**Leicester City Council**

**Highly Commended**

**Sheffield City Council**



**GOLD**

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AWARD

**SILVER**

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AWARD

**BRONZE**

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AWARD

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## GOLD AWARD

The ultimate accolade of the evening, the Gold Award is presented to the overall winner, selected from all category winners. It recognises the entry that sets the benchmark for excellence in people management.

Silver and Bronze Awards are also presented to outstanding runner-up entries that have demonstrated exceptional impact and achievement.

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2026

## JUDGES COMMENTS

**Salford City Council** was recognised as the **overall Gold Award winner** for its *Step into Salford* programme — a truly outstanding and transformative initiative that sets a benchmark for inclusive workforce development across the public sector.

Judges praised the programme's **holistic, community-led approach**, co-designing solutions with local residents and partners to create meaningful and sustainable employment pathways. The introduction of an **Inclusive Recruitment Guide** and the innovative focus on **training over 200 managers in inclusive recruitment practices** demonstrated strong corporate commitment and a clear shift in organisational culture.

The programme delivers both **scale and impact**, directly addressing persistent vacancies and operational challenges while creating opportunities for those facing barriers to employment. With measurable outcomes including the recruitment of care-experienced individuals and young people into council roles, *Step into Salford* is generating significant social value and strengthening the local talent pipeline.

More than a recruitment initiative, the programme represents a **catalyst for systemic change**, embedding fairness, inclusion and social mobility at the heart of the organisation. Its highly transferable model offers a blueprint for other councils seeking to align workforce strategy with community impact.

Overall, *Step into Salford* stood out for its **innovation, scale, measurable outcomes and lasting impact**, making it a deserving recipient of the **Gold Award**.

**GOLD AWARD**

**WINNER**

**Salford City Council**

**SILVER**

**London Borough of Newham**

**BRONZE**

**Wigan Council**

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MANAGEMENT AWARDS**



**2026**

The background of the page is a vibrant pink color. It features a series of horizontal, wavy lines that create a sense of movement and depth. In the lower portion of the background, there are numerous small, white, star-like sparkles or glitter particles, adding a celebratory and dynamic feel to the design.

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