

LocalGovernment*Lawyer*

May 2023

Recruitment Market Report 2023



Welcome to the annual salary survey from *Local Government Lawyer*, based on 3373 permanent local authority legal jobs published on the *Public Law Jobs* board between 2017 and 2022.

With inflation on the rise, the impact of government budgets setting in and an ever-increasing demand for lawyers, 2022 provided more than its fair share of obstacles to those attempting to recruit for legal positions in local government.

Analysis of the vacancies, and their salaries, advertised over the last few years reveals that the job market for local government lawyers has recovered strongly since being torpedoed by the COVID-19 fallout. However, the growth in salaries has not kept pace.

The rate at which councils were recruiting in 2022 dramatically recovered, leading to a considerable jump in the overall number of vacancies advertised on *Public Law Jobs* in both 2021 and 2022, from just 484 in 2020 to 728 in 2021 and then jumping again to 906 in 2022. Job vacancies being advertised saw the greatest jump in April of 2022 – around the time of the final COVID-19 restrictions in the UK being lifted.

Demand grew most strongly for property, child protection and adult social care lawyers but the most striking growth has been for lawyers with governance experience, partly in response to a series of high-profile local authority governance failures (see Figure 3).

Applications

While the number of applications on *Public Law Jobs* (as measured by clicks on the Enquire/Apply button) has remained constant over past few years, many vacancies remain hard to fill.

The LGA's *Local Government Workforce Survey 2022* reveals that lawyers have maintained their status as one of the hardest occupations to both hire for and retain, alongside Social Workers, Planning Officers and HGV drivers.

Meanwhile, the number of locum roles advertised on *PLJ* has boomed as more lawyers look to agency roles to boost their earnings.

One key reason for this is that wage



Figure 1: Average salary by role 2022

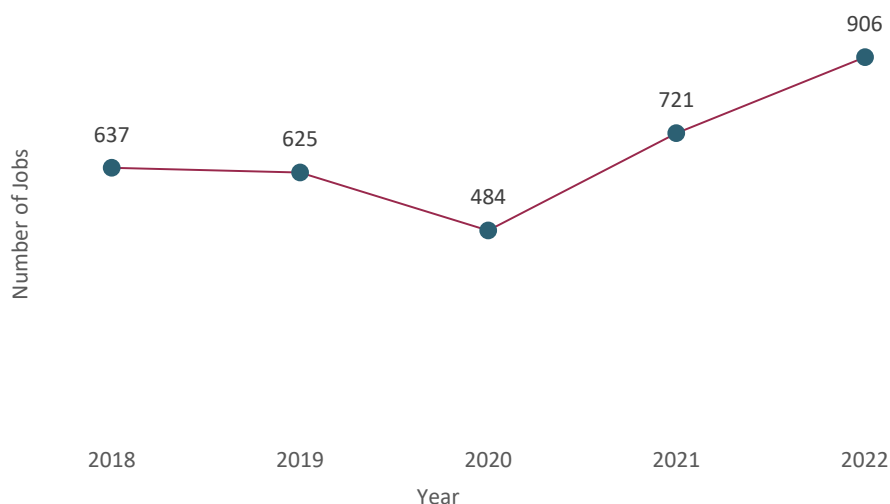


Figure 2: Number of jobs posted by year on Public Law Jobs

growth for local government lawyers has been minimal, especially when compared with private practice, where wages boomed in 2022. Taking the last five years into account, the increase in local government lawyer salaries equates to an increase of only 1.6% per year – compared to an average inflation rate of 4.6% over the same period.

The extent of the wage battle is summed up by Duane Cormell of Realm Recruit, who stated that 'In the early part of 2022 there was some silly money being thrown around'. This trend was driven by big US firms with the financial firepower to outmuscle other firms, but the effect was felt throughout the profession – in the case of regional firms, some have had to increase salaries by as

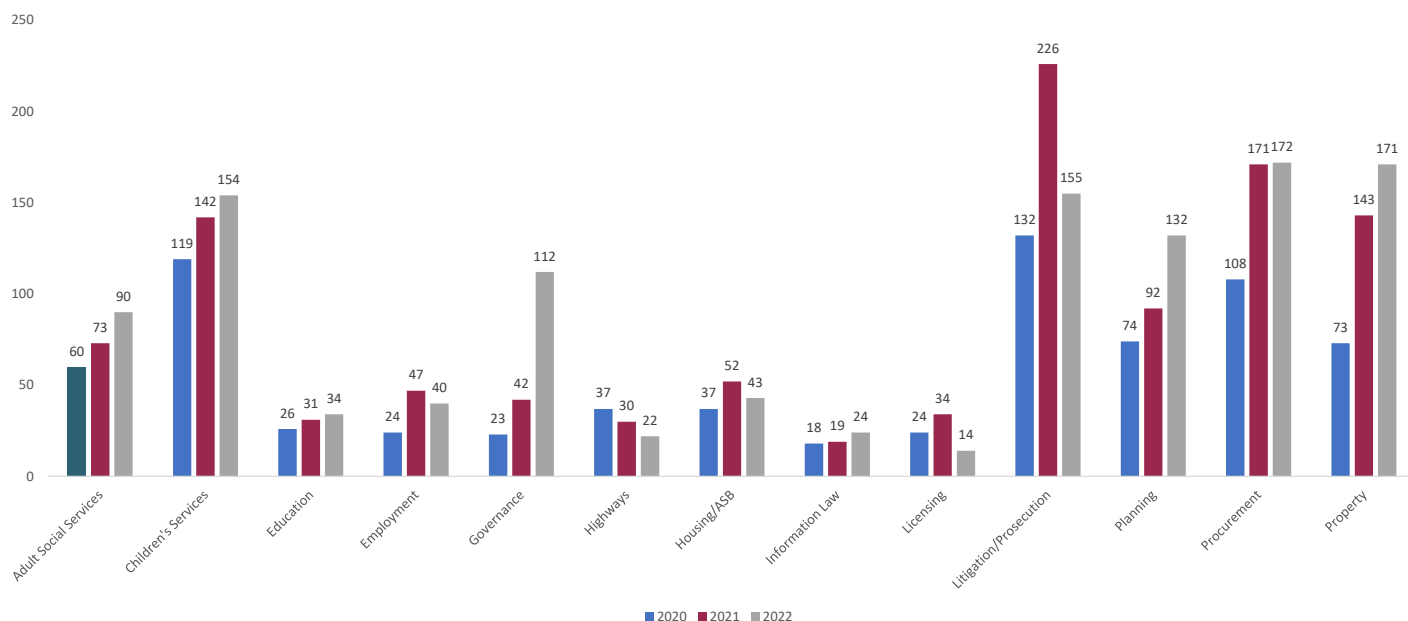


Figure 3: Number of vacancies by practice area

much as 20%.

According to the *Law Society Gazette*, the private sector pay increased by 7.4% across the legal industry, compared with an overall average of 5.4% across all sectors. However, some legal roles enjoyed much higher wage rises – and they were not the most senior roles. Pay levels for newly qualified solicitors in private practice rose by 14.6%; while salaries for solicitors with one year's PQE increased by 12.3%, and general counsel saw salaries rise by 8.7%.

Supplements to salary

Although wage growth remains unspectacular, the rate at which monetary supplements were included on job adverts grew significantly across the vast majority of specialisms in 2022, with 7% of jobs offering a supplement up from 2% of roles in 2021. Education lawyers benefited from the most dramatic increase, rising from 0% of roles advertised featuring a monetary supplement to 18%. Information Law specialists experienced the second-highest growth, with an eight-point rise from 8% in 2020 to 18% in 2022.

In the opposite direction, the percentage of childcare lawyers offered supplements declined sharply, with 2% of all positions advertised including supplements down from 8% in a field which our data suggests has seen a high proportion of supplements over past years.

The rate at which childcare roles were advertised also fell, with 17% of all roles advertised on *Public Law Jobs* relating to childcare law (compared with 25% in 2020

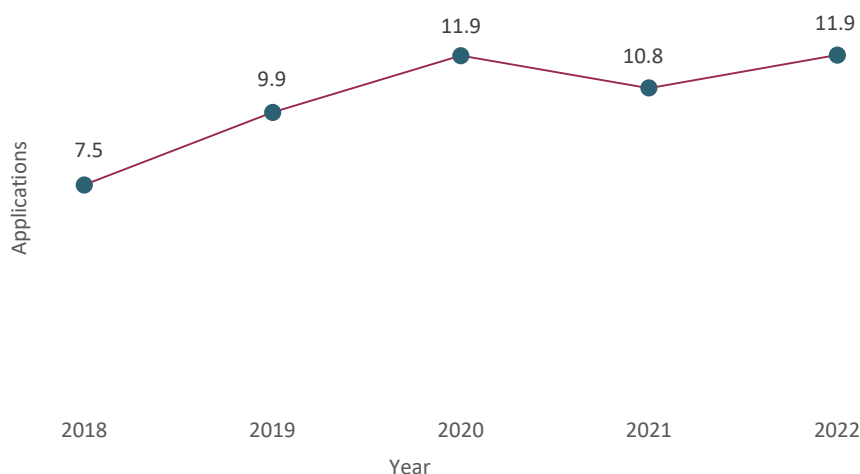


Figure 4: Average number of applications per job over five years (excluding head of legal, assistant directors and directors)



and 19% in 2021).

The rate that supplements were offered rose in four of the eight regions monitored last year, and the East Midlands maintained top spot at 19% of roles. Other regions saw steady growth of around 3 percentage points in the South West, the North West and the South East.

Compensating for the salary divide, London placed 7th when looking at the rate at which monetary supplements were offered for roles. Falling from 13% of roles including a supplement to only 4% in 2022, London is now ranked behind all the regions except the West Midlands.

Regional salary trends

The differential between salaries for lawyers in London and the South East and the rest of the country is relatively narrow but was consistent once again this year. In the highest paid region, London, qualified lawyers enjoyed salaries of between £46,279 and £54,008 – considerably higher than those in a qualified lawyer role in the North East, the lowest paid region this year.

The North East saw average salaries at between £36,321 and £39,454, averaging out to a difference of 27%. In 2019 and 2020 the gap between the lowest and highest paid regions (London and the South West) was considerably less, at 16% and 17% respectively.

Flexible Working

Perhaps the most significant development in the job market last year was the offering of flexible working options. Employers appear to have embraced offering flexible working as a part of the market, with 696 out of 906 jobs in 2022 advertised with a flexible working option – a total of 76% compared to only 46% in 2021.

Flexible working is less prevalent for more senior roles, but comparing application rates for lawyers at junior and mid-level roles, those offering flexible terms on average had two more applications than those without.

Storing up trouble

The number of training contracts has not recovered since COVID. Having peaked at 6,344 (including private practice) in 2018/19, the number has only fallen – to 5,495 in 2021. Of these, just 146 were in government departments and 69 in local government.

While some recovery is likely, it is unlikely to reach this peak again considering

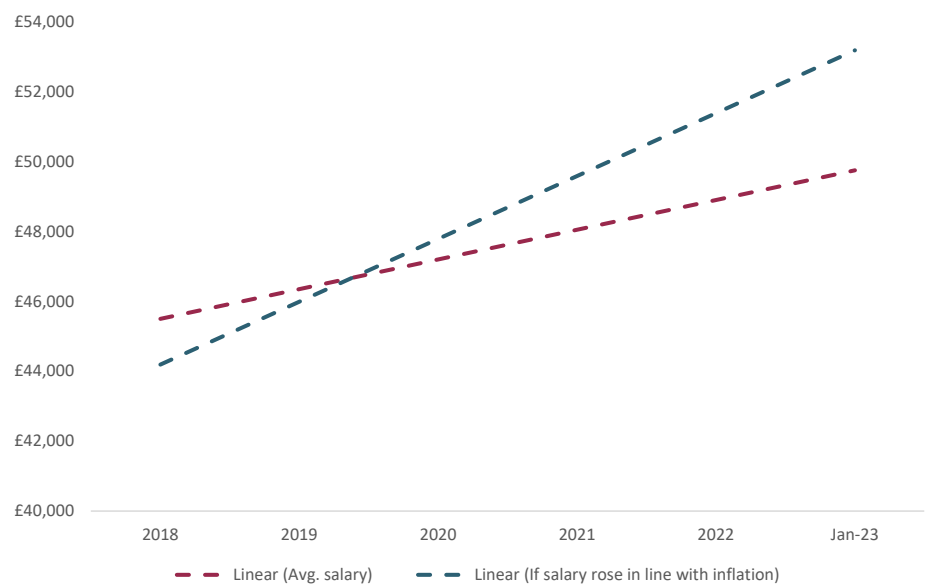


Figure 5: Salary increase compared to national inflation

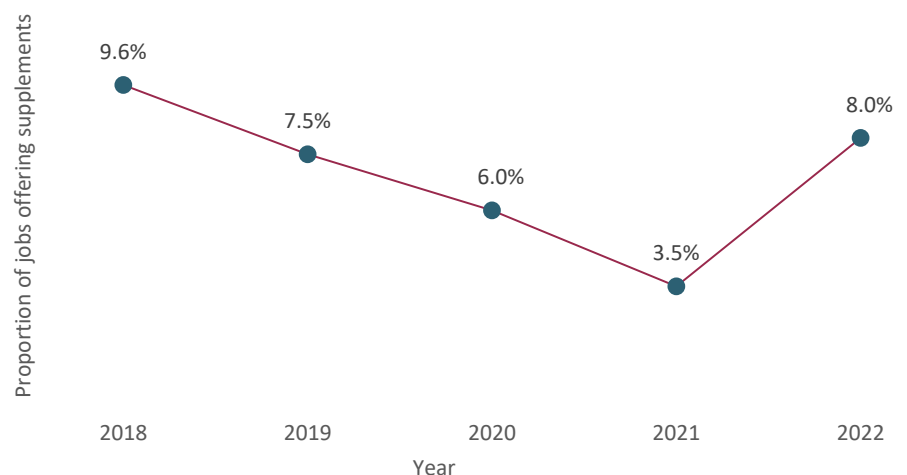


Figure 6: Proportion of jobs offering supplements over five years

the coming transition towards the new Qualifying Work Experience system which will take over completely by 2032.

Local authority training contracts offered were well below replacement rate before Covid, and the situation has got worse. Apprenticeships are on the rise (although many wouldn't be advertised on *Public Law Jobs*) but the route to full qualification is longer for legal apprenticeships, suggesting that the recruitment squeeze for local government lawyers is unlikely to ease anytime soon.

The number of councils wishing to hire trainee solicitors – the 'grow your own' solution to staff shortages – appears to fall year on year. Just 10 such roles were

advertised through *Public Law Jobs* in 2022, with 13 the previous year. Despite a rise from 2020, the frequency of these opportunities appears on a downward trajectory. As a result, application rates rose once more from the two-fold increase in 2020. An average of 44 people applied to each of these roles in 2022 (compared to 34 in 2020 and 18 in 2019).

With trainee recruitment falling by more than half, continued competition from the private sector, and wage stagnation, staffing problems in legal departments look set to remain for some time yet.

Harry Rodd is an Editorial Assistant at Local Government Lawyer.

Practice area		Legal Asst or Paralegal	Solicitor	Senior Solicitor	Principal	% of roles with financial supplement
Adult Social Services	Min	£26,560	£43,342	£43,521	£61,448	6%
	Max	£32,036	£48,882	£49,209	£73,135	
Children's Services	Min	£26,266	£41,417	£43,349	£53,734	2%
	Max	£30,161	£47,525	£51,262	£58,967	
Education	Min	£24,765	£42,559	£41,441*	£46,936	18%
	Max	£29,029	£46,779	£48,122*	£52,297	
Employment	Min	£25,017	£42,031	£47,671*	£50,537	3%
	Max	£28,073	£48,502	£55,699*	£55,248	
Governance	Min	£25,449	£52,478	£44,039	£49,233	7%
	Max	£27,925	£56,555	£49,831	£54,665	
Highways	Min	£20,043*	£38,819	£41,473	£44,054	5%
	Max	£22,129*	£42,333	£45,482	£47,557	
Housing/ASB	Min	£32,804	£39,367	£51,908	£34,373*	5%
	Max	£35,233	£44,756	£59,882	£50,671*	
Information Law	Min	£31,475*	£40,619	£44,582	£35,432	8%
	Max	£34,202*	£45,922	£53,251	£38,154	
Licensing	Min	£29,577*	£42,870*	£40,578*	£61,082	7%
	Max	£32,910*	£45,922*	£43,570*	£71,270	
Litigation/ Prosecution	Min	£28,273	£41,185	£44,617	£46,465	5%
	Max	£31,939	£47,929	£50,747	£54,215	
Planning	Min	£28,719	£42,943	£44,093	£43,866	9%
	Max	£30,106	£48,256	£50,621	£49,830	
Procurement	Min	£29,109	£43,352	£44,753	£48,262	9%
	Max	£32,528	£49,001	£49,400	£53,606	
Property	Min	£26,896	£41,533	£41,761	£46,777	8%
	Max	£30,011	£47,935	£47,509	£50,650	

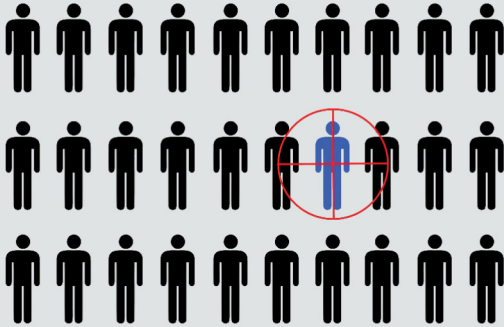
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the best candidates*



Finding and recruiting the best lawyers - those with the experience, background and skills to make a contribution from day one - is harder than ever and set to become more difficult still.

As the dedicated jobs board for *Local Government Lawyer*, *Public Law Jobs* provides a unique opportunity to reach thousands of potential applicants for your vacancies, including the all-important 'passive' candidates, at highly competitive rates.

- **Reach thousands of local government lawyers.** Vacancies are prominently profiled throughout the *Local Government Lawyer* website (36,000 unique visitors per month), its email newsletters (10,000+ subscribers) and through *Public Law Jobs* (4,000+ unique users per month). All vacancies are also distributed to our 4000 LinkedIn connections and 2000 Twitter followers.
- **Get your vacancies in front of 'passive' potential candidates** that aren't actively looking at jobs boards by prominently displaying your job vacancies alongside our market-leading editorial material.

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