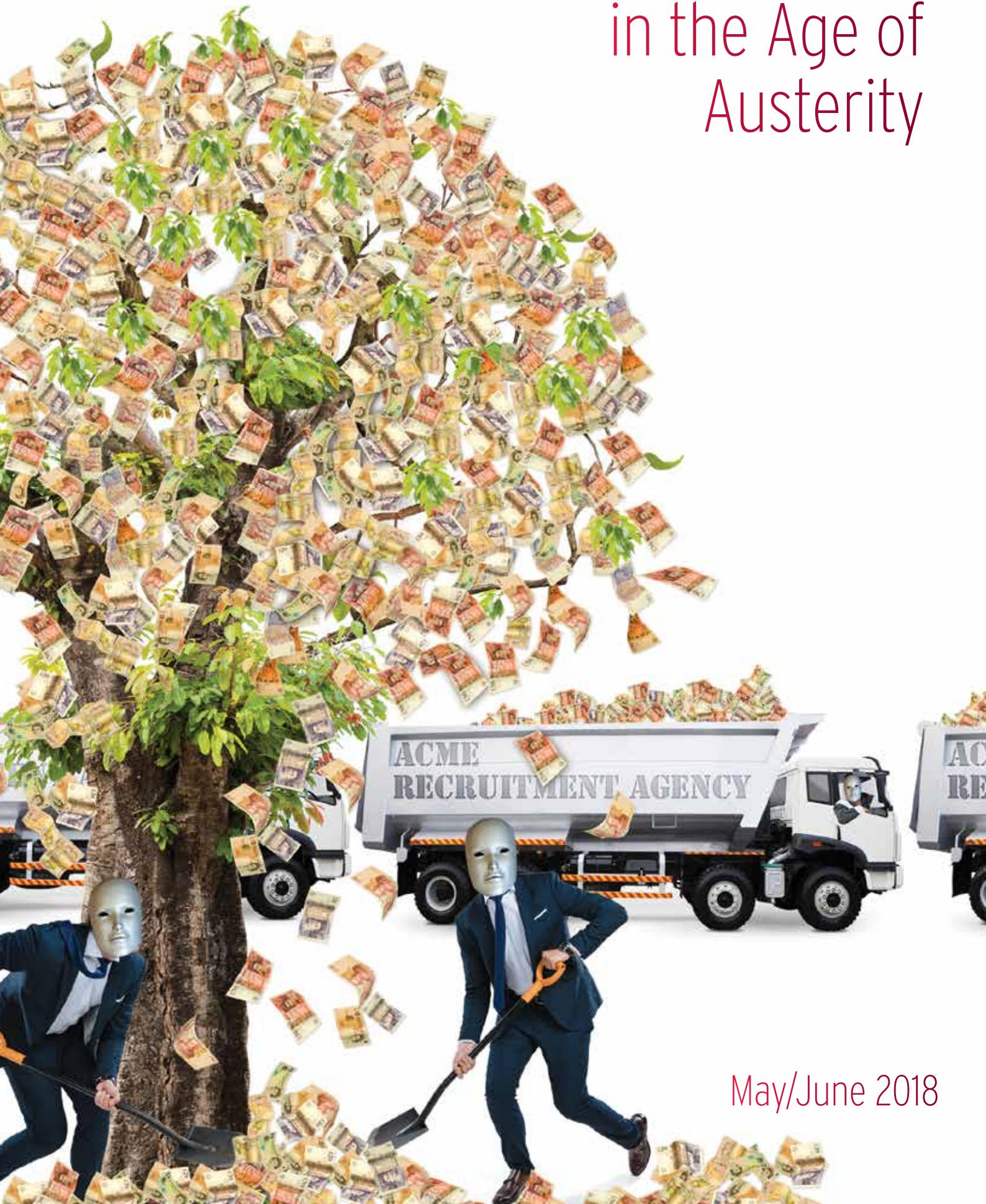


Agency Boom in the Age of Austerity



May/June 2018

Contents

Executive Summary

Agency Boom in the Age of Austerity

Northern Ireland Housing Executive	1
Health and Social Care	5
Northern Ireland Civil Service	9
Local Government	15
Education Authority	37
Libraries NI	41
Overview	45



John McVey, NIPSA Policy and Research

Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance

Headquarters

54 Wellington Park
Belfast
BT9 6DP

Regional Office

30 Great James Street
Derry
BT48 7DB

© Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance 2018

Executive Summary

Introduction

At the end of 2016, NIPSA published a report looking at the scale and cost of the deployment of agency staff in three areas of the public sector – the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Health/Social Care and the Northern Ireland Civil Service¹. This document updates the figures for these employers and enhances it with discussion of data from Local Government, Libraries NI and the Education Authority's Headquarters/regional offices.

In our original document we challenged the high rhetoric of the Northern Ireland Executive referring to “world class” public services yet presiding over the expediency and economic re-structuring of “insecurity as policy” that our research revealed. This meant while the language of austerity preached that “there is no money” and cut the necessary strategic investment in staff and services, simultaneously, a huge transfer of public funds to private sector agency providers continued across all sectors.

Data Gaps

We accept at the outset that in terms of data there are comparative problems both within and between sectors in terms of: the timelines for which data is stored (for example 12 month periods captured by agencies versus the financial year in local government); how data is defined, and how transparent it is to the general public. In terms of the latter point this meant that we worked from documents in the public domain and information provided on request either through normal negotiating means or through Freedom of Information requests.

A magic money tree for agencies?

The thousands of agency staff deployed and the overall costs that our research has revealed are striking enough in relation to the individual sectors we examined – particularly those such as the Northern Ireland Civil Service after Departmental re-structuring or local government (post-Review of Public Administration) that, in theory, are through their “reform” phase. What is more shocking is when we add these post-2010 costs from across the public sector together. See Table 1.

¹ See <https://www.nipsa.org.uk/NIPSA-in-Action/Policy-and-Research/Insecurity-as-Policy> December 2016.

Table 1 Total agency spend on Agency Workers by Sector

Sector	Total
Health and Social Care 2010-2015/6 (non-medical)	£201,500,000.00
Education Authority 2012-2016/7	£5,625,891.00
NIHE 2012-2016/7	£44,556,892.82
NI Libraries 2010-2015/6	£5,372,000.00
Local Government 2014-2017	£54,462,388.00
NICS Dec 11-Jan 16	£45,930,796.00
NICS Feb 16 - March 16	Not available
NICS April 16 - March 17	£11,795,147.00
Total	£369,243,114.82

This shows that, at the same time as we are being told there is no “magic money tree” to fund public services and during the years when the rhetoric of austerity has been at its loudest, tens of millions of pounds (and this an underestimate given data gaps and the fact this is only a few areas/years within the public sector) has been paid to private sector agencies. In the same way that, money which it was claimed by central government did not exist the day before a UK General Election can be surprisingly “found” in the days after it (for the purposes of securing a parliamentary majority), the artificial rationing of resources is clearly an economic choice. A different choice therefore, can and should be made. It is that funds should be available for a progressive, long-term and strategic operating model for public service delivery.

The move to a “casual” economy

The time line that the figures capture coincides with the initiation and operation of the public service Voluntary Exit Scheme. This means that the Northern Ireland Executive chose to make public servants (voluntarily) redundant at a time when staff shortages were/are sufficiently large to generate the numbers of agency staff/costs detailed above. While in operational terms we cannot rule out force of habit, strategic incompetence or expediency as factors that contributed to this approach (cutting full-time staff and deploying agency staff to fill the gaps they are leaving) a more important deliberate policy is in operation here. This is the acceptance that the price worth paying for the Executive’s stated desire to “re-balance the economy” is in effect a switch to an economy where any significant job growth that is evident is in “administrative services (which includes agency workers)”² with, as NERI comment, a wider trend in the Northern Ireland economy that sees “an increase in part-time and female employment and a shift toward service sector industries...[to] lower-paid, less secure employment.”³

2 See <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/business/economy-watch/why-the-jobs-weve-regained-may-not-benefit-everyone-35077364.html> 27/9/16

3 See http://www.nerinstitute.net/download/pdf/hours_and_earnings_in_ni_neri_wp17.pdf p.2.

In terms of this lower pay, far from the Programme for Government's rhetoric of meeting public need, the lack of long-term strategic investment in those whose public service meets our health needs left at least 10% of workers in health/social care on or below the Minimum wage and 37% of residential care workers below two-thirds of the Median Wage in 2013. This trend is confirmed in more recent work by NERI⁴ that highlighted the increasingly precarious nature of work across the public services.

Conclusion

The latest figures and the costs they reveal reinforce the point we made in our initial report of the urgent necessity, across the public sector for a strategic re-appraisal of staffing needs and a commitment from Government at whatever level to meet these needs. This also requires a rejection of current costly delivery models that continue to offer no more than a sticking plaster of expediency and agency worker exploitation.

This long-standing agenda, therefore, has to be opposed on the ground. Allied to our proposals for the development of fully devolved labour laws that would facilitate the restoration of trade union rights⁵ is the need to increase the trade union recruitment and organisation of all workers (agency or permanent) in order to increase our negotiating position. Furthermore, within negotiations we have to continue to raise the issue of appropriate staffing levels needed to deliver a quality service to the public and establish: what are the vacancy levels in terms of both number of staff and duration of vacancy? What are the agency numbers/duration of such contracts? What plans are there to fill these 'agency' posts with permanent staff? What management fees are being incurred by the use of recruitment agencies? In this way, whilst at the highest political level the Executive are content with this economic direction of travel, with an overt political agenda that treats job insecurity and diminished employment rights as policy, union activism must challenge every manifestation of this regressive approach.

Irrespective of the crisis within the Executive during 2017 and the possibility of formal restoration of devolution in 2018, the fact remains that the crisis in our public service delivery is much deeper than the latest political setback and is rooted in both a long-term history of economic underinvestment in Northern Ireland and the (neo-liberal) Treasury's failure to provide the funds necessary to strategically re-build a post conflict society⁶. The spine of such a society must be: free at the point of use (public sector delivered) public services that create the virtuous circle of economic regeneration for the regional economy in which they operate.

4 See <https://www.nerinstitute.net/download/pdf/20180108145212.pdf>

5 NIPSA research previously discussed the scale of unpaid overtime among public sector workers. (See [On line] Available: <http://www.nipsa.org.uk/NIPSA/media/NIPSA/PDFs/PR/Trojan-web-2.pdf> p.16. Similarly a recent survey from the Northern Ireland Association of Social Workers (NIASW).that found that "Nearly nine out of 10 of those [surveyed] said they worked extra hours with no extra pay". <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-37501731> 29/9/2016

6 See NIPSA response to the Department of Finance briefing on the NI Budgetary Outlook 2018-2020. [https://www.nipsa.org.uk/NIPSA/media/NIPSA/PDFs/NIA/Policy_and_Research/NIPSA-\(Jan-2018\)-response-to-Dept-of-Finance-Briefing-on-Budget-2018-2020-\(2\).pdf](https://www.nipsa.org.uk/NIPSA/media/NIPSA/PDFs/NIA/Policy_and_Research/NIPSA-(Jan-2018)-response-to-Dept-of-Finance-Briefing-on-Budget-2018-2020-(2).pdf)

Agency Boom in the Age of Austerity

Introduction

At the end of 2016, NIPSA published a report looking at the scale and cost of the deployment of agency staff in three areas of the public sector – the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Health/Social Care and the Northern Ireland Civil Service. This document updates the figures for these employers and enhances it with discussion of data from Local Government, Libraries NI and the Education Authority's Headquarters/regional offices.

In our original document we challenged the high rhetoric of the Northern Ireland Executive referring to “world class” public services yet presiding over the expediency and economic re-structuring of “insecurity as policy” that our research revealed. This meant while the language of austerity preached that “there is no money” and cut the necessary strategic investment in staff and services, simultaneously, a huge transfer of public funds to private sector agency providers continued across all sectors.

Data Gaps

We accept at the outset that in terms of data there are comparative problems both within and between sectors in terms of: the timelines for which data is stored (for example 12 month periods captured by agencies versus the financial year in local government); how data is defined, and how transparent it is to the general public. In terms of the latter point this meant that we worked from documents in the public domain and information provided on request either through normal negotiating means or through Freedom of Information requests.





**Northern Ireland
Housing Executive**

Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE)

In response to our request for information we were able to establish the extent of agency staff employed within the NIHE's Directorates from April 2012 – March 2017. Both in terms of the initial available figure in each Directorate and the overall totals, we see a significant rise, year on year, of the total number of agency staff. See Table 1.

Table 1: NIHE Agency Staff by Directorate

	April 12 to March 2013	April 13 to March 2014	April 14 to March 2015	April 15 to March 2016	April 16 to March 2017
Housing Services	103	136	189	233	192
Asset Management	54	61	62	64	57
DLO	36	90	129	114	118
Regional	29	45	48	76	45
Housing Benefit (HB)	48	75	91	96	102
Finance	11	10	9	19	17
Corporate Services	11	13	19	26	27
Corporate Management	-	1	2	3	3
Total	292	431	549	631	561

We were interested to examine the length of time for which agency staff were employed by the NIHE. The figures released to us show that 241 agency staff were employed for more than 2 years, 128 staff were employed for less than 2 years. (This figure includes the 192 agency staff employed for less than one year) – see Table 2.

Table 2: NIHE Agency Staff Duration of Employment by Directorate

Area	>2 Years	<2 Years	<1 Year	Total
Asset Management	37	8	12	57
Corporate Management	-	2	1	3
Corporate Services	11	9	7	27
DLO	64	7	47	118
Finance	3	5	9	17
Housing Benefit	43	14	45	102
Housing Services	65	67	60	192
Regional Service	18	16	11	45
Total	241	128*	192	561

*(excludes <1 yr)

This staffing model involves the expedient use of agency staff provided by private sector agencies. These agencies, therefore, underwritten by public funds, benefit from the ideologically driven financial strait-jacket of austerity that public services/servants continue to endure. The price we pay for such an approach is considerable. Within the NIHE for example, we see a spend of over £44m between April 2012 and March 2017 with £11.7 million spent in both the financial years 2014/15 and 2015/16 alone. See Table 3.

Table 3: NIHE Total Costs of Agency Staff Use

Directorate	Apr 2012 to Mar 2013	Apr 2013 to Mar 2014	Apr 2014 to Mar 2015	Apr 2015 to Mar 2016	Apr 2016 to Mar 2017
Landlord Services	£2,065,882.51	£5,158,123.68	£8,251,191.79	£7,910,701.46	£7,287,703.23
Regional Services	£127,056.03	£485,199.56	£948,333.76	£1,322,850.48	£939,603.68
Benefit Admin (HB)	£421,215.27	£937,915.56	£1,561,778.63	£1,513,162.28	£1,563,863.81
Finance	£137,476.92	£141,725.09	£165,309.40	£285,628.95	£645,970.26
Corporate Services	£121,875.43	£444,245.34	£619,306.70	£615,482.81	£531,509.79
Corporate Management	-	-	£162,441.00	£123,009.30	£68,330.01
Total	£2,873,506.16	£7,167,209.23	£11,708,361.28	£11,770,835.28	£11,036,980.87

In terms of the total “management fees” paid to recruitment agencies by the NIHE and the percentage of total “agency spend” this represents, we see costs of well over 200k a year between 2013-17 with over £280k paid out in 2014 alone - see Table 4.

Table 4: Agency Fees in NIHE

Year	Management Fee	% of Agency Spend
2013/14	£217,394.58	3.53
2014/15	£282,672.35	2.79
2015/16	£244,771.08	2.17
2016/17	£208,562.25	2.11





**Health and
Social Care**

Health and Social Care

NIPSA contacted the Health Trusts to establish the cost and extent of agency employment. Responses to this request were, to say the least, patchy in terms of responses being slow or in some cases failing, to respond at all. At this stage for the sake of completeness however we can at least explore the fullest data on this sector that is in the public domain. If, for example, we look at the evidence from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to the NHS Pay Review Body that reported in 2017,¹ we can see the cost of agency/locum staff over the six financial years between 2010/11 and 2015/2016. See Table 1.

Table 1: Agency/Locus Spend (including locums) 2010-11 – 2015-16² (£m)

Agency Spend (includes Locums)	2015/6						% Increase
	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	
Medical and Dental	£23.6	£23.1	£32.4	£32.6	£38.5	£46.4	20.5%
Nursing and Midwifery	£6.9	£8.6	£9.9	£11.1	£12.1	£15.8	30.7 %
Professional and Technical	£1.2	£2.4	£4.9	£4.0	£3.0	£3.6	19.2%
Administration and Clerical	£5.0	£6.6	£10.9	£10.8	£10.6	£10.6	-0.1%
Support Services	£2.0	£2.8	£4.7	£5.3	£6.3	£7.8	24.0%
Social Services	£4.1	£4.6	£5.5	£5.8	£5.8	£7.5	28.8%
Other	£0.1	£0.1	£0.3	£0.1	£0.2	£0.1	-48.6%
Total	£43.0	£48.4	£68.7	£69.7	£76.5	£91.8	20.0%
Non Medical - Total	£19.4	£25.3	£36.2	£37.1	£38.1	£45.4	19.4%

As the table shows, agency costs have risen year on year. In addition, a key question raised by these figures relates to the lack of strategic coherence illustrated by them. For example, this sector requires planning and certainty to provide the platform for the health and social care we all need. While, of course, there will have to be some flexibility within the system, how can, for example, the agency spend in relation to "Admin and Clerical" double between 2010/11 and 2015/6? In this context it is little wonder that the sector can attract headlines such as "£400,000 a day for agency staff to plug chronic shortage in Northern Ireland."³ Although the NI Executive did not provide any vacancy data for the 2017 NHS Pay Review Body (NHSPRB), staff shortage is neither new nor short-term as is clear when we look at the extent and duration of long-term vacancies in the 2016 NHSPRB data. See Table 2 and Figure 1.

1 The NHSPRB themselves reported that "The Northern Ireland Executive were unable to provide us with their pay bill information". See [On line] Available: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/505949/54488_Cm_9210_NHS_PRB_2016_Print_Ready_NEW.PDF p.29

2 See [On line] Available: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/602312/58551_NHS_PRB_Print.pdf p. 38.

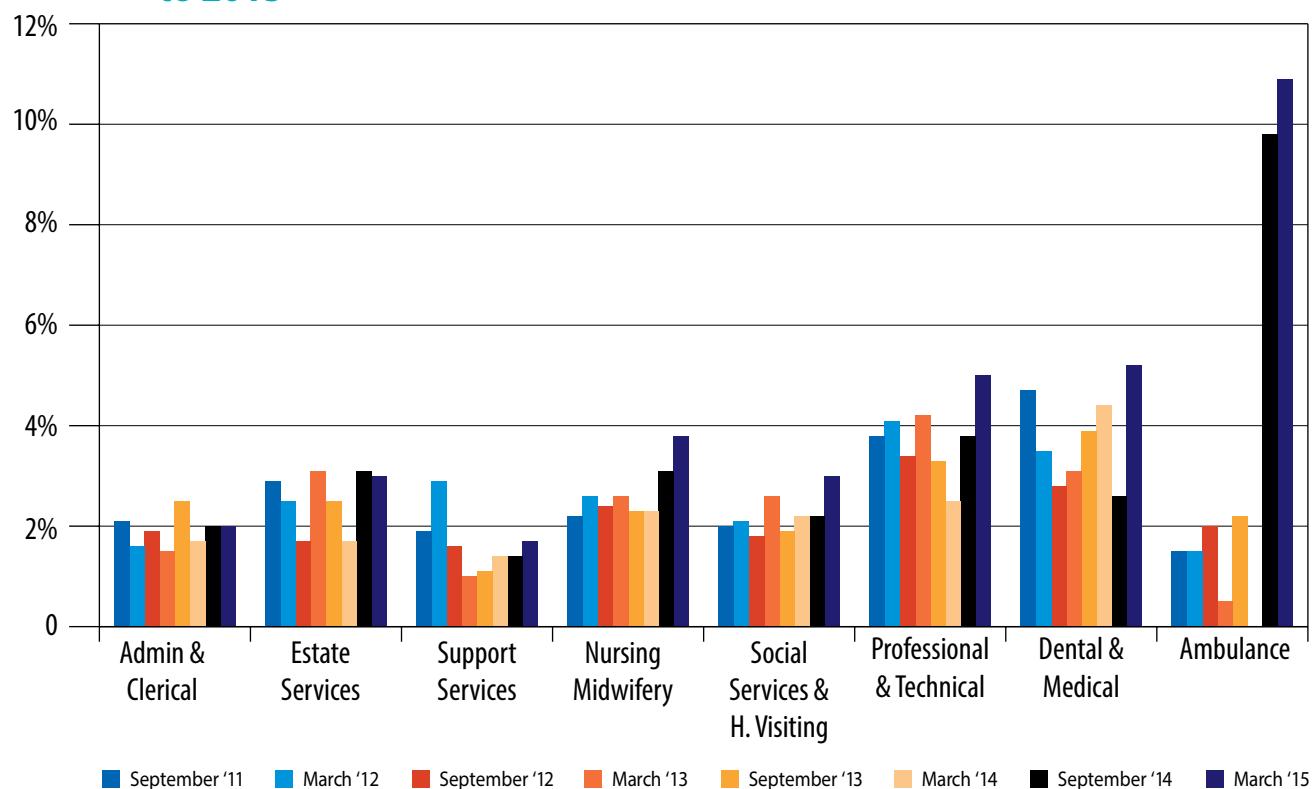
3 See [On line] Available: <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/hospitals-spend-400000-a-day-for-agency-staff-to-plug-chronic-shortages-in-northern-ireland-34547532.html> 17/3/2016

Table 2: Health and Social Care Long-term Vacancies (Whole-Time Equivalent)⁴

	Jun-04	Mar-05	Sep-05	Mar-06	Sep-06	Mar-07	Sep-07	Mar-08	Sep-08	Mar-09	Sep-09	Mar-10	Sep-10	Mar-11	Sep-11	Mar-12	Sep-12	Mar-13	Sep-13	Mar-14	Sep-14	Mar-15
Generic																						
Admin & Clerical	70.2	89.4	68.0	104.6	154.5	102.6	103.0	81.8	101.7	40.8	75.03	27.15	48.86	58.19	103.2	62	77.1	72.7	112.4	74.3	66.4	66.6
Estates	2.0	2.0	0.0	7.0	1.0	5.0	7.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2	1	1	11	4	10.0	8	8.0	14.0	6.0	3.0	5.0
Support Services	82.7	104.1	87.1	66.6	109.5	66.1	79.1	66.2	157.5	111.1	22.47	32.52	12.79	34.22	23.8	81.7	56.0	26.6	28.7	18.9	41.4	11.5
Nursing, Midwifery & Health Visiting	251.5	297.2	137.9	156.5	231.9	273.8	167.1	119.0	119.9	75.4	57.35	86.75	64.52	97.57	180.0	181.9	145.0	169.8	190.3	118.9	180.7	290.8
Social Services	40.2	43.4	11.6	37.7	21.8	21.2	24.9	43.7	46.6	46.8	55	35.41	38.91	47.01	65.7	60.6	69.9	151.1	96.7	56.3	66.2	96.0
Professional & Technical	108.5	136.7	93.1	95.1	92.8	89.6	81.7	61.5	50.1	29.3	45.7	33.6	43.58	73.92	101.8	109.7	93.5	158.4	127.1	41.1	85.2	107.0
Ambulance	68.0	0.0	25.0	57.0	43.0	49.0	44.0	20.0	46.0	0.0	61	12	48.53	3	10.0	8	0.0	4.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	124.1
Total	623.1	672.8	422.7	524.5	654.4	607.3	506.9	392.1	521.7	303.4	318.6	228.4	268.19	317.91	494.5	519.2	450.9	597.7	561.1	312.5	449.9	704.1

⁴ This is a sub-set of long term vacancy data.

Figure 1: Vacancy rates (FTE) in Northern Ireland by main staff group, 2011 to 2015⁵



This re-enforces the point made in our research on the much heralded Transforming Your Care initiative (See [On line] Available: http://www.nipsa.org.uk/NIPSA/media/NIPSA/PDFs/PR/tyc_long.pdf). We pointed out that all the visionary smoke and mirrors around the re-configuring of any public service is irrelevant without the necessary investment in staff and core resources. Without this, there are three damaging consequences. It undermines the existing public service, it allows the enemies of its ethos (i.e. the private sector and their apologists in government) to feed off a more disillusioned public willing to listen to the promises of a "new way of doing things" (including privatisation/part-privatisation) and it harms wider society which continues to experience the chipping away at the societal pillars that publicly funded, accountable, free at the point of use public services represent.

5 See [Online] Available: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/505949/54488_Cm_9210_NHS_PRB_2016_Print_Ready_NEW.PDF p.45



**Northern Ireland
Civil Service**

Northern Ireland Civil Service

At first glance the NISRA statistics on “temporary/casual employees, full-time Equivalent” in the civil service appear to show that the issue of agency deployment relates to specific work demands, largely within one department, the Department for Communities (the former DSD). See Table 1.

Table 1: Temporary/casual employees, Full-time Equivalent (FTE)¹

Department	1st July 2017			1st October 2017			Change on last quarter		Change on last year	
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Value	%	Value	%
DAERA	5	0	5	5	0	5	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
DfC	41	15	56	27	15	42	-14	-25.0%	-37	-46.8%
DfE	0	0	0	1	1	2	2	N/A	2	N/A
DE	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	N/A	0	N/A
DoF	5	4	9	10	4	14	5	55.6%	2	16.7%
DoH	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	N/A	0	N/A
DfI	6	0	6	5	0	5	-1	-16.7%	4	400.0%
DoJ	2	0	2	1	0	1	-1	-50.0%	0	0.0%
TEO	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	N/A	0	N/A
PPS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	N/A	0	N/A
Other*	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	N/A	0	N/A
Total	59	19	78	49	20	69	-9	-11.5%	-29	-29.6%

*Figures include staff in the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland, the Office of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland, and the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry Team.

However, these figures use a definition of employees as those “with no agreed expiry date or a fixed term contract of more than 12 months. Temporary/casual employees are those with a fixed term contract of twelve months or less, or employed on a casual basis.” This table, therefore, merely captures the numbers of staff whose contractual relationship is *directly* with the NICS. Beyond this and of greater significance in terms of the wider picture on casualisation are the figures that, as in Health, show a long-standing and significant use of agency staff where numbers are hidden by the formal employment relationship being between the worker and the employment agency. For example figures obtained by NIPSA that looked at the number of such workers employed under the old Departmental structures showed that, in any 12 month period between December 2011 and January 31 2016, there was only one occasion when less than 1000 (and this figure as high as 952) agency workers were in place. See Table 2.

1 [On line] Available: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/sites/nisra.gov.uk/files/publications/Quarter-3-Quarterly-bulletin-Oct-2017.pdf>

Table 2: NICS Total Agency Staff December 2011-January 2016

Year	Total Agency Staff
1 February 2015 – 31 January 2016	1090
1 February 2014 – 31 January 2015	952
1 February 2013 – 31 January 2014	1132
1 December 2011* – 31 January 2013	1242

**The contract commenced on 1 December 2011*

We also know the location of such staff during this period. See Table 3.

Table 3: NICS Total Agency Staff by Department December 2011-January 2016

Department	Number of Agency Staff Placed 1 December 2011* to 31 January 2013	Number of Agency Staff Placed 1 February 2013 to 31 January 2014	Number of Agency Staff Placed 1 February 2014 to 31 January 2015	Number of Agency Staff Placed 1 February 2015 to 31 January 2016
DFP	299	268	191	179
DOJ	126	123	86	129
DHSSPS	0	10	4	2
OFMDFM	35	22	25	89
DOE	418	282	181	81
DSD	153	212	265	403
DRD	29	44	37	19
DETI	2	4	3	4
DE	8	8	21	25
DEL	16	9	9	16
DARD	97	74	57	83
DCAL	51	61	64	46
NIO	8	15	9	14
Total	1242	1132	952	1090

**The contract commenced on 1 December 2011*

So what is the situation under the new Departments and within the framing of a financial year? This shows 812 agency staff placed during this period not including the "658 DWP paid agency workers during this period." See Table 4.

Table 4: Number of Agency staff by Department April 2016-March 2017

Department	Total
DE	39
DoH	0
DfI	204
DoF	208
TEO	10
DoJ/PPS	79
DfE	21
DAERA	92
DfC	159*
Total	812

*Does not include 658 DWP paid agency workers during the period.

In terms of the duration of placement, notwithstanding the inflation of the figures by the DWP funded agency workers, the numbers and duration across the new Departments is significant. See Table 5.

Table 5: Duration of Agency worker employment April 2016-March 2017

Department	>2 Years	<2 Years	<1 Year	Total
DE	0	39	39	78
DoH	0	0	0	0
DfI	0	63	54	117
DoF	10	75	66	151
TEO	0	8	7	15
DoJ/PPS	9	70	6	85
DfE	1	9	9	19
DAERA	0	90	84	174
DfC	1*	7**	8***	16
Total	21	361	273	655

*Plus 42 DWP paid agency workers. **Plus 246 DWP paid agency workers. ***Plus 174 DWP paid agency workers.

We previously reported that given the scale and duration of this use of agency staff, inevitably costs are high – never less than £9 million (sometimes as high as £12m) in the 12 month period of the agency's contractual relationship with the NICS. See Table 6.

Table 6: Total cost per year from December 2011-January 2016 spent on Agency staff by Department

Department	Total Charge 1 December 2011* to 31 January 2013	Total Charge 1 February 2013 to 31 January 2014	Total Charge 1 February 2014 to 31 January 2015	Total Charge 1 February 2015 to 31 January 2016
DFP	2,584,930.73	2,973,806.02	2,280,138.35	1,943,055.34
DoJ	1,172,973.81	1,305,635.92	1,143,140.11	1,230,566.88
DHSSPS	0.00	12,453.02	56,266.56	15,005.59
OFMDFM	188,012.80	251,541.79	375,527.47	864,802.63
DoE	6,254,102.39	2,547,581.73	1,202,602.54	418,206.46
DSD	2,355,336.91	2,919,210.48	2,355,724.04	3,806,190.03
DRD	348,969.12	481,625.99	296,717.63	152,659.21
DETI	4,076.72	37,202.81	51,469.55	46,892.16
DE	106,161.76	101,535.47	217,037.73	207,468.74
DEL	182,285.16	109,466.58	35,452.00	148,875.33
DARD	513,441.96	812,002.00	585,613.46	631,443.89
DCAL	418,937.72	312,703.55	332,687.72	278,318.16
NIO	250,515.56	323,440.21	233,088.00	453,897.13
Total	£14,379,744.64	£12,188,205.57	£9,165,465.16	£10,197,381.55

*The contract commenced on 1 December 2011

Again we are now able to look at the situation within the new Departmental structures and a *financial* year. This shows an annual figure of over £11.7m as well as well as the “£5.8m funded by DWP”. See Table 7

Table 7: Total Cost² on Agency Staff by New Department April 2016-March 2017

Department	Total £
DE	398,000
DoH	54,730
DfI	582,000
DoF	3,727,000
TEO	444,620
DoJ/PPs	1,875,556
DfE	185,978
DAERA	3,042,567
DfC	1,484,696*
Total	£11,795,147

*In addition there were costs of work which is funded by DWP (£5,818,676).

Finally in terms of costs the deliberate policy choice to save money on pay, pensions and long-term investment in staff coexists with the parasitic cost of the recruitment agencies that profit from this agenda. Despite such agencies being paid out of public funds, their costs are masked by the acceptance that their management fees can be withheld from the public record as they are “commercial in confidence” and treated, therefore, as “off-limits.” Our requests for data on this point also met this form of resistance.

² The NICS stated “Please note these figures include temporary, contract and agency staff. It is not possible to separate solely information relating to agency staff on the financial databases.”



Local
Government

Local Government

The following section looks at the issue of agency staff used across local government. In a number of 'new' councils, requests for information met with the difficulty of how the "legacy" councils from which they emerged retained, handled and released information to the new council and ultimately to ourselves. The councils are presented in alphabetic order followed by a summary of total agency staff/costs in local government for the period 2014-2017.

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council

The Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council provided information on the deployment of agency staff since the commencement of the Council on April 1 2015. This showed a total of 213 workers employed since then. The totals and areas in which they are employed is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Agency Staff by Council Area

Area	Total
Arts	13
Communications	5
Community Planning	19
Economic Development	2
Environmental Health	15
Finance and ICT	10
Governance	3
Human Resources	8
Leisure	92*
Property	6
Waste	40
Total	213

*(Majority are seasonal parks maintenance)

In terms of the duration of the retention of the agency staff, 17 have been with the Council for more than 2 years and 196 for less than two years (this includes the 156 agency staff employed for less than 1 year). See Table 2.

Table 2: Length of Agency Employment

Area	>2 Years	<2 Years	<1 Year
Arts	1	12	12
Communications	-	5	4
Community Planning	5*	14	14
Economic Development	-	2	2
Environmental Health	4*	11	7
Finance and ICT	-	10	8
Governance	-	3	3
Human Resources	-	8	6
Leisure	4	88	65
Property	-	6	2
Waste	3	37	33
Total	17	196	156

*(inc funded posts)

The Council informed us that they “do not hold details of the actual posts that required cover for more than 4 months.” They did, however, provide information on *areas* (by Department and Section) within the Council where cover was required. See Table 3.

Table 3: Council Area Requiring Over 4 month’s Cover 2015-2017

Community Planning	10
Economic Development	2
Property	4
Finance	5
Arts and Culture	6
Leisure	39
Waste	18

In terms of Council spend on agency workers Antrim and Newtownabbey provided the following. See Table 4.

Table 4: Agency Costs 2014-2017

Year	Cost
2014/15 Antrim Borough Council	£374,949
2014/15 Newtownabbey Borough Council	£467,138
2015/16 Antrim Borough Council	£1,452,294
2016/17 Newtownabbey Borough Council	£1,898,727
Total	£4,193,108

In terms of the spend for 2015/16 and 2016/17 this: “includes the use of agency staff for seasonal posts (£205,000) that legacy Councils would have employed directly in 2014/15. The material increase in costs in 2015/16 and 2016/17 relate to the opening of new facilities, increased opening hours and covering sickness absence, covering vacancies until structures are filled, secondments etc. The cost of agency staff accounted for 6% of all staffing costs for 2015/6 and 8% for 2016/7.”

Ards and North Down Borough Council

As with the information provided by other Councils, the data from Ards and North Down acknowledged that “full information” can be limited by the fact that the “new” Councils inherit the processes/contracts etc. of their predecessors. While this is understandable, more concerning in terms of the question of central coherence and financial control/oversight of spending is the comment from this council that, outside of the two main suppliers (Grafton and Diamond), “Human Resources...do not hold full details of agency workers supplied outside of the agency tender as HR are not always provided with this information as Line Managers may deal directly with agencies”. This operational possibility is also in evidence outwith local government.

The total number of agency workers within Ards and North Down between April 2014 - March 2017 (788) and the Council area within which they are employed is presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Total Agency Workers by Council Area 2014-2017

Area Employed	Total Number of Agency Workers
Community & Wellbeing	496
Environment	148
Finance & Performance	13
OD, Admin and CEO Office	53
Regeneration, Development and Planning	78
Total	788

The duration of the agency workers employment within Ards and North Down is shown in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Duration of Agency Worker Employment

	>2 Years	<2 Years	<1 Year
Community & Wellbeing	61	282	153
Environment	11	86	51
Finance & Performance	3	2	8
OD, Admin and CEO Office	9	24	20
Regeneration, Development and Planning	20	45	13
Total	104	439	245

This total cost of this employment is considerable – over £4.9 million from April 2014 – March 2017 and rising year on year within each of the financial years. See Table 7 below.

Table 7: Total Agency Worker spend April 2014- March 2017

Year	Total Cost
April 2014-March 2015	£1,361,117
April 2015-March 2016	£1,546,413
April 2016-March 2017	£2,060,374
Total	£4,967,904

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council

The overview of agency staff employed in the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council (ABC) and the areas within the Councils in which they worked is shown in Table 8. This captures the use of 116 agency staff employed between April 2014-March 2017.

Table 8: Agency staff by Council and Area Employed 2014-17

		April 2014-2017
Armagh		
Corporate Services		6
Environmental Health		3
Finance		3
Graphic Design		1
IT		1
Neighbourhood Services		7
Regeneration & Development		5
SGEHC		2
Total		28
Banbridge		
Corporate Services		7
Economic Development		1
Environmental Services		5
Regeneration		1
Total		14
Craigavon		
Building Control		3
Corporate Services		11
Chief Executive's		1
Development		10
Environmental Services		35
Leisure Services		5
Planning		9
Total		74
ABC Borough Council Overall Total		116

The duration of such employment is presented in Table 9. Only in Craigavon, during this period, were any agency staff employed for more than two years. The general local government pattern of employment for less than 2 years is also evident in ABC.

Table 9: Length of Agency Worker Employment 2014-17

		>2 Years	<2 Years	<1 Year
Armagh				
Corporate Services		-	6	6
Environmental health		-	3	3
Finance		-	3	3
Graphic Design		-	1	1
IT		-	1	1
Neighbourhood Services		-	7	7
Regeneration & Development		-	5	5
SGEHC		-	2	2
Total		0	28	28
Banbridge				
Corporate Services		-	7	7
Economic Development/Regeneration		-	2	1
Environmental Services		-	5	5
IT		-	-	
Leisure		-	-	
Regeneration		-	-	1
Total		0	14	14
Craigavon				
Building Control		-	3	2
Corporate Services		1	10	10
Chief Executive's		-	1	1
Development		-	10	10
Environmental Services		3	32	25
Leisure Service		-	5	5
Planning		-	9	9
Total		4	70	62
ABC Borough Council Overall Total		4	112	104

The information on cost spent on agency workers captures the previous cost from the “legacy” Councils and newly formed ABC. See Table 10. This shows total spend for the period 2014-17 as £1,238,758.78.

Table 10: Agency Costs 2014-17

Armagh	2014/15 (legacy)
Total	£138,383.00
Banbridge	2014/15 (legacy)
Total	£64,269.78
Craigavon	2014/15 (legacy)
Total	£427,024.00
ABC Borough Council (from 01.04.15)	2015/16
Total	£372,207
ABC Borough Council	2016/17
Total	£236,868
Total Costs 2014-17	£1,238,751.78

In terms of a management fee paid to recruitment agencies, ABC Borough Council state that “agencies were only paid an agreed hourly rate of pay, based on the grade of the post as advised by Council to each of the agencies”.

Belfast City Council

Information from Belfast City Council on the employment of agency workers revealed that the total number employed from April 2014 – February 2017 by full-time equivalent (FTE) never falls below 150. The totals and the breakdown by Council area in which they are employed are shown in Table 11 (below). This data was undergoing further validation by the Council at the time of going to print.

Table 11: Total Agency Workers by Department

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Chief Executive's Department	5.15	9.72	13.8
City and Neighbourhood Services Department	112.86	139.09	125.72
Development Department	17.74	20.66	13.12
Finances and Resources Department	2.26	0.83	0.5
Property & Projects Department	16.48	9.49	11.38
Total	154.49	179.79	164.52

In terms of the duration of the agency worker's employment the vast majority of agency workers are employed for less than one year. See Table 12 (below).

Table 12: Duration of Agency Worker Employment

	>2 Years	>1 Year	<1 Year
Chief Executive's Department	3	-	-
City and Neighbourhood Services Department	8	36	97
Development Department	5	3	12
Finances and Resources Department	-	-	2
Property and Projects Department	-	4	19
Total	16	43	130

The scale of the spend on agency workers by Belfast City Council is considerable with spend never less than £3.7 million in an individual financial year between April 2014 – March 2017 and a total of over £12.5 million for the period. See Table 13 (below).

Table 13: Total Agency Worker spend April 2014-March 2017

Year	Total
2014/15	£3,731,828.37
2015/16	£4,273,625
2016/17 (to date)	£4,501,349
Total	£12,506,802

While Belfast City Council released the eight recruitment agencies used during the April 2014 – March 2017 time frame (Grafton Recruitment Ltd, Diamond Recruitment Group, Hays Specialist Recruitment, Industrial Temps Ltd, Premiere Employment Group Ltd, Alchemy Recruitment Solutions, Apple Recruitment, Miller Group), despite the scale of this spend of **public money** the “commercial sensitivity” approach to non-disclosure of the management fees that are paid to these agencies was again in evidence.

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

Causeway Coast and Glens Council provided a response based on "information held as of 1 April 2017." The total of agency staff employed (246) and the Council service areas within which they work are shown in Table 14 below.

Table 14: Total Agency Workers by Council Area 2014-2017

Council Area	Total
Environmental Services	128
Finance	4
Leisure & Development	86
Performance	23
Planning	5
Total	246

The majority of the agency staff with Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council in April 2017 have been employed for less than two years. It is noticeable, however, that as many as 79 have been employed for more than two years. The duration of employment and service area are outlined in Table 15 below.

Table 15 Duration of Agency Worker employment by Council area

	>2 Years	<2 Years	<1 Year
Environmental Services	50	78	34
Finance	2	2	1
Leisure & Development	19	67	39
Performance	8	15	12
Planning	-	5	5
Total	79	167	91

In terms of cost, the total spend for 2015-2017 is over £9.7 million. See Table 16 below.

Table 16: Agency Costs 2015-2017

Year	Total
2015/6 (approx)	£4,300,000
2016/7	£5,402,326
Total	£9,702,326

Derry City and Strabane District Council

In the Derry City and Strabane Council, 86 agency staff were employed between April 2014-March 2017. The area of council work in which they were employed is illustrated in Table 17 below.

Table 17: Agency Worker Total by Council Area of Work

Area of Work	Total
Human Resources	3
Governance and Assurance	5
Democratic Services and Corporate	1
Waste and Resource Management	3
Grounds Maintenance and Cemeteries	1
Capital Development and Building Control	4
Environment	45
Planning	1
Business	3
Culture	10
Community Development and Leisure	7
Environmental Health	3
Total	86

In terms of the duration of agency staff deployment, 8 staff were employed for over 2 years during this time period, 78 were employed for less than 2 years while 56 agency staff worked for the Council for less than 1 year. The breakdown of such deployment by area of work is illustrated in Table 18.

Table 18: Duration of Agency Worker Employment

	>2 Years	<2 Years	<1 Year
Human Resources	-	3	2
Governance and Assurance	1	4	2
Democratic Services and Corporate	-	1	-
Waste and resource Management	-	3	3
Capital Development and Building Control	-	4	3
Environment	5	40	30
Planning	-	1	1
Business	-	3	3
Culture	2	9	6
Community Development and Leisure	-	7	5
Environmental Health	-	3	1
Total	8	78	56

The cost of such agency employment totals over £2m for the 2014-7 timeline. Spend for each of these 3 financial years is presented in Table 19.

Table 19: Council Spend on Agency Workers

Year	Total
2014/15	£1,007,977
2015/16	£953,593
2016/17	£755,566
Total	£2,717,136

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council

The information provided by Fermanagh and Omagh District Council showed that forty agency staff were employed between April 2014-March 2017. See Table 20.

Table 20: Agency Staff by Council Area 2014-2017

Area	April 2014-31 March 2017
Corporate/Governance/Chief Executive's Department	11
Environment and Place	14
Regeneration and Planning	11
Community Health & Leisure	4
Total	40

The Council state that none of their workers were employed for more than two years and while "1 of the above was employed for between 1 and 2 years, the remainder were employed for less than 1 year". This pattern is further evidenced by the deployment of "88 temporary positions of more than 4 months" during this 2014-2017 period. See Table 21.

Table 21: Temporary Position of more than 4 month's duration

Area	Total
Corporate/Governance/Chief Executive's Department	14
Environment and Place	20
Regeneration and Planning	10
Community Health & Leisure	44
Total	88

The total costs revealed by the Council for the last two financial years exceeds half a million pounds. See Table 22. In terms of reporting agency costs for 2014/5 as "nil" the Council state that they "operated in shadow mode in 2014 and a number of staff were employed during the period up to 1 April 2015. The response "nil" for 2014 indicates that the Council did not employ nor incur any costs for Agency staff in the 2014/15 financial year".

Table 22: Agency Cost by Year

Year	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	Total
Cost	NIL	£278,505	£298,543	£577,048

Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council

The issue of agency staff use/costs within the Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council was complicated both by the way data has/has not been retained from "legacy" councils and new recording systems within the new council that will need further scrutiny at branch level to test its transparency. The information we have been able to retrieve, however, reveals: a total number of 106 agency staff employed at the end of the last financial year; 10 of whom at this point have been employed for more than 2 years; 96 for less than 2 years and 70 who have been employed for less than 1 year. The distribution of this employment across the Council's departments is detailed in Table 23.

Table 23: Agency Worker Total by Council Area of Work

Department	>2 Years	<2 Years	<1 Year
Corporate Service	1	18	15
Development and Planning	1	14	14
Environmental Services	6	54	31
Leisure and Community Services	2	10	10
Total	10	96	70

The costs of such deployment of agency staff between 2014/5 and 2016/7 is £4,614,469 and has risen year on year. See Table 24.

Table 24: Council Spend on Agency Workers

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	Total
Lisburn	£445,044.0	-	-	£445,044.0
Castlereagh	£673,479.0			£673,479.0
Lisburn and Castlereagh	-	£1,288,036.0	-	£1,288,036.0
Lisburn and Castlereagh	-	-	£2,207,910.0	£2,207,910.0
Total	£1,118,523.0	£1,288,036.0	£2,207,910.0	£4,614,469.0

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council employed 335 agency staff between April 2015-March 2017. The breakdown of the 105 agency workers employed for more than 2 years, 110 employed for less than less than 2 years and 120 employed for less than 1 year is provided in Table 25 below.

Table 25: Agency Staff Employment by Duration

	>2 Years	<2 Years	<1 Year
Total	105	110	120

The work area where these agency workers are placed is presented in Table 26 below.

Table 26: Agency Staff Area of Work

	>2 Years	<2 Years	<1 Year	Total
Chief Executive	1	2	5	8
Economic Growth, Regeneration and Tourism	14	10	16	40
Finance	10	6	11	27
Organisation and Community Planning	4	5	16	25
Operations	76	87	72	235
Total	105	110	120	335

This generates costs, for the last two financial years alone of over £7 million – with the 2016/7 figure of over £3.9 million an increase of £800k on the previous years' figure. See Table 27.

Table 27: Council Spend on Agency Workers

Year	Total
2015/16	£3,137,505
2016/17	£3,937,609
Total	£7,075,114

Mid Ulster District Council

The Mid Ulster District Council employed 81 agency staff between April 2014 and March 2017. The breakdown of such employment by geographical area is detailed in Table 28. (It should be noted, as the Council state "a number of agency workers' assignments straddled 2015/16 and 2016/17").

Table 28: Agency Worker Total by Geographical Area of work

Area	2014/5	2015/6	2016/7	Total
Dungannon	-	10	32	42
Cookstown	-	12	12	24
Magherafelt	-	6	9	15
Total	-	28	53	81

The area of work within which these agency workers are placed is illustrated in Table 29 below.

Table 29: Agency Staff by Area of Work

	2015/6	2016/7
Refuse and Street Cleaning	14	17
Environmental Health	6	8
Project Management and Technical	5	7
Marketing, Communication & IT	3	3
Admin, Reception & Facilities Support		16
Vehicle Maintenance		1
Cemeteries Maintenance		1
Total	28	53

The work areas for these workers is detailed below in Table 30.

Table 30: Agency Staff Duration by Area of Work

	>2 years	< 2 years	<1 Year
Refuse and Street Cleaning		1	29
Environmental Health		1	12
Project Management and Technical		2	8
Marketing, Communication & IT		1	4
Admin, Reception & Facilities Support			16
Vehicle Maintenance			1
Cemeteries Maintenance			1
Total	0	5	71

In terms of these totals, the Council employed no agency workers for over 2 years, 5 for less than 2 years and 71 for less than one year. See Table 31 below.

Table 31: Duration of Agency worker Employment

	>2 Years	<2 Years	<1 Year
Dungannon	-	1	40
Cookstown	-	2	20
Magherafelt	-	2	11
Total	-	5	71

In terms of cost the information provided by the Council revealed that they had spent £858,699 between 2014-1017. These costs are outlined in Table 32 below.

Table 32: Council Spent on Agency Workers

Year	Cost
2014/5	-
2015/6	£277,923.00
2016/7	£580,776.00
Total	£858,699.00

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council

The Newry, Mourne and Down Council released details of the total agency workers employed by them between April 2015 and March 2017. The area of Council activity within which the 268 agency staff were deployed is illustrated in Table 33.

Table 33: Number of Agency Workers by Council Area April 2015-March 2017

Department	Division	Total
Active and Healthy Communities		
	Community Engagement	4
	Health & Well Being	5
	Leisure and Sport	115
Corporate Services		
	Administration	10
	Finance	13
	Human Resources	2
	Information Technology	3
Enterprise, Regeneration and Tourism		
	Enterprise, Employment and Regeneration	1
	Tourism, Culture and Events	32
Regulatory and Technical Services		
	Building Control and Regulation	4
	Facilities Management and Maintenance	28
	Health & Well Being	1
	Waste Management	41
Strategic Planning and Performance		
	Community Planning	2
	Corporate Planning and Policy	2
	Estates and Capital Projects	3
	Strategic Programmes	2
Total		268

The vast majority of these workers are employed for less than two years – only 16 agency staff in Newry, Mourne and Down were used for more than 2 years, 252 were employed for less than 2 years and 219 were employed for less than 219. See Table 34 (page 20).

Table 34: Length of Agency Worker Employment April 2015-March 2017

Department	Division	>2 Years	<2 Years	<1 Year
Active and Healthy Communities				
	Community Engagement	-	4	3
	Health & Well Being	-	5	5
	Leisure and Sport	9	106	96
Corporate Services				
	Administration	-	10	9
	Finance	-	13	13
	Human Resources	-	2	1
	Information Technology	-	3	2
Enterprise, Regeneration and Tourism				
	Enterprise, Employment and Regeneration	-	1	1
	Tourism, Culture and Events	3	29	27
Regulatory and Technical Services				
	Building Control and Regulation	-	4	2
	Facilities Management and Maintenance	3	25	20
	Health & Well Being	-	1	32
	Waste Management	-	41	
Strategic Planning and Performance				
	Community Planning	-	2	2
	Corporate Planning and Policy	-	2	2
	Estates and Capital Projects	1	2	2
	Strategic Programmes	-	2	2
Total		16	252	219

The total of agency staff from April 2014 – March 2017 is broken down in Table 35. It captures cost from the “Legacy Down District Council” and the “Legacy Newry and Mourne District Council”. This total is in excess of £6 million. See Table 35.

Table 35: Agency Costs April 2014-March 2017

Year	Total Cost
2014-15	Legacy Down District Council £1,025,453 Legacy Newry and Mourne DC £947,354
2015-16	£1,862,088
2016-17	£2,176,135
Total	£6,011,030

Local Government Summary

The table below presents a summary of information on the number of agency staff and associated costs across local government over the period 2014-17. Even allowing for the caveats around gaps in information held by the councils and the varieties of time in post the scale of both is dramatic with the deployment of over 2700 agency staff at a cost of over £54 million. See Table 36 below.

Table 36: Agency Staff Deployment and Cost in Local Government

Council Area	Period Covering	Total Agency Staff	Total Cost
Antrim and Newtownabbey	from 2015 to 2017 (Agency Numbers)	213	£4,193,108
Ards and North Down	from 2014 to 2017	788	£4,967,904
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	from 2014-2015 (legacy council figures)	116	£1,238,751.78
Belfast City Council	from 2014 to 2017	499	£12,506,802
Causeway Coast and Glens	from 2015-2017	246	£9,702,326
Derry City and Strabane	from 2014 to 2017	86	£2,717,136
Fermanagh and Omagh	from 2014 to 2017	40	£577,048
Lisburn and Castlereagh	from 2014 to 2017 (Agency Numbers 2016-17)	106	£4,614,469
Mid and East Antrim 2015-17	from 2014 to 2017	335	£7,075,114
Mid Ulster District Council	from 2014 to 2017	81	£858,699
Newry, Mourne and Down	from 2014 to 2017 (legacy councils 2014-15)	268	£6,011,030
All Councils Agency Spend Grand Total		2778	£54,462,388

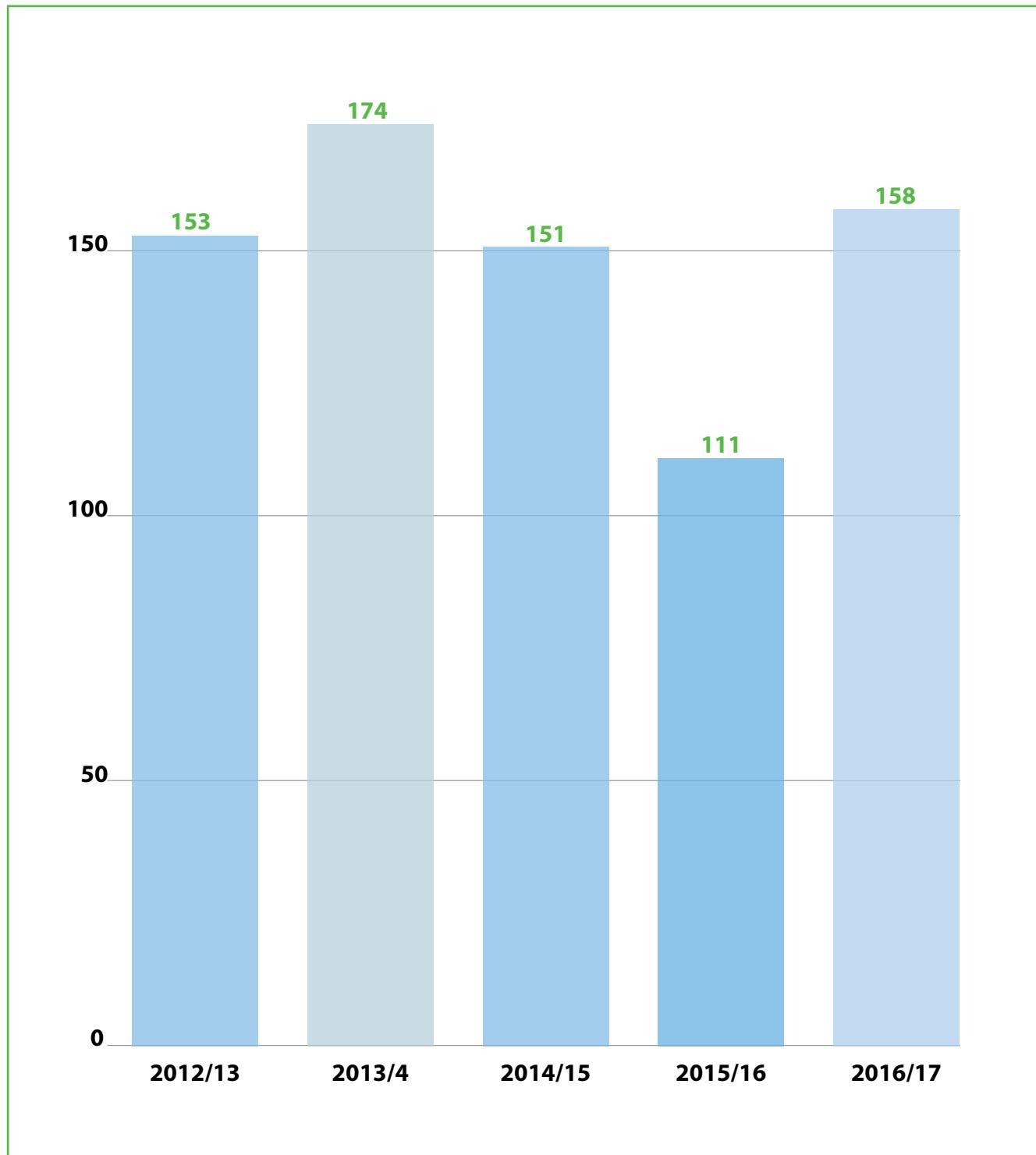


**Education
Authority**

Education Authority

The information obtained from the Education Authority and outlined below presents data from the Authority's Headquarters/Regional Offices. In terms of total numbers (accepting in the Education Authority's words – "Agency staff may be accounted for in more than one financial year.") this figure is never less than 111 and reaches as high as 174 in the four financial years we examined. See Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Agency Workers Employed by Financial Year



The types of work carried out by Agency Workers, and numbers undertaking it, are listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Agency Staff Type of Work by Employment Length

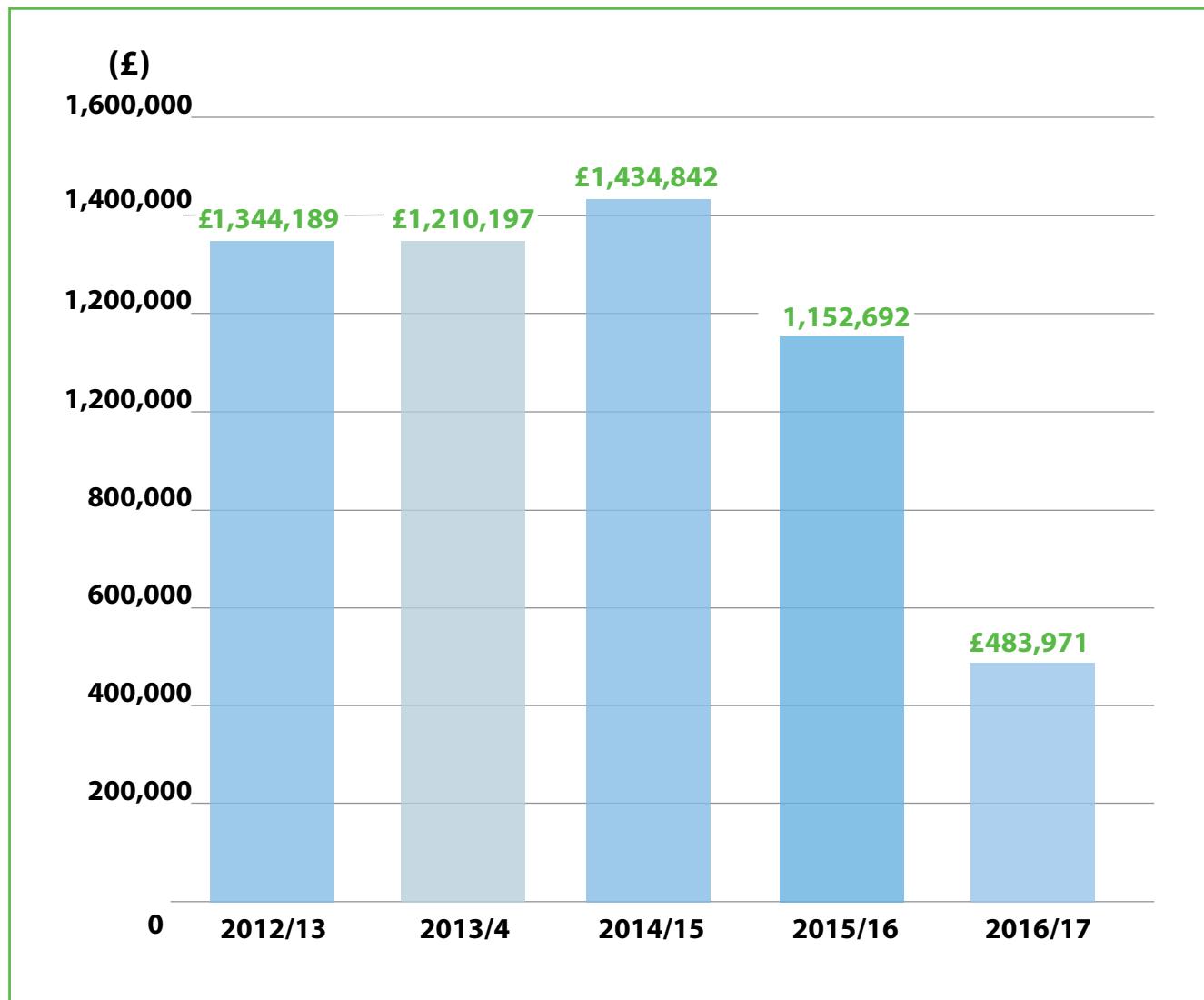
Type of Work	Number employed for >2 years	Number employed for <2 years	Number employed for <1 year
Accounting Manager	-	2	2
Architect	1	5	3
Architectural Technician	1	-	-
Building Maintenance Officers	3	-	-
Budget Support	-	-	6
Catering Assistant	-	1	1
Classroom Assistant	-	3	3
Building Maintenance Officers	-	-	-
Clerical Officers	9	170	321
Clerk of Works	-	1	-
Clerk/Typist	-	9	-
Condition Surveyor	-	1	4
Contract Monitoring Officer	1	-	-
Education Welfare Officer	-	22	27
Environmental Hazards Officer	-	1	-
Executive Officer	-	5	5
Information Technology (IT)	-	1	-
Library Assistant/Mobile Driver	1	3	3
Maintenance Officer	-	8	7
Project Manager	-	-	1
Porter/Security	-	1	1
Quantity Surveyor	2	4	6
Senior Architectural Technician	-	4	8
Senior Clerical Officer	4	19	86
Senior Executive Officer	-	-	1
Tech Support Officer (Level 3)	-	1	1
Transport Officer	-	1	-
Total	22	262	486

Although the list includes 27 types of work, in each of the four years the vast majority is at clerical/senior clerical level. For example, this type of work accounts for more than 59.1 % of agency workers employed for more than 2 years (13 out of 22); 72.1% of such workers employed for less than 2 years (189 out of 262) and 83.7% of agency workers employed for less than one year (407 out of 486).

The only other significant numbers bar maintenance officers (8 employed for less than 2 years; 7 less than 1); 10 quantity surveyors (4 less than 2 years, 6 less than 1) are the numbers of education welfare officers (22 less than 2 years; 27 less than 1 year).

In terms of total agency worker costs (See Figure 2) the Education Authority spent £5,625890 between 2012/3 and 2016/7.

Figure 2: Agency Worker Costs





Libraries NI

A “minuscule” investment in Libraries

NIPSA wrote to Libraries NI with a series of questions on the use of agency staff. In addition to the answers we received directly from them on the number of such staff, in response to our questions about financial data, we were referred to their published annual reports. Comment below, therefore, is based on both data sources.

Before discussing the figures however it is important to re-emphasise that the debate on the deployment of agency staff (and associated costs) is made to re-enforce the point that essential services, often lauded for their contribution to societal well-being need more than warm words or this model of ad-hoc staffing. The treatment of libraries is a case in point. As NIPSA commented at the time of the Draft Programme for Government (July 2016) the overall Assembly spend allocated to Libraries NI is “minuscule” – a spend insulting to both the dedication of its workforce and the importance of the contribution of libraries to wider society. Even this allocation however is not safe. For example, the Libraries NI Annual Report and Accounts 2015/2016 reports that “the initial budget allocation for the year of £29.415 million was £2.385 million less than the initial allocation in 2014-15, a cut in real terms of 8.3%”.¹ This meant that opening hours [were] cut by 6% from November 2015.

Discussion of the libraries use of agency staff that follows, therefore, is fully aware of how essential, because of the stranglehold of inappropriate funding, the agency staff have been. This contribution is captured by the detail of the roles carried out by Agency workers and the reason for example why 548 were engaged in 2014/15 – the equivalent of 54 full time posts (FTE).

Figure 1: Agency Workers by Role²

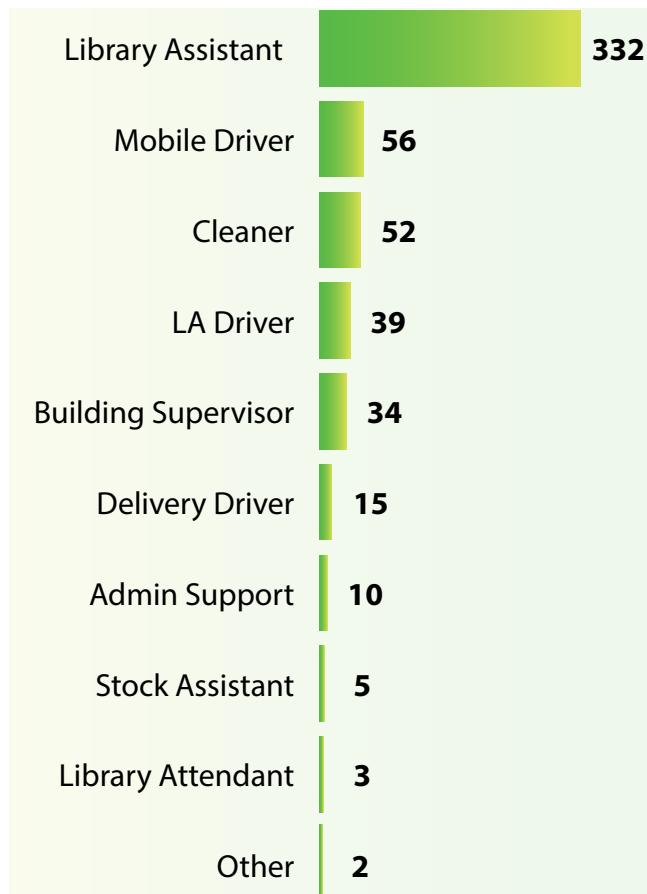
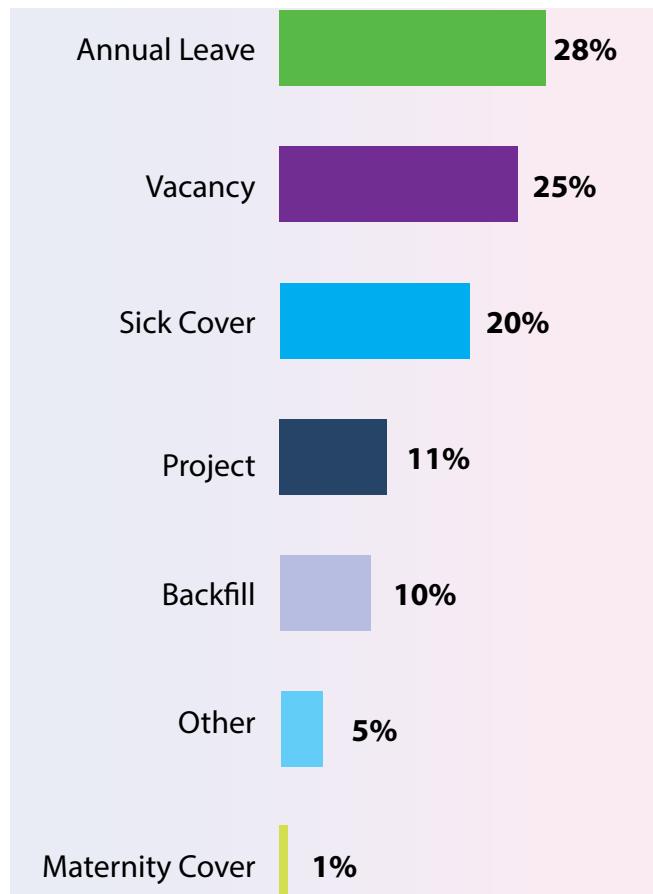


Figure 2: Reason for Agency Workers³



1 [On line] Available http://www.librariesni.org.uk/AboutUs/OurOrg/Annual%20Reports/Annual_Report_and_Accounts_2015-16.pdf p. 6.

2 [On line] Available http://www.librariesni.org.uk/AboutUs/OurOrg/Annual%20Reports/Annual_Report_and_Accounts_2014-15.pdf p. 32.

3 [On line] Available http://www.librariesni.org.uk/AboutUs/OurOrg/Annual%20Reports/Annual_Report_and_Accounts_2014-15.pdf p. 32.

This is not a recent pattern and, indeed, has been the case since the inception of Libraries NI into which agency staff transferred, after the Review of Public Administration (RPA). These staff, as the Libraries NI report on this time (2009/10) makes clear, were in place “to ensure that frontline services continued to be delivered”⁴.

By 2014/15 this survival mode has continued with the annual report reporting budgetary cuts to “agency staff covering vacancies in front-line posts” released leading to “emergency cuts”⁵ in opening hours.

In terms of the full totals the total Full Time Equivalent (FTE) agency staff used since 2014 are outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Total Agency Staff (FTE) - April 2014-March 2017

Year	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Total	54	54	66

In terms of duration the majority of staff were employed for less than 2 years.

Table 2: Agency Staff Employment Length - April 2014- March 2017

> 2 Years	< 2 Years	< 1 Year
5 (3.54 FTE)	154 (70.4 FTE)	117.0 (54.7 FTE)

The total agency costs year on year 2009-2016 (the latest audited/approved accounts) are detailed below.

Table 3: Total Agency Costs

Year	Total £K
2009/10	£417
2010/11	£430
2011/12	£548
2012/13	£1,090
2013/14	£1,269
2014/15	£997
2015/16	£1,038
Total	£5,789*

The extent of management fees paid by Libraries NI to the recruitment agencies and the percentage of total spend this constitutes were not released to us. This again was denied on the basis it was defined as “commercially confidential”.

4 [On line] Available http://www.librariesni.org.uk/AboutUs/OurOrg/Annual%20Reports/Annual_Report_and_Accounts_2011-12.pdf p. 49.

5 [On line] http://www.librariesni.org.uk/AboutUs/OurOrg/Annual%20Reports/Annual_Report_and_Accounts_2014-15.pdf p.11.

* For cross-sectoral comparative purposes, in other parts of the report, NI Libraries’ post 2010 agency costs figure of £5.372 million is used.





Overview

A magic money tree for agencies?

The figures for overall costs that our research has revealed are striking enough in relation to the individual sectors we examined – particularly those such as the Northern Ireland Civil Service after Departmental re-structuring or local government that, in theory, are through their “reform” phase (Review of Public Administration). What is more shocking is the scale of cost that is revealed when we add these figures from across the public sector together. See Table 1

Table 1: Total agency spend Sector

Sector	Total
Health and Social Care 2010-2015/6 (non-medical)	£201,500,000.00
Education Authority 2012-2016/7	£5,625,891.00
NIHE 2012-2016/7	£44,556,892.82
NI Libraries 2010-2015/6	£5,372,000.00
Local Government 2014-2017	£54,462,388.00
NICS Dec 11-Jan 16	£45,930,796.00
NICS Feb 16 - March 16	Not available
NICS April 16 - March 17	£11,795,147.00
Total	£369,243,114.82

This shows that, at the same time as we are being told there is no “magic money tree” to fund public services and during the years when the rhetoric of austerity has been at its loudest, tens of millions of pounds (and this an underestimate given data gaps and the fact this is only a few areas/years within the public sector) has been paid to private sector agencies. In the same way that, money which it was claimed by central government did not exist the day before a UK General Election can be surprisingly “found” in the days after it (for the purposes of securing a parliamentary majority), the artificial rationing of resources is clearly an economic choice. A different choice therefore, can and should be made. It is that funds should be available for a progressive, long-term and strategic operating model for public service delivery.

The move to a “casual” economy

The time line that the figures capture coincides with the initiation and operation of the public service Voluntary Exit Scheme. This means that the Northern Ireland Executive chose to make public servants (voluntarily) redundant at a time when staff shortages were/are sufficiently large to generate the numbers of agency staff/costs detailed above. While in operational terms we cannot rule out force of habit, strategic incompetence or expediency as factors that contributed to this approach (cutting full-time staff *and* deploying agency staff to fill the gaps they are leaving) a more important *deliberate* policy is in operation here. This is the acceptance that the price worth paying for the Executive’s

stated desire to “re-balance the economy” is in effect a switch to an economy where any significant job growth that is evident is in “administrative services (which includes agency workers)”¹ with, as NERI comment, a wider trend in the Northern Ireland economy that sees “an increase in part-time and female employment and a shift toward service sector industries...[to] lower-paid, less secure employment.”²

In terms of this lower pay, far from the Programme for Government’s rhetoric of meeting public need, the lack of long-term strategic investment in those whose public service meets our health needs left at least 10% of workers in health/social care on or below the Minimum wage and 37% of residential care workers below two-thirds of the Median Wage in 2013. This trend is confirmed in more recent work by NERI³ that highlighted the increasingly precarious nature of work across the public services.

1 See <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/business/economy-watch/why-the-jobs-weve-regained-may-not-benefit-everyone-35077364.html> 27/9/16

2 See http://www.nerinstitute.net/download/pdf/hours_and_earnings_in_ni_neri_wp17.pdf p.2.

3 See <https://www.nerinstitute.net/download/pdf/20180108145212.pdf>

Conclusion

The latest figures and the costs they reveal reinforce the point we made in our initial report of the urgent necessity, across the public sector for a strategic re-appraisal of staffing needs and a commitment from Government at whatever level to meet these needs. This also requires a rejection of current costly delivery models that continue to offer no more than a sticking plaster of expediency and agency worker exploitation.

This long-standing agenda, therefore, has to be opposed on the ground. Allied to our proposals for the development of fully devolved labour laws that would facilitate the restoration of trade union rights⁴ is the need to increase the trade union recruitment and organisation of all workers (agency or permanent) in order to increase our negotiating position. Furthermore, within negotiations we have to continue to raise the issue of appropriate staffing levels needed to deliver a quality service to the public and establish: what are the vacancy levels in terms of both number of staff and duration of vacancy? What are the agency numbers/duration of such contracts? What plans are there to fill these 'agency' posts with permanent staff? What management fees are being incurred by the use of recruitment agencies? In this way, whilst at the highest political level the Executive are content with this economic direction of travel, with an overt political agenda that treats job insecurity and diminished employment rights as policy, union activism must challenge every manifestation of this regressive approach.

Irrespective of the crisis within the Executive during 2017 and the possibility of formal restoration of devolution in 2018, the fact remains that the crisis in our public service delivery is much deeper than the latest political setback and is rooted in both a long-term history of economic underinvestment in Northern Ireland and the (neo-liberal) Treasury's failure to provide the funds necessary to strategically re-build a post conflict society⁵. The spine of such a society must be: free at the point of use (public sector delivered) public services that create the virtuous circle of economic regeneration for the regional economy in which they operate.

4 NIPSA research previously discussed the scale of unpaid overtime among public sector workers. (See [On line] Available: <http://www.nipsa.org.uk/NIPSA/media/NIPSA/PDFs/PR/Trojan-web-2.pdf> p.16. Similarly a recent survey from the Northern Ireland Association of Social Workers (NIASW).that found that "Nearly nine out of 10 of those [surveyed] said they worked extra hours with no extra pay". <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-37501731> 29/9/2016

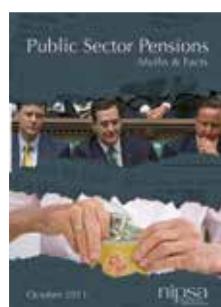
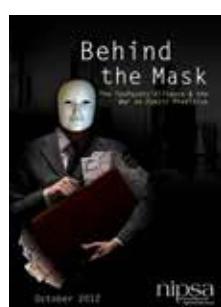
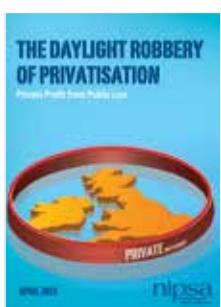
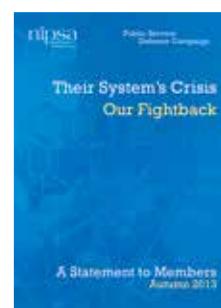
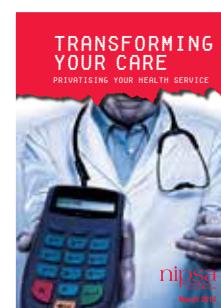
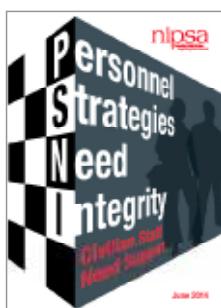
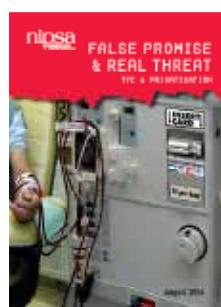
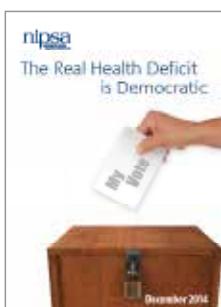
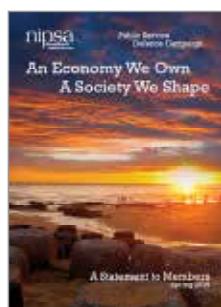
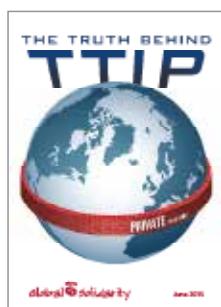
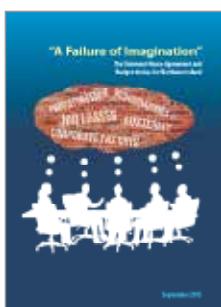
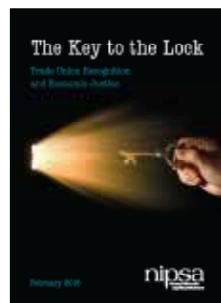
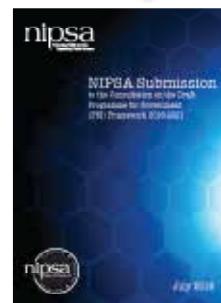
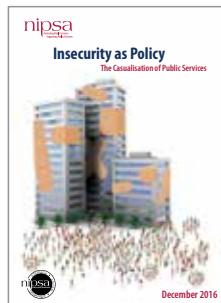
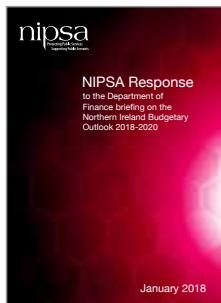
5 See NIPSA response to the Department of Finance briefing on the NI Budgetary Outlook 2018-2020. [https://www.nipsa.org.uk/NIPSA/media/NIPSA/PDFs/NIA/Policy_and_Research/NIPSA-\(Jan-2018\)-response-to-Dept-of-Finance-Briefing-on-Budget-2018-2020-\(2\).pdf](https://www.nipsa.org.uk/NIPSA/media/NIPSA/PDFs/NIA/Policy_and_Research/NIPSA-(Jan-2018)-response-to-Dept-of-Finance-Briefing-on-Budget-2018-2020-(2).pdf)



Read the facts... ..fight the myths

Booklets and accompanying leaflets are available as a PDF download from the NIPSA Website.

www.nipsa.org.uk



028 9066 1831 info@nipsa.org.uk www.nipsa.org.uk



Headquarters

54 Wellington Park, Belfast, BT9 6DP
Tel: 028 9066 1831

Regional Office

30 Great James Street, Derry/Londonderry, BT48 7DB
Tel: 028 7137 4977