

General Purposes Committee

10 June 2026

Part 1 - Public

Matters Taken Under Delegated Powers



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Cabinet Member	Not Applicable
Responsible Officer	Adrian Stanfield - Director of Central Services & Deputy Chief Executive
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Workforce Development Strategy Progress Update 2025/2026

1 Summary and Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report provides Members with an overview of progress made during the first year of the Workforce Development Strategy 2025–2028. It sets out delivery against the agreed Year 1 priorities, highlighting key achievements in embedding the Council’s core behaviours, introducing a revised appraisal approach, strengthening workforce processes, and promoting employee wellbeing.
- 1.2 The purpose of the report is to provide assurance that the Strategy is being effectively implemented, to highlight areas where further development is ongoing, and to seek Member endorsement for the continued delivery of the Strategy, including progression into Year 2 priorities.

2 Corporate Strategy Priority Area

- 2.1 Efficient services for all our residents, maintaining an effective council.
- 2.2 This report provides Members with the first annual update on the implementation of the Workforce Development Strategy 2025–2028. It outlines progress made against the agreed Year 1 (2025/26) priorities.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 Note the progress made in delivering the Year 1 priorities of the Workforce Development Strategy 2025–2028.
- 3.2 Endorse the continued delivery of Year 2 priorities as set out in the Workforce Development Strategy.

4 Introduction and Background

- 4.1 The Workforce Development Strategy 2025–2028 (**Annex 1**) was approved by the General Purposes Committee in March 2025.
- 4.2 The Strategy provides the framework for how the Council will support, develop and manage its workforce to deliver its corporate priorities. It is structured around four key pillars:
- i. talent and development
 - ii. recruitment and retention
 - iii. wellbeing and recognition
 - iv. ensuring staff are prepared for change
- 4.3 As part of its approval, it was agreed that progress would be reported to this Committee on an annual basis, supported by ongoing monitoring through Management Team.
- 4.4 This report provides the first annual update, setting out progress against Year 1 priorities and highlighting key workforce issues.

5 Progress 2025/2026

- 5.1 The Year 1 targets in the Workforce Development Strategy were stated as follows:

Year 1 (2025-2026):

- Embedding the new core behaviours across the Council.
- Launching and embedding the Council's new and updated online appraisal form.
- Launch a training programme for all new managers on managing employee policies.
- Revise the Council's recruitment and selection policy and procedure to ensure that it can be adaptable to recruit to nationally recognised hard to fill vacancies across Local Government.
- Revise the Council's recruitment and selection policy and procedure to ensure that opportunities for our staff are maximised.
- Manage and target vacant posts covered by agency staff to look to look at alternative ways to deliver what is needed by the post.
- Increase the promotion of employee wellbeing initiatives to promote mental and physical health.
- Roll out a variety of core behaviour initiatives to ensure they are integrated across the organisation.

- 5.2 **Core Behaviours:** Key achievements during Year 1 include the introduction of the Council's core behaviours, the launch of the online appraisal system, and progress on recruitment and wellbeing initiatives.
- 5.3 The introduction of the Council's core behaviours represents a significant step in establishing a consistent organisational culture, with early work focused on communication, awareness and initial integration into people processes. While progress has been made, embedding these behaviours fully across the organisation remains an ongoing objective requiring continued reinforcement through leadership, appraisal and engagement activity.
- 5.4 The Council's values and behaviours have also been embedded through key people processes. The updated appraisal framework requires employees to demonstrate how these behaviours are applied in practice, ensuring they are reflected in day-to-day performance.
- 5.5 In addition, all nominations for the Council's Excellence in Action awards must clearly identify the relevant values and behaviours demonstrated, reinforcing expectations and promoting consistent recognition across the organisation.
- 5.6 **New Appraisal System:** The launch of the updated online appraisal system has provided a more structured and consistent approach to performance management. This has enabled clearer alignment between individual objectives and organisational priorities, and improved identification of learning and development needs across the workforce.
- 5.7 Appraisal completion rates for 2025/26 show a significant improvement compared to previous years. The October 2024 staff survey indicated that 74% of employees had received an appraisal within the preceding 12 months. By contrast, analysis of the 2025/26 cycle indicates that approximately 93% of staff have now had a recorded appraisal.
- 5.8 This represents a strong uplift in compliance and reflects the positive impact of introducing the new online appraisal form, improved visibility of completion rates, and increased focus from managers.
- 5.9 Looking ahead, the appraisal process for 2026/27 has been formalised into a defined annual window of April to June. Establishing a single, consistent appraisal period is a positive step, as it will enable clearer alignment between individual objectives and annual service delivery plans, improve the robustness of corporate monitoring and reporting, and provide a more consistent experience for staff across the organisation.
- 5.10 It will also support more effective workforce planning, including training and development, succession planning, and timely escalation of any incomplete appraisals, strengthening overall assurance and accountability.

- 5.11 **Project Management and Leadership:** During 2025/26, the Council made good progress in strengthening project management capability across the organisation.
- 5.12 Basic project management training was delivered to around 50 members of staff between September and December 2025, supporting the introduction of a more consistent corporate approach and new project management templates.
- 5.13 Feedback from those attending has been positive, with a 50% survey response rate and an overall template rating of 8.4 out of 10, indicating that staff find the tools effective in supporting project planning and delivery. This initial phase has helped establish a common framework and improved confidence in project delivery across services.
- 5.14 Building on this, the Council is now moving to a more targeted second phase of development, focusing on more advanced project management skills. A tailored “8 Challenges to Project Management” training programme is planned for delivery in June/July 2026, aimed at staff who have already completed the introductory training.
- 5.15 Alongside this, a project management reference library has been developed to provide ongoing learning resources, ensuring continued development of skills and supporting a more consistent and embedded approach to project management across the organisation.
- 5.16 In support of strengthening leadership capability, a Management Essentials Programme and a Senior Development Programme are currently being developed. This work is being led by the recently appointed Learning and Development Manager and will form a central component of the Council’s approach to supporting and developing managers.
- 5.17 A key principle of these programmes is to ensure that the Council’s vision, values, behaviours and corporate priorities are clearly embedded. This will help ensure that management practice is consistently aligned with the Council’s strategic direction, supporting delivery of key outcomes and reinforcing the expected behaviours across the organisation.
- 5.18 The programmes will offer a broad range of development opportunities, with a particular focus on building core management capability and supporting managers to understand and develop their individual leadership styles.
- 5.19 **Recruitment and Selection:** The Recruitment and Selection Policy is currently being updated to ensure full alignment with the Council’s Workforce Development Strategy and to reflect evolving organisational priorities. This includes responding to ongoing challenges within the external labour market, strengthening workforce planning, and ensuring the Council is well positioned to manage structural change associated with Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

- 5.20 The proposed revisions retain the Council's established principles of fair, transparent and merit-based recruitment, while introducing greater flexibility within a clear governance framework. This includes the ability, in defined and objectively justified circumstances, to undertake internal-only recruitment to support redeployment, succession planning and retention, alongside measures to strengthen the quality and consistency of selection processes.
- 5.21 Collectively, these changes are intended to support recruitment and retention, enhance workforce resilience and ensure a more responsive and adaptable approach in a competitive employment market.
- 5.22 **Employee Wellbeing:** There has been an increased focus on promoting employee wellbeing initiatives. This includes targeted health and wellbeing activity such as wellbeing days and awareness sessions led by the Council's One You team including health checks, exercise taster sessions and a planned information morning on cancer awareness in July 2026.
- 5.23 The Council also has a well-established Employee Assistance Programme, which is promoted through induction, appraisal processes and ongoing manager support.
- 5.24 In addition, initiatives such as the menopause café, flexible working arrangements, employee benefits (including discounted leisure membership and health-related provision), and a clear approach to annual leave usage contribute to a broader package of support for staff.
- 5.25 There is also a continued focus on strengthening communication and engagement around wellbeing, including increased promotion through staff briefings and Staffnet.
- 5.26 **Workforce Development Strategy – Priorities for 2026/27**
- 5.27 Building on the progress made during year one of the Workforce Development Strategy, a clear set of priorities has been identified for 2026/27, with a strong emphasis on preparing the workforce for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and supporting organisational change.
- 5.28 The priorities for 2026/27 are:
- Provide learning and development opportunities on devolution and change management
 - To prepare staff for local government reorganisation.
 - Continue to revise recruitment strategies to attract key talent, particularly in high demand roles.

- Develop succession planning frameworks to mitigate risks associated with an aging workforce.
 - Expand internal mobility programmes to improve talent retention and development.
 - Strengthen recognition and award mechanisms to encourage buy-in to core behaviours.
- 5.29 A key development has been the recent appointment of a Learning and Development Manager, providing dedicated capacity to lead and deliver a more structured and strategic learning offer.
- 5.30 There will be a particular focus on delivering learning and development activity to support LGR, organisational change and wider transformation, alongside embedding and further progressing the initiatives already introduced. This will include a broadened offer of learning opportunities for staff at all levels, moving beyond traditional classroom-based training to incorporate a wider range of development approaches, including digital learning, peer learning and targeted development interventions.
- 5.31 In addition, the Council is working collaboratively with neighbouring authorities through the West Kent Learning and Development Manager network. This group is focused on developing a consistent and shared approach to key development areas, including Microsoft 365 and digital skills, project management, change management, transformation and service design. This will help ensure a coherent and cost-effective approach to building capability across West Kent in preparation for LGR.
- 5.32 The Council is also supporting the recruitment of a dedicated Microsoft 365 Trainer through a shared arrangement with West Kent partners. This role is currently being recruited to by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, with the vacancy advertised across partner authorities.
- 5.33 Once appointed, the role will play a key part in developing digital capability across the workforce, delivering a structured programme of Microsoft 365 training aligned to organisational needs and staff feedback.
- 5.34 This initiative represents a tangible investment in improving digital skills and supporting more efficient and effective ways of working, particularly in the context of ongoing transformation and preparation for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).
- 5.35 Further work is also planned to strengthen internal workforce development arrangements. This includes reviewing the approach to supporting professional qualifications, with a clearer expectation that learning is aligned to organisational priorities and contributes to service improvement.

- 5.36 Alongside this, there will be an increased focus on internal mobility and career development opportunities, supporting retention and enabling staff to broaden their skills and experience across the organisation.
- 5.37 The Council will also continue to refine its recruitment strategies to attract and retain talent, particularly in hard-to-fill and high-demand roles, and to develop succession planning frameworks to mitigate risks associated with an ageing workforce.
- 5.38 In parallel, work will be undertaken to strengthen recognition and reward mechanisms, encouraging engagement with the Council's core behaviours and supporting a positive, high-performing organisational culture.

6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 6.1 A dedicated annual training budget of £120,000 per annum for the next two financial years will fund the full range of learning and development initiatives. This is met within the existing annual training budget and training reserves.
- 6.2 Following a favourable financial outturn in 2025/26, and in recognition of the increased level of learning and development activity required as the Council prepares for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), Officers and Cabinet have agreed a £100,000 contribution to the training reserve.
- 6.3 This investment will support the expansion of the Council's learning and development offer, including initiatives to build organisational capability in key areas such as digital skills, leadership and change.
- 6.4 A proportion of this funding will be used to support the delivery of the shared Microsoft 365 and digital training programme, ensuring a cost-effective approach while maximising the benefit of enhanced training provision for staff.
- 6.5 The Council will continuously monitor spending and assess the impact of these initiatives through regular reviews.

7 Risk Assessment

- 7.1 The Council lists recruitment and retention issues on the Strategic Risk register.
- 7.2 The Workforce Development Strategy should, in part, help to minimise risk in this area by implementing targeted initiatives designed to attract, retain, and develop a skilled and engaged workforce.

8 Legal Implications

- 8.1 Supports the Council's legal duty under the Public Sector Equality Duty and Equality Act 2010.

9 Consultation and Communications

9.1 The Council actively engages with staff to communicate the strategy's objectives and initiatives. Staff input will be sought to ensure the effective implementation of the strategy and to identify any emerging priorities.

10 Implementation

10.1 The current Workforce Development Strategy covers 2025-2028.

11 Cross Cutting Issues

11.1 Climate Change and Biodiversity

11.1.1 A moderate source of emissions is likely to be maintained at current levels or increased.

11.1.2 Climate change advice has not been sought in the preparation of the options and recommendations in this report.

11.2 Equalities and Diversity

11.2.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

11.3 Other If Relevant

- Human Resources
- Procurement
- Business Continuity / Resilience
- Health and Safety
- Healthy Lifestyles

Background Papers	None
Annexes	1. Workforce Development Strategy 2025-2028