



Medway Council

Recruitment Strategy 2024-2026



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CONTENTS

1. Strategy statement	Page 3
2. Our recruitment organisation	Page 4
3. Strategy aims	Page 5
4. Safer Recruitment	Page 9
5. Action Plan (2024-2025)	Page 11
6. Action Plan (2025-2026)	Page 13

1. **Strategy Statement**

1.1 Medway Council, like all other local authorities, is working harder than ever to provide the best value for the communities that we serve, and hiring the right people to perform the required roles is the foundation to effectively provide these services. We recognise the value of recruiting a diverse, multi-cultural workforce and are committed to meeting our social and legal obligations to maintain and encourage diversity through our recruitment practices. We want our staff to be themselves at work, because we recognise that our strength is in who our people are. Recruiting successfully is a crucial activity to help us achieve our aim of recognition as an 'employer of choice' in the local area, and to ensure the continued delivery of quality services to the residents of Medway.

1.2 The current employment market is very competitive, with high demand for the most skilled and talented people; and supply in certain key statutory service areas (i.e. social work, educational psychology, building control and planning) is often low, leading to an unsustainable reliance on locum staff, at increased cost. The power is often in the hands of the prospective employee, rather than us, the employer. When it comes to recruiting the right people, we need to be holistically attractive to potential candidates, answering their question of 'why should I choose you?' prior to them making their application. We need to work on our 'front door' making this more attractive, recognisable, and easily accessible for all applicants. Showcasing our successes, achievements, our people, our diversity of jobs and our ways of working.

1.3 This Strategy aligns with our Workforce Strategy 2024-2028 and is designed to support the One Medway Council Plan and the Financial Improvement and Transformation Plan (FIT) which supports our Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP). Collectively all these documents describe the ambition we have for Medway, the money available to deliver and the people we need to make delivery successful.

1.4 This Strategy identifies our ambition to be an organisation which utilises talent intelligence and workforce knowledge to plan for our future. We wish to represent our community more accurately through inclusive recruitment practices, as well as engaging with young people, utilising apprenticeships, T-levels and internships to welcome new talent into our services. Augmenting our internal and external people data, experience, and technology, to drive and improve our recruitment decision-making.

1.5 This Strategy will be reviewed regularly to ensure that our recruitment and selection processes align with our Council Values and Behaviours.

- Proud to be Medway: taking pride in what we do
- Caring: compassionate towards our communities and colleagues
- Respectful: thoughtful about Medway's diversity, heritage and one another
- Trusted: we do what we say, and are accountable
- Ambitious for Medway: empowering our colleagues to deliver with integrity
- Collaborative: working together – One Medway.

Our values and behaviours tell the world the kind of organisation that we are, the things that are important to us, what we stand for and the way in which we will achieve our vision.

1.6 This Strategy will challenge us and ensure that we operate fairly and equitably, meeting our commitments and responsibilities as a disability confident employer, a supportive corporate parent for our care experienced young people, and an armed forces covenant Gold employer. We will never discriminate unlawfully against any candidates on the grounds of age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, race, marriage/civil partnership, pregnancy/maternity, religion/ belief or sexual orientation, nor on the grounds of their membership or non-membership of a trade union.

2. Our Recruitment Organisation

2.1 Medway Council is an organisation which exists to serve its community. It is one of the largest unitary authorities in England providing all local government services to its c.280k residents and, to support this work, we are proud that 4/5ths of our employees come from our community, giving us a greater understanding of the impact of our work and the value we bring for our residents.

2.2 We directly employ 2,992 people across 64 different service areas, supporting 'whole of life' spanning services, which vary widely in their remits from registering births and children's services, through housing and regeneration, to adult care and bereavement services. We are effectively one organisation made up of 64 different sub-organisations. However, whilst our resident community is almost a 50:50 split of female and male, 3 in every 4 of our workforce are female (74.3%) possibly identifying that our work roles are not equally gender attractive.

2.3 We are a mature workforce, and our age profile continues to be an area of concern at both ends of the range. Only 35% of our workforce are aged under 40, yet almost 40% are aged over 50. Although we have several early talent schemes, such as work experience, apprenticeships and graduate programmes, the lack of young people within our workforce has a direct impact on our ability to grow our own talent and reduce skills gaps. The recruitment, retention and development of younger people is clearly a priority.

2.4 Almost 93% of our colleagues are willing to declare their ethnicity to us, with 81.8% identifying themselves from a white background, similar to our community profile of 83.8%. 13.5% identify from other ethnic backgrounds compared to our community profile of 16.2%, but another 4.7% did not detail their ethnicity within any group. Whilst our workforce profile is similar to the community profile, we must remain vigilant that our recruitment and selection processes are fair and open for all.

2.5 We are proud to be recognised as a Disability Confident Employer, a status which identifies we are committed to ensuring that our recruitment process is inclusive and accessible. However, less than 60% of our employees have declared their disability status, and only 5.9% of our staff have declared a disability, which is significantly lower than the community profile where 16% of 16 to 64 years are identifying as having a disability. We embrace our responsibilities under the Equality Act but need to work harder to raise our employer profile and be recognised by

prospective employees as a disability friendly, inclusive and welcoming for all, organisation.

2.6 In summary, if the Council wishes to be truly reflective of our community, we need to employ more young people, males, people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, and people with a disability.

2.7 Against the above backdrop, of workforce and work roles, the Council is being driven through a period of significant change. Our financial sustainability is a constant challenge, worsened by increased costs, reduced funding, and an increased demand for services. Wider Government support was required through a capitalisation direction for £14.72 million, to balance the budget for 2024/25. Further projections identify that support will again be required for 2025/26 or savings found in the region of £16.303 million.

2.8 Since the organisation moved to a local pay agreement in 2014, employee salary increases had stayed low with budget priorities being identified elsewhere but, after listening to the needs, aspirations and commitment of our workforce through our programme of employee engagement, this has become a priority. A commitment from Corporate Management Team and the political administration has enabled a review of our performance, progression and pay offer, enhanced our employee value proposition, reviewed our values, and implemented manager refresher training. Continuing to listen to our workforce's needs, aspirations, and commitment will strengthen and support us to be agile as the way we work changes.

2.9 The above financial pressures and lack of salary and career progression opportunities have not helped this organisation to attract, retain and develop staff, in the way we would have wished to, and this new enhanced reward offer needs to be widely promoted, to challenge any old perceptions of us, as a staid public sector employer.

2.10 The changes to how we work are being driven by emerging technologies and these must be prioritised and utilised to provide opportunities to transform how we deliver services, making them more targeted and effective for the public we serve. Although this will create challenges as new ways of working develop that require new and different skill sets, our employees will develop with us, in a supportive working environment, in fulfilling careers which allow them to grow and demonstrate how they are making a difference for Medway.

2.11 In an ideal world, we would possess a single comprehensive data source that encompasses the entire employee lifecycle from initial planning for a role through to hiring and retention. However, our HR teams are juggling up to 4 different HR systems, depending on the work task - and this slows us down, forces work repetition and is neither efficient nor effective. We must instigate system improvements and to this end, we will commence with the integration of a new recruitment platform, starting in August 2024. Tribepad is an award-winning solution

which will help us build our brand and deliver a powerfully straightforward recruitment journey for our applicants, recruitment teams and managers.

3. Strategy aims

3.1 Medway Council aims to improve candidate connections, foster inclusivity, embrace technology and use data-driven decision making to become an effective recruitment organisation. Utilising the Local Government Association's Six P's model, we will create a structured and effective recruitment process, helping us to overcome some of the significant challenges we face around the recruitment and retention of employees.

- Plan
- Promote
- Process
- Partnerships
- People
- Pledge

Plan: Taking the steps to allow the identification of the right person for the right role is fundamental and has long term implications for service delivery. The recruitment journey from start to finish can take a long time, and if it results in an unsuitable candidate being onboarded, is dispiriting for all involved. In the first four months of the financial year (2024-25) we have offered roles to 330 new staff, identifying how busy our recruitment activity is. Workforce planning around our latest understanding of our workforce needs, utilising our Performance, Progression, Pay ('PPP) career progression frameworks; will identify skills gaps and enable intelligence-led decision making with regard to each recruitment need, supporting the future-proofing of workforce capability within teams and services; and thereby our organisation.

Equally important for planning is the right selection process to use, to enable the candidates to showcase their suitability for the role. All our recruiting managers have a responsibility to ensure the selection process results in the best-fit candidate being successful. They must also ensure they construct a diverse interview panel, to collectively deliver the most fair and equitable decision on the successful candidate. With the assistance of our experienced Recruitment Officers and HR Business Partners; as well as relevant, up to date, recruitment and selection training courses (which are mandatory for completion, prior to undertaking any recruitment activity) we will safeguard ourselves from making poor recruitment decisions.

Promote: Effective promotion of our varied job vacancies will be key to our success in a competitive labour market; and with such a wide array of different work and career opportunities to offer, across our 64 different service areas, our recruitment teams will support our subject specialists in their individual professions (our recruiting managers) to ensure that vacancies are advertised to reach and attract the desired candidate pool. In the first four months of the financial year (2024-25) we advertised 256 different roles across the organisation, so with this level of advertising activity, we need to be ensuring that we are utilising the right portals to reach our target market.

We need to be more innovative with our recruitment plans and advertising to engage and communicate, thereby increasing (especially) the number of young people, and males, considering local government as their future career path. Utilising the LGA's new national campaign 'Make a difference - work for your local council', which will be launched later this year, and will support us by providing publicly recognisable resources, which we must adapt to reflect our organisation and the local career prospects we offer. This is a major programme for us to be a part of, maximising public reach and building awareness via the use of radio and tv advertising and social media. We must also monitor the responses received from different recruitment sites and portals, to identify which are reaping the quality applications, we are aspiring for, and which are not.

Recognising our limitations regarding salary aspirations, in comparison with wider private sector organisations, we will strengthen our recruitment campaigns with promotion of our holistic Employee Value Proposition ('EVP') which highlights the collective benefits available to all our employees. Our complete employment package has many valuable elements which we do not endorse enough currently, and this must be improved if we are to achieve our ambition to be recognised as an 'employer of choice' within the local area.

Demonstrating that we care about the health and wellbeing of our employees is another key factor to being an 'employer of choice'. It is no coincidence that wider benefits, such as flexible working, are among the most popular employee perks being sought by today's labour market.

Mental health charity, Mind, found that 60% of employees would be more likely to recommend their company as a good place to work if their employer took action to support mental wellbeing and the promotion of our Press Pause (take a break) campaign, our Mental Health Wellbeing Champions, the Healthy Mind and Wellbeing Group and the Care First service, will all help us to identify our solid commitment to supporting staff in this key area.

Our Climate Change Action Plan and Climate Change staff volunteering day also enable us to identify that we are an ethical organisation with a social conscience. It is recognised that younger employees are attracted by a strong corporate social responsibility and, with our recognised workforce demographic being predominantly over 40 years old; we must develop our attraction tools to be demonstrating the qualities that younger people are looking for.

As a corporate parent for our looked after children, the Council has developed a local offer for our care leavers which consists of services and support to help them manage the journey into early adulthood and independent living. The Council strives to enhance employability prospects too, and we offer quality work experience placements, apprenticeships and diverse employment opportunities. All our current opportunities are promoted to our care leaver teams at the earliest opportunity, so that our young people are not missing this information. We ran a 'You Matter' event for our children in care to highlight many of the diverse areas of potential work within the council, to inspire and awaken interest; and in the last three years we have enrolled five care leavers onto apprenticeships with the Council.

Process: We ensure that all processes used for the recruitment and selection of new staff are proportionate, lawful, accountable and necessary. We will review and assess our recruitment and onboarding processes regularly, taking feedback and making improvements, wherever possible, from our recruiting managers, applicants and new starters.

Our recruitment decisions take account of the holistic results of all selection tools utilised i.e. application, testing, presentations and interview performance, comparing all candidates equitably, with appointment decisions being made jointly by a diverse interview panel.

We consider the needs of the widest selection of applicants and will be flexible and accommodating for any specific needs requested, to ensure equitable access to an interview. All shortlisted candidates are contacted, seeking information on any personal accessibility needs they may have, to ensure we (and the interview panel) are aware and can prepare.

Creating a positive onboarding experience generates a more welcoming environment for new starters. We are currently working to improve our recruitment systems to enable us to achieve smoother processes, an easier navigation for applicants, and faster results for swifter onboarding. We are utilising the Tribepad applicant tracking system, and the inbuilt onboarding module within our HR and Payroll System, Resourcelink, to start engaging with candidates from the moment of their application being received, through to them becoming a new starter. This relationship building will 'keep them 'warm' throughout the onboarding journey and help to make them feel welcome and valued by us.

Partnerships: As a Cornerstone Employer, and member of the Kent & Medway Careers Hub, we work closely with our local Jobs Centre, our schools and higher education institutions to support their employability programmes, offering work experience, student and T-level placements. We also support Skills 360 events, which are speed reverse interview events assisting local young people with SEND to consider roles within local government as a future career. By promoting the extensive range of local government career opportunities through attendance at careers and apprenticeship fairs, we engage with young people who will be enlightened by the learning, and hopefully view us as their employer of choice in our locality; helping to build our recruitment talent pipeline.

Medway is an area with a rich history and attachment to the military, and we are proud to have attained the Armed Forces Covenant Gold Award as an employer. We are committed to supporting those who serve or who have served, and their families and we work to ensure they are treated fairly and not disadvantaged in their day-to-day lives. We advertise all our vacant roles on the Forces Families Jobs website and commit to guaranteeing anyone applying for a role, who is either ex-forces, or related to someone who is, an interview (if they meet the minimum eligibility criteria).

As one of the largest employers in Medway, we recognise our responsibilities to provide employment to local people who may be currently removed from the

workforce, for many different reasons. We continue to support employability programmes run by the Jobs Centre, including attendance at jobs fairs and careers events. We also support charities and employability organisations offering training to the long-term unemployed, to help them get back into work, delivering interview experience and skills training for course participants.

With the challenging recruitment market currently, our organisation has an increasing reliance on locum staff in some of our key statutory services. We ensure that all partnership recruitment agencies we work with are of excellent quality, giving us an effective additional short-term recruitment option. Through our procurement process we verify that every agency we work with, through our Dynamic Purchasing system, is robust, has effective policies on equality and diversity, personal data security, a commitment to carbon reduction (in line with our Climate Change Action Plan), and are engaged in supporting young talent into their workplace (work experience, apprenticeships etc.). Mirroring our own commitments in these key areas.

As active members of the National Apprenticeship Ambassador Network we continue to look at new ways to bring apprentices into the organisation and support the development of new career progression opportunities, utilising apprenticeships, for our existing staff. We will continue to procure (and monitor the quality of) our apprenticeship training providers, supporting both new entrants to our organisation in their first working role, as well as our existing staff achieving their career progression aspirations via apprenticeship programmes and qualifications; providing our staff with the best provision in the apprenticeships market. We will also continue to work with our contacts at the Local Government Association and Department for Education to ensure that we are engaged with Skills England (the new body created to bring together a post-16 skills strategy, aligned to the government's Industrial Strategy.)

People: People spend a third of their waking life at work which, for most employees, means they will want to have more than just a job, but a career they can be proud of. Offering an engaging work environment, a strong induction and supportive probation period; plus, opportunities for long-term career development is vital, if we are to retain the best talent. Upskilling our existing workforce will have additional benefits, as we will then spend less time sourcing further skilled workers in the recruitment market.

As part of our commitment to developing our employees, once recruited and past probation; we utilise our PPP scheme to support personal and career progression aspirations; considering required learning and development options, internal secondments and acting up arrangements (where appropriate) in line with the Career Conversation performance appraisal process. This is key to our being able to give new employees the ability to support their personal and career progression aspirations, by understanding what they need to learn or develop in order to plan their development pathway and gain progression through their salary range, if they wish to.

Our Employee Value Proposition (EVP) is a strong tool when it comes to demonstrating our commitments to rewarding and supporting our employees. It is our People Promise, a multi-faceted demonstration of our offer to staff and the

benefits they can enjoy whilst working with us. Ensuring that new staff recognise all aspects of the EVP, and feel widely recognised and rewarded for their contribution, will help us to ensure that we retain our most valuable asset.

Pledge: Medway Council is proud to be a Disability Confident Employer meaning we think differently about disability and have taken action to improve how we recruit, retain and develop people with health conditions or impairments. We work to identify appropriate workplace changes or adjustments to support employees with a disability or health condition to reach their full potential and thrive at work.

Supporting, developing and retaining our young talent is very important to us and we pledge to give our apprentices a holistic personal and professional development opportunity, whilst they are completing their apprenticeship with us. We also work with them, towards the end of their programme of learning, to find an ongoing role (if one is not available in their current team) so that they continue to grow their careers with us.

We pledge to ensure that the information which job applicants provide to us will be regularly assessed to enable us to check that we are attracting suitable candidates from a wide range of backgrounds, with varied characteristics, and track that they are appropriately successful in the shortlisting and interview stages. This information also allows us to build an accurate picture of the make-up of our workforce and our success in encouraging equality and diversity.

Councils working together to save money and to promote career opportunities in local government is an excellent way of engaging with potential employees. We will continue to work with other local authorities, public sector organisations, regional and national bodies etc. to ensure we remain alive to new practices and processes, improving how we recruit and retain our staff.

4. Safer Recruitment

4.1 Organisations, across many different sectors, are placing increased importance on making the hiring process fairer for prospective applicants. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion plays an important role in shaping this, especially with regards to attracting applications from underrepresented candidates. We are striving to implement faster recruitment processes (where we can) tackling avoidable delays; but by always ensuring that appropriate safeguarding checks are carried out, a faster recruitment process will not detriment a fair and safe recruitment process. It is crucial that our hiring processes are done correctly, with rigorous checks and balances in place, ensuring that any unsuitable, unqualified or fraudulent applicants do not successfully obtain employment.

4.2 We aspire to embed a culture that applies a 360° approach to safer recruitment and employment. Making best use of induction and probationary periods, together with effective line manager supervision; as part of an ongoing culture of safeguarding and vigilance. The rise in remote and hybrid working has seen an increase in overemployment, where employees will gain two or more full-time roles without

declaring it to their employers – our managers need to identify to HR any behaviours or attitudes which may cause concern, and which may not have been noticed in the earlier recruitment and selection process.

4.3 It is every employee's responsibility to safeguard children and vulnerable adults and is contained in all our job descriptions. Our Recruitment Officers and Recruiting Managers need to be curious when planning the recruitment and employment process and be able to understand what the safeguarding risks are in the roles being recruited for. A safeguarding mindset is the difference between compliance and curiosity. Many inquiries and serious case reviews have identified that a culture of compliance alone does not keep children and vulnerable adults safe.

4.4 As a curious organisation, when something does not seem right, we will seek additional information to validate or challenge our observations. This means we will always have the right evidence we need to make the safest recruitment decisions.

4.5 Medway Council is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, young people and vulnerable adults, and recruits to posts using safer recruitment methods as recommended by the Bichard Inquiry and the Warner report.

Action Plan (2024 – 2026)

No	Action	Start Date	Completion	Owner	Review
1.	Commence programme to implement positive change with the integration of our new recruitment platform, Tribepad, with new jobs site, improved processes and timely recruitment of staff, plus an enhanced onboarding experience.	August 2024	January 2025	Jo Budd	Quarterly reporting
2.	Implement monitoring to ensure that all recruiting managers have completed all mandatory training, ensuring compliance with our recruitment strategy, addressing any unconscious bias.	August 2024	March 2026	Recruitment Teams	Quarterly monitoring and reporting on statistics, to evidence compliance
3.	Track recruitment data to inform decisions on channels to market, for effectiveness against advertising costs (if applicable).	January 2025	Ongoing	Recruitment teams	Quarterly reporting
4.	Interrogate our attraction and selection data quarterly, to monitor that we are increasing attraction and that there are improving efficiencies in recruitment timeline to onboarding.	January 2024	March 2026	Recruitment teams	Quarterly reporting
5.	Wider promotion of apprenticeship roles, student and graduate placements, across the	September 2024	March 2026	Apprenticeship Academy	Quarterly monitoring and annual reporting.

	organisation, as effective early talent attraction.				
6.	Working with local schools & colleges to increase T-Level placements and work experience opportunities, initially using the Finance case study as base, widening our corporate participation.	Sept 2024	March 2026	Talent Acquisition Team	Quarterly monitoring and reporting
7.	Interrogate and compare our attraction and selection data annually, to identify if we have increased our applications and employment of under-represented and priority characteristic groups i.e. young people, males, disabled.	April 2025	March 2026	Recruitment Teams	Quarterly monitoring and annual reporting.