

Kent and Medway

Integrated Work and Health

Strategy 2025 – 2030:

You Said, We did Report

During the consultation period, we continued to get stakeholder feedback for the draft strategy. This included attending:

- Kent County Council All Member Briefing
- Better Mental Health Network

Main overarching issues raised

You Said	We Did
Recruitment and application processes are not accessible or inclusive.	In Aspiration A, Commitment 1, we have included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘This commitment proposes that more creative and alternative approaches to recruitment and onboarding practices are explored and implemented’.
Applicants lack qualifications, confidence in transferable skills, or awareness of opportunities.	
Access to training and skills development is inconsistent across the county.	<p>The strategy does refer to this in Aspiration B, Commitment 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Ensure that the range of opportunities for training and development are widely disseminated • ‘The provision of these services across Kent and Medway is being reviewed and gaps in type or geographical availability of provision identified, the aim is to move towards equity of provision.’ <p>Mapping of Provision is also currently being undertaken as part the Connect to Work programme and the development of the Kent and Medway Working Plan, which will link into the strategy.</p> <p>We have also referenced this throughout Aspiration B, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Promote availability of relevant training provision’ • ‘Ensure that the range of opportunities for training and development are widely disseminated’.
Individuals need time, confidence, and support to re-enter work after health or life challenges, and understanding available help.	<p>We have made this stronger in Aspiration C, Commitment 1, by adding in the line:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Including signposting support available to employees and those seeking employment’. <p>There is also referenced in Aspiration C, Commitment 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Well-paced, tailored transition into work will be promoted and a focus on developing resilience to navigate challenges associated with the long-term health condition or disability’.

You Said	We Did
	Programmes such as Connect to Work are referenced in Aspiration C, Commitment 3, will also aim to support people once employed into a workplace.
Cost of living and benefit loss are barriers to work.	<p>We have expressed this in Aspiration B, Commitment 3, noting that appropriate development, training and skills can help ‘people seek higher paid posts to avoid risk of the work/benefit tension and poverty gap.’</p> <p>In Aspiration D, Commitment 2, the cost of living is referenced by how we will also:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Ensure employees are signposted in a timely way to a range of appropriate support linked to the challenges of the cost of living and benefits.’
SMEs need support to employ and retain people with health conditions.	<p>We have mentioned that employers have concerns around legislative requirements in Aspiration A, Commitment 1, which is has been covered by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘We will signpost and make information easily accessible to employers.’ <p>This has been referenced in Aspiration A, Commitment 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Collaboration between organisations and businesses will facilitate the sharing of best practice, knowledge, resources, and information’.
Employers need access to training and support to meet employee needs.	<p>We have added the following line into Aspiration A, Commitment 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘This can also include workforce training such as sign language and autism awareness courses’ <p>This has been referenced in Aspiration A, Commitment 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Collaboration between organisations and businesses will facilitate the sharing of best practice, knowledge, resources, and information’. <p>As part of the delivery of the strategy there will also be an action for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Organisations and businesses to collaborate to share best practice, knowledge and resources.’
Employers need clearer guidance on legal obligations and how to support diverse workforces.	<p>This has been referenced in Aspiration A, Commitment 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘This included legislative requirements and practical implementation.... we will signpost and make information easily accessible to employers.’ <p>There will also be an action on opportunities to engage further with SMEs on how they can be best supported.</p>

Main overarching issues raised

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Employers need more training, tools, and support to feel confident in making reasonable adjustments and fostering inclusive workplaces.	<p>This has been referenced in Aspiration A, Commitment 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ‘... we will signpost and make information easily accessible to employers, including training where appropriate, and improve access to occupational health advice. This can also include workforce training such as sign language and autism awareness courses.’ <p>As part of Aspiration A, Commitment 1 it goes on to promote inclusion of the Disability Confident Scheme in this work.</p>
Flexible, accessible training formats – including online, in person, and hybrid – are needed to meet varied needs and conditions.	<p>We have enhanced Aspiration B, Commitment 1 by adding ‘accessible formats’ :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ‘...to promote availability of relevant training provision in accessible formats and provision of the time, space and opportunity for people to undertake training and development that will be mutually beneficial for people businesses and organisations.’
A centralised, easy-to-navigate system for advice, guidance, and support would help both employers and individuals.	<p>This is referenced in Aspiration A, Commitment 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ‘... we will signpost and make information easily accessible to employers, including training where appropriate, and improve access to occupational health advice. This can also include workforce training such as sign language and autism awareness courses. We will also draw attention to the impact of trauma and raise awareness of trauma informed approaches.’ <p>This also incorporated into the action plan which supports the implementation of the strategy.</p>
More awareness is needed for peer support, mentoring and real-life case studies to build confidence and reduce stigma in both training and work settings.	<p>This is incorporated into Aspiration A, Commitment 2 which covers collaboration and sharing of innovative and best practice across organisations with anchor institutions taking a key role.</p> <p>Aspiration C, Commitment 3 has been strengthened and now incorporates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advantages of peer support and mentoring opportunities will be incorporated as appropriate. <p>Aspiration C, Commitment 3 includes. ‘An inclusive culture will also be promoted which mitigates against stigma and builds confidence for all.’</p>

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More visibility and promotion of inclusive schemes – too many people miss out due to poor communication and outreach.	Aspiration A, Commitment 1 focuses on raising awareness of support for employers, Aspiration B, Commitment 1 focuses on raising awareness of training and development, so promotion is incorporated into the existing strategy document. This is also reflected in the action plan which is being developed.
Create an ethos of open, honest communication without judgement and an inclusive culture which integrates good mental and physical wellbeing.	Aspiration A, Commitment 2 states: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ‘... told us about the need for good communication and open and honest dialogue. A focus on a collaborative approach and nurturing good understanding between employer and employee is required. The aim is to work towards mutually beneficial arrangements resulting in good outcomes for employees and organisations/business.’
Raising awareness to reduce stigma and unconscious bias.	Aspiration C, Commitment 3 states: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ‘An inclusive culture will also be promoted which mitigates against stigma and builds confidence of all employees.’
Access for employers to practical support, for example occupational health, support for adaptations and assistive technologies and guidance on legal responsibilities.	Aspiration A, Commitment 1 has been updated to include assistive technologies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ‘... signpost and make information easily accessible to employers, including training where appropriate, and improve access to occupational health advice. This can also include workforce training such as sign language, assistive technology and autism awareness courses.’
Development for line managers to support employees and inclusive teams.	The aim of Aspiration B, Commitment 3 is to ‘Provide employers with access to knowledge about development, training and skills opportunities across the system which can enhance their own offer to facilitate people reaching their potential.’ Reference to inclusive teams has been included in this commitment to strengthen it.
Incorporate simple solutions for example quiet spaces for wellbeing breaks, line manager ‘check ins’ and peer support networks.	Aspiration D, Commitment 1 has been strengthened to highlight that simple solutions can often be effective: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ‘Simple solutions can often be effective including quiet spaces for wellbeing breaks and peer support networks.’
Incorporate reasonable adjustments and accessible workspaces.	Aspiration C, Commitment 2 has been strengthened to incorporate accessible workspaces as well as reasonable adjustments: <p>‘Reasonable adjustments and workspace accessibility should be used effectively to enable people with long-term conditions and disabilities to start, stay and succeed in work.’</p>

Lived Experience Interviews and Focus Groups Feedback

You Said	We Did
Ensure mental health conditions are explicitly and consistently addressed as a distinct area of need across all four aspiration areas and embedded throughout the overall strategy – going beyond general references to wellbeing.	Aspiration C, Commitment 1 specifically mentions mental health support and also ‘...aims to raise awareness of the full range of multidisciplinary support available for work/health professionals and employers, including signposting support available to employees and those seeking employment.’
Place communication at the heart of the strategy by embedding it as a key element across all four Aspiration areas, recognising its central role in shaping relationships, delivering support, and promoting positive working environments as well as wellbeing in the workplace.	<p>Aspiration A: ‘To underpin this aspiration, a strong, trusted, working relationship is important between employer and employee, facilitating a collaborative, open and honest dialogue which is responsive to the needs of both parties.’</p> <p>Aspiration B has been strengthened with reference to communication in the final paragraph: ‘An ethos of appropriate development, training and upskilling based on good communication between employer and employee should be fundamental to people, organisations and businesses and will be encouraged along with ease of access, in a timely way, to relevant opportunities from across the system.’</p> <p>Aspiration C: ‘Open and honest dialogue is key to ensuring that the business needs of the organisation are balanced alongside people's needs to create an inclusive work culture.’</p> <p>Aspiration D: ‘A collaborative approach across the system is proposed, this includes partnership working and connecting with expertise on healthy food, fuel poverty, housing and the cost-of-living crisis’</p>
Prioritise flexibility as a core principle of workplace support across the whole strategy – encouraging organisations to adopt empathetic, more adaptable approaches tailored to individual employee needs –	<p>Aspiration C, Commitment 1: ‘In this way professionals can work with people in a multidisciplinary and holistic way to build the programme which meets their needs and supports them in the most appropriate way, coordinating a bespoke solution from the full range of support available.’</p>

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especially during periods of challenge or transition.	
Encourage a culture of proactive, collaborative engagement that replaces assumption with informed, person-centred dialogue – ensuring support is tailored to individual needs and grounded in mutual understanding.	There are references to this throughout the strategy, but particularly in Aspiration C, Commitment 1: ‘In this way professionals can work with people in a multidisciplinary and holistic way to build the programme which meets their needs and supports them in the most appropriate way, coordinating a bespoke solution from the full range of support available.’
Recognise and promote the value of small low-cost adjustments across all four Aspiration areas. Encourage organisations to embed a culture where small, everyday acts of empathy, flexibility and consideration are normalised – benefiting individuals with specific needs and the wider workforce.	There are references throughout the strategy, for example: Aspiration A: for example, autism awareness and sign language training Aspiration B: for example, development offered as part of a new role Aspiration C: for example, flexibility to attend appointments Aspiration D: for example flexibility to take breaks and move around during the working day.
Demonstrate importance of employees feeling that they are working with their employer where support evolves through shared learning.	Aspiration A, Commitment 1 states: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘A focus on a collaborative approach and nurturing good understanding between employer and employee is required.’
Recognise the importance of accessible training.	Aspiration B, Commitment 1 states: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This commitment aims to promote availability of relevant training provision in accessible formats and provision of the time, space and opportunity for people to undertake training and development that will be mutually beneficial for people businesses and organisations.
Training for employers to be aware of the range of support available.	Aspiration B, Commitment 1 states: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This commitment aims to promote availability of relevant training provision in accessible formats and provision of the time, space and opportunity for people to undertake training and development that will be mutually beneficial for people businesses and organisations.
Recognise the importance of employers getting to know the employee as an	Aspiration C, Commitment 1 states:

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individual. Personal connection, individual understanding and confidence building as essential foundations to help people be supported and thrive in the workplace.	‘In this way professionals can work with people in a multidisciplinary and holistic way to build the programme which meets their needs and supports them in the most appropriate way, coordinating a bespoke solution from the full range of support available.’
Support for good mental wellbeing to be firmly placed in workplace culture.	Aspiration D, Commitment 1 states: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisational and job design, leadership and workload if not managed well can all have a stressful impact on employees. A focus on managing these well will be taken to achieve a positive impact on employee mental wellbeing and work life balance.’
Importance of moments to pause and recharge.	Aspiration D, Commitment 1 has been strengthened: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ‘ A focus on managing these well, for example moments to pause, will be taken to achieve a positive impact on employee mental wellbeing and work life balance.’

You Said	We Did
Ensure an action focus to Aspiration B and its implementation.	A balanced view has been taken given that the programme is running from existing resources. However, more action focused wording has been incorporated and action focused work is being incorporated into the action plan.
Ensure a balanced approach to flexible working to facilitate business need.	The strategy has been reviewed to ensure that flexible working is set in the context of business or organisational need.
Recognise the significant role that stigma can have on individuals with disabilities and long term health conditions in the workplace and ensure there is scope to address this in the strategy.	Aspiration C, Commitment 3: ‘An inclusive culture will also be promoted which mitigates against stigma and builds confidence of all employees.’