

Employment Matters Committee

17 September 2026

Learning and Development Strategy Update

Report from: Sam Beck Farley, Chief Organisational Culture Officer

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Summary

This report provides an update on progress against the Learning and Development Strategy and associated Action Plan during 2025/26. Significant progress has been made in strengthening employee development opportunities and learning governance. Key achievements include the review of the Medway College of Social Care, the introduction of a council-wide learning needs analysis process, and the development of new learning resources to support managers. The report also outlines priorities for 2026/27, including the rollout of leadership development programmes, mentoring arrangements and enhanced workforce analytics.

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 The Committee is asked to review and note the key achievements of the Learning and Development Action Plan in 2025/26 set out in section 4 of the report.
- 1.2 The Committee is asked to note the proposed key actions in the Learning and Development Strategy and timescales for delivery for 2026/27.

2. Budget and policy framework

- 2.1 This strategy is a key document that complements the delivery of the Workforce Strategy, Recruitment Strategy, One Medway Council Plan and the Financial Improvement and Transformation Plan.
- 2.2 The update on progress will be provided annually by the Chief Organisational Culture Officer, to Corporate Management team.
- 2.3 This decision is within the Council's policy and budget framework.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Learning and Development Strategy enables us to deliver on our priorities by equipping employees with the skills, knowledge and confidence needed to thrive in a changing environment.
- 3.2 The strategy sets out the key areas of focus for Learning and Development activities, including talent development and succession planning, onboarding, developing effective leaders and managers, inclusion, diversity and wellbeing, digital transformation, reward and wellbeing.
- 3.3 The majority of learning and development opportunities are delivered through a combination of in-house training, subject matter experts, e-learning and apprenticeship programmes funded through the Apprenticeship Levy. Where learning needs cannot be covered through these routes, external training may be sourced in accordance with the Council's procurement and compliance requirements.

4. Advice and analysis

- 4.1 During 2025/26, activity focused on supporting talent development, leadership effectiveness, and employee engagement. Key achievements included:
 - Development of the Strategic Leadership Development Programme.
 - Completion of the review of the Medway College of Social Care.
 - Introduction of a council-wide learning needs planning process.
 - Development of manager resources to support career conversations.
 - Enhanced workforce data and reporting capability.
 - Continued delivery of the Complete Medway Manager Programme.
 - Increased focus on inclusion, diversity, wellbeing and employee engagement.
- 4.2 **Building our early talent pipeline** – The Council continued to invest in developing its early talent pipeline through apprenticeships, work experience opportunities, and engagement with educational providers. Apprenticeships remain a key route for attracting, developing, and retaining talent, while also supporting workforce succession planning and addressing future skills needs.
- 4.3 Medway Council continues to maximise the use of its Apprenticeship Levy funding to support workforce development across apprenticeship levels 2 to 7.
- 4.4 The gap between levy income and expenditure has reduced significantly due to apprenticeship reforms which have led to the funding for some Level 7 apprenticeships for employees aged 21 or over being withdrawn. In anticipation of government changes, a review of workforce development needs was undertaken during 2025. This enabled eligible employees to commence Level 7 programmes before funding restrictions were introduced, securing levy-funded development opportunities and reducing potential pressure on the Council's central training budget.

- 4.5 Recent government reforms, including restrictions on some Level 7 apprenticeship funding and the withdrawal of funding for 16 apprenticeship standards, are expected to have longer-term implications for workforce development.
- 4.6 The greatest impact on Medway is anticipated to arise from the withdrawal of management-related apprenticeship standards that have historically supported leadership and management development:
- Team Leader / Supervisor (Level 3)
 - Operations Manager (Level 5)
 - Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship (Level 6)

These programmes have formed a key part of the Council's Career Progression Framework and provided accessible, levy-funded development routes for aspiring and existing managers.

- 4.7 Alternative apprenticeship and non-apprenticeship development pathways are currently being explored, including leadership and management qualifications delivered through Medway Adult Education. While these alternatives will help maintain development opportunities, they cannot be funded through the Apprenticeship Levy and are therefore likely to increase demand on the Council's central training budget in future years.
- 4.8 Apprenticeships remain a key component of the Council's workforce development strategy. As at 31 December 2025, Medway supported 219 active apprentices, welcomed 139 new apprenticeship starts during the year and achieved 66 successful completions. The Council was also ranked 4th nationally within the public sector in the Sunday Times Top 100 Apprenticeship Employers submission.
- 4.9 Following consultation with apprentices and a review of participation levels, the Council has refreshed its apprentice engagement offer. From September 2026, apprentice forums will move to a quarterly development model, complemented by a monthly Microsoft Teams network. This revised approach is intended to strengthen peer support, improve engagement and provide apprentices with greater opportunities to evidence their professional development.
- 4.10 A comprehensive review of the Medway College of Social Care (MCSC) was completed during the year. The review confirmed the continued value of MCSC in supporting workforce development across the social care sector. MCSC continues to provide high-quality, cost-effective learning opportunities, supports workforce competence and legislative compliance, secures external funding opportunities and generates income for the Council.

- 4.11 The review highlighted the positive contribution MCSC makes to workforce resilience through its extensive training offer, support for personal assistants, and partnerships with social care providers. The review also identified opportunities to strengthen engagement with registered care managers and refresh the College's digital presence.
- 4.12 **Enabling our People to Develop** - Engagement with senior officers took place throughout the year to help shape the Strategic Leadership Development Programme. The programme has been designed to support leaders in developing the behaviours and competencies identified within the Strategic Leadership Framework.
- 4.13 The programme will provide structured development opportunities covering key topics including:
- governance and accountability foundations,
 - legal and policy compliance,
 - ethical leadership and conduct,
 - assurance in practice,
 - service planning and performance management,
 - financial management and value for money,
 - risk, internal control and assurance,
 - employee relations,
 - leadership, reflection and continuous improvement.
- 4.14 The programme will be rolled out during 2026/27 and will form a key component of the Council's approach to leadership development and succession planning
- 4.15 The Complete Medway Manager Programme was refreshed during 2025/26. The programme increased from 4 modules to 6 modules with a further module planned. This remains a key element of the Council's learning and development offer. The programme supports managers in developing the core leadership and management skills required to effectively lead teams, manage performance and drive service improvement. Appendix 2 provides a summary of participation levels during 2025/26.
- 4.16 **Inclusion, Diversity and Wellbeing** – the Learning and Development Team continued to work closely with employee networks and colleagues across the organisation to promote learning initiatives that support inclusion, diversity and wellbeing. Learning opportunities have been aligned to key awareness days where possible to ensure training remains relevant, accessible and supportive of creating an inclusive workplace culture.
- 4.17 **Engagement, Reward and Wellbeing** – A dedicated space has been created on Medspace under Leadership and Development. This includes monitoring performance, creating a psychological safe space, supporting individual team members with their development and maintaining employee's wellbeing. In addition, face to face training and a video is being created for individuals on how to prepare for your Performance Progression Appraisal.

The resources contribute to improved employee engagement and support the Council's commitment to career development and talent retention.

- 4.18 A structured training needs scoping exercise was successfully introduced during the year. This represented the first coordinated approach to gathering learning requirements directly from service areas.
- 4.19 Discussions were undertaken with Directorate Management Teams to ensure identified learning priorities aligned with organisational objectives, workforce needs and available resources. The exercise has provided a more strategic approach to commissioning learning and development activity and will be refined further during 2026/27.
- 4.20 Supporting learning and development is fundamental to both personal and organisational success. For employees, access to learning opportunities enhances professional knowledge, skills and confidence, supports career progression and ensures practice remains current and aligned to best practice.
- 4.21 For the organisation, investment in learning and development supports statutory compliance, improves workforce capability, strengthens succession planning, promotes innovation and contributes to workforce retention. Continued investment in learning and development supports the Council's ambition to be an Employer of Choice and ensures employees have access to development opportunities aligned with organisational priorities.
- 4.22 Work has been undertaken collaboratively with the HR Systems Team to establish improved data capture and reporting mechanisms that will support future workforce analytics, learning evaluation and KPI monitoring. This work will enable the Council to better assess the impact of learning activity on workforce outcomes, including career progression, retention and organisational capability.
- 4.23 Learning and Development continued to support the wellbeing agenda through the promotion of learning opportunities linked to resilience, stress management and employee wellbeing. Activity aligned with wellbeing awareness campaigns and key events took place throughout the year. Appendix 2 provides a summary of participation levels during 2025/26.
- 4.24 Throughout the year significant work was undertaken to review and enhance learning provision. This included updating training programmes, revising and modernising face-to-face content, increasing the use of digital learning resources and producing a range of training videos to improve accessibility and flexibility for learners. These improvements support a blended learning approach and help ensure learning remains relevant and engaging.
- 4.25 The focus for 2026/27 will be on continuing to embed programmes of learning, evaluating impact and progressing additional actions aligned to the overall objectives within the Workforce Strategy. Key priorities for 2026/27 include:

- Rollout of the Strategic Leadership Development Programme.
- Introduction of mentoring arrangements linked to the Strategic Leadership Framework.
- Evaluation of leadership development activities and outcomes.
- Continued delivery of management development programmes.
- Enhancement of workforce analytics and learning impact measures.
- Further development of learning opportunities supporting inclusion, diversity and wellbeing.
- Progression of digital skills development activity, subject to organisational priorities.
- Reviewing course evaluation across all learning activities (excluding e-learning).

5. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
An unstructured approach to learning and development may lead to unequal access to opportunities undermining the Council's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion	Impact on workplace morale. Failure to create an inclusive learning environment.	The Learning and Development Strategy seeks to address this through promotion of the learning and development planning cycle. Training needs gathered from Heads of Service.	C3
Inability to support all training requests due to budget not increasing with inflation	Impact on workplace morale. Employees may feel disengaged. Risk of increase in turnover.	Increase budget in line with inflation	B3
Apprenticeship levy being withdrawn from programmes	Reduction in management development opportunities due to loss of funded programmes	Increase budget to support individuals meet CPF or place emphasis on individuals' funding.	B2

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
	Increased costs of professional qualifications outside the levy.	Review CPF's to consider including and/or experience.	

For risk rating, please refer to the following table:

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely B Likely C Unlikely D Rare	1 Critical 2 Major 3 Moderate 4 Minor

6. Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) implications

- 6.1 There are no direct Local Government Reorganisation implications arising from this report currently.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

8. Legal implications

- 8.1 There are no legal implications for this report.

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Appendices

- Appendix 1. Learning and Development Action Plan 2026-27
- Appendix 2 Course participation levels
- Appendix 3 Defunded Apprenticeship Standards

Background papers

None

Appendix 1 - ACTION PLAN 2026/27

Priority 1 Workforce 2028

Ref	Target/Action	Specific	Measure	Responsible Owner	Time	Update
1	Align talent management with strategic workforce planning which will facilitate staff development, upskilling for service needs and future proofing for the future	Align 9 box diamond into Senior Leadership Programme. Create a training video to support the roll out of 9 box diamond.	100% engagement by all Service Managers.	Selina Bullivant / Charlotte Baldwin/Jan St John Knight	Q2/Q3	
2	Identify future skills requirements to meet the changing needs of the council and the digital environment through engagement and partnering with services on a regular basis	FIT Plan 9j - Use skills data captured through the MedPay review—focusing initially on the priority 'A' skills—to shape service-level workforce planning and inform a structured annual learning review in Q3/Q4. This review will set learning priorities for the following year and ensure all development activity aligns with CPFs and statutory requirements.	100% engagement by all Service Managers.	Lisa Morgan / Selina Bullivant	Q1 and Q3	
3	Build on existing partnerships with schools and local	Engage with schools, colleges and universities	% of school leavers starting	Claire Poynter / Jodie Billson	Q1/Q4	

Ref	Target/Action	Specific	Measure	Responsible Owner	Time	Update
	colleges/universities to increase our offer of work experience and apprenticeship opportunities.	to promote Medway as an employer of choice.	an apprenticeship with Medway. % of work experience placements supported.			
4	Standardise induction quality across directorates to close variation and ensure a seamless welcome experience.	Review, implement and promote a corporate induction framework and supporting resources to ensure all new starters receive a positive experience aligned to the Council's values, culture and key policies.	100% of new starters complete the corporate induction programme. 100% of managers utilise the induction toolkit for new starters.	Claire Poynter / Lisa Morgan	Q3/Q4	

Priority 2 Enabling our People to Develop

Ref	Target/Action	Specific	Measure	Responsible Owner	Time	Update
1	Design and launch a structured mentoring programme aligned to the Senior Leadership CPF at Level C.	Develop, implement and promote mentoring programme as part of Senior Leadership Development Programme.	100% engagement by all Service Managers assessed at Level C.	Selina Bullivant / Jan St John Knight	Q3/Q4	
2	Design and launch the Senior Leadership Development Programme focussed on enhance the core competences of senior managers at Service Manager level and above.	Build a suite of training for leaders, aligned to the Senior Leadership CPF (first 6 months).	100% engagement by all Service Managers.	Jan St John Knight	Q3/Q4	
3	Continue to review and promote the Complete Medway Manager Programme focused on enhancing the core competences of managers at Range 8 and below.	Managers are equipped with the essential leadership skills to lead teams and drive service improvement.	75% of managers completed 3 or more modules. All new managers complete all modules within 6 months of joining Medway.	Jan St John Knight	Q1-Q4	
4	Continue to develop the suite of training available through e-learning to complement other initiatives, placing a	Develop and promote a comprehensive learning and development offer ensuring all employees have access to a	90% positive feedback from participants attending training.	Selina Bullivant	Q1-Q4	

	stronger emphasis on the delivery of blended L&D options including virtual delivery methods, e-learning and face to face sessions.	minimum of 5 days CPD per year.	Increase the positive response rate to the staff survey statement ""I have opportunities to develop my career, by a minimum of 5 percentage points compared with previous results.			
5	Continue to promote and extend the range of accredited learning through apprenticeships.	Align the apprenticeship placements with directorate workforce planning.	Increase the number of apprenticeship placement by 5%, achieving an 80% retention rate and securing at least 50% into permanent roles.	Jodie Billson	Q1-Q4 Quarterly tracking	

Priority 3 Enabling our People to Develop

Ref	Target/Action	Specific	Measure	Responsible Owner	Time	Update
1	Promote and deliver modules on key wellbeing topics such as managing stress, resilience, mental health and emotional intelligence.	Staff are equipped with practical tools to manage wellbeing and reduce workplace absence.	Increase in participation rates across the Council Positive feedback from staff.	Learning and Development	Q1-Q4	

Appendix 2

Complete Medway Manager

Training Course	No of Sessions	Delivery	Cost Per course (excl. vat)	Number booked on iShare	Number of attendees	Failed to attend	Non-attendance % rate
The Complete Medway Manager - Managing My Team (Operational)	3	MS Teams	£0.00	89	83	6	5%
The Complete Medway Manager - Managing My Team (Operational): Recruitment, Resourcing & Development	2	MS Teams	£0	83	76	7	8%
The Complete Medway Manager - Me as a Manager (Operational)	2	MS Teams	£0	57	52	5	9%
The Complete Medway Manager - My Core Responsibilities (Operational) Equality, Diversity, Inclusion	5	MS Teams	£165	111	100	11	10%
The Complete Medway Manager - My Core Responsibilities (Operational) Internal Audit & Counter Fraud	3	MS Teams	£0	100	94	6	6%
The Complete Medway Manager - My Core Responsibilities (Operational) Legal & Finance	4	MS Teams	£0.00	107	100	7	7%

Nb. Please note in 2025-26 the CMMT sessions were paused to review and amend the existing programme. This means there was a reduction in delivery of the courses with the programme restarting in September 2025

Well-being Training

Training Course	Number of Courses	Length	Delivery Style	Cost Per course (excl. vat)	Number booked on iShare	Number of attendees	Failed to attend	Non-attendance % rate
An Introduction to Emotional Intelligence	2	Half day	F2F	£0	26	22	4	15%
Loneliness Awareness Training for Managers and All Staff	3	1.5 hours	Microsoft Teams	£500.00	51	47	4	7%
Managerial Training Series- Identifying & Reducing Stress In Your Team	4	3 hours	F2F	£165	47	40	7	17%
Managing Your Own Stress Levels	1	3 hours	F2F	£0	19	17	2	11%
Menopause Awareness	2	45 mins	Microsoft Teams	£0.00	11	10	1	10%
Menopause Awareness for Managers	2	2.5 hours	Microsoft Teams	£0.00	22	19	3	13%
Neurodiversity Training	4	3 hours	Microsoft Teams	£450	117	104	13	11%

Appendix 3

Defunded Apprenticeship Standards

Apprenticeship Standard	Level
Cleaning Hygiene Operative	2
Professional Security Operative	2
Custody and Detention Professional	3
Facilities Management Supervisor	3
Learning and Skills Assessor	3
Public Sector Compliance Investigator and Officer	3
Security First Line Manager	3
Team Leader / Supervisor	3
Improvement Practitioner	4
Lead Practitioner in Adult Care	4
Learning and Skills Mentor	4
Coaching Professional	5
Operations Manager	5
Outdoor Learning Specialist	5
Chartered Manager (Degree Apprenticeship)	6
Improvement Leader	6