

Employment Matters Committee

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Workforce Report 2025/26

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Summary

This report presents Medway Council's annual Workforce Report for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026, attached at Appendix 1, and the accompanying Workforce Report Action Plan, attached at Appendix 2.

The Workforce Report provides an overview of workforce composition, equality monitoring, recruitment, retention, turnover and sickness absence. It highlights positive improvements in workforce stability, alongside areas requiring further attention, including equality data quality, succession planning and workforce retention. The Workforce Report Action Plan sets out the actions that will be taken to address identified workforce priorities and support continuous improvement across the organisation.

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 The Committee is asked to note the contents of the Workforce Report 2025/26 attached at Appendix 1 to the report.
- 1.2 The Committee is also asked to note the Workforce Report Action Plan attached at Appendix 2 to the report.

2. Budget and Policy Framework

- 2.1 Whilst there is no specific decision required as a result of this report, it is important that the Committee receives assurance regarding workforce trends, workforce equality monitoring and the actions being taken to support workforce sustainability and inclusion.
- 2.2 The report supports delivery of the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2023-2028, People Strategy priorities and statutory obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

3. Background

3.1 Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (Public Sector Equality Duty), public authorities must have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- advance equality of opportunity; and
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

3.2 As part of these responsibilities, Medway Council publishes workforce equality information to monitor workforce representation, identify trends and support evidence-based decision making.

3.3 The Workforce Report provides analysis of:

- workforce size and composition;
- protected characteristic representation;
- recruitment activity;
- employee turnover;
- sickness absence; and
- workforce trends across directorates.

3.4 The report also enables the Council to assess progress against equality objectives and identify areas where improvement activity may be required.

3.5 In addition to the annual workforce analysis, a Workforce Report Action Plan has been developed to respond to the key findings and workforce risks identified within the report.

4. Advice and analysis

4.1 Workforce Overview

4.1.1 As of 31 March 2026, Medway Council employed 3,330 employees, representing an increase of 266 employees (8.7%) compared with March 2025. Workforce capacity also increased, with FTE rising by 9.7% during the year. Growth was concentrated primarily within the Children and Adults directorate, where workforce numbers increased by over 21% during the year following service investment and workforce expansion activity. The increase in workforce capacity was accompanied by growth in established employment, supporting workforce stability across the organisation.

4.1.2 The Council continues to employ a predominantly female workforce, with women accounting for 75.2% of employees. The workforce also continues to reflect the ethnic diversity of the Medway population.

4.1.3 The workforce age profile also became more balanced during the year, with the proportion of employees aged 16 to 24 increasing from 6.6% to 9.7%. This supports the Council's longer-term workforce sustainability and succession planning objectives.

4.2 Recruitment, Retention and Workforce Stability

4.2.1 Recruitment activity remained strong during 2025/26, with 628 employees joining the organisation during the year. Most recruitment growth occurred within Children and Adults.

4.2.2 Workforce stability improved during 2025/26:

- turnover reduced from 12.7% to 9.7%, remaining below wider local government turnover levels;
- first-year turnover reduced from 29.8% to 27.3%; and
- the rolling turnover trend continued to decline.

4.2.3 Despite these improvements, first-year turnover remains relatively high, with more than one quarter of new employees leaving within their first year of employment. The Children and Adults directorate continues to experience the highest turnover rates and remains the Council's primary workforce planning focus due to the scale of workforce growth and recruitment activity within the directorate. This indicates that workforce movement continues to be concentrated amongst newer employees rather than the established workforce.

4.3 Health and Wellbeing

4.3.1 The Council's sickness absence rate reduced from 10.46 to 9.97 days per FTE during 2025/26. Improvements were recorded across all directorates.

4.3.2 Long-term sickness absence reduced significantly during the year, with over 1,600 fewer days lost compared with 2024/25. This contributed to the overall improvement in attendance levels, although stress and anxiety remained the leading cause of absence across the organisation.

4.4 Equality Monitoring

4.4.1 The Workforce Report demonstrates that workforce representation remains broadly stable across most protected characteristics. Ethnic minority employees account for 15.8% of the workforce compared with 15.7% of the Medway population, indicating that the workforce continues to broadly reflect the diversity of the communities it serves.

4.4.2 A key issue identified within the report is the reduction in declaration rates for several protected characteristics, including:

- ethnicity declaration rates reducing from 94.9% to 90.4%;
- disability declaration rates reducing from 59.8% to 54.5%; and
- sexual orientation declaration rates reducing from 74.5% to 72.8%.

4.4.3 Equality data quality for new starters deteriorated significantly during the year, particularly within Children and Adults following substantial recruitment activity. This has reduced the completeness of workforce equality information and limits the Council's ability to accurately assess workforce representation and trends.

4.5 Workforce Report Action Plan

4.5.1 The Workforce Report identifies a number of workforce priorities requiring further action. These include improving equality data quality, strengthening workforce planning, supporting retention, improving employee wellbeing and developing more sophisticated equality outcomes reporting.

4.5.2 Appendix 2 sets out a Workforce Report Action Plan that responds directly to these findings. The action plan includes measures to:

- improve equality declaration rates;
- strengthen recruitment and onboarding arrangements;
- improve retention and first-year turnover;
- develop succession planning for critical roles;
- improve workforce diversity;
- introduce equality outcomes monitoring; and
- enhance workforce intelligence and benchmarking.

4.5.3 Progress against the action plan will be monitored through existing workforce governance arrangements and reported annually through future workforce reports.

5. Financial and legal implications

5.1 There are no direct financial or legal implications from this report.

6. Local government Reorganisation (LGR) implications

6.1 There are no direct financial or legal implications from this report.

6.2 This report will not require Shadow Council approval.

7. Risk management

7.1 The risk implications arising from this report are detailed below

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Failure to identify emerging workforce pressures may impact service delivery.	Insufficient workforce intelligence and planning may prevent the Council from responding effectively to changing service demands and workforce risks.	Annual workforce analysis and workforce planning activity.	C2
High turnover and recruitment difficulties within key services could affect workforce capacity.	Ongoing recruitment and retention challenges may result in skills shortages, increased workloads and reduced service resilience	Continue recruitment and retention improvement activity identified within the action plan.	C2
Incomplete employee equality information limits the Council's understanding of workforce representation and trends.	Poor quality or incomplete equality data restricts the Council's ability to monitor representation, identify inequalities and demonstrate progress against its equality objectives.	Implement equality data improvement actions and monitoring	C3

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

8 Conclusions

- 8.1 The Council's workforce grew during 2025/26 and workforce stability improved, with reductions in turnover, first-year turnover and sickness absence.
- 8.2 The workforce continues to be diverse and broadly representative of the communities it serves in relation to ethnicity.
- 8.3 The report identifies a number of areas requiring further improvement, particularly workforce equality data quality, workforce planning, succession planning and equality outcomes monitoring.

- 8.4 The Workforce Report Action Plan provides a structured approach to addressing these priorities and supports the Council's commitment to equality, diversity, inclusion and workforce sustainability.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Workforce Report
Appendix 2 – Workforce Report Action Plan
Appendix 3 – Workforce Report Diversity Impact Assessment

Background papers

None