

Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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Adult Social Care Workforce Strategy 2025 - 2028

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Summary

This report presents Medway Council's Adult Social Care Workforce Strategy 2025 – 2028.

The strategy sets out how Adult Social Care will attract, retain, develop and support a skilled, stable, inclusive and future-ready workforce capable of delivering safe, effective and person-centred services for Medway residents. It establishes a clear framework for workforce improvement through six strategic priorities focused on workforce capability, ethical practice, inclusion, recruitment and retention, leadership, and workforce intelligence. The strategy also provides a three-year delivery roadmap and framework for measuring impact and assuring progress.

The report was previously considered by the Health and Wellbeing Board on 3 September 2026 and its comments are set out at section 8 of this report. The report is then due to be considered by Cabinet on 20 October 2026.

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 The Committee is asked to note the contents of the draft Adult Social Care Workforce Strategy, provide any comments and recommend the strategy to the Cabinet for approval.

2. Budget and Policy Framework

- 2.1 The strategy supports the One Medway Council Plan, including:

Priority 1: Delivering Quality Social Care and Community Services, and sub-priorities:

- Provide effective, targeted support for our most vulnerable residents to enable them to fulfil their potential and improve their quality of life;
- Support people of all ages to live the most happy, healthy, independent life possible, utilising assistive technologies;
- Support all adults, including those living with disability or physical or mental illness to live independently and stay safe;
- People in Medway live independent and fulfilled lives into an active older age.

Priority 4: Improving Health and Wellbeing for All, and sub-priorities:

- Empowering people to achieve good health and wellbeing through prevention, with access to local activities and services that will enable and support them to lead independent, active and healthy lifestyles;
- Work in partnership with communities and organisations to address the issues that negatively affect health and wellbeing, making sure everyone has the opportunity to live long, healthy lives.

2.2 The Workforce Strategy is a key enabling strategy supporting delivery of the Adult Social Care Strategy 2025 – 2028, and the Adult Social Care CQC Improvement Plan.

2.3 The strategy aligns with national Adult Social Care policy and regulatory expectations by strengthening workforce capability, leadership development, digital confidence, data literacy, integrated working and continuous improvement. It also supports the CQC's expectations regarding workforce effectiveness, organisational learning and sustainable service improvement.

3. Background and Local Context

3.1 The Workforce Strategy provides the strategic framework for workforce improvement across Adult Social Care and completes a key action within the Adult Social Care Improvement Plan. It sets out the workforce conditions required to support safe, effective and person-centred care, strengthen organisational resilience and maintain readiness against CQC expectations.

3.2 The strategy was developed with support and constructive challenge from the regional Care and Health Improvement Adviser (CHIA). Further detail on the development process and CHIA feedback is set out later in this report.

3.3 Adult Social Care continues to operate within a challenging environment, with increasing demand, rising complexity of need, workforce shortages, financial pressures, and heightened regulatory expectations. In this context, workforce stability, capability and resilience are critical to the delivery of high quality, timely, and person-centred services for Medway residents.

- 3.4 The Workforce Strategy reports that Medway Adult Social Care employed 321.3 FTE staff, including 59.6 FTE agency workers, based on April 2025 workforce data. While these figures reflect the position at the time the strategy was developed, the workforce has grown significantly. As at July 2026, Medway Adult Social Care employs 401.7 FTE staff, comprising 362.3 permanent FTE staff and 39.4 FTE agency workers. This represents a reduction of 20.2 FTE agency workers (34%) since April 2025, demonstrating continued progress in reducing reliance on agency staffing and strengthening the permanent workforce. This workforce profile highlights both existing strengths and areas requiring strategic focus, particularly in relation to agency reliance, succession planning, career progression, and wellbeing and inclusion.
- 3.5 The evidence base for the strategy identifies five key workforce challenges that need to be addressed if Adult Social Care is to strengthen resilience and support sustainable improvement:
- High reliance on agency workers;
 - Gaps in skills, confidence and digital capability;
 - An ageing workforce and succession planning risks;
 - Unequal access to progression and mixed experiences of inclusion;
 - Leadership visibility and communication.
- 3.6 These challenges are particularly significant in the context of the CQC Assurance Framework, which places strong emphasis on leadership, workforce capability, organisational learning, quality improvement, and sustainable delivery.
- 3.7 Following Medway's CQC assessment, the development of a dedicated Adult Social Care Workforce Strategy was identified as a specific action within the CQC Improvement Plan. The strategy responds directly to this requirement by providing a clear framework for workforce stabilisation, development, and transformation. It ensures that workforce planning is aligned with service improvement priorities, organisational ambitions, and the conditions needed to deliver consistently safe, effect, and person-centred care.

4. Development of the Strategy

- 4.1 The Workforce Strategy has been developed through analysis of workforce data, staff feedback, workforce intelligence and engagement activity across Adult Social Care. Development activity included:
- Analysis of workforce demographics, recruitment and retention data;
 - Workforce surveys;
 - Stay interviews;
 - Review and challenge from the regional Care and Health; Improvement Advisor;
 - Alignment with Adult Social Care improvement activity and CQC expectations.

- 4.2 The strategy has been designed to address both immediate workforce stabilisation and longer-term transformation. This ensures that workforce planning is not treated as a standalone activity, but as an integral part of delivering the Adult Social Care Strategy, the Improvement Plan and wider transformation priorities.

5. Care and Health Improvement Advisor: External Scrutiny and Assurance

- 5.1 Our regional Care and Health Improvement Advisor (CHIA) provided external scrutiny and assurance throughout the development of the Workforce Strategy.
- 5.2 The CHIA reviewed successive drafts and provided challenge on scope, strategic alignment, workforce intelligence, workforce experience and links to wider transformation ambitions. This input strengthened the final strategy and helped ensure it reflects recognised good practice.
- 5.3 Following revision, the CHIA provided positive assurance regarding the overall quality of the strategy. Feedback concluded that the strategy was comprehensive, strongly evidenced and well aligned with CQC assurance expectations. The CHIA highlighted the strength of the workforce evidence base, the clear articulation of workforce priorities and the strong links between workforce actions and resident outcomes.
- 5.4 This external review provides additional assurance that the strategy is sufficiently robust to support delivery and future scrutiny through the Adult Social Care improvement journey.

6. The Workforce Strategy

- 6.1 The Workforce Strategy describes the workforce Medway requires to deliver high-quality Adult Social Care, and the practical priorities required to build that workforce over the next three years. It focuses on ensuring the right people, with the right skills, are in the right place at the right time.
- 6.2 The vision of the strategy is:

“To develop, adapt, and innovate to sustain and continually evolve a confident, skilled, inclusive and future-ready Adult Social Care workforce that reflects Medway’s diversity and values”
- 6.3 The strategy brings together workforce capability, organisational culture, leadership, inclusion and workforce sustainability into a single framework, recognising that progress in each area is mutually reinforcing.
- 6.4 To deliver this vision, the strategy establishes six strategic workforce priorities:
 - 1. Workforce Capability and Confidence: Ensuring staff have the skills, knowledge and confidence required to meet increasing service demand and support transformation.

2. Ethical Practice and Human Rights: Strengthening staff confidence in managing complex ethical dilemmas, ensuring consistent and proportionate decision making and supporting high-quality person-centred practice.
3. Inclusion, Diversity and Cultural Competence: Improving representation, cultural competence, and workforce confidence in equality, diversity and inclusion initiatives.
4. Recruitment, Retention and Wellbeing: Reducing reliance on agency staff, strengthening workforce stability and positioning Medway as an employer of choice.
5. Leadership and Culture: Developing visible, inclusive and values-based leadership capable of sustaining improvement and creating positive workplace cultures.
6. Data, Intelligence and Impact: Strengthening workforce planning through improved workforce intelligence, data literacy, performance management and predictive analytics.

6.5 A key feature of the strategy is the introduction of a Workforce Maturity Model. The model provides a structured framework for assessing workforce development across eight domains: confidence, skills and capability, inclusion and representation, digital and data readiness, transformation readiness, ethical and human rights practice, leadership and culture, and workforce sustainability. The model describes progression from “Emerging” through to “Thriving” and provides a shared understanding of what good looks like, where Adult Social Care currently sits, and the outcomes the strategy seeks to achieve by 2028. This approach provides a clear framework for monitoring progress over time.

7. Delivery, Monitoring and Reporting Arrangements

- 7.1 Delivery of the Workforce Strategy will be managed through the Adult Social Care Transformation and Improvement Programme. Each strategic priority will have a named Senior Responsible Owner accountable for delivery, risks and dependencies.
- 7.2 Oversight will be provided through the existing Adult Social Care governance structure, including:
 - Adult Social Care Transformation and Improvement Programme Board.
 - Adult Social Care Quality Assurance and Performance Improvement Board.
 - Adult Social Care Senior Leadership Team.
 - Children and Adults Directorate Management Team.

- 7.3 Implementation will follow the phased roadmap contained within the strategy, moving from workforce stabilisation and core capability towards maturity, leadership capacity, inclusion and strengthened workforce intelligence.
- 7.4 Progress will be monitored through the strategy's Measuring Effectiveness and Impact Framework, supported by a range of workforce, service and organisational indicators. The strategy identifies twelve Key Performance Indicators that provide a balanced view of workforce effectiveness, organisational resilience, service performance, and improvement outcomes:
- Timeliness of assessments;
 - Safeguarding timeliness;
 - Reablement impact;
 - Agency reliance;
 - Vacancy and retention health;
 - Wellbeing and burnout risk;
 - Caseload manageability;
 - Manager confidence to lead change;
 - Access to development;
 - Flexible working access;
 - Digital confidence and adoption;
 - Staff confidence in leadership and culture.
- 7.5 Quarterly progress reports will be presented through programme governance arrangements, covering delivery progress, performance against key indicators, risks, dependencies and corrective actions. An annual review will test continued alignment with workforce intelligence, organisational priorities, national policy developments and Adult Social Care improvement activity.

8. Health and Wellbeing Board

- 8.1 The Board considered the report on 3 September 2026, and the draft minutes of the discussion are set out below.
- 8.2 The Board received the report which detailed the strategy to expand on and develop a 'future ready' workforce. As part of the Strategy, various workforce challenges were identified and responded to which aligned with learning from the January 2025 Care Quality Commission inspection and the improvement plan developed as a result of that inspection. The Strategy reinforced the Councils intentions and aspirations to existing staff, and senior management continued to work extensively to promote development opportunities to staff and encouraged staff to remain working in Medway.
- 8.3 Improvements had been made to the workforce which resulted in improved strategic decision making for the people cared for. There was also a willingness by new staff to share ideas and expressed that they felt valued and listened to by senior management.

- 8.4 It was commented that this Strategy would facilitate a much needed transition between adult social care and the NHS by integrating health and social care services in line with legislative requirements.
- 8.5 Discussions took place regarding staff access to flexible working and reliance on an out of hours service to which the Board was informed that the service was committed to ensuring there were opportunities for staff to work flexibly whilst maintaining the needs of the service. Particular mention was made on encouraging providers to explore the actions being taken in this Strategy and how it could be applied to their own workforce strategies. The officer explained that there was also another workstream currently in progress on development of a care sector plan which took learning from this plan and would be made available to providers to support them with their own workforce plans.
- 8.6 It was commented that this Strategy was similar to that of the Children's Social Care Workforce Strategy and the regular meetings held to monitor progress had been instrumental in driving forward change. This had enabled improvement to be made to the recruitment and retention of staff.
- 8.7 There were strong links between the University and Medway, students sought placements across children and adults services and were encouraged and supported through the process. If a social worker expressed a desire to develop their skills in another areas, opportunities to take up posts across both children and adults were encouraged and supported.
- 8.8 The Strategy was commended by partners across the Board, in particular colleagues who were keen to refer to this strategy as the reviewed their own policies.
- 8.9 **Decision:**
- a) The Board agreed to note the proposed monitoring, reporting and governance arrangements set out within the report.
 - b) The Board suggested that officers consider exploring how to share their aspirations with other parts of the Council such as the Employment and Skills Board.

9. Risk Management

- 9.1 The following risks to successful delivery of the Workforce Strategy have been identified:

Risk	Description	Mitigation	Rating
Capacity to deliver strategy actions	Delivery of workforce improvement initiatives may be affected by competing service pressures, wider improvement activity, and operational priorities, reducing capacity available for implementation	Delivery embedded within the Transformation and Improvement Programme, with clear prioritisation, phased implementation, and named senior ownership for each priority. Progress and capacity will be monitored through programme governance arrangements	B2
Insufficient workforce engagement	Staff may not fully engage with workforce initiatives, reducing the impact of learning, development, leadership, and cultural improvement activity	Ongoing workforce engagement, co-production, and staff feedback mechanisms Leadership visibility Communications activity Monitoring of participation risks	C2
Recruitment and retention improvements not realised	Planned workforce interventions may not achieve the anticipated reduction in agency reliance, improvements in retention, or workforce stability	Regular monitoring of workforce indicators Targeted recruitment activity Retention initiatives Succession planning Periodic review of delivery approaches	B2
Pace of organisational change	The scale of transformation activity across ASC may impact the organisation's capacity to absorb workforce-related change and implement new ways of working	Phased delivery aligned to the roadmap Change readiness activity Programme management oversight	B2

Risk	Description	Mitigation	Rating
Workforce data and intelligence limitations	Incomplete or insufficient workforce data could affect workforce planning, prioritisation and evaluation of strategy outcomes	Development of workforce dashboards Data quality improvements Regular performance reporting	C2
Financial constraints	Financial pressures may limit the availability of resources required to fully implement the strategy actions or sustain workforce investment	Alignment with budget setting processes Any additional investment requirements will be considered through normal governance and business case processes	B2
Failure to evidence impact	The strategy may deliver activity without sufficient evidence that it is improving workforce outcomes, service performance or resident experience	Delivery will be monitored through Key Performance Indicators, with quarterly reporting and annual strategy reviews	C2
Leadership and ownership	Lack of sustained leadership ownership could reduce momentum and undermine delivery of strategic priorities	Named Senior Responsible Owners for each area Regular reporting through Programme Board for Leadership Team oversight Annual review of delivery plans	C2

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

10. Climate change implications

- 10.1 Implementation of the strategy may support more sustainable ways of working through the increased use of digital technologies, virtual learning and flexible working arrangements, which could contribute to reducing travel and associated carbon emissions where appropriate.
- 10.2 The Adult Social Care Workforce Strategy is not expected to have any significant direct climate change or carbon emission implications. The strategy focuses primarily on workforce planning, recruitment, retention, learning and development, leadership and organisational improvement.

11. Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) implications

- 11.1 Following the announcement of the pause of Local Government Reorganisation on 7 September 2026, officers will monitor the ongoing situation and will consider any relevant impacts as they arise.

12. Financial Implications

- 12.1 The Workforce Strategy does not in itself create additional financial commitments. Delivery will be managed through existing Adult Social Care budgets, workforce planning arrangements and the Transformation and Improvement Programme. Any initiatives requiring additional investment will be subject to separate business cases and approval through established governance processes.
- 12.2 The strategy is expected to support improved workforce stability, reduced agency reliance and more effective workforce planning, contributing to improved value for money over time.

13. Legal Implications

- 13.1 The strategy supports delivery of Medway Council's statutory responsibilities under the Care Act 2014, Mental Health Act 1983, Mental Capacity Act 2005, and Equality Act 2010.
- 13.2 The strategy also supports compliance with the CQC Assurance Framework by strengthening workforce planning, leadership and organisational improvement arrangements.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Adult Social Care Workforce Strategy

Appendix B – Diversity Impact Assessment

Background papers

None