

## **CABINET**

**27 June 2025**

### **REPORT OF PORTFOLIO HOLDER PARTNERSHIPS**

#### **A.6 Tendring District Council (Career Track) Apprenticeships**

##### **PART 1 – KEY INFORMATION**

###### **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

The purpose of this report is to update the Cabinet on the activities of Career Track, the Council's apprenticeship training provider.

Furthermore, this report satisfies the requirements of the Governors' framework, which aims to implement and provide a quality experience for apprentices and employers and meet the expectations of funders and regulators, whereby the Board will undertake to provide clarity between the Board and the Cabinet with a yearly update.

###### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

At its meeting on 19 April 2024, the Cabinet considered a report from the Partnerships Portfolio Holder (A.5), which provided an update on the work of Career Track, the Council's apprenticeship training provider. The report also sought the Cabinet's approval to continue its support for Career Track and to acknowledge the outcome of the recent Ofsted visit, which rated Career Track as 'Good' and noted that apprentices enjoy their learning and feel valued by staff.

This report details the outcome of the annual review as required by the Governors' framework.

Career Track has been offering apprenticeship opportunities since its inception in 1983, both within the Council and to external employers, particularly other public sector bodies. This programme is a key component of the Council's strategy to develop a skilled workforce and create job opportunities for Tendring residents, which is crucial given the socio-demographic challenges of the area.

Tendring district, with a population of around 146,500, faces significant educational and employment challenges. It has the lowest job opportunities per working-age resident in Essex, and 34.3% of residents aged 16 and over have no formal qualifications, compared to the national average of 22.5%. Additionally, only 21.78% of pupils achieved five or more GCSEs at grades 4-9 in 2023, below the national average of 30.01%. These statistics highlight the need for targeted interventions to improve educational and employment outcomes.

As part of its commitment to providing work and learning opportunities, Career Track has consistently received strong support from the Council. Over the past decade, 500 individuals have participated in the Career Track apprenticeship programme. It is regarded as a key mechanism for young people across the district to pursue careers within Tendring. Career Track directly impacts the "Raising Aspirations and Creating Opportunities" theme in the Council's current Corporate Plan, which emphasises supporting residents in reaching their potential by collaborating with businesses and enhancing access to skills, learning, and training.

The government-set maximum funding band levels for the delivery of apprenticeships, which form the basis of fees and charges, have not been increased since 2017. Career Track operates on a non-profit basis and receives funding from the Department for Education (DfE) to deliver apprenticeships. However, this funding does not cover the full costs incurred by the service. The shortfall is primarily due to increased costs since 2017, with no adjustments made to the allowable fees set by the government when the current apprenticeship system was established eight years ago.

To assist with mitigating the revenue shortfall, Career Track provides apprenticeships for other local authorities, creating an additional revenue stream to further support the provision of the service. As of the time of writing, Career Track has a total of 54 apprentices currently enrolled on the programme. Of these, 29 are employed within Tendring District Council, while the remaining apprentices are placed in local authorities across Essex, including Braintree and Colchester, and Suffolk, Kent, and two London Boroughs.

Current data indicates a 32% increase in the number of apprentices participating in the Career Track programme since it was last reported to Cabinet. As a result of this growth, the net direct cost of the service is projected to decrease by 13% in the 2025/26 financial year compared to the previous year. In addition, the Council's workforce profile reveals that approximately one-fifth of current employees, circa 100 employees, began their careers at Tendring District Council as Career Track apprentices. This highlights the programme's continued importance as a strategic recruitment pathway for the organisation

In line with the Cabinet's decision at its meeting on the 19 April 2024, Officers have evaluated several alternative solutions (set out below) to reducing the overall subsidy required, which addresses the specific request of Cabinet to undertake a review of the service. However, it is strongly considered that Career Track is fundamental in supporting the authority's Corporate Plan, upskilling local residents, and enhancing Council services. Therefore, the Cabinet is asked to acknowledge these efforts and the team's success in delivering the forecast subsidy as outlined in the long-term financial plan. This therefore forms the basis of the proposals moving forward.

Finally, Career Track is particularly important in the context of Local Government Reorganisation, as effective apprenticeship programs are essential for building a resilient workforce and addressing employment challenges for the future of local government.

#### **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

**It is recommended that Cabinet:**

- a. Notes the annual review undertaken by the Career Track team, including the proposed actions (set out in this report) to deliver the forecast subsidy reflected in the long-term financial plans;**
- b. Requests financial updates to be included as part of the quarterly financial reports, as necessary.**

#### **REASON(S) FOR THE RECOMMENDATION(S)**

The Career Track apprenticeship programme is central to Tendring District Council's efforts to support local talent and businesses while contributing to economic and social progress. With

its "Good" Ofsted rating and positive outcomes, it is a key contributor to the Cabinet's priority of "Raising Aspirations and Creating Opportunities" theme in the Council's current Corporate Plan.

#### **ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS CONSIDERED**

1. Join Crown Commercial Services (CCS): this option was disregarded due to resource needs, loss of autonomy, increased competition, and existing legislation allowing collaboration without competition.
2. Career Track Becomes an Approved Employer Provider: this option was disregarded because it requires a higher apprenticeship wage budget, limits regional reach, and reduces adaptability to demand changes.
3. Utilise Alternative Local Authority Providers: this option was disregarded due to lack of prioritisation for Tendring, potential decline in support and success rates, unmatched local understanding, and significant role in staff recruitment and retention.

## **PART 2 – IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION**

#### **DELIVERING PRIORITIES**

The 2024-2028 Corporate Plan continues the Community Leadership theme with Career Track able to make a direct contribution to

- Raising aspirations and creating opportunities in Tendring.

Career Track's vision is to be recognised as a 'Good' provider of apprenticeships; engaging learners in the development of workplace knowledge, skills and behaviours that enable them to actively contribute to the economic, health and social wellbeing of the district:

- to educate, engage and inspire.
- to inform, advise, support and mentor.
- to establish and maintain high quality standards in apprenticeship training.
- to safeguard and promote the welfare of our learners.

**OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT** (including with the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee and other stakeholders where the item concerns proposals relating to the Budget and Policy Framework)

#### **Board of Governors Engagement and Programme Overview**

The Board of Governors has been consulted on the content of this report through its scheduled quarterly meetings. As part of their ongoing engagement, the Board has also participated in a series of discussions with apprentices to gather direct feedback on their experiences. The insights gained from these consultations are being actively considered to inform future service developments and to enhance the Council's support for both apprentices and their supervisors.

#### **Employer Engagement**

During National Apprenticeship Week in 2023, Career Track hosted a 'Celebration of

Success event', which also marked the programme's 40th anniversary. In addition to celebrating achievements, Career Track has continued to provide tailored support to employers through one-to-one sessions, with a particular focus on curriculum development and the effective use of OneFile software.

### Learner and Employer Feedback

A comprehensive survey was conducted for the 2023/2024 academic year, targeting both learners and employers. The results were overwhelmingly positive:

- **Employers** reported that their apprentices are acquiring the knowledge, skills, and behaviours necessary for their chosen career paths. They also confirmed that Career Track collaborates effectively with their organisations to review individual apprentice progress and plan future training needs.
- **Learners** indicated that their apprenticeship programme meets their needs, the feedback they receive helps them improve, and they feel their voices are heard on matters that affect them.

### Ofsted Inspection Findings

The most recent Ofsted inspection further reinforced these findings, highlighting that apprentices enjoy their learning experiences and feel valued by the staff, whom they respect. Apprentices were found to be highly motivated, making good progress, and committed to successfully completing their training.

### LEGAL REQUIREMENTS (including legislation & constitutional powers)

Is the recommendation a Key Decision (see the criteria stated here)	No	If yes, indicate which by which criteria it is a Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/> Significant effect on two or more wards <input type="checkbox"/> Involves £100,000 expenditure/income <input type="checkbox"/> Is otherwise significant for the service budget
		And when was the proposed decision published in the Notice of forthcoming decisions for the Council (must be 28 days at the latest prior to the meeting date)	

The report is not seeking a decision but is merely asking the cabinet to note the outcome of the annual review.

It is considered that Local Authorities (Goods and Services) Act 1970 power which enables local authorities to provide administrative, professional, and technical services can be relied upon for services to local authorities and public bodies.

Section 93 of the Local Government Act 2003 introduced powers which enable local authorities to charge in function related activities provided the authority is not under a duty to provide the function. Under the Act, Councils can decide to charge for any discretionary services, which includes those provided on the basis of the general power of competence. The Act does not apply to services which a local authority is mandated or has a duty to provide.

Also, the recipient of the discretionary service must have agreed to its provision and to pay for it.

The 2003 Act power cannot be used where charging is prohibited or where another specific charging regime applies. Charging is limited to cost recovery. Local authorities wishing to engage in commercial activity with the private sector in their discretionary services will need to rely on other powers such as the trading powers under section 95 of the 2003 Act and can only do so, through a company. It is understood that no additional fee is being charged, and the payment of the services being provided is restricted to the national apprenticeship levy arrangements.

The General Power of Competence was introduced under the Localism Act 2011 and gives local councils the ability and flexibility to make decisions to do anything that an individual can do (provided it is not unlawful). The Council is not seeking to trade in these services for commercial purpose.

☐ **The Monitoring Officer confirms they have been made aware of the above and any additional comments from them are below:**

Nothing to add in addition to the content of the report.

#### **FINANCE AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

**Impact on the Net Budget 2024/25 and anticipated impact on Net Budget 2025/2026.**

<b>Original Base Estimate</b>	<b>2024/25</b>	<b>2025/26</b>
Direct Expenditure	214,490	226,360
Direct Income	(188,080)	(188,080)
Net Direct Cost of Service	26,410	38,280
Financial Forecast adjustment to reduce estimated income	75,000	50,000
Net Direct Cost of Service (after financial forecast adjustment)	101,410	88,280

☐ **The Section 151 Officer confirms they have been made aware of the above and any additional comments from them are below:**

As acknowledged via associated amendments to the budget from 2025/26 that were agreed by Full Council in February, as the Service continues to work towards lowering the overall subsidy where possible, a phased approach was adopted with an estimated reducing net position reflected in the budget over the medium term. The proposals set out in this report support this overall approach.

#### **USE OF RESOURCES AND VALUE FOR MONEY**

The following are submitted in respect of the indicated use of resources and value for money indicators:

A) Financial sustainability: how the body plans and manages its resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its services;	Tendring District Council (Career Track) Apprenticeship Governance Board, including clear Terms of Reference
B) Governance: how the body ensures that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks, including and	As above.
C) Improving economy, efficiency, and effectiveness: how the body uses information about its costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers its services.	As above.

### **MILESTONES AND DELIVERY**

The progress of Career Track is monitored at the termly governance meetings and recorded formally with a continued yearly report to Cabinet.

Ofsted visited Career Track in November 2023 and undertook a full inspection – the outcome of this is that Career Track is now a ‘Good’ provider and has a positive report to support this, with the next Ofsted visit anticipated 2026/27.

### **ASSOCIATED RISKS AND MITIGATION**

Reduced government funding or changes to the Apprenticeship Levy could make programmes less viable. However, the levy is a key part of the government's strategy to fund apprenticeship training. Employers who pay the levy can use these funds to cover the costs of training and assessing apprentices, while non-levy paying employers receive significant government funding to support their apprenticeship programmes.

Other authorities may determine that, to satisfy their internal governance requirements, a competitive process must be implemented to procure an apprenticeship provider. If this trend is observed by Career Track, it is noted that future decisions on the use of procurement frameworks to deliver the service to other public sector organisations will need to be made at the Cabinet level, supported by a business case.

### **EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 places a statutory duty (The Public Sector Equality Duty, “PSED”) on the Council in the exercise of their functions and is applicable when making decisions to have due regard to the needs to:

(a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act. In summary, the Act makes discrimination etc. on the grounds of a protected characteristic unlawful.

(b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

(c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender assignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion, or sexual orientation. The Act states that notably, ‘marriage and civil partnership’ is not considered a relevant protected characteristic for advancing equality of opportunity (b) and fostering good relations (c).

An Equality Impact Assessment ("EqIA") has been conducted to ensure that the report proposals comply with these requirements.

### **SOCIAL VALUE CONSIDERATIONS**

Social Value is defined through the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 and requires all public sector organisations (and their suppliers) to look beyond the financial cost of a contract and consider how the services they commission and procure might improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of an area.

Career Track offers apprenticeship opportunities to people and employers from the Tendring district, adding money back into the local economy. This in turn improves health and wellbeing, increases self-esteem, raises educational attainment, and enhances employability skills and experience, providing a positive example to others.

### **IMPLICATIONS RELATED TO DEVOLUTION AND/OR LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION**

Career Track has been successfully supporting apprentices at Tendring District Council and in the wider community, including Braintree District Council and Colchester City Council, for over 40 years.

As local authorities in Essex, including Tendring District Council, explore new opportunities through Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation, the need to upskill individuals for the local government sector remains essential. Tendring District Council is committed to collaborating closely with Colchester and Braintree during this reorganisation process, with the Board of Governors including representation from both councils. Given Career Track's valuable contributions across these three councils, the Cabinet is asked to continue supporting its initiatives.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S AIM TO BE NET ZERO BY 2050**

No implications.

### **OTHER RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS OR IMPLICATIONS**

**Consideration has been given to the implications of the proposed decision in respect of the following and any significant issues are set out below.**

#### **Crime and Disorder**

No direct implications

#### **Health Inequalities**

No direct implications

Subsidy Control (the requirements of the Subsidy Control Act 2022 and the related Statutory Guidance)

Since the legislation came into force in January 2023, public authorities must assess whether they are providing subsidies within the definition of the Act, which equates to financial assistance conferring an economic advantage to one enterprise over another.

Reference to the Act is specifically mentioned in the Department for Education Apprenticeship Funding Guidance updated on 15 May 2025, in

	particular in considering the ability for employers to transfer unused funds in their account to any number of other employers, for any number of apprenticeships. The Guidance states that the subsidy control rules need to be taken account of when receiving funds from other organisations.
<b>Area or Ward affected</b>	All wards.

## PART 3 – SUPPORTING INFORMATION

### BACKGROUND

The Tendring district, with a population of approximately 146,500, faces significant educational and employment challenges. Findings from the Office for National Statistics demonstrate that Tendring has the lowest job opportunities per head of the working-age population in Essex. Additionally, 34.3% of residents aged 16 and over are reported as having no formal qualifications, which is notably higher than the national average of 22.5%. Furthermore, GCSE achievement rates in Tendring are below the national average, with only 21.78% of pupils achieving five or more GCSEs at grades 4-9 in 2023, compared to the England average of 30.01%. These statistics highlight the pressing need for targeted interventions to improve educational outcomes and employment opportunities in the district.

Career Track is the name used by Tendring District Council for its apprenticeship service. Established in 1983, Career Track has been offering apprenticeship opportunities both within the Council and to external employers, specifically other public sector bodies. This programme is a key component of the Council's strategy to develop a skilled workforce and create job opportunities for Tendring residents. In the last 10 years, over 500 people have taken part in a Career Track apprenticeship programme.

Career Track is registered with the Department for Education (DfE) and the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) as a Local Authority Provider and is therefore subject to inspection by Ofsted. The most recent Ofsted inspection rated Career Track as 'Good' and identified that apprentices enjoy their learning and feel valued by staff whom they respect. Apprentices are highly motivated to successfully complete their training and make good progress.

In order to provide apprenticeships, the organisation has to continue to be an Approved Training Provider with the ESFA/DfE. Providers apply to be approved on a register, referred to as the apprenticeship provider and assessment register (APAR) (previously RoATP - Register of Approved Training Providers). Since this requirement was introduced, Career Track has been through the re-application process twice, most recently in July 2022. A successful application is essential for the continuation of Career Track; it is anticipated that re-registration will be required during 2025/2026.

All approved providers are subject to inspection from Ofsted. On Inspection, Ofsted grades the organisations it inspects as Excellent; Good; Requires Improvement; or Inadequate. Its Inspection Reports are published here [www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports).

Career Track were inspected by Ofsted in November 2023 and received a 'Good' outcome. The inspection recognised the work that has been undertaken and support by Cabinet over



the last two years.

The Apprenticeship Funding Rules set by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and the Department for Education (DfE) govern how apprenticeship training providers must charge for their services within the funding bands. The key legislation underpinning this is the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009, which established the framework for apprenticeships in England. However, the specific funding rules and band limits are enforced through ESFA's funding guidance, which is updated annually. Since 2017, the government-set maximum funding band levels for apprenticeships have remained unchanged, as a result, Career Track faces a funding shortfall as the current funding does not fully cover the full costs incurred.

In light of this, at its meeting 19 April 2024, the Cabinet acknowledged that the long-term cost of providing a subsidy will need to be considered as part of developing the long-term financial forecast. It was noted that the Career Track Service will continue to work towards reducing the subsidy as reflected in the long-term forecast.

To support its governance requirements, Tendring District Council (Career Track) Board of Governors was established in 2022, the membership is currently as follows: -

<b>Name</b>	<b>Job Role/Organisation</b>	<b>Board Function</b>
Cllr. Gina Placey	Portfolio Holder for Partnerships, Tendring District Council	Chair
Ian Davidson	Chief Executive, Tendring District Council	Representative
Richard Barrett	Corporate Director, Finance and IT, Tendring District Council (deputy for Ian Davidson)	Representative
Gary Guiver	Corporate Director, Planning and Community, Tendring District Council	Representative
Debianne Messenger	Work Based Learning Manager, Tendring District Council	Representative
Katie Wilkins	Assistant Director, People, Tendring District Council	Representative/ Management Team Lead
Marcia Fuller	People Development Manager, Tendring District Council	Representative
Jess Douglas	Strategic People and Performance Manager, Colchester City Council	Independent
Robin Harbord	Acting Strategy Development Lead in Education, Essex County Council	Independent
Hassan Shami	Commissioner for Skills, Essex County Council	Independent
Tracey Headford	People and Performance Manager, Braintree District Council	Independent

The addition of the four independent governors not only ensures that Career Track is subject to external rigour they also bring a wealth of experience, knowledge and support which assists with the leadership and effective governance of the service. It should be noted that there is governor representation from two other local district councils, who are likely to make up part of the new Unitary Council moving into LGR alongside Essex County Council.

When figures were previously reported to members in April 2024, there were 37 apprentices on the programme, this is now 54, with a view to reaching a maximum target position of 60 learners. Apprentices are placed with a number of local authorities including Maldon, Braintree, and Colchester. Career Track has recently been approved as a provider for all Suffolk authorities to deliver the Public Service Operational Delivery Officer (PSODO) Apprenticeship Standard and is working with Suffolk County Council and Babergh and Mid Suffolk. A detailed breakdown of apprentice numbers by apprenticeship type is provided in Appendix A.

Career Track also provides apprenticeships for care experienced young people at the Virtual School, Kent (run by Kent County Council) and two apprentices in two London Boroughs. The vacancies at other local authorities are taken up by people in those local areas.

#### PREVIOUS RELEVANT DECISIONS

Cabinet - Friday, 19th April 2024 10.30 am

119. [Cabinet Members' Items - Report of the Partnerships Portfolio Holder - A.5 - Tendring District Council \(Career Track\) Apprenticeships](#)  [PDF 144 KB](#)

#### BACKGROUND PAPERS AND PUBLISHED REFERENCE MATERIAL

- [View the background to item 119.](#)
- [View the decision for item 119.](#)

#### Additional documents:

- [A5 Appendix A - ToR Apprenticeship Board updated August 2023 , item 119.](#)  [PDF 94 KB](#)
- [A5 Appendix B - TDC Ofsted Inspection Report 2023 , item 119.](#)  [PDF 419 KB](#)

#### APPENDICES

Appendix A - Apprentice Numbers by Apprenticeship Type

#### REPORT CONTACT OFFICER(S)

Name	Katie Wilkins Debianne Messenger
Job Title	Assistant Director - People Work Based Learning Manager
Email/Telephone	<a href="mailto:kwilkins@tendringdc.gov.uk">kwilkins@tendringdc.gov.uk</a> 01255 686315 <a href="mailto:dmessenger@tendringdc.gov.uk">dmessenger@tendringdc.gov.uk</a> 01255 686313

## Appendix A – Total Number of Apprentices

	Level of Apprenticeship	Total Apprentices	TDC Apprentices
<b>Business Administrator</b>	Level 3	18	8
<b>Customer Service Practitioner</b>	Level 2	20	15
<b>Customer Service Specialist</b>	Level 3	1	0
<b>Public Service Operational Delivery Officer</b>	Level 3	15	6
<b>Team Leader</b>	Level 3	0	0
		54	29

**Overall total of apprentices: 54**