

An Insight into Thanet District Council's T-Level Programme

Meeting held on 3 November 2025

Attendees

Nick Hughes – Committee Services Manager (Thanet District Council)

Charles Hungwe – Deputy Committee Services Manager (Thanet District Council)

Gabriella Stewart – Senior Democratic Services Officer (Thanet District Council)

Chris Bailey – Elections and Leadership Support Officer (Tendring District Council)

Katie Koppenaal – Democratic Services Officer (Tendring District Council)

Nick Hughes, Committee Services Manager at Thanet District Council, commenced the meeting with a concise overview of the T-Level programme. He explained that T-Levels are a two-year qualification designed for students aged 16 to 19, broadly equivalent to three A-Levels. The programme integrates academic study with practical experience, requiring a minimum of 315 hours of industry placement to ensure students gain meaningful, hands-on exposure in a professional setting. At Thanet District Council, students undertaking placements are working towards qualifications in Business Administration and Management.

Nick continued by outlining the origins of the initiative, noting that it began three years ago when Thanet District Council was approached by the local college. The college had identified a student with a keen interest in pursuing a career within Democratic Services, prompting initial discussions that laid the foundation for the current programme.

Following the initial engagement, a student was welcomed into the Democratic Services Team, attending one day per week over the course of a year. Nick highlighted the positive impact of this arrangement, noting that the student quickly became a valuable asset to the team. Their enthusiasm and aptitude for learning enabled them to adapt swiftly and contribute meaningfully to the team's work.

Nick further explained that the key consideration in proceeding with the placement of a T-Level student was the character of the local college, which operates outside the sixth form model and focuses predominantly on vocational education. He observed that, in his view, such institutions are occasionally perceived as catering to students who are less academically inclined—a perception he firmly disagrees with. He also observed that the programme could be especially impactful in economically disadvantaged areas, describing it as an excellent opportunity to expose college students to industry environments and career pathways.

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Nick explained that each student is assigned a dedicated mentor within the team and follows a structured six-month work programme. This programme is tailored to align with the student's individual skills, interests, and personality profile. Regular one-to-one meetings are conducted to support the student's development and progress.

Democratic Services Officers rotate responsibility for supervising the student, ensuring consistent oversight and guidance. Thanet District Council receives a £1,000 equipment grant to support the placement. Students are not permitted to work remotely.

The Council maintains a formal partnership with the college, whereby all tasks completed by the student are systematically logged and contribute directly to their academic qualification.

The current T-Level student placed within Thanet District Council's Democratic Services Team has benefited from cross-departmental exposure, including time spent with the Licensing Team, Environmental Health, and Legal Services. Of the 17-week placement, 12 weeks have been dedicated to working within the Democratic Services Team.

Previous placement students have actively contributed to the preparation of Full Council minutes and a range of committee agendas. These experiences have significantly enhanced their understanding of local government operations while fostering the development of essential professional skills.

Nick noted that, following the successful placement within Democratic Services, Thanet District Council has expanded its T-Level programme to include additional placements—such as an engineering student at Ramsgate Port and another student supporting the ICT team.

He highlighted that, as part of the next onboarding process for the Democratic Services T-Level placement, students will undergo a formal interview process, including the preparation of their own CVs. This approach ensures that, regardless of the recruitment outcome, participants gain valuable, real-world skills and experience that will support their future development.

Nick described a previous initiative hosted by Thanet District Council, in which secondary school students were invited to participate in an interactive budgeting exercise. During the event, students were presented with a fictional budget and tasked with allocating funds across a range of proposed projects. This activity was designed to illustrate the complexities and challenges involved in prioritising expenditure within a local authority setting.

The Committee Services Manager has expressed his willingness to attend a Scrutiny meeting, should the committee wish to extend an invitation for further discussion or to ask additional questions.