

CABINET

24 JULY 2026

REPORT OF PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR 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 Cabinet on the activities of Career Track, the Council's apprenticeship training provider.

The report also fulfils the requirements of the Governors' Framework, which is designed to ensure the delivery of a high-quality experience for apprentices and employers, while meeting the expectations of funders and regulators. In accordance with this framework, the Tendring District Council (Career Track) Apprenticeship Governance Board ("the Board") provides Cabinet with an annual update to maintain transparency and effective governance.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Career Track is Tendring District Council's long-established apprenticeship training programme and remains a key part of the Council's approach to skills, employment and workforce development. This annual review provides Cabinet with an update on the programme's impact, governance, quality assurance, financial position and future development, in accordance with the Governors' Framework and the oversight role of the Board.

Over the last decade, more than 500 individuals have participated in the programme and 20% of Tendring District Council's current workforce (one in five employees) began their career through Career Track. This demonstrates that Career Track is an important part of the Council's recruitment and workforce strategy, providing entry-level routes into local government and supporting the Council's ability to attract, develop and retain employees.

Beyond its contribution to the Council's recruitment and workforce strategy, the wider economic case for this provision remains clear. Tendring continues to face significant socio-economic challenges, including lower economic activity and employment rates than regional and national averages, alongside lower levels of educational attainment. Career Track therefore provides both a high-quality apprenticeship training route and a practical intervention to improve local skills, employment prospects and progression into sustainable careers.

There are currently 44 apprentices on programme, including 18 employed by Tendring District Council. Apprentices are also supported by local authority and public sector organisations across Essex, Suffolk, Kent and London Boroughs. This public sector-only focus is a distinctive feature of Career Track, reflecting its specialist role in supporting public service apprenticeship pathways and workforce needs. A further ten apprenticeship positions are currently being advertised, demonstrating continued demand and planned growth.

Learner outcomes continue to demonstrate the effectiveness of the programme. In 2025/26, Career Track achieved a 94% success rate, significantly exceeding the Government's national ambition for apprenticeship providers to achieve a 67% achievement rate. This reflects consistently strong performance, with an average success rate of 97% achieved across the last two academic years. This strong achievement translated into positive onward destinations, with 86% of those who successfully completed in 2025/26 progressing directly into employment and a further 14% progressing into higher education or further Level 3 study. In addition, 82% of current apprentices are aged between 16 and 24, underlining the programme's role in supporting younger residents into early career pathways and aligning with the Department for Work and Pensions' Youth Guarantee, which is focused on helping young people access education, employment or training and reducing the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).

Career Track was judged to be a 'Good' provider following its most recent full Ofsted inspection in November 2023. This external validation, alongside strengthened governance arrangements through the Board and support from the Strategic Development Network (SDN), provides assurance that the programme is well placed to maintain Ofsted readiness, respond to apprenticeship reforms and meet changing sector requirements.

In recognition of its strategic importance, Full Council agreed, as part of the February 2026 budget-setting process, to provide dedicated financial support for Career Track within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy for the period 2025/26 to 2027/28. This financial support also reflects the Council's wider objectives in relation to young people, skills development and the future public sector workforce. The service's financial position remains relatively stable, with ongoing action to reduce subsidy requirements and support longer-term financial sustainability.

However, national apprenticeship funding arrangements continue to present challenges, with funding band levels for many standards remaining largely unchanged since 2017 despite increases in delivery, assessment and compliance costs. Emerging reforms, including the anticipated review of apprenticeship funding bands by Skills England, may provide further opportunities to strengthen the programme's future financial position.

Career Track also has particular strategic relevance in the context of Local Government Reorganisation and wider public sector workforce challenges. Apprentices are already being supported across Tendring, Braintree and Colchester, providing a practical foundation for future workforce development across the proposed North East Essex unitary authority area.

Overall, Career Track remains a successful, externally validated and strategically important programme, offering a distinctive public sector apprenticeship pathway that delivers measurable benefits for residents, public sector employers, the local economy and the Council's future workforce.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- a) notes the annual review of Career Track, including the programme's impact, governance arrangements through the Board, quality assurance activity, financial**

position and proposed actions to support its continued development, together with the forecast subsidy reflected in the Council's long-term financial plans; and

- b) requests that officers continue to report financial updates through the two-year financial planning process and/or quarterly financial reporting arrangements, as appropriate.

REASON(S) FOR THE RECOMMENDATION(S)

The recommendations enable Cabinet to maintain appropriate oversight of Career Track in accordance with the Governors' Framework and the annual reporting role of the Board, while recognising the programme's contribution to the Council's Corporate Plan priority of raising aspirations and creating opportunities. Career Track supports the local economy by helping residents move into work, improving skills levels, reducing barriers to employment and enabling public sector employers to recruit and develop employees through apprenticeship pathways. It also strengthens the future workforce pipeline for Tendring, Braintree, Colchester and the wider North East Essex public sector.

The recommendations also ensure that any significant emerging financial risks or variances are considered through the Council's established financial monitoring arrangements.

ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS CONSIDERED

In preparing this annual review, consideration has been given to whether any alternative delivery approach would better support the Council's strategic objectives. The current Career Track model continues to provide strong strategic value to Tendring District Council and partner authorities, supported by its established reputation, governance arrangements, positive Ofsted outcome and contribution to workforce development.

The continued support of Cabinet, together with growing engagement from neighbouring authorities and emerging opportunities through Local Government Reorganisation, reinforces the value of retaining and developing the existing model. At this stage, no alternative approach has been identified that would provide greater benefit for learners, employers or the future public sector workforce.

PART 2 – IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

DELIVERING PRIORITIES

Career Track directly supports the Council's Corporate Plan 2024-2028, particularly the priority of raising aspirations and creating opportunities. It does this by providing residents with access to high-quality apprenticeships, training and employment pathways, while supporting local public sector employers to develop the skills and capacity needed for effective service delivery.

The programme contributes to the Council's Community Leadership role by helping to address local skills, employment and economic participation challenges. By supporting residents to gain qualifications, confidence and workplace experience, Career Track helps improve life chances, supports improved access to employment and training opportunities and contributes to the wider economic, health and social wellbeing of the district.

Career Track also supports organisational resilience and workforce planning. It provides an established route into local government careers, helps develop future employees for Tendring

District Council and partner authorities, and supports the wider public sector workforce pipeline across North East Essex.

The programme's aims remain to educate, engage and inspire learners; inform, advise, support and mentor them throughout their apprenticeship journey; maintain high-quality standards in apprenticeship training; and safeguard and promote the welfare of 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)

Engagement with learners and employers continues to demonstrate the positive impact of Career Track. Feedback indicates that the programme supports learners to access sustainable employment, apprenticeships and further learning opportunities through tailored support, strong employer partnerships and high-quality placement experiences.

Learner feedback demonstrates improvements in confidence, motivation, professional behaviours, sense of belonging and aspirations for career progression. The programme also helps learners develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours required for successful employment within public sector environments.

Employers report that Career Track apprentices make a positive contribution to the workplace and demonstrate increasing levels of independence and professionalism throughout their apprenticeship. Feedback also indicates high levels of satisfaction with recruitment support, communication, learner progress reviews and the responsiveness of the Career Track team.

Career Track also promotes equality of opportunity and supports participation from learners who may face additional barriers to employment and training, including vulnerable and care-experienced young people. The programme therefore contributes to wider corporate priorities relating to improved access to employment and training, inclusion, early intervention, employability and economic wellbeing.

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	☐ Significant effect on two or more wards ☐ Involves £100,000 expenditure/income ☐ 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 recommendations in this report do not seek approval for new expenditure or a new policy decision; rather, Cabinet is asked to note the annual review and ensure that any significant emerging financial variances or risks continue to be reported through the Council's established financial monitoring arrangements.

It is considered that the Local Authorities (Goods and Services) Act 1970 can be relied upon in

respect of apprenticeship and related support services provided by the Council to other local authorities and public sector bodies. This reflects the current delivery model, under which Career Track provision is focused on Tendring District Council and other local authority/public sector employers.

Section 93 of the Local Government Act 2003 provides a power for local authorities to charge for discretionary services, where the recipient has agreed to the provision of the service and to pay for it. For the purposes of this report, any such provision is understood to relate only to services provided to local authorities and public sector bodies and is limited to cost recovery.

The Council is not seeking to trade Career Track services for a commercial purpose or to provide apprenticeship services to the private sector under this report. It is understood that no additional commercial fee is being charged and that payment for the services provided is restricted to the national apprenticeship levy and associated public funding arrangements.

The General Power of Competence, introduced under the Localism Act 2011, provides local authorities with the ability to do anything that an individual may do, provided it is not unlawful. In this context, the power supports the Council's ability to collaborate with other local authorities and public sector partners, alongside the specific powers set out above.

Y	The Monitoring Officer confirms they have been made aware of the above and any additional comments from them are below:
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Nothing to add in addition to the content of the report.

FINANCE AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The financial position for 2025/26 remains relatively stable with the service actively continuing to undertake actions with the aim of reducing the overall subsidy "as far as reasonably possible".

The service acknowledges that support from the financial forecast is being tapered down over the course of the medium-term financial strategy with £40k included in the 2026/27 estimate set out in the table below. However, as learner numbers increase in line with the approved growth strategy, there always remains a risk of short-term timing differences between expenditure commitments and income generation. Any such pressures are expected to be temporary and will be managed through the Council's established financial monitoring arrangements.

Outturn Position for 2025/26 and Estimate for 2026/27

	2025/26 Current Estimate	2025/26 Outturn Position *	2026/27 Estimate *
Direct Expenditure	289,750	289,960	251,420
Direct Income	(143,080)	(140,470)	(148,080)
Net Direct Cost of Service	146,670	149,490	103,340

** Direct expenditure includes requested carry forwards of £22k.*

Y	The Section 151 Officer confirms they have been made aware of the above and any additional comments from them are below:	
As reflected in the amendments to the budget agreed by Full Council in February 2026, and highlighted above, the service is working towards reducing the overall subsidy where possible. A phased approach has been adopted, with an estimated reduction in the net position reflected in the budget over the medium term. The proposals and monitoring arrangements set out in this report support that approach, with the comments regarding potential timing differences to be considered as part of the Council's wider financial planning processes.		
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.	Budget provision, regular financial review, quarterly monitoring of significant variances, and actions to grow learner numbers and reduce the forecast subsidy over the medium term.	
B) Governance: how the body ensures that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks.	Termly oversight by the Board, clear Terms of Reference, independent challenge, Ofsted assurance and external support from the Strategic Development Network.	
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.	Monitoring of learner outcomes, employer feedback, apprenticeship numbers, delivery costs and financial performance to inform continuous improvement and value for money.	
MILESTONES AND DELIVERY		
The progress of Career Track is regularly monitored through termly meetings of the Board, with outcomes formally recorded. This is supplemented by an annual report to Cabinet, ensuring ongoing oversight and strategic accountability.		
Career Track was subject to a full Ofsted inspection in November 2023 and was judged to be a 'Good' provider. The next inspection is anticipated in the 2026/27 academic year. To maintain readiness, the Council has entered into an agreement with the Strategic Development Network (SDN) to strengthen apprenticeship governance and scrutiny, build confidence and capability across the Board, and support continued compliance under the revised inspection framework.		
ASSOCIATED RISKS AND MITIGATION		
The principal risks relate to future apprenticeship funding arrangements, learner number growth, delivery costs, inspection readiness and changing national policy expectations. These risks are not unique to Career Track and reflect wider pressures across the apprenticeship sector.		
Financial risk will be mitigated through regular budget review, monitoring of learner numbers and income assumptions, and reporting of any significant variance through the Council's quarterly financial monitoring process. Delivery and quality risks will be mitigated through termly oversight by the Board, continued use of learner and employer feedback, external		

support from the Strategic Development Network and ongoing preparation for future Ofsted inspection.

Strategic risk will be mitigated by continuing to strengthen public sector employer partnerships and aligning the programme with workforce planning activity linked to Local Government Reorganisation, devolution and future public sector skills requirements.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 places a statutory duty, known as the Public Sector Equality Duty, on the Council when exercising its functions. This requires the Council to have due regard to the need 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 reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for the purposes of advancing equality of opportunity or fostering good relations.

Career Track has positive equality implications. The programme supports access to apprenticeships, training and employment pathways for residents who may otherwise face barriers to participation, including young people, care-experienced individuals and learners requiring additional support. With 82% of current apprentices aged between 16 and 24, the programme makes a significant contribution to improving opportunities for younger residents at the start of their working lives. In doing so, Career Track helps advance equality of opportunity, promote inclusion and support improved employment outcomes for residents across the district.

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 delivers clear social and economic value by supporting residents into apprenticeships, employment and career progression, while helping employers recruit and develop employees through apprenticeship pathways. By retaining skills, wages and workforce capacity within the district, the programme contributes to local economic resilience, improved life chances and wider community wellbeing.

IMPLICATIONS RELATED TO DEVOLUTION AND/OR LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

Career Track has strategic relevance in the context of Devolution and Local Government

Reorganisation because it already provides an established mechanism for attracting, developing and retaining employees within local government across North East Essex. Apprentices are currently being supported across Tendring, Braintree and Colchester, demonstrating the programme's existing contribution to shared workforce development and its potential value within future unitary authority arrangements.

As the sector prepares for significant structural change, the ability to build a resilient and skilled workforce will be critical. Career Track supports this by creating entry-level pathways into local government, improving access to public sector careers and helping to develop the skills and behaviours required for effective service delivery. This is particularly important in the context of recruitment pressures, demographic change and the need to retain local knowledge and capacity during transition.

The programme also provides a practical platform for closer collaboration across North East Essex. Its governance arrangements include representation from Braintree District Council and Colchester City Council, providing a basis for shared oversight and strategic alignment as future workforce requirements become clearer.

The Human Resources and Council Tax Committee has highlighted the strategic importance of Career Track and its contribution to workforce development, requesting that the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive support consideration of the continuation of Career Track within future unitary authority arrangements arising from Local Government Reorganisation. The Leader and Chief Executive subsequently confirmed their support, recognising the programme's economic importance and its contribution to developing employees through apprenticeship pathways, supporting workforce resilience and addressing future public sector workforce challenges.

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	Positive indirect implications through improved access to skills, employment and economic participation.
Subsidy Control (the requirements of the Subsidy Control Act 2022 and the related Statutory Guidance)	Since the Subsidy Control Act 2022 came into force in January 2023, public authorities must assess whether financial assistance may constitute a subsidy by conferring an economic advantage on one enterprise over another. Where the Council receives apprenticeship levy transfers from other organisations to support eligible apprenticeship training for Council employees or other public sector apprentices, those funds will be used only through the

	national apprenticeship funding system for approved apprenticeship training and assessment. The Council will ensure that any such arrangements comply with Department for Education funding rules and that subsidy control requirements are considered and recorded where appropriate.
Area or Ward affected	All wards.

PART 3 – SUPPORTING INFORMATION

BACKGROUND

Local context and need

Tendring District, with a population of approximately 156,700, continues to face significant educational and employment challenges. Office for National Statistics data shows that 73.6% of working-age residents are economically active, compared with 81.8% regionally and 79.2% nationally. Tendring's employment rate, at 66.6%, also remains below the East of England average of 77.5%. Skills levels also continue to fall behind national benchmarks, with a higher proportion of residents having no formal qualifications compared with the national average.

These factors demonstrate the continuing need for targeted interventions that improve skills, employment and economic participation locally. Career Track directly supports this by helping residents gain qualifications, access apprenticeships and progress into sustainable employment.

Programme overview

For more than 40 years, Career Track has supported residents into apprenticeships, employment and career progression, while helping the Council and other public sector employers develop the skills and capacity needed to deliver services to residents. The programme forms a key part of the Council's approach to developing a skilled workforce and improving employment outcomes for local residents. Over the past decade, more than 500 individuals have participated in a Career Track apprenticeship programme.

There are currently 44 apprentices on programme, including 18 employed by Tendring District Council. Apprentices are also supported through partner local authority and public sector organisations, demonstrating the programme's wider reach and value across Essex, Suffolk, Kent and London Boroughs.

Of the current apprentice cohort, 82% are aged between 16 and 24. This is particularly relevant in Tendring, where educational attainment, skills levels and employment participation remain below regional and national averages, highlighting the importance of providing positive pathways into employment and further learning.

Regulatory assurance and quality

Career Track is registered with the Department for Education, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Education and Skills Funding Agency as a Local Authority provider and is therefore subject to Ofsted inspection. The most recent full inspection, undertaken in November 2023, rated the service as *Good*, noting that apprentices enjoy their learning, feel

well supported by staff and make good progress.

To maintain its ability to deliver apprenticeships, Career Track must remain on the Apprenticeship Provider and Assessment Register. The service has successfully completed the re-application process on multiple occasions, most recently in July 2022, ensuring continued compliance with national requirements. The Council has also entered into an agreement with the Strategic Development Network to support continued Ofsted readiness, strengthen apprenticeship governance and build confidence and capability across the Board.

Governance arrangements

The Tendring District Council (Career Track) Apprenticeship Governance Board was established in 2022 to support effective governance, oversight and challenge. Its membership includes Members, senior officers and independent representatives from partner organisations, providing external challenge, sector expertise and strategic oversight. Independent governors provide external rigour, while representation from neighbouring district councils and Essex County Council reflects the programme's regional relevance and its potential role in supporting future workforce development through Local Government Reorganisation.

The current membership of the Board is as follows:

Name	Job Role/Organisation	Board Function
Cllr. Gina Placey	Portfolio Holder for Partnerships, Tendring District Council	Chair
Katie Wilkins	Director, People, Tendring District Council	Representative
Richard Barrett	Corporate Director, Finance and IT, Tendring District Council	Representative
Gary Guiver	Corporate Director, Planning and Community, Tendring District Council	Representative
Debianne Messenger	Work Based Learning Manager, Tendring District Council	Representative
Marcia Fuller	Acting Head of People, Tendring District Council	Representative
Jess Douglas	Director of People 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

Strategic relevance

Career Track is well placed to support workforce priorities linked to Local Government Reorganisation and wider devolution across Essex. Its partnership working across multiple organisations, particularly neighbouring authorities, provides a strong platform for attracting new employees, supporting workforce development and building a resilient future workforce across North East Essex.

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](#)

Cabinet - Friday, 27th June, 2025 2.30 pm

27. [Cabinet Members' Items - Report of the Partnerships Portfolio Holder - A.6 - Tendring District Council \(Career Track\) Apprenticeships](#)

Budget & Council Tax Setting, Council - Tuesday, 17th February, 2026 7.30 pm

108. [Report of the Cabinet - A.1 - Executive's Proposals - General Fund Budget and Council Tax 2026/2027](#)

[A.1 Appendices A-L, item 108](#)

BACKGROUND PAPERS AND PUBLISHED REFERENCE MATERIAL

- [View the background to item 119.](#)
- [View the decision for item 119.](#)
- [View the background to item 27.](#)
- [View the decision for item 27.](#)

Additional documents:

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

APPENDICES

Appendix A - Apprentice Numbers by Apprenticeship Type

REPORT CONTACT OFFICER(S)

Name	(1) Katie Wilkins (2) Debianné Messenger
Job Title(s)	(1) Director, People (2) Work Based Learning Manager
Email/Telephone	(1) kwilkins@tendringdc.gov.uk 01255 686315

(2) dmessenger@tendringdc.gov.uk
01255 686313

A.6 APPENDIX A – TOTAL NUMBER OF APPRENTICES

	Level of Apprenticeship	Total Apprentices	TDC Apprentices
Business Administrator	Level 3	10	3
Customer Service Practitioner	Level 2	15	12
Customer Service Specialist	Level 3	1	0
Public Service Operational Delivery Officer	Level 3	18	3
		44	18

Overall total of apprentices: 44