By: **Ben Watts; Deputy Chief Executive**

To: **Personnel Committee**

Date: **19 November 2026**

Subject: **Workforce Update**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

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1. Introduction

1.1 Members of the Personnel Committee have raised questions about the impact that uncertainty associated with LGR may have on KCC's ability to recruit and retain staff, and the actions being taken in response. This report provides an update on that activity.

1.2 The report seeks to pull together responses to the questions asked and provides detailed information to support the discussion, which Members will find included in the appendices.

1.3 It is recognised that given the current position on LGR means that the period of uncertainty continues at the time of this meeting.

2. Purpose, context and workforce resilience

2.1 Members of the Personnel Committee have raised questions about the impact that uncertainty associated with LGR may have on KCC's ability to recruit and retain staff, and the actions being taken in response. This report provides an update on that activity.

2.2 The impact also needs to be considered in the wider financial context facing both KCC and the local government sector. The Council continues to operate under significant financial pressure and is required to deliver savings and maintain tight control over its workforce and expenditure. The response to recruitment and retention pressures therefore cannot simply be to increase staffing levels or financial incentives. The Council has instead sought to maintain essential organisational capacity, retain critical skills and support service continuity while continuing to exercise appropriate restraint over recruitment and workforce costs.

2.3 Against this background, KCC has continued to recruit where vacancies need to be filled. Existing recruitment arrangements provide a range of options including apprenticeships, graduate recruitment, flexible deployment, temporary and fixed-term arrangements and, where justified, market premiums.

2.4 An important element of the Council's response has been to make best use of its existing workforce. Workforce planning guidance encourages managers to consider succession planning, flexible deployment, secondments, apprenticeships and development opportunities. Flexible deployment can enable employees to move more quickly between roles, helping the Council retain skills and experience while responding flexibly to changing and often challenging organisational requirements. This approach is particularly relevant in the current financial and operating environment because retention and redeployment of existing capability can, where appropriate, provide an alternative to external recruitment.

2.5 Targeted financial measures remain available, but their use is deliberately controlled. The Council's market premium arrangements enable additional payments in defined circumstances where posts have proved demonstrably difficult to recruit to or where the loss of existing employees would create skills shortages that would affect business operations. Approval requirements are built into the arrangements. Service-specific measures also continue in areas experiencing established labour-market pressures, including Adult Social Care and Children's Services.

2.6 The Council has also continued to focus on development and internal career opportunities as a means of retaining capability without relying solely on financial incentives. KCC's workforce approach includes learning and development, flexible deployment, secondments and apprenticeships. During 2026, employees have also been signposted to resources, which include guidance on CVs, applications and interview preparation, alongside coaching and other development opportunities to help support staff ahead of time with concerns they may have around possible implications of LGR.

2.7 Alongside these measures, considerable emphasis has been placed on communication and engagement. During a period in which definitive answers have not always been available, the Council has sought to provide colleagues with confirmed information rather than speculate about individual or organisational outcomes. Dedicated LGR information has been made available through KNet, supported by manager communications and engagement activity. Communications associated with the Service Complexity Assessments also made clear that these were fact-finding exercises rather than restructuring or performance exercises.

2.8 Employees have had opportunities to raise questions through State of the Sector sessions hosted by the Chief Executive, where staff also receive a briefing on the current position. Wider engagement across Kent and Medway has also taken place.

2.9 The annual data shows an improvement in retention across the non-schools workforce: rolling turnover reduced from 13.4% in March 2025 to 10.7% in March 2026. These figures should not be attributed solely to particular interventions, but they provide useful context when considering the concerns raised by Members. Section 3 and Appendix 2 provide further turnover information, including the available 2026/27 data.

2.10 LGR nevertheless creates a continuing workforce risk. As the programme develops, uncertainty about future organisational structures and individual roles (alongside opportunities in other areas) may affect both recruitment decisions and employees' willingness to remain with KCC, particularly in specialist and hard-to-fill areas. The Council will therefore continue monitoring turnover, vacancies and employee feedback to plan carefully and respond proportionately where evidence of particular recruitment or retention pressures emerges.

2.11 Overall, KCC's approach has been to balance three objectives: maintaining the workforce and skills necessary to deliver services safely; supporting and retaining employees through a period of significant organisational uncertainty; and ensuring that recruitment and retention activity remains proportionate to the very significant financial pressures facing the Council. This balance will become increasingly important following any final decision on progressing LGR where the Council moves closer to implementation.

3. Turnover

3.1 Members particularly asked to see data regarding turnover of staff and a range of information is provided in the appendices to this paper.

3.2 Rolling turnover decreased during 2025/26, falling to 10.7% in March 2026 from 13.4% in March 2025 although it is currently running a little higher.

3.3 The Chief Executive's Department recorded the lowest turnover rate at 8.7% with Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) continuing to have the highest turnover rate, at 12.4%. However, this has also reduced during the past year when compared with 16.1% in 2024/25.

3.4 Appendix 2 provides rolling turnover data for the non-schools workforce, including separate measures with and without CRSS staff and a historical series extending into 2026/27.

3.5 Resignation was the main reason for leaving, accounting for 60.7% of leavers. Retirement and redundancy were the next most common reasons, each accounting for 13.7%.

3.6 During 2025/26, 164 employees left KCC due to redundancy, compared with 154 in 2024/25. Appendix 3 provides a breakdown of leavers by leaving reason. The analysis relates solely to employees who left the authority.

3.7 During 2025/26, there were 178 apprenticeship training starts in the non-schools workforce.

4 Social care recruitment, retention and locality pressures

4.1 Recruitment and workforce pressures are evident across ASCH and vary by service, profession and locality. In response to the specific question asked by Members, the available data therefore does not demonstrate that recruitment challenges are unique to West Kent or concentrated solely in that locality.

4.2 We are working with ASCH to review Market Premium Payments following feedback. The review will benchmark current arrangements against the external market to ensure they remain appropriate and effective in supporting attraction and retention.

4.3 There is further work ongoing through the ASCH Workforce Strategy which focuses on retention and the 'grow your own' pipeline. This work is intended to strengthen workforce sustainability, improve career pathways and configure services to meet future demand.

4.4 Historically, CYPE has experienced social worker retention pressures in North Kent because of its proximity to London. East and South Kent have also faced challenges associated with their coastal location and the lack of neighbouring authorities from which to attract staff and students for placements. West Kent has typically been more stable.

4.5 Workforce development initiatives seek to address these pressures and reduce reliance on agency workers. KCC has a Memorandum of Understanding with South East local authorities to set agency worker pay rates. The change to statutory guidance requiring agency social workers to be four years post-qualified has led some to move into permanent posts.

4.6 CYPE's Strategic Workforce Plan prioritises recruitment and retention in hard-to-recruit roles, workforce development and appropriate pay and reward arrangements. Current activity includes:

a. Benchmarking market premiums and allowances against neighbouring authorities. The recent review concluded that the total reward package is competitive for frontline social workers.
b. Proactively monitoring social worker recruitment and retention through the County Resources group to identify emerging issues and initiatives.
c. A ‘grow our own’ approach to training social workers and supporting retention, including the apprenticeship degree programme funded through the levy and the government-funded Approach Social Work programme.

5 Recommendation

The Personnel Committee is asked to discuss and NOTE the update