

# Ensuring providers have a voice at the table

## How providers can influence Local Skills Improvement Plans



A practical approach toolkit  
Based on Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce's approach



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# Introduction



Adult social care has long struggled to secure a clear and consistent voice within local skills systems – the local networks of employers, training providers, authorities and partners who work together to shape skills planning and ensure education and training align with local labour-market needs.

Recognising this, Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce (KICC) and their partners in Kent and Medway have developed an approach that places relationships, clarity and sector specific understanding at the centre of workforce planning.

This toolkit captures how that approach has taken shape – through intentional outreach, involving trusted networks early on, asking providers what skills they need, and designing events around the realities of social care delivery. These methods have enabled providers to contribute more confidently, helped surface practical intelligence about workforce pressures, and ensured that social care is recognised as a distinct sector with its own priorities, rather than being folded into broader health conversations.

The guidance below outlines the planning steps, engagement methods, governance arrangements and partnership roles that enabled this progress. It shows how consistent, well co-ordinated work can strengthen provider representation, deepen collaboration and build shared understanding of what the sector needs to succeed.

This toolkit is designed for organisations responsible for bringing adult social care providers into local or national planning discussions. This includes bodies such as Chambers of Commerce, Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) teams, local authorities, care associations, workforce partnerships, and any organisation acting as a convenor between adult social care providers and wider skills or economic planning structures.

Its purpose is to support those organisations to raise the voice of adult social care providers ensure their insights meaningfully shape skills planning, and create the conditions for consistent, confident provider engagement.

# The context



Before exploring the approach, it's important to understand why adult social care needs a focused and co-ordinated LSIP.

Nationally, the sector faces longstanding workforce pressures: high turnover, low visibility among young people and an ageing workforce. These challenges are not the result of poor intent – adult social care providers operate in a fragmented system, with thousands of small and micro organisations trying to manage workforce crises while navigating complex funding and regulatory demands.

Recruitment pipelines remain fragile, sector reputation is inconsistent, and the demands of modern care – including digital skills, supporting people with more complex conditions, and providing more intensive care – continue to grow faster than the workforce can adapt.

The LSIP was created to address exactly this problem by giving adult social care providers a structured role in shaping post16 technical education and ensuring that only the most critical local priorities drive change. By grounding decisions in lived experience, the LSIP aims to focus investment, strengthen pathways into the sector, and support providers to articulate the skills that matter most – not just for today's workforce, but for future provision and service innovation.

In Kent and Medway, these national pressures are amplified by high vacancy rates, low apprenticeship uptake, and a workforce where over a quarter of staff are over 55. With many services too stretched to participate in planning activity, without deliberate co-ordination, their insights can be easily overlooked.

Early LSIP activity in the region highlighted this risk, revealing that without structured engagement, social care voices were either absent or overshadowed by larger sectors. This prompted targeted action to elevate adult social care as a priority area and ensure providers could influence decisions affecting curriculum design, workforce planning and investment.

- **National workforce pressures are intensified locally** – With over 45,000 staff and consistently high vacancies, Kent and Medway reflects the wider national picture of instability. High turnover, low visibility of care careers, and limited progression routes make provider led planning especially crucial in the region.
- **The LSIP provides needed structure and focus** – By concentrating on a small number of high impact priorities, the LSIP creates a clear mechanism for providers to address skills gaps together, avoiding unfocused activity and ensuring local training aligns with real workforce needs.
- **Adult social care needs to be elevated** – Adult social care providers were under-represented in early LSIP activities. Bringing sector networks into the process resulted in adult social care being recognised as a priority sector with clear workforce driven objectives.

- **There are distinct visibility challenges within Further Education (FE) provision**  
– Health pathways (e.g., T Levels and Level 3 health study programmes) dominate learner recruitment, meaning social care careers receive significantly less focus, limiting awareness of entry routes and progression opportunities across the care sector.

**“We’re aligning with local growth plans – co creating stakeholder engagement so we’re all joined up.”**

**Camilla Maurice**, LSIP Project Manager, Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce



# About the organisation

Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce (KICC) is the designated Employer Representative Body for Kent and Medway, leading the development and delivery of the LSIP. KICC acts as a central voice for local employers, ensuring that post16 technical education is shaped by real workforce needs and aligned with the realities of the local economy.

Through its longstanding role supporting businesses across Kent and Medway, KICC brings together employers, training providers and public sector partners to identify the skills that matter most for the region's growth.

Alongside its analytical and convening functions, KICC co-ordinates a programme of events, sector focused activity and partnership working that strengthens the relationship between adult social care providers and learning providers. This ongoing engagement allows the LSIP to operate as a living framework – continuously shaped by updated adult social care provider insight, aligned with wider economic strategies, and supported by collaborative action across the skills system.

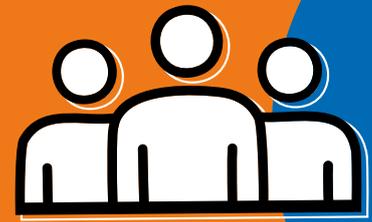
By championing adult social care provider led priorities and maintaining strong regional partnerships, KICC plays a role in creating a more responsive, future focused skills landscape for Kent and Medway.

As part of its remit, KICC has placed particular emphasis on strengthening the skills system for adult social care – a sector that is central to the region's economy and community wellbeing. By working closely with sector leads, provider networks and local authorities, KICC ensures that the needs of social care providers are consistently reflected in LSIP priorities. This includes creating routes for smaller providers to contribute their insight, championing more accessible progression pathways, and supporting collaborative activity that helps address the sector's recruitment, retention and digital capability challenges.

**“The LSIP aims to align adult social care employer needs with education and training provision... ensuring the region's workforce is equipped with current and future skills. It's about understanding the sector – skills needs, challenges, gaps – and facilitating those conversations, then writing them into a meaningful local plan.”**

**Camilla Maurice, LSIP Project Manager, Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce**

# The approach



The approach is sector specific and uses trusted networks and well-planned engagement. This strengthens adult social care provider voice, which directly shapes skills priorities and actions.

## What was the challenge?

Where adult social care is identified as an LSIP priority, the skills system must respond to the needs of the future workforce. Achieving this is only possible when providers from the sector are actively and consistently engaged in shaping those priorities.

As a pioneering LSIP location and the first to identify adult social care as a priority, KICC needed to surface accurate, sector specific intelligence. It also needed to build trust with providers that had limited time, capacity and belief that engagement would lead to action.

- **College provision did not always instil the expectations or capabilities needed for modern social care roles** – Some educators had low expectations of learners and outdated delivery approaches, meaning students were not consistently prepared for a high skill, high purpose profession. This undermines both learners' readiness for delivering adult social care and the attractiveness of social care careers.
- **Engaging adult social care providers early highlighted an opportunity to strengthen social care insight** – Despite challenges, initial conversations revealed the value of dedicating focused attention to sector-specific workforce pressures and ensuring these perspectives informed LSIP priorities.

## The engagement opportunity

KICC developed a highly relational model that recognised social care as a distinct sector and removed barriers to participation through accessible venues, familiar networks, and practical event formats.

Engagement shifted from one-way consultation to two way dialogue, strengthened by trusted intermediaries and direct links between providers and educators. This was possible via a series of targeted engagement activities informed by sector specialists.

- **Engagement was rooted in trusted networks** – Registered manager forums, learning and development groups, local authority channels and WhatsApp networks ensured credibility, reach and responsiveness.
- **Face-to-face meetings created meaningful dialogue** – Roundtables and sector-specific breakout discussions strengthened insight sharing and deepened education and adult social care provider relationships.
- **The Care Careers Carousel connected students with real practice** – This event had a rotating, provider led series of short, hands on sessions that offered direct exposure to modern care, technologies and lived experience. The sessions also provided valuable CPD for teaching staff by updating their understanding of current practice.

## Key decisions that secured success

Progress accelerated when KICC made deliberate choices that elevated social care, supported providers to be honest and open, and aligned system partners.

- **Social care was recognised as a standalone sector** – Separating social care from health allowed clearer focus on workforce characteristics, career pathways and digital capability needs.
- **Engagement was designed to support honest and open discussions** – Neutral venues, adult social care providers only discovery sessions and curated attendance enabled honest, practical insights.
- **Strategic partners were embedded from the outset** – Close collaboration with Skills for Care and local authorities ensured coherence, reach and meaningful sector alignment.

**“Having providers at the table and their voice heard lets us dive into needs, challenges, and possible solutions. When you sit with providers and genuinely understand the pressures, everything changes.”**

**Camilla Maurice**, LSIP Project Manager, Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce

## Key learnings

KICC learned that sustainable change requires disciplined focus, information from a carefully-selected range of sources and strong relationships built over time. Providers become more engaged when they see their input shaping decisions, and when the LSIP remains available and accessible, responsive and aligned with frontline realities.

- **Effective LSIP delivery depends on ongoing relationships** – KICC’s progress demonstrates that workforce improvement is achieved through continued dialogue, shared ownership and practical collaboration between providers, colleges and sector bodies – not simply through producing a plan.
- **Providers engage when they experience visible impact** – Clear links between provider contributions and resulting action increased providers’ confidence and sustained participation.

**“For me, the most powerful part has been watching our relationships grow. The collaborations that emerged after Skills 25, the sector’s willingness to engage and the calibre of discussions we’re now having – it’s all shaped a more confident, connected LSIP.”**

Sarah Parrish, LSIP Officer, Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce

**“I’ll stay engaged if I see action, measurable impact, clear feedback loops. Use provider insight to drive change.”**

Mark Craig, Owner, Home Instead Maidstone



## Recommendations checklist

The recommendations checklist offers concise, evidence based steps for planning, implementing and sustaining a sector led skills improvement model shaped through the Kent and Medway LSIP. It supports areas to secure early buy in, engage key provider networks, design focused adult social care provider only discovery activity, build trusted partnerships and embed governance rooted in real workforce insight.

The recommendations provide practical actions to strengthen adult social care provider voice and maintain meaningful collaboration. They draw on intentional outreach, established networks, roundtables and clear feedback loops.

Use this checklist to adapt Kent and Medway's model in your area – boosting provider engagement, improving training relevance, deepening cross sector relationships and building a connected skills system where adult social care provider insight drives lasting change.

**“Our understanding of social care is really good now. The relationships we’ve built have shaped how we frame questions and interpret what providers tell us.”**

**Sarah Parrish, LSIP Officer, Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce**



# Timeline

Year	Key activity
2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ First meaningful links established with Skills for Care to interpret sector intelligence.</li><li>■ Clear need identified to separate health and social care within LSIP priorities.</li><li>■ Initial LSIP published with social care insight, but with limited direct involvement from adult social care providers.</li></ul>
2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Strong partnership working developed between KICC, Skills for Care and Kent County Council, with aim to expand engagement.</li><li>■ Adult social care elevated as a distinct priority requiring focused workforce attention.</li><li>■ Adult social care provider-only discussions introduced to enable candid insight from frontline leaders.</li></ul>
2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Skills 25 conference significantly boosted provider engagement and sector visibility across Kent.</li><li>■ First county-wide careers carousel delivered, strengthening college-provider collaboration and student insight.</li><li>■ Targeted roundtables held, generating richer intelligence for next year's LSIP priorities.</li></ul>
2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Continued roundtables planned to maintain insight flow and support LSIP implementation.</li><li>■ Start delivery of the next LSIP supported by stakeholder and provider engagement.</li></ul>

**“Adult social care providers have seen so many initiatives come and go. They need to know something concrete is going to come out of this, because people won’t keep engaging if they can’t see that anything has changed. When providers can see a clear link between what they’ve told you and what’s actually happening, that’s what keeps them coming back.”**

**Pia Rathje-Burton**, Locality Manager, Skills for Care