

Learning & Development Policy

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils





Change Record

Change Record	
Document Title	Learning & Development Policy
Version Number	4
Owner(s)	People & Culture Team
Author(s)	People & Culture Team
Approved by	People & Culture Team, UNISON & SMT
Approved date	19 March 2025
Effective date	1 April 2025
Renewal date	1 April 2027





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1 Vision and Values

Our Vision

We are customer focused and approachable. We are honest and open and are committed to providing high quality cost-effective public services.

Our Values



Working Together

We are a committed professional team, who embrace change and help one another improve



People and Planet

We care about each other and the environment we share



Respect

We act with integrity, and champion diversity and inclusivity



Accountability

We take ownership, do what we say, strive for clarity and welcome feedback



Approachability

We are open, honest and accessible





2 Introduction

2.1 Purpose

The councils are committed to encouraging and supporting staff to access appropriate development opportunities recognising that this brings benefits to the individual and the services we provide.

It is recognised that to support the councils' goals and objectives, as well as providing a high quality of service provision, it is important to develop all employees effectively.

There is also a recognition that there is a finite budget to support this activity and that not all learning and development activities have a financial cost attached.

The purpose of this policy is to define the councils' commitment to learning and development; to define everyone's responsibilities in identifying, requesting, accessing, and evaluating appropriate learning.

2.2 Scope

This procedure applies to all permanent and temporary employees (fixed term/casuals) of the councils. However, caution must be taken if considering requests for learning of temporary employees where claw-back of costs is expected (see [section 6](#)). The employee must be made aware of the potential requirement to repay any funding should their employment end within the claw-back period (unless they leave prematurely through compulsory redundancy).

Providing training for agency workers is permissible, but only where there is a clear benefit to the councils or their team i.e. if all the team need a certain skill or certification. It will not be possible to claw-back training costs where the individual is not directly employed by the councils.

The councils reserve the right to revise, withdraw or replace this procedure at any time and to introduce new procedures from time to time to reflect the changing needs of the organisations.

This document supersedes any previously existing or alternative procedures, agreements or arrangements relating to training requests at the councils.

Any learning arrangements previously agreed will be honoured in line with the previous policies and procedures.

2.3 Contractual status

This is a non-contractual document and procedure. We reserve the right to make minor changes to the procedure but will liaise with UNISON and SMT should any significant amendments be required.



2.4 Alternative formats

Please do not hesitate to contact a member of the People and Culture Team if you would like this policy in an alternative format.

Email: equalities@southandvale.gov.uk



3 The councils' approach

3.1 Vision

Our vision for Learning & Development at South and Vale, is to **empower** our people to achieve their **fullest potential** through **continuous learning, innovation, and growth**.

We strive to create a culture where **learning is embedded in our daily work**, making it **accessible** to everyone. To enable us to develop the skills, knowledge, and mindsets needed to drive **excellence in performance** and adapt to the evolving needs of the communities we serve, as well as each other.

Everyone is accountable for their own learning while working collaboratively to support the learning of others.

We aim for a blended approach to learning that accommodates different learning styles, moving beyond a sole focus on 'training' towards a **well-rounded, holistic approach to development**.

Our learning opportunities aim to be **inclusive** and are designed to support employees at every stage of their career, from early career starters to experienced managers seeking role enrichment.

We believe in the **power of peer-to-peer learning** and recognise that our people are our greatest strength. By creating opportunities to learn from one another, we encourage the sharing of expertise, knowledge, and experience, allowing each person to grow while also developing others. Learning through teaching, mentoring and from experience will be a core element of our strategy, **fostering a culture of knowledge-sharing across all levels and functions**.

To ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of our learning initiatives, we will **enhance our tracking and monitoring of learning progress**, completion rates, and budget usage. This will allow us to invest wisely in development programs that deliver meaningful, measurable results for both our people and our organisation.

3.2 The Aim

The councils' aim is to create a continuous learning and development culture with their employees, to develop multi-skilled employees capable of operating flexibly and responding rapidly to changes in organisational needs or skill requirements, as well as supporting employees to reach their career aspirations.



3.3 Our Approach

The councils set aside a budget for learning and development annually which covers:

- Compliance (Statutory and Mandatory) training requirements, which the councils are required to provide to staff (such as having trained first aiders, ensuring all staff are aware of all health and safety practices),
- A platform to host learning resources, to ensure core learning requirements can be delivered regardless of location and accessed at any time,
- Dedicated learning and development budgets for each service area to support the development of its teams and employees as individuals, to ensure it can provide a high-quality service, where employees have the right skills and knowledge within their roles,
- Additional learning activities and interventions that go beyond our core requirements as directed by the Learning and Development Advisors and Subject Matter Experts to encourage personal development.
- Support directly to teams and service areas to assess learning needs.

The councils broadly focus on three key areas:

- Compliance – Ensuring we meet all our statutory obligations by providing compliance training to all staff.
- Skills for now – Ensuring the right skills are in place to competently deliver roles to a high standard.
- Skills for the future – Understand the skills that are needed for the future of the organisation, but also focusing on the career aspirations of employees.

To achieve compliance each service area and relevant subject matter experts will support the councils in defining, engaging with, and monitoring our mandatory requirements. The learning and development advisors will provide advice and guidance on mandatory training requirements, be responsible for holding a central record and providing access to reports and information to relevant individuals to assist with monitoring activity and expenditure.

To achieve skills for now and the future the utilisation of the ‘Let’s Talk’ process is a key tool for managers. Managers should be assessing the needs of their teams by considering the following areas:

- Skills and knowledge needed to achieve the organisational objectives.
- Skills and knowledge needed within roles.
- Succession planning, future focuses, horizon scanning, and individual career aspirations.



This will help to identify the required learning and development, at both team and individual levels, for service areas to consider priorities to be achieved within the year against their set budget.

The councils also operate early careers initiatives, including a graduate programme, apprenticeships, work experience and internships, which support the councils future workforce strategy. More information on these can be found by emailing learning@southandvale.gov.uk.

The Learning and Development Advisors are on hand to support managers and service areas in:

- Providing advice, guidance, and tools to identify skills and knowledge requirements within roles.
- Advise on the required learning interventions across the organisation and the most efficient and effective way to deliver them.

Learning and Development is most successful if provided in a multitude of ways – the model below outlines the three main ways of learning. The councils strongly encourage all employees to explore various options (when considering their needs) to identify an intervention that is fit for purpose and to consider their own learning style.



The councils provide a platform for employees to access various different areas of learning, as well as hosting a number of different learning initiatives internally, which are regularly reviewed. If you have any feedback or suggestions in relation to our learning and development offer, you can contact: learning@southandvale.gov.uk

Employees and managers are encouraged to share knowledge and support the learning of others. The Learning and Development Advisors are always on hand to offer support and provide training and advice on how best to do so.



3.4 Learning Styles

There are a variety of learning methods and styles of learning, and we all learn and retain information differently. Understanding how we learn can help us to identify which approach will help us to learn.

Visual or spatial learners retain information best by viewing pictures or images and respond well to colours and mind maps.

Kinaesthetic learners are all about doing things physically. Role playing, using things like flashcards, or carrying out the action physically can help them learn things better.

Aural or auditory-musical learners retain the most information after hearing it.

Social, or interpersonal learners work best when they participate in study activities with other people such as quizzing each other or having a study group.

Solitary, or intrapersonal learners work best alone. Making notes and reciting them back are useful activities when studying by yourself.

Verbal, or linguistic learners respond well to written or spoken words, using tools like rhymes and acronyms.

Logical, or mathematical learners use logic and structures in order to learn effectively.

Further information can be found in appendix 2.



4 Statutory & Mandatory Training

4.1 Overview

The councils have a responsibility to ensure that employees receive the relevant statutory and mandatory training for their job role in order to ensure their own, the communities we service, and colleagues' safety.

The councils reserve the right to amend Statutory and Mandatory training requirements at any time and to introduce new training from time to time to reflect the changing needs of the organisation and changes in legislation.

Statutory and mandatory training requirements will be reviewed regularly by the councils. Final approval of the requirements expected of employees will be made by the Senior Management Team, with the support of the Learning and Development Advisors and Subject Matter Experts.

4.2 Scope

The requirement to complete statutory and mandatory training applies to all permanent and temporary employees (fixed term/casuals) of the councils. The training required to be completed will vary depending on the role the employee is undertaking with the councils. The training requirements and timeframes in which these need to be completed within can be found on Jarvis under the L&D page.

Agency workers, contractors, and interims will also be required to complete statutory and mandatory training. The training required to be completed will vary depending on the role they are undertaking with the councils and duration of their contract. The training requirements and timeframes in which these need to be completed within, can be found on the [Manager Guidance – Induction for Agency Workers and Contractors](#).

4.3 Accountability & Responsibilities

All **employees** are responsible for ensuring they complete their statutory and mandatory training, in line with the set-out timeframes. Should any barriers or needs for reasonable adjustments prevent the training from being completed, these should be raised with line manager in the first instance, for them to offer support in addressing any such barriers/need. Regular check-ins regarding the completion of such training should take place as part of one to ones and the Let's Talk process between the employee and line manager. Further support and advice is available from the Learning and Development Advisors.



Line managers, Heads of Service and Subject Matter Experts, have responsibility for ensuring that employees attend, and will proactively undertake, the relevant statutory and mandatory training required for their role. Attendance and completion of training will be reported regularly to Heads of Service and Subject Matter Experts to review and take appropriate action.

4.4 Non-completion

In instances of non-completion of statutory and mandatory training, following reasonable requests for this to be completed and any reasonable barriers/adjustments being addressed, the line manager may refer to the Capability and/or the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure to address the matter.

Employees are not expected to complete statutory and mandatory training during periods of leave (such as sickness, parental, compassionate). Employees are expected to have completed any statutory and mandatory training within a reasonable timeframe, as agreed with their line manager upon their return.



5 Formal Learning Requests Procedure

5.1 Overview

The councils recognise that external expertise may sometimes be required to support and develop employees.

When approving learning requests, managers should always consider the following:

- What is already available within the councils (resources, expertise, online learning)?
- Would a council-wide arrangement be beneficial?
- Equity and fairness amongst employees with the utilisation of the budget.
- How many people need to attend the learning intervention – this should be a maximum of two attendees per learning intervention who then commit to sharing learning with peers (unless this is a team wide workshop or there are specific requirements for all staff to attend or gain certification to meet statutory compliance)

Each service area is allocated a proportion of the corporate learning and development budget each year based on the full-time equivalent headcount for the service area, and can request to utilise their budget, in line with the below procedure.

As the corporate learning and development budget sits with the People and Culture Manager, each service area must liaise with Learning and Development Advisors to raise the required purchase orders and pay the subsequent invoices. Each service area is responsible for organising and booking their own learning interventions.

Each service area must monitor their expenditure within their allocation and take responsibility to ensure they do not exceed their budget allocation. Information will be provided to Heads of Service at least quarterly to help monitor the budget.

Conferences, and networking events are not covered by the corporate learning and development budget and will need to be covered by individual service area budgets.



If any provider states a learning intervention can be funded by utilising the apprenticeship levy, the manager should liaise with the Learning and Development Advisors to discuss this further.

All requests should be submitted in a timely manner (giving at least two weeks' notice), allowing for the relevant approvals to take place and subsequent purchase orders.

Study leave can be granted to attend authorised formal learning at a rate of 10% of an employee's contracted hours for the duration of the learning. This should be included in the application form and the allocated protected hours must be agreed with the manager. If additional time is required to complete the learning, this must be taken outside of the employees contracted hours.

If attending half/full day release for studies (for example, if you are completing an apprenticeship), this will supersede the statement above as there is a statutory requirement to allow a per centage of off the job learning time for apprenticeships.

To ensure the councils are supporting employees that may require reasonable adjustments or whom have additional needs to consider, these cases can be discussed with HR and advice will be discussed accordingly.

5.2 Categories

To achieve the most simple and efficient process to access formal learning interventions and to manage the finite budget available, the following categories have been introduced, each with their own request procedure and associated level of required approval:

Category	Total Amount	Approval requirement	Claw-back
General	£1 - £500	Line Manager	No
Enhanced	£501 - £999	Service Manager	No
Advanced	£1000 +	Head of Service	Yes

Any Health and Safety learning requests that will utilise the Health and Safety proportion of the learning budget, will require approval from the Health and Safety Team. Health and Safety approval can be given in part 3 of the Formal Learning Application.



Should more than two employees be attending the same learning intervention, then Service Manager sign off will be required for General Requests also.

If there is insufficient budget to cover the learning, the Learning and Development Advisors will share the request with the Head of Service for confirmation of how to progress, which may include requesting a service area budget code to recharge the learning request to.

The procedure is set out below, please see each category section below for specific details.

Step 1. The formal learning request is completed by the employee or manager.

Step 2. Relevant approvals are obtained – if these are not obtained then the employee/manager must explore alternative opportunities and can consult L&D Advisors.

Step 3. The formal request form is then passed to the L&D Advisors (learning@southandvale.gov.uk).

Step 4. Subject to approval, the L&D Advisors will request a Purchase Order (PO), which will be shared with Corporate Services to raise.

Step 5. The employee/manager is provided with the PO and can go ahead and book the learning intervention requested.

5.3 General Formal Learning Requests

Approval Level:	Line Managers
Documentation:	Formal Learning Application (Part 1 & 2)
Claw-back:	No

The line manager will consider the importance of the qualification to the employee’s role and also factors such as:

- Likely development of the employee
- Value of the learning intervention to the councils, including requirements for service and/or project delivery
- Cost of the course and budget available
- Fairness/consistency of requests across the team





The line manager may decide to fully or part-fund an application from the corporate learning and development budget and whether any remaining funding required should be paid via the employee’s service area budget or would require the individual to contribute.

Any approved requests will be taken from the service’s allocated proportion corporate learning and development budget for the financial year, so line manager must ensure there are sufficient funds to support this and the wider service needs.

5.4 Enhanced Formal Learning Requests

Approval Level:	Service Manager
Documentation:	Formal Learning Application
Claw-back:	No

The Service Manager will consider the importance of the qualification to the employee’s role and also factors such as:

- The employee’s historic performance and conduct
- Likely development of the employee, as discussed during quarterly Let’s Talk reflection conversations that is approved by their line manager
- Value of the learning intervention to the councils, including requirements for service and/or project delivery
- Cost of the course and budget available
- Fairness/consistency of requests across the team

The Service Manager (in discussion with their Head of Service) may decide to fully or part-fund an application from the corporate learning and development budget and whether any remaining funding required should be paid via the employee’s service area budget or would require the individual to contribute.

Any approved requests will be taken from the service’s allocated proportion corporate learning and development budget for the financial year, so the Service Manager must discuss with their Head of Service to ensure there are sufficient funds to support this and the wider service needs.





5.5 Advanced Formal Learning Requests

Approval Level:	Relevant Head of Service
Form:	Formal Learning Application
Claw-back:	Yes- unless an apprenticeship

The Head of Service will consider the following criteria when reviewing applications:

- The employee’s historic performance and conduct
- Likely development of the employee, as discussed during quarterly Let’s Talk reflection conversations that is approved by their line manager
- Value of the learning intervention to the councils, including requirements for service and/or project delivery
- Cost of the course and budget available
- Fairness/consistency of requests across all services

The Head of Service may decide to fully or part-fund an application from the corporate learning and development budget and whether any remaining funding required should be paid via the employee’s service budget or would require the individual to contribute.

Should funding be granted, a claw-back agreement will be included (see [section 6](#)).

Any approved requests will be taken from the service’s allocated proportion corporate learning and development budget for the financial year, so the Head of Service must ensure there are sufficient funds to support this and the wider service needs.



6 Claw-back

Where a claw-back agreement is in place, this means, should an employee leave the councils of their own accord during the course or during a specified period after completing the course, they will be expected to reimburse all or some of the course costs.

Set out below are the circumstances in which repayment is required:

1. When the learning intervention/study is not fully completed due to voluntary withdrawal from the course
2. The employee fails to obtain the qualification
3. Dismissal from the course
4. Termination of employment or resignation (with the exception of compulsory redundancy)

For points 1, 2 and 3 above, full repayment would be required.

If an employee has not been able to complete their learning or fails to gain their qualification due to long-term health conditions, the councils will review the situation on a case-by-case basis and at their discretion may waive the clawback.

In cases of termination or resignation, reimbursement is based on the following sliding-scale:

Timeframe	Payment Requirement
Up to 6 months	100%
From 6 to 12 months after completion	75%
From 12 to 18 months after completion of course	50%
From 18 to 24 months after completion of course	25%

Please note, this reimbursement also applies if the employee ceases employment before attending/during the learning intervention, but the councils have already paid, and it cannot be refunded/reassigned to another employee.

Claw-back will apply in all cases (except apprenticeships which are exempt under the apprenticeship rules), but discretion can be applied with the agreement of the employees' Head of Service.



7 Examination re-sits and re-submissions

Should an employee need to re-sit an exam, or re-submit study modules, in order to pass or complete the intervention detailed in their learning agreement, approval must be sought from the Service Manager for any associated/additional costs or working time required to do so.

If you feel that your performance in, or attendance at, exams is likely to be affected by illness, bereavement, or another circumstance then you should make your line manager aware of this before your exams start, if possible.

Reasons for re-sits or re-submissions will be considered on an individual basis.

With Service Manager approval, a maximum of one instance of an examination re-sit or re-submission will be eligible for costs to be met by the councils. Any additional re-sit/re-submission costs will need to be met by the employee. All approvals must be in writing and sent to the Learning and Development Advisors, along with details of any budget codes to be charged.

Please also refer to the claw-back statement (section 4), which sets out our policy when employees fail to obtain the qualification (claw-back applies to the original cost and will not apply where the resit takes the costs above the threshold).



8 Professional memberships and subscriptions

Details of our policy for professional memberships and subscriptions can be found in our Travel and Expenses policy.



Appendix 1: Formal Learning Application

Please ensure you have read the Learning and Development Policy in full before making an application. For General Category requests Parts 1 and 2 need to be completed. For Enhanced and Advanced requests or where the Health and Safety proportion of the budget is being utilized, parts 1, 2 and 3 need to be completed.

If the request is for **group training**, you are not required to complete the form for each employee, just include everyone’s details in part 1.

Part 1 – Employee Completion

Date of request:	Click or tap to enter a date.
Name:	
Email address:	
Job title:	
Payroll Number:	
Service Area:	Choose an item.
Team:	
Which category does the learning intervention fall under:	Choose an item.
Type of learning intervention:	Choose an item.
Title of learning intervention:	
Field of learning:	
Summary / overview of learning intervention:	
Learning provider:	
Duration of learning intervention:	
Method of learning (e.g., one off 3 hour, weekly or monthly attendance, distance learning, residential):	
The cost of the learning intervention: <i>Please be clear on whether this includes or excludes VAT and whether VAT is payable, otherwise the PO could be delayed or incorrect and unusable.</i>	





<p><i>If your learning will take place across several years or will be required to be paid in instalments, please set out clearly date, amounts and total overall costs</i></p>	
<p>Start date of learning intervention:</p>	<p>Click or tap to enter a date.</p>
<p>End date of learning intervention:</p>	<p>Click or tap to enter a date.</p>
<p>Is there a requirement for study leave or additional support: <i>In addition to financial support, you may need other assistance, such as study leave for exams, writing dissertations, attending residential etc. If this support is required, you should discuss and agree this in advance. Details of what the councils offer to support can be found in Section 3 of the policy.</i></p>	
<p>Why would you like to attend this learning intervention/ How will you benefit:</p>	
<p>How will the council and your colleagues benefit from you undertaking this learning intervention:</p>	
<p>How will you apply the knowledge and skills gained to your work and how will you share any learning with others:</p>	
<p>What qualifications or certifications will you gain from attending this learning intervention:</p>	
<p>Please confirm you have explored the market ensuring this is an efficient, effective, and reasonably priced learning intervention?</p>	<p>Choose an item.</p>
<p>Can this learning intervention utilise the Apprenticeship Levy? https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/</p>	<p>Choose an item.</p>
<p>You are signing to confirm acceptance of the terms outlined in the Learning and Development Policy for your funding, including the councils' right to recover fees and clawback under Section 4 of the policy where applicable.</p>	
<p>Name:</p>	
<p>Signature:</p>	<p>Date:Click or tap to enter a date.</p>





Part 2 – Line Manager Completion

Date:	Click or tap to enter a date.
Name:	
Email address:	
Job title:	
Please describe the business case for supporting this application (i.e., value to the councils, your team, how the knowledge / skills will be used etc.):	
How will you support the individual during their studies:	
Has this request has been in accordance with the criteria detailed within the policy:	Choose an item.
What is the outcome of the request at this level:	Choose an item.
If the request is only being partially funded or rejected, please provided the details on this decision:	
Please sign below to confirm that this request has been reviewed and is approved in accordance with the criteria detailed within the policy.	
Name:	
Signature:	Date:Click or tap to enter a date.





Part 3 – Approver Completion (where required or where this is not your line manager)

Date:	Click or tap to enter a date.
Name:	
Email address:	
Approver Type:	Choose an item.
Job title:	
Please describe the business case for supporting this application (i.e., value to the councils, your team, how the knowledge / skills will be used etc.):	
How will you support the individual during their studies:	
Has this request has been in accordance with the criteria detailed within the policy:	Choose an item.
What is the outcome of the request:	Choose an item.
If the request is only being partially funded or rejected, please provided the details on this decision:	
Please sign below to confirm that this request has been reviewed and is approved in accordance with the criteria detailed within the policy.	
Name:	
Signature:	Date:Click or tap to enter a date.

Please return the form to learning@southandvale.gov.uk





Appendix 2: Learning Styles

7 DIFFERENT TYPES OF LEARNING STYLES

When people identify the learning style that suits them best, they tend to stick with it. However, research has shown that the most effective study comes from blending different learning styles together.



VISUAL

Visual learners do well when they use symbols, boxes, charts and colours in their notes. If you find that you learn better by reading and looking at pictures, diagrams and graphs etc. the chances are you're a visual learner.



VERBAL

- Techniques used by verbal learners are reciting information out loud, writing your own notes and highlighting the key points.
- Having a passion for words, writing, tongue twisters, rhymes, may indicate that this learning style is for you.



AURAL

Aural learning involves using sound and music. Auditory learners develop understanding and memory by hearing and listening. If you find it easier to understand spoken instructions rather than reading, aural learning will benefit you.



PHYSICAL

- Physical learning involves using your body and sense of touch to learn. Physical learners learn by doing, touching, moving, building, and are described as a "hands-on".
- If you find it difficult to sit still for long periods of time, chances are you're a physical learner.



LOGICAL

Logical learners often learn by asking a lot of questions. Logical learners want to understand the whole picture. They are natural thinkers who learn by classifying, categorising and thinking abstractly about patterns & relationships etc.



SOCIAL

- Social learners prefer to learn in groups rather than on their own and like generating ideas by brainstorming with others.
- If you like taking part in group sports and prefer social activities than doing things on your own, you may be a social learner.

SOLITARY

Solitary learners tend to be more independent and introspective, spending a lot of time on their own, enjoying their own company. If you enjoy spending time alone, keeping a journal and engaging in self-analysis to gain a deeper understanding of yourself, you may be a solitary learner.

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