

## **REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF OVERVIEW COMMITTEE**

### **RESPONSE TO FULL COUNCIL MOTION – SUPPORT FOR FORMER WILKO STAFF IN NOTTINGHAMSHIRE**

#### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide an update on the support provided by the Council for employees affected by the closure of Wilko, following a motion to Full Council.

#### **Background**

##### Policy background

2. Employment and skills are a key ambition of the **Nottinghamshire Plan** which is focused on building the skills that help people get good jobs. We need a skilled workforce that and increasing the number of jobs within the economy and ensuring that businesses can access the skilled workers they need, both now and in the future is a priority. Within this ambition, there are specific targets to “Use our position as a major employer to create training and development opportunities” and “Help adults to learn new skills”.
3. The **Economic Transition Plan** (ETP) also makes specific reference to supporting people to access employment and skills and enable more residents to secure employment status and/or progress into better paid jobs. The ETP sets three priorities within the People theme:
  - Access to employment and skills for all
  - Skills for the future – building the skills employers seek
  - Influencing partners, policy and programmes

##### History

4. In summer 2023, Wilko announced that it would be closing its 400 stores nationwide. It was widely reported at the time that this would mean the closure of the Wilkos Headquarters in Bassetlaw, where it also operated a distribution centre, and the 15 stores across Nottinghamshire, which could result in over 2,000 people losing their jobs.
5. In September 2023, a motion was taken to Full Council on this matter. At this meeting, it was resolved to:
  - 1) Continue to use our position as a major employer in the County, to establish links to support the significant number of ex-Wilko staff in Nottinghamshire with transferrable skills;
  - 2) Continue taking additional steps to connect ex-Wilko staff to existing opportunities and to offer opportunities to learn new skills, with the view to joining our valued workforce;
  - 3) Offer support to help ex-Wilko employees transition into new opportunities successfully and facilitate connections with businesses and stakeholders seeking candidates with similar skill sets;
  - 4) Measure additional actions taken in order to evidence and demonstrate impact.

## Information

### Redundancies events

6. Since the announcement in Summer 2023, the Council's Growth, Infrastructure and Development, HR and Welfare teams collaborated closely and rapidly with Bassetlaw District Council in their efforts to assist affected employees through redundancy support events (especially as Worksop is the location of the headquarters) offering access to employment, skills development options and crisis support programs. Initially this was focused on attending and promoting the Redundancy Events:
  - **14th September 2023** – event at the Bridge Street Skills Hub in Worksop, offering access to employment, skills development options and crisis support programs. Members of staff from economic development, HR and skills and employment were present to share the wide range of current opportunities, as well as talking through the range of apprenticeships and sign posting people to opportunities across Nottinghamshire. Representatives from the Council's recruitment team and social welfare programs like Notts Help Yourself were also in attendance. Over 60 organisations were present including support agencies, businesses and local authorities, offering potential job opportunities to 300+ jobseekers, primarily those affected by the Wilko closure.
  - **28<sup>th</sup> September 2023** – event at the Bridge Street Skills Hub in Worksop where Nottinghamshire County Council representatives from business, HR, adult reablement, and children's services were on hand with internal vacancies and access to wider opportunities. Over 40 exhibitors showcased job opportunities.
7. The Council's "Nottinghamshire Opportunities" employment and skills platform provide a useful tool for people to access a range of training courses and search through current job vacancies. After the first redundancy event, there were 323 users of the platform (which is around the same number of visits the platform received in all of February). The most popular search terms entered into the search engine were "part-time", "retail", "warehouse" and "logistics". The number of users on the "Nottinghamshire Opportunities" website after the second event was slightly less at 236 users, but still significant spike of users from usual.
8. Any affected staff that attended the events were offered support as required in upskilling them for the role they were interested in undertaking. This involved a range of methods from on-the-job training, our range of learning and development courses and opportunities as well as apprenticeships at various levels, as appropriate. Inspire, our adult community learning provider, were also present at the Worksop events, along with supporting at specific events from stores in Beeston and Kimberley.
9. Colleagues from HR were at both events with details on the current vacancies available at the County Council. There was a chance to discuss the jobs on the day or people could take away information through leaflets/QR codes. People's details were registered on the day, if they had a specific role they are interested in, wanted further information or to be kept in contact with about future opportunities.
10. Futures the Council's jointly owned employment and skills provider who hold the contract in the East Midlands for the National Careers Service also attended the events to provide information, advice and guidance.

### Other support provided

11. The Growth, Infrastructure, and Development group had partnered with local businesses to promote their attendance at redundancy support events. We also collaborated with small and medium businesses to highlight opportunities for hiring former Wilkos staff. Referral companies included Amazon, GlenAir, Mayborn Group, Abacus Lighting, and Centre Parcs to name a few. Additionally, we worked with the DWP advisers' team leadership to provide support with business engagement. These efforts aimed to facilitate smooth transitions for employees facing redundancy and support continued economic growth within the community.
12. Officers have also been on hand to support the District and Borough councils on the re-use of the Wilko buildings. The re-use of these buildings was one way to reduce the amount of job losses, with the expectation that any new business would require staff. Of the 10 stores across Nottinghamshire, here is some further details of their closures and if they have been reopened:
- **Arnold** (closed 8<sup>th</sup> Oct) – reopened as B&M
  - **Beeston** (closed 21 Sept) – still closed
  - **Carlton Square** (closed 21 Sept) – currently closed to allow Farmfoods to expand from their adjoining premise.
  - **Hucknall** (closed 8<sup>th</sup> Oct) – due to be reopened by The Range (15<sup>th</sup> March)
  - **Kimberley** (closed 19 Sept) – reopened as Poundland
  - **Mansfield** (closed 19 Sept) – still closed, but with good interest being shown
  - **Newark** (closed 27<sup>th</sup> Sept) – still closed, but with good interest being shown
  - **Retford** (closed 29 Sept) – still closed, but with some interest being shown
  - **Sutton in Ashfield** (closed 27<sup>th</sup> Sept) – still closed, some early interest being shown
  - **Worksop** (closed 27<sup>th</sup> Sept) – reopened as Poundland
13. Work continues to support the Districts and Boroughs Councils where the stores remain closed and the staff who are still looking for work. This includes working with other businesses and stakeholders in the locality who may be requiring similar roles, through advertising the roles on “Nottinghamshire Opportunities” platform.
14. The Headquarters and large distribution centre (1.1m sq.ft in size) in Worksop has also been re-used with DHL now operating out of the building since December 2023. Whilst Inspire had offered support for the individuals affected, this was largely not required, as the majority of the staff were re-employed by DHL.
15. Local Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) colleagues have confirmed that there has been a 68% return to work for those staff affected and in addition to this figure others that have left and do not want another job.

#### Summary of activity carried out in response to the motion

16. There has been considerable support provided to those employees affected by the closure of Wilko, either directly at the redundancy support events, accessing the “Nottinghamshire Opportunities” platform for jobs and training, linking in with the training and support Inspire can provide, linking in with our business advisers or indirectly with the buildings being re-used. This is a summary of the work completed under each of the motions agreed by Full Council in September 2023:
- 1) **Continue to use our position as a major employer in the County, to establish links to support the significant number of ex-Wilko staff in Nottinghamshire with transferrable skills.**

17. HR Colleagues have been present at the main redundancy support events to advertise the vacancies at the County Council and have been in contact with those who asked for further information or to be a contact database.

**2) Continue taking additional steps to connect ex-Wilko staff to existing opportunities and to offer opportunities to learn new skills, with the view to joining our valued workforce.**

18. The Growth, Infrastructure and Development group have been working with their colleagues in the District and Boroughs to support those made redundant to either find other work or further training, either through the "Nottinghamshire Opportunities" platform, or through the targeted support that Inspire have been providing.

**3) Offer support to help ex-Wilko employees transition into new opportunities successfully and facilitate connections with businesses and stakeholders seeking candidates with similar skill sets.**

19. The Growth, Infrastructure and Development group have linked in with local businesses to encourage them to attend the redundancy support events. Furthermore, our business advisors working with small, medium businesses in the area, are flagging the opportunities to recruit Wilko staff (especially those in HQs as skilled work force).

**4) Measure additional actions taken in order to evidence and demonstrate impact.**

20. These have been monitored wherever possible.

## **Financial Implications**

21. There are no financial implications from this decision, as this is covered by existing revenue budgets.

## **RECOMMENDATION/S**

That the Overview Committee:

- 1) Notes the work that has been carried out to date to offer support to former Wilko staff across Nottinghamshire.
- 2) Notes the continuing support that is being provided to those residents seeking reemployment and/or training to be work ready.
- 3) Considers how members would like to receive further information on the work being carried out to further develop the support offered to those residents seeking reemployment and/or training to be work ready.

**Councillor Boyd Elliott**

**Chairman, Overview Committee**

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### **Constitutional Comments (LPW 04/03/2024)**

The recommendations fall within the remit of the Overview Committee by virtue of its terms of reference

### **Finance Comments (PAA29 04/03/2024)**

The financial implications are set out in paragraph 19 of the report. Any costs of the work to support ex-Wilko staff will be met from existing revenue budgets. There are no additional financial implications for the Council arising directly from the report.

### **Background Papers and Published Documents**

#### **Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected**

- All