



**16 October 2012**

**Agenda Item:**

## **REPORT OF SERVICE DIRECTOR HR AND CUSTOMER SERVICE**

### **WORK RELATED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES AT NOTTINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

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

1. To provide members of Economic Development Committee with an Overview of the work that the County Council is doing to enable young people to access a variety of work related learning opportunities at Nottinghamshire County Council.

#### **Information and Advice**

2. The unemployment figure for young people aged 16-24 exceeded one million nationally in the autumn of 2011. In Nottinghamshire between July 2006 and July 2011 unemployment amongst 16-19 year olds rose from 1255 to 1720 and amongst 16-24 year olds from 3055 to 5530.
3. Work has already begun with Futures (formerly Connexions) regarding the development of a Youth Employment and Employability strategy which will focus on increasing employment opportunities for the 16-24 age group and developing the skills and employability of this age range across the County. Apprenticeships has been identified as one of the key areas of activity to drive improvement in this area.
4. Each year the County Council has a statutory requirement to produce its overall workforce monitoring information. The latest figures for the 12 months up to September 2011 showed that the proportion of young people under 25 employed by the County Council is now less than 5% of the total workforce.
5. It is against this backdrop that the County Council has been developing three key strategies to offer more young people the opportunity to gain valuable learning and work experience which will at the same time promote the many and varied career opportunities at the County Council. These 3 key routes are as follows:
  - Short term work experience
  - Apprenticeships
  - Graduate traineeships

### **Short term work experience:**

6. This is intended to give young people from the start of year 10 an experience of working life and the key skills needed in the workplace and is generally unpaid. The County Council offers a wide variety of these placements generally for a week to a month. It is proposed to develop further opportunities across the County Council and monitor their take up on a corporate basis thus providing information across the whole organisation which can be used to help plan and target activity in the future.

### **Apprentices:**

7. The County Council has a long history of supporting and employing small numbers of apprentices but in the light of the recent trend for rising youth unemployment has recently developed and extended this scheme.
8. The County Council is working in partnership with 'Futures' Apprenticeship Agency who act as an 'employment brokerage service' between employers, young people and training companies. This model is known as an Apprenticeship Training Agency (ATA). Although other agencies also offer this model, Futures are well placed to provide this service because of their close liaison with schools through their personal advisors. The benefit of this approach is:
  - The ATA recruits and employs the apprentice, charging the host employer a weekly fee. This means that they are responsible for any employment issues
  - Provision of pastoral and other support to young people on the programme
  - The weekly fee is used to cover the apprentice's wage and an administration charge
  - The apprentice is placed with a host employer to provide both the practical and work experience necessary to gain the appropriate qualification
9. The apprenticeship scheme provides opportunities in a range of areas across the County Council. The placements usually last for 52 weeks. The scheme was initially set up to provide 25 placements on a rolling programme with the intention of growing the scheme on an annual basis. There are currently 46 apprentices placed with the authority in a wide range of areas such as business support, HR, Customer Services, Youth Service, Highways, and Libraries etc. A further 21 opportunities are being advertised - 5 of these opportunities are at the interview stage. The rest it is hoped will be secured over the coming weeks as young people start to firm up their decisions about what they want to do now that they have got their A level and GCSE results.
10. The County Council is under no obligation to offer employment to the apprentice at the end of the placement. However clearly this would be the desired outcome if a suitable vacancy was available at the time and the apprentice met the appropriate requirements. Even if a job was not available there would still be a benefit to the apprentice from:
  - the opportunity to work in a large diverse organisation and gain valuable work experience which would stand them in good stead for future job applications either within or outside the County Council.
  - the opportunity to gain a recognised qualification whilst receiving some remuneration.
  - other targeted support in terms of letter and CV writing, interviewing skills etc.

## **Graduate Trainees:**

11. Over recent years the County Council has also supported the national graduate development programme as part of its overall provision of work opportunities for young people.
12. The programme is a two year fast track management development programme for high calibre graduates with the potential to become senior managerial leaders. It is led by the Local Government Association (LGA) which provides the infrastructure for the programme.
13. Over 135 local authorities have already participated in the scheme which is firmly placed within the Times Top 100 Graduate Employers and the Guardian UK300 survey. This year the LGA received 2250 applications for the programme.
14. Despite the current financial situation it is felt that this scheme offers considerable benefits to the Authority, as well as to the individuals. Results from trainees over the last 3 years have been extremely positive with them making significant contributions to the initiatives and projects within which they have been placed. They have provided good value for money and have received positive commendations.
15. The graduate trainees are employed to help deliver a range of projects across strategic, support and front line services over the two years. This will involve substantial placements across all departments. Due to the calibre of the candidates this year the County Council has offered placements to 5 graduate trainees.
16. There is no commitment given to the graduates that they will be found work within the Council at the end of their placement with us; however, in the last year two of the trainees have achieved employment within the Council. Current work being undertaken by those involved in the programme includes social care transformation projects, Looked After Children services and The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub.
17. This programme offers the Council the opportunity to recruit and develop possible future managers as 'One Council' ambassadors who gain experience of working across the organisation offering them valuable insight and understanding of the work of the County Council.

## **Financial Implications**

18. The apprentices and graduate trainees are paid at the nationally recommended rates.

## **Other Options Considered**

19. Increasing the take up of apprenticeships is a key aspect of strategy both locally and nationally and benefits both young people and employers. The County Council has a key role to play in this. Improved access to work experience opportunities can further support young people in gaining valuable experience and enhancing employability.

## **Reasons for Recommendation**

20. The benefits to the Council are outlined in the report. In summary, the apprenticeship scheme is a good opportunity for young people to gain valuable work experience, could potentially contribute to improving the age profile of the workforce with the associated benefits this brings and is a key plank in the developing Youth Employment and Employability Strategy.
21. The national graduate development programme is the leading management development programme for local government. The Council will have the benefit of additional independent support to key areas of activity in a cost effective way which will help the Authority plan for the future.

## **Statutory and Policy Implications**

22. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, personnel, crime and disorder and those using the service. Where such implications are material, they have been described in the text of the report.

## **Human Resources Implications**

23. The personnel issues are identified within the report. The trades unions have previously been consulted and have commented on the Council's approach.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that:

The Committee note the positive steps the County Council is taking to offer more young people the opportunity to access a variety of work related learning opportunities.

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**Constitutional Comments (KK 04/10/12)**  
This report is for noting only.

**Financial Comments (MB 04/10/12)**  
Provision for the Apprenticeship scheme and the National Graduate Development Programme has been made in the County Council Budget from 2012/13.

**Background Papers**  
None

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