

**REPORT OF SERVICE DIRECTOR – CUSTOMERS, GOVERNANCE AND  
EMPLOYEES**

**NOTTINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND  
EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES STRATEGY**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To seek approval from Elected Members of the draft Skills Development and Employment Opportunities strategy and associated resource requirements to enable effective delivery of the identified actions and to deliver the objectives set out in the new Council Plan.

**Information**

2. The Council Plan, approved at Full Council on 25<sup>th</sup> November, sets out the strategic vision for the future of Nottinghamshire and the local authority. It sets out an ambitious 10 year vision for a “healthier, prosperous and greener future for everyone.” It is recognised that having access to meaningful work through sustainable employment is essential for individuals’ health and well-being. Creating employment opportunities which pay a living wage contribute to the overall economic growth and prosperity of our communities.
3. A new People Strategy to support the delivery of the Council Plan will be considered at January’s Personnel Committee for approval. However, this report covers a key component of the People Strategy and associated workforce plan in creating an ambitious programme of skills development with an expectation that this will lead to permanent employment with the Council or one of its partner organisations.
4. Whilst there are certain risks attached to setting specific targets in a time of continuing financial uncertainty and the ongoing impact of the covid pandemic on service delivery, it is considered important to have identified milestones to enable Members to measure progress in delivering on the ambitions set out in the attached strategy. It is therefore intended that a minimum of 25% of all vacant posts to be recruited to up to and including Grade 5, will be offered as apprenticeships. The other potentially limiting factor is the time it is taking for new apprenticeship standards to become available.
5. It is recognised that some people’s job prospects and living standards have suffered due to COVID-19. The role of the Council in supporting the local economy has never been so critical during the pandemic and as we begin to build back for a better future. The impact of the

pandemic has been especially hard on those who already faced existing challenges on entering and maintaining employment, for example, figures show a significant increase in young people claiming unemployment benefits over this period. There is now, more than ever, the need for the Council to take a leadership role in creating new opportunities for all our communities, particularly those who have left care, have a disability or who are from an ethnic minority currently under-represented in the Council's or wider local workforce.

6. A recent study from the Institute of Employment Studies (IES) reports that the majority of young people have found it harder to secure high-quality work since the start of the pandemic. 62% of people aged 16 to 24 feel the pandemic has made it harder to find work based on factors including environment, job security and work life balance. The same percentage said the pandemic has impacted their confidence when it came to work.
7. The Council values its workforce and aims to be an inclusive and accessible place to come and work and, should people choose to, to develop their careers. This also ensures that the council has a workforce with the right skills, knowledge and experience to undertake their roles successfully. The Council continues to face significant challenges in securing suitable candidates to fill a range of roles, including entry level jobs where we previously have not experienced any shortage of applicants. The Council workforce covers over 450 different types of roles. Our current recruitment challenges include social care, both qualified and unqualified, catering and cleaning, customer services, business support, legal services and some more specialist roles. This is not a problem unique to this Council and one that is recognised locally and nationally across both the public and private sectors. Work is underway to consider why this is the case and to adopt more creative approaches to ensure the Council is well-placed in the race for talent.
8. The attached strategy provides an overview of the existing programmes offered by the Council, how these will be developed to offer sustainable employment opportunities and seeks to draw together activity taking place in all four departments. It seeks to form and build relationships with work experience candidates and graduates so when they begin thinking about their careers, Nottinghamshire County Council or one of our partner organisations, is at the forefront of their minds as a place where they will be supported to develop and have a genuine opportunity for sustainable employment at the end of their trainee placements. These include:
  - i. Work Experience
  - ii. Kickstart Programme
  - iii. Apprenticeships
  - iv. T-level industry placements
  - v. Graduate Programme
  - vi. Leonard Cheshire Change 100 interns
  - vii. Supported interns
9. The Council's apprenticeship programme utilises the Apprenticeship Levy to offer learning and development opportunities via approved apprenticeship standards to existing staff as continued professional development and through the conversion of appropriate vacancies to an apprenticeship or by the creation of entry to employment level apprenticeships additional to the staffing establishment.

10. There has been a steady increase in the number of young people employed on an apprenticeship programme with the Council, and whilst the majority of our Apprentices are existing employees, there has been a noted increase in the number of young people applying for apprenticeship vacancies. There are currently 241 Apprentices employed by the Council with a further 30 in train; 62 of these already in post are under 25 years old and 11 apprentices are aged 16-18 years.
11. There is a small budget identified for the employment costs associated with the Apprenticeship Programme that are additional to the staffing establishment and this is prioritised for those aged 16 – 18 years; looked after children and Care Leavers and anyone eligible for an apprenticeship on completion of a Kickstart placement.
12. The Council is also able to transfer a percentage of unspent Levy to other employers to fund apprenticeships and we are currently supporting and in the process of supporting 75 Apprentices in a range of businesses across Nottinghamshire. A proportion of the levy transfer has been committed to providing apprenticeships and associated support for any young person in contact with Children and Families Department, specifically looked after children and care leavers. An agreement is in place with Impact Futures to provide young people with careers information, advice and guidance and employability skills where appropriate and to identify apprenticeship opportunities with a local employer that meets the young persons aspirations.
13. Any organisation with a paybill over £3million has to pay 0.5% of each month's payroll as a levy. Members may recall that there are very specific ways in which the levy can be spent, that is, solely to fund the training provided. We cannot use the levy to fund salary costs or further support for apprentices. The Council has already committed £2.3m of the levy to fund apprenticeships in the last 12 months.
14. The Council is able to use the relevant incentive payments for a far wider range of support, including travel costs and to make up any salary differentials. Payments are claimed retrospectively but we are aiming to be more creative with how we utilise the payments and will share our learning with schools who are also employing apprentices to ensure they too maximise the opportunities presented.
15. The table below provides the information on the numbers of current and planned apprenticeship starts as at 30 November 2021.

	Number	Costs Committed
Current Live Apprentices	241	£1,544,371
Planned Apprentice Starts	30	£176,300
Live Levy Transfer Apprentices	33	£273,309
Planned Levy Transfer Apprentices	42	£298,191
<b>Total</b>	<b>346</b>	<b>£2,292,171</b>

16. The Council's Graduate Development Programme is a two year programme that is designed to shape the next generation of local government managers. Applicants should have graduated with at least a 2.1 degree within the last five years from one of the Nottingham Universities or be a Nottinghamshire resident. The scheme is also open to existing Council employees and members have recently received a report at November's Committee, attended by our most recent cohort, outlining the success of the programme.

17. The programme offers a rotation of placements across the departments that are designed to build on knowledge, skills and behaviours and the participants undertake the L5 Departmental Manager Apprenticeship throughout the programme. Now in its fourth year of being delivered in-house, the quality of applicants remains exceptionally high and recruitment for the next cohort will commence in March 2022 for a September start date.
18. Working in partnership with Leonard Cheshire, the Change 100 programme is designed to open employment opportunities to disabled people who are either in their final year of university or have recently graduated. As part of the programme, the Council offers paid three month internships for candidates over the summer and it is intended to continue our involvement in this programme.
19. The Council has been participating in the Change 100 scheme since 2017 with four placements available each year and continued to offer placements throughout the Coronavirus restrictions last year all but one at a reduction of one placement. Two of the participants in previous years have been successful in gaining employment with the Council as a result of their engagement in the scheme.
20. This year we had capacity for four placements and received a number of options for participants to be matched to across all departments. The placements started in mid June for three months and included development days with Leonard Cheshire for the participants and bespoke disability awareness sessions for the teams hosting the placements.
21. The development of the strategy provides an opportunity to progress the “levelling-up” agenda to address inequalities and to provide greater support to those disadvantaged in their search for employment. It also provides an excellent platform to build on partnership working with the boroughs and districts, Health partners, Council-owned businesses and SMEs across the county as well as our agency managed service provider, REED, who already support the council as part of the social value element of the contract by promoting work readiness.
22. There is significant activity across the council in the area of skills development and employability but this needs to be coordinated and organised to maximise the impact of the work already underway and to further grow this over time. This will include colleagues in Economic Development, the Family Service, the workforce development lead in children’s and adults social care, the Achievement Advisor Service, Children’s Centres, ICDS, I-Works, the Recruitment team and in Human Resources & Workforce and Organisational Development.
23. Successful delivery of the strategy will require a more creative approach to resourcing. It is understood that managers often prefer to select a fully qualified and experienced candidate when filling a vacancy as this reduces the time required to support a new employee. However in a period when we know there are existing skills shortages and ongoing challenges in attracting this type of candidate, it provides an opportunity to select a candidate who can be developed into the role using the various trainee programmes available. Managers will require support to shift from the more traditional recruitment models and to be open to accepting candidates who will not have all the necessary skills and attributes when they commence employment. Our revised approach to skills development creates wider opportunities for the people of Nottinghamshire to access and maintain employment with the Council. The use of a wide range of skills development programmes demonstrates our ambition that every trainee

will secure permanent employment at the end of whatever traineeship they have undertaken. Supporting people to be work ready and having a greater focus on assisting people through the recruitment process to enable them to secure employment either with the council, with one of our partner organisations or with external employers will be given greater priority under this refreshed approach.

24. To enable the successful delivery of the strategy, some additional capacity is required. We plan to utilise existing resources, where possible, with some adjustments in responsibilities. The existing Band C post which leads on apprenticeships will be redesignated to be the Lead Business Partner for Skills Development and Employment and take on coordination of the various existing and future programmes of work. It will report directly into the Head of Human Resources. The role will require re-evaluation in recognition of its expanded responsibilities and is anticipated to be evaluated as Band D. The existing 0.6 fte Band C role which is responsible for the graduate programme will sit within this team structure alongside the 0.6 fte existing Band A role which will incorporate the development of our work experience programme. This report also seeks approval for an additional full time Band C post and an apprentice role to support the development of this work. The new team will work across the council and with colleagues in Economic Development, I-works and other skills and employment advisers to ensure the Council maximises the opportunities presented both internally and through the transfer of the apprenticeship levy to Nottinghamshire business where appropriate to do so.

### **Other Options Considered**

25. As one of the largest local employers in Nottinghamshire, the Council has a lead role in identifying employment opportunities at varying levels for our residents. Engagement in the schemes identified above, ensures we maintain our offer to provide such opportunities and we continue to work with partner organisations to maximise the offer. Kickstart is a recent example of a new initiative which we have committed to and we will continue to engage in national and local programmes and initiatives to enhance opportunities for people of every level of ability. The option to do nothing would result in people who face additional challenges in accessing employment being left unsupported with the real possibility of falling into long term unemployment with all the issues associated with this.

### **Reasons for Recommendations**

26. The Council seeks to build on its brand as an employer of choice and our commitment to these initiatives provides demonstrable proof of the work underway to improve employment chances which has an overall positive impact on the local economy. The strategy ensures we have a programme of work which provides work experience opportunities to enable young people to see what opportunities are available for them within the Council and provides a potential talent pipeline for future recruitment particularly in hard to recruit to areas. Given the age profile of our current workforce, encouraging younger residents to consider the Council as a place they can begin and develop their careers, is critical to guaranteeing the Council can access new employees with the relevant skills, knowledge and experience to ensure the future success of the Council on delivering its identified priorities.
27. The strategy draws together existing activity and will enable the Council to maximise both internal and external opportunities through a more coordinated approach to work experience, traineeships and employment.

## **Statutory and Policy Implications**

28. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

## **Data Protection and Information Governance**

29. There are no data protection issues arising from this report as all the information contained is generic and cannot be attributed to individual employees or local businesses.

## **Financial Implications**

30. Financial implications to the Council arise from the potential change of grade from Band C to Band D for the Lead Business Partner role. The new Band C role and the apprentice role require funding. Approval has already been given for the employment costs of participants in the Graduate Programme, Change 100 and the Apprenticeship Programme. Funds relating to the Kickstart scheme are drawn down from Department of Work and Pensions grants and utilise existing funding initiatives available to Inspire through Education and Skills funding. The delivery of Apprenticeship training is funded through the Council's Levy payments and any unspent levy is removed by HMRC after 24 months. The transfer of unspent levy to Nottinghamshire employers and residents ensure these funds are maximised and remain in the local economy.

## **Human Resources Implications**

31. The range of training programmes enables the Council to maximise career development opportunities and to expand the offer of in-work training to ensure its workforce has the right skills and knowledge required by a modern, public service organisation. The challenge to create sustainable employment opportunities will require a change of mind-set in recruiting managers, with support from senior leaders, to explore appointing candidates who will develop into roles rather than being employed as "the finished article".

## **Public Sector Equality Duty implications**

32. The proposals in this report meet the Council's existing commitment to meeting, and where possible exceeding, the statutory requirements of the Equality Act 2010. The transfer of levy funds with a focus on delivering opportunities for under-represented and vulnerable groups supports the Council in meeting its statutory obligations.

## **Smarter Working Implications**

33. Any smarter working implications will be considered as part of the emerging Agile Working Policy which will apply to relevant sections of the Council's workforce. Greater flexibility in how work is delivered and from where, creates new opportunities for some people previously restricted in their access to work spaces.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That Personnel Committee approve:

- 1) The attached Skills Development and Employment Opportunities Strategy – Appendix 1 and agree to receive associated action plans on individual initiatives required for its successful delivery.
- 2) The establishment of a Skills Development and Employment Team as set out in Appendix 2 and discussed in paragraph 30 of the report.

**Marjorie Toward**  
**Service Director, Customers, Governance and Employees**  
**Chief Executives Department**

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### **Constitutional Comments (KK 07/12/2021)**

34. The proposals in this report are within the remit of the Personnel Committee.

### **Financial Comments NS 07/12/2021)**

35. Any additional funding required will be considered as part of the construction of the budget for 2022/23.

### **HR Comments (JP 06/12/2021)**

36. The resources identified in paragraph 30 will be subject to the Authority's Job Evaluation, Recruitment and HR procedures.

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

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- None

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

- All