

Report of the Cabinet Member for Next Generation Services

Cabinet - 21 July 2016

CORPORATE APPRENTICE AND TRAINEE STRATEGY

Purpose:	To outline the proposed Corporate Apprentice and Trainee strategy, along with the timeline for the project implementation.
Policy Framework:	New Policy
Reason for Decision:	To set Policy Framework
Consultation:	Legal, Finance, Planning, Access to Services.
Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that: 1) The key principles of the strategy are accepted and embedded across the Authority via the proposed action plan.
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1. BACKGROUND

Discussions have taken place over some time about developing a clear Council wide policy and strategy for a "Corporate Apprentice Scheme".

A working group drawing representatives from across the Council was established, chaired by the Chief Operating Officer and this report outlines initial findings, suggested principles for inclusion in the strategy, proposed timeline for the project and any issues and decisions required to finalise the strategy and action plan.

2. BASELINE AND DATA GATHERING

The first process carried out was to focus on understanding what the Council already does, either directly or indirectly with partners. This identified that the amount of work in this area is significant with many positive examples being undertaken across the Council. The following list is not intended to be exhaustive but it does give an insight into how proactive the council is currently being in this area:-

- Employment training wide ranging apprentice programme across many different sectors and industries.
- A range of apprentices including in CB&PS which focusses on trade apprentices with 150 recruited to date.
- The Council's Beyond Bricks and Mortar which has made significant progress in its targeted recruitment and training programme in construction in areas such as QEd, WHQS and regeneration opportunities.
- The Council's approach to dealing with NEETS which has been identified as best practice.
- Waste management and baling plant working in partnership with Social Services.
- LIFT programme.
- Numerous examples of work experience ranging for 1 week placements to longer more formalised schemes.
- Foreign student placements.
- Internships, master placements and working with Universities.
- Various working with "outside bodies" where the Council is placing trainees/work experience.
- Job Growth Wales.
- Council delivery on it corporate parenting role.
- Previous schemes such as the Work Related Education Programme and 14 - 19 network.
- The ultimate successful "whole council" approach in delivering on the previous COASTAL project.

However, whilst these are very positive initiatives, it has also become clear that there is a lack of awareness and cross-authority working and as such, some of these excellent examples could achieve improved outcomes with better visibility and sharing of best practice.

3. SCOPE OF STRATEGY

The examples referred to above and further discussions to date have highlighted that the term "Apprentice Strategy" can somewhat restrict the opportunities and as a result, may be too narrow an approach. It is understood that the desire for such a scheme is to capture and maximise the wider opportunities for young people, "long term unemployed" or other disadvantaged groups and as such it is recommended that the following activities should be included in the proposed strategy:-

- Formal traditional apprentices
- Pre-apprentice initiatives
- Short term work experience
- Longer term work experience
- Internships, master's placements etc.

It is felt this wider remit would have greater positive outcomes and also a closer synergy to the overall council priorities and certainly make the scheme more sustainable.

What is critical is this is not an academic policy but an attempt to deliver a person centred approach to proactively develop improved outcomes for the young people of Swansea and surrounding region. As such it will have a focus with specific target groups but should also allow “equal opportunity for all” to gain experience and get a step up into the world of work.

4. PARTNERS

Initially it is proposed the scheme starts with the Authority but then if practical it is rolled out with other public sector partners. It is possible to widen this to the Private Sector within the City region but these opportunities can be subsequently explored once “we have got our own house in order”.

However one example where progress can be made quickly is the link between this scheme and the current Beyond Bricks and Mortar policy operated by the council. That has historically made significant progress in the construction and regeneration areas but it is also proposed that this is widened across all relevant procurement activity. A separate report will be presented to Cabinet on these principles in due course.

5. PRIORITY AREAS FOR DISCUSSION/DECISION

Initial discussions have identified that there is a danger that the scheme could be broadened and become overly onerous and therefore it is necessary to confirm the core purpose of such an Authority wide initiative. As such the “indicative” priorities are captured below with further details presented in the subsequent paragraphs:

- To maximise the work experience opportunities thus developing the “bridge” from formal education into work based opportunities through work experience.
- To agree some key principles for a corporate wide apprentice strategy including key principles and targets.
- To have a single agreed process to access opportunities across the Council and its designated partners managed by a single team within the council with appropriate coordination across all service areas.
- To agree the principles of and specific “target areas” in terms of age, locality, ethnicity and other barriers to long term employment.
- To agree a way of “target setting” opportunities inked to available funding.
- Any initial links with external partners/contracting opportunities.
- To explore the potential implications of the UK governments “apprentice levy” which if implemented in Wales would have an effect on any proposals.
- To consider the above in terms of existing or new budgets in support of these objectives.

5.1. Work Experience Opportunities

One of the key recommendations is the desire to try and provide the skills and experience to those young people in our society which would otherwise find it difficult to secure meaningful long term employment. This is also as much about “work ready skills” as opposed to actually work experience and decisions have already been made by cabinet as to how the council will build on the excellent work carried out to date. This includes the Council’s approach to NEET’s and previously by employment training and this proposal would also include the council’s commitments and corporate parenting role in relation to the LAC population.

A decision has already been made on the future of the employment training service with residual funding being earmarked towards “disadvantaged” learners. As such the proposals in this scheme are intended to complement and enhance it by committing the Council to also utilise within council “work experience opportunities to maximise the potential employability of candidates.

Targets will be set on an annual basis once the new service is constituted with wider opportunities being identified via other Public and Private sector employers, wherever possible.

In “prioritising” this area it is not intended to exclude other students who are progressing well within formal education or “school leavers”, from also accessing work experience opportunities, but adds an additional “obligation” on the Council in an area where it can make a greater difference to the desired outcomes.

There will be a need for all parts of the Council to facilitate such opportunities and this will need a network of workplace mentors, although experience shows that many employees readily embrace such opportunities.

Work experience placements need to be meaningful and well supported and as such, there will be a need to develop “structured” work experience, possibly backed up with vocational qualifications or units relevant to each area but this will take some time to put in place so that it doesn’t become an over-burdensome task.

It is also necessary to make a direct link from work experience opportunities into further development opportunities available for those successfully completing a work experience e.g. a number of ring-fenced ‘traineeship’ opportunities, which our young people can apply for.

5.2 Apprentices

As indicated, there are some existing, positive apprentice opportunities across the Council but it is also certain that these could be expanded across a much wider areas of the council. Consideration could also be given to utilise a “shared apprentice” approach for some generic activities whereby the

apprentice is employed “corporately” and then loaned out to various services thus sharing the “cost”, giving employees a much wider pool of work experience and also assisting in avoiding “peaks and troughs” within small service areas. It is certainly a viable proposal when considering the future model for Council wide business support but could also be a model that could be extended to other parts of the Council and possibly also with external stakeholder and partners.

It is suggested that the Council sets an aspirational target for apprentice opportunities, the level of which would depend on any additional funding that could be made available.

Initially it is suggested that a percentage of vacancies that currently are advertised externally are “re-designated” as apprentice opportunities. To give an indication of numbers, the Council will advertise circa 250 posts in the last financial year so a 10% target would equate to 25 posts and a 20% target would equate to 50 jobs and so on. Caution needs to be expressed that a one size won’t fit all and a simplistic gateway will assess the opportunities as and when they arise.

The benefit of this approach is that the Council will have already discharged its legal duty in terms of redundancy and redeployment and as such this is likely to also be more acceptable to staff and trade unions.

5.3 Identify a Single Point of Access and Co-Ordination role

The Council has already committed itself to developing a single “electronic” point of access to training and job opportunities via the website developed by the regional learning partnership. This includes job vacancies, details about training opportunities, advice and guidance on issues such as overcoming barriers to employments and how people can access advice and support. It currently signposts candidates and employers to opportunities and it is certainly felt that this would be a valuable tool to align with this proposed initiative.

The link can be accessed as follows:- www.informswansea.co.uk

It was developed and hosted by CCS (BB&M team) and it appears that this may no longer be a core requirement of the RLP. However, it is proposed to continue to run and develop the web portal in conjunction with the Councils IT service as it also has the functionality to extend into an apprentice module which can very quickly be switched on.

This single point of entry would be aligned to the Councils “digital by default” and one way of doing things but it is understood that some prospective learners may require assistance in accessing these, or other services, depending on personal circumstances.

One potential “hurdle” that will need to be overcome is that links with other agencies such as Job Centre Plus means that opportunities are accessible to

all, regardless of personal circumstances or where prospective candidates live. As such, there may be a desire to set up a “member’s area” which is password protected if there is an intention for some of the opportunities to be “ring-fenced” in any way and this is explored further below.

As such, consideration has been given to where the Council wide “coordination role” should sit with logical options being either as part of the Education, Poverty and Prevention, Beyond Bricks and Mortar or HR/Corporate services.

After consideration of the optional and current issues across each of these areas it is proposed that the coordination role sits within the council’s current Beyond Bricks and Mortar team.

This is fully aligned to the widening of the scheme to all “procured goods and services” the council commissions and as such seems a logical place to merge these two complementary activities. There will be a direct link via service “champions” allowing the sharing of best practice. This would be an extension of the initial working group and be on a voluntary basis

In addition, services will be asked to have a member of staff to act as apprentice and workplace “coordinators”. There will no doubt be some concerns over capacity but given the positive engagement taking place across the Council as part of the working group there would seem to be enough “willing volunteers” to embrace such an initiative.

5.4 Targeting opportunities

The “work experience” section above has identified some of the proposed priorities but there is also the need to consider the specific point of “positive discrimination”. This area has received a great deal of attention from the working group as there is a clear dichotomy between the desire to maximise opportunities for all young people, whilst also understanding that the Council needs to run its services as an efficient business and with growing financial pressures needs to also look to employ the best candidates. There is also a requirement to comply with employment legislation and ensure “equal opportunity for all”.

The opportunities referred to above should allow people to compete for jobs and apprenticeships on a level playing field by hopefully given additional skills and experience. However, in some cases, it may be desirable to ring-fence or reserve a certain number of placements for candidates from a particular “target group” in terms of age, locality, ethnicity and other barriers to long term employment. The general view is that this is fully signed up to the need to maximise work experience opportunities but there are greater issues and HR implications of extending this “prior consideration” to apprentice or full time employment opportunities. However, it is believed a reasonable balance can be struck and an open debate is welcome with executive board and Cabinet on the subject.

5.5 Support Care Leavers into Education, Employment and Training

In drafting this strategy, significant discussion has taken place to try and align its objectives with the future life-chances of care leavers. Evidence demonstrates that these are dramatically improved if they can be supported to move into Education, Employment or Training and we recognise that young people within the care system are often at the disadvantage of a poor start and require assistance to catch up.

More specifically the council's Corporate Parenting Strategy has a specific action as follows:-

Develop a 'from care to work' initiative for all looked after children which ensures clear access routes to impartial advice, information and guidance and targeted youth support to enable young people leaving care to remain in education, training or employment and to engage in positive activities.

It is believed that this strategy is completely aligned with this objective and will add significant value in supporting care leavers.

5.6 Target setting

Whilst it is hoped the above principles will be fully supported, there will be a need to set some measureable targets so that key success factors can be set and outputs can be monitored. Existing services will already have some in-built targets such as educational attainment, outcomes in relation to the NEET and LAC population etc. but it is intended to extend these further.

Some initial targets are listed below and these should be read in conjunction with the action plan contained in **Appendix A**.

- Aspirational target to create "100 apprentice and trainee positions over the next 12 months.
- Proposed to set an indicative target that an average of at least 10% of all jobs being externally advertised across the Council will be converted into apprentice opportunities. This will not be mandatory but services will be expected to justify where such adoption is not possible.
- Maintain existing schemes in place in services like CB&PS and Social care should mean this target can be achieved without any additional investment.
- Set aspirational targets for work experience opportunities. This could be based on budget, FTEs or an arbitrary figure. For indicative purposes in this report, a target of 500 person weeks in the first year is not unreasonable and it is likely that actual opportunities will very much depend on the demand, as opposed to the other way round.
- It is also intended to also set someone specific targets for ring-fenced opportunities as referred to in the report for example with NEETS and LAC groups such as guaranteed work experience opportunities.

Further work is required as part of the forward action plan to formulate and test the principles further.

It is suggested that an initial 12 month period is used to pilot the principles with targets being firmed up once this period has been completed and evaluated.

A range of services across the Council have initially indicated that the proposed way forward is sensible and a number of services including Corporate services, Social services and a range services within the Place directorate are already planning to recruit apprentices or trainees under the umbrella of the new strategy. This is very encouraging and bodes very well for the future.

5.7 Wider Stakeholders/Contractors

As indicated above, there is a need to not overly-extend the limited resources of the Council by extending the scheme too far prior to it really being embedded “in-house” first. However, there is no reason why the Council can’t continue to progress its current agenda including:

- Extend the existing Beyond Bricks and Mortar scheme to procurement activities over and above the traditional construction related project to other major procurement such as Social care. (The current scheme sets targets of 52 person weeks per £1m on “contract value” so significant impacts can be made in this regard). A separate report is being presented to cabinet on this proposal.
- Seek expressions of interest from other agencies and employers in the area who may sign up to an employer “charter” and can get involved in the early stage development of the scheme.
- Promote the scheme via other forums including PSB, city region board etc.

5.8 Apprentice Levy

Progress is being made via national policy in regards to the imposition of an apprentice levy by UK government which will come into effect in April 2017, at a rate of 0.5% of an employer’s pay bill. This would include local authorities although it is unclear if this is a matter that would be “devolved” to Welsh Government and as such would be applicable in Wales.

Therefore, the reason this is referred to is to make Cabinet aware that if such a scheme is nationally created the council approach would need to be flexible enough to become aligned and also to make sure it benefited from any funding that is made available.

6. EQUALITY AND ENGAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

A full EIA report was completed for the Corporate Apprentice and Trainee Strategy, which is aimed at developing a Council wide approach to apprentices, traineeships and work experience. A copy of this can be found in **Appendix B**.

Specifically, the comments from the UNRCR have identified significant positive opportunities and as such it is crucial that meaningful and ongoing consultation takes place throughout the life of the strategy.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Funding/Costs

Whilst undertaking this review due consideration has been given to the financial implications of any proposals and it is fully appreciated that during these austere times, opportunities for additional monies will be limited. It is therefore critical that all opportunities will be explored including grant funding and external sources such as Private Sector and better reallocation of existing monies.

As such these initial priority proposals are based on an assumption of very limited additional funding of circa £50k to implement the coordination and facilitation role across the Council. In addition, it is assumed that any “new” apprentice positions will be converted from substantive roles and budgets any “work experience” opportunities will generally be assumed as unpaid and therefore at no cost since most opportunities are currently linked with existing education/training schemes and also linked to allowances or benefits entitlements.

Any proposal to develop long term “paid” work experience would have to be dealt at some point in the future via the work plan to ensure it is operated consistently across the Council.

Clearly if Cabinet wished to identify additional sources of funding, then it is likely that a greater number of opportunities could be created but it is felt that the scheme should firstly become embedded and then only extended if the outcome proves to be successful and “value for money” is demonstrated and thus a review after the first year of operation would seem prudent.

If in the future there is a desire to add increased funding into creating new apprentice positions the consideration has to be given to the councils existing policies and not replace “redundant” employees with apprentices and it would be preferable to link these with areas of demand or “hard to fill” posts. Each “new” post would carry a typical cost of £25k to the end of 2 years. I.e. average £12.5k per annum per apprentice.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications at this point. Legal advice may be required as the strategy is implemented.

9. TIMESCALES

Appendix A outlines the indicative timeline assuming Cabinet approval is obtained in July 2017 with a formal launch taking place shortly after.

This would be good opportunity for the Council to highlight its aspirations, carry out consultation as necessary with partners who wish to work with the Council and also give the initiative some visibility and which should assist in driving through the subsequent action plan for implementation.

However the council will continue to develop and implement any quick wins and maintain ongoing activity but will better coordinate across the Council.

Background Papers: None

Appendix A - Key Actions to Initiate the Scheme

Appendix B – EIA Report