
Apprenticeship Strategy 2020-2024

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1. Foreword

Foreword by Nick Carter Chief Executive and Dominic Boeck portfolio holder for Education and Young People.

Our Apprenticeship Strategy underpins what has been a long standing commitment to the expansion of apprenticeships across the Council. Since the introduction of the apprenticeship levy in April 2017 we have supported 208 (as at July 2020). Our apprenticeships have been a demonstration of our commitment to 'growing our own'.

This year we took the decision to invest further in our Apprenticeship Programme with new financial resources aimed at focusing our support on those who find it particularly difficult to find employment. Whilst West Berkshire has a strong local economy we know that a minority find it difficult to get into the local labour market. The Vision for West Berkshire (West Berkshire Vision 2036) highlights the challenge as does our Council Strategy (2019-2023). This Strategy seeks to seize that challenge by focusing part of our future Apprenticeship Programme on those who need that support. We cannot do that alone but in making a start we hope that others will follow.

The world of work continues to change and Covid-19 Pandemic will bring yet further change. The Council will need to respond to that change and in doing so ensure that it has a workforce capable of meeting the needs of its changing communities and those that live within them. Apprenticeships will continue to play a vital role in ensuring we can respond effectively to those changes and in doing so bring benefits not only to the Council and its many services but also those for our own staff and their future development.

2. Background

In April 2017 the Government relaunched apprenticeships alongside the plans for the Apprenticeship Levy in a bid to recruit three million new apprentices by 2020. All organisations with a pay bill of over £3 million are required to pay a levy of 0.5% of their pay bill each month into the levy which equates to approximately £0.5 million per year being allocated to the levy fund. Organisations with more than 250 people were set an apprenticeship target for new starts each year of 2.3% of the headcount which equates to approximately 91 apprentices per annum for West Berkshire Council including maintained schools (based on the public sector target of 2.3% of headcount including maintained (non-Voluntary aided) schools as at 31st March each year- 3,962 as at 31st March 2020).

3. Introduction

This document sets out the Apprenticeship Strategy for West Berkshire Council both as an employer and as key stakeholder in the future of our communities including the promotion of apprenticeships to other local businesses both within West Berkshire and as part of a pan-Berkshire initiative. The strategy is aligned with the Council Strategy and also contributes to a number of other strategies including our Workforce, Economic Development, SEND, and Autism strategies.

The Apprenticeship Strategy and delivery plan will be a dynamic document initially spanning 2020-2024. It will be regularly reviewed to ensure it is in line with national policy but also local needs. The strategy will be overseen by the member led Apprenticeship Steering Group and the employee led Workforce Board.

The strategy along with workforce planning & development activities and recruitment & retention reviews will inform plans at directorate and department/service level in ensuring we have the right people in the right places to meet our needs. The Apprenticeship Strategy also links into other initiatives such as workforce development, coaching and mentoring, management development, work experience, traineeships and other Government programmes such as the current Kickstart Programme which has been developed in response to the recent Covid-19 pandemic impact in employment opportunities for our young people.

To date, we have since April 2017 contributed £1.35 million to our levy pot (Annual Spend for Schools is £233,396 and for Corporate is £202,440). We work with 20 different training providers providing 23 different apprenticeship programmes and we have enrolled 208 staff onto an apprenticeship programme. Whilst we are pleased with the progress we have made so far we are ambitious in our plans for the future both within the Council and the local area.

3.1 Vision

The Council recognises the value of apprenticeships as a way of supporting staff at all stages of their career whether that be our young people starting out on their career path, existing staff wishing to develop new skills or to change career and providing quality training.

At West Berkshire Council we see apprenticeships as valuable at all levels enabling the Council to meet its current and future skills needs. Apprenticeships are one element of our workforce training and development plans to ensure we have the right people with the right skills for our future needs.

In addition we want to be an ambassador for apprenticeship in our local area and play an active role in reducing the employment inequality gap and encouraging businesses to support our ambition. Part of this would be working with our Economic Development Team, local businesses and colleges to ensure increased awareness of apprenticeships and their value. This will include working to facilitate levy transfer between local businesses to support Small and Medium Employers (SME's) who don't have an apprenticeship levy pot to fund training.

3.2 Purpose- Meeting Current and Future Skills Needs- our strategic ambitions

West Berkshire is a growing district with our population estimated to grow by 5.4% by 2036. In 2018 for every resident aged 16-64 there were an average of 1.17 jobs which is higher than the South East and National average. We also have a highly qualified workforce with 65.7% of 16-64 year olds living in the area qualified at NVQ3 or above (Data from NOMIS LA Profile). However this data is only a snapshot at a point in time and does not reflect the ever changing picture that is the reality for our local community.

However, some service areas within the Council still have recruitment and retention challenges and therefore the Council recognises the need to attract and retain talented people to help us build on our strengths and meet our future requirements. The Council is also committed to "growing our own talent" and being recognised as an employer of choice that attracts a diverse and talented workforce and acts as an advocate for apprenticeships in West Berkshire and across the wider Berkshire area.

As part of our recovery strategy in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic we are mindful that our young people have been disproportionately affected as the jobs market is in a constant state of flux. Therefore we are looking to work with training providers, colleges, schools, Education colleagues and local businesses to identify those who need our help and participate in government initiatives such as the current Kickstart scheme- this is a scheme which provides fully government funded placements (for 6 months @ 25 hours per week at the National Minimum Wage) for those aged 16-24 who are in receipt of universal credits.

As part of the Kickstart scheme the Council is acting as an intermediary for local businesses helping facilitate placements for our young people. As at the beginning of November 2020 we have 5 confirmed and 2 potential internal placements and 13 confirmed and an additional 35 potential external placements. Our ambition is to convert as many of these internal placements into apprenticeships at the end of the six months and to encourage other businesses to do the same.

We recognise the value of investing and developing staff at all levels of the organisation and we encourage regular dialogue between employee and line manager using our performance management framework to identify training needs to assist with recruitment and retention as well as future aspirations. The Council is particularly keen to help our disadvantaged young people who have been significantly impacted due to the recent pandemic.

In addition we recognise that we cannot do this alone and so are keen to lead by example and also encourage other local businesses through being an advocate for across Berkshire, to utilise apprenticeships; in some cases they also deliver apprenticeship training.

These aspirations are captured in our Council strategy vision of “Working Together to make West Berkshire an even greater place in which to live, work and learn” and in particular the following priorities:

- Ensure our vulnerable children and adults achieve better outcomes
- Support everyone to reach their full potential
- Support businesses to start, develop and thrive in West Berkshire

4. Apprenticeship Strategy Aims

4.1 Identify apprenticeship opportunities and embed these across the council.

Through collaboration with services through workforce development groups (Adult Social Care and Children & Family Services), the workforce board and workforce planning activities we will look to maximise the use of apprenticeships and map standards onto career paths and job descriptions where possible. This will enable services to identify skills shortages and take appropriate action.

The Council will also look to participate in LGA forums and working groups and input to trailblazer groups to further develop the range of apprenticeships on offer and their promotion.

4.2 Actively promote apprenticeships within the Council both as a recruitment tool, as part of retention strategies, and encouraging a learning and development culture.

Through active communications we aim to promote a pro-apprenticeship culture making information on apprenticeships readily available and encouraging discussions around personal development on a regular basis (for retention and development reasons). In addition we will have information pages on both our intranet and on the internet and hold events such as promoting Apprenticeship Week to raise awareness and look for ambassadors within the Council and to become an advocate for apprenticeships both within and across Berkshire.

To support promotion within services we have service representation on both our Apprenticeship Steering Group and Workforce Board.

- 4.3 Utilise higher level apprenticeships to support succession planning, personnel development, recruitment & retention and developing future leaders.

By providing opportunities for existing staff to utilise apprenticeships to upskill and develop as part of their own development plan we will seek to improve recruitment & retention of staff, support personal development and facilitate improved succession planning. In addition we will also use apprenticeships to facilitate staff to progress their career and therefore will develop the skills of our future leaders.

- 4.4 Maximise the use of levy spend and increase the number of apprenticeship starts with a view to meeting our public-sector target

This will be achieved by promoting apprenticeships across the Council through encouraging all services to review vacancies up to and including Grade E with a view to creating an apprenticeship. This will help increase opportunities for new entrants by taking an Apprenticeship First approach as well as increasing the number of existing staff undertaking an apprenticeship to develop their skills and career paths.

In addition we will develop partnerships with training providers and local businesses and identify opportunities for Levy Transfer as we recognise that the Council, despite having a wide range of roles, will not have a role that suits everyone. It is also recognised that SMEs may not be able to afford the training costs for an apprenticeship but may have roles of interest to job seekers.

- 4.5 In the capacity of Corporate Parent we will create apprenticeships for our Looked After Children, SEND pupils and NEETS.

Those leaving care, with special educational needs (SEND) or disadvantaged young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEETS) face additional challenges negotiating the complexities of finding and sustaining work. The Council is keen to actively support this group into work and to narrow the gap between SEND and non-SEND pupil outcomes.

The apprenticeship strategy seeks to compliment our Autism and SEND Strategies which identify the following priorities:

- We want to develop positive transitions for young people with SEND to enable them to prepare for adulthood. (Strategic Priority 4 SEND Strategy)

- Supporting young people with SEND to reach their potential as adults by developing the skills they need in order to be able to make informed decisions about the future.
- Autistic adults are able to find employment or volunteering opportunities and are supported to remain employed. (Strategic Priority 3 Autism Strategy)
- Enabling and encouraging Autism Friendly environments (Strategic Priority 4 Autism Strategy)

Programmes of work experience and traineeships can help with this and we look to develop partnerships both between services within the Council and with our mainstream and special schools to find and facilitate opportunities.

This can include a range of activities such as work trials, work placements, information days, advice and support on the internet in relation to our offer, careers fairs, work shadowing, and traineeships.

As a disability confident employer we guarantee an interview for those meeting the essential criteria for a role and we are seeking to extend this to our disadvantaged young people. We are also looking to sign up to the Care Leaver Covenant.

Our aim is to provide high value work experience and traineeships as a pre-cursor to an apprenticeship facilitating our young people to start on their career path with us or other employers in the area.

In addition the Council has set aside £125,000 per annum for the next four years to provide support for our disadvantaged young people in a variety of ways including developing high quality work experience in particular for our mainstream SEND pupils, supporting schools to train job coaches as well as funding apprenticeship salaries and periphery costs such as personal protective equipment, support with transport costs, support to services to provide ICT equipment to minimise the barriers to those young people accessing work.

4.6 Encourage work experience placements and/or traineeships as a pathway to an apprenticeship

The challenge for young people to find work especially those who are disadvantaged is acute. Whilst employment rates in West Berkshire are healthy the impact of high quality work experience and traineeships should not be underestimated when starting on a career path. In conjunction with our colleagues in the Education Service (SEND/Post 16 etc.) we will seek to provide work experience and traineeship opportunities as a pathway to apprenticeships.

The apprenticeship strategy seeks to compliment our Autism and SEND Strategies which identify the following priorities:

- We want to improve post 16, education, learning, employment and training. (Strategic Priority 3 SEND Strategy)
 - Provision available to all young people with SEND aged 16-25 to access purposeful activities (including education, work experience,

supported employment, supported internships, apprenticeships, training including voluntary and community projects as appropriate)

- Autistic adults are able to find employment or volunteering opportunities and are supported to remain employed. (Strategic Priority 3 Autism Strategy)
- Enabling and encouraging Autism Friendly environments (Strategic Priority 4 Autism Strategy)

In doing so we hope to promote a more representative and diverse workforce and help our disadvantaged young people overcome personal barriers when entering the workplace.

We seek to pay at least the age appropriate minimum wage to all apprentices.

4.7 Actively promote apprenticeships to local businesses within West Berkshire

The Council's Economic Development Strategy looks to promote apprenticeships and identify local employers who either wish to transfer levy to other businesses or receive levy transfers as they are unable to meet the 5% contribution cost for apprenticeship training. In addition we are working with training providers, other Local Authorities and the Local Enterprise Partnership to maximise these opportunities.

5. In-house Support

The Council has guidance and support for managers to make the process from creation or a role through recruitment to appointment as easy as possible. There is information on the intranet about available [apprenticeships](#), [how to apply](#), guidance on supporting [off the job training](#) and how to recruit an apprentice.

HR actively manage the procurement of training providers, compliance with the apprenticeship funding rules and administration of contract paperwork to make the process as easy as possible for managers, and manage the risks associated with compliance.

To support our new apprentices and particularly disadvantaged young people, SEND apprentices or apprentices with additional needs we are working to train up job mentors who can act as a buddy or sounding board outside of the team to support the apprentice with any challenges they may be facing. We will also be advocating the use of pen portraits so managers can learn about the apprentice and any requirements in terms of additional support. In addition we will utilise in house expertise e.g. SEND colleagues to ensure support is available for those with additional needs and this can be supplemented with advice from Occupational Health and/or Access to Work as appropriate.

We also have advice and information for managers in relation to setting up [work experience placements](#) and have an information page on the external website for prospective apprentices and [work experience applicants](#).

We are also looking to develop informal quarterly "cuppa and chat" sessions so apprentices can meet other apprentices from across the Council and share experiences.

6. **Schools**

All maintained schools (excluding Voluntary Aided schools) pay into the apprenticeship levy pot and are part of the public sector target for apprentices.

Consequently we provide advice and information on apprenticeships that are relevant to schools such as Teachers, Teaching Assistants, School Business Managers, Early Years practitioners, IT technicians and Senior Leaders in Education.

In addition schools can access apprenticeship levy money from a pooled pot rather than just being able to use the money they have contributed to the fund.

We also seek to lobby for more school appropriate standards via our contacts within the Education, the Education Skills Funding Agency and Local Government Association.

7. **Review and Monitoring**

The Apprenticeship Strategy will be underpinned by a delivery plan which will be reviewed by the Apprenticeship Steering Group and Workforce Board. Updates will include information in relation to the following:

- Apprenticeship spend
- Enrolments to date
- Numbers of apprentices currently on programme
- Equality and diversity data e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, disability, grade and part/full time status
- Enrolments by service
- Support for disadvantaged apprentices/young people
- Levy transfer
- Update on Government initiatives e.g. Kickstart

We will also include a number of measures in our annual employment report published each year:

- Apprentices on programme as at 31st March
- Enrolments for the financial year- corporate and schools
- Enrolments by service
- Equality and diversity data on apprentices (age, gender, ethnicity, disability, grade and part/full time status)
- Amount of levy transfer as % of annual contribution
- Support for disadvantaged apprenticeships
- Update on government initiatives
- Number of fixed term apprentices who are offered a permanent role

In addition in accordance with our public sector duty requirements HR will monitor through key performance indicators our progress on the following measures:

- Number of corporate and schools staff enrolled onto apprenticeship training funded through the levy (Council Delivery Plan) - target based on 2.3% of headcount based on corporate and maintained schools.

- Number of corporate, school staff, and those who have been facilitated via levy transfer, who are disadvantaged and aged 16-25, enrolled onto training which is funded through the apprenticeship levy (Executive)- target for 2020-2024 is 12
- Number of young people attending/involved in work experience and project work opportunities. (Council Delivery Plan)- 9 per annum

Glossary

DfE- Department for Education
ESFA- Education Skills Funding Agency
LEP- Local Enterprise Partnership
LGA- Local Government Association
NEET- Not In Education, Employment or Training
SEND- Special Educational Needs & Disability
SME- Small & Medium Employers

Appendices- available on request

Appendix A – Equalities Impact Assessment
Appendix B – Data Protection Impact Assessment
Appendix C – Apprenticeship Strategy
Appendix D – Apprenticeship Delivery Plan
Appendix E- Levy Transfer Policy
Appendix F- Levy Transfer Process
Appendix G – Apprenticeship Procurement Strategy
Appendix H – Apprenticeship Procurement Process
Appendix I – 9 Steps to Recruiting an Apprentice
Appendix J- Schools Apprenticeship Information Pack
Appendix K- Apprenticeship Expenses Policy
Appendix L- Job Mentor Training
Appendix M- One-page Profile
Appendix N- Apprenticeship Steering Group Terms of Reference
Appendix O- Quotes from apprentices

Other relevant documentation

Council Strategy
Economic Development Strategy
Autism Strategy
SEND Strategy