

For publication

Investing in our staff – Apprenticeship Programme

Meeting:	Community, Customer and Organisational Scrutiny Committee
Date:	26 November, 2020
Cabinet portfolio:	Business Transformation and Customers
Report by:	Human Resources Manager

For publication

Purpose of reviewing the topic	To consider the progress of the Council's apprenticeship programme to date, taking account of the Council Plan priority: <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ 'Providing value for money services'
Objectives of the review	To consider any lessons learned to date for the future operation and development of the apprenticeship programme
Key Issues for review	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Recruitment, retention and career development of existing apprentices.● Identifying areas where apprentices are needed.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The council has a long history of supporting apprentices having nurtured many trades staff through their careers and supported customer service and administration roles also.

- 1.2 The introduction of the Apprentice Levy and Public Sector Targets in 2017 gave the council the opportunity to further develop the apprenticeship offer to new and existing staff and enhance the position of Chesterfield as an apprentice town.
- 1.3 The Apprentice levy is set at 0.5% of the monthly payroll deducted at source and sent to HMRC and equates to approximately £9,000 per month which is then handed back to the council through the levy digital account and used to pay for apprentice learning. The total amount of levy spent since 2017 to date is £529,666.54
- 1.4 The levy has to be spent within a 2-year period of entering the levy account otherwise this amount is lost. The council has not lost any levy to date.
- 1.5 The Public Sector Target is set at 2.3% of the workforce spread over the 4-year period 2017 -2021. The council achieved 24 in 2017/18, 27 in 2018/19 and 28 in 2019/20. We currently have 28 apprenticeships underway and the target for 2020/21 is currently 23 but this will increase to 26 once the Arvato staff transfer into the council in January 2021.
- 1.6 The council is required to submit an annual return to government each September declaring progress against spend, targets and identifying any barriers or obstacles to achievement of the spend and target and identify any lessons learned.
- 1.7 Chesterfield has achieved its Public Sector target every year and has recently been awarded Top 100 Employer status in the National Apprenticeship Awards by Government.

2.0 **Current position**

- 2.1 To ensure that the council can support the Borough and Apprentice Town ambition, a policy of 'apprentice first' for recruitment has been implemented. All vacancies are considered through the council's vacancy control process and opportunities for apprentice recruitment identified. To date there have been 26 new recruits employed by the council.
- 2.2 These have been recruited into areas such as housing, customer service, trades, planning administration and legal. The approach the council has taken is to recruit to a substantive post and on condition that the apprentice completes their apprenticeship they are appointed to the post, securing a permanent role with the council.
- 2.3 Internally the council has used the levy funding to provide learning and development opportunities to our existing staff. Each year the learning and development needs of employees are identified through the annual performance development review and where these can be met by an apprenticeship this route is taken to a) maximise use of the levy b) enable the council to achieve the Public Sector target and c) to lessen the burden on the council learning and development budget. In the 3 years to date 73 employees have undertaken apprenticeships as development opportunities.
- 2.4 Apprenticeships are used as career development opportunities and the council has seen many apprentices secure career progression once completing their apprenticeship. E.g. planning administration apprentice secured promotion to planning. The figures below demonstrate the retention overall:
- 2017/18 - 18 of the 24 apprentices remain with the council, we have 4 apprentices progressing to higher level qualifications

- 2018/19 - 23 out of 28 apprentices are still in employment with one promoted to a new role in asset management.
- 2019/20 - 27 out of 29 apprentices are still in employment: 3 have been promoted and 4 are progressing to higher level apprenticeships or training

3.0 **Barriers/obstacles**

3.1 The Government approach to apprenticeships and the changes introduced have not been without their challenges. Neither providers or employers were ready for the changes and many providers struggled to make the change to being a provider to business as opposed to an education establishment. A great deal of time has been spent building relationships with providers to learn from each other and provide support.

3.2 As a consequence, the council has been able to achieve some added value from providers. E.g. offered placements to students at Chesterfield College relating to digital skills who updated our aspire learning pages; a free mentoring course was delivered to a cohort of staff, and two places on a coaching course provided by Tempest Training.

3.3 Providers, employers and government have been learning as the programme has developed however there are several key issues which have been a barrier to our delivery. These are:

- The change from apprenticeship frameworks to apprenticeship standards over the last 3 years. As frameworks have disappeared, new standards have not replaced them e.g. L3 bricklaying no longer provided as a standard requiring us to pay for an NVQ in place of this.
- Change in key skills requirements – every apprenticeship standard requires achievement of L2 Maths (without a

calculator) and English. Whilst it is understood that from a policy perspective this should lead to an increase in educational standards across the country, it is a barrier for those who cannot achieve it but would be successful in the role e.g. customer services. This has been raised with Government.

- Lack of available standards for specialist roles e.g. planning, bereavement services etc.
- Lack of flexibility within the standards to accommodate corporate learning and development requirements.
- 20% off the job requirement – for each apprenticeship the council has to commit to allowing the apprentice 20% of their working time to complete the apprenticeship and this must be demonstrated through use of work logs. This has been a barrier to many people applying for apprenticeships internally especially in more senior roles.
- The amount of time required to support managers and apprentices to adapt to the changes which was previously provided by colleges/providers e.g. providing the right level of support to apprentices who have disabilities has now passed to the council who are not skilled in providing this level of support.
- The new end point assessment that the apprentice has to complete which requires an interview and presentation which many are uncomfortable with – this has been a learning curve for providers and employers.
- Employers have been provided with access to a digital account to manage the levy and apprenticeship agreements with employers and this has developed

over the three years. A forecasting tool was added to the account to enable us to forecast spend. The system does not however provide customisable reports and is limited in its use.

- The Coronavirus pandemic has added another layer of complexity to the learning environment; however, we have risen to the challenge. Many of our apprentices were able to continue through lockdown as the learning could be done online however our trades staff were unable to continue as they had been furloughed and their work could not be observed and assessed. One apprenticeship was paused by the provider during lockdown.

4.0 **Future plans**

4.1 Lessons learned and how we have addressed them?

As a consequence of the issues identified above the following has been put in place:

- Continue with 'apprentice first policy' when recruiting and identifying internal opportunities for apprenticeships through annual Performance Development Reviews.
- A robust apprenticeship recruitment process has been put in place ensuring that a skills scan is in place before appointment to ensure the recruit can complete the apprenticeship.
- Working with other agencies such as Derbyshire Autism Services for example to access specialist assistance when relevant for our apprentices.

- Provide clear guidance to our providers on our expectations relating to performance reporting and contract monitoring.
- The competency framework is used with apprentices from recruitment to emphasise required behaviours.
- Managers are given more training about apprenticeships through 1-2-1 training, workshops with providers and managers seminars.
- Our Learning and Development team attend appropriate conferences, webinars and forums – particularly local government forums, to learn and share good practice.
- Provide government with feedback on the operation of the scheme via the annual report.

5.0 **Conclusion**

- 5.1 The council has successfully implemented the changes to apprenticeships having achieved the annual Public Sector Target each year and spent the appropriate amount of levy accrued.
- 5.2 The council has been recognised as a top 100 apprentice employer by Government.
- 5.3 Employees and the council are benefitting from the approach taken to development through the apprentice programme (see quotes on aspire from recent apprentices) and gaining qualifications and skills whilst maintaining their employment.

6.0 **Suggested scrutiny activity**

- 6.1 There are no areas of concern which are not already being addressed, and no further scrutiny activity is therefore suggested at this stage or in the foreseeable future.

Document information

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Background documents These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when the report was prepared.	
Appendices to the report	