

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Joint Meeting of Business, Economy and Enterprise
Scrutiny Board (3) and Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1) held at
2.00 pm on Wednesday, 24 March 2021
(This meeting was held remotely)

Present:

Members: Councillor Miks (Chair)
Councillor J Blundell
Councillor G Hayre
Councillor M Heaven
Councillor T Jandu
Councillor R Lakha
Councillor R Lancaster
Councillor C Miks
Councillor E Ruane
Councillor T Sawdon
Councillor R Singh

Other Members (by invitation):

Councillor R Brown – Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources
Councillor K Maton – Cabinet Member for Education and Skills
Councillor J O’Boyle - Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration

By invitation:

A Barbour – Severn Trent
G Gathercole – Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership

Employees (by Directorate):

Education and Skills

K Mawby, G Smailes

Human Resources

S Newing (Director of Human Resources), G Haynes, A Hyland

Legal and Governance

V Castree, G Holmes, M Salmon

Apologies:

Councillor F Abbott
Councillor R Ali
Councillor R Auluck
Councillor B Gittins
Councillor B Singh (Retrospective)

Public Business

1. Election of Chair

A proposal was received from Councillor R Lancaster that Councillor C Miks be elected as Chair of the Joint meeting. The proposal was seconded by Councillor R Singh.

RESOLVED that Councillor Miks be appointed as Chair of the Joint meeting of Business, Economy and Enterprise (3) and Finance and Corporate Resources Scrutiny Board (1).

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

3. Citywide and Council Apprenticeship Update

The Joint Meeting of Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) and Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1) received a briefing note of the Director of Education and Skills and the Director of Human Resources that provided an update on Citywide and Council Apprenticeships. A report that had been prepared in partnership between the City Council's Employment and Skills Service and the Organisational Development Team was attached as an Appendix to the briefing note. Further Appendices provided the Council's Apprenticeship Strategy; Data on Trends, Age, Gender, Equalities and WMCA Levy Transfer; and Case Studies.

Apprenticeships combined hands-on work with the opportunity to train and obtain qualifications: 'Earning whilst you learn, with 20% of an apprentice's paid working time set aside for classroom based and/or online learning. 700 apprenticeship standards were available with traditional and employed apprenticeships offered. Overall, since 2016/17 apprenticeship starts for England had fallen 34% with higher-level apprenticeships increasing by 125% since 2016/17. Covid-19 had impacted on apprenticeship starts for all levels in 2019/20 with varying impacts across age, gender and sector. Coventry followed a similar trend to England but with 200% growth of higher-level apprenticeships.

There had been a series of apprenticeship regulatory reforms since 2016/17 that had impacted on apprenticeship delivery, including a minimum of 20% off the Job Training, a change from Apprenticeship Standards to Frameworks, and increased course costs. In addition, in April 2017 an Apprenticeship Levy was introduced for all employers paying a wage bill of more than £3 million per year (approx. 3% of UK businesses), requiring them to pay 0.5% of their payroll each month as a levy tax. The levy had resulted in increased numbers of apprentices with large employers and an increase in higher-level apprenticeships.

Statistically, compared to national figures, Coventry had a higher proportion of female apprentices, in particular, in intermediate and higher-level apprenticeships and had slightly lower levels of 19-24-year-old learners. National data suggested apprenticeships were broadly representative of population in ethnicity.

Traineeships had helped bridge the gap for lower level learners including those with learning difficulties/disabilities into apprenticeships with limited success. Numbers of traineeships were down nationally partly due to the pandemic and also the Government adding in grants of £2000 per trainee for businesses who supported Traineeships for Academic Year 2020/21 and a further increase in this grant to £3000 per trainee, announced in the 3rd March 2021 Spring Budget.

Supported Internships could be a good alternative to Apprenticeships for those with learning disabilities, with learners supported through skilled Job Coaches for their work experience placements. The City Council's Employment and Skills Service had been successfully running Supported Internships in partnership with Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust for the last 5 years and this had recently expanded to include Warwick University, with further plans for the Council itself to act as a host employer.

The Apprenticeship and Early Careers Team within the Council's Organisational Development Section were responsible for managing the Council's Apprenticeship Programme and delivering the actions set out in the Council's Apprenticeship Strategy. The team engaged with managers across the Council to identify opportunities to create new apprenticeship roles and provide support with recruitment, identifying suitable apprenticeship standards and providing advice and guidance to managers and apprentices to ensure the quality of placement was maintained. The Team also worked with Local Authority maintained schools. At 1st March 2021 the Council had 70 traditional apprentices in post. Apprenticeship starts had decreased in the last 12 months compared to the same period a year before, mirrored nationally, with the main factor in the decrease due to the challenges associated with the Coronavirus Pandemic. Support to existing apprentices throughout this challenging time had continued, by working closely with training providers to transition to online/remote delivery for continuity of apprenticeships. The Council has also been able to successfully support its apprentices that have come to the end of their apprenticeships during this period into positive destinations. 81% of all apprentices that finished between 01/03/20 – 01/03/21 went into a positive destination, this is up from 78% in the previous year.

The Authority has continued to utilise the Apprenticeship Levy funding to support the training and development of the existing workforce with a total of 49 different types of apprenticeship being undertaken, from service/role specific apprenticeships through to corporate offerings such as Project Management.

Further, the Authority had been a training provider (The Adult Education Service - Coventry Adult Education trained 308 apprentices) providing apprenticeship training for Coventry City Council and City Council Maintained schools. In addition, it provided apprenticeship training for Private Sector Nurseries and to Academy Schools. The Education and Skills Team also provided support to schools to help them promote Apprenticeships as part of their statutory duties to provide careers guidance.

The Council's Employment and Skills Service encompassed the Job Shop, Employer Hub, Adult Education, the Youth Hub and Disability Employment Support and it sat within the Education & Skills Service. It had a strategic influencing role for skills provision across Coventry and this included Apprenticeships. The Job Shop had developed an Employer Hub which engaged

with hundreds of the City's employers to offer high quality and free recruitment support and to recruit Apprentices.

Kickstart was a Department for Work and Pensions scheme that provided funding for employers to create six-month paid job placements with a minimum of 25 hours per week for those aged 16-24 and claiming Universal Credit. The Authority was an Employment and Skills Service Kickstart Gateway support and provider.

In respect of future plans for City Council Apprenticeships, the Authority:

- Were currently finalising plans to increase apprentice recruitment in the coming months to bring numbers back up to pre-Covid levels with an ambition to recruit 100 apprentices in the next 12 months.
- In line with the Apprenticeship Strategy 2020-2022, planned to revise the process of recruiting corporate apprentices to include a workforce planning approach, promote diversity, inclusion and social mobility by building on the changes to practice in attraction, recruitment and selection that had been implemented in corporate recruitment to ensure apprentices recruited were reflective of the communities served.
- Through workforce planning meetings with Heads of Service, would identify new opportunities to utilise apprenticeships to upskill the Council's workforce.
- Would evaluate all apprenticeships to ensure they remained fit for purpose and added value to the needs of the employee and organisation.
- Would work with the Economic Development Service to allocate the remaining Levy transfer allowance to support Coventry residents and businesses.

In respect of future plans for Citywide Apprenticeships:

- The Employment & Skills Service would build on its strong partnership base, ensuring the Skills Board and Labour Market Intelligence Group responded to the needs of residents and employers.
- Continue to widen employer networks, including working alongside the Economic Development Service, and building relationships with growing sectors and Anchor Institutions.
- Support planned widening of apprenticeships as set out in the Government's Skills for Jobs: 'Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth' White Paper, January 2021.
- Continue working with colleagues to look to establish the City Council as a Supported Internship host employer.

The Board questioned officers, received responses and discussed the following issues:

- Apprenticeships would be considered for all capital projects being undertaken in the City
- The Job Shop, Schools and Colleges all provided advice to students on future career paths which included apprenticeship opportunities
- Apprentices were a vital element to the future workforce of the City
- Severn Trent, a major employer in the City, anticipated 50 apprenticeship starts in 202/21, a number of which had been from social mobility cold spots

- Government data was used to identify target areas such as social mobility cold spots. Work was undertaken to ensure inclusivity and the representation of all groups with further work to be done in this area and good practice planned for the future
- The effects of the pandemic had had a detrimental effect on the usual number of apprenticeship starts in the last 12 months, in particular there were lower numbers at the intermediate level
- Supported internships provided opportunities to those from special schools, Hereward college and those with disabilities requiring support. Links to the labour market were in place with regular meetings to these links
- Levy transfer had benefitted 43 Small and Medium Enterprises (SME's) both within the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and non-constituent members of the Authority (in the surrounding area)
- It was important that the Apprenticeship Levy transfer to the Combined Authority was prioritised for re-distribution to SME's within the seven metropolitan boroughs of the WMCA
- The Council was a gateway provider for Kickstart applications. 297 Kickstart placement applications had been made and were making good progress
- There were varying levels of apprenticeships at the Council, this included 31 employees on degree level apprenticeships and 18 employees on MA level apprenticeships
- There were 65 vacant apprenticeships across a number of sectors and levels in the City. Work was being undertaken on levels of apprenticeships for the future to ensure the skills needs of employers were met
- It was important to promote apprenticeships with employers and also to target work with Coventry children, especially those with disabilities where there was currently a low level of take-up.
- The supported internships were positive routes for those with learning difficulties
- The lack of take-up of apprenticeships by Coventry residents at the Severn Trent Headquarters in Coventry, was a concern
- Youth employment was greater in Coventry than in other areas, before and after the impact of the pandemic. It was important to reach the 19-24-year-old age group as much as possible including through schools, colleges and youth hubs and that the City Council maximised its offer of employment opportunities to young people
- A Government White paper issued in January 2021 included a £2.5billion investment in apprenticeships. Future announcements were expected
- A recent change in standards had resulted in Level 2 apprenticeship numbers dropping as some had now become level 3 and others hadn't met the standards
- It was important to understand the work of the Coventry Skills Board and the Labour Market Intelligence Group and how they linked
- The Authority would continue to monitor sectors and levels of City Council apprentices and the number of apprentices who were Looked After Children on the Authority's Apprenticeship Programme
- The City of Culture Panel would be requested to recommend that the City of Culture Trust considered increasing the number of apprenticeship opportunities they offered and also offering opportunities with the Kickstart Scheme.

The Board requested that they be provided with the following:

- 1) Information on the current number of apprentices who were Looked After Children on Coventry City Council's Apprenticeship Programme
- 2) Details of the sectors and levels of vacancies that made up the 65 vacant apprenticeships
- 3) Information on the work of the Coventry Skills Board and the Labour Market Intelligence Group and how they linked
- 4) Details of sectors and levels of City Council apprentices

The Board also requested that Severn Trent investigate why apprentices at the Coventry Office of the organisation were not Coventry residents.

RESOLVED that the Joint Meeting of Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) and Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1) agreed:

- 1) **To continue to recognise the achievement of the Organisational Development Team in continuing to run successful apprenticeship schemes in challenging circumstances and in successfully using the Apprenticeship Levy and Levy Transfer Scheme to drive up apprenticeship numbers for Coventry.**
- 2) **To continue to recognise the Employment and Skills Service key strategic role in supporting Apprenticeship Training Providers and Employers.**
- 3) **To support the aims of the Organisational Development Team - in line with the Council's Apprenticeship Strategy 2020-2022, to increase Traditional Apprentice numbers to pre-Covid levels whilst maintaining a focus on quality and diversity.**
- 4) **To support the expansion of the Employment and Skills Service Supported Internship programme with the City Council acting as a host employer.**
- 5) **That the following recommendations be submitted to the appropriate Cabinet Member:**
 - a) **The Apprenticeship Levy transfer to the Combined Authority is prioritised for re-distribution to SME's within the seven metropolitan boroughs of the WMCA.**
 - b) **The City Council maximise their offer of employment opportunities to young people.**

6) To recommend that the City of Culture Panel request that the City of Culture Trust:

a) Consider increasing the number of apprenticeship opportunities they offer.

b) Consider offering opportunities with the Kickstart Scheme.

4. Any other items of public business which the Chair decides to take as matters of urgency because of the special circumstances involved

There were no other items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 3.40 pm)