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**To: Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1)**

**Date: 21 September 2023**

**Subject: Coventry City Council Apprenticeship update**

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## **1 Purpose of the Note**

- 1.1 To provide the Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1) with an update on Coventry City Council's internal Apprenticeship programme.

## **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1) is recommended to:
  - 1) Continue to support the work and the achievement of the Apprenticeship and Early Careers Team within People & Culture in continuing to deliver a successful apprenticeship programme and outcomes for the Council's apprentices.
  - 2) Make any recommendations to the relevant Cabinet Member.

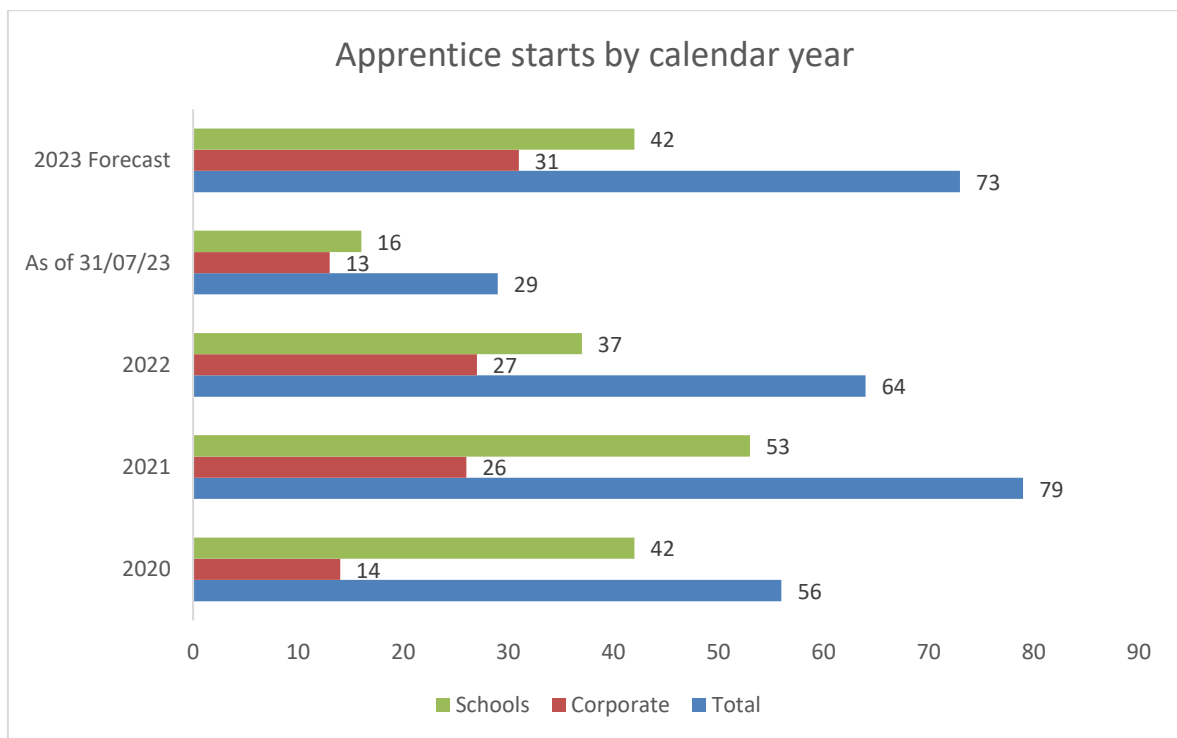
## **3 Background**

- 3.1 The Apprenticeship and Early Careers Team within People and Culture are responsible for managing the council's apprenticeship programme and apprenticeship levy account.
- 3.2 The team engages with managers and services across the Council to identify opportunities to create new apprenticeship roles (Traditional Apprentices) and to match appropriate apprenticeship standards to existing roles to upskill current staff (Employed Apprentices).
- 3.3 As part of this engagement, apprenticeships are mapped to career pathways to aid in areas of skills shortage and as part of workforce planning activities.
- 3.4 For further information on what apprenticeships are and the difference between Traditional and Employed Apprentices, please see appendix 1.

## **4 Traditional Apprentices**

- 4.1 The Apprenticeship and Early Careers Team actively engages with service areas across the council to identify opportunities to recruit apprentices and develop career pathways. The team works with managers to undertake workforce planning activities to identify how the recruitment of an apprentice can help with their current and future needs, including addressing skills gaps and succession planning.

- 4.2 The team ensures the most appropriate apprenticeship standards are mapped to the apprenticeship role and support managers throughout the recruitment process.
- 4.3 Following recruitment, Apprenticeship and Career Pathways Advisors will work with the apprentice and manager throughout the apprenticeship lifecycle to ensure they receive the required support to get the most out of their apprenticeship and move into a positive destination on completion.
- 4.4 The team also provide advice and guidance to local authority maintained schools regarding best practice in the recruitment of apprentices.
- 4.5 As of the 31/07/23 there were 78 traditional apprentices in post (33 corporate and 45 maintained schools). For a further breakdown of this information, please see appendix 2.
- 4.6 The graph below shows the total number of Traditional Apprentice starts by calendar year:



- 4.7 Starts fell in 2020 due to the pandemic mirroring the national trend but recovered in 2021. Starts in 2021 were especially boosted by Government monetary incentives to recruit apprentices that were available at the time in response to the pandemic.
- 4.8 The number of corporate apprentices starting in 2022 remained consistent; the decrease in school starts for 2022 are explained by the fact that an unusually high number started the previous year as a result of available incentive payments.
- 4.9 The Apprenticeship and Early Careers Team had a target to recruit 60 corporate apprentices between 2020 and 2022. This target was exceeded with 68 apprentices recruited in this period.
- 4.10 As part of the new People Plan the Apprenticeship and Early Careers Team has a target to recruit 30 corporate apprentices per year for 2023-25. As shown in the graph above, the team are forecast to meet the target for 2023.

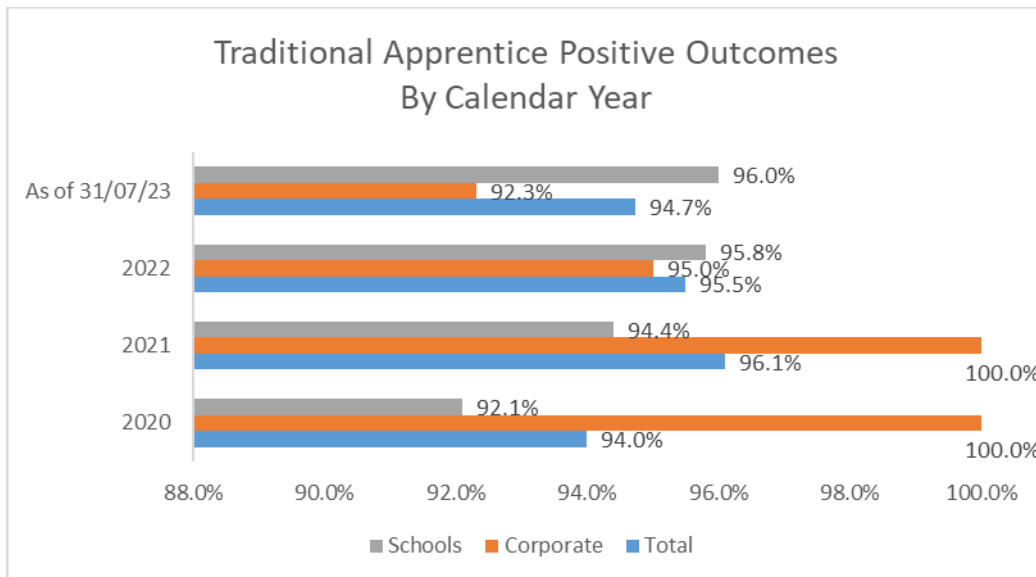
#### 4.11 Outcomes

Whilst it is important that we set targets and monitor the number of apprenticeship starts; equal, if not more emphasis should be placed on the destinations of our apprentices.

4.12 All apprentices are recruited on fixed-term contracts that mirror the length of their apprenticeship training. Whilst workforce planning and career pathways for apprentices are discussed when first working with recruiting corporate managers, it is rarely possible to guarantee a role for the apprentice to move into at the point of recruitment.

4.13 With the majority of corporate apprenticeships being 18 months and longer (some up to 6 years) there are many factors that can change in this period. The main difficulties faced are being able to accurately predict the required needs of the service at the point the apprentice finishes, as well as holding the budget for the post-apprenticeship position for this time.

4.14 Despite not having a guaranteed role in place, our apprentices have very high levels of positive outcomes\* as shown in the graph below:



\*Positive outcome defined as: Apprentice moving into either employment, further/higher education or the next level of apprenticeship upon completion.

4.15 The high level of positive outcomes is achieved by the support given to apprentices and their line managers throughout the apprenticeship by their Apprenticeship and Career Pathways Advisors.

4.16 Key points of contact have been mapped out throughout the apprenticeship lifecycle to ensure that the apprentice is getting the most out of their apprenticeship and to discuss their post-apprenticeship career ambitions.

4.17 At these points, Apprenticeship and Career Pathways Advisors will provide advice and guidance to the apprentice and their line manager on what actions can be taken to help meet the apprentice's career goals. This can take various forms including: ensuring the apprentice is obtaining the relevant skills, knowledge, and experience to enable them to achieve their post-apprenticeship goals, 1:1 coaching sessions and support with job applications and interviews.

- 4.18 The apprentice's manager is also supported and encouraged to do all they can to explore the options available to them in keeping on the apprentice within their team upon completion.
- 4.19 Additional support  
As well as the planned interventions throughout the apprenticeship lifecycle, Apprenticeship and Career Pathways Advisors also provide ad hoc guidance and pastoral care to corporate apprentices. The availability of this support and guidance has proved to be vital in enabling apprentices to complete their apprenticeship and move into positive destinations, especially for our apprentices with additional barriers or more complex needs.
- 4.20 Further development  
In addition to development within their team, apprentices have the opportunity to be involved in a variety of other activities to enhance their learning and further enrich their apprenticeship experience.
- 4.21 We encourage all our apprentices to assist in the promotion of the council's apprenticeship programme; this can take a number of forms such as: writing case studies, attending careers fairs to talk to others about their experience as an apprentice and giving talks at school assemblies.
- 4.22 We also run quarterly apprenticeship forums. These forums have been designed to bring our corporate apprentices together to build a sense of community and to deliver additional learning opportunities.
- 4.23 Topics and activities at these forums have included: giving the Apprenticeship and Early Careers Team feedback on the support apprentices are receiving and how we can better improve their experience, talks with former apprentices still at the council on their time as an apprentice and how they got the most out of it, mental wellbeing sessions, talks from senior leaders on their career journeys and various other team building activities.
- 4.24 Pay increase  
In December 2022 a briefing note was presented to the One Coventry Leadership Team (OCLT) outlining the current apprenticeship pay scale and a proposal to increase the apprentices' starting pay to aid with recruitment and retention, in addition to being the socially responsible course of action.
- 4.25 This proposal was agreed and saw all existing and new corporate apprentices move from being paid at least current apprentice minimum wage of £4.81 per hour to at least the 18-20 minimum wage of £7.49 per hour as of the 1st of April 2023. This rate of pay was arrived at following undertaking a benchmarking exercise with other local authorities.
- 4.26 This change was communicated to all maintained schools with the recommendation that they opt-in and nearly all have done so.

## **5 Higher Apprentices**

- 5.1 In order to expand the types and level of apprenticeship available, a new type of Traditional Apprentice, 'Higher Apprentice' was introduced.
- 5.2 Prior to the creation of the Higher Apprentice, all Traditional Apprentice roles at the council were limited to undertaking level 2 and level 3 apprenticeships.
- 5.3 This left a gap when undertaking workforce planning and developing career pathways as there was no mechanism to recruit Traditional Apprentices on higher level (level 4 and above, including degree apprenticeships)

apprenticeships. This in turn restricted the ability to match the correct apprenticeship standard to meet the needs of the role.

- 5.4 Higher Apprentice roles have increased entry requirements compared to the level 2 and 3 apprenticeships to reflect the fact that they will be undertaking more challenging qualifications. These roles will still not expect a large amount of previous experience as they are apprenticeships; however, depending on the type of apprenticeship, candidates may require higher levels of existing qualifications such as A-levels. There will also be a need for greater soft skills given the additional responsibility required to undertake the higher levels of qualification.
- 5.5 Higher Apprentices require pay commensurate with the increased entry requirements to differentiate them from the apprentice roles at level 2 and 3. A short benchmarking exercise was undertaken, and it was decided to pay Higher Apprentices the national minimum wage for those aged 21-22 (currently £10.18 per hour/£19640 per year).
- 5.6 Work on the recruitment of Higher Apprentices has started in Environmental Protection and Legal Services with further expansion planned in the future.

## **6 Employed Apprentices**

- 6.1 Since the introduction of the apprenticeship levy in April 2017 we have been able to use levy funding to upskill current employees using apprenticeships.
- 6.2 The Apprenticeship and Early Careers Team engages with managers to identify where apprenticeships can be utilised to meet both the current and future needs of colleagues and the service.
- 6.3 We work with managers to undertake workforce planning activities to identify how apprenticeships can help to address skills gaps, aid with succession planning and to develop career pathways to aid in increasing retention and meet current and future predicted skills gaps.
- 6.4 In addition to directly working with heads of service and managers to identify service/role-specific apprenticeships, appraisal data is also utilised to identify trends in corporate learning requirements.
- 6.5 As of the 31/07/23 there were 188 employed apprentices in post, undertaking 43 different apprenticeships. For a further breakdown of this information please see appendix 4.
- 6.6 Apprenticeships are effectively utilised as part of a workforce planning model across many services with pathways into hard to recruit roles mapped out.

## **7 Diversity and inclusion**

- 7.1 The principles of diversity and inclusion are rooted in the ethos and values of the team. We are always working to engage with under-represented groups to widen participation, remove barriers and increase the diversity of our apprentices so that they are reflective of the communities we serve.
- 7.2 A breakdown of the diversity information of our Traditional Apprentices can be found in appendix 3.
- 7.3 Looked After Children/Care Leavers  
We take our responsibility as a corporate parent very seriously and work closely with colleagues in Through Care and across Children's Services to promote our apprenticeships to Looked After Children and Care Leavers (LAC and CL).

- 7.4 In addition to the 4 LAC/CL in apprenticeships mentioned in appendix 3, a further 4 are starting in August and September.
- 7.5 These numbers are achieved by pro-active engagement by the Apprenticeship and Early Careers Team to promote apprenticeship vacancies and the support available to our LAC/CL.
- 7.6 The team attends the LAC/CL NEET panel to keep up to date with any LAC/CL that are looking for or may be suitable for apprenticeships and to bring partners up to date on forthcoming apprenticeship opportunities.
- 7.7 An apprenticeship referral process for LAC/CL is also in place and through this Apprenticeship and Career Pathways Advisors meet with LAC/CL and help them to apply for apprenticeships as well as giving 1:1 interview support.
- 7.8 Holiday Activities & Food (HAF) programme  
HAF is a national programme for 5–16-year-olds who are eligible for free school meals. In addition to providing meals for the approximately 12,500 eligible children, the remit of the programme extends to providing skills and other enrichment activities. The Apprenticeship and Early Careers Team continues to engage with colleagues delivering the programme to identify opportunities to deliver apprenticeship information sessions to groups on the HAF to engage and build relationships with young people from disadvantaged and under-represented groups.
- 7.9 Engaging with refugees and migrants  
The Apprenticeship and Early Careers Team works closely with colleagues in the Migration Team to promote apprenticeships to their clients. Following an initial session in 2021 two apprentices were taken on in the Migration Team and 2 more have started since.  
As part of National Apprenticeship Week in February 2023 an apprenticeship information session was delivered to refugees and migrants in partnership with the Migration Team to raise awareness of apprenticeship opportunities at the council.
- 7.10 Recruitment best practice  
We work closely with colleagues in the Recruitment Team and colleagues leading on diversity and inclusion within People and Culture to ensure that we are up to date with best practice in advertising and recruitment methods.
- 7.11 We have built an extensive mailing list of all organisations and partners across the city that work with young people, particularly those from under-represented groups that we e-mail each time we advertise apprenticeship vacancies.
- 7.12 Candidates that apply for our corporate apprenticeships also have an additional stage in the application process – the ‘pre-interview’. At this stage, shortlisted candidates are invited to attend a session prior to final interview where they are given an overview of what to expect from the interview as well as tools, tips, and advice on how to prepare for it to give them the best possible chance of success.
- 7.13 The pre-interview stage was added as it was noticed that not all applicants were aware of expectations of the interview process and those that did not receive support (such as from parents or carers) were not performing as well due to this.

## 8 Incentive payments

- 8.1 The team has taken a pro-active approach in ensuring Government incentives are maximised, resulting in an income of £46.5k for the financial year 2022/23. £38.5k of this was from Covid incentives, introduced over the pandemic and now no longer available, with £8k coming from ongoing incentive schemes.
- 8.2 The majority of this money has been used to fund a 2-year fixed-term contract for an Apprenticeship and Career Pathways Advisor within the team.
- 8.3 The team were also responsible for ensuring maintained schools that recruited apprentices maximised the Covid incentive payments, with over £150,000 of funding applied for on their behalf over the course of the programme.
- 8.4 Due to this approach Coventry City Council substantially outperformed comparator councils in incentive payments as per 2023 LGA figures:

Council type	Average incentive payments received per Council
County	£115,880
District	£2,802
London Borough	£35,129
Metropolitan	£68,729
Unitary	£43,328
Coventry City Council	£230,500

- 8.5 As mentioned above, the vast majority of the incentive payments claimed were related to the pandemic and are no longer available. Forecasts for future incentive payments are between £8-10k per year based on what is currently available.

## 9 Levy Transfer

- 9.1 Coventry City Council can transfer up to 25% of its yearly apprenticeship levy funding to non-levy paying employers. We work in partnership with colleagues in the Economic Development Service to receive referrals from Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) requiring funding.
- 9.2 To date we have pledged to transfer over £430k, supporting 26 businesses and 88 apprentices.
- 9.3 The original levy transfer process was designed in part by the Skills & Growth Manager in the Economic Development Service who also engaged with businesses to promote it. Following their departure at the end of 2022, the process was reviewed to ensure a more effective allocation of funding and that it aligns with the priorities in the new Skills Strategy.
- 9.4 2023 LGA stats for apprenticeships created by levy transfers for 2018-22 show Coventry City Council performing above average:

## Apprenticeships created by Levy Transfers - 2018-22

Coventry City Council	86
Regional Average	80
Council Type Average	32
National Average	43

### 10 Levy spend

- 10.1 The council has paid circa £1million per year towards the apprenticeship levy since its inception in 2017. Unspent funds in the levy account expire after 24 months, and many large organisations have had expiring funds for several years now.
- 10.2 Due to our approach of effectively utilising apprenticeships across the organisation and supporting local SMEs with our levy transfer scheme we have not yet had any funds expire.
- 10.3 The Council isn't currently due to return any unspent levy funding until January 2024. This date moves on a regular basis as each month we add circa £85k to the account and apprentices are starting and finishing throughout the year.
- 10.4 Whilst we have not had any levy funding returned to the government to date, it is likely that this will start to happen in the coming months.
- 10.5 For context, a 2022/23 LGA survey showed that 81% of all councils had seen funds expire.

### 11 Work experience

- 11.1 The arrangement and administration of work experience placements at Coventry City Council sits with the Apprenticeship and Early Careers Team.
- 11.2 Historically the team acted as the broker for work experience requests, receiving them on behalf of the council and contacting the relevant teams/departments to organise placements.
- 11.3 We've changed our approach and no longer offer work experience placements in response to requests; in part due to the capacity to deliver this and also as it is difficult to arrange meaningful hybrid work experience placements with the majority of the organisation no longer working from the office full-time.
- 11.4 The exception to the above is when we are approached by one of our Looked After Children/Care Leavers; in this case we will do all we can to arrange a placement for them.
- 11.5 However, where managers/teams receive requests directly and/or approach the Apprenticeship and Early Careers Team wanting to provide a placement then this can still go ahead.
- 11.6 As part of this change of approach, and in recognition of the value of promoting the council as an employer of choice for the next generation of talent, a new offer was created.
- 11.7 We are working with schools to run 'Employer insight days'. These days involve various sessions and talks about the council as an employer and provider of services, employability exercises, a round-robin chat with our



current apprentices and tours of the Council House. We also have had guest speakers from the Job Shop, Children's Services, Electoral Services and the Transformation and Change Team who've given an overview on their services. Following a pilot with Eden Girls' School in 2022 we've recently welcomed students from Sidney Stringer, Grace Academy and Lyng Hall.

- 11.8 Feedback from students and teachers for these days has been excellent and have led to a lot of interest in applying for our apprenticeships and an increase in our social media following.

## **12 Best practice**

- 12.1 The Apprenticeship and Early Careers Team participates in and works with a wide variety of networks and partners to share best practice and keep up to date with the latest developments. These include membership of the West Midlands Apprentice Ambassador Network (WMAAAN), Chiring the Coventry and Warwickshire Apprentice Ambassador Network (CWAAN), regular meetings with counterparts from Solihull, Warwickshire and Warwick Councils relating to joint procurement exercises and attendance at quarterly West Midlands Combined Authority apprenticeship meetings.

## **13 Future plans**

- 13.1 The Apprenticeship and Early Careers Team will continue to adapt its work to the needs of the organisation, ensuring we align with the new People Plan and One Coventry Plan.
- 13.2 Traditional Apprentices  
Following exceeding the recruitment target of 20 corporate apprentices per year as mentioned in section 4.9 we will be working towards a new target of 30 starts per year for 2023 onwards.
- 13.3 In addition to increasing the number of starts we will also be expanding the types of apprenticeship on offer to meet the ever-changing needs of the organisation.
- 13.4 We will continue to engage with our apprentices to monitor and evaluate their experiences to ensure they are receiving the required support and to increase the quality of apprenticeships across the board. This will include building on the success of our apprenticeship forums and identifying additional learning and development opportunities for apprentices.
- 13.5 We will continue to ensure that we monitor our recruitment and selection processes so that they are inclusive and attract a diverse range of candidates that reflect the city; targeting under-presented groups where required.
- 13.6 We will grow the number of Higher Apprentices across the organisation, identifying career pathways as part of a workforce planning approach.
- 13.7 Employed Apprentices  
Through workforce planning meetings with heads of service we will identify new opportunities to utilise apprenticeships to upskill our workforce.
- 13.8 New apprenticeship standards are being developed regularly and we will continue to use them where there is a recognised need, building these into recognised career pathways and meeting future workforce skills needs.
- 13.9 Analysis will be undertaken on the learning and development needs recorded in colleagues' appraisals to ensure future apprenticeship availability is in line with demand.

13.10 Workforce Planning

Further work to consolidate an organisational approach to workforce planning and the utilisation of apprenticeships will take place. This activity will utilise both traditional and employed apprentices and will include: identifying workforce capability and availability which in turn will inform where work on succession planning is required; producing career pathways listing the required skills, knowledge, behaviours and qualifications for each role; mapping appropriate apprenticeship standards to each role; and the identification of bridging mechanisms between pathways. This work will start in Adult Services and then expand across the council as informed by need and priority. Initial conversations have also taken place with the Strategic Lead – Green Futures to build upon the current apprentices working in this area to aid in the delivery of Climate Change Strategy.

13.11 Work Experience

Further sessions with schools will be arranged for the 2023/24 academic year to continue to engage with Coventry students to promote the council and its apprenticeship programme. Our most recent session with students from Lyng Hall specifically targeted students with additional barriers and/or from under-represented groups and we will adopt this approach moving forwards.

13.12 Incentive payments

We will continue to ensure we maximise all available incentive payments and other opportunities to bring in an income. As mentioned in section 8, one of the two Apprenticeship and Career Pathways Advisors are on a two-year fixed term contract has been funded via government incentives during the pandemic that are no longer available.

13.13 At present, existing available incentives will not be anywhere near sufficient to cover this post after the 2-year contract which is due to finish in August 2024.

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