

## **Children, Education and Skills Sub-committee**

**20 February 2017**

Present: Councillor M Madden  
Councillors K Bolger, J Cassidy,  
M Green, A Newman, P Oliver, J O'Shea,  
M Rankin, M Thirlaway and J Walker.

Mr G O'Hanlon	Church Representative
Rev. M Vine	Church Representative
Mrs M Ord	Parent Governor Representative

### **CES47/02/17 Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor A Austin, P Brooks and K Clark.

### **CES48/02/17 Substitute Members**

Pursuant to the Council's Constitution the appointment of the following substitute member was reported:

Councillor J O'Shea for Councillor K Clark.

### **CES49/02/17 Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest or dispensations were reported.

### **CES50/02/17 Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 23 January 2017 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **CES51/02/17 Apprenticeships Programme 2014-17**

The sub-committee received a report from Human Resources and Organisational Development which detailed progress with the Authority's apprenticeship programme since 2014, highlighted developments relating to apprenticeship reforms and the Authority's response to the apprenticeship levy and public sector targets and the associated implications for North Tyneside community schools.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development attended the meeting and was accompanied by a Workforce Programme Adviser and the Manager of Schools' Human Resources from the Authority's partner Engie. The sub-committee was informed that currently there were 37 apprentices in post but the 2015 cohort would complete at the end of the month which would leave 22. The 2015 cohort were being supported with employability skills training and were being considered for any appropriate internal vacancies. Overall only 4% of apprentices have had their contract terminated due to failing

to reach a satisfactory level of performance which was testament to the effort made by officers to be flexible and supportive to an apprentice. Of all the apprentices' who had completed the programme, 72.5% had found employment, 47.5% of that within the Authority.

Information was also provided on the gender breakdown of the apprentices recruited and those who would consider themselves disabled; the percentage of the total number of applicants from the targeted groups of those who were NEET (not in employment, education or training), looked after, leaving care or who had additional support needs, both over 50% in 2015 and 2016; and the number of applicants appointed who lived in the borough against those who did not.

The proportion of boys applying for and being successfully recruited had risen to 70% of all apprentices. This significant increase was due to a narrower range of vocational areas (fitter and park keeping vacancies attracted mainly boys) and an increase in boys applying for and being recruited to administration positions. A higher number of apprentices with disabilities, 3.8% compared to 1% last year, had been recruited although proportionally fewer disabled applicants had been shortlisted for interview. The total number of care leavers currently on Authority apprenticeships was 5. The number of applications and apprentices appointed from North Tyneside residents continued to far outweigh those from outside the borough.

In response to some young people not being ready for the rigors of the full apprenticeship programme, a traineeship scheme was piloted for 10 weeks in the summer of 2016. The rationale was to engage less advantaged young people living in the borough and equip them with some foundation level skills and knowledge to support their progression into apprenticeships and/or employment. Eight young people were recruited to the programme and 50% were from vulnerable groups, for example care leavers or with additional needs. The young people were placed for two weeks in each leisure centre gaining work experience and attended weekly taught sessions with TyneMet College. Each was guaranteed an interview for an apprenticeship in sport and leisure. As a result two of the trainees had been appointed to a sport and leisure apprenticeship.

The Authority had made a commitment to encourage applications from young people in "target groups", which included looked after children and care leavers, those with additional support needs or those who were NEET. Meeting this commitment required careful preparation and investigation to ensure the offer to these young people was a positive experience, was realistic about their potential for employment and minimised the risk of drop out and termination. To achieve this, the team had been more creative about selection processes; given greater consideration to matching the young person to the most appropriate team environment, mentor and manager; and tested a pathway from traineeship to apprenticeship with the previously referred to pilot in sport and leisure.

Issues remained with addressing the balance for staff between "doing the day job" and managing the demands of apprentices, especially in the face of a reducing workforce, the commitment to recruit from young people in "target groups" and the demands of the upcoming apprenticeship reforms.

The sub-committee was then given a summary of the forthcoming government apprenticeship reforms. This included:

- As an employer with an annual pay bill of more than £3 million the Authority was liable to pay a levy (a digital account) at a rate of 0.5% of pay bill; this included the

community schools within North Tyneside. The HR team for schools has been keeping the schools abreast of these changes and work was underway with finance teams to agree a framework. Employers who paid the levy would receive a 10% top up to their digital account. The levy would stay in the digital account for 24 months, starting in May. If it was not used the money went to central government.

- The levy could only be used to pay for training and assessment costs and was capped depending upon each individual framework/standard. The maximum funding bands began at £3,000 and went up to £27,000. The levy could not be used to pay for apprenticeship wages.
- There was an annual target of 2.3% of the Authority's workforce to be apprentices. For the Council that meant 88 apprentices; 22 of which were for the 19 community schools which came under the Authority's pay bill calculations. The apprenticeships offered had to be sustainable; apprentices could not be employed solely to deliver an apprenticeship, there must be a genuine job available after their apprenticeship has been completed.
- The Authority could use the levy to upskill its current workforce for future challenges and priorities rather than solely employing new apprentices. It could also be used for apprentices studying lower qualifications; therefore graduates could undertake a lower level apprenticeship provided the training allowed them to acquire substantive new skills.
- If 16-18 year olds were recruited the government would provide extra funding (£1,000 per person) to employers and training providers and an additional cash payment would be made to training providers equal to 20% of the funding band maximum. The government would also provide £1,000 to employers and training providers who took on 19-24 year old care leavers or those with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

A new register of approved training providers had been created and the Adult Learning Alliance would be an approved training provider and therefore could continue to be the Authority's provider, where appropriate. This would enable the Authority to utilise the levy and retain the funds within the organisation.

The Senior Leadership team began work in November on identifying how the Authority could meet the target and maximise the levy within the challenge of a reducing workforce and service redesign. Initial responses indicated a total of 15 apprentice posts and 58 'up-skill' apprenticeships for the existing workforce, exceeding the 66 target by 7. The new reforms came into force on 7 April 2017 and it was intended to have the first cohort of existing employee apprenticeships begin in May 2017 with the external 'new' apprentices commencing employment in August/September 2017.

A question was asked regarding what steps had been taken to reduce the gap between the number of girls and the number of boys who applied for apprenticeships as the percentage of boys had increased since 2017 with suggestions that it might be peer pressure and opposition at home which was putting girls off from applying for 'traditionally male' apprenticeships. In response the sub-committee was reassured that these figures were just for one year and the team did work to encourage all genders to apply for any apprenticeship but they could not designate a certain number of positions for a particular gender. Increasing awareness of the apprenticeship option and what was available was a key part of the work; as well as improving the work experience programme to allow for

placements in areas of work where apprenticeships would be available and also to target those children for apprenticeships.

Questions were also asked on the work with the targeted groups to improve their representation and to support them in the applications and the interview process. It was explained that children with disabilities traditionally had a preference for the further education route over apprenticeships because it was what the family was familiar with and had established and specialised support for the young person. As part of the support for the targeted groups officers offered to meet with parents at the beginning of the recruitment/selection process; gave advice on completing applications; and had a session of 'meet and greets' with managers in an informal setting to allow initial impressions of both the young person and the Authority managers to be formed. It was not a very strenuous process; the application form was simple and the interview was as non-threatening as possible. In the past year whilst only seven looked after care leavers had attained apprenticeships keeping them on track had been labour intensive. Whilst the number might appear small it was important to remember that not all care leavers were available to apply for the scheme due to their particular circumstances, for example they might be parents. Concentrated efforts were made to ensure the right young person was matched to the right apprenticeship and with the right management/mentor team to facilitate as far as possible a successful experience for all involved.

Clarification was also provided on: the number of apprentices currently employed by the Authority could not be included in the new target of 66; that Academies in the borough did not have a target as they did not meet the pay bill threshold; that potentially the length of apprenticeships might have to reduce to allow for the number required to be completed in the time allowed; the rates of pay for apprentices; the impact on the 'day job' for those apprentices 'up-skilling'; and the reasons for the termination of the 4% of apprentices who had had their contracts terminated, which included the pay not being sufficient and performance issues relating to behaviour.

In conclusion, a committee member noted that the high retention rate for apprentices' spoke volumes for the quality of the apprenticeship offer and congratulated the team as she knew it was a very well thought of scheme.

The Chair then thanked the officers for their attendance and presentation to the meeting.

It was **agreed** (1) to note the information; and (2) that if positive discrimination was not permissible for apprenticeships then the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development considered ways to increase the number of women applying for apprenticeships and what support could be offered to increase the number of successful applications by women.