



Partnership and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee

20 March 2014

Report by Human Resources Director

Brent Council's New Apprenticeship Programme

1.0 Summary

1.1 The Council's new Apprenticeship Programme was set up in September 2013. The aim of the programme is to recruit 100 apprentices to the council over 3 years. The first of the new cohorts started in January 2014. This paper provides an update on progress implementing the programme and future developments.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Committee is asked to note the progress against the agreed apprenticeship programme targets.

3.0 Background

3.1 A report was presented at the meeting of this Committee on the 20th November 2013. The report set the scene for introducing an apprenticeship programme. The government through the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) is committed to increasing the number of young people participating in apprenticeships as part of their strategy to get young people into work. NAS has a target of 1 in 5 16-19 year olds undertaking an apprenticeship by the year 2019/20.

3.2 Unemployment among 16-24 year olds in London is above the national average – 24.7% of young people are unemployed in London, while the national average is 20.9%. The London Borough Apprenticeship project run by the London Councils and funded by NAS has created 614 additional apprenticeship places – exceeding its original target of 550 – and over 340 young people have started work.

3.3 The council is committed to being part of this initiative to get young people into work. Equally important to the council is that it is seen as a leader and role model amongst local employers championing the interests of young people to improve their employability and economic wellbeing. The table below provides information on those claiming job seekers allowance in Brent.

Age Group	National %	London %	Brent %
18-24	5.1	4.0	4.3
16-65	3.0	3.0	3.6

Brent's profile is better than the national average and comparable with the London profile for the 18-24 year age group. Looking at the broader employment group the national and London averages are 3% and Brent is 3.6%. In this particular group there is evidence to show the gap is closing. Previously 4.2 % were claiming job seekers allowance in Brent. It is not possible to show a comparison in the 18-24 age group. Although this presents a positive trend for Brent in terms of employment levels amongst young people, the council is committed to ensuring all young people are afforded the opportunity to enter employment and progress their careers.

- 3.4 Children and young people generally perform well in the education system in Brent and leave school and go on to further education. However, many young people are now exploring different ways to pursue their chosen career as a genuine alternative to going to university. The financial responsibility associated with university can be prohibitive for many young people and their families. The apprenticeship programme provides a vocational and practical pathway for young people to fulfil their career aspirations.

4.0 Apprenticeship Programme in Brent

- 4.1 The council established its refreshed apprenticeship programme last year in keeping with the national and London initiative. It provides a young person with an alternative vocational route into work whilst continuing their education. The design of the programme is geared toward raising skill levels and offers a range of career paths that will enable young people to build interesting and rewarding careers in local government.
- 4.2 It is aligned with the council's priority to promote jobs, growth and fair play to achieve the outcome of more local people in more local jobs; more local people supported into work, and Brent's Children and Young People's Plan which seeks to ensure young people have the skills they need to achieve economic wellbeing in adulthood. The council is keen to encourage applications from young people in the local community which is consistent with its workforce strategy.
- 4.3 The programme enables the council to nurture talent in house and address recruitment difficulties in the market where there are skill shortages. The objectives for the council's apprenticeship programme are to:
- raise the quality and number of apprenticeships. The aim is to ensure that apprentices are better skilled and competent.
 - work with departments to create apprenticeship offers in areas of skills shortages (e.g. social care) and areas that are attractive to young people (e.g. leisure sector).
 - improve the range of apprenticeship opportunities on offer across departments.

- work strategically with Regeneration and Growth Department to target apprenticeship opportunities in wards where youth unemployment is highest; thereby reducing unemployment, worklessness and improving income levels. The programme co-ordinator will work collaboratively with the Head of Employment and Enterprise to ensure there is a commitment by contractors to recruit apprentices.
- provide looked after children, who have disproportionately poorer educational outcomes and weaker job prospects than other young people, with the opportunity to gain an apprenticeship place by working with stakeholders in Children and Young People to promote the benefits of apprenticeships to young people leaving care.

4.4 The new apprentice programme is an ambitious initiative aimed at improving the employment prospects for young people through a major expansion of apprenticeship jobs offered within the council. It is a 3 year (2013-2016) programme with a target of employing 100 apprentices in a variety of roles across the council.

In summary the features of the programme are:

- apprenticeships are offered in a diverse range of occupations across the council.
- the apprenticeship co-ordinator works with departments to identify entry level positions that can be converted into apprenticeships.
- a two stage programme. Apprentices are offered a 12-month fixed-term contract as a minimum during which they will learn on-the-job and complete a number of vocational qualifications including an NVQ level 2 as well a Functional Skills qualification in maths, english and ICT.
- on successful completion of year 1 an apprentice may be offered an advanced apprenticeship (18 month fixed term contract) linked to NVQ level 3.
- a starting salary of £8,500 for 16-18 age group and £9,500 for the 19-23 age group. In addition 3 increments of £500 are paid on completion of each NVQ qualification. Salary costs are funded from departmental budgets.
- extensive five day corporate induction programme to provide apprentices with an in-depth understanding of Brent's culture and values as well as providing training in areas such as communication and team working. Following the corporate induction apprentices receive more specific job related induction.
- apprentices are able to access the range of training offered as part of the corporate learning and development offer.
- recruitment and training of workplace mentors to provide additional support. A buddy system has also been introduced to provide apprentices with basic support and guidance on office processes and protocols.

- development programme for managers aimed at providing effective support for apprentices.
- celebration event to raise the profile across the council and the wider community.

4.5 The recruitment and selection of apprentices is undertaken through the council's normal recruitment and selection procedures and appointments are made on merit. The programme offers high quality learning and development to a wide cross section of the community, enabling the council and the community to benefit from a more skilled, motivated and flexible workforce.

4.6 The table below shows the annual recruitment targets for the programme.

Year	No of Apprentices
2014	35
2015	35
2016	30

5.0 The Apprenticeship Programme - Progress

5.1 Since November 2013, twenty one of the first cohort of apprentices for 2014 have been recruited. Some commenced employment on 27th January and others on 3rd March 2014. Further rounds of advertising to recruit to the remaining positions in 2014 will take place in March and June/July. There will be two intakes, one in April and the other in September. Research undertaken suggests that June/July is likely to be the best time to engage with the widest group of young people, particularly school leavers. It is therefore anticipated that a greater number of the posts will be advertised in June/July. It is intended to work with the Employment and Enterprise Team to engage with local partners, Job Centre Plus, local schools and Connexions to raise awareness of the opportunities amongst young people in the community and encourage them to apply.

5.2 To promote the councils apprenticeships amongst local young people a number of information days will be held at the Civic Centre to promote apprenticeships at Brent. Existing apprentices will be involved in the design and delivery of these events to engage their peer groups. An apprenticeship website is also being developed to make information about the opportunities more accessible to young people. Digital and e-communication methods are also being explored.

5.3 The positions available so far cover a more diverse range of work disciplines than previously - accounting and finance, housing, health and social care, planning, ICT as well as customer service and business administration.

5.4 The apprentices in post have completed the induction programme. Since induction peer meetings have been held with the apprentices to review their progress as well as to reinforce messages about workplace behaviours. Apprentices and their line managers have met with training providers to plan the work programme required to meet the qualification criteria. Generally the

feedback from managers has been positive and most are established in their roles and making a real contribution in their service area.

- 5.5 There is a commitment in the programme to target looked after children who have disproportionately poorer educational outcomes and weaker job prospects. The programme is working closely with stakeholders in the Children and Young People Department to promote the benefits of apprenticeships to young people leaving care. It has also been arranged through BACES to run a programme targeting young looked after people to improve their opportunity to gain an apprenticeship. This is scheduled to start April 2014. The programme will be over a two month period and will focus on preparing young people for work including workplace etiquette, literacy and numeracy skills and work experience. The council would like to see 20% of the apprenticeships being offered to young people in this group. It is also recognised that there will be a need to provide greater support to those who secure an apprenticeship to remain engaged and motivated to succeed. This will be achieved partly through the assigned social worker and partly through specialist support and mentoring. The arrangements are currently being developed and will be in place by April 2014.
- 5.6 Provision has also been made through the Employment and Enterprise Team for young people in Brent to be able to access workshops and one to one support designed to get people ready for work and to give them the best opportunity to secure one of the apprenticeship positions. The support provided includes completing application forms, interview skills and work place etiquette training.
- 5.7 Arrangements have also been put in place to support managers. These include monthly round table discussions where managers can discuss issues and share learning about the apprenticeship scheme. Training and briefings are also provided to support managers for example with engaging with training providers and undertaking workplace assessments.
- 5.8 A career development module has been developed which is an integral part of the programme. It has been designed to enable the apprentices to maximise the learning and experience gained from being an apprentice and secure permanent employment with the council or another employer. The council has set a 10% target for the retention of apprentices. The module covers how to search for job opportunities within the council and externally and preparing and presenting at interviews. It is also planned for apprentices to receive IT training for word and excel at basic and intermediate levels. IT skills are considered to be essential for the apprentices to be productive in the workplace and to progress their careers. They will also be encouraged to access other training offered in the council's corporate training offer.
- 5.9 It is early days to be able to report on the progress of the first cohort of apprentices. Implementation of the programme will be closely monitored to ensure the apprentices receive the necessary support to achieve a successful outcome for the individual and the council. The current cohort of apprentices will be involved in a three month review of the programme to identify ways in which the programme can be enhanced to attract and retain young people to successfully complete the programme.

6.0 Financial Implications

6.1 The cost of an apprentice varies according to the age of the individual. The apprentices' starting salary of £8500 (aged 16-18) £9500 (aged 19-23) and will be funded from departmental budgets. The maximum salary cost (including employer on costs) for up to 35 apprentices ranges from £392,700 to £498,900. The training provider who delivers the vocational qualifications will draw government funding for the cost of the qualification for each apprentice. Where an apprentice is 19 and over there is a requirement for the council to make a contribution towards the training cost. The calculation for determining the actual cost will depend on the number of 16-18 year olds on the programme compared to the number of 19 to 23 year olds. The greater the number of 16-18 year olds the lower the cost for the council.

7.0 Legal Implications

7.1 The council is committed to providing further employment opportunities to local people given unemployment rates and the council is legally able to encourage local residents to apply for vacancies however final recruitment decisions must be based on merit.

8.0 Diversity Implications

8.1 The council demonstrates its commitment to diversity by permitting entry-level posts to be converted to apprenticeship opportunities thereby increasing the profile of its younger workforce. The council has improved its diversity of apprenticeships by offering a wider range of disciplines including finance, social care, planning and leisure. Support will also be given to apprentices to identify suitable employment opportunities in advance of their apprenticeship being completed. The apprenticeship programme lead will work closely with the recruitment service to facilitate the smooth transition of apprentices into permanent employment.

8.2 It is important that young people who experience greater disadvantage in the labour market gain access to the council's apprenticeship programme. To ensure access is offered to 'hard to reach' young people, the delivery team will work with various partners to promote and engage young people. Additional support provided by trained mentors will help with the retention of apprentices.

Background Papers

Report to Corporate Management Team September 2013

Report to Partnership and Place overview and Scrutiny Committee 20 November 2013

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