

Employment Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 21 November 2023 at Shire Hall, Warwick at 6.00pm.

Present: Councillor Sinnott (Chair), Councillors Aizlewood, K Dickson, Dray, Gorman, King, Noonan, Payne, Phillips, Sinnott, Syson and Yellapragada

6. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Margrave and Davison.

7. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

8. Corporate Apprenticeship Programme Update

The Committee considered an annual report from the Head of People and Communications which presented an annual update in relation to the Warwick District Council Corporate Apprentice Programme as requested by the Committee.

The public sector apprenticeships target concluded on 31 March 2022. From 1 April 2022, there was no longer a target set for public sector employers. However, public sector employers who were required to report against the public sector apprenticeships target were asked to voluntarily continue to gather, and later report: new apprenticeship starters; total number of apprentices and organisational headcount. The DFE would publish this data annually to support transparency and external accountability and help maintain the momentum public sector employers had developed.

As of October 2023, since its launch in 2018, the Corporate Apprentice Scheme had funded opportunities for twenty-six apprenticeships. At the time of reporting:

- 10 out of 26 had secured alternative employment with the Council;
- seven out of 26 were still undertaking their apprenticeships;
- nine out of 26 successfully completed their apprenticeships and left for other opportunities; and
- the Council was in the process of recruiting two more apprentices.

In addition, the corporate scheme part funded a Forestry Apprentice employed by Heart of England Forest and seconded to Warwick District Council.

It was particularly positive to report that some apprentices had progressed their careers into managerial and professional roles.

The Apprenticeship Levy was initiated by the UK government in April 2017, for all employers paying a wage bill of more than three million per year. Employers that met the criteria were required to pay 0.5% of their

payroll each month as a levy tax. This levy could then be reinvested into the workforce in the form of apprenticeship training. The Council made a levy payment of £74,464 in 2022/23 which was a payroll deduction, processed directly from payroll each month using the 0.5% apportionment of Gross Pay.

The Council could access its Levy contribution plus 10% to fund apprenticeship training funding each year. This was £84,110 for 2022/23 and should this be exceeded, 80% of excess costs would be topped up by the government.

To maximise the use of the apprenticeship levy, the Council had taken the opportunity to secure apprenticeship training for existing members of staff. This had funded training for 18 staff, largely at degree level. To date, circa £320,000 worth of Levy Funded training had been accessed for established members of staff and £192,500 for apprentices.

Three members of staff who joined the Council as apprentices were now in established positions studying at degree level.

Public sector bodies with 250 or more staff in England had a target to employ an average of at least 2.3% of their staff as new apprentices within the period of 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2023. From a low starting point of 0.19% Warwick District Council achieved an average of 1.6% in this time. This was a significant increase from its starting point.

The average for Public Sector for 2022-23 was 1.7%, including 5.8% in the armed forces and 1.2% for Local Government. A table reporting percentages was included at section 3.2 in the report.

During 2022/23, staff from the Human Resources team attended seven Career/Job fairs held in schools and within the local community. These were also supported by apprentices as ambassadors. These events supported promotion of not just the apprenticeship scheme but career opportunities for local government. They enabled the team to engage with young people in the District and talk about career and further education opportunities.

The Human Resources Team had attended (alongside the Community Partnership Team) two of the job fairs held in Royal Leamington Spa. These events allowed them to engage with residents within the local community and discuss current job opportunities, the benefits of working for Warwick District Council and opportunities such as the Council's Apprenticeship Scheme.

In addition to students undertaking work experience within specific service areas, in July 2023 the Council held its first corporate work experience programme. This three-day event, which was held from 4 to 6 July, gave students the opportunity to learn more about Warwick District Council and the services it provided, as well as to gain valuable work life skills. The work experience programme was open to schools within the District, as well as to schools that officers had been collaborating with. As part of the programme, the students had the opportunity to work on their interview technique and learn more about important topics which might affect their careers in the future such as social media awareness. The workshops were

designed and ran by staff across the Council and again supported by the current cohort of apprentices.

It was important to recognise the success of the Apprenticeship Programme within the Council. There had been challenges over the last few years to provide a positive learning opportunity with remote based working.

A recent benchmarking review of salaries indicated that the Council offered a lower salary for higher level apprenticeships than neighbouring authorities. However, the higher-level apprenticeships, together with more specialist roles, tended attract a higher number of applicants. A recent Digital Marketing opportunity attracted over 70 applicants. Officers would continue to monitor this.

Feedback from a networking event for apprentices and their managers, in December 2022, was extremely positive, with the only improvement suggestions being greater opportunity to work within a team and network. Plans to address this continued with a review of the induction process and development programme.

No alternatives had been considered as the scheme was linked to the Recruitment, Retention and Remuneration project aligned to 'Grow your Own'.

In answer to questions from Members, the Head of People and Communications and the HR and Payroll Manager advised that:

- the apprentices would go through the usual staff induction process;
- she was looking into having a separate induction specifically for apprentices, but that was dependent on resources;
- the experience could be different, depending on if the apprentices were working in the office or from home;
- the figures in the report were a proportion of the headcount. In 2021/22, the Council had taken on longer apprenticeships;
- the wages were dependent on age;
- there were roughly the same number of apprentices, and to recruit more apprentices, more funding was needed, as well as encouraging more people to undertake the apprenticeship training;
- there had been some dropouts for personal reasons, in which case the funding would be allocated to recruit another apprentice;
- as part of the Peer Review, the Council was doing some work in balancing the agile approach and the new ways of working;
- the Council was trying to "grow our own", which meant bringing people in, training them up and encouraging them to progress their experience with the Council;
- the majority of apprentices were 18-20 years old, though the Council had had some more mature students in the past too;
- the apprenticeship scheme was open to everyone, at all levels in the organisation; and
- the foundation and degree levels were set by the education system.

Members thanked the Head of People and Communications and congratulated the Human Resources team.

Resolved that the report be noted. Although the Public Sector apprenticeship target was discontinued with effect from 31 March 2022, Warwick District Council will continue to publish progress voluntarily.

(The meeting ended at 6.30pm)

CHAIRMAN
19 March 2024