

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Employment & Appeals Committee
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CONTACT OFFICER: Surjit Nagra, Service Lead, People
AUTHORS: Sarah Trahearn, Project Manager
WARD(S): All

PART 1 **FOR INFORMATION**

SLOUGH ACADEMY UPDATE

1 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to update this Committee regarding the new Operating Model to deliver the Council's Apprenticeship Scheme through 'The Slough Academy'. This will deliver the overall objective to achieve Continuous Professional Development for our workforce.

The report also highlights the key drivers behind the new Operating Model and illustrates the benefits for our workforce and Slough's residents.

2 Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action

The Committee is requested to note the changes highlighted within this report.

3 Supporting Information

3.1 Current Apprenticeship Scheme

3.1.1 The current scheme focuses on 16 - 19 year olds who are engaged on a one year fixed term contract, taking them through a 12 month Level 2 Business Administration training programme. Apprentices perform two rotations in two different Service Areas to gain insights into every-day working life and a high-level understanding of those Services.

3.1.2 Simultaneously, Apprentices complete work-based course work to provide a broad understanding of standard working practises. Basic English and Maths tuition is included if not yet achieved. If successfully completed, Apprentices achieve a GCSE standard in Business Administration.

3.1.3 On completion of the training programme, the Apprentice's one year Apprenticeship contract is concluded and they are able to apply for vacant roles within the Council. If successful, they are employed by the Council on a standard employee contract for their new role. If unsuccessful, they are supported to find alternative employment within Slough or go onto further education.

3.1.4 The advantages of this approach are that it provides entry level opportunity for young people to join the workforce and underpins the Council's commitment to give them the best start and opportunities for positive lives as described in our Five Year Plan.

3.1.5 The limitations of this scheme are that it only focuses on one Training Programme at one level, with one audience for one year. It does not guarantee the opportunity to progress further within the Council unless successful for new roles and therefore future employment is speculative potentially allowing talent to escape from Slough. This scheme also does not focus on professional development. Its generalist nature does not encourage Apprentices to consider and work towards long term career goals and ambitions which Slough Borough Council could support and benefit from. The scheme is not business need driven.

3.2 The National Context

3.2.1 The Apprenticeship Reforms of 2016 and the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy in 2017 are aimed at upskilling the national workforce to enable us to compete in global markets particularly after Brexit.

3.2.2 With employers now focusing on the skills and competencies they need their workforce to develop to respond to future commercial challenges, the range of work-based training programmes has expanded dramatically and is now available to all ages and can be undertaken by both existing staff and new staff. The new training programmes are profession and role based and created by groups of employers from within each sector to ensure the correct range and depth of skills and competencies required.

3.2.3 The training programmes are funded by the Apprenticeship Levy which relieves employers of the traditional budget constraints associated with upskilling and allows them to focus on how best to take advantage of the schemes.

3.2.4 The minimum Levy investment per individual ranges from £1,500 for a 12 month programme up to £27,000 for 60 months. Qualifications range from GCSE and A level equivalents to degrees. For some, this could mean 'degrees for free', no student debt and earning income whilst learning without having to leave Slough.

3.2.5 Public Sector bodies have an annual 2.3% target for training programme 'new starts' to contribute to the overall national target of 3 million Apprentices by March 2021.

3.3 The Slough Context

3.3.1 Slough Borough Council is ambitious to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the national upskilling programme to develop its workforce and benefit Slough residents.

- 3.3.2 The Slough Academy is the Council's workforce development initiative aimed at establishing the principle of Continuous Professional Development within the Council. The Slough Academy is implementing these changes as Phase 1 of the project.
- 3.3.3 A detailed exercise has been conducted creating 'Development Pathways' mapping Levy funded training programmes to the professions and roles within the Council to support the development of key skills and competencies required to achieve the outcomes of the Five Year Plan.
- 3.3.4 The volume and timing of the required programmes has been identified together with the balance between developing existing staff through 'Sponsored Qualifications' and attracting new staff as Apprentices. Slough's planned volume of 'new starts' for the training programmes is directly aligned to illustrate our steps towards the trajectory of achieving our 2.3% target for which official and public reporting commences in September 2018.
- 3.3.5 The fundamental underpinning aim of this approach is to 'grow our own' talent to replace expensive Agency staff and deliver the best services for Slough residents. We want to invest in our staff, keep them and watch them flourish as we support them to achieve our outcomes.

3.4 The new enhanced Apprenticeship Scheme

- 3.4.1 As a Council, we want to take maximum advantage of the opportunities presented by the Reforms and play our part in meeting the 2.3% target. Therefore contributing to the national upskilling programme at a local level to develop the skills and competencies we need to deliver the best services for Slough residents.
- 3.4.2 So far, 17 professions and 21 training programmes have been identified ranging from level 2 (GCSE equivalent) to level 7 (Master's degree) with durations varying from 12 months to 60 months. Some programmes have been combined to create more advanced Apprenticeships and capitalise on the 'grow your own' opportunities they present which means some Apprenticeships are up to 5.5 years long.
- 3.4.3 The impact of greater variety and increased training durations coincides with the change in Apprentice employment legislation aiming to provide Apprentices with greater employment security and increased employee rights aligned with the rest of the workforce. SBC will no longer be issuing fixed term contracts to Apprentices. Instead their offer of employment will be an 'Apprentice friendly' version of our standard employment contract including a six-month probation period as for all other employees.

3.4.4 Because the training programmes are profession and role based, Apprentices will be recruited by each Directorate and Service Area in the same way as non-Apprentices following our standard recruitment policies.

They will be managed individually by the relevant Line Manager and have Job Descriptions defining their job and the role they are learning to perform. Once training is completed, they will be able to apply for any vacant posts which are available at that time.

The new approach provides an opportunity for the Council to help support reducing the town's skills gaps by being an exemplar authority in 'growing and developing our own talent' to meet business need. This initiative will support our priorities of reducing the numbers of agency staff as well as alleviate a number of recruitment problems going forward.

4 **Conclusion**

The Apprenticeship Reforms and Levy provide the framework and funding to enhance our current Apprenticeship Scheme and support future workforce development initiatives. These enhancements address two of our outcomes in the Five Year Plan and make a direct contribution to the reduction of Agency spend through our 'grow our own' philosophy. Therefore, the enhancements will enable us to meet the targets, support our workforce development ambitions and promote our commitments to Slough residents.

The Committee will be updated further on progress at regular intervals.

5 **Appendices Attached**

None

6 **Background Papers**

None