

Scrutiny Sub-Committee for Building a Strong Economy

5th December 2005



Apprentices – Review of Progress

Report of Head of Overview and Scrutiny

Purpose of Report

1. To explain progress following a Scrutiny investigation into apprenticeships in County Durham.

Background

2. A Scrutiny investigation took place last year to consider apprenticeships in County Durham. A copy of the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Group which was approved by Cabinet is attached.
3. On the 31st October 2005, a Scrutiny Group was convened to review progress in relation to the recommendations and consider recent developments for apprenticeships and training generally.
4. Before the Scrutiny Group carried out its investigation, the County Council itself had thirty-four apprentices (at that time, they were referred to as modern apprentices). There was a view at that time that the Council did not perhaps have a positive image as a potential employer particularly for young people. Only 172 applications were received for apprenticeships with the Council and, in some instances, it was not possible to fill posts.
5. The Scrutiny investigation has raised the profile of training and apprenticeships. Whilst the main thrust of the investigation was to try to encourage more apprenticeships across the county, there was a strong view that the Council itself needed to set an example before it could credibly encourage others to enhance their approach to training. A number of recommendations, therefore, were made in respect of the Council's approach.
6. This year, 950 applications were made for apprenticeship positions within the Council. The total number of apprentices employed by the County Council has increased to 55 and the number of occupational areas wishing to attract apprentices has increased from 8 to 13. Clearly, this has not been achieved without a considerable shift in the Council's approach to apprenticeship training which was encouraged by the Scrutiny Group.
7. The Social Care and Health Service of the Council has been particularly innovative, not simply arranging apprentices within their workforce but also facilitating the appointment of six new apprentices in the independent and

voluntary sector in the County and eight new apprentices employed by Primary Care Trusts.

8. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) was encouraged to consider a One Stop Shop approach for employers to assist them in setting up apprenticeship schemes. They were also asked to focus on areas recognised as 'deprived' and to consider the tourism sector and Social Care and Health. The LSC has responded positively. Business Link is providing the One Stop Shop approach. Members of the working group still thought that more could be done to publicise this role particularly for small businesses. The LSC had sought to concentrate on areas of most need particularly those not in education, employment or training. The numbers in this group were falling steadily although the percentage in County Durham was significantly higher than the national average and more work was needed in this area. The LSC was also encouraging schemes in tourism and in Social Care and Health in association with the County Council.

11. In relation to economic development assistance and procurement, the recommendations from the Scrutiny Group had been pursued. In terms of Corporate Procurement, a pre-qualification questionnaire was to be introduced to explore the issue of training before decisions were made by the Council in respect of services to be provided by external organisations. The County Durham Development Company was also considering the issue of apprenticeships in its grant making powers.

13. The Employer Training pilot has now been completed but, unfortunately, the Council was unable to participate. However, there are a number of training initiatives now being pursued by Service Departments.

Summary of Main Issues

- 14
 - The numbers of apprentices employed by the Council has increased significantly.
 - Members raised the need to provide more structured support for County Council apprentices. This arose from discussions with members at a meeting with young employees.
 - Social Care and Health have been able to arrange six new apprentices in the independent and voluntary sector and eight apprentices in two PCTs. The target is 26 overall this year in the Social Care and Health economy and there are plans to seek to double this.
 - Social Care and Health have a contractual arrangement with New College Durham to support their apprentices. They have also secured funding from external sources. Human Resources were encouraged to discuss funding and support arrangements with Social Care and Health to ensure a corporate and cost-effective approach.

- The recommendations about corporate procurement are being taken into account in the Council's procurement arrangements. The outcome of these new arrangements should be reported to the Cabinet. There should also be a more transparent approach to the consideration of training and apprentices in the process of providing economic development grants.
- The LSC should be encouraged to give more publicity to their One Stop Shop approach and assist in further promotion of apprenticeship schemes particularly in deprived areas and target sectors such as tourism and Social Care and Health.

Recommendation

15. You are asked to note this positive report and to endorse the issues raised by the working group to be passed on to the relevant Council officers and the LSC.

Contact: Ian Mackenzie Tel: 0191 383 3506

ATTENDANCE

Councillor Pye in the chair

Members of the Working Group:

Councillors Armstrong, Chaplow, Chapman, Coates, Iveson, Lethbridge, Meir, O'Donnell, Pye

Other Members:

Councillors Bowman, Douthwaite, Hodgson, Walker

Officers:

Bob Elliott – Staff Development Manager, Social Care and Health

David Attyeo – Development and Performance Manager, Personnel Services

Gillian Kilgour – Access to Learning Facilitator, Personnel Services

Rob Strettle – Chief Executive's Office

EXTRACT FROM
MODERN APPRENTICESHIPS IN COUNTY DURHAM
July 2004

12. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 12.1 To seek to improve the numbers of modern apprentices in the County in the future, we have the following recommendations:-
- i. Durham County Council should consider setting an example in engaging modern apprentices. This would require:-
 - a. A corporate commitment, greater understanding of the wide scope of modern apprenticeships and recognition of their value.
 - b. Support to services in this initiative – for example, the recent suggestion from Social Care and Health needs to be encouraged.
 - ii. Health bodies should be encouraged to take on far more modern apprentices. Each health trust operating in the County should be asked to consider this issue.
 - iii. The example in the private sector from the Esh Group is very impressive and similar initiatives should be encouraged in the County.
 - iv. The Learning and Skills Council should be asked to increase the promotion of modern apprenticeships in County Durham including:
 - Considering a 'One Stop Shop' approach for employers to assist them in setting up schemes.
 - Focusing on areas of the County which are recognised as 'deprived'.
 - Encouraging schemes in the Tourism sector and in Social Care and Health.
 - v. The County Council should seek to raise the issue of modern apprenticeships as part of its well-being powers:-
 - a. In its functions such as Economic Development Grants and assistance to industry.
 - b. In its procurement arrangements.

- vi. The current arrangement in relation to the Strategic Alliance which excludes local firms who are setting an example in relation to modern apprenticeships should be carefully reconsidered.
- vii. The young apprenticeship scheme is generally to be welcomed but employers must still be encouraged to be fully involved.
- viii. The Strategic Partnership for Education and Lifelong Learning which is to take the lead for Challenges 4 and 5 in the Strategic Vision should be asked to regularly review County Durham's position in relation to modern apprenticeships.
- ix. The County Council, as a corporate issue, should seriously consider participating in the Employer Training Pilot which is to be extended to County Durham on the 1st September 2004 and promoting the pilot in the County.
- x. This project should be reviewed six months after the report is considered by Cabinet. The focus should be on the numbers of modern apprentices in place and projected.