

Staffordshire County Council

Apprenticeship Strategy

Foreword – John Henderson – Chief Executive

Staffordshire County Council is one of the largest employers in the county. Helping to grow Apprenticeships and routes into Apprenticeships is an important part of our wider economic development strategy, which also aims to raise skill levels and aspirations.

We value Apprenticeships within the council; as well as being high-quality pathways to successful careers, they also provide opportunities for new and existing employees to develop and progress, which assists the county council in meeting our current and future skills needs.

An apprentice learns so much more than just how to do a job or achieve a qualification. Because of this, we want to use Apprenticeships as a way to explore new ways of working, improve the organisation and help employees to progress through their career.

A major theme of our new People Strategy is ‘Developing Skills for Now and in the Future.’ Apprenticeships have a key role to play in this, as we will support the development of key skills including leadership and development of existing staff and encourage young and local people into the workforce.

Staffordshire County Council aspires to be an employer of choice, that attracts, develops and retains the most diverse, creative and innovative individuals with the required skills and abilities in the short-term and for the future.

1. Introduction:

The introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy aims to put employers at the centre of identifying the skills, knowledge and behaviours that are required for the workforce of the future and to ensure the apprentices receive high quality training to meet the chosen professional standards.

The public sector has been asked to achieve a greater proportion of growth in Apprenticeships and has been set a public-sector duty to ensure that 2.3% of the workforce are Apprenticeships by 2020.

This document sets out the Apprenticeship Strategy for Staffordshire County Council as an employer and its approach to Apprenticeships. It is aligned with the Council’s Corporate Learning and Development Commissioning Plan 2019-2022 and the Connected Staffordshire Our People Strategy – Developing a Workforce for Now and the Future – 2019 – 2022 and beyond.

This Apprenticeship Strategy and its delivery plan will be regularly reviewed, developed and updated in response to local and national changes. The key actions for the delivery of the Strategy are set out in detail in the Delivery Plan. The Strategy

will also help to identify the actions that individual service areas will need to take in support of the Council's overall approach so that they are able to have a role in creating and identifying development opportunities and in meeting the specific skills challenges they face.

2. The Vision:

Apprenticeships are valued, within the Council, as a way for existing employees to develop their skills and providing high quality training for new recruits coming into the business. A successful Apprenticeship programme will assist the Council in meeting its current and future skills needs and provide routes to successful careers for its staff.

The Council faces future challenges which can only be met with the right people with the right skills at the right time which will help to meet changing demands. Apprenticeships will form an integral part in providing the Council with the talent pipeline for the future.

3. Meeting Current and Future Skill Needs:

Staffordshire County Council aspires to be an employer of choice, that attracts, develops and retains the most diverse, creative and innovative individuals with the required skills and abilities in the short-term and for the future. The Council previously had a good record in recruiting apprentices aged 16-24 years, many of whom stayed working within the Council or moved into other employment or further education, but the programme was narrow and mainly consisted of level 2 entry level Apprenticeships.

Staffordshire County Council recognises that keeping and attracting talented people to come and work for us to fill skills gaps now and in the future and keeping the skills we already have will be key to our success. Focussing on the development of skills for now and the future and the provision of opportunities for all will be a priority and the Apprenticeship delivery programme will be a main component in having better development opportunities for employees enabling them to pursue careers across the Council.

We want our leaders to be at all levels and across the council, leading projects, working with volunteers and commissioning services not just at senior management levels. They have a significant part to play in our success. We recognise in this strategy that we must provide them with support and the development to be able to fulfil their important roles.

To maximise the use of the Levy to develop skills within the business and meet the proposed public-sector target, the internal Apprenticeship programme will need to be reshaped and the number of Apprenticeships offered increased. The Council's Apprenticeship Programme goes beyond meeting targets and aims to support the wider strategic commitment to sustainably improve the employment prospects and social mobility of local people, and to strengthen the skills base of our existing and future workforce by providing high quality jobs and learning opportunities with related qualifications which are embedded in career progression routes.

4. Supporting Staffordshire's Strategic Ambitions:

Staffordshire County Council is one of the largest employers in the county and will support Apprenticeship growth and routes into Apprenticeships, using an influencing role and leading by example. Apprenticeship growth is an important part of Staffordshire's wider Economic Growth and Skills strategy which also supports the aim to raise skills levels and aspirations. The challenges faced are particularly acute for young people aged 16-25, as well as for care leavers, long term unemployed people, returners to the labour market and people with disabilities, as they try to compete within the labour market.

We will champion the value of Apprenticeships at a regional and national level through our engagement in and leadership of relevant bodies and partnerships, such as the Local Government Association, the Midlands Engine and the Constellation Partnership.

We aim to contribute to raising skills levels within the county by increasing the number of opportunities for existing employees to undertake Apprenticeships, and to develop an Apprenticeship culture which will improve recruitment and retention and change the age diversity profile of the workforce by attracting younger people into the business via the Apprenticeship route as well as supporting more women into senior leadership roles.

Staffordshire County Council is aware that current budget restraints may impact on the delivery of the Apprenticeship delivery programme therefore we will introduce a Levy Transfer process where consideration will be given to transferring Levy monies not spent to other employers and partners to support the wider take up of Apprenticeships and development of skills appropriate to local needs and in line with the Council's and Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire LEP's aims and objectives. This will include small and medium employers that do not have access to levy funding and young people especially who cannot access an Apprenticeship due to the lack of funding.

5. Apprenticeship Programme Aims:

Our Apprenticeship Programme will,

- Embed Apprenticeships within the workforce.
- Aim to achieve 100% of Levy spend by 2021
- Aim to meet the Public-Sector target to employ an average of at least 2.3% of staff as new apprentice starts by 31st March 2021.
- Review the recruitment process to ensure that all vacancies are considered for an Apprenticeship where a relevant standard can be applied.
- Encourage existing employees to use Apprenticeships as a means of developing their skills and career path within the Council where ever a relevant apprenticeship standard can be applied and there is a strong fit to the strategic aims and objectives of the team and the Council.
- Develop a network of Apprenticeship ambassadors at all levels and across all departments within the Council and in Schools.

- Actively engage with the national development of additional standards that are relevant to Council occupations
- Actively encourage and support all apprentices in gaining the knowledge, skills and qualifications that will meet the needs of the Council.
- Guarantee that all new vacancy apprentices, that successfully complete the Apprenticeship, will be offered the chance to stay in the role where the job remains after completion.
- The Council will review services to identify existing and future skills gaps and ensure that priority is given to Apprenticeships that are designed to meet these challenges and develop skill sets relevant to the future workforce. This will include developing career pathways to provide opportunities for the growth and development of staff that will be focussed around existing and anticipated future skills needs.
- Acting in the Council's capacity as Corporate Parent, the Council will work across services to support care leavers and ensure that any care leaver wanting an apprenticeship will be provided with support to enable them to apply and remain in the position if successful. Not all care leavers will want to work within the Council, but they will be guaranteed an interview if they do and provided with support to find an opportunity with another employer if they don't. This approach will help more disadvantaged young people in the County to begin their journey to independence.
- All Care Leavers that are unsuccessful at interview will receive good feedback and support to find another opportunity.
- We will identify opportunities to engage young people not in education, employment or training and those with special education needs; working with IAG professionals, local schools, colleges and supported employment organisations, creating effective ways to support these young people to access Apprenticeships and secure sustainable employment.

The Council supports social mobility. All apprentices will be treated as equals with potential barriers to under-representation identified and addressed with additional support offered to apprentices and managers as required.

The Council has a programme called Open Door which offers work experience opportunities to people who have been out of employment on a long-term basis, including women and older returners to the job market, the long term unemployed and members of the Armed Forces seeking a career change on completion of service as part of support for the British Armed Forces Covenant. The Apprenticeship delivery programme will link closely with Open Door to ensure that all candidates are aware of any Apprenticeship opportunities that are available both internally and externally via the Apprenticeship Vacancy Service.

6. Develop partnerships with training providers and other Local Authorities and Public-Sector bodies within the region:

The Council will work with training providers and other local authorities, regionally and nationally, to identify gaps in Apprenticeship standards to ensure that new standards which are relevant to the Council and reflect the requirements of the public sector are developed.

We will work with the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire LEP Apprenticeship Hub, the Skills Hub and Apprenticeship Ladder for Staffordshire to ensure joint working on Apprenticeship growth and quality.

We are partners in the NHS Workforce and Development Midland Partnership Trust – STP Workforce project – the project enables partners to work together regarding the Transfer of Levy Funds to ensure that the appropriate partner can transfer underspent funds to other employers where possible.

This joint working means we can,

- Use the Apprenticeship Levy to meet workforce and labour market needs
- Identify gaps in the market and working with training providers, assessment organisations and sector bodies to develop new Apprenticeship Standards
- Promote Apprenticeships to support recruitment and achievement.
- Share costs of procurement and transfer processes.

7. Engage with Maintained Schools to ensure they maximise benefits from the levy:

The Council will ensure that Local Authority maintained schools are aware of the impact of apprenticeship reforms and work with them to provide advice and support that enables them to engage with and benefit from the Levy.

In addition to providing advice, information and guidance relating to the reforms we will work with schools to promote the benefits the changes can offer in helping them to meet skills gaps and future workforce needs. This will include raising awareness of the new Apprenticeship standards in development for Teachers, Teaching Assistants, School Business Managers and School IT Specialists, as well as a range of other broader standards that could be used by the wider schools' workforce in helping to create apprentice opportunities. As new school focused standards are developed, the Council will ensure that schools are kept up to date.

8. Future Development of the Apprenticeship Programme:

The Apprenticeship delivery programme provides the opportunity for us to be proactive in the recruitment of apprentices into a wider range of service areas across the Council. This will include identifying apprenticeship opportunities as part of wider workforce planning with changes made to the recruitment policy and process to ensure that all vacancies are considered for an Apprenticeship, which will allow us to embed Apprenticeships in as many service areas as possible.

The Council has a diverse range of job roles and we will identify relevant Apprenticeships that can support the skills needed within specific occupational areas which will be crucial in helping to maximise the Levy funding and mitigate potential skill shortages. Managers will be encouraged to consider all levels of vacancies for application of an applicable Apprenticeship standard.

We will ensure that all services, departments and teams are aware of how Apprenticeships can be used to recruit new staff or develop the skills of existing staff,

removing all myths and legends – this will provide opportunities for the Council’s workforce to gain occupational skills, including management and leadership, through Levy funding to enhance their career prospects which will help to retain talent within the Council.

We will explore the option to offer work experience placements to T Level students where there is a link to the qualification and sector. This will also enable an opportunity for the Council to promote its Apprenticeships and future career prospects to the students.

9. Review and Monitoring:

The Apprenticeship Strategy will be underpinned by a Delivery Plan which will regularly be reviewed and reported on at the Council’s Apprenticeship Programme Board. This will include statistical information to assess the range of demand for Apprenticeships across the business and within schools. It will also include the processes for the ongoing monitoring of the quality of the Apprenticeship provision delivered by training providers.

In accordance with the public-sector duty requirements the Council will also publish data, annually, relating to progress towards the 2.3% apprenticeship target set by the Government.

For further information email: apprentices@staffordshire.gov.uk