



ARTICLE NO: 2A

**CORPORATE & ENVIRONMENTAL
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MEMBERS UPDATE 2016/17
ISSUE: 2**

Article of: Director Development and Regeneration

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**SUBJECT: LET'S TALK APPRENTICESHIP GRANT AND LET'S TALK
EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS CHARTER PROGRESS REPORT**

Wards affected: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF ARTICLE

1.1 To provide an update on the Council's employment and skills initiatives, including the Let's talk Apprenticeship Grant and the Let's talk Employment and Skills Charter.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 The West Lancashire Challenge programme was established in 2011 with the aim of removing barriers to employment, and included supporting the creation of apprenticeship and volunteering opportunities. The West Lancashire Challenge was a partnership between West Lancashire Borough Council, West Lancashire CVS and West Lancashire College, with support from other partners.

2.2 The key role of the Council in the West Lancashire Challenge was the business engagement element of the project and, in order to meet the outcomes, developing relationships and gaining support from both businesses and partners was paramount.

2.3 In March 2015, funding for the West Lancashire Challenge ceased. Despite the programme ending, the Council has continued the provision of support to businesses to assist with the creation of employment and apprenticeships, as well as the continuation of building and maintaining relationships and engaging with businesses and partners, including the Lancashire LEP Skills Hub.

- 2.4 Engaging and supporting local businesses, as well as working with our strategic partners, is key to meeting the Council's Corporate priority of focussing on sustainable regeneration and growth, as well as creating opportunities for and retaining good quality jobs for local people.
- 2.5 As employment growth in the Borough is expected to outperform the national, regional and Lancashire average, and coupled with the aim to attract inward investment, raise wage levels and substantially grow the economy, there is also an on-going imperative to raise the skill levels of residents.
- 2.6 To help raise skill levels amongst young people in the Borough, as well as supporting business growth, apprenticeships have proven to be a successful way to help meet these objectives.
- 2.7 Statistics and information on key employment sectors, as well as information relating to skills and employment within the Borough, can be found in Appendix A – Employment Fact Sheet April 2016 and Skills Fact Sheet April 2016

3.0 LET'S TALK APPRENTICESHIP GRANT SCHEME

- 3.1 Following the success of the West Lancashire Challenge project, in 2013 the Council funded a Business Engagement Officer post, together with an apprenticeship post and funding to continue to deliver a small apprenticeship grant scheme. This enabled the Council to start to engage and support local businesses with their skills and employment issues. As a result, the Let's talk Apprenticeship grant scheme was developed with the aim of supporting 22 local businesses with a grant of £1000 to help create 22 employment opportunities.
- 3.2 The Council launched the Let's talk Apprenticeship Grant scheme in October 2015, developed in partnership with the West Lancashire Skills, Training and Employment Partnership, to encourage and support West Lancashire businesses to recruit local 16-24 year olds into employment through an apprenticeship programme.
- 3.3 Eligible businesses must be based in West Lancashire, employ less than 50 employees, and commit to employing an apprentice for a minimum of 12 months.
- 3.4 In order to support the Borough's growth sectors and increase skills and job opportunities in these areas, businesses must employ an apprentice who undertakes an apprenticeship in one of the following frameworks:
 - Business, Administration & Law
 - Construction & Planning
 - Engineering & Manufacturing
 - Information & Communications Technology
 - Transport & Storage

The grant scheme eligibility criteria can be found in Appendix B – Let's talk Apprentices Grant Scheme, Employer Fact Sheet March 2016.

- 3.5 As well as offering financial support to eligible businesses via the grant, assistance is also available to all businesses in the Borough to help them understand the benefits of apprenticeships, how to advertise a vacancy and recruit an apprentice, and how to select an appropriate training provider to deliver the apprenticeship programme. Officers within the Economic Regeneration team have devised the West Lancashire Apprenticeships – Employer Guide July 2016 (Appendix C) to facilitate discussions with employers and support the apprenticeship process, as well as updating businesses on apprenticeship reforms and future developments. This Employer Guide has been well received by many businesses who find the apprenticeship route to be very complex and complicated, with new standards and processes being brought in by Government, including the Apprenticeship Levy due to be implemented in 2017.
- 3.6 The grant scheme is managed by the Council's Business Engagement Officer, who works closely with Quarry Bank Community Association to help deliver the project. Quarry Bank Community Association is a third sector organisation and partner on the West Lancashire Skills, Employment and Training Partnership who currently deliver employment contracts on behalf of Job Centre Plus. This partnership approach not only helps to develop the skills and capacity of a small third sector organisation, it ensures joined-up working linking unemployed individuals to employment opportunities.
- 3.7 As a result of the success of the Let's talk Apprenticeship initiative, Quarry Bank Community Association are now working closely with a private sector organisation to secure additional support for apprenticeships.
- 3.8 As of 31st August 2016, 30 grant applications have been received and 21 grants awarded.

4.0 LET'S TALK EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS CHARTER

- 4.1 The Let's talk Employment and Skills Charter is a Council initiative designed to engage with local businesses and to encourage them to invest in the people of West Lancashire. See Appendix D.
- 4.2 The notion behind the Charter was to offer recognition to those businesses that are already active in supporting with local initiatives, and to engage with other businesses across the Borough with a view to promoting employment and skills activities.
- 4.3 By signing up to the Charter, businesses are asked to contribute at least one day a year supporting local employment and skills initiatives and/or recruit an apprentice. In return, the Council will work with the business to provide a package of support including information on workforce solutions, available

funding programmes, networking events and property availability, in addition to signposting to partners where appropriate.

- 4.4 As a sign of recognition for their commitment to the Charter, businesses are presented with a certificate, signed by the Council's Chief Executive. Their business name is also listed on the Council website.
- 4.5 As of 31st August 2016, 37 businesses have signed up to the Charter including some of the Borough's major employers e.g.:
- Trelleborg Offshore UK
 - Hotter
 - Edge Hill University
 - SCA Hygiene Products Limited
 - Stocks Hall Care Homes Limited
 - Flavourfresh Solfresh Group.
- 4.6 To date, support from Charter members has included the recruitment of apprentices, attendance at local school and college careers fairs, participation in mock interview days for students as well as involvement in recruitment events for local job seekers at Job Centre Plus. Offers to mentor and give entrepreneurial talks to students at Edge Hill University have also been pledged.
- 4.7 The Charter is an effective mechanism to engage with businesses and build relationships with employers and has been very well received, linking in well with many business' Corporate Social Responsibility policies.

5.0 BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

- 5.1 Both the Apprenticeship Grant Scheme and the Charter have proved to be successful, pro-active tools to engage with businesses and have enabled the Council to gain business involvement in other Council initiatives and projects.
- 5.2 Charter members have supported one of the Economic Development Strategy's main themes and the specific Key Ask of developing a Skelmersdale brand. Many Charter members have actively taken part in focus groups, one-to-one discussions as well as some members being key participants of the Task and Finish Group. Going forward these businesses will be members of the Skelmersdale Place Board.
- 5.3 As the Skelmersdale branding work continues and the Ambassador network evolves, the relationships developed with Charter members and businesses will be key to enrolling ambassadors to promote the positive Skelmersdale story which is critical to ensuring the long term success of the place. Local businesses will be the driving force behind Skelmersdale's future.
- 5.4 Apprenticeship employers, Charter members, as well as many other businesses, have actively taken part in the Council's business networking

events. Such events demonstrate the Council's commitment to businesses within the Borough and are an opportunity to demonstrate and promote the support available from the Council.

- 5.5 The Let's talk Apprenticeship Awards event, held every two years, is not only an opportunity to showcase the Borough's young talent and give recognition to the businesses that support apprentices, but it is also successful in engaging new businesses and promoting the business benefits of employing an apprentice which in turn can lead to further job creation. A number of recipients of the Council apprenticeship grant took part and reaped success in the most recent apprenticeship awards held in 2016.

6.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS/COMMUNITY STRATEGY

- 6.1 There are no significant sustainability impacts associated with this report and, in particular, no significant impact on crime and disorder. The article has no significant links with the Sustainable Community Strategy, however the above mentioned employment and skills initiatives are all working to increase business engagement and growth, partnership working and to increase the skills and employment opportunities for residents of the Borough.

7.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no direct financial / resource implications arising from this article as it is for information purposes only and the activities described are being met from existing resources.

8.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 This article is for information only and makes no recommendations. It therefore does not require a formal risk assessment.

Background Documents

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Article.

Appendices

- Appendix A - Employment Fact Sheet April 2016
Skills Fact Sheet April 2016.
- Appendix B - Let's talk Apprentices Grant Scheme, Employer Fact Sheet
March 2016.
- Appendix C - West Lancashire Apprenticeships – Employer Guide July 2016
- Appendix D - Let's talk Employment and Skills Charter