

EDUCATION, CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the meeting of the Education, Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel held on Thursday, 26 September 2024 at 5.30 pm at the Civic Offices, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Hannah Brent (in the Chair)

Councillors Yinka Adeniran
Brian Madgwick
Mary Vallely

48. Apologies for absence (AI 1)

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Leonie Oliver and Lee Tindal. Apologies were also received from Education Representatives Rob Sanders and Helen Reeder.

49. Declarations of members' interests (AI 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

50. Review into work experience opportunities for young people within PCC (AI 3)

Natasha Edmunds, Director of Corporate Services

Natasha explained that this year the service had recruited 26 new apprentices; this was to young people as well as for existing staff, across 54 different apprenticeship standards. Examples included chartered surveyors, business administration, IT and customer service. They are also working to introduce supported internships, and she is a corporate sponsor for that.

There were some real successes with last year's cohort with going on to secure permanent employment. The service also uses social value policy to extend that to external opportunities with the Council's supply chain. They recently ran an event with suppliers who are contracted with the Council along with beneficiaries and young people, some who have learning disabilities. This was an immense success and welcomed by all of the attendees. The workshop gave the opportunity for young people to talk about the barriers they faced with gaining work experience and employment. Employers who employ young people were able to share their experience with other suppliers about overcoming some of the barriers in terms of recruiting and supporting young people in the workplace. This sharing has resulted suppliers actively looking to recruit people and participating more widely in the supported internship programme. More work is planned to focus on other groups such as care experienced young people as well as other groups who struggle to gain work experience and employment. Amanda Percy, Post 16 Skills and Campaign Manager, added with that the supported internship programme having the

links to suppliers made a huge difference and two of the Council's organisations; Voi scooters and Mountjoy, are now on board with this. The Council try to focus on those suppliers based in the city. There is a list of all suppliers through procurement and the Council have good relationships with all of the contractors so they reach out to them through procurement colleagues. Ms Edmunds said the directorate works with John Attrill the Learning and Disability Champion at the Council to use his contacts to reach out. They also worked with some of the other services they commission such as the Minstead Trust.

The directorate also build into some of the recruitment policies and training, the framework for managers to help them in developing their approach to recruiting young people. Some of the feedback they have received from staff when looking at recruitment systems is the barriers of recruitment for young people and ethnic minority communities. They are working with the Race Equality Network to address these barriers in recruitment for those communities.

In the last year, the directorate have supported two A-level students interested in politics to shadow councillors and she had supported members with this. The service has also previously supported sixth form students to observe the count for the General Election.

Barriers

Ms Edmunds felt that these were around the support required for young people, their work readiness and how the organisation supports them. This was one of the successes of the supported internship programme as there are job coaches and people to support them on what to expect in the workplace. Managers in the organisation must balance supporting a young person in the workplace with delivering a service with tight financial constraints and capacity challenges.

In response to a question from the Chair, Amanda Percy said that they were keen for young people to come into the Council to meet with staff to see what they do or have an 'information interview' where they ask a few questions to a manager find out how they got into the role, what they like and do not like for example, this can sometimes be enough for young people to move on a step and decide if this is a career they want to pursue. Ms Edmunds said that this is something the directorate could look at doing. The capacity of the organisation is the biggest barrier to co-ordinate this activity. The other barrier is attracting young people to come and complete work experience in the Council as it is not always seen as the most interesting option and people do not always realise what a local authority does so there is work to be done around promoting the vast opportunities within the Council.

The supply chain opens out the opportunity for work experience across a broader range of areas of work that might be more attractive to young people. She felt that if directorates knew more about the careers that young people are interested in, they could facilitate more opportunities within the Council and across the city. There is already a good link in place with the progression advisors and team leaders. Ms Percy said that one of the things the

progression advisors have suggested is to host an 'experience week' at PCC where a group of young people can come in and receive some learning on the first day on protocols and health and safety. They will then spend a phased week with time in every directorate to see what interests them.

In response to a question, Mr Stoneman said that unfortunately the numbers of young people aged 16-18 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) has increased. The Council does have a strong record of monitoring those young people and each has a progression advisor. Ms Bushby added that children seeking asylum are unable to work until they receive their 'leave to remain' however they can carry out work experience.

Claire Watkins, Business Development and Projects Manager and Rachel Richardson, Performance and Change Officer

Claire Watkins presented the report. She said that the museums collections give an opportunity for young people to explore identity and advocacy, and they have had some successful projects such as the 'I Will Movement' where young people used the D Day collection to explore how they could advocate for themselves. For parks, there is a funded arrangement with the Princes Trust to have opportunities for young people to get involved in the regeneration project at Victoria Park to gain valuable skills.

The apprenticeships they have offered were listed in the report and the directorate are engaging with Amanda Percy on the supported internships piece.

As part of the contractual arrangement with BH live there is a commitment to offer work experience for young people and they have also had apprenticeships that have progressed to permanent employment. Andrew Simpson Watersports Centre have also offered opportunities for work experience as part of the Andrew Simpson foundation.

Ms Richardson said that the Detectives Programme run at the library had some neurodiverse adults who volunteering for this. She had been speaking to Lauren Bumstead about opening this out to care experienced young people for two hours a week. Regulatory Services have said they are keen to hold some inspirational taster sessions for young people, the library and museums services will be offering the same. They can then go on to do work experience in any areas of interest.

Barriers

Ms Watkins felt the main barrier was funding. Most of the opportunities so far had been for short term where they had advocated a bid from an external source such as the Arts Council, which has given the funding to enable an outreach worker. She felt they would struggle with longer term work experience opportunities as they would require a member of staff to support the apprentice. The service did offer Kickstarts but there was no social support with it so managers were drawn away from business as usual and services were being affected. Some managers are also nervous on how to deal with young people who may have complex needs. Ms Richardson said it

would be useful if there was some training for all managers in the Council on how to support these young people.

Ms Percy said that the Solent Careers Hub which is a partnership between Portsmouth, Southampton and Isle of Wight local authorities and they have done immersive days at the port. It would be good to transfer that model to the culture and regulatory services directorate as that brings staff to supervise.

Helen Atkinson, Director of Public Health

Ms Atkinson said that there were approximately 60 people in the directorate, 30 of these are in the wellbeing service which is frontline work with residents. They are a formal training site for the Wessex Deanery and Health Education England so there is some NHS funding for training available. Every quarter the directorate takes three F2 doctors from Queen Alexandra Hospital who they train for three months. They also have GP registrars who stay in the directorate for six months as well as public health training posts who come for a year. The directorate must provide educational supervisors for every one of those training posts which can be up to 15 people at one time.

In the last year the directorate received some additional funding and support from the Wessex Deanery for research on social mobility and barriers to careers and they worked with 10 young adults from an ethnic minority group or deprived community about what stops them getting employment. Some useful learning came from this. Most of the people did not want a career in public health but wanted careers in health and care. The directorate then worked with HR and the directorate now attend all the career fairs. As of this year the directorate started supporting students at Havant & Southdowns College doing their T levels in Health and Social Care and they are given the opportunity to carry out work experience with the Wellbeing service. There are also three Community Health and Wellbeing worker apprenticeships for a period of 18 months which are funded by Wessex Deanery. There are a further two graduate trainee posts for two years and they get their practitioner recognition and other qualifications. The service also works closely with the University of Portsmouth with the medical school and dental academy. There are 70 pharmacy students from the university getting work experience coming in to carry out blood pressure checks. The Health Determinants Research funding to ensure the Council becomes a research focussed organisation and enable training of the community to become researchers. Starting in January 2025 there is funding for six undergraduate placements, (two per year or three years).

In response to a question, Ms Atkinson said she would be happy to offer taster days to young people. Ms Bushby said that many of the young people are interested in mental health and this could be an opportunity for work experience. Ms Atkinson said this could be explored and roles could be ringfenced for care experienced young people. Ms Percy added that young people often do not know about the opportunities. Members felt that communications could be used to help promote these opportunities.

Chris Ward, Director of Finance & Resources

Mr Ward explained that in the main the posts are professional occupations however there are many training opportunities available through a particular career pathway. Currently there are six trainee accountants there are also accounting technicians, procurement and revenue and benefits all completing a professional qualification. He said the Council was atypical for this as most local authorities will recruit to their areas through the market. The graduate trainee programme is very structured and is for three and a half years. This is also offered to existing staff. There are also apprenticeship pathways which are based on turnover as there is limited funding available. When a post becomes vacant the directorate will consider whether an apprentice is an appropriate option. In the last 12 months the directorate have appointed at least two apprentices and all experiences with apprenticeships had been positive ones.

Apprenticeships had been offered in payroll, central financial planning, audit, accountancy. Four apprenticeships had been offered in the past two years and there had been take up of three. There are currently five trainee accountants.

Barriers

Mr Ward said these are funding as it is limited. Another barrier is that the nature of their work is very deadline orientated with constant cycles where there is intense activity at various times and during these times it is difficult to support an apprentice. This means they need to be selective around timing. There is an embedded training regime that has supervision attached to it.

Mr Ward said what we put out in terms of our contracts and the social value offer, that would be the biggest driver to offer employment to young people. Ms Percy agreed and said it was important not to underestimate the support required for employers to make it work.

In response to statistical neighbours having good practice, Ms Percy said that they talk regularly. Southampton is in a similar position but they have more unknown children and look at Portsmouth and want to do what we do. The traded services with schools and colleges in Portsmouth is also very strong.

In response to a question, Ms Daly said that some of the needs of the care experienced young adults are great and at times the trauma will appear so it was important to look at how they support employers with this alongside them getting the job done. They would like to do more work around this. Some of the progression advisors also work in the traded service and are all qualified to or working towards level 6. There are approximately 5 FTE but at least 3 of these are concentrating their work with the traded service. The professional advisors are partly funded through the cash limit within the Council but a significant amount is through the traded services with the schools and colleges and various grants. Their case loads have doubled due to the increase in NEET numbers so more FTEs would be welcomed to meet the demand. In response to a question Ms Daly said that employer patrons could be something to explore with external partners.

Jo Bennett, Assistant Director Housing Need and Supply

Play and youth service

Jo said she felt the strongest practice in terms of career pathways was in youth and play services and also in building services, where they have focussed hard on creating the professionals needed for the future. Within youth and play the team have been helping to write a play work apprenticeship programme. There have been four school aged work experience placements in the past two years within youth and play. They are also listed for opportunities on the supported internship programme and they have regular university placements for those studying youth work; there have been approximately 15 in the last two years. As a service they are looking at whether they can offer T levels in childcare. Play and youth have employed one play worker apprentice and have plans to advertise more posts as apprenticeship opportunities when they have capacity. There are currently 10 apprentices, 9 existing staff members and one new apprentice to the service. With regard to university students 20-25 students were offered opportunities within play and youth. One of the barriers can therefore be professional boundaries and the need to consider the appropriateness of a placement. They are also difficult careers to come into at a young age.

Housing, Neighbourhoods and Buildings

The team are responsible for all Council buildings, leasehold properties as well as the commercial properties; there are about 18,000 properties. Comserv offer 15 work placements per year, Mountjoy offer four work placements per year and Liberty gas offer two work placements per year. The buildings repair service also offers one placement per year. There are a number of technical professions and one of the things that could be done is to offer a 'look/see' for young people to come into the directorate to see every area and then be told the options you would need to choose to go forward with the career. This is something being looked into.

There are currently 13 building surveyor degree apprentices, two surveying technician apprenticeships, one business administrator apprenticeship and one architect degree apprenticeship. Last year an apprenticeship was created in the homelessness service which has been extremely successful. She felt that the directorate was very good at accommodating young people into posts but felt more could be done in sharing the experiences of the apprentices to encourage more into the service. She felt that the Council could also support young people more in work readiness. There was a piece that one of the contractors had done where the young people were asked just three interview questions and she thought this was a brilliant initiative that the Council could use. She added that the directorate does not have ring fenced placements for care experienced young people but could look at this as well as the 'menu' of options available in the directorate to show young people what is out there.

The meeting concluded at 7.00 pm.

Councillor Hannah Brent
Chair