

CABINET

6 FEBRUARY 2018

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR 18-25 YEAR OLDS (INCLUDING APPRENTICESHIPS)

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Rodney Chambers OBE, Inward Investment,
Strategic Regeneration and Partnerships
Councillor Jane Chitty, Planning, Economic Growth and
Regulation
Councillor Adrian Gulvin, Resources
Councillor Andrew Mackness, Children's Services (Lead
Member)
Councillor Martin Potter, Educational Attainment and
Improvement

Report from: Richard Hicks, Director Regeneration, Culture, Environment
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Summary

This report asks the Cabinet to consider the final report of the in-depth Task Group review on Employment Opportunities for 18-25 Year Olds (including apprenticeships).

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 Under Chapter 4 of the Constitution (Part 5 – Overview and Scrutiny Rules - paragraph 21.1 (xviii), each overview and scrutiny committee has the responsibility to appoint time limited Task Groups to undertake in-depth reviews within the overall programme of reviews agreed each year by the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to make recommendations to the Council and Leader and Cabinet as appropriate. The topic of this review is within the remit of this Committee and the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Membership of the Task Group has been comprised of Members drawn from each of these committees.

1.2 The recommendations arising from the review are consistent with the Council's Policy Framework.

2. Background

2.1 In June 2011 the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to exercise a more pro-active role than previously in prioritising the programme of in-depth scrutiny review work. This followed a Council decision that a maximum of three reviews or themed meetings can be undertaken annually across all four Overview and Scrutiny Committees, in light of shrinking capacity across the organisation. This represented a shift from the previous position of multiple Task Groups, with no fixed timelines, running at any one time.

2.2 In line with best practice, the Committee also decided to adopt a more systematic approach to the selection of topics, with nominations submitted by each Committee, taking into account suggestions and advice from Directors and Deputy / Assistant Directors.

2.3 In December 2015 the Business Support O&S Committee agreed the following programme of Task Group topics:

- Review two (to follow the Task Group on Housing) - **How far has Medway gone in developing a dementia friendly community?**

This review reported to Cabinet in May 2017.

- Review three - **Employment Opportunities for 18-21 year olds (including apprenticeships)**

It was subsequently decided that the age cohort should be extended from 18-21 to 18-25 to better ensure the needs of vulnerable young people (who are supported up to the age of 25) are appropriately reflected in the work of the Task Group.

2.4 The Membership of the Task Group comprised Councillors Royle (Chairman), Gilry, Josie Iles, Johnson and Williams.

3. Scope of the Review

3.1 On 19 June 2017 the Task Group met to set the scope and determine the key lines of enquiry for this review. The Task Group had been set up to consider progress made by the Council in working with local and regional stakeholders to deliver a joined up approach to supporting young people aged 18 to 25 into employment and apprenticeship opportunities. In addition it evaluated the Council's progress in developing a "One Council" approach to promoting and delivering the skills and employability agenda in Medway.

3.2 The Task Group agreed four key lines of enquiry:

1. To consider the **NEET rate for 18-25 year olds** in Medway and the contributory factors.
2. To evaluate the **Council's role as community leader** in terms of a Medway Skills agenda working with partners locally and regionally to encourage the growth of the local job market and deliver outcomes around skills, training and employment for 18-25 year olds.
3. To evaluate the Council's **performance as an employer - 'leading by example'**.
4. To consider action required to address the particular **needs of vulnerable young people** including looked after children and those with disabilities in the 18-25 age range.

4. Methodology

4.1 The Task Group was briefed on the context for the review in terms of the legislative background, current national policy and the landscape at a regional and local level. In addition Members were provided with a range of background reading.

4.2 The Task Group was fortunate to be able to draw on the high quality evidence already recently gathered through extensive stakeholder engagement in the preparation of the Council's 16-19 Strategy, much of which was relevant to this review. The report of the recent Task Group on Support for Care Leavers was also valuable.

4.3 The Task Group met with a number of senior officers, young people from the Young People's Disability Group and also with apprentices currently working for the Council and former apprentices. The Task Group also spoke with representatives from the Department of Work and Pensions, Mid Kent College, Skillnet, Bradfields Academy and the Medway Parent and Carer's Forum. In addition, evidence relating to quality of careers advice in Medway's secondary schools was invited from the Regional Schools Commissioner.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations of the Task Group

5.1 The Task Group has reviewed the wide range of national policy initiatives and the significant level of activity underway across the Council and with regional and local partners to secure closer links between education providers and business, to support young people in the transition from education to employment and to develop effective interventions to bring down the number young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEETS). The key finding of this review is that it is imperative to now bring all these plans and initiatives together and develop a more cohesive and collaborative approach to ensure the intended outcomes are achieved. The Task Group concluded that the soon to be established Medway Skills Board is best placed to do this and the Cabinet is asked to refer a number of recommendations arising from this review to the Board for attention as a priority.

5.2 The recommendations of the Task Group are set out in full in the Appendix (see Supplementary Agenda No.1).

- 5.3 The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the report at its meeting held on 11 January 2018, the comments from this Committee are set out in section 6.
- 5.4 After the report was considered by the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee the Department of Work and Pensions highlighted that some minor changes they had requested to the summary of the evidence they had given had inadvertently not been incorporated. As a result the report was amended to take on board these comments.
- 5.5 The Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the report at its meeting on 23 January 2018, the comments from this Committee are set out in section 7.

6. Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 11 January 2018

- 6.1 The Committee received the final report of the in depth Task Group review on Employment Opportunities for 18-25 Year Olds (including apprenticeships).
- 6.2 The Committee thanked all the witnesses who gave evidence, in particular the young people as well as officers who had supported the Task Group. The Committee commended the Task Group on the production of a comprehensive report and raised a number of points and questions including:
- 6.2.1 **External witnesses** – A Member commented that the Task Group had hoped to receive evidence from a mainstream secondary headteacher, however this was not possible. The Director of Children and Adults Services advised the Committee that a Medway Education Partnership had been established and would have representatives from Medway headteachers associations and the further education college. In addition to the Skills Board, this group would also take particular interest in the work of the Task Group and comments of the Committee.
- 6.2.3 **Careers advice** – With reference to the careers advice provided at secondary schools, Members commented that schools needed to improve the quality of the advice given to young people. A Member highlighted that Parliamentary Select Committees had raised concerns in relation to careers advice and the Chairman of the Medway Youth Council also noted that the British Youth Council had recognised this was a national issue.
- 6.2.4 **Financial support for apprentices** – In relation to the areas examined by the Task Group, a Member suggested that financial support for young apprentices should be examined, owing to the potential impact this could have on young people as they reach the age of 16. Whilst referring to a particular case in which grant support was withdrawn from a young person by the Department of Work and Pensions, while the young person had been undertaking a low paid apprenticeship, a Member suggested financial support should be improved. Members suggested this could be taken forward by the Skills Board.
- 6.2.5 **Housing Task Group** – A Member identified a link between the outcomes of this Task Group and the Housing Task Group with regard to schools promoting apprenticeships to close the skills shortage gap.

6.2.6 The Committee noted the report and recommendations made by the Employment Opportunities Task Group, set out at appendix A to the report and agreed to recommend it to Cabinet on the 6 February with the following comments:

- a) the Cabinet is recommended to refer the recommendations arising from the Task Group to the Skills Board for attention as a priority; and
- b) the Cabinet is recommended to ask the Skills Board to examine the financial support for young apprentices.

7. Regeneration, Culture, Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 23 January 2018

7.1 The Assistant Director Physical and Cultural Regeneration introduced the report from the in-depth Task Group review on Employment Opportunities for 18-25 Year Olds (including apprenticeships).

7.2 As this was a cross-cutting Task Group, a copy of the report had been considered by the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 11 January 2018 and an extract from the minutes of that meeting had been circulated prior to the meeting of this Committee.

7.3 The Committee thanked both Councillors Josie Iles and Gilry who had taken part in the Task Group as representatives from the Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee and expressed their appreciation to all the witnesses who had given evidence.

7.4 The Committee was advised that the Task Group had agreed four lines of enquiry as set out in paragraph 3.2 of the report.

7.5 The Assistant Director Physical and Cultural Regeneration advised the Committee that an Officer Group, chaired by the Chief Executive had been established to review the recommendations of the Task Group and the recently established Medway Skills Board, would be providing a comprehensive joined up approach to driving up the skills of communities in Medway and, by doing so, support the area's economic growth and physical regeneration. The Medway Skills Board would also be working closely with key business suppliers, in addition to schools, academies, colleges and universities.

7.6 The Committee commended the Task Group on the production of a comprehensive report and raised a number of points and questions including:

7.6.1 **Careers advice and financial support for apprentices** – A Member referred to the comments of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 11 January 2018 concerning the quality of careers advice given to young people and the need to examine the financial support given to young apprentices. She suggested that careers advice should be inclusive and not solely aimed at following an academic path and that increased financial support should be made available for young people to attend interviews.

- 7.6.2 In addition, she drew attention to the need to reassure parents of young people with SEND (special educational needs and disability) as to the opportunities available for their children.
- 7.6.3 Another Member suggested that careers advice should be provided independently, as some schools/academies may wish to retain pupils rather than recommend that they progress onto college. Therefore, the involvement of an independent source of careers advice would be beneficial.
- 7.6.4 The Assistant Director Physical and Cultural Regeneration reassured the Committee that the Medway Skills Board would be giving consideration to the issue of careers advice. He also referred to the National Career Strategy which, not only enabled provision for Enterprise Advisors, but also ensured that young people could have up to seven encounters within a business environment to enable them to experience different types of work.
- 7.6.5 **The level of NEETS in Medway** – A Member referred to the fact that 40% of NEETS were concentrated in 4 Wards across Medway and asked whether the Medway Skills Board would be taking any action to identify where NEETS were located and whether there were any particular reasons why there were high concentrations of NEETS in these particular areas. He also asked whether there was any action that the Council could take to help these individuals.
- 7.6.6 The Assistant Director Physical and Cultural Regeneration confirmed that this would form part of the work of the Medway Skills Board.
- 7.6.7 **Retention of young skilled workers in Medway** – A Member drew attention to the need for the Medway Skills Board to identify ways in which young skilled workers could be encouraged to remain in Medway once they had obtained their qualifications or completed training.
- 7.6.8 The Assistant Director Physical and Cultural Regeneration advised upon funds available to provide apprentice opportunities.
- 7.6.9 **Schools suitable for young people in wheelchairs** – Referring to page 55 of the Task Group Report, a Member drew attention to the fact that Rivermead was not the only school in Medway with wheelchair access.
- 7.6.10 **Lack of data for 18 – 25 year olds** – A Member expressed concern as to the limited NEET data available for 18 – 25 year olds. He drew attention to information set out in paragraph 6.5.1 of the Task Group report and expressed concern that as this data was limited to 16 and 17 year olds. Therefore this did not provide a true reflection of the total numbers of NEETS.
- 7.6.11 In response, it was reported that nationally, data for NEETS was only collected for 16 – 17 year olds.
- 7.6.12 The Director of Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation and Deputy Chief Executive gave an assurance that the Medway Skills Board would be looking at NEETS more widely than just 16 and 17 year olds.
- 7.6.13 **Employment opportunities within Medway** – The Assistant Director Physical and Cultural Regeneration informed the Committee that the Medway Skills Board was

also investigating the reskilling of the adult population of Medway and he reminded the Committee that the various regeneration projects within Medway and the surrounding areas, would increase opportunities in the field of construction.

7.6.14 The Committee:

- a) agreed that the report and recommendations made by the Employment Opportunities for 18 – 25 year olds (Including apprenticeships) Task Group be supported and recommended to Cabinet on 6 February 2018;
- b) noted that the Assistant Director Physical and Cultural Regeneration will provide the Member concerned with further information, as to the geographical spread of 18 – 25 year old NEETS and more information as to the work that is being undertaken to address the situation for these individuals via the Officer Skills Board; and
- c) extended appreciation to Councillors Josie Iles and Gilry for their involvement in the Task Group on behalf of this Committee.

8. Risk Management

- 8.1 There are no risks arising from the report. However, adoption by Cabinet of the recommendations would lead to various options being explored and, at that point, any risks would need to be assessed.

9. Implications for Looked After Children

- 9.1 One of the review's key lines of enquiry was to consider action required to address the particular needs of vulnerable young people including looked after children. Several of the Task Group's recommendations seek to improve the employment and training opportunities for this group.
- 9.2 The Council's Looked After Children Strategy 2015-2018 and the SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2016 - 2020 also helped inform the findings of the Task Group.

10. Financial implications

- 10.1 Any service improvements as a result of the recommendations of this report will need to be delivered from within existing budgets. The work of the Task Group was supported by Democratic Services and officers from the Children and Adult Services and Regeneration, Culture and Environment Directorates.
- 10.2 There is a small budget held by Democratic Services to meet the cost of any visits, stakeholder events or expenses incurred by expert witnesses associated with the review. There were no costs incurred during this review.
- 10.3 Task Groups are advised to formulate recommendations in the context of the prevailing financial climate. The work of this Task Group was framed to complement rather than duplicate work already underway.

11. Legal implications

- 11.1 Medway Council has a legal obligation under section 149 Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality, and foster good relations between those with a protected characteristic (pregnancy and maternity, age discrimination, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil

partnerships, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it. To assist the Council in fulfilling these legal obligations a Diversity Impact Assessment is attached to the report of the Task Group.

- 11.2 There are no other legal implications arising from the recommendations. However, officers may need to consider the legal implications of some recommendations as the proposals are developed.

12. Equality

- 12.1 A Diversity Impact Assessment is attached to the report of the Task Group.

13. Recommendations

- 13.1 The Cabinet is asked to consider the comments from the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the comments from the Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee as set out in sections 6 and 7 of the report respectively.

- 13.2 The Cabinet is asked agree the recommendations made by the Employment Opportunities Task Group set out in Appendix A to the report.

14. Suggested reasons for decisions

- 14.1 The recommendations aim to bring together the wide range of national policy initiatives and activities undertaken across the Council and with regional and local partners to develop a more cohesive and collaborative approach to ensure the intended outcomes are achieved. This includes securing closer links between education providers and business, supporting young people in the transition from education to employment and to developing effective interventions to bring down the number young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEETS).

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Appendices

Appendix A – Report from the Employment Opportunities Task Group (see Supplementary Agenda No.1)

Background Papers

The background papers relied on in producing the report from the Task Group are set out within the main report.