

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

This matter is not a Key Decision within the Council's definition and has not been included in the relevant Forward Plan.

Report of the Executive
Director (Place)

RESPONSE TO THE SCRUTINY TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT ON 'WORK READINESS'

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To respond to the findings and recommendations of the 'Work Readiness' Task and Finish Group (TFG) regarding what is being done to help people in Barnsley to be 'work ready'.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet considers the conclusions, suggestions and recommendations set out in section 5.

3. Introduction/Context

- 3.1 Barnsley Council has a high level of ambition and aspiration to make the borough a thriving and unique place to live and work;

- A brighter future where people achieve their potential
- A better Barnsley where our residents think and feel we are making a difference together
- Working together with our partners and communities

Our three priorities to help us reach our vision are:

- Growing the economy
- Improving people's potential and achievement
- Changing the relationship between the Council and the community

Skills play an essential role in delivering this vision. Our employment and skills strategy "More and Better Jobs" aims to build the skills we need to support a thriving and vibrant economy which gives Barnsley employers the skills they need to grow locally, regionally and globally and Barnsley people the skills they need to gain and secure sustainable employment now and in the future.

We want to make sure there are more job opportunities for Barnsley residents, to help the local economy provide the role models for young people and reduce the extent of worklessness and poverty across the borough. And, we

want to ensure there are better jobs for people to progress into and enable Barnsley residents to progress their careers within Barnsley.

We are supporting our economy to grow and diversify and are seeing progress; our employment rate has improved significantly, out-performing city region averages and nearly closing the gap with national averages. We have one of the highest rates of new business formation in the country. Equally there is progress relating to skills and employability; we have reducing rates of adult and youth unemployment and significant falls in 16 to 18 year old Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).

However, challenges remain, and although skill levels and GCSE attainment are improving, they remain a concern and the economy is still characterised by lower skills and lower than average workplace earning than elsewhere in the city region.

Despite rising employment levels, there are still high numbers of people without work. These people often face multiple barriers, including with no or low skills or long term health conditions. In work many lack workplace progression or are under-employed. We also want to reduce our level of NEETs further.

“More and Better Jobs” sets out strategic priorities and actions on skills and routes to employment to build on our strengths, address our challenges and accelerate progress.

“More and Better Jobs” focuses on embedding a shared ambition in peoples, communities and businesses not just for any job, but for better jobs that support Barnsley’s businesses and help people to thrive in the long term.

4. Response to What the Task and Finish Group Found

- 4.1 We welcome the report findings and are pleased to receive the TFGs positive comments. The constructive suggestions will help us further shape and develop our strategy for employment and skills.
- 4.2 Our Employment and Skills Strategy “*More and Better Jobs*” (2016 - 2021) is designed to:
 - *Identify the key challenges facing Barnsley on employment and skills;*
 - *Identify what is in place, any gaps in provision, and what is needed to tackle the education and skills deficit that is holding people back from getting into and progressing in work and in doing so, drive productivity improvements;*
 - *Set out the strategic priorities and actions on skills for business and more and better jobs.*

The headline measures of success are that by 2021:

- There is stronger ambition across businesses, organisations and people of all ages;
- All schools and colleges have excellent business engagement and employability activity;
- The proportion of people claiming out of work benefits is cut by a third;
- Workforce skills, progression and earnings are increased, with the gaps to national average on NVQ Level 3+ and NVQ Level 4+ qualifications reduced by a third.

The strategy aims to *“To embed a shared ambition, not just for any jobs, but for better jobs that grow Barnsley’s businesses in the long term.”* It identified significant gaps and challenges in its review of current and planned skills delivery and recommends 4 priorities:-

1. To raise the ambition of Barnsley business, institutions, people and communities.
2. To improve education, employability and work-readiness.
3. To improve routes into work.
4. To enhance business skills and progression within the workplace.

It aims to drive progress in Barnsley on 2 fronts:

- Ensuring that local people have the skills and aptitudes that will allow them to work and progress.
- Working with businesses to ensure that they have access to the skills they need in order to compete and grow

The core focus is on embedding a shared ambition not just for any job, but for better jobs that support Barnsley’s businesses and help people to thrive in the long term. The key objectives are:

- Worklessness is reduced and everyone has the skills they need to get a job.
- Careers and employment advice better match the needs of Barnsley’s businesses.
- Young people gain expansive, high quality training through an enhanced traineeship/apprenticeship offer.
- A strong platform of basic, intermediate and higher level skills unlocks enterprise and employment growth.
- Businesses are confident the local workforces will be available to help them grow.
- Businesses will have the best chance of getting the right staff with the right skills and attitude at the right time.
- Businesses are developing their workforce and raising demand for an investment in skills.
- Low paid/low skilled workers, those who earn less than 2 thirds of the median hourly pay, progress in their careers.

5. Response to Recommendations Made by the Task and Finish Group

5.1 Recommendation 1: BMBC and Local Employers to Offer Work Experience Placements

To help people gain skills and experience to secure long-term employment, they need to be given the opportunity to practice and develop relevant skills. Many job seekers may have been out of work for a number of years and have not had the opportunity to experience being in modern work places. These placements need to be supportive, thereby enabling individuals to improve their confidence and skills.

We would welcome this recommendation – “More and Better Jobs” has been developed in partnership with a wide range of stakeholders in Barnsley and the City Region. This document recognises there are too few work experience opportunities and identifies a need for more collaborations between business and educational institutions to develop opportunities for young people to improve their work readiness. It also proposes developing an over 25yr employment programme which includes tailored work placements linking to local vacancies.

Preparing young people and adults who are economically inactive for the workplace is important and any initiatives to support this would be welcomed.

The recommendation reflects the recent statutory guidance recommendation for schools to build strong links with employers in order to boost young people’s attitudes and employability skills as well as inform them about the range of roles and opportunities available. In addition, the 2014 announcement of the introduction of the new careers and enterprise company for schools will help to broker better relationships between schools and employers in order to ensure young people aged 12-18 get the ‘inspiration and guidance they need for success in working life’.

In her review of vocational education (2011), Professor Alison Wolf described the unique role that work experience can have in helping young people develop employability skills and the value that employers place on this when they are assessing young people for employment. Wolf recommended increasing work-related provision for students aged 16 years and older. This is a critical stage for every young person because they are close to entering the labour market. Many young people appreciate the importance of improving their work-related skills in order to pursue their career aspirations.

That the study programmes and traineeships, introduced in 2013 in the wake of Wolf’s review, have work experience as a statutory component may well have had an indirect impact on the availability of work experience placements for pupils in school. But it is also worth noting that schools no longer have a statutory duty to provide a work experience placement for their pupils.

To counterbalance this, through the work of the Sheffield City Region Enterprise Adviser Pilot, schools are being supported to highlight areas of current need and be linked with employers and programmes that would be of benefit, along with the IKIC Employability Challenge. The Employability Challenge offered through IKIC, provides opportunities for young people to develop their employability skills through interventions with businesses. Programmes such as the IKIC Internship Programme, the IKIC Day Out, the Made in China Logistics Event and STEM Careers Talks, whilst not being able to offer large scale access to work experience, does provide opportunities for young people to engage with real employers and the world of work to help develop their career aspirations and work readiness.

SMT recently endorsed 'Pathways to Success' which offers a range of opportunities within BMBC to support young people to develop their employability and transferable skills. It includes supported placements, Council-wide traineeships, increases to the apprenticeship programme and development of undergraduate placements and graduate internships. It establishes specific support for vulnerable young people such as people with Special Education Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND), Care Leavers and Looked After Children.

Authorisation has been obtained for the creation of two supported apprenticeship opportunities funded through Future Council as a contribution to the offer within Pathways to Success for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to gain paid work.

In addition BMBC will offer 3 Supported Internship placement opportunities and plans to develop 1 each within our supply chain partners NPS, Berneslai Homes and NORSE. A supported internship is one type of study programme specifically aimed at young people aged 16 to 24 who have a statement of special educational needs, a Learning Difficulty Assessment, or an EHC plan, who want to move into employment.

In time it is anticipated that the opportunities created will be open to adults of all ages to ensure that job seekers who may have been out of work for a number of years or short-term unemployed and interested in upskilling and re-training are also able to benefit.

5.2 Recommendation 2: A Map of local Employment Support Services is Made Available and Shared with Stakeholders

During their investigation, the TFG were made aware of work currently being undertaken to map current employment support services and provide recommendations for improvements. The TFG were able to contribute to this exercise by providing their knowledge of services from this investigation and would recommend that when finalised, this document is shared with all the services listed as well as job seekers. This document will also need to be updated on an on-going basis.

We would welcome this recommendation - “More and Better Jobs” proposes greater coordination between employment stakeholders through an Employment and Skills Board. This will provide a forum through which such information could be coordinated and disseminated.

5.3 Recommendation 3: Need to Ensure we Secure Long Term Funding and Maximise Opportunities From the Proposed Sheffield City Region Devolution Deal

To utilise resources effectively, it is important that existing, established services are supported to continue as they have built networks and trust amongst local communities. Support should be provided to local community groups to bid for contracts, including assisting them with application forms and ensuring they have appropriate policies in place to be eligible for contracts. Many individuals facing barriers to employment prefer to seek independent advice and support as they may be reluctant to approach statutory services as they fear this may have negative implications. It is also important that commissioners recognise and appreciate the number of steps that individuals need to progress through to gain employment. Therefore, without investment in early intervention and personalised support to help people gain confidence and overcome personal barriers, they will never progress into employment.

We would welcome this recommendation - “More and Better Jobs” promotes close alignment with the city region and proposes active contribution to the development of city region priorities and design of interventions.

Significant financial resources for skills development have now been devolved to Sheffield and Leeds City Region and it is likely more will be devolved or co-commissioned with city regions including employment support, but at the same time the overall funding is reducing. Aligning the strategy to an engagement with city region partners will be vital to access the financial resources needed to support the ambitions of the plan and to ensure that local businesses and individuals can maximise the opportunities these resources present.

We need to ensure we have the capacity and appropriate structures in place to maximise these opportunities and also to ensure we have the infrastructure in place to have a robust, outcome focussed commissioning process in place that targets resources where they will have the greatest impact.

For example BMBC is working closely with SCR on the development and implementation of the Health and Work Programme (replacing Work programme 2 in 2017) and the development of a pilot to look at supporting people to gain life skills to enable them to look for work.

5.4 Recommendation 4: Opportunities to Support People trying to Obtain Employment Should be Listed as Part of BMBC's Employer Supported Volunteering Scheme

Council employees have a wealth of knowledge and skills which they could share with local job seekers, including IT skills, how to complete applications as well as employability skills required in the workplace.

We would welcome this recommendation – we hope that part of this will be addressed through 'Pathways to Success' however BMBC staff could volunteer to mentor / coach and support job clubs etc. in community settings plus continue to support work placements / experience within the council.

5.5 Recommendation 5: We recommend An All Member Information Brief (AMIB) is Held so that ALL Members are Aware of and Can Share the Available Opportunities With their Communities

This will help to raise awareness of the employment support opportunities available so that Members are better able to promote opportunities in their wards. All Members need to promote that there are jobs available in Barnsley and be aware of the locally used 'ABC' terminology that 'Any job' can then lead to a 'Better job' and then a 'Career'.

We would welcome this recommendation - progression into and in work is a key aim for "More and Better Jobs", supporting the progression of people through 4 priorities - Raising ambitions, Getting ready for work, Getting into work and Getting on in work.

Following the formal adoption of "More and Better Jobs" by Cabinet in mid-May we would welcome the opportunity to support and facilitate an all-member information brief (AMIB) so that all Members are aware of and can share the available opportunities with their communities.

We would also suggest information briefing sessions for the Area Councils and would be guided by Members as to who else would benefit from such a briefing session.

5.6 Recommendation 6: The OSC facilitates consideration of BMBC's annual Adult Skills and Community Learning Service (ASCL) Self Assessment Review (SAR)

To assist with the governance of the ASCL service, in-line with the review they undertake for their funding and Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) requirements, following a visit to the service, the TFG reviewed their 2014/15 SAR. The ongoing review of this service will enable Members to be aware of services being delivered. This will also include the important monitoring of the uptake of 'wellbeing' and 'hobby' courses, which facilitate engagement with people, improve their confidence and encourage them to undertake formal skill qualifications and improve employability skills.

We would welcome this recommendation – the engagement of Scrutiny, ‘check + challenge’ and feedback this year was extremely useful – moving forward it would support the annual SAR process and ensure there is ‘good governance’ arrangements in place in regard to OFSTED requirements.

Devolution of the Adult Education Budget will lead to the prioritisation of courses to engage adults and provide the skills and learning they need to equip them for work, an apprenticeship or other learning. As the TFG recognised, learning can also facilitate wider wellbeing and support adults to participate fully in life and community therefore contributing to the development of strong and thriving communities. The Service would therefore welcome an ongoing challenge in relation to ensuring breadth and depth to its curriculum offer to ensure it meets the whole range of local learning needs and is not inadvertently limited to a narrow focus on those learning programmes eligible for funding subsidy.

5.7 Recommendation 7: The OSC Facilitates a TFG to Investigate How Barnsley Can Increase the Availability of Higher Level Skills and Jobs

Having previously considered ‘work-readiness’ skill development and employment support opportunities for young people and adults in the Borough, the TFG recommends the OSC investigates what is being done to: assist residents to obtain higher level skills; make suitable employment opportunities available; as well as consider what barriers may be faced in obtaining these jobs. The TFG recognises that the quality of jobs and availability of a skilled workforce is important for the Borough’s economic growth.

We would welcome this recommendation - “More and Better Jobs” promotes higher level skills across the spectrum. From increasing GCSE attainment and reducing the number of adults without basic skills to increasing the proportions of people with level 3 and level 4+ skills in the population and workforce. Activities will include supporting and building the ambition of more young people to study at HE level, the increase in higher apprenticeships at level 3 and level 4+. It will promote business investment in higher skills and proposes collaborations across BMBC and other employers to develop progressive routes to higher level employment.

Internally, within BMBC, “Pathways to Success” will also support the availability of higher level skills by supporting undergraduates and graduates to gain employment experience to integrate into the labour market and expanding the apprenticeship offer to include Higher Apprenticeships.

6. Implications for Local People/Service Users

As outlined earlier there are significant positive implications for residents of Barnsley if the More and Better Jobs Plan is successfully implemented.

7. Financial Implications

7.1 There are no immediate financial implications arising directly from this report.

8. Employee Implications

8.1 There are no immediate employee implications arising directly from this report.

9. Communications Implications

9.2 There are no immediate communications implications arising directly from this report.

10. Consultations

10.1 Wide consultation has taken place both internally and externally.

10.2 External consultation has included the Barnsley Economic Partnership (BEP), Stronger Communities Partnership, local businesses, members and officers of the Sheffield City Region LEP and Combined Authority, schools, skills and education providers from further education, community and adult learning and work-based training providers, the Skills Funding Agency and Department of Work and Pensions.

10.3 Internal consultation has included colleagues from the Directorates of PEOPLE, PLACE and COMMUNITIES.

11. The Corporate Plan and the Council's Performance Management Framework

11.1 The responses and proposals in this report are consistent with Council's Corporate Plan as it directly contributes towards the Future Council ambitions of people achieving their potential, stronger more resilient communities and a thriving and vibrant economy by raising aspirations, increasing skills and supporting people to access more and better jobs.

11.2 The More and Better Jobs Business Plan will set out a clear set of metrics by which its overall success will be defined through indicators feeding into the Council's performance monitoring system.

12. Tackling Health Inequalities

12.1 Ill health is identified in the More and Better Jobs Plan as a major cause of economic inactivity, entrenched worklessness and a barrier to full engagement in the labour market. Recognition of this factor and actions to support people tackle their health barriers and progress into and in employment will help to address some of the long-term causes of structural health inequality.

13. Risk Management Issues

- 13.1 Barnsley starts from a low base position in terms of its key economic and skills indicators, namely to reduce the numbers of people with no qualifications to and increase Level 2 and Level 3 achievement, simply to reach Yorkshire and Humber average. Moving forward however, the borough needs to accelerate skills development in order to keep abreast of wider change such as the introduction of the living wage.
- 13.2 Central budgets for skills are diminishing with increasing emphasis being placed on self-funding for higher level skills. It will be important to maintain and build engagement with city region partners to ensure the borough continues to access the funding to support skills progression, but also to ensure financial capacity remains to enable people to develop from a low skills and wage base.

14. Health, Safety and Emergency Resilience Issues

- 14.1 There are no immediate implications arising directly from this report.

15. Compatibility with the European Convention on Human Rights

- 15.1 The proposal is fully compliant with the European Convention on Human Rights.

16. Promoting Equality, Diversity and Social Inclusion

- 16.1 The responses and proposal includes proactive support to promote social inclusion and to support people to address barriers to labour market participation and access to employment.
- 16.2 Some people face significant barriers to employment and skills. The strategy will ensure that the needs of these groups are fully incorporated – identifying any gaps in current service delivery, appropriate priorities for future focus and activities to ensure the strategy benefits all sections of the community. In particular the strategy will consider the needs of:
- Disabled people
 - People with long term health conditions
 - People recovering from mental health
 - BME people, including refugees and new arrivals to the Borough (eg from Eastern Europe)
 - Young people leaving care

17. Reduction of Crime and Disorder

17. The prison population has a higher proportion of individuals with low basic skills; an issue which contributes toward crime and disorder and makes integration into labour market more difficult upon release. Helping people to progress their skills at all levels will therefore provide an indirect benefit to reducing crime and disorder.

18. Background Papers

More and Better Jobs Plan – full version.

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Financial Implications /

Consultation

(To be signed by senior Financial Services officer where no financial implications)