

AD HOC SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel was held on 13 February 2017.

PRESENT: Councillors Sharrocks (Chair), Davison, J Hobson, Lewis, Mawston, McGloin, G Purvis, D Rooney and Taylor.

PRESENT AS OBSERVERS: Councillor P Purvis.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Apprentice A – Middlesbrough Council
Apprentice B – Middlesbrough Council
Apprentice C – Middlesbrough Council
R McGurrell – HR Manager, Acklam Grange School.

OFFICERS: C Lunn.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: There were no apologies for absence.

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no Declarations of Interest made at this point in the meeting.

1 MINUTES - AD HOC SCRUTINY PANEL - 16 JANUARY 2017

The Minutes of the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 16 January 2017 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

As per the agreed actions detailed on page 6, a copy of Middlesbrough Community Learning's (MCL) Ofsted inspection report had been circulated to Members, and the Community Learning Service Manager had provided statistical information in respect of the YEI programme, which had also been circulated to Members.

NOTED**2 APPRENTICESHIPS - FURTHER INFORMATION**

The potential terms of reference for the investigation were tabled for Members' consideration; these were as follows:

1. To investigate the process of how apprentices are recruited by the Council.
2. To examine the number of apprentices employed within the Council and the service areas and costs involved.
3. To consider how the different apprenticeship programmes are managed and objectives achieved.
4. To examine how the Council's apprenticeship programmes link in with wider organisations and businesses across Teesside.

Members agreed that terms 2, 3 and 4 were suitable and did not require any amendments.

Regarding term 1, Members requested that an additional reference be made to incorporate the retention of apprentices. The amended term would read as follows:

'1. To investigate the processes of how apprentices are recruited and retained by the Council.'

A Member queried the available support/guidance that would be offered to an apprentice if a permanent position within the Local Authority was not available to them. It was agreed that the Democratic Services Officer would contact the Apprentice and Workskills Co-ordinator for a response to this, and circulate it to the Panel Members once received.

The Chair welcomed R McGurrell, HR Manager at Acklam Grange School, and three current Middlesbrough Council apprentices to the meeting. Copies of case study reports pertaining to the three apprentices were tabled for Members' perusal.

The Panel was informed that a number of apprentices currently worked at Acklam Grange School. Apprenticeship opportunities within the school were advertised via two pathways: the first was through the placement of advertisements on local job websites, which would have resulted in applications being returned directly to the school, and the second was through partnership working with MCL. MCL placed recruitment advertisements on apprentice recruitment sites, and also forwarded details of potential applicants (that were held on file) to the school.

The Chair clarified to the representative that the Panel had sought information in relation to the school's students, and the work that was being undertaken to raise awareness of apprenticeships and the opportunities that existed for them within Middlesbrough. In response, it was indicated that the school organised an annual Shine Event; a large variety of employers attended to operate stalls and showcase the different apprenticeships that they offered. All Year 11 students attended this event. The representative advised that any specific queries relating to the work undertaken by Acklam Grange, in this regard, could be forwarded to an appropriate person within the school for a response. The Chair and Democratic Services Officer would follow this up and circulate the information received to the Panel Members.

In response to an enquiry, it was explained that a range of apprentices were currently employed within Acklam Grange School. These included:

- Teaching & Learning apprentices, who were classroom-based;
- Apprentices based within the school's Reflect Unit (for challenging behaviour);
- Apprentices based in off-site education provision; and
- Apprentices based in customer service and finance.

Apprentices commenced at Level 2, with progression to Level 3 dependent upon such factors as successful completion of Level 2, and the availability of funding. It was indicated to the Panel that the school had retained a number of its apprentices. Mention was made of three who had been offered full-time employment, which was always strived for; however, this too was subject to funding and the successful completion of both levels of the apprenticeship.

A Member sought clarification with regards to the role of apprentices employed within the school's Reflect Unit, particularly as there would have been substantial responsibility associated with this. It was explained to the Panel that the Reflect Unit consisted of individual booths, where students on a C5 behaviour grading would have completed their work (behaviour was assessed on a scale of C1-C5). Apprentices would not have undertaken lone working at any time; a Behaviour Manager and an experienced member of staff would always have been present. It was highlighted that an apprentice had recently been appointed to a permanent role within the Unit.

A Member queried the role of classroom-based apprentices in relation to that of Teaching Assistants. In response, it was explained that apprentices would not have had the full responsibility of Teaching Assistants. Apprentices received Level 3 Certification in Teaching and Learning at the end of their programmes, which would then have allowed them to progress onto the Teaching Assistant qualification. It was highlighted that this route would not only have offered Teaching Assistant candidates an insight into this career area, but also significant classroom experience should they have wished to pursue it further.

Regarding the timescales involved with apprenticeship programmes, Members heard that the duration for Level 2 was twelve months, and for Level 3, eighteen months.

Reference was made to retention and a query raised as to the potential reasons why apprentices may have left mid-way through their programmes. In response, it was explained that only one apprentice had vacated a programme at Acklam Grange - the reason for this was that they had felt unsuited to it. Reference was made to an apprenticeships-related

event that would be held at the school in the near future. The Panel was advised that statements received from all of the current apprentices, in preparation for this event, indicated that they had felt supported and were enjoying their programmes.

A Member considered financial compensation in respect of apprenticeships and queried the level of pay being given to apprentices undertaking programmes at the school. In response, it was indicated to the Panel that payments were in line with legislation; the basic apprenticeship wage was made, although Level 3 payments were reflective of the apprentice's age.

The Chair thanked the HR Manager for her attendance and contribution to the meeting, and invited the three apprentices to discuss their experiences of completing apprenticeships within Middlesbrough Council.

The apprentices raised the following points:

- The reasons why they had chosen to undertake an apprenticeship;
- How they had been notified of apprenticeship opportunities - Members heard that Apprentice A had been referred by a friend; Apprentice B by a parent who had worked with an apprentice outside of the Council, but within the Middlesbrough area; and Apprentice C via the Job Centre;
- The induction process and support offered by the Training Centre;
- The tasks undertaken, responsibilities given, and positive experience gained; and
- The opportunities that had arisen for progression to full-time work - Members were informed that two of the apprentices had been offered full-time permanent employment with Cleveland Police and Middlesbrough Council.

Members gave consideration to the role of schools in promoting apprenticeships. The Panel felt that further engagement work was required in this regard, particularly as the three apprentices had attended different secondary schools and referrals had been made from outside of the education system.

A Member asked the apprentices whether the level of financial compensation they received was sufficient for their needs. In response, all three indicated that they were happy with the salaries awarded, particularly as they had progressed directly from school into salaried programmes.

A Member queried whether there were any negatives to the apprenticeship programmes that were being offered, and whether anything could have been changed from their perspective. In response, all three apprentices indicated that they had enjoyed their experiences, were happy with the support that had been provided to them, and that the apprenticeship programmes were being operated well.

The Panel thanked the apprentices for attending the meeting and congratulated them on their excellent achievements. Members felt that they were a credit to the Local Authority and were both reassured and inspired by their positive experiences. The apprentices and representative of Acklam Grange School left the meeting at this point.

Members discussed the opportunities available to apprentices for progression within the Local Authority, with mention being made of their eligibility to apply for internally-advertised vacancies.

A discussion ensued with regards to the progression of the investigation and the evidence that had been received to date. The Panel were happy with the information presented and discussed potential conclusions and recommendations arising from the review. Members agreed that a recommendation be made for an update to be provided in November 2017, when the revised national apprenticeship structure was firmly in place and the autumnal intake of apprentices had been undertaken. The Panel felt that, in light of the evidence received from the apprentices, further engagement from schools in respect of apprenticeship programmes was required. This would form the second recommendation of the Panel's report.

Members agreed that a further meeting of the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel in respect of this topic would not be necessary. Responses to the questions forwarded to Acklam Grange School would be circulated to the Panel Members once received. A copy of the draft final report would be circulated to Members for feedback, prior to submission of the final report to the Overview and Scrutiny Board in April 2017.

AGREED that:

1. The Democratic Services Officer would contact the Apprentice and Workskills Co-ordinator for information regarding the support/guidance made available to apprentices, in instances where permanent employment within the Local Authority was not possible. This would be circulated to the Panel Members once received.
2. The Chair and Democratic Services Officer would forward specific queries relating to the work undertaken by Acklam Grange School in raising awareness of apprenticeships amongst its students to an appropriate person for a response. Information received would be circulated to the Panel Members.
3. A draft final report would be produced and circulated to the Panel Members for feedback in line with the discussion points raised at the meeting. A subsequent final report would be forwarded to the Overview and Scrutiny Board in April 2017.
4. The information, as provided, be noted.