

**By:** Paul Carter, Leader  
Amanda Beer, Director of Personnel & Development

**To:** Personnel Committee - 30 January 2009

**Subject:** Employing Young People

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**Summary:** Informs Personnel Committee of KCC's plans to build on successes so far in employing a younger workforce.

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### **1. What Has Been Achieved – Some Key Highlights**

- A successful apprenticeship scheme that has attracted interest from the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit
- A vibrant Gap Year Programme that now attracts high calibre graduates as well as gap year students
- A high quality graduate management trainee scheme that includes Finance and Transportation & Development streams
- Well established work experience schemes that provide young people with valuable insights into the world of work
- KCC's approach to employing young people has attracted national recognition

### **2. What We Aim To Achieve - 2009 / 10 Targets**

During 2009 /10 KCC will continue to develop and monitor the performance of the various schemes aimed at attracting a younger workforce through a new working group, *Routes to Employment*, that has recently been established and has set the following targets for 2009 /10:

- Kent Success Apprenticeship Scheme – a further 100 places, making a total of 300 by 2010. However the vision is that this will increase further following the developments that are underway (see para 5.1)
- Gap Year Programme – a further 85 appointments
- Work Experience – a further 18 places until 31 August 2009, in addition to those already arranged (continuation beyond 31.8.09. is dependent on further funding)
- Kent Graduate Programme – 12 posts

### **3. The Business Case**

Three key drivers to employing a younger workforce:

- (ii) In common with local government, KCC has an ageing workforce. Approximately one third (33.2%) of employees are expected to retire over the next 10-15 years. In contrast 14.4% of the workforce is under 30.
- (iii) To employ a workforce that reflects and understands the community it serves.
- (iv) Continue to increase KCC's performance by employing a workforce of all talents, including younger employees.

#### **4. Kent Success Apprenticeship Scheme**

This remains a major priority for the County Council. The national context is that the government's target is for 20% of school leavers to enter apprenticeships. Macdonald's has announced that it could offer the scheme to one in eight of its staff this year and up to 10,000 from 2010. It also has been accredited as a training provider, which KCC already has and is delivered through KEY Training.

KCC's apprenticeship scheme continues to go from strength to strength and with 200 starts is well on target to achieve the 250 commitment within 'Towards 2010'. This 200 includes 18 new starters in January 2009 – a record for this time of year! For the first time Kent Highways Services has recruited a stream of 9 apprentices. This was business led, supported by Personnel in partnership with Key Training (KCC's apprenticeship provider). There are many examples of the positive impact apprenticeships have delivered.

*'My apprentice Laura is willing, helpful, resourceful, eager to learn, friendly and has integrated into our team brilliantly. This is my third apprentice and I think the scheme is great'*- Fiona Webb, Legal & Democratic Services

*'This apprenticeship has opened up so many doors and training opportunities, I have the skills and experience to do well in my chosen career and believe apprenticeships are the best thing for young people looking to go into work'* – Aimee Sutton, former Marketing Apprentice.

*'I honestly believe completing a Kent Success Apprenticeship was the best life choice I have ever made to date'* – Abi Ellis, former Supporting Independence Apprentice

In December 2008 a high profile event was held to showcase apprenticeships to employers in Kent. This was a huge success with a key note speech from the Leader, Paul Carter together with speeches from former apprentices who did a fantastic job promoting apprenticeships.

Further evidence of recognition is apparent by KCC being one of a handful of employers identified nationally by the Prime Ministers Delivery Unit to inform government policy. A delegation visited Kent during December 2008 and met with the Leader, Chief Executive, Personnel and other key players. As the

Leader commented at the showcase event for employers the following day, *'I think they were blown away by what they saw'*

## **4.1 Building on Success- increasing apprenticeships**

### **4.1.1**

We will continue to build on this success by challenging ourselves to find innovative ways to enable the employment of more and more apprentices. The Highways business led approach was highly successful and we will want to replicate this in other parts of the business. For example, Commercial Services are supportive and already employ 4 apprentices including in business areas not available elsewhere in the Council. We will explore additional business specific apprenticeships such as within social care.

### **4.1.2**

Personnel are currently developing a process that will enable managers to recruit an apprentice and hold the post against a vacancy. Apprentices will receive the apprenticeship rate during training and be appointed to the KCC post on successful completion of the apprenticeship and the probationary period. This will provide savings (as the apprenticeship rate is below Kent Scheme salaries) for managers and the commitment of a job, subject to performance, for the apprentice.

### **4.1.3**

Following the success of the event for employers in Kent we will showcase to KCC managers the business benefits and the value of employing apprentices.

### **4.1.4 Pay**

Apprentices currently receive £80 per week, the national minimum. This has been reviewed in order to enhance the scheme. Key drivers for review:

- There have been no cost of living increases since the Kent Success Apprenticeship was introduced in 2006
- These are KCC's lowest paid employees. Also consequently travel expenses are a relatively high proportion of an apprentice's pay
- The national minimum rate will increase to £95 per week from April 2009
- The increase should improve the attractiveness of the scheme to prospective apprentices and therefore increase applications

The rate must remain affordable to KCC, particularly in the current climate of tight budgeting restraint. It is also sensible to avoid setting a rate that would trigger tax and national insurance deductions.

**It is therefore recommended that the new rate be set at £105 (the threshold at which tax and NI become payable) and that this should take effect from 1 January 2009.**

***This recommendation has been endorsed by COG and the Leader.***

## **5. Gap Year Programme**

Originally established to provide young people with paid placements prior to going to university, KCC's Gap Year Programme now attracts undergraduates on sandwich courses wishing to spend a year in industry, and increasingly large numbers of graduates who are looking for their first step into the job market. The programme is attractive to individuals who are unsure where they want to start their career and lack experience. It provides individuals with quality employment experience so they have a positive experience of working in Kent. Managers benefit by employing motivated individuals who bring a lot of skills but at the same time represent value for money as they are new to the job market. Individuals are both placed in KCC and with employers across Kent.

In the first year of the programme in 2004/05, 23 people were placed. This has increased to 81 so far during 2008/09, already exceeding the 75 target, of which 47 are with KCC.

Feedback from managers and employees has been very positive indeed.

*'Getting in touch with the Kent Gap Year Programme was one of the best decisions I have ever made. Without a scheme like the Kent Gap Year Programme there is no opportunity to work in places like this. This scheme enabled me to gain experience and earn money for my future, meeting great people along the way'*- Ben Hanson, Youth Offending Service

*'The scheme is an excellent way for gap year students (and industrial placement students like myself) to be introduced to the world of work'*-Bradley Johnson, Environment & Waste.

*'I love it! The job is really suited to my degree and I am learning lots of new things about the tourism industry that I never knew! I have to thank the Gap Year Programme for making the whole process stress free and finding me the perfect gap year job!'*- Hannah Elver, Kent Tourism

*'For my first full-time job, this is exactly what I wanted. The job is thoroughly rewarding because of its nature, providing the public with a good service'* – Jaspreet Gary, Canterbury Library

*'Over the years I have been more and more impressed by the quality of students that we have both interviewed and taken on in our Business Unit. Jack and Matthew this year have exceeded all my personal expectations. All the students that we have taken on via your innovative and exciting programme have been dedicated to learn and their enthusiasm, dress code, punctuality and attendance records have been an example to all.'*- Ian Flower, Systems Manager, Commercial Services.

Applications have increased year on year with a record of 358 so far during 2008/2009 (up 131 already from last year)

## **6. Kent Graduate Programme**

KCC also has a well established graduate programme that has been operating since 1998. The programme attracts high calibre graduates seeking a career in local government. Last year KCC recruited Management, Finance, and for the first time, Transportation and Development graduate trainees (a total of 10) and an IT & Computing stream will be added this year. In previous years between 5-10 Management trainees and 2 Finance trainees have been recruited. Consideration will be given for places in other specialisms in the future.

Individuals benefit from a structured learning and development programme, gain a management qualification, and undertake four six month placement before being supported to secure permanent employment with KCC. Feedback from managers and trainees:

*'Being on the Kent Graduate Programme was a fantastic way to start my career. My time on the programme has undoubtedly supported me to develop as a manager much quicker than I would have otherwise, and subsequently at the end of the programme I was able to secure a management position in my chosen area.'* - Jenny Dixon, former Kent Graduate Management Trainee.

*'My experience generally of the Kent Graduates is that they are an extremely able group. I am currently managing a new KGP - her first placement - and have been most impressed by the calibre of the work she is doing and have been able to give her a high degree of responsibility. I am confident that she will be a real asset to KCC, and a senior manager of the future. The Programme is excellent in the way it supports and develops the individuals, ensuring that they have the management and professional skills that KCC needs, now and in the future.'* Debra Exall, Head of Strategic Policy

## **7. Work Experience**

KCC's well developed work experience schemes provide placement opportunities across the council for young people aged 14-19. This includes the Kent Vocational Training Placements (KVTP) that provides young people with vocational training within the social care sector. KCC has also established Kent Works to engage with schools, colleges and employers in Kent to arrange work experience opportunities for young people. During 2008/09 143 formal (managed by KCC) work experience placements have been arranged for young people so far and during 2007/08 159. This is in addition to the Kent Vocational Training Placements (over 200 a year). The schemes have again resulted in positive experiences for young people and managers:

*'Mikey's placement here has been of great benefit to him and us! The members have responded very favourably to him and it is a joy to see a young person so accepting and tolerant of others! All in all a successful outcome for everyone and we look forward to further referrals,* Heather Gooch, Manager, Resource House, KASS.

*I have always known I wanted to go into care and make a difference but now I know I'd like to work in a day centre for people with disabilities. Meeting them has changed my mind .... it has made me change my career choice.'* Charlotte Sprigel-Sinclair – KVTP placement.

KCC will continue to develop its approach to work experience (will require funding).

## **8. Retention**

We know that retaining young people long term is a challenge given that people in this group change jobs more frequently. We will continue to develop employment practices that support the retention of young people.

Greenhouse is an established staff group for employees under 30 that provides a voice for young people. A conference for young people is planned for next month and a talent management programme for young people is being developed in partnership with Greenhouse.

## **9. National Recognition**

KCC's approach to employing young people continues to attract national interest with articles appearing in the press. We have recently been approached by *Equal Opportunities Review*, a national publication, with a request to be interviewed on KCC's approach to employing young people. This has resulted in an in depth article being published in January 2009. A copy of the article is attached for information.

## **10. Recommendations**

Personnel Committee is asked to:

**10.1** Note the progress and success so far in employing young people through a range of approaches, future developments and national recognition.

**10.2** Agree the increase in pay for apprentices of £105 per week with effect from 1 January 2009 that has been endorsed by Chief Officers' Group

**10.3** Advise of any additional approaches that Members would specifically like officers to research and develop.

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## Appendix A

### KENT SUCCESS STARTS and LEAVERS with DESTINATIONS FROM OCTOBER 06 TO DECEMBER 08

**NOTE:** Figures exclude 18 new starts during January 2009

Total Number of Starts: **172** - of which **50** are still in training

Total number of leavers: **122**

Total number of Framework achievers (i.e. completed the full apprenticeship): **88**.  
This equates to 71.5% achievement

#### Destinations of those 88 who achieved the full Apprenticeship:

| Job Within KCC | Job within private sector | Job Within Public Sector | Unemployed | Unknown   | Continuing Study |
|----------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|------------|-----------|------------------|
| 56<br>(65%)    | 14<br>(16%)               | 4<br>(5%)                | 6<br>(6%)  | 6<br>(6%) | 2<br>(2%)        |

#### Destinations of the 32 who did not complete the full framework:

| Job within KCC | Job within private sector | Job within public sector | Learner continuing study | Not suited to qualification or changed their mind | Personal | Dismissed | Pregnancy | Unknown |
|----------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|----------|-----------|-----------|---------|
|                | 7                         |                          | 1                        | 4   | 9        | 7         | 5         | 1       |

#### All Kent Success Leavers destinations

| Job Within KCC | Job within public sector | Job within private sector | Not suited to qualification or changed their mind | Personal | Learner Continuing Study | Dismissed | Pregnant | Un-employed | Un-known |
|----------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|---|----------|--------------------------|-----------|----------|-------------|----------|
| 56             | 4                        | 21                        | 4   | 9        | 3                        | 7         | 5        | 6           | 7        |

#### Skill areas of those 50 still in training

| Admin | Customer Service | Care | Childcare |
|-------|------------------|------|-----------|
| 44    | 3                | 1    | 2         |

#### Directorates of those 50 still in training

| KASS        | CFE         | CMY         | E & R     | CED         |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|
| 14<br>(28%) | 11<br>(22%) | 13<br>(26%) | 2<br>(4%) | 10<br>(20%) |

**Gap Year Programme Statistics**

**2004/05**

**How many students were placed? 23**

**How many were:**

- 14 Placed in KCC
- 9 Placed in private companies

**How many students applied that year? No information held**

**2005/06**

**How many students were placed? 76**

**How many were:**

- 33 Placed in KCC
- 43 Placed in private companies

**How many students applied that year? No information held**

**2006/07**

**How many students were placed? 80**

**How many were:**

- 33 Placed in KCC
- 47 Placed in private companies

**How many students applied that year? 205**

**2007/08**

**How many students were placed? 23**

**How many were:**

- 14 Placed in KCC
- 9 Placed in private companies

**How many students applied that year? 227**

**2008/09**

**How many students were placed? 81**

**How many were:**

- 47 Placed in KCC
- 34 Placed in private companies

**How many students applied that year? 358**



### Kent Council targets young people

**With an ageing workforce, Kent County Council recognised the need to take a proactive approach to employing younger workers. Kate Godwin examines the thinking behind this move and the various initiatives the council has put in place.**

#### Key points

- An ageing workforce means that Kent County Council needs to attract more young people to work for it. The council has therefore introduced a number of positive action initiatives specifically for younger people.
- The schemes include creating 250 apprenticeships at the council, a “gap year” programme, a graduate programme and offering a variety of work experience placements.
- The council supports a staff group for young people called Greenhouse. As well as giving young people a voice, it also allows them to contribute to policy. The group has its own site within KCC’s website, which allows members to post documents and contribute to forums.
- To encourage retention of all its staff, KCC offers career breaks and flexible retirement options. It is also reviewing its retirement age.
- Another example of using new technologies to reach young people is a recruitment website featuring young people who work at KCC. The council has distributed thousands of “credit cards” across the county to publicise the site and encourage job applications.
- The council has a graduate training programme that leads to a management qualification.
- Two-week work experience placements are offered to 14- to 19-year-olds.
- The council has a young people’s group, which gives a voice to people up to age 30 in the organisation. It has its own “virtual community” accessible only by members of the group.
- The council has a website aimed at young people to encourage them to apply for jobs with the council.
- It is recognised that once young people have been recruited, it remains a challenge to retain them. The feasibility of a career-break scheme is being investigated.
- There has been a culture change and the council has become attractive to young people, but it is acknowledged that it will take time to effect a change in the age profile of the workforce.

In common with many local authorities, Kent County Council (KCC – see box 1) could see up to one-third of its employees retire in the next decade. With 56% of its workers within the 35–55 age bracket, the council could face the prospect of being unable to deliver key services in the future. By contrast, younger age groups are under-represented at KCC, with just 6.5% of employees aged 25 or under. The local authority also recognises that due to societal ageing, the proportion of young people within the potential workforce pool will continue to diminish.

Nigel Fairburn, workforce strategy manager at KCC, explains that the council has a workforce strategy board to look at issues such as recruitment and retention and the need to address key future occupational skill shortages. The council's chief executive chairs the board, with membership drawn from HR and representatives from each of the local authority's directorates.

To ensure the sustainability of the organisation, KCC is taking action to:

- promote jobs and careers;
- identify, develop and motivate talent;
- address key future occupational skill shortages;
- address diversity issues; and
- meet the need to “grow its own” professionally trained staff.

“We look at some of the medium and longer-term actions that we need to take,” says Fairburn. “And one of those actions is the need to change the age profile of our workforce and attract more young people to work for us.” The council's workforce strategy therefore includes a number of positive action initiatives specifically for younger people.

### **Recruitment changes**

The local authority created an “age champions” network to promote age-neutral recruitment, selection and retention policies and practices. Job descriptions and person specifications were overhauled to ensure they were age neutral. This included a review of qualifications criteria and the removal of both “desirable criteria” and the requirement for experience in lower grade roles unless there is a justifiable business need. KCC uses a “behaviours framework” called Ways to Success, which sets out behaviours, attitudes and competencies and the council is increasingly using this in the person specification for job vacancies.

“Traditionally, we focused on experience, but that's not the only criteria in terms of predicting someone's success in a role,” comments Fairburn.

All recruiting managers at KCC must undergo recruitment training that includes a diversity element and also covers permissible positive action. The council monitors all job applications, shortlisting and positions offered by age, disability, gender, religion and belief and sexual orientation.

## **Creating apprenticeships**

In its vision document, *Towards 2010*, KCC pledged to create an additional 1,000 apprenticeships by 2010. A quarter of these are to be within the council, with the remaining 750 being hosted by public and private employers across Kent.

One reason for urging firms to employ apprentices is that while the proportion of young people in Kent who are not in education, employment or training is below the national average, the proportion in some areas is high.

The programme gives 16- to 24-year-olds the chance to gain an NVQ, a nationally recognised qualification, while being employed by KCC in a variety of departments. All apprenticeships in the Kent programme have been developed to provide more than just the formal work-based learning placement. A support package for the apprentices provides them with structured training in confidence-building, assertiveness, CV writing, KCC application forms and interview techniques. Apprentices are expected to complete training either on-the-job or at an approved training centre and are paid £80 a week for the course of their apprenticeship.

As there are no formal entry requirements regarding qualifications, the programme can reach out to young people, although apprentices do undergo an assessment process before joining. Apprenticeships vary between six and 18 months, according to the nature of the apprenticeship and how long the individual needs to complete it.

The personnel function at the council has supported the programme from the start and developed an apprenticeship contract. This ensures:

- guaranteed interviews for apprentices who meet the minimum criteria when applying for roles with KCC;
- personalised support to apprentices in the last three months of their contract; and
- that the need for experience for lower-grade roles with the council is not a requirement unless there is a business need.

As of January 2008, 79% of those who had successfully completed their apprenticeships had moved into longer-term employment with either KCC or other organisations.

## **Programme support**

The leader of the council and the chief executive are totally committed to the apprenticeship programme. It has been supported by the personnel and development function, including the workforce strategy manager, the director of personnel and development and the council's supporting independence manager. The employee services team and recruitment team are also involved as they manage the day-to-day personnel aspects of the programme.

Key Training Services, a training provider at the council, delivers the training aspect of the programme. They also recruit the young people, set up the placements and provide pastoral support to apprentices.

KCC provided the initial funding to establish the programme and to cover the £80 a week salary of the apprentices, but the different business units of the council now cover the salary costs. The Learning and Skills Council receives funding to put the apprentices through training for the qualifications, so the council does not have to pay for the cost of the qualification and training.

KCC is confident that it will meet its target of 250 apprenticeships but Fairburn explains that the council would like to increase this number. "We're currently having internal discussions as to whether we should put targets into each directorate's business plan around apprenticeships, employment and young people."

### **Difficulties**

Fairburn explains that initially there was a general lack of understanding within the organisation about what an apprenticeship involves, the responsibilities of placement managers, the expectations of young people and the lack of permanent positions for apprentices to apply for once they were actively seeking employment.

Following the launch of the programme, the council recognised the need for a much more coordinated approach to ensure complete "buy-in" throughout the authority, and this has now been developed.

The council feels it could have been more effective in its selection of departments at the outset, to ensure that they could accommodate apprentices. A number of areas of the council are now being targeted. "In terms of turnover, opportunities do arise," says Fairburn. "But it's a question of whether a vacancy comes up in the right place for an individual."

KCC is now considering whether it should appoint apprentices with a particular vacancy in mind. Subject to satisfactory assessment, they could then be slotted into that post. This approach is being discussed with several areas of the council.

In terms of achieving the wider objective of 1,000 apprenticeships, the council feels this is well on the way to being met and has started a further push to other public and private sector employers in Kent, with a recent event for employers launched by the leader of the council.

### **Gap-year scheme**

Traditionally, fewer graduates return to work in Kent than in neighbouring counties in the south-east, so KCC has adopted the gap-year programme as one strategy to help overcome this issue. The council offers paid placements of between six to 15 months to gap-year students, undergraduates on sandwich courses and, increasingly, graduates who are looking for their first step into the job market. The gap-year scheme is attractive to those individuals who are not sure where they want to start their career and need some work experience, and

to those who are interested in a particular career but who lack the experience an employer would normally be looking for.

There are a variety of placements both within the council and with other employers in the county and the gap-year programme team screens and interviews suitable candidates in order to match their requirements to specific employers in Kent. The council wants to encourage Kent employers to offer short-term employment opportunities to young people in order to counter the skill shortage that will in time have a detrimental effect on Kent's economy if it is not addressed.

Fairburn reports that, in the current financial year, the council had a target of appointing 75 people under the gap-year programme, but that has already been exceeded. He explains: "It's a growing scheme and the employers taking part are delighted with the high standard of work that these young people deliver. It provides employers with motivated employees and provides the young people with quality employment so they have a positive experience of working in Kent and an established relationship with the employer.

"Young people may lack work experience but they do bring a lot of skills to business. Like many local authorities, we have emphasised experience when recruiting which can disadvantage young people. The apprenticeship scheme and gap-year programme are giving people the opportunity to get that experience and develop their careers."

### **Graduate programme**

One way that KCC is "growing its own" professionally trained staff is through its graduate programme. Trainees have the opportunity to study for a professional qualification to ensure they gain the business skills and local authority knowledge to equip them to become managers within KCC. The council currently offers placements in management, transportation and development and finance, and it is considering offering places in other specialisms in future.

Trainees benefit from:

- project management training and experience;
- four six-month placements in different directorates over the two-year programme (three years in the case of finance), which provide excellent experience within the local authority;
- a network of support, including a mentor and a placement manager, with workshops giving an opportunity to develop personal skills, organisational knowledge and networking links within the council; and
- a management qualification.

As well as undertaking work on their placements, the trainees also have the opportunity to take part in group projects with the rest of their graduate cohort. The aim is that by carrying out discrete projects for senior managers, they will make good networking links across the whole of the organisation, develop excellent teamworking skills and get the chance to manage a real-life project.

Some of the projects that former graduate trainees have worked on include:

- creating a website to provide support and information for young carers in Kent;
- organising a two-day residential conference for schools across the county, promoting higher education and graduate work opportunities within Kent; and
- promoting the Europe Direct Information Relay in Ashford Gateway, where people can find answers to any questions they have about the European Union.

The number of places available with the council varies each financial year and in 2008 the six places that were offered, with a starting salary of around £22,500 a year, attracted 400 applicants.

### **Work experience**

The council also offers two-week work experience placements for 14- to 19-year-olds in a variety of areas, including legal services, finance and accountancy, landscaping, social care and personnel.

The work experience placements are generally unpaid and can include job-shadowing, helping out with all aspects of a department while learning how things work, and taking part in a specific project.

KCC has also established Kent Vocational Training Placements as part of its commitment to achieving employment targets within the care industry. The object of the programme is to encourage those aged 14 to 19 years old to consider a career in social care when they leave school by providing them with real experience of the discipline of employment and the opportunities provided by a variety of work within the social care sector.

Placements are from one half day up to four days a week and last from six weeks to two years or more. Students can take part in special projects, group work or work with the care team in social care. The project is open to those in full-time education, young people who are not in school, students who are excluded or at risk of exclusion and those who have dropped out of school for one reason or another.

The council has also established Kent Works to engage with schools, colleges and employers to create first-class work experience placements for young people, as well as schemes that mutually benefit employers and local educational organisations.

“Rather than just responding to requests for placements, we want to be more proactive,” comments Fairburn. “We’re considering setting targets for a certain number of work experience opportunities, which could include volunteering, and then advertising them on the job site.”

## **Talent management**

As part of its strategic approach to workforce planning, KCC has established its own approach to talent management. The aim is to identify future leaders, managers and employees with further potential, and provide them with the skills and experience they will need. Diversity is monitored, although the council admits the senior talent pool is not as representative as it would like it to be in terms of ethnicity and disability. The programme has two prongs – one focusing on senior leaders and the other taking a whole-organisation approach.

The council has created a senior management talent pool by asking directors and senior managers to nominate individuals for the pool and by inviting self nominations.

The whole-organisation approach is being piloted within the council's directorates and one of its outcomes is the identification of high performers with further potential.

"We've told directorates to pilot it in a way that suits their business, so directorates are doing that in different ways," says Fairburn. "For example, the chief executive's department is piloting in personnel and development and has created secondments and other opportunities which are giving people experience outside their current role. This allows us to identify individuals who have the potential to move beyond their present job."

One aim of all the different initiatives being run by KCC is to make managers aware that there are various ways to fill roles and that a number of options exist for bringing people into the organisation. "It's a cultural change to alter the way recruiting managers think about who they might consider for a job," comments Fairburn. "HR needs to set the framework and lead on the issue."

## **Young people's group**

In 2007, the council established a formally recognised staff group for young people called Greenhouse. Nicola Lodemore, who is responsible for employment policy at KCC, explains that it came about because KCC felt there was a need to give young people in the organisation a voice that would enable them to contribute to policy and provide support to one another.

The group is open to all employees under the age of 30 – who make up 15% of KCC's workforce – and to any member of staff who can actively contribute to the aims of the group.

Greenhouse aims to be proactive in empowering younger members of staff to fulfil their potential through helping make employment and development opportunities and service provision easier for young people to access, and through seeking opportunities to expand their experiences at work.

The group holds meetings at least four times a year and aims to provide a non-judgmental, comfortable environment in which younger staff can meet, share concerns and seek advice and guidance.

As well as raising the profile of young people currently working for the council, Greenhouse also facilitates better engagement with younger members of staff as it serves as a consultation mechanism that can be used by all council directorates.

The group's activities include:

- **buddying** – trained Greenhouse members provide a buddy system to help a young person with any issues or questions they have;
- **training** – training sessions directed towards younger staff;
- **socials** – nights out to enable members to get to know each other and have fun; and
- **volunteering** – a group volunteering day once a year.

Greenhouse also has its own virtual community on IDEA's Communities of Practice website, which can only be accessed by the group's members. As well as containing details of social events, meetings, newsletters and policy consultations, the site allows people to log on to chat, post documents and contribute to forums.

Holly Strang, chair of the Greenhouse forum, says: "It's like a friendship group and we provide a support function for young people. At meetings people can bring up any issues or problems, which chairs of the group take forward."

Some of the support offered by the group concerns preparing people for job interviews and giving them interview tips. "Lack of confidence is quite a big issue for some young people," says Strang, "and we've encouraged people to apply for jobs and helped them prepare for interview."

One of the issues identified by Greenhouse is that many young people are in administrative work and are concerned about gaining the necessary skills and experience to move out of that role and progress to other jobs in the council. The group is currently working with Fairburn on developing a talent pool of young people which would help individuals move out of administrative work. Strang points out that KCC's policy decision to change its recruitment policy for lower grades – by not asking for experience unless there were really strong business reasons to do so – was informed by its consultation with Greenhouse.

### **Reaching young people**

KCC has developed a [website](#) (opens in new window) aimed at young people who are considering their first step into work. The site gives information on the wide variety of roles and businesses that exist in local government.

"I think it's fair to say that local government doesn't have a particularly sexy image among young people," says Lodemore. "And you need to be aware of the fact that young people won't automatically be thinking of working for the council."



To this end, the site carries a number of examples of what a day at work is like for several young people at KCC. It also has advice about how to apply for jobs at the council.

To publicise the website, KCC produced thousands of “credit cards” carrying the website address. In summer 2008 these were sent to every secondary school in Kent and the Connexions career service, and were placed “in every building in the county that has a connection with the council. In addition, members of Greenhouse attended the county show to publicise the website.

“You need to be creative about how you make relationships,” comments Lodemore. “The yourfirstjob site is a great example of that as it profiles young people, has pictures of them and talks about their experiences in a way that young people can connect with.

“Similarly, the Greenhouse site is a perfect example of using technologies that young people are very comfortable with to communicate the organisation’s message.”

Lodemore reports that the council has been tracking the hits on the site and that the numbers have been rising, although it is too early to say if there has been an increase in the number of job applications received from young people.

KCC has also commissioned a school to produce a recruitment DVD for young people that will be ready in early 2009. This will be placed on the [website of Kent TV](#) (opens in new window) and will be used at events such as job fairs.

## **Retention**

Retention is critical to the long-term health and success of a business, particularly one that faces the prospect of many employees retiring in the next decade.

While traineeships and graduate programmes can help to retain younger employees, there is a danger that individuals will take the experience and skills they have gained at KCC to other employers.

“Retention of young people is a challenge,” acknowledges Lodemore. “While we recognise that young people are perhaps less likely to stay for a very long time we also need to get something back for our investment.

“It’s also the case that while people may leave, if they have a good impression of us they may come back later in their career.”

To help deal with this issue, a graduate gap-year student is researching the feasibility of developing KCC’s career-break facility to make it more attractive to a wider staff group. Currently most breaks are taken by working mothers, but the council is considering extending the basis on which people can take extended breaks, which it feels may work as a retention tool for younger staff.

“While some people may still use it for caring responsibilities, younger people beginning a career could use it to go travelling and then return to work,” says Lodemore.

Employees are also more likely to stay with an organisation if they feel it offers development opportunities. This is an issue that Greenhouse believed it was key to get KCC to consider as many of its members are keen to progress out of an admin. role.

“Many people in Greenhouse told us they want to stay at KCC and move up, which is why we went to Nigel [Fairburn] and asked if a programme could be devised that would help with this,” states Strang.

KCC’s ageing workforce highlights the need to have enough employees with the right skills in place in 10 years’ time. The potential prospect of more than 30% of the workforce retiring within the next decade highlights the need to retain some older workers as well as the importance of attracting and keeping young people.

“We need to give a clear message, both internally and externally, that both ends of the age spectrum are important in order for us to be able to deliver services in the future,” says Lodemore.

“The best thing we can do is look at what we offer to our staff and ensure it meets the needs of both older and younger staff.”

### **Policy changes**

The benefits on offer at KCC can make the council an attractive place to work for employees of all ages, particularly in a tight pay climate. Lodemore reports that initiatives such as a rewards website offering various discounts to staff have proved popular.

From a policy perspective, the council is considering reviewing its retirement age. Lodemore explains: “We took some time to consider our approach to the Age Regulations and at that time decided to retain a retirement age, but it was always in the back of our minds that that was a temporary decision.”

KCC offers flexible retirement options that gives its employees greater choice about the nature and timing of their retirement. Flexible retirement is a way of developing the council’s work–life and diversity policies and integrating equality principles more fully into its existing employment practices.

The council enables people to plan ahead and address career changes constructively. To do this, it offers guidance on how to prepare for the final years in the workforce and the choices that are available, such as career breaks, part-time work and stepping down a grade.

“Essentially, we’re looking at what we can do to encourage people to continue working,” says Lodemore, “and what KCC can offer that would make that more attractive.”

### **Employer advice**

Initially KCC found it difficult to get a coordinated approach across directorates to the various schemes it introduced. Some parts of the organisation also did not acknowledge that young people require a positive-action approach.

For those employers considering similar initiatives, Fairburn stresses the importance of getting managers on board. “The benefits aren’t always that visible, so you need to strongly make the business case so people are aware that if they don’t have a fully representative workforce they may be missing out on talent.”

He points out that there is also a need to tackle underlying cultural issues and long-standing ways of doing things. KCC had to tackle managers’ perceptions that job applicants must always have direct work experience, and this is ongoing. “We should have dealt with that before we introduced new recruitment programmes.

“One of the biggest challenges is encouraging managers to be braver about their choices – that’s one of the hardest things to achieve quickly.”

Both Fairburn and Lodemore stress that while people may be impatient for change, it will be some time before the job programmes that the council has put in place alter the age profile of the workforce.

“There has, though, been a culture change in KCC being seen as a good place for young people to work,” says Lodemore. “Many of the initiatives that we’ve put in place are taking root now so we are hopeful that we’ll see their positive effects from next year.”

[Kate Godwin](#) is a research officer for *Equal Opportunities Review*.

#### Box 1: Kent County Council

Kent County Council (KCC) is the largest non-metropolitan local authority in England, with a resident population of around 1.4 million people. Overall, 70% of residents in the KCC area aged 16 and over are “economically active”.

KCC is the county’s largest employer, with around 46,000 staff. Excluding schools, it has 16,000 employees.

The council is divided into five directorates, each of which is responsible for a particular area of council activity.

*Towards 2010* is the council’s key document, which sets out a vision for the future of the county, identifies the main challenges to be addressed and provides a strategic framework for its equality strategy.

The council has a central corporate diversity team to take the lead on key equalities issues but each directorate has its own equality group, which produces an annual action plan. Work on equalities is supported across all five directorates by the presence of 48 “equality champions”.

The council is an accredited Investor in People and has been accredited as a Two Ticks (Positive about Disabled People) Employer every year since 2002. Formal partnership working arrangements with a variety of disability organisations have been in place since 2003 and the council has been

recognised by the Employers Forum on Disability and Remploy for its good practice in recruitment and employment.

Independent group Stonewall ranked the council 29th in its list of the 100 best employers in the country for lesbian and gay staff in 2008.