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**To:** Personnel Committee

**Date:** 23 September 2011

**Subject:** Employing a Younger Workforce

**Classification:** Unrestricted

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## **Summary**

Outlines the County Councils achievements to date in employing a younger workforce, the challenges in the context of a contracting workforce, and potential future developments

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### **1. Introduction**

Employing a younger workforce continues to be a priority for KCC.

Priorities:

- To employ and develop talented employees from all demographic groups, particularly individuals with high potential who will be successors for employees that leave the organisation
- To deliver high quality services by employing a workforce that reflects and understand the Kent communities it serves
- To address the number of young people who are NEETs (not in employment, education or training)

### **2. One Council One Plan**

Employing a younger workforce will form part of the County Council's One Council One Plan Organisation Development and People Plan which sets out how our people will deliver Bold Steps for Kent.

### **3. Context**

As a result of a number of initiatives that support young people into employment the County Council has historically seen increases in the number of young people employed by the County Council. As KCC is now contracting and due to a reduction in staff planned over the next 4 years maintaining this progress is a huge challenge for the County Council. There has been a slight decrease in the percentage of young people employed. While the decrease is not significant clearly we want to reverse this trend. Therefore plans that support the employment of young people are being reviewed as part of the new Organisation Development and People Plan.

There are a number of programmes and initiatives that support the employment of young people – work experience, apprenticeships, GradsKent, the Kent Graduate Programme, and the Greenhouse staff group.

#### **4. Work Experience for Young People in Kent Schools**

The County Council continues to provide work experience opportunities for young people in Kent schools. In the past work experience placements have been found in response to requests. Since the academic year 2010/11 a far more proactive approach has been taken by publicising placements on the kent.gov website and contacting schools directly to publicise opportunities. This has the added benefit of students seeing the types of job roles available at KCC and young people being placed in areas that interest them. Moving the process online also brings KCC into line with how students expect to be able to view job opportunities. It also enables managers to plan placements and ensure good quality and relevant work experience is provided. Students also complete a form in advance saying what they would particularly like to get out of the experience. In doing so the aim is to develop the employability skills of young people and what the job actually involves.

The management of work experience has moved to the Human Resources Division where recruitment knowledge and expertise has added value and will be used to develop the scheme.

Although this approach was implemented part way through the 2010/11 school year it still resulted in 91 young people being provided with a work experience placement. For the 2011/12 school year the target is to provide at least 300 placements. A communication has recently been sent to managers from the Corporate Director of Human Resources requesting work experience placements for advertisement and outlining the benefits of work experience such as identifying the next generation of talent, increasing the employability of young people, building confidence and motivation and providing a positive experience of the world of work.

#### **5. Apprenticeship Employment**

The County Council continues to recruit and employ apprentices through its Kent Success apprenticeship programme. Despite the pressures on managers' budgets and a workforce that is contracting to achieve savings targets, managers continue to employ supernumerary apprentices (i.e. posts not funded), no doubt in recognition of the benefits apprentices bring and the high priority of apprenticeships. In addition to supernumerary placements apprentices are also recruited to suitable entry level roles (in grades KR2-4) providing there are no employees at risk of redundancy that could undertake the job. However the number of posts arising at this level has reduced reflecting the picture of a contracting workforce. In total there are currently 94 apprentices in post.

When KCC introduced Kent success four years ago the take up of apprenticeships within the council was limited. Over the years the programme has developed and grown so that now there are approximately 80 apprentices employed at any one time. KCC has come to recognise apprentices as valuable employees. Recruitment policy has been changed so that suitable posts in grades KR2-4 can only be recruited from an apprenticeship pool, unless there is

a strong business case not to do so, providing there are no suitable employees who are at risk of redundancy.

In addition to the Kent Success Programme a social care strand has provided 8 apprentices for Kent employers who have social care contracts with KCC. A Vulnerable Learners programme is also running that has placed 69 apprentices with Kent employers, including 6 with KCC. The programme targets young people who particularly find it difficult entering employment – young parents, ex offenders, young people leaving care and young people with disabilities.

KCC will continue to deliver and improve the existing Kent Success programme. This will include working with business units to explore career pathways as outlined within KCC's Apprenticeship Strategy and Action Plan. In Bold Steps for Kent KCC has committed to employing at least another 350 apprentices over the next four years.

## **6. Graduate Employment**

### ***GradsKent***

GradsKent was launched in October 2010 and operates primarily through its website, [www.GradsKent.com](http://www.GradsKent.com). It incorporates the former GIGS (graduate, intern, gap and sandwich year) and Gap Year programmes.

The GradsKent website works with recruiting managers in KCC and external Kent-based employers to promote student and graduate employment opportunities. 69% of registered users on GradsKent are aged 25 or under, and 90% are aged 35 or under. It is therefore a key recruitment channel for recruiting managers to target younger audiences.

Since GradsKent was launched in October 2010, the project has placed the following numbers of candidates within KCC:

- Quarter 1 (11-12): 10
- Quarter 2 (11-12): 6 (as of 31/08/2011)

Due to the organisation contracting levels of recruitment have decreased slightly compared with the same periods last year:

- Quarter 1 (10-11): 16
- Quarter 2 (10-11): 10

In addition to placing graduates in employed roles an internship scheme was piloted during summer 2011. The purpose of the scheme is to provide graduates with valuable work experience (individuals receive expenses) and managers with additional support, for example for a short term project. Placements are typically 12 weeks and often take place during the university summer break. However the take up was low, again with budget pressures and a contracting workforce having an impact.

GradsKent has also placed graduates with Kent employers. For example two former Pfizer employees have been placed with local employers.

## ***Kent Graduate Programme***

Kent County Council has a long tradition of employing graduates through its Kent Graduate Programme. KCC recruited a further 7 graduates this year, 3 management, 2 Finance and 2 to the Highway Transportation stream. In total there are currently 14 graduates on the programme across the two years, i.e. including last year's intake.

The quality of candidates remains high and there has been an increase in the number of applications received.

## **7. Supporting Young People in KCC**

### ***Greenhouse***

Greenhouse is Kent County Council's staff group for young people run by young people. It seeks to not only support and develop young employees but to also influence the national agenda through participation in events and telling other local authorities about its work. It aims to provide young people with a means to express themselves and maximise the impact they can have on the organisation in the long-term. The group is engaged in a range of activities ranging from conferences to charity fundraising and local volunteering which allow members to gain skills and build their confidence. Greenhouse has developed various initiatives. These include a skill sharing project, a work shadowing day with elected Members and working with the County Council to deliver a development programme for younger employees.

Greenhouse has set itself a number of aims and objectives which include:

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- raising the profile of younger employees within the organisation
- promoting home grown talent through personal and career development
- supporting and developing employees to realise their potential
- having an impact beyond the organisation, into the community
- influencing the national agenda; and
- helping raise the council's profile as an employer of choice

The group has been shortlisted for and has won a number of national awards. Recently the group achieved the accolade of the 2011 Employers Forum on Age award for best innovation in the public sector.

## **8. Number of young people employed – The Challenge**

The number of employees aged under 25 reached a peak in March 2009 at 1006, which was 8% of the workforce at the time. Given KCC's workforce is contracting this number has reduced to 826, which is 7.1% of the workforce. The reasons why the percentage of young people has decreased is likely to be due to a number of factors including that in recent years managers have risen to the challenge of employing more young people, often on temporary or fixed term contracts due to the uncertainty of budgets. As a consequence of the tightening financial climate and savings requirements the expectation is that these contracts have not been renewed. Added to this young people change jobs more frequently than other age groups as they are developing their

careers. When managers have vacancies these often contribute to savings. Furthermore when vacancies are filled employees at risk of redundancy are recruited. If there are no such individuals who are suitable posts are normally advertised internally. Only after these routes have been exhausted are posts advertised external (except in shortage skills areas such as children's' social care). Information on employees aged under 25 and under 30 is shown as an appendix to this report.

## **9. External Recognition**

Over the years KCC has been recognised for its work in employing young people. Even in the current climate KCC was invited to contribute a case study on 'HR best practice and benchmarking' by the Incomes Data Services that was published in August 2011.

## **10. Future Developments**

KCC will continue to develop its approach to engaging with and employing young people by working with managers to provide opportunities through work experience, apprenticeships, KentGrads and the Kent Graduate Programme. In addition it is proposed that a further route to employment is introduced that targets post A Level students. It is recognised that increasing or indeed maintaining the current level of young people is a challenge given the organisation is contracting. There is already a great deal of synergy between each programme and the recent change of management and delivery of work experience to the Human Resources Division has been beneficial by pooling knowledge and expertise. The One Council culture will further enhance this approach. The Human Resources Division is currently developing an Organisation Development and People. Routes to employment is one of the key actions contained within the resourcing action plan (which is part of the overall plan). Other key actions will be developed that will support employing young people including talent management and succession planning. Further analysis will be undertaken on why young people leave (HR is also looking into undertaking exit questionnaires) and an action plan developed.

## **11. Recommendations**

(i) That Personnel Committee notes KCC's approach to employing young people through work experience, Kent Success Apprenticeships, GradsKent, the Kent Graduate Programme and Greenhouse young peoples group.

(ii) That HR develops a new route to employment that targets post A Level students.

(iii) That Personnel Committee informs officers of any specific work it would like developed as part of future action plans.

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