

# **NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## **PERSONNEL COMMITTEE**

**16<sup>th</sup> May 2016**

**Report of the Head of Commissioning and Support Services –  
A. Thomas**

### **Matter for Monitoring**

**Wards Affected: All**

## **The Appointment of Foundation Apprentices within the Social Services, Health and Housing Directorate**

### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide information to Members in relation to the Foundation Apprentice Scheme and its adoption within Business Support Services, of the Social Services, Health and Housing Directorate.

### **Executive Summary**

2. The report covers the following areas:
  - An explanation of the Foundation Apprentice Scheme
  - Details of how the scheme has been applied within the Social Services, Health and Housing Directorate.
  - Observations and comments from Line Managers and Social Services Practitioners, with regards to their experience of FA's.
  - Comments and feedback from current and previous Foundation Apprentices (FA's)

## Background

3. Business Support Services (BSS) is the administrative arm of Children and Young People Services (CYPS) and Community Care Services. The primary responsibility of BSS is the provision of a high quality administrative service to front-line social work teams, which is both adaptable to the changing needs of practitioners, whilst remaining economically sustainable.

In keeping with the Authority's 'Career Start Scheme', BSS has been a trailblazer within the Council, in its commitment to recruit Foundation Apprentices (FA).

The FA scheme is open to 16-24 year olds. Candidates are not necessarily required to have "formal" qualifications; however, they are expected to complete a literacy and numeracy test as part of the recruitment process and perhaps more importantly, they must have the drive and ambition to embrace an apprenticeship.

New appointments are given a 15 month contract, during which time; they are provided with all the necessary help and support required to complete a NVQ Level 2 in Business. FA's currently receive £3.30 per hour for the first 12 months of their contract, rising to £7.20 per hour once they have completed 12 months service.

The Scheme supports a number of the Council's Corporate Aims and Objectives, including the following: -

- "To get.....people into training, work experience and employment..." (Economic Prosperity).
- "To promote opportunities for access to quality skills development throughout the community" (Education & Lifelong Learning)
- "To establish the Council as an Employer of Choice to potential employees" (Service Quality & Improvement)

BSS has allocated a supernumerary budget of £72,500 to support the FA scheme. Savings from elsewhere within BSS have been re-directed to fund this initiative.

There are several significant benefits associated with BSS/the Local Authority's adoption of the FA scheme:

- FA's are given the opportunity to acquire a practical and respected qualification.
- FA's acquire 15 months "on the job" experience.
- FA's youthful enthusiasm can be infectious throughout the entire service.
- FA's often come with new ideas and skills, particularly with regards to I.T., that can be shared amongst colleagues.
- BSS and the Council as a whole, are setting the right example to other employers within the County Borough, with regards to giving young adults apprenticeship opportunities
- Many FA's have progressed on to acquiring substantive positions within the Authority.
- Almost all Business Support Officer (BSO) vacancies in the past 2 years or so within BSS, have been filled by individuals who have first proved themselves as FA's.
- Both the quality and quantity of work undertaken within BSS has improved in recent years, due in part to new BSO appointments (derived from the FA cohort) "hitting the ground running" and generally making a seamless transition to the more responsible role.

There are few if any negatives linked to the FA initiative. However, the scheme requires commitment to a certain level of investment, both in terms of "management time" and financial resources; however, in relative terms, neither of these are overly burdensome, particularly considering the overriding positives associated with the appointment of FA's.

## Progress

4. BSS first adopted the FA scheme in November 2013, during which time, some 32 FA's have been appointed. For many of these young adults, a FA post was their first full-time job.

It is pleasing to note that of the 32 appointments made, many have subsequently progressed to temporary or permanent substantive positions within the Authority. In fact, of the 22 individuals that have completed their apprenticeship (there are currently 10 FA's in post at present); only 4 have left the employment of the Council, whereas 18 remain; a retention rate of 78%.

Despite the obvious need to protect the anonymity of current and previous FA's, Personnel Committee may find it of interest to have sight of a selection of brief comments from Line managers and/or Practitioners, referencing how individual FA's have integrated into the role/service. These are shown in **Appendix 1**.

In addition to acquiring the views of line managers and social work practitioners, during April 2016 19 FA's completed a brief survey, noting their experiences and observations on the FA scheme. They were asked to rank four statements by selecting either 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'disagree', or 'strongly disagree'; the details of which are shown in **Appendix 2**.

## Conclusions

It is evident from the experiences of our FA's and their colleagues, that the FA scheme offers real opportunity for young people to gain the skills, experience and potential career in what can be, an extremely rewarding environment. It could also be argued that that the scheme provides FA's with an element of structure and security that, to some degree, appears to be helping them grow into responsible and conscientious young adults.

If there are any Sections within the Council, still undecided as to whether to "invest" in FA's; based on the experiences of BSS, there is relatively little to lose and so much more to be gained by fully adopting the FA scheme.

## **Financial Impact**

5. There is no financial impact. This activity is funded from within existing Social Service, Health and Housing budgets.

## **Workforce Impacts**

6. There are positive workforce impacts associated with this report as shown above.

## **Legal Impacts**

7. There are no legal implications to this report.

## **Risk Management**

8. There are no associated risks.

## **Consultation**

9. There is no requirement for consultation on this matter.

## **Recommendations**

10. That Members note the report.

## **Appendices**

11. Appendix 1 - Line Manager and Social Work Practitioner Comments.  
Appendix 2 - Foundation Apprentice Survey.

## **List of Background Papers**

15. None

## **Officer Contact**

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