

Committee: **Regeneration Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting: **9th February 2022**
Report Subject: **Aspire Shared Apprenticeship Programme**
Portfolio Holder: **Executive Member Cllr D Davies, Regeneration and Economic Development**
Report submitted by: **Richard Crook, Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
x	27.01.22	31.01.22			09.02.22	02.03.22		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is for Members to consider performance of the Aspire programme and associated external business engagement; and to also provide performance information on the BGCBC internal apprenticeship programme.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The Aspire Shared Apprentice Programme was initially setup in 2015, with funding from WG, as a response to identified market failure within the engineering and advanced manufacturing sector within Blaenau Gwent. It proved so successful that it was expanded to include provision in Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council in 2017 and the project has been extended to September 2021 in both localities.
- 2.2 In 2018 the Aspire Team started working with internal departments to raise the profile of the programme and demonstrate how having an apprentice could strengthen the workforce and fulfil future skills gaps and in October 2020 a designated officer was appointed through Legacy Funding to support this.
- 2.3 Currently there are 11 apprentices in situ within departments in the Council. There are 4 vacancies with 5 pending. The opportunities are widening to Social Services, Estates and Finance. It has been really encouraging how the Authority has embraced this over the last 12 months and really positive in creating opportunities of long term roles within the Authority not just placement opportunities.
- 2.4 The mentor alongside the apprenticeship pathways also facilitates work placement opportunities for the 'Children who are Looked After'. At present there are 3 on placement with partners in the borough.
- 2.5 In 2019 & 2021 Aspire won the 'Large Employer of the Year' award at the Apprenticeship Awards Cymru 2019 (AAC), The award category entitled 'Large and Macro Employer of the Year' recognises and celebrates the employer's commitment to developing their workforce through

apprenticeships, whilst also supporting their employees during training. To have won the award a second time and during a pandemic, demonstrates the commitment and support the Team has given to apprentices and their employers.

2.6 **The Aspire Offer to Apprentices across Blaenau Gwent**

- The programme provides an accessible platform for young people to access bespoke apprenticeship opportunities in the region facilitated by a programme management team liaising with local colleges and apprenticeship learning provider.
- The Aspire Team provides a range of support from advice on their application form; to encouragement, preparatory guidance for interviews and the selection processes. Feedback will be provided to unsuccessful applicants at all stages of the application and recruitment processes and signposting will be provided to other similar advertised vacancies that may be of interest.
- The successful candidates become part of a cohort that gives them an identity and peer to peer support in the first few months of their working life as an apprentice.
- They are also supported by a mentor throughout the term of the apprenticeship helping them resolve educational and social impediments to the completion of their apprenticeship. The mentors will also act as a point of mediation between the apprentice, the employer and the educational provider.

2.7 **The Aspire Offer to Businesses across Blaenau Gwent**

- One of the main appeals of the Shared Apprenticeship Programme to businesses is that flexible approach that can be offered, depending on business needs and capacity.
- The main attributes of the Programme are:
 - The creation of 'Partnership Agreement' between industry and the Programme
 - Continued investment in business engagement building upon local level connections
 - The Aspire Team undertake the recruitment process for employers
 - Employers make final recruitment decisions
 - All apprenticeship level positions are paid for
 - Regular reports on the progress of individual apprentices
 - Short surveys are completed at the end of the apprenticeship and feedback is provided to the apprentice and employer
 - The employer has a qualified employee to help take the business forward.

2.8 **To date the Aspire Shared Apprenticeship Programme has:**

Externally

- Recruited and supported 84 apprentices (2015-2020)
- The Programme has engaged with over 60 manufacturing companies across the Local Authority to facilitate the apprenticeships, 20 have become host employers of which some of the companies are:
 - Continental
 - PCI Pharmaceutical
 - JC Moulding
 - GTEM
 - Cruz Engineering
 - Sogefi Filtration
 - Liberty Steel
 - TCK Electrical
 - Camtronics
- 60% of companies are SMEs
- Learning Pathways include:
 - Electrical Engineering
 - Mechanical Engineering
 - Applied Science
 - IT
 - EEP's
 - Commercial focused Business Administration
 - Quality Engineering
- 100% of apprentices on cohort 1 have been employed, of which 67% retained within host employer
- The programme can now measure the outcomes due to the first two cohorts of apprentices completing their apprenticeships.

2.9 The programme has facilitated 101 apprentices based within industry in Blaenau Gwent on various pathways including: - Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Applied Science, IT, EEP's, Commercial focused Business Administration and Quality Engineering.

2.10 In 2015/2016/2017 academic years Cohort 1 and 2 & 3: -

	Number of apprentices	Completed their framework	Framework completed if transfer was successful	Entered Employment	Progressed onto further learning
Cohort 1	18	15 (83%) 2 transferred onto other apprenticeships	17 (94%)	18(100%)	10 (55)%

Cohort 2	19	16 (84%)	16 (84%)	18 (95%) 1 apprentice when on to a degree	9 (47%)
Cohort 3	19	13 (68%) 2 Transferred	15 (79%)	17 (89 %) 1 Apprentice degree 1 different sector course	8 (42%)
Totals	56	44 (79%)	48 (85%)	53 (95%)	19 (51%)

2.11 From the above data the SAP programme has had good framework completion rates – all above the traditional apprenticeship framework success rate which was 80.9% in Feb 2020 a decrease of 0.6 of a percentage point from 2017/18.

2.12 Entering into employment is also positive, the lowest being 89% in cohort 3 but almost all SAP apprentices are employed within their hosts following framework completion.

2.13 Progression from the Level 3 programme into higher apprenticeships is also successful with almost half of the recruits continuing their learning journey.

2.14 Internally

- Recruited 11 Internal Apprentices employed within BGCBC on a range of pathways.
- Community Services, Audit, Business Support and Social Services are departments who have already engaged.
- Housing and Digital pathways are being reviewed and it is hoped vacancies in these areas will be created in early 2021.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

Option 1

To consider the detail contained in the report and make specific comments and/or recommendations for improvement for consideration by the Executive Committee.

Option 2

Accept the report as provided.

4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

- Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan: Forge new pathways to prosperity through employment and skills development
- Corporate Plan: Economic Development and Regeneration
- Regeneration Priorities: employment and skills, enterprise and innovation.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

Short Term

To date there has been no confirmation of funding post 2022 and this is Welsh Government funding.

Long Term

It is anticipated that the proposals submitted to the Welsh Government and City Deal will generate funding for the programme to continue over the next 6 years for Blaenau Gwent and the City Region

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

Demand for the service across the region doesn't materialise; mitigated through market research, early business/LA engagement and a phased approach to delivery.

Demand for the service exceeds resource available; this will be managed within the realms of the funding, some areas may not require the service and because the programme will be centrally funded the programme management team can allocate resource where required.

Duplication of provisions/lack of engagement from FEs; mitigated through early engagement with providers and colleges. Over the last few months a number of meetings have been held to discuss apprenticeship allocation and how best Aspire could potentially facilitate opportunities and support recruitment and compliment their service.

5.3 ***Legal***

Legal advice and joint contracts of employment have been agreed for the programme currently and it is expected that these will remain the same future host employers.

In addition to contracts of employment, there are training agreements in place with the apprentice, Aspire, host employer and training provider.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

Not required for this update

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

To date the Aspire Shared Apprenticeship Programme has:

- Recruited and supported 101 apprentices placed in over 25 manufacturing companies across Blaenau Gwent in addition to employment of 11 apprentices within council departments.
- 51% of apprentices within Cohorts 1 2 &3 have progressed onto higher education / HNC.
- 100% of apprentices on cohort 1 have been employed, of which 67% retained within host employer
- Framework completed: Cohort 1 –83%, Cohort 2 – 79% Cohort 3 – 68%
- 100% of apprentices in cohorts 1-6 have had the opportunity to rotate to another company to fulfil skills gaps

6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***

The following are future outcomes that are based on the regional proposals submitted to City Deal and Welsh Government respectively which includes Blaenau Gwent and 9 other authorities:

- Recruit and support over 300 apprentices across the region over 6 years should the funding proposals be awarded
- 20% of apprentices to progress onto higher education / HNC.
- 70% of apprentices to be employed within host employer
- 100% of apprentices to have had the opportunity to rotate to another company to fulfil skills gaps

The Employment and Skills plan will outline specific priorities and associated actions to:

- Increase the number of employment opportunities available
- Increase the range of employment opportunities available
- Ensure appropriate employment provision to support people into work and progress once in work
- Train and upskill local residents aligned to demand or growth sectors
- Raised awareness of opportunities to support educational attainment and aspiration
- Increased employment and skills opportunities secured through community benefits.

6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***

To date the emerging proposals have been developed in consultation/discussions with:

- Merthyr Tydfil Council
- Welsh Government
- City Deal
- Regional Skills Partnership
- Coleg Gwent
- Coleg Y Cymoedd
- Coleg Merthyr Tydfil
- Torfaen Council
- RCT Council

6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

The future proposals aim to meet the needs businesses; future skills planning and fulfil current skills gaps. The success within two current local authorities' (BG & MT) demonstrate the need for a coordinated approach to facilitate the recruitment for business and engagement with learning providers.

The team are continually working with education to identify progression routes onto higher education as industry requires these higher level skills and with this apprenticeship pathway it provides alternative routes to employment for young people.

The proposals are offering employers and local authorities to demonstrate the employment opportunities within local areas providing skilled young people locally and meeting regional needs

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

Within the plan there is acknowledgement of current employment, skills and attainment figures relating to the local population and our relatively weak performance comparative to other areas within the region. The plan seeks to address this by putting in place measures to address current performance.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

The proposals are integral to collaborative working across the city region and with individual local authorities, that is the key to its success, to date there has been RSP engagement, partner LA and FE discussions, business engagement.

There are currently Joint Contracts of employment in place with all current employers with apprentices and these documents will be shared and part of the proposal.

It is vital that the team works closely as they have done in the past with FE. It will be important to utilise the apprenticeship contract within individual providers for each area. Relationship with the FE to support delivery

6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***

The contents of the plan will link closely with Education.

6.8 ***EgIA***

The plan is aimed at ensuring Blaenau Gwent Prospers, this is inclusive of all in our efforts to raise skills and employment levels for residents.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

- 7.1 A baseline, aligned to the proposals will be developed to measure the medium and long term impact of the programme. An annual review and update on progress will be prepared and reported through scrutiny, executive and the PSB.