

**Report of the Director of City Development**

**Report to Executive Board**

**Date: 7 March 2012**

**Subject: Apprenticeships In Parks and Countryside**

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

**Summary of main issues**

1. A Parks and Countryside apprenticeship programme was run in Leeds with final recruitment ending in 1984. A number of those former apprentices are now employed in many differing roles throughout the service. However, over the years many skilled staff have left the service, some as part of the early leavers initiative or indeed retired. In order to maintain a sustainable approach to skills development, there is a need to implement an expanded apprenticeship programme. This will ensure that future employees have the skills to plan, design, manage and maintain parks and green space in Leeds, as well as how to work with volunteers and manage park-based events safely.
2. There are several apprenticeship opportunities available within the service, all of which are work-based training programmes designed by a learning provider around specific needs, and leading to nationally recognised qualifications.
3. The proposal is to employ 21 apprentices in Parks and Countryside for a minimum of 2 years reflecting the roles and range of skills required in such a diverse service.
4. It is hoped that in due course employment opportunities can be offered to apprentices, so that they can further develop up to and beyond degree level, the future skills and knowledge required to help lead and deliver the service.

**Recommendations**

5. It is recommended that Executive Board supports the planned development of an apprenticeship scheme in Parks and Countryside.

## **1 Purpose of this report**

- 1.1 This report highlights proposals to develop an apprenticeship programme for the Parks and Countryside service.

## **2 Background information**

- 2.1 An apprenticeship is a learning framework which can be applied to a job role to either up skill an existing employee or train a new employee to the required standard. Instead of theoretical learning in the classroom, apprentices learn in the workplace, absorbing skills from experienced colleagues. Apprenticeships offer a framework of qualifications covering NVQ's, technical certificates, the theoretical side of the business and key functional skills in English and Maths. The framework can provide a development route for existing staff and it can also provide a route into employment and also an alternative viable route to higher education.
- 2.2 The Council's apprenticeship programme has been used to provide new opportunities for 173 previously unemployed young people and to skill, retrain and redeploy 531 staff to meet its changing workforce needs over the last 2 years. With over 700 new starts to date, the council is now one of the largest in the country in terms of supporting apprenticeships. The Council is committed to continued workforce development and even at a time of change and uncertainty will continue to make a substantial investment in key frontline services through its apprenticeship programme. HR Managers are working with service managers to identify workforce development needs to ensure future apprenticeship provision is targeted to meet the Council's changing business needs.
- 2.3 It is evident that a larger and broader mix of Leeds employers need to be engaged in Apprenticeships to grow the city's skills base, increase employment and improve business productivity, and the Council has a role in enabling this activity and acting as an exemplar employer. The Council has led work with local partners and the business community to increase the number of young people accessing apprenticeships and supporting employers to increase the number of apprenticeships offered in the city. Growing the number of high quality apprenticeship opportunities is a priority issue for the city to contribute improving skill levels, increase employment and improve business productivity. As a result of our activity there has been a 98% increase in the number of people starting apprenticeships in Leeds in the last year growing to a total of 7,031 apprenticeship starts by July 2011.
- 2.4 An apprenticeship programme was last run in Parks and Countryside in Leeds with final recruitment ending in 1984. This focussed primarily on giving young people horticultural skills by enabling them to experience a wide range of facilities and mentoring opportunities. A number of apprentices recruited up to 1984 are now employed in many differing roles throughout Parks and Countryside, including senior managers and highly skilled craft and landscape gardeners. The current Head of Parks and Countryside finished his apprenticeship in the mid-eighties, along with a number of other managers in the service. Many of the head and craft gardeners based in the 62 community parks across Leeds are also former apprentices, including some Estate Officers responsible for the high

horticultural standards achieved at Golden Acre, Roundhay Park, and Temple Newsam Estate. The current Nursery Manager and staff within the landscape construction team (who are currently delivering the Parks for People Heritage Lottery scheme in Middleton Park) are all apprentice trained.

- 2.5 Parks and green spaces are a key factor in demonstrating that Leeds is an attractive place to live, visit, work and invest. They provide places for relaxation and escape, exercise and recreation, and also build a sense of community. There are almost 4,000 hectares of parks and green space in Leeds which includes 7 major parks, 62 community parks, 95 recreation grounds, and 155 hectares of local green space. Leeds has achieved the Green Flag Award for 7 parks and has an ambition to manage all community parks to this standard by 2020. Currently, 21 out of the 62 parks (34%) achieve the standard and the creation of these apprenticeship opportunities will be crucial to maintaining a skilled workforce and help deliver the quality of horticulture to achieve this ambition.
- 2.6 However, over the years many skilled staff have left the service, some as part of the early leavers initiative or indeed retired. This situation is not unique to Leeds as other local authority apprenticeship programmes ceased at the same time. Recently 5 apprentices have been recruited within horticulture, forestry and animal care. However in order to maintain and develop a sustainable approach there is a need to expand an apprenticeship programme. This will ensure that future employees have the skills to plan, design, manage and maintain parks and green space in Leeds, as well as how to work with volunteers and manage events safely. There is therefore an opportunity for an expanded apprentice recruitment programme from within the local community which will help develop talent and improve skills. There are several apprenticeship opportunities available within the service, all of which are work-based training programmes designed by the partner provider around specific needs, and leading to nationally recognised qualifications.

### 3 Main issues

- 3.1 The proposal is to take on 21 apprentices in Parks and Countryside for a minimum of 2 years reflecting the roles and range of skills required in such a diverse service as set below:
- **Catering and Retail – 2 apprentices** in food preparation and cooking at NVQ level 2. These apprentices will combine work experience at the 4 cafes based in parks and develop theoretical skills in relevant areas of hospitality. They will include a range of different cuisines including healthy options, special diets and practical food production. In addition they will also develop skills in menu creation, stock control, purchasing, storage, waste minimisation and will gain certification in basic food hygiene.
  - **City and Community Park horticultural teams – 11 apprentice gardeners** all at NVQ Level 2 in amenity horticulture. These apprentices will develop an in-depth knowledge of plant identification and use, a good understanding of soil science and practical horticultural skills including elements of design, planting, site preparation, pruning and propagation. They will also learn about fine turf management for use on sports pitches, bowling green and golf courses.

- **Landscape Construction – 3 apprentice landscape gardeners** at NVQ Level 2 in landscape construction. This will include site preparation, surveying and interpretation of architectural plans along with hard landscaping skills such as ground forming, paving, and block work. They will also develop skills in soft landscaping including planting, site preparation and turf laying.
- **Lotherton Hall Estate – 1 visitor assistant apprentice.** Hospitality training to help provide an excellent customer service, develop communication skills, interpretation, customer care and conflict resolution, site security, and cash handling.
- **Roundhay Park – 1 apprentice animal keeper** at NVQ level 2 in animal care. This will include gaining an understanding of the health and well being of animals including accommodation and enrichment, appropriate food choice and preparation, animal handling techniques, interpretation and presentation skills, and public safety.
- **Transport and Engineering – 1 apprentice mechanic** at NVQ level 2 in mechanical engineering. This will include developing basic engineering skills, including repair and maintenance of horticultural/agricultural machinery, health and safety, appropriate choice and care of tools and equipment. A good understanding of the storage and handling of oils and fuels and the COSHH implications will also be required.

3.2 Each apprentice will also learn the importance of the Council's values as well as how to develop productive working relationships with colleagues, and maintaining the health, hygiene, safety and security of the working environment. Apprentices will also work towards developing core skills qualifications including problem solving, improving learning and performance, as well as working with others.

3.3 It is anticipated that all the training requirement costs will be via the National Apprenticeship Scheme. The learning provider will be selected carefully depending on the apprenticeship being studied and will appoint a representative who will be able to offer support and guidance to the trainees. The learning provider would assist with the following:

- Choosing the correct apprenticeship pathway
- Recruitment of the apprentices including open evenings, interviews and tests
- Agree a training plan with the apprentice and the service
- Management of the training
- Evaluation to ensure that national quality standards are met

3.4 The Leeds Children and Young People's Plan 2011-15 recognises the particular challenges faced by looked after children. The service will seek to ensure that young people in these circumstances are given every opportunity to consider an apprenticeship with Parks and Countryside.

3.5 A programme will be put in place to ensure the apprentices have the necessary support networks by providing an appropriate mentor for each apprentice. They

will seek to support the apprentice and ensure that the structured programme of work based development is followed. The mentor will come from within the service and will work closely with the apprentice giving professional advice, guidance and work welfare support.

- 3.6 In addition to the standard work programme we will seek to ensure that opportunities to provide wider experience (where appropriate) are taken such as through working in the horticultural nursery, green keeping and golf course maintenance and assisting with forestry operations. In addition there are many unique features across the city such as the Chelsea Flower Show gardens, the Japanese garden at Horsforth Hall Park, sites specifically designated for their conservation value and the national plant collections, which will provide opportunities to develop specialist horticultural and conservational skills and experience. Apprentices will have the opportunity to supervise and facilitate community events (600 held in Leeds parks annually), participate during 'in bloom' preparations, and assist in other visitor service functions.
- 3.7 Apprentices will also learn vital skills to engage and work with the 44 volunteer / 'friends' groups who support the service by undertaking practical work which combined with the 50 'in bloom' groups and corporate volunteering equates to over 210,000 volunteer hours annually. Encouraging volunteers is an area that the service is seeking to develop and 12 new volunteer groups have been established in 2011 with 10 new groups likely to be formed in 2012.
- 3.8 It is hoped that in due course employment opportunities can be offered to apprentices, so that they can further develop up to and beyond degree level, the future skills and knowledge required to help lead and deliver the service.

## **4 Corporate Considerations**

### **4.1 Consultation and Engagement**

- 4.1.1 Posts will be advertised along with open evenings held locally.

### **4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration**

- 4.2.1 The appropriate Leeds City Councils policies and procedures on recruitment and selection will be followed and an EDCI screening or impact assessment will be completed prior to implementation.

### **4.3 Council policies and City Priorities**

- 4.3.1 The proposals in this report contribute to the City Priority Plan and in particular the number of young people in employment, education or training. It contributes to the Council Business Plan and in particular improving the quality of Leeds' parks.
- 4.3.2 All staff with responsibility for mentoring will be CRB checked and given appropriate safeguarding guidance.

### **4.4 Resources and value for money**

- 4.4.1 Funding to conduct training for the apprenticeship programme is available from the National Apprenticeship Service, depending on the age of the apprentice.

This is paid directly to the organisation that provides and supports the apprentice, which in most cases this will be a learning provider. Each apprentice will receive around £7k per annum funded from within the Parks and Countryside revenue budget, thus managing the overall staff resources in 2012/13, between permanent and seasonal staff, and the cost of providing these apprentice opportunities.

#### **4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In**

- 4.5.1 Council policies and procedures will be followed by ensuring the apprentices are recruited openly and fairly. There are no issues relating to confidentiality or access to information with the content of this report. Although the report does not require a decision it is still eligible for call-in.

#### **4.6 Risk Management**

- 4.6.1 There are no significant risks associated with the contents of this report.

### **5 Conclusions**

- 5.1 The proposal to take on 21 apprentices in Parks and Countryside reflects the roles and range of skills required in such a diverse service. It provides an opportunity to provide training and employment particularly to young people finding it most difficult to find employment. This will ensure that future employees have the skills to plan, design, manage and maintain parks and green space in Leeds, as well as how to work with volunteers and manage park-based events safely.

### **6 Recommendations**

- 6.1 It is recommended that Executive Board supports the planned development of an apprenticeship scheme in Parks and Countryside.

### **7 Background documents<sup>1</sup>**

- 7.1 None.

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<sup>1</sup> The background documents listed in this section are available for inspection on request for a period of four years following the date of the relevant meeting. Accordingly this list does not include documents containing exempt or confidential information, or any published works. Requests to inspect any background documents should be submitted to the report author.