

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD

22 February 2017

Report of the Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)

1 SKILLS AND WORK READINESS

This report provides feedback on the findings of the Skills Panel in November 2016, and sets out a series of actions which will help contribute towards improving skills attainment and careers guidance.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 As requested by the Economic Regeneration Advisory Board in September 2016, a Skills Panel (comprising Members, Officers and a representative from the Kent Education Business Partnership) was convened on 09 November 2016 to discuss some of the key challenges and possible solutions to the skills and work-readiness agenda in the borough.

1.1.2 To aid the discussion, a short paper setting out key statistical information was provided to the panel. This paper is attached to this report (see Appendix 1).

1.2 Overview of the Discussion

1.2.1 Key issues raised by Members included:

- Although things are changing, there is still currently too much emphasis on academia/university as a route to employment, at the expense of vocational training and apprenticeships.
- Where there is a focus on apprenticeships, there is currently not enough focus on higher level and degree apprenticeships.
- In many schools there is a general lack of awareness amongst young people of their career options. This is in part due to a lack of professional careers advice, with the responsibility falling to teachers that are often not well-informed themselves.
- Need to be more businesses going into schools (both primary and secondary schools) to offer advice on employability skills, and for more school visits to local businesses to help young people and teachers build an initial understanding of the work place.

- In addition, need more work experience opportunities for young people to help them gain a greater appreciation of how businesses work.
- Work readiness is a key issue that has been raised by businesses. This includes the softer skills that are required in order to fit in to a work environment.
- Churches and voluntary sector can assist with work experience, but are generally not used enough.

1.2.2 With the above issues in mind, and recognising that there are a number of initiatives already being delivered (as set out in Appendix 1), the Skills Panel then looked at potential additional actions that could be undertaken by the Borough Council that would add value to this agenda. These included:

- **Engage with the Careers and Enterprise Company and Kent County Council (through the West Kent Partnership) to establish an enterprise adviser network across West Kent.** This measure would help to forge stronger links between education establishments and the private sector through establishing a number of local business mentors to help secondary schools in the area with setting up and providing good quality careers advice for their students - <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/>
- **Explore a possible ‘Make it Work’ event via the Kent Education Business Partnership.** This initiative involves Year 10 students being set work related challenges by local businesses (and potentially also voluntary sector groups) that can run over the course of a number of days. Students are selected to work with a particular employer based upon their career aspirations and general abilities. In previous events elsewhere in the county, challenges have included designing a bomb detector, designing offices for research staff, creating a campaign to raise awareness of skin cancer, and to draw up plans for a housing development.
- **Explore possible ‘taster’ days via Kent EBP and promotion of work experience.** Either as a follow on to the ‘Make it Work’ event or as a separate initiative, to enable young people to get real life work place experience for a couple of days with local businesses.
- **Investigate setting up a ‘speed networking’ event with the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) and local SMEs to engage hard to reach young people.** Having discussed this initiative with the FSB, this event gives local businesses an opportunity to forge strong links with a local school, share experience of running a business and meet potential young employees. The format of the event elsewhere in the county has been for students take part in workshops related to work readiness whilst business owners attend a seminar on a current topic, such as a new initiative or change in legislation. Then, afterwards both groups meet together for facilitated speed-networking.

1.3 Proposed Next Steps:

- 1.3.1 **Careers and Enterprise Company:** some initial exploratory work has been undertaken already through an informal working group comprising the West Kent Partnership, the 3 West Kent local authorities, Kent County Council and the Careers and Enterprise Company to pull together funding for a network co-ordinator, who will work directly with local businesses and schools to improve relationships between the two for the mutual benefit of students and employers.
- 1.3.2 The proposed breakdown of contributions is as follows:
- Careers and Enterprise Company - £25,000
 - Hadlow Group - £15,000
 - West Kent Partnership - £5,500
 - Sevenoaks DC - £1,500
 - Tunbridge Wells Borough Council - £1,500
 - Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council - £1,500
- 1.3.3 It is therefore proposed that a contribution of **£1,500 per annum for three years (2017/18 – 2019/20)** be put towards this initiative in order to guarantee the Borough Council maintains a voice on decision-making and ensuring maximum benefit for Tonbridge & Malling. This funding will be taken from existing Economic Development budgets.
- 1.3.4 **‘Make it Work’ Event and ‘Taster Days’:** initial discussions have taken place with the Kent Education Business Partnership, who have expressed an interest in supporting the Council in delivering these events and offering up match-funding themselves as a contribution. At this initial stage, it is proposed that a contribution of **£2,000 for 2017/18** from existing Economic Development budgets be used to carry out two ‘Make it Work’ Events involving 2 local schools and local businesses, and look to use these events as a route in to setting up a selection of ‘Taster Days’.
- 1.3.5 **‘Speed Networking Event’:** the next steps would be to work with the Federation of Small Businesses to identify a local secondary school or schools that are interested in taking part in this event. This could conceivably be done in liaison with the Careers and Enterprise Company, who could also promote the mentoring scheme to local businesses.
- 1.3.6 Once willing schools are identified, then dates would be established and the event would be promoted via social media and newsletters.
- 1.3.7 It is expected that the cost of holding these events would be low as the school would act as the venue. However, a nominal budget towards this initiative of **£500 for 2017/18** is suggested. Again, this would be from existing Economic Development budgets.

1.4 Legal Implications

1.4.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.5.1 These are addressed in Section 1.3 of this report.

1.6 Risk Assessment

1.6.1 Not applicable.

1.7 Equality Impact Assessment

1.7.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

1.8 Recommendations

1.8.1 That the feedback from the Skills Panel is noted and the proposed next steps, as detailed under 1.3 of this report, **BE APPROVED**.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration and the Chief Executive confirm that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

None

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