

Agenda Item No: 9
Report To: Cabinet
Date of Meeting: 10 January 2018
Report Title: Undergraduate work placement and bursary scheme
Report Author & Job Title: Michelle Pecci
Head of HR & Customer Services
Portfolio Holder: Cllr. A Pickering
Portfolio Holder for: Portfolio Holder for: HR & Customer Services



Summary: This report recommends the introduction of an undergraduate work placement and bursary scheme. The scheme will aim to support a local person in developing their career by providing good quality work placements as well as financial assistance whilst studying.

Key Decision: YES

Significantly Affected Wards: None

Recommendations: **The Cabinet is recommended to:-**

- I. Approve the introduction of the Undergraduate Work Placement and Bursary scheme**
- II. Note and approve the financial commitment of doing so.**

Policy Overview: The council has a role in supporting the development of local talent and we do this well with our work with Ashford College, and with our work on apprenticeships and graduates more generally. This scheme will aim to enhance our offer and will help to address recruitment and retention difficulties in key service areas.

Financial Implications: This scheme will cost £8k per person, per year in total. Comprising £5k per annum for the paid work placement and £3k per annum for the bursary.

Year 1: £ 8k
Year 2: £16k
Year 3: £24k
Year 4: £32k

Total maximum cost £32k after four years then annually after that.

Legal Implications A set of conditions for the scheme have been considered by legal services. We will need to ensure that we apply

appropriate tax and national insurance rules to any payments and be alive to any changes, currently the proposed scheme satisfies HMRC rules that the Bursary element can be paid without deductions for Tax and NI.

Equalities Impact Assessment

See Attached

Other Material Implications:

None

Exempt from Publication:

No

Background Papers:

None

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Introduction and Background

1. Getting young people to recognise local government as a place to build a career can be difficult. Historical publicity about austerity, preconceptions about the work local government does and preconceptions about the way we work can become barriers meaning that young people take convincing that the public sector is a place where they can build a career.
2. Whilst we can develop communications to combat this view, and promote the unique opportunities available in Ashford and the organisational culture, the millennial generation and generation 2020 take self-promotion with a pinch of salt; such is the rise of websites such as 'Glass Door' where employees are able to review their employers. This generation's demands of their employer are complex and they will want to know what it is really like to work in an organisation, how their career will be built and how they can truly contribute to the success of the organisation they are working for.
3. As a local authority we have a strategic role in supporting the development of local talent and we do this well with our support for Ashford College and, on an operational basis, with our work with apprentices and graduates more generally.
4. Going to university is a big financial commitment and this can create a strain on a family, perhaps meaning deferment, compromising choice of course to stay at home to keep costs down, not going at all and working whilst at university to cover living costs and to keep debt levels down.
5. Recently we have had to consider different ways to build resilience in parts of the organisation where traditional recruitment pathways have sometimes struggled to produce results we want. This combination of factors have led to the proposal in the report to introduce a bursary and placement scheme for undergraduates.

Proposal

6. It is proposed we introduce a work placement and bursary programme that combines good quality paid summer work experience with a bursary of up to £3,000 to a local undergraduate student for each year of their studies up to a maximum of 4 years. **Appendix 1 attaches an outline scheme for further information.**
7. An advantage for ABC is that we will have key projects and work completed during the summer, but more importantly we will begin to challenge the preconceptions of local government by this generation. Millennials and Generation 2020 have wide social networks, assisted with technology, and they

will start to share the word that local government, and Ashford Borough Council specifically, is a great place to work.

8. Ideally, we will be in a position to offer a role after graduation, this would not be guaranteed but the individual will be in a very strong position in their job search having been through this programme.

How would it work?

9. If agreed, the scheme will be advertised online, in the borough magazine and directly with local (in the borough) secondary schools and the college around March, there will be a period of time the application process would be open, and shortlisted undergraduates will be invited to interview and make a presentation to a panel after the summer exam period ends (early July).
10. We would expect the placement to be in one service area but on occasions it may be possible to move the placement to different departments if this helps to support a specific programme of study.
11. An offer of a placement will be mid-July. The placement, in year one would start late July until Mid-September (around 8 weeks). Placements in future years would start from the beginning of July and last the full 12 weeks.
12. The scheme (at appendix 1) will have a number of conditions including:
 - a. they must have been resident in the borough for a minimum of five years
 - b. they must complete the application process by the dates set out
 - c. the student must be committed to undertaking the work placement and the bursary would only be paid after successful completion of the work placement
 - d. they must have enrolled or have a conditional offer (which then becomes a firm offer) of a place at a recognised university or similar establishment,
 - e. they must have eligibility to work in the UK
13. Services will be invited to request a placement each year in the Autumn. The cost of the summer placement will to be met from service budgets so this will enable the placement cost to be built into budgets during the service planning process. The commitment will be ongoing for up to 4 years. The bursary budget will be held centrally so this will not need to be built into service budgets.
14. Opportunities will be advertised as described above and department managers will be able to shortlist, interview and select their undergraduate in much the same way as a traditional recruitment process.
15. Departments will allocate a buddy to help support their placement and HR will act as a placement coordinator role to make sure services have all the information they need to make the placement work, and for the individual to refer to if they have queries or issues with how the placement is going.

16. It is proposed that the Planning & Development Service lead the way and take the first undergraduate in 2019, the head of service has confirmed he is happy to support this proposal.

Implications and Risk Assessment

17. The scheme will cost £8k per person per year for up to four years.

Work Placements will cost in the region of £5k per annum, the bursary element will cost £3k per annum

Year 1: £ 8k

Year 2: £16k

Year 3: £24k

Year 4: £32k

The total financial impact will be £32k after four years then £32k annually thereafter.

18. The terms of the scheme will ensure there is the ability to recover the bursary payment in the event of the individual drops out of their course.

Equalities Impact Assessment

19. Members are referred to the attached Assessment. The only issue arising is how families of service personnel may be negatively impacted by having a minimum residency period in the conditions. We will waive this condition in these circumstances to ensure the scheme is open to all.

Consultation Planned or Undertaken

20. Unison have been consulted and have indicated that they are happy with the introduction of the scheme and comfortable with the proposals.

21. This report has been considered by JCC and, although members are advised to review the minutes of this meeting for full details, the discussions are summarised below.

- Members were generally very supportive of the scheme. They considered that the scheme was part of the Council's investment in the community and that the net worth outweighed the practical cost.
- Members agreed that the scheme was an opportunity to develop in-house quality professionals, and would help with future staff retention in key areas.
- The Chairman pointed out that this was the first such scheme amongst local authorities in Kent, so represented an innovative approach.
- A staffside representative said that staff were supportive of the scheme, but concern had been raised about a potentially negative impact on the number of apprentices. The Human Resources Manager said that the intention was to continue to increase the number of apprentices in line with the public sector apprenticeship reporting target.

- A staff-side representative asked about cuts in services and the use of temporary workers. A Member responded that this scheme would be an investment in the future, whereas agency staff would leave at the end of their contract, taking their skills and knowledge with them. Another Member added that the current budget scrutiny reviewed the requirement for resources.
- The Human Resources Manager reiterated that the Bursary Scheme was proposed as part of the Council's entry level employment offering alongside apprenticeships, graduate schemes and year-long placements (sandwich year).
- The value of 12-week placements was discussed and the Human Resources Manager said that the placements would consist of relevant and meaningful work for the Council and the individual.

Other Options Considered

22. We currently have graduate posts where we provide financial support for post graduate qualifications, we have reviewed whether we could enhance our offer to this group and help reduce student debt, but the tax implications of this would not make this option widely attractive. Currently the undergraduate pool of talent has less of a 'draw' towards ABC, and it is hoped that this scheme will address this.

Reasons for Supporting Option Recommended

23. It is felt that this proposal has a number of benefits a) it will support a local person in growing their career, b) it will start to address the perception of local government as a place to have a career, c) it will start to introduce different pathways of recruitment to more difficult to fill professions, d) the council will once again be leading the way in making career development accessible to all (in the way the Ashford Apprentice Wage was introduced).

Next Steps in Process

24. Once members have approved the introduction of the scheme we will commence the launch of the scheme in March and advertise a placement in the Planning & Development Service.
25. We will liaise with local schools and the college to encourage them to promote the scheme across their leavers as well a wider communications via the Ashford For You magazine, the website, social media and other communications channels.

Conclusion

26. The scheme is a great opportunity for the council to develop its reputation as an organisation that supports the development of talent and build on the established pathways for talent development (graduate roles, traineeships and apprenticeships). We plan to continue to develop these career pathways within the Council in the future.

27. At the same time it will help to challenge the misconceptions about working in local government whilst also supporting a local person with the costs of achieving a degree.

Portfolio Holder's Views

28. Councillor Alan Pickering- Portfolio Holder for HR & Customer Services:

I welcome the introduction of the work placement and bursary scheme. 'It is a positive approach to supporting a local person develop their career with work placement experience whilst also providing assistance with the costs of being a student. This scheme will set Ashford apart from other councils and introduce a new way of attracting talent to our organisation'.

Contact and Email

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Ashford Borough Council higher education bursary and work placement scheme (up to 3 or 4 years)

Purpose

The council is keen to support the growth of local talent and recognise that the cost of higher education can make the decision to go to university more difficult.

The purpose of this scheme is for the Council to provide financial support to a **local person** in meeting some of the day to day costs of going to undertaking higher education whilst also providing good quality paid work experience during the summer holiday period to support their programme of study.

We want to help the individual develop skills and experience and build an attractive CV ideally for a role at ABC if there is an appropriate opportunity on graduation. We also see this as an opportunity to build on our work of making opportunities accessible to all, in the way our Ashford Apprenticeship Wage does.

Conditions

1. You must be resident in the borough, for a minimum of 5 years¹, and be committed to working up to 12 weeks of the summer holidays in a placement at the council.
2. You must be enrolled/have an offer of a place at an educational establishment for at least one academic year and you must attend the course for at least twenty weeks in that academic year. Or if the course is longer you must attend for at least twenty weeks on average, in an academic year over the period of the course.
3. The educational establishment must be a recognised university, technical college or similar educational establishment, which is open to members of the public generally and offer more than one course of practical or academic instruction.
4. You must complete the full application process to be eligible for the bursary and the work placement; and satisfy eligibility to work in the UK checks.
5. You will be paid at the Ashford Living Wage Allowance rate for the period of the placement and you will be an employee of ABC.
6. We will pay a bursary up to £3,000 per year, this will be a tax free payment made upon commencement of the academic course of study (subject to any new taxation rules). This will be repayable if you drop out of your course before the end of the academic year.
7. If the summer work placement is not completed satisfactorily the offer of the bursary will be withdrawn. Examples of unsatisfactory completion will include issues relating to conduct, capability or attendance. Any future commitment

¹ Armed Forces Service Personnel and their families will not be required to meet this condition under our commitment to the Borough Council's Armed Forces Covenant

to a work placement will also be withdrawn. If you are unsuccessful in securing a place at university the offer of the bursary and future placements will be withdrawn. *Typically* this will be due to lower than expected A Level results. We will usually honour the current placement if it has commenced.

8. If you are successful in being awarded a bursary you agree to take part in publicity about the scheme.

Application process

You must complete the online application by the advertised date, this will detail the course and educational establishment that you have a confirmed place at (or a conditional offer of a place), a supporting statement highlighting why you should be considered for the work placement scheme and bursary.

Applicants who on the face of their application satisfy the conditions, and have provided a compelling supporting statement will be invited to present their application to a panel who will make a decision on whether the council is able to offer an opportunity of a bursary and placement scheme.

At times the council may decide to focus on specific professional backgrounds, especially where there is a scarcity of new graduate talent. Where possible we will highlight this in the invitation to apply details. However on occasions we may not have made this distinction but it could become a deciding factor when making decisions about successful candidates.

The placement

A placement will typically be in one service area focusing on a specific project or service delivery issue. The goal is to provide you with a better understanding of an area(s) of local government, to help you develop knowledge and skills in the workplace and to support your programme of study.

You will have a placement buddy and where possible we will try to link a key area of study to the placement to help embed learning or prepare you for your upcoming programme.

After graduation

Consideration will be given to a further 12 week placement at the end of your course, should there be an appropriate vacancy we will also encourage you apply for this role too.

Approximate timings

The first year of placement will need to fit around school/college commitments so the timetable for placement year 1 will be shorter.

- Applications open in April and close the end of May
- Presentation to the panel will commence early July
- Offers made mid-July
- Placement year 1 commence end of July to mid-September – up to 8 weeks
- Future year's placements run from beginning of July-.up to 12 weeks.