

Economic Prosperity Sub Committee

Tuesday, 23 February 2021

Present: Councillor Janet Hunter (Chair)
Councillors J Harrison, J Kirwin, K Lee, M Thirlaway,
J Walker and M Wilson

Apologies: Councillors M Rankin

EP24/21 Appointment of Substitute Members

There were no substitute members appointed.

EP25/21 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

Councillor M Thirlaway declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in relation to the employment and training of social care workers referred to in minute EP27/21 as he is employed by Parkside Care Limited.

EP26/21 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 3 March 2020 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

EP27/21 Employment and Skills

The sub-committee met to examine the most recent data, policy announcements, progress and challenges in relation to employment and skills and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Mark Barrett, the Council's Senior Manager Employment and Skills, presented an overview of:

- a) recent policy announcements made by the Government including details of the Chancellor's Plan for Jobs and the White Paper Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth;
- b) the Council's continuing work to deliver the key elements of the Our North Tyneside Plan related to employment, skills and business growth and the key priorities set out in its Employment and Skills Strategy;
- c) work with schools to ensure that young people across all ages received a good quality offer of careers education and information, advice and guidance;
- d) the latest data relating to the proportion of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and the support provided to this group;
- e) the decline in the number of apprenticeship starts for all age groups in North Tyneside which was reflected at regional and national levels;
- f) the numbers of workers in North Tyneside who were furloughed as part of the Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) and the support offered to unemployed residents;
- g) implementation of the Kickstart Scheme which provided funding to employers to create

- h) six-month job placements for 16 to 24 year olds;
- h) devolution of Adult Education Budget (AEB) to the North of Tyne Combined Authority and how this had enabled the area to respond to the needs of residents and businesses across the area;
- i) the Digital Outreach Project which aimed to address a gap in digital skills training. Officers confirmed that this programme was being delivered in association with the community and voluntary sector; and
- j) a six-month pilot Social Care Academy which would deliver pre-employment training and skill development which will help to supply well-prepared and sector-aware candidates for the social care workforce.

Sean Collier, the Council's Senior Manager: Business and Enterprise, presented a statistical analysis of the impact of Covid-19 on the local economy. It was suggested that members of the sub-committee be provided with the data on a regular basis. The latest data included figures in relation to Universal Credit claimants, the numbers of workers furloughed, property vacancy rates, the numbers of businesses not trading, businesses' turnover and the numbers of new businesses.

Henry Kippen, the Director of Economic Growth at the North of Tyne Combined Authority, joined the meeting to comment on the work of the Authority, to take a longer term view of the regional economy and develop in collaboration with the government and partners beyond the public sector a £2.8bn recovery plan for employment and transport in the region. The plan would focus on skills and employability and the sub-committee were presented with examples of areas for investment including the offshore wind, digital and cultural sectors. It was suggested that the sub-committee may wish to receive a more detailed presentation on this work at a future meeting.

Members of the sub-committee considered in more detail:

- a) the reasons for the high number of vacancies within the social care sector and the options available to the Council to work with the sector to improve the quality of employment and training;
- b) the options, opportunities and support likely to be available to young people at the conclusion of their 6 month placement under the Kick Start scheme; and
- c) the need to develop softer interpersonal skills and interviewing techniques to support people into employment.

Officers undertook to provide members with further information in relation to

- a) the amount of funding likely to be invested in North Tyneside as part of the Government's Plan for Jobs;
- b) a home care pilot in the North West of the borough and how it might act as an exemplar in terms of the quality of employment;
- c) the reasons why the Lifelong Loan Entitlement would not be available until 2025; and
- d) the feasibility work being undertaken by the North of Tyne Combined Authority in relation to the establishment of a community bank.

Members also asked to be briefed on the Reopening High Streets Safely Fund allocated by the Government and work commissioned by the Council to carry out some preliminary consultation. It was agreed that a report be presented to the next meeting of the sub-committee in March 2021.