

## County Council - 16 December 2022

### Item 11(a) - Notice of Motion on Skills from Cllr Sparkes

#### Briefing Note

##### Background

West Sussex is predominantly a service-led economy, with over 60% of the county's employees working in the largest employment sectors which are retail (16%), health and social work (13%), administrative and support services (10%), and transport and storage, education, and accommodation and food services (each 8%)<sup>1</sup>. This is like the South-East although West Sussex has a higher proportion of employee jobs in agriculture, forestry and fishing, manufacturing, and transportation than the region.

The Annual Population Survey<sup>2</sup> suggests West Sussex generally has higher economic activity and employment rates than the national and regional trend. These levels are beginning to rise towards pre-pandemic levels. There are indications that during the pandemic economic inactivity increased. There were more economically inactive residents in West Sussex in the year ending June 2022 than the year ending March 2019. Data suggests that economic inactivity has grown particularly among the 16 to 24 and the 50 to 64 years age groups.

During 2022 there has been an increase in job postings<sup>3</sup> to levels higher than five years ago. In October 2022 there were 21,900 job postings in West Sussex. The top 10 posted occupations were: care workers and home carers, nurses, customer service occupations, other administrative occupations, sales related occupations, programmers and software development professionals, kitchen and catering assistants, chefs, HR, bookkeepers, and payroll managers.

Apprenticeship vacancies are advertised on a [national web site](#). There were 4,690 apprenticeship starts across West Sussex in 2021/22.<sup>4</sup>

##### Green Economy

The [Government](#) has set an ambition for two million [green jobs \(PDF, 2.3MB\)](#) in the UK by 2030. Through the [Net Zero Strategy](#) there is a commitment to reform the skills system to deliver skills for green jobs to meet business need. [Greener Sussex](#) is a Department of Education 'Skills Development Fund' initiative for Sussex, designed to build local collaboration between colleges and employers with the aim of responding to local employment needs and trends in the green economy. The focus includes green technology for land management and food production, decarbonisation, hydrogen, and electric vehicle technology. A range of pathways for skills development will be established, including apprenticeships.

##### Partnership working

The Council works with partner organisations to seek to address skills gaps. One example is a joint initiative between the County Council and the borough and

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<sup>1</sup> 2021 Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES) ONS

<sup>2</sup> The Annual Population Survey, a residence-based labour market survey

<sup>3</sup> LightCast – provides details of job postings across the country

<sup>4</sup> <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/>

district councils, funded by the pooled business rates, which will see a range of activities in 2023 to promote digital jobs and tech careers to West Sussex residents. The aim is to raise aspiration around digital careers and to help fill digital skills gaps being experienced by many local businesses. Apprenticeship routes into digital careers will be promoted.

There are existing groups and forums where workforce, skills, and training opportunities such as apprenticeships and internships can be considered and promoted. These include member and officer economy themed meetings (with the latter also involving the South Downs National Park Authority), the [Coastal West Sussex Skills and Enterprise Group](#), Crawley Skills Taskforce and the employability-focussed Synchronise Group. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) also promotes apprenticeships and work experience. In 2021/22 the County Council worked in partnership with the DWP to run 'What Next After Kickstart' events to help businesses to understand how to create an apprenticeship for their [Kickstart](#) participant. The Coast to Capital Local Enterprise Partnership is no longer required by the Government to take a strategic role on skills.

The Government has introduced plans to put employers more firmly at the heart of the skills system. Employer Representative Bodies (ERBs) in local areas are designated to develop a Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP). The Plans need to clearly articulate employers' skills need, and the priority changes required to ensure post-16 technical education and skills provision is more responsive and flexible to meet labour market needs. The Sussex Chamber of Commerce was one of eight national trailblazer ERBs and has developed a [Local Skills Improvement Plan](#) to provide a framework for technical skills provision across Sussex. The County Council is a member of the Sussex LSIP Board.

## **Apprenticeships**

The County Council is proactive in promoting apprenticeships internally, using the apprenticeship levy. There are currently over 350 apprentices across the County Council and schools with around 80 apprentices waiting to start their apprenticeship training. A recent example of use of the apprenticeship levy has seen the recruitment of five individuals in Highways, Transport and Planning as civil engineer apprentices, who will be supported to become fully qualified in their specialism to help fill the Directorate's skills gaps.

The County Council transfers up to 25% of the apprenticeship levy to external organisations in West Sussex. The Local Government Association commended the County Council on this in 2021: 'Among the councils that have transferred funds, the average authority has committed £169,000 to be transferred to create 32 apprenticeship starts. Transfers is an area that West Sussex has excelled in with more than £359,000 committed to be transferred to create 96 apprenticeships in social care, the third sector, non-maintained schools, digital, engineering, design, retail and hospitality and tourism.'

## **Careers Service**

Schools have a statutory duty to provide careers guidance for their pupils and students on all post 16 routes, including apprenticeships. The [Careers and Enterprise Company](#) is funded to deliver support to schools around careers education. The County Council works closely with colleges and training providers to help young people to access apprenticeship opportunities. The Council works in

schools with targeted year 11s at risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment, or training) to provide them with high quality careers guidance which will include advice, information and guidance on apprenticeships and other vocational routes to employment.

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