

SUPPORTED INTERNSHIP PROJECT AT SEVENOAKS DISTRICT COUNCIL

People and Places Advisory Committee - 2 March 2021

Report of: Sarah Robson Deputy Chief Executive, Chief Officer, People and Places

Status: For Decision

Also considered by: N/A

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary: This report outlines the background and operational model for the Sevenoaks District Council supported internship project that commenced on 9 September 2019.

This reports support the Key Aim of: various elements of the Community Plan.

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Lesley Dyball

Contact Officer(s): Kelly Webb, Ext 7474

Recommendation to People and Places Advisory Committee: That Members note the contents of the report.

Reason for recommendation: The report outlines progress for the supported internship project at Sevenoaks District Council.

Introduction and Background

- 1 In January 2019, Senior Management Team agreed to pilot a supported employment initiative based on pioneering work done at the National Grid.
- 2 The National Grid's Supported Internship model involves a partnership with a local Special Educational Needs School. The school employs a full-time Job Coach who is based at the National Grid. The National Grid then appointed a Site Lead for the project from within the National Grid who helps to support and promote the project, and liaise between managers and the Job Coach.
- 3 The National Grid model has operated for over five years and supports an intake of around five students a year. From recent visits to the National Grid, it was clear that the scheme had created a talent pool that helped the Interns to transition into employment, including appropriate employment opportunities at the National Grid. Managers at the National Grid spoke about the positive impact on staff and the culture of the organisation. Interns spoke about improvements to confidence and quality of life

- 4 Following meetings with the National Grid, the Council's Enterprise Co-ordinator facilitated a partnership with Broomhill Bank Foundation Special School based in Tunbridge Wells and who have a satellite base in Hextable.
- 5 The concept has been to use the experience at the National Grid to carve out meaningful internship opportunities at Sevenoaks District Council, for students at Broomhill who had such opportunities identified within their Education and Health Care Plan.

The Supported Internship Model at Sevenoaks District Council

- 6 Broomhill Bank School successfully appointed a full-time Job Coach, and office space (that became known as "The Nest") was set aside for the project on the first floor of the Council's offices. The Council has a designated an Officer to be the Site Lead between the project and the Council.
- 7 Three students from Broomhill were selected for the scheme. The Site Lead invited senior managers to express an interest in hosting a supported internship. A job matching process took place looking at suitability of placements alongside students, their needs and aspirations. As a result the following placements were agreed:
 - IT Development
 - Facilities Management/Post Room and Asset Maintenance
 - Private Sector Housing
- 8 The interns started their placements on 9 September 2019. In line with the National Grid scheme, they are working school hours and during term-time only. The Job Coach works closely alongside interns who spend the first hour and last half hour of their day with the Job Coach. This provides essential support and reflection of their experience. Interns are also working to complete qualifications alongside their work experience as supported by the Job Coach.

Key outcomes

- 9 At the beginning of the Internship Programme in September 2019, Broomhill Bank School anticipated the scheme would contribute to the long-term career goals of some of its students and would fit with their working capabilities. For the Council, the internship needed to meet a real business need, with the potential of a paid job at the end of the programme, if appropriate.

Key findings from Year 1 of the Supported Internship Programme.

- 10 The school's students gained valuable work experience in their placements, which have had a significant impact on the interns and their futures. As a result of the skills learnt at the Council, the interns are all attending college, studying courses directly linked to their work experiences.

- 11 The interns overcame huge social fears and as they grew in confidence, managed to attend and positively contribute to several meetings. As a result, the school found that communication skills improved rapidly, with the young people initiating conversation, not just following another's lead. The interns felt confident to start conversations and ask questions to individuals and in groups, bringing teams together in a positive way. Council managers reported teams coming together to support the young person, which helped to grow more up support across departments and the organisation.
- 12 During the programme, the Job Coach considered each intern's personal skills, helping to support the practice of social skills and explore differences in communication styles. For example, "How we speak to colleagues in the workplace, do we talk to colleagues the same as we would our friends or family? The Job Coach and Council staff discussed language, subjects of conversation - should we share our political options for example?" This support the interns to become more self-aware, on several occasions, they practised volume skills - Should we speak as loudly in the open plan office, as we would in the post room? Appropriateness of dress, attendance and time keeping was also discussed, to support being work ready and increase life skills and development.
- 13 As the interns confidence grew, the Job Coach focused on developing independence, including completing tasks without being prompted, using initiative to find tasks and spending break times with their departments.
- 14 As part of the training and support delivered, the Job Coach supported Council staff to communicate positively with the interns, working with staff members individually and in groups to consider effective communication techniques and different strategies to apply and share knowledge.
- 15 During the programme, senior managers received Autism awareness training, which was rolled out more broadly to teams working with interns and across the Council. The project has led to a greater understanding of the customer experience for people with autism.
- 16 One of the young people had an ambition to work in a shop at the weekend, but viewed it as a goal for "other people, not someone like me". The intern was supported to bring together an impressive and honest CV, alongside help to practice interview techniques and presenting herself as the young professional she is. As a result, the intern gained part time employment in retail and now regularly uses public transport to travel to work, has increased her hours, and is quite rightly very proud of herself. All these experiences are enjoyed thanks to the confidence and skills gained on the internship programme. Although life skills are taught in school, this growth in confidence was nurtured in the workplace and extended in a way, we do not believe could be achieved in any other setting.

- 17 Broomhill Bank School has been delighted with the relationship that has developed with Sevenoaks District Council and looks forward to building on the success of the first year of the internship programme.

Next steps

- 18 The Council would like to continue working with Broomhill Bank School, extending the programme on a rolling annual basis. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the Council is working with the school to re-commence the programme in 2021.
- 19 With future cohorts of interns, we will look to introduce a recruitment and selection programme where the young people apply to and interview for the intern positions at the Council. We will also look to further develop the transition for the selected young people so that they are comfortable and familiar with their working environment before embarking on their internship.
- 20 Due to the current pandemic, the school is not proposing to place any interns until late 2021/early 2022, but both the Council and the school very much look forward to continuing this work and providing some more life changing experiences for young people.

Key Implications

Financial

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

There are no legal or human rights issues relating to this report.

Equality Assessment

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.

Resource (non-financial)

Work connected with the programme is undertaken through existing resources. A dedicated office space at the Council's offices will need to be set aside for the project interns and Job Coach.

Conclusion

The Supported Internship programme at Sevenoaks District Council has been established to improve employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities, and create a talent pool which will assist the Council in improving diversity of the workforce, develop talent and fill future vacancies. It has created a two-way learning experience, helping the Council to use the experience to improve the customer experience for people with learning difficulties.

Appendices

None

Background Papers

None

Sarah Robson

Deputy Chief Executive

Chief Officer, People and Places