

COUNCIL
22 February 2011

COUNCILLORS' QUESTIONS

**QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR JEFF OSBORN
TROWBRIDGE GROVE DIVISION**

**TO COUNCILLOR LIONEL GRUNDY OBE, CABINET MEMBER FOR
CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND COUNCILLOR JOHN BRADY, CABINET
MEMBER FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PLANNING AND HOUSING**

Question 1

Given that the Conservative led Government has terminated the Future Jobs Fund Scheme, what is this Council doing to tackle the scandal of rising youth unemployment in Wiltshire?

Response

The Wiltshire Potential Future Jobs Fund (FJF) contract with Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) is to create 495 new/additional jobs for unemployed young people aged 18-24 between October 2009 and March 2011. The contract runs until September 2011.

By 15 February 2011, all 495 jobs had been advertised with Job Centre Plus. 416 of these have been filled; another 15 are waiting on start dates. Thanks to our 21 employer partners we are confident we will fill all the vacancies giving 495 unemployed young people the chance of real work in a real job.

Our Jobcentre Plus (JCP) colleagues have indicated that as at 25 January the destinations for 209 Wiltshire Potential FJF leavers were:

- 46% found work,
- 1% University
- 1% travelling
- 2% maternity leave
- 12% unknown
- 38% went back on benefit,

Given the opportunity Wiltshire Council would certainly have sought to expand its FJF programme beyond September 2011.

The FJF experience in Wiltshire has been an unqualified success for both its employees and its employers. It has also been a very positive and far reaching example of successful partnership working which has helped the development of even stronger working relationships to tackle worklessness in Wiltshire especially with Jobcentre Plus and with Wiltshire College.

The issue of young people's lack of preparedness for the world of work is of key importance for Wiltshire Works - the Worklessness sub-group of the Employment & Skills Board (ESB). At its meeting on 11th February the Action for Wiltshire Board agreed to convene a special meeting of Wiltshire Works to look at support for 16-24 year olds.

Young People are amongst the people priorities in the Wiltshire Work & Skills Plan which outlines relevant activity aimed at increasing opportunities to help young people achieve their potential such as:

- **Wiltshire Works Grant**
We are working with JCP locally on a national pilot to provide 40 jobs for existing long term unemployed (2 year+). The jobs will be for at least 30 hours a week and last for 13 weeks. We are recruiting local employers as part of the Action for Wiltshire programme with 20 vacancies at the start of February 2011 and another 20 vacancies at the start of March 2011.
- **Work Experience for unemployed young people**
We are working with JCP on a work experience initiative for up to 300 unemployed 18-24 year olds who have been claiming JSA for 13 weeks or more to offer them work experience placements of up to 8 weeks and pay their travel costs if they live independently of family or with family in receipt of income based benefits.
The aims of the initiative are to:
- **Maximise the number of young people moving into employment or training through providing young unemployed people with quality work experience.**
If successful this will minimise the number of young people flowing onto the DWP Work Programme.
- **Working with Wiltshire College, neighbouring universities, employers and sector skills councils to develop the Higher Education offer and increase access to Higher Education**
- **Addressing attitude/cultural barriers of employers regarding their perception of young people**
- **A Basic Skills project to assist those who left compulsory education without the minimum skills level required for employability**
- **The WSEP Basic Skills Performance Reward Grant project being delivered by Wiltshire College commenced in August 2010. The project seeks to assist those who left compulsory education without the minimum skills level required for employability. Specifically it aims to:**
 - **Increase the number of adults obtaining a Skills for Life qualification at Entry Level 3**

- Increase the number of adults passing a Level 1 National Test in Adult Literacy (and/or Numeracy) from any of the accredited examining bodies
- Increase number of adults who gain a Level 2 qualification in Adult Literacy (and/or Numeracy) from any of the accredited examining bodies or any other Level 2 Qualification
- Through its own Skills for Life contract with the Skills Funding Agency, Wiltshire Council has been actively raising the Basic Skills levels of its workforce to increase employability. In 2008/09 139 staff were enrolled on programme with an achievement rate of 94.2%. In 2009/10 74 staff were enrolled on programme with an achievement rate of 97.3%. The lower number of learners is due to funding changes which excluded stand alone Skills for Life provision in 2009/10 so that the numbers are only for those enrolled on NVQ courses. Through the Family Learning Skills for Life contract with the Skills Funding Agency, the Council has been actively raising the Basic Skills levels of its communities. In 2008/09 there were 138 on programme with an achievement rate of 93.5%. In 2009/10 there were 64 on programme with an achievement rate of 94%. Enrolment numbers were fewer in 2009/10 as a result of national policy changes which now embed Family Learning Skills for Life courses within longer Family Learning courses rather than deliver as additional 'bolt-on' courses. In the past learners on very short Family Learning programmes were able to join 6 hour 'move on' courses but the short delivery times only suited higher level learners who needed to brush up on their existing skills. This new, longer, integrated approach has worked well as learners working at lower levels have more time to prepare and feel less anxious about taking the test.
- Wiltshire 100 in 100 Apprentices Campaign
We are working with Wiltshire College to achieve 100 new apprentices starting an apprenticeship in 100 days. This was launched on 10th January and an event is being held on 1st March to get as many employers as possible to pledge to take on an apprentice.
- Economy & Enterprise service is also working with HR & Organisational Development on a developing an Apprenticeship Action Plan in regard to Wiltshire Council employing apprentices and maximising the opportunities arising from apprenticeships to up skill its existing workforce.
- A recent decision has been taken by the Wiltshire Strategic Economic Partnership (WSEP) Employment & Skills Board for the Apprenticeships MoU Group between relevant Wiltshire Council services and National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) to formally become a sub-group of the ESB.

Assisting young people with the transition from education to employment is featuring as a priority in the emerging Employment & Skills Strategy for

Wiltshire as well as the Wiltshire Assembly's Action for Wiltshire Programme – Support for Recovery (phase 2) , which has areas of focus on:

- A programme of employability and informal skills development for young people and new labour market entrants
- Establishing a network of local entrepreneurs/business owners to be engaged as role models and provide placements or projects for young people to gain a practical context for skills application and practice
- Young Entrepreneur Society pilot to provide the right environment that will help prepare young people to start their own businesses
We ran this course for FJF employees in during the autumn and it was very well received.
- ESF Response to Redundancy

This is a programme of training and skills development for those at risk of redundancy or recently made redundant across Wiltshire & Swindon which only has until March 2011 to run. The Accountable Body is New College Swindon but both Wiltshire Council and Wiltshire College are partners. Overall the project is doing really well and the partnership is on target. So much so that we were asked by the SFA if we wanted to increase our allocation and extend the project to end March 2011 (otherwise would have ended in December 2010). We secured a further £100K approximately. With the project ending at the end of March we are focusing our efforts on building further links with employers.

Keeping NEET levels below the national average is another important priority and is being achieved by:

- The 'Get Prepared Programme' an Action for Wiltshire Initiative to support 16 to 18 year old young people move into employment, training or further education.
- Ensuring that vulnerable groups have access to additional support and guidance, for example an intensive personal adviser is co-located with the Looked After Children team.