

Briefing Note

Title: Generate More Jobs and Learning Opportunities

Date: 04.11.2020

Prepared by: Richard Lawrence

Job Title: Director of Regeneration

Intended Audience:

Internal

Partner organisation

Public

Confidential

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To provide an overview of the key emerging work that is being led by the Regeneration Directorate, working with a number of services across the council, to deliver the 'Generate More Jobs and Learning Opportunities' priority set out in the Council's Relighting Our City strategy.

2.0 Overview

- 2.1 The Generate More Jobs and Learning Opportunities priority is a key driver to support the city's recovery post Covid-19.
- 2.2 The priority has refocused efforts to address the increased barriers emerging from the pandemic that many local people are now facing to get into or sustain employment and to access skills.

3.0 Background and context

- 3.1 There are many challenges that have emerged from the pandemic which have increased the barriers local people are facing to get into work and sustain employment and to access new skills and training.
- 3.2 As a direct result of Covid-19 unemployment has increased in the city. There are indications that unemployment levels will rise further as the furlough scheme comes to a close in December and the economy continues to undergo fundamental changes such as a second national lock down starting from 5 November 2020.
- 3.3 The impact of Covid-19 on the local economy has resulted in a number of key sectors being severely affected, most notably hospitality, entertainment, leisure manufacturing and retail. This is in contrast to other sectors such as logistics, food sales, social and health care, digital and communication which are reporting huge growth due to a sharp rise in demand.

- 3.4 As these shifts in the economy occur the 'Generate More Jobs and Learning priority' in the Council's 'Relighting Our City' Strategy becomes more pressing to minimise the impact of the downturn the economy on the city and ensure the residents of the city can access opportunities.
- 3.5 Nationally, not only will Covid-19 have put millions of individuals out of work, but the mix of jobs that emerge from this crisis is likely to be different than those that were lost. People with the lowest incomes and educational attainment have been disproportionately affected, putting strains on achieving inclusive growth and potentially raising income inequality.
- 3.6 Amongst those who will be most susceptible to these changes will be the young people in the city. The disruption to education and the reduction in the number of entry level opportunities available both for apprenticeships and jobs will disproportionality impact on the city's younger population.
- 3.7 The youth claimant count in the city is 15.6% which is the third highest in the country.
- 3.8 The pandemic has also impacted those who are aged over 50 who are higher skills and have been in long term employment in the manufacturing sector. With the shifts in the economy adversely affecting sectors such as manufacturing, an increasing number are now for the first time in their working life facing re-deployment or redundancy.
- 3.9 The impact of Covid-19 has changed the skills requirements for local people with the need for those affected by redundancy to re-train or upskill so that they can compete for jobs that are available. Notably employers from most industries need local people to have digital skills. This challenge is exacerbated as the city remains an area where skills levels are low and there remains a need to increase skill levels at Level 4 and above.
- 3.10 The pandemic has highlighted and amplified the significant digital divide in the city. Prior to Covid-19, an estimated 35,000 residents had not been online in the last 3 months and 59,000 lacked all digital skills. National data showed that 44% of these were under 50. However, local evidence during Covid-19 illustrated the extent of the issues with 50% of adult education learners and nine out of ten people on a basic skills course not being able to get online to access learning. In addition, 60% of wolves at work clients and 25% of Impact clients were unable to access support online. Covid-19 highlighted a particular issue around lack of devices and connectivity, in addition to lack of motivation and digital skills. This problem has been further compounded as the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in the acceleration in the adoption of digital services by 2-5 years to facilitate remote working, remote learning, telehealth and ecommerce. Digital is considered critical to level-up our economy and to power economic and social recovery it is, therefore, also critical to ensure residents, our workforce and businesses have the right digital skills.

4.0 Proposal

4.1 The Generate More Jobs and Learning Opportunities priority is building on new and existing initiatives to support people in the city affected by the impact of Covid-19. To address barriers to employment, skills and training and assist all residents into good jobs.

4.2 In order to address these barriers work is being undertaken that is focused on developing a Wolves Youth Offer, digital connectivity and providing support to local people that are facing or are at risk of redundancy.

4.3 Young People

4.4 Young people have been disproportionately affected by Covid-19 due to several factors including a disruption in their education; the removal of many entry level jobs from the job market; and an economic environment where businesses are focussing on recovery rather than recruitment.

4.5 Wolves Youth Offer presents an ambitious programme to ensure all young people (16-24 years) in the city will receive appropriate support that will help them with their pathway into employment. Working with partners and colleagues from Education, Children and Young People, the approach looks to coordinate and enhance the advice and guidance already in place with the introduction of a 'Skills Health check'.

4.6 There is a key need to identify new routes of engaging for those young people not previously visible through existing links. Working with a work coach the young person will identify and create their own pathway to determine next steps and progression to move them in to work and on to sustained employment. This includes key links with specialist youth employability work coaches by DWP (Department for Work and Pensions) and the opening of a Youth Hub at the Way and at Wolverhampton College. It also includes additional skills provision for young people; subsidised apprenticeships; a traineeship programme and a subsidised paid Kickstart work experience programme.

4.7 Kickstart, a Government led initiative offering a 6-month work placement programme to any young person (16-24 years old) claiming Universal Credit to access paid work experience with an employer. The young person receives a living wage, paid through HMRC and the employer receives a financial grant to support the training, skills and progressions for the young person. A key objective for Wolverhampton is that the young people, particularly those who are most vulnerable are given a positive experience in the world of work whilst receiving quality skills and training that will help them to progress in to employment, an apprenticeship and, or further skills.

4.8 Digital Connectivity

- 4.9 Covid-19 highlighted the extent of digital exclusion in the City, not just relating to motivation and digital skills, but also devices and connectivity due to digital poverty. Wolves Online is a new device and connectivity lending scheme working through trusted partners, including Wolves at Work and Wolverhampton Learning Communities. The project will identify residents who could benefit from the devices and support them, enabling them to get online to participate in online learning and aid their job search and engage in digital skills training. This complements the range of digital inclusion activities already delivered in 'digital hubs' across the city, including libraries, online centres, Wolverhampton Learning Communities and community venues which address the needs of a diverse range of groups and individuals.
- 4.10 Covid-19 has accelerated the adoption of digital services by 2-5 years and is considered critical to level-up our economy to power economic and social recovery. A single gateway to digital skills #digital wolves is being developed signposting residents, workforce and businesses to online digital learning opportunities and local provision. The opportunities will range from basic digital skills, digital skills for employment to digital skills to reflect changing nature of all sectors as well as jobs in tech.
- 4.11 Response 2 Redundancy**
- 4.12 Wolves at Work is working with DWP and training providers to provide a package of support for those who find themselves facing or affected by redundancy.
- 4.13 Building on the experience the team has had with Carillion, House of Fraser and Debenhams the Council have a redundancy model in place. It has been identified that the model needs to be developed further in response to the impact of Covid-19 in the city.
- 4.14 Formally, once an organisation signals its intent to release 20 or more people to be placed at risk, they would raise a HR1 which would trigger JCP intervention and instigate the creation of a response taskforce. For Wolverhampton the Council want to ensure a quality coordinated approach in place and equally if there is no HR1 raised due to a lower number of people being made redundant, that the city can still engage, respond and offer a quality support package to those facing redundancy.
- 4.15 For Wolverhampton it is evident that there is an opportunity for intervention to occur much more quickly through are strong employer relationship. Growth Hubs and Local Authorities offer a great deal of support to employers and as such if the employer offer is visible then there is an opportunity for earlier engagement to provide a preventative response.
- 4.16 It is key that the city works closely with a number of stakeholders to assist those who are at risk or facing redundancy.

4.17 Through the response 2 redundancy model, working alongside national partners, the city would provide:

- A wrap around service of early interventions including benefit advice, careers advice and vacancy matching
- Residents of the city will have a Wolves at Work work coach to assist with careers and skills advice as well as vacancy matching
- Through the Wolves at Work model the Council are able to track and monitor individuals progress and outcomes

5.0 Questions for Scrutiny to consider

5.1 As part of the Wolves Youth Offer how do we ensure a collaborative approach across the Council and partners to raise awareness, understanding and seek their support?

5.2 How we can ensure the Wolves Youth Offer is inclusive and we engage fully with all Young People in the city?

5.3 How are we going to sustain the successful Wolves at Work model?

5.4 How can we help to close the digital divide in the city?

5.5 How do we as a city manage and support the effects of redundancy in a way that can be scaled up?