



**Bristol City Council**

**Apprenticeship Strategy 2020-24**



## **Foreword**

Bristol City Council has a clear vision to support and create apprenticeships to build a diverse and skilled local authority workforce, as well as promoting apprenticeships through our one city partnership with local employers, schools and partners.

To achieve our corporate and partnership ambitions we want to create an inclusive, high-performing, healthy and motivated workplace and become an employer of choice. This means having a highly skilled and diverse workforce with the right people with the right skills across the organisation at all levels.

Creating apprenticeship opportunities is a vital part in how we will do this.

Apprenticeships give people the opportunity to learn and grow, bringing fresh ideas, motivation and innovation into the organisation as well as supporting the personal development and growth of individuals taking part.

It is vital that Bristol City Council leads the way by prioritising job and training opportunities – in particular providing apprenticeship opportunities for local people, especially those who face the greatest challenges and risk such as care leavers and people with additional support needs.

Apprenticeships also play a critical role in enabling our existing workforce to develop their skills from entry to senior level roles - helping the Council to keep pace with rapid change and technological developments.

Apprenticeship training for staff will help us ensure we have a workforce equipped to provide outstanding services to local people and local communities.

## 1. Introduction

This document sets out the Apprenticeship Strategy for Bristol City Council as an anchor employer and also as a leading education and skills commissioner and provider. This strategy is closely aligned with the Council's Corporate Strategy and Organisational Improvement Plan and also the West of England Employment and Skills Strategy.

This document spans the period 2020 to 2024. It is intended to be a dynamic activity that will be regularly reviewed and updated in response to local, regional and national changes. It is being overseen by the City Council Strategy and Policy Board.

This strategy will be used to inform service planning and activity across a number of teams – including the Apprenticeship Team, the HR Recruitment Team and the Learning and Development Team that are working together to support all Council Directorates and locally managed schools to optimise our use of our Apprenticeship Levy.

## 2. Vision

Bristol apprenticeships enable new recruits and existing staff to develop their knowledge and learn new skills to get ahead in their career

Apprenticeships within Bristol City Council are seen and valued as high quality pathways to successful careers, providing opportunities for new and existing employees to develop, and also assisting the Council in meeting its current and future skills needs.

The Council faces a number of challenges that can only be met by employing the right people and ensuring they have the right skills to meet demands and provide outstanding services. Through apprenticeships we can 'grow our own' diverse talent to meet our skills needs both now and in the future.

## 3. Context

### 3.1 Apprenticeship Reforms

In 2016 Government introduced the National Apprenticeship Reforms, enshrined in legislation through the Enterprise Act 2016 and the Finance Act 2016. The ambitious reforms moved apprenticeships away from Further Education and Training Providers by repositioning the ownership, development and funding of apprenticeships with Employers.

The reforms aimed to increase the take up of apprenticeships, drive up quality, address skills shortages, stimulate local economic growth and support the social mobility agenda ensuring apprenticeships are available to all.

The reforms were designed to:

- Give employers control in designing apprenticeships
- Increase the flexibility of delivery
- Simplify the funding system
- Increase the effectiveness of training

To achieve this ambition and ensure these reforms could be fully funded a central component of the reforms was the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy, whereby all organisations with more than 250 employees and a pay bill greater than £3 million would pay to HMRC a levy equivalent to 0.5% of their total pay bill from April 2017.

To ensure that the public sector is a role model for these reforms an additional target to commence annually 2.3% of the workforce on apprenticeships was established.

Considerable progress has been made nationally towards reform, however, within the public sector there is more to do, the Government remain committed to [English Apprenticeships: Our 2020 Vision](#)

### **3.2 The Public Sector Target**

The Government's ambition to achieve 3 million apprentice starts by 2020, thereby addressing the national skills shortage led to the introduction of a public-sector target. This target ensures the Government's own sector can lead by example, the target is set at 2.3% of the public sector employed workforce starting an apprenticeship. This target can be met by both the recruitment of new apprenticeships in to the workforce and by the use of apprenticeships to upskill existing employees.

For Bristol City Council by March 2021 the apprenticeship target is 144 for non-schools staff, 80 for school's staff, giving an organisational total of 324 apprenticeship starts per year. The Council currently has 343 employees who are registered as apprenticeship starts which means we have exceeded our 2.3% target in 2019/20. Whilst this current position compares favourably to other councils, fewer starts have been achieved in schools. At the last census point in November 2019, Bristol was ranking comfortably in mid-table nationally.

### **3.3 Bristol's Apprenticeship Levy**

The approximate annual pay bill for Bristol City Council is circa £200 million and the Apprenticeship Levy is calculated at 0.5% of pay bill which results in a levy of circa £1 million. In addition, central government provide a levy top-up of 10% giving a total available levy pot £1.1 million per annum. The Council currently has £2.24 million in its levy pot.

Should the council spend more than its levy total it will move in to a co-funding arrangement where it will need to provide 5% of the cost of its unfunded apprentice provision. However, if the council does not spend its levy funds then these will be reclaimed after 24 months on a rolling basis. i.e. unspent levy funds from Sept 2017 were returned to HMRC in Sept 2019.

Bristol City Council has a responsibility to maximise the use of the apprenticeship levy to ensure that funding raised from the council is re-invested in the Bristol area. This can be achieved by using apprenticeships to develop Bristol City Council's employees and by transferring levy funds to non-levy paying organisations in the local area to support their apprenticeship training. This transfer can be up to 25% of the value of the council's levy pot.

Where unspent levy is reclaimed by HMRC it is then lost to the local economy, there is no provision for unspent levy to be invested locally or even in national schemes that benefit Bristol.

At the time of writing this strategy, Bristol is currently not spending its full levy allocation and is now seeing our first wave of funds expire and be returned to government.

## 4. Bristol's strategic ambitions

### 4.1 Bristol's Corporate Strategic Themes

Our [Corporate Strategy 2018 – 2023](#) identifies key strategic themes that are being directly supported through this apprenticeship strategy, in particular:

**Empowering and caring:** Through apprenticeship, Bristol City Council is increasing positive post-16 outcomes for priority groups, including the recruitment of young people in care and leaving care, Disabled young people with additional support needs, and young people who live in our challenging communities who are risk of disengaging from education, training and employment.

**Fair and inclusive:** Through apprenticeships, the Council is helping improve economic and social equality, contributing to inclusive economic growth and making sure people have access to good quality learning. Through our planning and social value commissioning processes, the City Council is also developing a talent pipeline to support the local construction industry and the recruitment of local labour for major projects and housing building programmes.

**Well connected:** Through our experience of work and apprenticeships, the Council is taking bold and innovative steps to make Bristol a joined up city, linking up people with jobs and with each other.

### 4.2 Organisational Improvement Plan Priorities

The Council's [Organisational Improvement Plan 2018–2023](#) sets out the Council's ambition to build a better Bristol for everyone, made possible through the professionalism and dedication of our employees.

This plan outlines a clear commitment to increase the recruitment of apprenticeships and to make full use of our apprenticeship levy to recruit 250 new apprenticeships starts each year to meet Public Sector Duty and utilise excess funds within levy.

Going forward it will be critical that apprenticeships are more embedded into wider organisational improvement and workforce development priorities and planning, with detailed arrangements in place so that apprenticeships are utilised more fully to enhance:

- leadership and management skills
- digital skills
- workforce planning
- support for managers who need to fill hard-to-fill roles and improve retention
- use of data to address diversity gaps.

### **4.3 Meeting current and future skills needs**

With the number of jobs in Bristol predicted to rise by at least 10-15,000 over the next decade, there is strong evidence that the Council will find it increasingly difficult to attract and retain sufficient numbers of people with the skills required to deliver exceptional services. Some service areas, particularly within Adults and Children Services, are already experiencing skills shortages as competition for skilled workers increases.

In addition to identifying apprenticeship opportunities for new employees, a 'grow your own' approach will also need to apply to our existing workforce if we are to ensure we have the capacity and capabilities we need. Providing opportunities for existing staff to utilise apprenticeships, particularly higher level apprenticeships, to gain skills and progress their career will further help to develop our talent pipeline within the organisation.

Although diversity in the Bristol City Council workforce is improving, there remain some service areas and job roles within Bristol City Council do not reflect the diversity of the Bristol population.

Overall, we have low numbers of young employees, 4% of the workforce are aged 16–24 compared with 16% in Bristol and 15% 'Travel to Work Area' benchmarks. We have a high number of employees aged 50–64, compared to the economically active population. Apprenticeships can help us to recruit new staff from target communities and also help us develop a more strategic and systematic approach to succession planning.

### **4.4 Improving quality and continuous improvement**

In 2019/20 our management of apprenticeship levy funding has also been scrutinized through a number of external bodies, including: through a financial audit of the apprenticeship levy; through an Ofsted inspection of Bristol City Council FE and Skills, and also through the Local Government Association Apprenticeship Acceleration Programme which included an Apprenticeship MOT.

These expert assessors and advisors have provided invaluable feedback that has been used to inform this strategy and the following priorities to drive forward improvements.

## **5. Apprenticeship strategy aims**

Our overall aim of this strategy is fully utilise the Council's apprenticeship levy and achieve 250 apprenticeship starts each year that:

- Support our workforce skills needs – now and in the future
- Supports Bristol's Corporate Plan strategic ambitions to improve equality
- Contributes to the One City Plan and WECA Employment and Skills Plan priorities
- Meet our public sector duty apprenticeship recruitment targets.

To achieve these ambitions and a step change in our apprenticeship recruitment we are committing to take action to deliver the following priority actions:

### **5.1 Improve manager engagement and accountability for apprenticeship**

We want to secure ownership and commitment to apprenticeships across 100% recruiting managers. To achieve this we want to refresh our communications and engagement activities, adopting a varied approach that incorporates senior manager directives, face to face engagement activities, intranet case studies and learning pool resources.

We also want to create apprenticeship champions throughout the organisation across managers who have positive experience of taking on apprenticeships who can act as advocates in their service area and help build a positive culture around apprenticeship recruitment.

Bristol City Council is in the process of establishing new senior level governance and monitoring arrangements with the introduction of a standing item on apprenticeships at Strategy and Policy Board meetings. These groups will oversee targets for apprenticeships starts and level spend for each service area.

Plans are also underway to improve strategic oversight and support for On Site construction apprenticeships.

### **5.2 Adopt an Apprenticeship First approach to recruitment**

Adoption of an Apprenticeship First Policy will enable the City Council to adopt a strategic and long term approach to accelerate apprenticeship recruitment and maximise levy spend. This requires all managers to consider whether a vacancy can be an apprenticeship before they go out to recruitment. It also requires all managers seeking to authorise staff training or development to consider whether it can be delivered via an apprenticeship (and funded out of the levy).

An Apprenticeship First policy does not mean that every vacancy or staff training course will be an apprenticeship, however, it does mean that all staff are supported to think about

apprenticeships differently, moving from 'nice to have' to the default option unless there is a business case and they are deemed inappropriate.

### **5.3 Use apprenticeships to improve our approach to workforce development**

In line with LGA recommendations, we want to carry out more detailed workforce development planning to address hotspots - particularly hard to-fill roles or persistent vacancies.

We also want to build on our detailed mapping of apprenticeship standards against job roles to support managers to use apprenticeships to develop their workforce skills and help staff members understand career development pathways. As part of this process, we need to reconfigure our leadership and management training offer to improve the alignment between short courses and apprenticeship programmes as part of a clear career progression pathway.

As part of our new leadership and management framework and the emerging talent management strategy, senior leaders will be asked to sponsor a talent pool of future leaders that can develop essential knowledge and skills through leadership apprenticeships that include cross-Directorate rotation and service transformation projects.

### **5.4 Improve engagement in schools**

We are keen to make more progress on improving engagement and creating more apprenticeships in our maintained schools workforce. This will involve raising awareness of apprenticeship standards for senior educational leaders, teachers, teaching assistants and school business managers, as well as broader standards that can be used for more generic school workforce roles such as finance assistants, ICT technicians and administrators.

In line with other local authorities that have achieved success in this area, we are proposing to establish a fixed term dedicated school apprenticeship co-ordinator. Drawing on the LGA Apprenticeships in Schools Toolkit, we want to explore options for a Schools Apprenticeship Delivery Board which can help oversee and progress a School Engagement and Delivery Plan. In partnership with the Bristol Teaching School, we are already developing links with apprenticeship providers that can deliver across a range of school standards and can help us 'sell' the offer to our schools.

### **5.5 Develop a multi-year spending plan**

We want to establish more detailed financial planning and target setting for our apprenticeship levy to enable us to keep track of how we are investing our levy funds against identified priorities. Using a model finance tool, we will monitor our spending profile, identify scope for new programmes, maximise levy spending and that everything remains affordable. This will be important as this strategy and our improvement actions are underway – enabling us to achieve the right balance between different priorities, including



recruiting new starts from under-represented and priority groups; meeting our workforce development needs; increasing our levy sharing and expanding school apprenticeships.

### **5.6 Improve our support for apprentices and managers**

We want to enhance our support arrangements for both managers and apprentices. We want to investigate options to develop a web based induction and application process that can be made available for both managers and apprentices through an online Learning Pool module. We want to introduce support groups involving both face to face meetings and online 'What's App' virtual group support.

We want to pilot new mentoring arrangements for example where experienced apprenticeships can be buddied with new starts, and where experienced apprenticeship managers can provide peer support and mentor other managers who are new to the council, to their role and/or new to apprenticeships.

### **5.7 Improve the quality assurance of apprenticeship provision**

We want to ensure that there is a more timely flow of feedback from apprenticeships about their programmes so that we can identify issues and address these quickly. We want to issue more regular apprenticeship surveys to obtain feedback from apprentices about their experiences.

Where it is identified that training providers are falling below required standards of performance, where they are unable to rectify issues in a required timescale, managers want to find alternative providers quickly that can step in and provide an improved training service. Where this is not possible, the Council will consider internal options through employment of trainers through our own Adult and Community Learning Team.

### **5.8 Accelerate our apprenticeship levy sharing with SMEs**

Bristol City Council has agreed to share up to 25% of its levy funding to valued SME employers from priority sectors and/or based in priority communities that can support our social value policy.

We want to accelerate the take up of this funding through more targeted communication with SME businesses. This will be achieved through joint working with the internal Economic Development Team and also working in partnership with WECA who are introducing a new apprenticeship levy matching scheme.

### **5.9 Take positive action to increase apprenticeship recruitment of under-represented and our priority groups**

We want to increase the number of people from under-represented and other priority groups facing the greatest challenges and risks to access work placements and apprenticeships at Bristol City Council. This includes:

**Young people** – we can build on the On Site outreach activities through local schools and education settings so that young people from diverse communities are inspired to consider applying for apprenticeship opportunities with Bristol City Council as an employer of choice.

**Care leavers** - as Corporate Parents, we want to ensure that extra consideration and support is given to Bristol care leavers when a new apprenticeship vacancy is created. All care leavers that take part in a work placement at the Council will receive a guaranteed interview for available apprenticeship roles.

**Disabled people** – Disabled young people and adults, including people with learning difficulties and/or are experiencing mental ill health experience face some of the greatest barriers to securing and maintaining apprenticeship positions. In addition to providing work placements for Disabled people, Bristol City Council is planning to introduce Inclusive Apprenticeships which will be targeted at people with learning difficulties.

**Women and men where they are under-represented in specific job roles** – for example women remain under-represented in areas such as construction, engineering and ICT, and men remain under-represented in health and social care, early years and teaching roles. Positive action apprenticeships are a great way to address gender imbalance in Council teams.

**Long term unemployed people and returners to the labour market** - work placements can provide excellent pathways into apprenticeships for unemployed and older workers returning to the labour market. We want to explore options for an ‘alternative career’ apprenticeship programme aimed at a mature entrant talent pool.

## **6. Action plan to support our strategic aims**

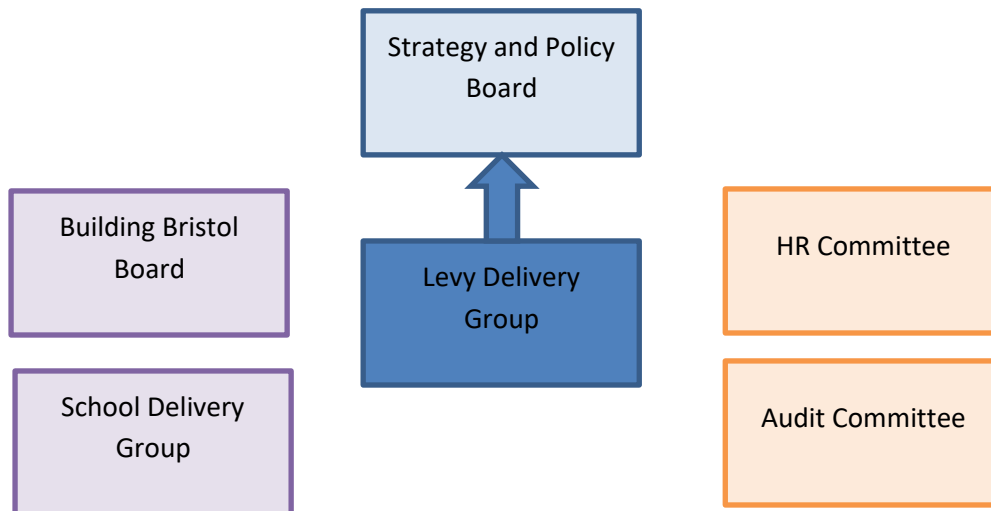
This draft strategy will be underpinned by an Apprenticeship Delivery Action Plan which will set out how our strategic aims will be delivered on an annual basis. In responding to the Government’s apprenticeship reforms our action plan also outlines how we intend to meet our apprenticeship targets as outlined in the Organisational Improvement Plan.

This action plan is a dynamic document and will be updated each year to take account of our self-assessment and any new business developments, including:

- national government review and changes to apprenticeship policy and funding arrangements
- introduction of T levels and new FE pathways into apprenticeships
- introduction of new apprenticeship standards
- introduction of new WECA levy sharing and ‘matching’ service
- LGA Workforce Development and Apprenticeship support programmes.

## **7. Monitoring, evaluation and reporting performance**

We want to strengthen our governance and accountability of apprenticeships. This will include a number of groups that can help oversee, scrutinise and support our strategy planning, implementation and monitoring:



It has been agreed that Council’s Strategy and Policy Board (SPB) will provide the overarching accountable decision making body for the local authority apprenticeship levy programme and levy spend.

Quarterly performance, including levy spend and progress against the delivery plan, will be reported to senior leaders at the SPB.

Quarterly performance updates will also be reported against a number of Key Performance Indicators through the Council’s Sparnet reporting system.

HR Committee provides an opportunity for elected members and trade union officials to scrutinise and support the levy programme through a bi-annual report.

Audit Committee also provides a financial scrutiny of the calculation, use and management of apprenticeship levy funding.

A Levy Delivery Group has been set up which includes lead officers with responsibility for the development and delivery of the apprenticeship strategy. Monthly meetings are held involving lead officers from Apprenticeships; Workforce Development; Recruitment; Schools and Economic Development Teams.

The Apprenticeship Delivery Group will contribute to an annual self-assessment process and quality improvement plan. This will be supported through the provision of data and evaluation feedback from providers, managers and apprentices.

It is recommended that additional Delivery Groups are established to improve the strategic and operational management of key apprenticeship programmes, including a Schools Delivery Group and the ‘Build Bristol’ Group that can oversee the On Site programme and ensure that this service is more systematically embedded into the city building pipeline, planning, social value contracting and S106 processes.

## 8. Working in Partnership

The development and implementation of the Council's Apprenticeship Strategy requires us to work as 'One Council', working together across Directorates and Teams, and also across a wide range of partners and stakeholders to promote and deliver great apprenticeship opportunities. Some of our main partners that are key to this work are:

**Apprentices** – acting as ambassadors and mentors, helping us to spread the word about the value of apprenticeships and to encourage others to get on board

**Recruiting managers** – supporting managers to carry out workforce planning, create new apprenticeship opportunities, ensure apprentices are well supported to achieve success, and acting as champions and mentors for other managers

**Elected members** – acting as champions and providing scrutiny through HR Committee

**Training providers** – helping Bristol City Council to identify appropriate standards and develop the right apprenticeship programmes that meet our business needs; ensuring that all programmes are delivered on time to the highest standard

**Local schools** – finding creative ways to utilise apprenticeship opportunities to drive forward workforce development and school improvement priorities

**Local SME employers** – supporting local businesses to make use of our apprenticeship levy to take on new recruits and enhance the skills of existing employees to help improve business performance and growth

**Staff Led Groups & Trade Unions** – helping spread the word about the value of apprenticeships

**Bristol Apprenticeship Diversity Hub** – bringing together the national apprenticeship service, leading anchor employers, leading providers and community partners to help us promote apprenticeships across diverse communities and to support employers to use apprenticeships to diversify their workforce

**WECA** – working with the WECA Skills team to develop a regional levy sharing framework, apprenticeship marketing and matching service

**National Apprenticeship Service** – helping us keep up to speed with national policy, funding and marketing activities that can support local recruitment

**Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network** – joining a network of committed employers and sharing best practice to increase diverse apprenticeships

**Local Government Association** – learning from and exchanging best practice with LGA lead advisors and other local authorities.

## **9. Risks**

Apprenticeships have been logged as a critical risk on Bristol's corporate risk register since October 2018. This is due to the high risk that, without a different approach, Bristol is at risk of not meeting our public sector apprenticeship recruitment target and levy funding clawback.

The current resource to manage apprenticeships within Bristol City Council is funded out of income generated through training provision via the On Site Bristol team. As a result of government changes to national apprenticeship funding, On Site resources have reduced and there remains limited additional resource to reinforce this.

Outcome and resource risks will continue to be monitored and reported as part of our new governance arrangements.

## **10. Revision date**

This strategy will be reviewed and updated towards the end of 2023. The action plan will be reviewed and updated on an annual basis.