

# **Early Careers Strategy – Somerset Council**

**April 2023 – March 2027**

## **Opening Remarks - To be completed.**

### **Introduction**

It is often hard for Young People to get a foot in the door, let alone two feet on the career ladder. At Somerset Council we are working hard to change that, we have ripped up the old Local Authority rule book and aim to build on our established initiatives such as: apprenticeships, graduate schemes, work placements and paid internships whilst also adopting new schemes available to support young people to enter and succeed in the workplace.

### **Our Vision**

We believe everyone deserves the opportunity to begin their career. By encouraging and supporting young people into the workplace, we can help build their self-confidence, self-belief, skillsets, and application of knowledge regardless of their start in life. We will bridge the gap between young people of Somerset and potential employers by giving young people a voice and empowering them to be better prepared for the world of work.

Data shows us that, just like the demography of Somerset, our Council is aging. Addressing this is crucial to prevent critical skills and experience being lost from the organisation. If we focus much of our recruitment and training effort on the transfer of skills and knowledge between age groups (because it works both ways!), The Early Careers Strategy will support Somerset Council to build the workforce of tomorrow whilst also keeping talented young individuals within the county of Somerset.

It is important to remember the value that young people bring into our organisation too. We need to build and maintain a diverse workforce and understand the significance of bringing fresh ideas and new approaches into our working lives. As an organisation who promotes equality and inclusivity, we must practice what we preach and ensure that all sections of society are represented within our workforce. The young people of today are our leaders of tomorrow.

We acknowledge our role as a large employer within Somerset; where appropriate we will influence others to mirror such initiatives to ensure opportunities for our young residents are maximised.

## **Our Values**

*Once the new Somerset Council values have been identified and agreed, list them here so that we can show how the Early Careers Strategy will complement the values.*

## **Our Aims**

We aim to provide the communities of Somerset with a strong workforce and recognise that the best way of doing this is to build our own workforce from the ground up. To achieve this, we will focus on five main areas:

- 1. Improve our engagement with schools**
- 2. Use data to drive our decision making**
- 3. Maximise the full range of opportunities to support young people**
- 4. Invest in retention initiatives, creating more than just jobs**
- 5. Promote inclusivity and diversity whilst championing young people's work**

### **1. Improve our Engagement with Schools**

We aim to work with local schools to ensure that our Young People across Somerset get the opportunity to take part in high quality work experience from the earliest possible time. We will build upon established programmes to offer varied and beneficial work experience programmes across the Authority.

Utilising the knowledge and expertise of our colleagues within the Somerset Education Business Partnership and Skill Up Somerset, we will endeavour to build meaningful partnerships with our local schools and ensure that Somerset Council is at the forefront of our Young Peoples' minds when considering their career options, through encouraging colleagues to support school careers activities such as assembly talks, mock interview events and careers fairs. We aim to inspire and raise the aspirations of our school pupils whilst showcasing roles across Somerset Council and our partner organisations within the County.

Strong relationships will be developed with local schools, colleges, and universities to ensure Somerset Council is an employer of choice and that we work in partnership to open doors for Young People at the start of their careers. We understand the importance of doing this both at Secondary school level for work experience and at university level. This will enable us to grow our graduate intake and ensure we have a stream of high-quality graduates who have roots within Somerset and share our vision to improve the lives of our communities.

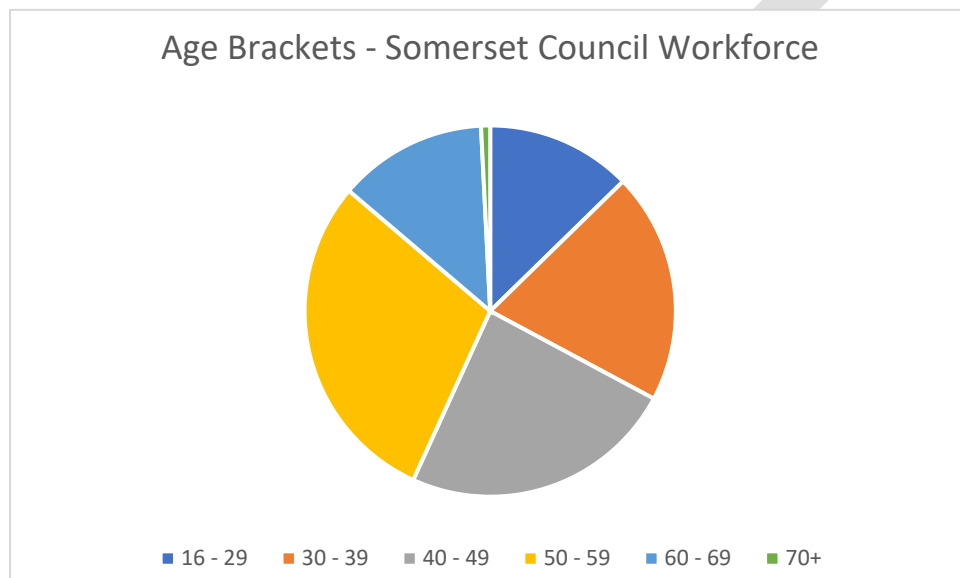
As one of Somerset's largest employers, we hope to be able to utilise the skills and experience of our workforce to collaborate with colleges, complementing their curriculums and giving our staff the chance to build upon their own personal and professional skills.

Internally we will continue to work with managers at all levels to share the benefits of these schemes and ensure that our culture reflects the aspiration to bring young people into the workforce and grow our leaders of tomorrow.

## 2. Use data to drive our decision making

Within many local authorities, an aging workforce continues to be a challenge. At Somerset Council we are at risk of losing key expertise and skills as staff near retirement. This is compounded by retention difficulties as the pandemic has given employees many more opportunities to work anywhere geographically so Somerset residents do not necessarily need to be employed within Somerset.

To demonstrate, the pie chart below shows the workforce of Somerset Council as at 27.07.22;



Within Somerset Council we intend to put workforce planning at the heart of our People agenda. In order to anticipate potential problematic service areas and pre-empt the loss of crucial knowledge, expertise and skills, our workforce planning needs to be evidence based and reflect the results of successful initiatives. A focus on internal demographics and consequential succession planning will be essential to maintain effective teams and, ultimately, the smooth running of services.

In order to support decision making about future young people initiatives, a variety of evidence based practices will be utilised. These will inform recommendations and actions that are based on the most accurate and up-to-date data. Examples of practices we intend to utilise are:

- Surveys
- Stakeholder feedback
- Organisational data eg. turnover, promotions
- Benchmarking externally with other local authorities
- External data statistics eg. Office for National Statistics

We plan to support service areas by providing a dedicated business manager who understands the importance of both hard and soft data and can advise service and strategic

managers on their succession plans. They will also advise on career pathways which will optimise opportunities for young people and the organisation as a whole.

The aspiration of our Early Careers Strategy is to bring young people into the organisation at the earliest possible stage and support, guide and develop them to reach their full potential be that at Somerset Council or within other local employers. This will be achieved by implementing various initiatives (see section 3 below). Our commitment to helping young people identify their career path and then developing them as Individuals, both professionally and personally, will result in a fitter, diverse and more effective organisation which is leading the way in youth employment.

### **3. Maximise the full range of opportunities**

We appreciate the importance of a positive work culture and will work with managers at all levels to help them understand and promote the benefits that bringing young people into the organisation can have.

Fantastic progress has already been made within the previous County and District Councils focusing on the importance of 'growing our own' and bringing fresh skills and knowledge into our organisations, such as our Social Work apprenticeship programme. This enabled unqualified staff to develop their skills whilst continuing in their substantive posts to become qualified as Social Workers.

Equally this can be shown through developing our younger employees through Level 3 management training to give them strong foundations to move into more senior roles accompanied by higher level management qualifications – all through making use of the apprenticeship levy.

As an organisation we are committed to continue building on this approach to ensure that proposed initiatives are at the forefront of all recruitment opportunities.

With the vast array of apprenticeships now available at various levels, there are likely to be appropriate learning opportunities which could support job vacancies. Our intention is to promote a learning culture within Somerset Council which provide opportunities for individuals - internally and externally.

Building upon strong partnerships already developed with our colleagues across the Integrated Care System, we will maximise opportunities across the Health and Social Care sector, offering high quality work experience and further learning opportunities.

### **Early Careers Strategy - Initiatives**

The following initiatives have been designed to deliver on our promise and encourage Young People to consider Somerset Council as a rewarding career.

#### **3.1 Work Experience and T-Levels**

Work experience can often be a Young Person's first experience of the workplace. At Somerset Council we aim to offer high quality and varied work experience placements to students of all ages, starting with those in Year 10 of secondary school.

We already work with local secondary schools to offer work experience weeks to students looking to gain insight into a variety of roles across the Council. These are offered at different points throughout the summer months.

We will continue to offer ad hoc, bespoke work experience placements for students for up to 2 months. These can be within specific teams or rotated around a service area.

T-Levels, introduced in 2020, are specific vocational courses that young people can complete allowing them to study and gain valuable work experience coherently.

The placement element, called an Industry Placement, is made up of 315 hours across the 12-18 month period – this usually equates to 1 or 2 days in the work environment each week.

Currently there are pathways in Digital and ICT, Business and Management, Finance and Accounting, Education and Childcare, Construction and Engineering and Health and Social Care.

David Goodman, completed a T-Level student placed in one of our Climate Teams, he reflected on his experience for us;

*I have enjoyed the placement here and feel it has been a great opportunity to work in County Hall. I have learnt a great deal in my time here such as, learning how professional web developers will create webpages and websites. The most enjoyable aspect of this placement for me was being at the Somerset Business Climate Summit and pushing myself outside of my comfort zone by helping others at the summit with the presentation and the Mentimeter Questions. I will take the experience I have gained here and use it whilst I finish my course and use it in my future jobs.*

Laura Jensen, David's mentor commented;

*David has been an invaluable part of our team since joining us as a T-Level student. He has supported the planning and delivery of a county-wide climate change event for businesses including website design alongside the Digital Team and attending the event to help ensure the smooth running of the event in particular the IT. He has learnt new skills and embraced office life as part of this placement, a highlight being weekly hot chocolate at our favourite café!*

### **3.2 Traineeships**

Traineeships are often seen as the step before an apprenticeship and aim to seek out promising young talent who may not have thrived at school or college.

They are bespoke programmes that can be used to build up personal and professional skills and also to offer level 1 qualifications which will prepare young people for the academic side of an apprenticeship. Alongside this, GCSE's can also be offered to enable Young People to remove this as a barrier to them securing future permanent employment.

They are non-paid positions and offer 1 or 2 days of workplace experience each week for a period of between 6 weeks and 6 months aiming to boost a Young Person's employability. They are targeted opportunities aimed at those with 1-9 GCSE grades.

They can be a valuable way of trialling potential apprentices (and for them to trial us!) and supporting Somerset Council's aim of growing our workforce internally.

### **3.3 Apprenticeships**

Apprenticeships can be a tool to help develop and motivate a workforce; ensuring staff have the right skills and targeted experience. Supporting workforce planning, apprenticeships are an integral way of bringing young people into the organisation. In addition, they are an extremely effective way of developing the organisation's workforce through upskilling, continued professional development and the provision of future opportunities for individuals.

[Link here to People Strategy & L&D Strategy](#)

Somerset Council pays into the Government run apprenticeship levy. This allows us to offer opportunities to staff and encourages them to develop themselves and gain nationally recognised qualifications to further develop themselves in their current role or identify further opportunities they may wish to pursue. This benefits their personal and professional development and brings new skills and fresh ideas into the organisation thus strengthening our ability to serve the communities of Somerset.

Apprenticeships are offered at different levels:

- Intermediate Apprenticeships – are equivalent to 5-9 GCSEs (Level 2)
- Advanced Apprenticeships – are equivalent to 2 A-Levels (Level 3)
- Higher Apprenticeships – award Level 4 & 5 qualifications. e.g. Foundation Degrees
- Degree Apprenticeships – award Bachelor (Level 6) and Masters (Level 7) qualification.

### **3.4 Paid Internships**

Internships are an opportunity for Somerset Council to discover the most promising students, primarily post A-Level or via a university placement, and they support our aim of encouraging Young People to stay in (or come back to) Somerset after they complete their studies.

Internships could play a vital part in our workforce planning and allows teams to engage with local young people at an earlier stage – allowing for relationships to be built prior to students leaving the County for higher education.

Internships can run from 2 -12 months and are paid at national minimum wage. They are the next step up from work experience and offer Young People the chance to immerse themselves into their chosen career field in order to gain valuable work experience and insight that they can take back and apply to their studies.

### **3.5 Graduate Programmes**

Graduates have talent and specific knowledge from their degrees. They are likely to be fantastic assets to Somerset Council but they can lack workplace skills and experience. Through planned graduate programmes, we can offer graduates from different fields the opportunity to work and learn within their chosen sector. They are provided with appropriate support, guidance and development opportunities allowing them to build upon their skills and gain valuable work experience from sector experts.

Within Somerset Council we aim to build upon successful previous schemes and offer a high quality cross organisational graduate scheme where peer to peer support and continuing professional development are at the heart. We will also consider the use of wider national programmes such as the NHS Graduate Programme and the National Graduate Development Programme (NGDP) which offer graduates a chance to experience various organisations both in the private and public sector.

These programmes can be a fantastic way to fill hard to recruit to roles and bring fresh ideas and up to date practices into the workplace.

### **3.6 Pathway to Employment (P2E)**

P2E is a valuable addition to the Council's armoury in supporting Somerset's vulnerable and/or disadvantaged Young People and encouraging them to access education or work-related opportunities.

It is a standalone budget that can be used to support SEND individuals and care leavers into paid positions within Somerset Council but also to encourage and motivate them to engage with education and develop themselves personally and professionally.

Guaranteeing sustainability and building interest are keys to a successful P2E programme therefore we will work with various in-house teams such as Leaving Care, and SENse to promote opportunities to Young People alongside working with partner organisations to ensure that support is provided throughout education and early careers.

It is our aim to build upon the work already being carried out in relation to supported apprenticeships for SEND individuals and specific apprenticeships for Somerset Care Leavers.



Hi! I'm Kelsey, I'm Care Experienced and I'm now on a Level 4 Apprenticeship after the successful completion of my Level 3.

I have been working as an Apprentice in Leaving Care since May 2020 and I have learnt more in the last two years than I ever thought possible. I have had a wide range of opportunities, from being a case holder to developing a creative exhibition for Care Leavers Week 2022. The exhibition will showcase work from Care Leavers and will be open to the public, I have led on the project every step of the way, which has enabled me to manage the responsibilities of planning an event while also engaging with Young People to ensure that their talents, identities, and stories are celebrated.

I also supported the planning and delivery of Care Leavers Week 2021, which included taking a group of Care Leavers to Bristol for an MSHED street art exhibition. It was an amazing day and a brilliant opportunity to connect with our Care Leavers.

At the end of last year, I was invited to be involved in the Social Care Review. It was an emotional but empowering experience, and I really valued the ability to represent the views of Somerset Care Leavers on a national level. I was able to voice these again at a manager's event in Leeds, after becoming a Young Persons Benchmarking Forum Champion for 2022. It was my first time speaking in front of a large audience, and despite my nerves I loved every second of it.

I then spoke as a Champion at the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum's Personal Advisors event in Birmingham. I was on a panel of Care experienced young people discussing the importance of Leaving Care Worker support. I shared parts of my own story and explained how Leaving Care support has benefited me. It was great to meet Leaving Care Workers from different Local authorities, share positive stories and ideas for the future.

I have really enjoyed both of my apprenticeships and the experience, confidence and drive for the future that has come with it. The progression onto Level 4 has enabled me to continue learning and developing my own practice. Being in an environment which understands Care Leavers has helped me to feel supported on my best and worst days; and allowed me to grow as both a person and a professional.

Looking forward, I'm excited to continue to use my views and experiences to support positive changes within the service.

#### **4. Invest in retention - offering development opportunities and support**

At Somerset Council we aim to provide more than just a job to our Young People – we want them to feel fully embedded in the organisation and develop personally as well as professionally.

To achieve this, we will give our Young People a clear identity and opportunities to feed directly into organisational objectives, develop their employee voice and the chance to feedback to directors and councillors.

Building upon steps taken previously by County and District Councils, we will continue to support a Young People's Network which gives our Young People the chance to interact informally as peers through virtual and face-to-face support sessions, dedicated CPD and annual conferences. Alongside this internal network, we will also encourage our younger apprentices to join national networks, such as the Young Apprentice Ambassador Apprentice



network which allows them the chance to meet peers from across the South West and UK, and gives them valuable experience to run alongside their academic learning.

**YEN Introduction** – *insert on its own page.*

Our hope is that the newly formed Young Employees Network will allow young employees (ages 16-26) to build professional and personal relationships with other young individuals across the organisation. We hope to remove the feeling of isolation for



colleagues who can find themselves, often, the youngest in their teams, and provide opportunities to attend a range of events, so that they can network and make new friends.



Our vision is that it will provide a safe space for young employees to share their experiences, gain new skills and build relationships that can support them both personally and professionally.

We hope that by hosting a range of virtual and face to face meetings and activities, it will encourage young employees to get involved and benefit from the positive social impact of the network.

**What will the network look like?**

The network will deliver a range of activities including CPD Opportunities, informal sessions, annual conferences and teambuilding sessions to ensure that it is attractive to as many young employees as possible. The network wants to tackle social isolation at work, and to provide development opportunities so that young employees feel valued and that they are given opportunities to thrive in the workplace.

The network will also include various communication methods so that young employees can collaborate and connect, whilst all upcoming events and opportunities can be shared. We will be launching a YEN monthly bulletin, Teams channel and YEN inbox so that information and collaboration is easily accessible to all young employees.

We look forward to working with SLT and senior managers to ensure that young employee's needs are being met, and their voices are being heard.

Jess Davis and Jess Cullen

Co-Chairs Young Employee's Network, Somerset Council

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is imperative to all careers and we will ensure that CPD opportunities are shared with our Young People as soon as they join the organisation. Regular communication will be shared regarding internal learning & development and there will be invitations to attend national and regional events e.g. the

PPMA Apprentice of the Year Event, South West Council's South West Challenge. At these events they will get to meet and work alongside colleagues at all levels and learn from their experiences.

We understand the importance of 'growing our own' and will work to ensure progression into permanent roles for our apprentices and graduates is as seamless as possible.

Currently we have a 90% retention rate across the organisations for apprentices moving into permanent roles and we would like to see this increase as we move forward into Somerset Council.

Jessica Cullen, Business Administration Level 3 Apprentice



Attending the broadcast of the Top 100 Apprenticeship Employers 2022 was a brilliant experience. I love working within the Council and Support Services for Education (SSE), so was more than happy to talk about the benefits of being an apprentice – especially for such a fantastic organisation.

Speaking in front of a group of people in a situation such as this was definitely out of my comfort zone, but I have always been supported within work and my apprenticeship to pursue each new opportunity.

The other apprentices and I were welcomed by everyone within the studio and it was great to meet people who have shared a similar experience to myself. I hope that others who may have been watching the broadcast recognise that university isn't the only option to starting a career, and that an apprenticeship is a good opportunity to network, gain experience and build industry knowledge and skills, with a qualification secured at the end.

## **5. Promote Diversity and Inclusion and champion the work of young people**

Somerset has a diverse and varying population both in terms of age and background. As one of the County's main employers, we recognise our responsibility to ensure our workforce represents the population that we serve. It is also imperative that employees actively engage with and represent our communities.

The pathway to employment budget ensures that opportunities are given to those Young People who come from vulnerable or disadvantaged backgrounds such as Care Leavers and those with SEND.

We aim to build upon the good foundations already in place to support managers in realising the benefits of supporting Young People from all backgrounds. Somerset Council recognises that the individual skills, knowledge and fresh outlook they can bring to the organisation will strengthen our workforce and ensure we can serve the communities of Somerset.

## **Closing remarks**

Although our Early Careers Strategy covers a period of 5 years, it will be reviewed year on year to ensure that we are capitalising on all new government initiatives and changes to current schemes that may affect young people and their entry into the world of employment. Continual evaluation will take place and, where needed, adaptations will be made allowing us to respond in an agile and pro-active way to changing environments.

Our Early Careers Strategy, together with our People Strategy and Learning & Development Strategy, will ensure that we recruit and retain a workforce who represents the communities we serve, delivers our organisational goals and contributes positively to a healthy and inclusive culture.

## **APPENDICES**

- 1) Action plan

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