



Somerset
Council

Early Careers Strategy

April 2023 to March 2027



Opening remarks

As we move into a new era for Local Government in Somerset, our universal pledge to support young people across the County to access high quality work and education opportunities, is at the forefront of our political and organisational agenda.

Somerset Council strives to be an employer of choice and allow all staff to reach their potential and fulfil their aspirations by creating an inclusive culture of continuous development whilst at the same time allowing colleagues to have fun and express themselves.

We recognise the wealth of experience our staff bring to their roles, and we aim to protect and nurture and develop their skills and aspirations through bringing young people into the organisation to assist us in 'growing our own' future leaders. We want to encourage younger employees to build professional and personal relationships with other young individuals across the organisation. We will remove the feeling of isolation for colleagues who can find themselves, often, the youngest in their teams.

Creating a safe space for young employees to share their experiences, gain new skills and build relationships is important; we will also provide opportunities to attend a range of events, so our younger employees can network and make new friends.

We want our younger employees' voice to be heard and will ensure that through the work cited below, we will also ensure that there is a clear link between our newest and youngest employees and our senior leaders.



Duncan Sharkey
Chief Executive



Jess Davis
Chair of the Young
Employees' Network

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 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 future workforce 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 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

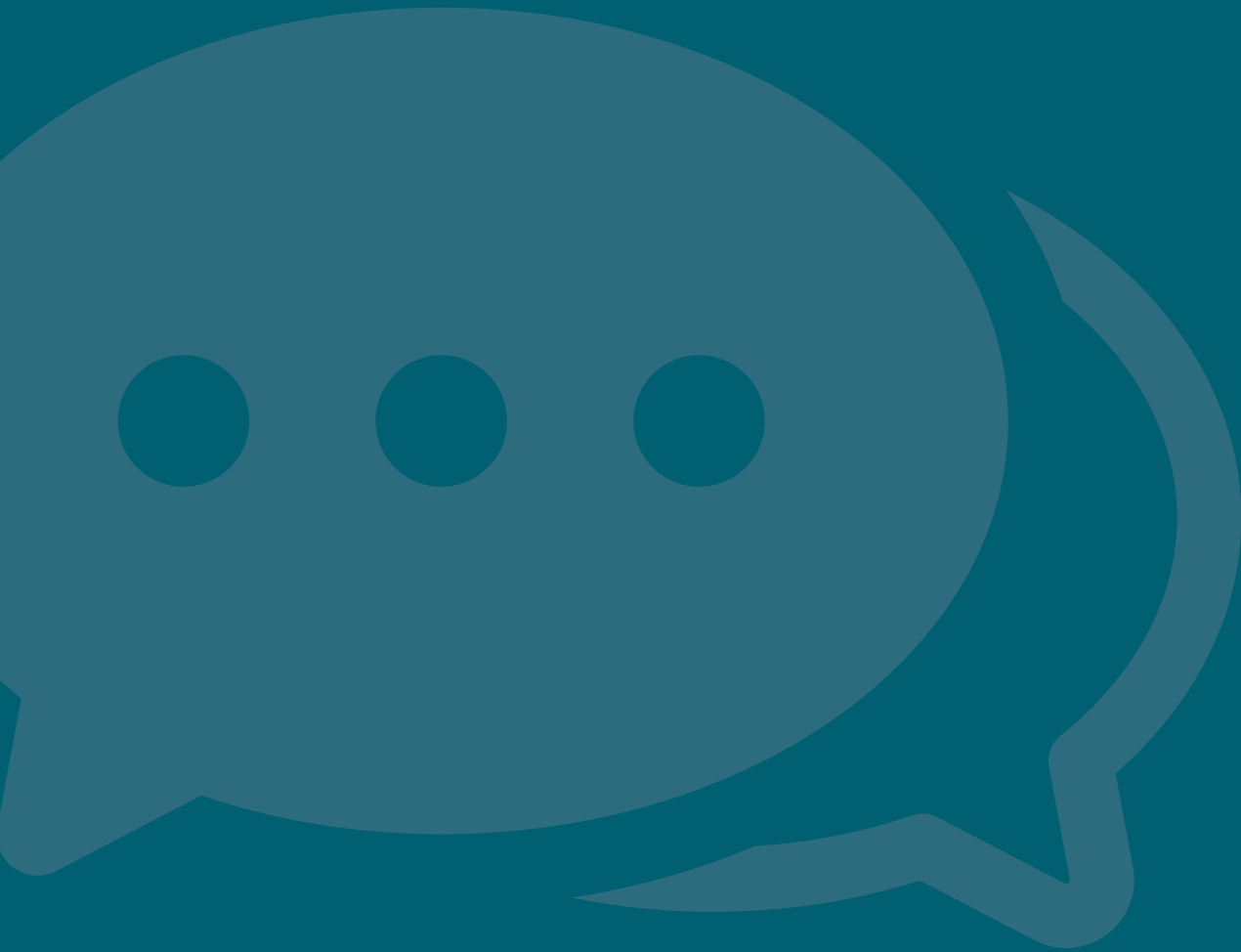
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Promote inclusivity and diversity whilst championing young people's work

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 will 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

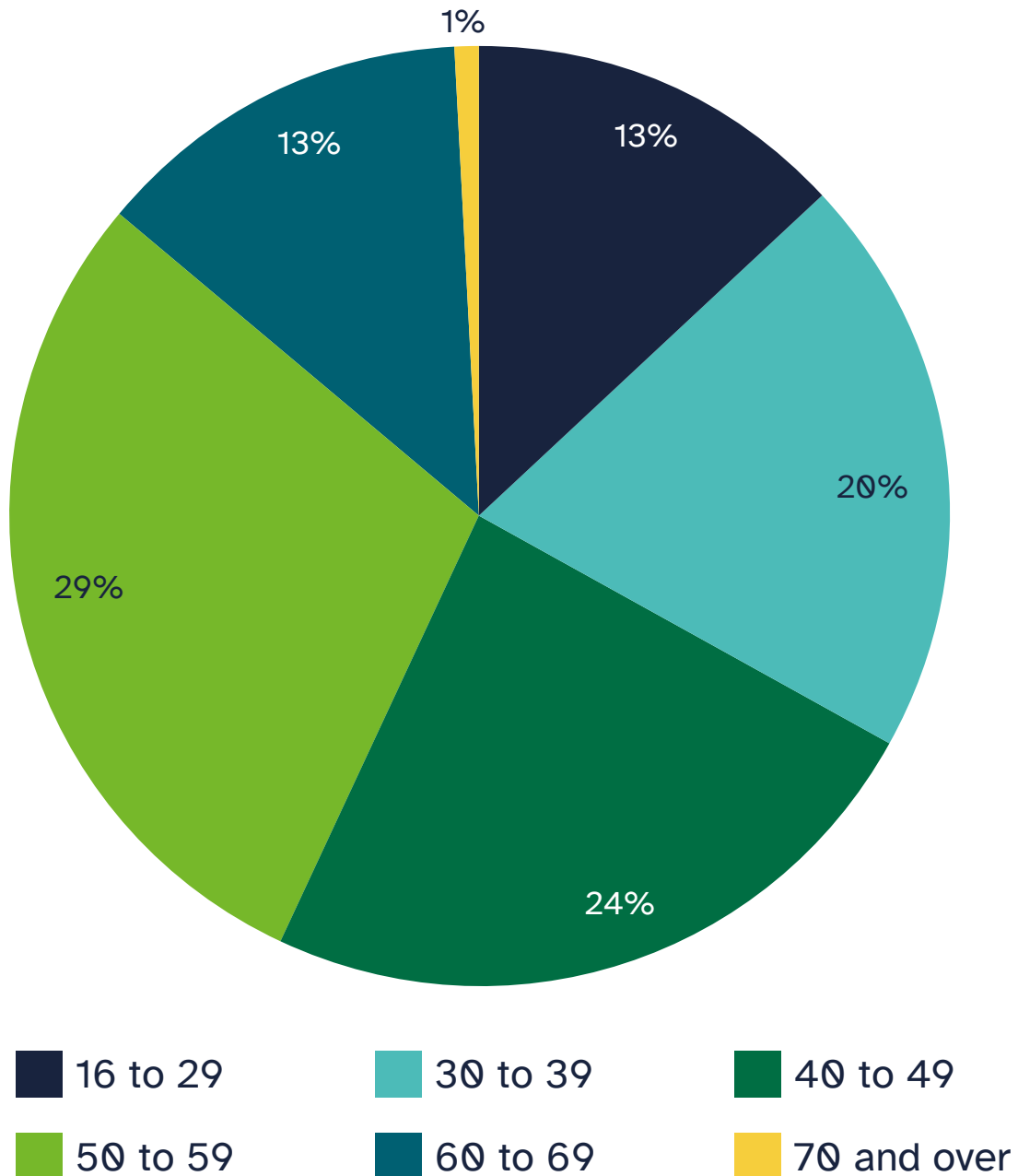
Use data to drive our decision making



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 increased 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 current workforce of Somerset Council;

Age brackets - Somerset Council workforce



Workforce planning and succession planning will be integral to the success of the smooth running of high quality 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 e.g. turnover, promotions
- Benchmarking externally with other local authorities
- External data statistics e.g. Office for National Statistics

We plan to support service areas through advising on career pathways which will optimise opportunities for young people and the organisation as a whole. An 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
to support young
people**



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.

Finally, we will look to continue to work with partners across Somerset and the South West, such as the Somerset Education Business Partnership and the Dorset, Somerset Training Provider Network to ensure that our offer to young people is as strong as it can be and showcased in the right places, at the right time.

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 various sectors from Digital and ICT, Business and Management, Finance and Accounting to Health and Social Care. Somerset Council has supported Industry Placements in their ICT, Business Admin and Climate Teams and will offer further placements across a variety of teams to align with the pathways currently available to students across Somerset.

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

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 workforce through upskilling, continued professional development and the provision of future opportunities for individuals.

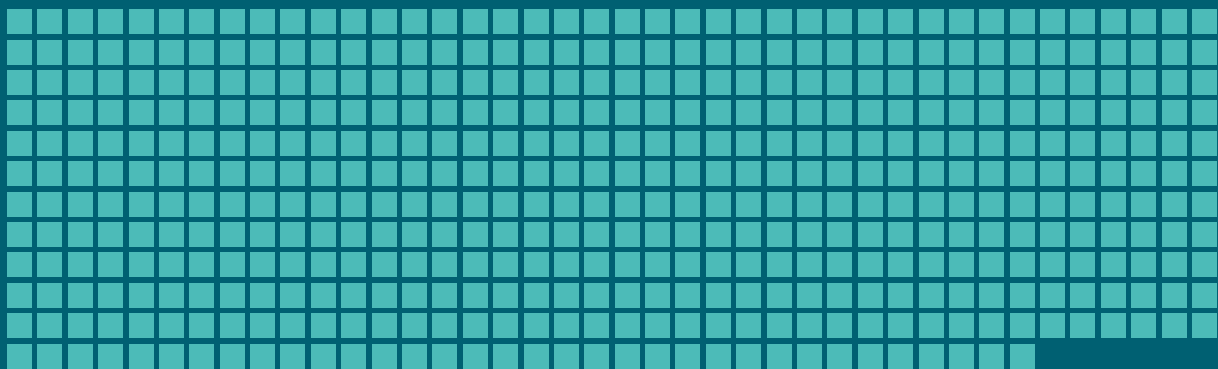
Somerset Council pays into the Government run apprenticeship levy. This allows us to offer opportunities to staff and encourages them to develop themselves and gain nationally recognised qualifications to further develop themselves in their current role or identify further opportunities they may wish 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.

474

Apprenticeships started since 2020



102

Recruited and...



60

Upskilled in the last 12 months

98

Apprenticeships completed in the last 12 months



£1,201,525

Total levy committed for the next 12 months

SME Levy Transfers 2020 to 2023: **£1,013,366**



3.3

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.

3.4

Graduate programmes

Graduates have talent and specific knowledge from their degrees. They are fantastic assets to Somerset Council but they can lack workplace skills and experience. Through planned graduate programmes, we can offer graduates from different disciplines 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.



“Hiya, I’m Josh and I’m the current Natural Environment Specialist. Having come out of university I felt slightly unsure where I wanted to focus my efforts to get experience around biodiversity, climate change and strategy/ policy writing. I found the Somerset Local Government Graduate Scheme in 2019 and felt this could be a freeing way to explore these topics in a time of significant change regarding climate and ecological emergencies being enacted within local government.

Through being accepted onto that scheme I got to work directly with our countryside ranger team and conduct several projects that provided support for the growing need for specialist knowledge around habitat restoration and species recovery.

Four months into the graduate scheme I was given the opportunity to become the natural environment officer within the council. This really gave me the confidence to progress with the work that previously I felt underqualified for, and so speaking with communities and working directly with elected members wasn’t so daunting.

After 9 months within the job, I was being given more responsibility especially around writing strategies, so the opportunity to apply for a specialist role was suggested by my line manager as an acknowledgement for the extra work being done.

It’s been an amazing couple of years, working on landscape-scale habitat restorations, county-wide nature recovery strategy, community engagement events and hands-on conservation work. I personally don’t think I could have got the freedom and the diversity of opportunities given to me within the roles I’ve occupied in any other organisation or sector.

I just wanted to show that working within local government gives you opportunities and a level of reliance which isn’t often reciprocated in other sectors. Additionally, if you do have an interest in politics, it is fascinating to get a chance to see the inner workings of local government, its structure and how things happen at this scale.

3.5

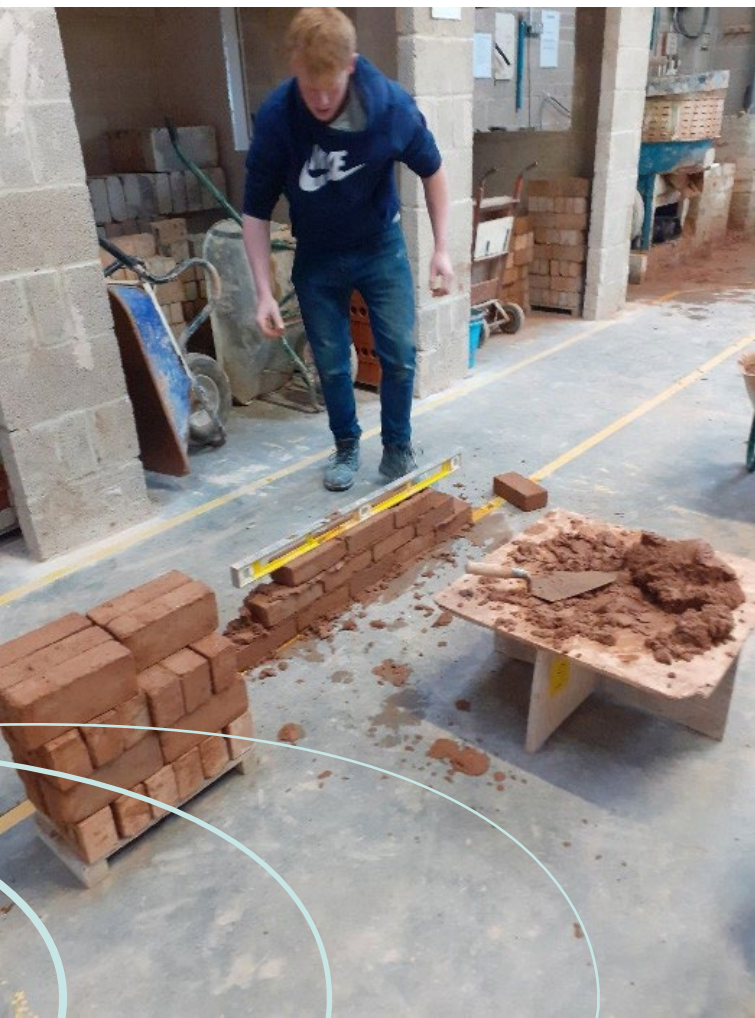
Pathway to Employment (P2E)

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 Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (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.

We will work with various in-house teams such as Leaving Care, and Supported Employment 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.



4

Invest in retention initiatives, creating more than just jobs



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 Employee'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.

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.

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



“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.”

Jessica Cullen, Business Administration Level 3 Apprentice

5

Promote inclusivity and diversity whilst championing young people's work





Somerset has a diverse and varying population both in terms of age and background. As one of the County's largest 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 will 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.

