

## **FINANCE COMMITTEE**

### **EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR**

#### **SUBMISSION FROM SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL**

1. I welcome the opportunity to let you know what we are doing here in the Scottish Borders in relation to supporting those furthest from the labour market as a public sector employer.

2. Services funded by SBC in relation to supported employment are currently located in several different service departments and tend to focus efforts on finding employment out with SBC. In order to consolidate and co-ordinate our support to a range of clients, as well as improving our performance as an employer, we are undertaking a project to create a corporate Employment Support Service (ESS) that:

- co-ordinates the efforts of staff currently located in different service areas in the field of supported employment;
- improves SBC performance in relation to supported employment, creating a workforce that is more representative of the population as a whole;
- equips and supports managers within SBC to deal with issues relating to supported employment;
- improves quality of life for those furthest from the labour market;
- maximises the support available to SBC for supported employment through Department of Work and Pensions and Scottish Government.

3. Phase 1 of the project, to be complete by April 2013, will involve the establishment of the new corporate service, whilst Phase 2 will consider the further development of the service, ensuring that partners are engaged effectively.

4. Ways2Work Borders (one of the services to be included in the ESS) is our Social Work Service's Supported Employment Service for people with disabilities. The service is based in Hawick, Duns, Gala and Peebles and covers the entire Scottish Borders. Ways2Work Borders is funded to support people with a disability into either paid or voluntary work. Those involved range in age from between 16 years old and 65 years old although the main focus is now on the younger age group. A few successful placements have been undertaken within Scottish Borders Council but it is acknowledged that our performance could be improved. Last year, 3 supported posts within SBC led to permanent positions, within our Cleaning and Gardening services.

5. In terms of Get Ready for Work (also to be included in the ESS), SBC's Education and Lifelong Learning Department has to competitively bid every year for a contract within the national training programme managed by Skills Development Scotland. This year, our contract is worth £45,452, providing 340 training weeks. Our commitment is to provide 20 young people with placements and successful outcomes, an increase on last year. Again, some of these placements have been

within SBC, and led to permanent employment within Catering, Refuse Collection, and Youth Work.

6. Also within our Education and Lifelong Learning Department, we have a Borders Production Unit that provides vocational and core skill training for around 12 MCMC young people who are over 16, in particular those that would struggle to maintain a supported College place, a Get Ready for Work placement or an industry training opportunity. It is aimed at assisting those who leave school with little or no qualifications and who are often dealing with challenging circumstances in their personal life.

7. Our ELL Dept has also developed a Youth Representative post for a young person aged 16-21 years, funded equally across directorates, for the next 4 years. The Youth Representative will provide a connection and 'bridging role' between young people (12-25 years) and elected members, officers and directors within Scottish Borders Council and will undertake this as a full time position, representing the interests of young people and provide a representative voice within council decision-making. We are asking our Council to approve this on 30<sup>th</sup> August.

8. Within our Environment and Infrastructure Department, a recent service review has revealed that the service is facing a major issue of an aging frontline operational workforce which needs to be addressed. On top of this there is the well known external national and local issue around the numbers of young people (16-25 year olds) unable to find work. As part of our review implementation programme, it is proposed to put in place an apprenticeship scheme to help address these issues. This will be funded from seeking further reductions in the use of overtime and, where operational requirements permit, pursuing and accepting as many Early Retirement / Voluntary Severance requests as possible. Although this is in its very early stages, we see it as a key part of taking a corporate approach to supporting those furthest from the labour market and we will ensure that it is a key part of our Employment Support Service project.