

Growth Scrutiny Committee

Themed Review 2021-22

Council support for job growth

Chair's Introduction

The Waltham Forest Growth Scrutiny Committee had a very productive year looking at council support for job growth. We focused on this area due to its importance as we emerged from the lockdown caused by the Covid epidemic. We felt that it was important to consider the extent to which the council was supporting the development of good quality jobs across a range of sectors.

We were very impressed by some of the work which was already being undertaken and it was clear that the Council had a strong focus on working with key partners to create not just a quantity of jobs but jobs of a good quality which would enable our residents to bring home a decent wage and to have prospects for development. We also heard from a wide range of witnesses, and I wanted to personally thank all of them for coming along and sharing their experience, knowledge, and expertise with the Committee. Every single one of them gave us significant insights and information and I hope that this has been reflected within the report and recommendations. Being able to hear from witnesses is essential to an effective and successful thematic review. I would also like to thank the London Academy of Sustainable Construction for hosting our 2nd meeting and making it so successful.

Emerging out of all these discussions and sharing of information has been this report with its 13 recommendations and I very much hope that these will contribute to positively building on the excellent work that the Council is already doing.

Cllr Marie Pye, Chair of Growth Scrutiny Committee

Summary of recommendations

The Committee recommends:

Recommendation 1:

That services work with employers and businesses to focus on engaging people who aren't traditionally involved in the creative or cultural sectors in order to attract them into employment in that sector

Recommendation 2:

That services work to facilitate linking creative organisations with the wider community with the aim of introducing local people to arts jobs

Recommendation 3:

That the Council makes being part of the construction industry 'Fairness, Inclusion and Respect' programme a contractual condition for its development partners

Recommendation 4:

That the Council works with schools and organisations providing career advice and development partners to promote education and career pathways into the construction industry particularly for underrepresented groups

Recommendation 5:

That the Council works with its providers and partners to support residents looking or needing to retrain because of changing work practices and new opportunities for jobs in the green economy, focusing particularly on older workers, and identifying funding opportunities where available

Recommendation 6:

That the Council works with its partners to actively promote green jobs to students of all ages at schools, Further Education colleges and other educational establishments, with a particular emphasis on demonstrating career progression after training or an apprenticeship

Recommendation 7:

That the Council continues to explore how small businesses can be supported to diversify into the green economy including maximising the potential of Council-owned buildings to enable the growth of the sector, and identifying any available funding

Recommendation 8:

That the Council engages with groups such as Women in Construction and Black Professionals in Construction, and identifies any other relevant professional groups, in order to ensure green job opportunities are promoted to a diverse range of people

Recommendation 9:

That the Council, in its role within the Integrated Care System/Integrated Care Board, works with health partners to ensure that raising the status of social care is a long-term priority for the ICS

Recommendation 10:

That the Council continues to work with commissioned social care providers to ensure that they understand the long-term benefits of paying the London Living Wage or higher

Recommendation 11:

That the Council reviews the national work carried out by Skills for Care around what makes local authorities attractive to social workers and ensures that this is disaggregated to show the local picture and that this is taken into account in planning future recruitment

Recommendation 12:

That the Council encourages commissioned providers to sign up to the 'Good Work Standard'

Recommendation 13:

That the new Hub encourages candidates intending to embark on health careers to gain initial experience through a job in social care

Recommendation 14:

That there is a focus on extending the work currently undertaken with schools and colleges to other schools and colleges

Recommendation 15:

That there is a strong focus on progression within the health and social care sector especially for BAME employees

Background

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, the Growth Scrutiny Committee continued to meet, and focused on some of the most pressing challenges facing Waltham Forest. It was clear that immediate central Government support for both residents and businesses was welcome, particularly in the form of the Coronavirus job retention scheme (furlough) and grants passported through local authorities to small businesses that had been forced to close. After this immediate support ended, the number of people claiming furlough payments, Self Employment Income Support and Universal Credit was equivalent to one third of working age residents, and

members were concerned by a report that predicted Waltham Forest to have one of the highest unemployment rates by the end of 2021¹.

The Council's Public Services Strategy was published in 2020, and 'connecting people with jobs' was one of the four key priorities². Following this, the Jobs Recovery Programme came to Cabinet in September 2021. The programme broke down the priorities for jobs into five key areas; these were:

- Culture and High Streets
- Creative and Tech
- Construction and Built Environment
- Green Economy
- Health and Social Care

The Growth Scrutiny Committee decided to carry out its review by focusing on one of these areas at each scrutiny meeting, scrutinising actions that the Council was taking or considering taking, and speaking to external expert witnesses about what else the Council could do.

This was the first time the committee had had a Young Advisor attending each meeting, following the outcome of a recommendation in the 2019/20 review. The Young Advisor was present at every meeting and engaged thoroughly with the review, often putting forward the specific challenges young people faced in entering the job market and particularly in getting 'good' jobs with real opportunities.

Methodology

The Committee used its meetings from September 2021 to March 2022 to speak to internal and external witnesses. All reports were written by internal officers and the Portfolio Lead Member for Economic Growth was present at each meeting to present the report. There was also an external witness at each meeting from a variety of organisations.

7 July 2021³

At the first meeting of the cycle, the Committee were presented with the scoping document. Dianna Neal, Strategic Lead for Enterprise, Economy and Skills at London Councils, joined the meeting to give an overview of the general situation in London and how London Councils was helping. She was asked how

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<https://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Policy%20themes/Economic%20development/A%20detailed%20study%20of%20unemployment%20in%20London.pdf>

² <https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/council-and-elections/about-us/waltham-forest-public-service-strategy>

³ <https://democracy.walthamforest.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=693&MId=5308&Ver=4>

councils could support job growth and responded that acting as a conduit – passing information on from businesses to residents – was the most important action they could take. In response to a question about the voluntary sector, she said that the support for this sector was key, and that volunteers would need to be given skills they could transfer into employment. The Young Advisor asked about jobs for young people, and Ms Neal noted that councils should take advantage of available schemes, such as central Government's Kickstart programme, and funding from the apprenticeship levy.

9 September 2021⁴

The Committee's first themed report focused on the creative and cultural strands. Rebecca Davey, Assistant Director Employment, Business and Skills, and Alan Ollier-Thompson, Head of Skills, presented the report. They noted that job recovery in general had been stronger than expected, but Waltham Forest's cultural sector was still relatively small. Although limited in some respects, there were some concrete actions the Council was able to take in relation to supporting job growth in this sector. Some of the tangible steps the Council was already taking included the Future Creatives programme, a legacy of the London Borough of Culture 2019.

The external witness at this meeting was Rachael Williams, Executive Director of Finsbury Park Theatre. She explained that the theatre was located close to Finsbury Park station, in a not particularly affluent area of Islington. She noted that the theatre worked closely with Islington Council, and had developed programmes that were mutually beneficial. For example, she said that the Council had funded a 'getting into work' course, initially aimed at young people aged 18-21 but extended to those aged up to 25 during the Covid-19 pandemic. She also cited a scheme run by the Council called 'Access', which funded relaxed performances and audio description; this was so successful that the funding was widened to pay for a coordinator to continue this work. Learning disabled students were employed as ushers for temporary work experience and had been kept on, due to the success of this partnership.

The Committee noted the close work between the theatre and the Council to provide opportunities for local residents and was particularly enthused at how the collaboration had led people not traditionally employed in the creative sector to find jobs.

November 2021⁵

This meeting was held at the London Academy of Sustainable Construction in Leytonstone – the Council's partner in supporting local people into construction jobs. Accordingly, it was an ideal venue for the theme of this meeting, construction and the built environment. Alan Ollier-Thompson presented the report, and noted the extensive work the Council has been doing to work with its partners, with a particular

⁴ <https://democracy.walthamforest.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=693&MId=5309&Ver=4>

⁵ <https://democracy.walthamforest.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=693&MId=5310&Ver=4>

focus on supporting underrepresented groups – such as women and people from culturally diverse groups – into work.

The external witness at this meeting was Michael Nathan, from Future of London. Future of London is a membership organisation for the built environment for both the private and public sector, and supports networking across London for those working in regeneration, housing, infrastructure and economic development. Mr Nathan explained he directed the Emerging Talent programme, which was targeted at people traditionally underrepresented in construction jobs, such as women and people of colour. Mr Nathan said that promoting available training opportunities was important. He also noted that it was important to demonstrate the earning potential in these jobs, and that they may not all be physical – some would be desk based and therefore offer more flexibility. When asked about recruitment, he cited a graduate programme at the construction group Mace, at which 35-40% of the participants were female, thanks to the commitment to extending the programme to people with non-construction related degrees.

The Young Advisor asked about opportunities in construction for young people. It was noted that although there are training programmes available at 16+, the offer for GCSE-level students is poor. Rebecca Davey said that some schools offered the 'Design Engineer Construct!' qualification⁶, which was funded through developer S106 contributions.

The committee asked about ensuring that standards of conduct in construction companies were high – particularly with regard to encouraging people from diverse backgrounds to enter the industry. Mr Nathan said that councils could play a role by ensuring construction companies were committed to inclusion. He noted that there was an industry standard companies could sign up to, known as the 'Fairness, Inclusion and Respect' programme⁷.

January 2022⁸

The committee used this session to consider 'green jobs' – jobs that will contribute to preserving the environment or mitigating the effects of climate change. The focus of the meeting was mainly around what kind of skills people would need in the future, and how the workforce could prepare for these now. The report was presented by Alan Ollier-Thompson, and the meeting was attended by Sheila Weeden and Sarah Murray from the Local London partnership, a sub-regional group of London boroughs in east and south-east London of which Waltham Forest is a part⁹. Local London had recently contributed to a pan-London report on Green Jobs and Skills, which highlighted that the Local London area was likely to benefit from green jobs focused on 'power' and 'homes and buildings'¹⁰.

⁶ <https://designengineerconstruct.com/qualifications/>

⁷ <https://www.goconstruct.org/why-choose-construction/whats-happening-in-construction/what-is-the-fairness-inclusion-respect-programme/>

⁸ <https://democracy.walthamforest.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=693&MId=5311&Ver=4>

⁹ <https://www.local.london/>

¹⁰ <https://www.local.london/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Green-Jobs-and-Skills-in-London-Final-Report.pdf>

The Committee asked about older people and how they could be upskilled. Sheila Weeden, Head of Policy and Programmes at Local London, explained that they and the Council could play a role in brokering conversations between employers and training providers, such as FE colleges, in how to kickstart that process. She noted how important it was to listen to learners and understand how they work best. Rebecca Davey explained that older people already came with a wide skillset, and it was a question of 'bolting on' additional skills. She said the Council would work closely with partners to ensure these were available. At the other end of the scale, the Young Advisor asked about opportunities for young people. Ms Davey explained that there would be jobs out there that aren't a reality yet – it was important to work with partners to monitor available training programmes and think carefully about how to present progression routes to young people so that apprenticeships and other entry level roles continued to remain attractive.

Committee members asked about sustainability within local businesses, including the Council's own activities through its property development company Sixty Bricks. Cllr Simon Miller said that recycling targets were part of the Council's own developments – for example, 99% of materials from the Town Hall development had been recycled. Ms Davey said that most business support programmes the Council was delivering would have some sustainable or zero carbon element as part of them, and added that the Council could support businesses through its own infrastructure and identifying how to enable business owners to utilise more sustainable forms, such as electric over gas power.

The Committee asked about how to encourage people from diverse backgrounds into green jobs, particularly women and people of colour. Ms Davey noted that the Council needed to promote green jobs and ensure that people were aware of the progression opportunities available. She also highlighted the importance of working with established groups including Black Professionals in Construction and Women in Construction, both of which the Council already had good relationships with.

March 2022¹¹

The focus of this meeting was health and social care jobs – a large source of employment for people in Waltham Forest. The report was brought by Alan Ollier-Thompson and Gareth Noble from North East London Clinical Commissioning Group. Mr Noble presented the new careers hub about to be opened by the North East London Health and Care Partnership (the forerunner to the NEL Integrated Care System, which will gain statutory footing in July 2022)¹². The Hub had just been awarded funding from the Greater London Assembly to train local people in health skills and match them with vacancies in health jobs in north-east London.

Mr Noble noted that the purpose of the Hub was twofold: to help local people gain skills in a useful area, and to match people with vacancies within the health service. He said that the Hub would aim to match people with administrative jobs at first, and

¹¹ <https://democracy.walthamforest.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=693&MIId=5312&Ver=4>

¹² <https://careers.eastlondonhncp.org.uk/health-hub/>

explained that NEL would monitor and promote progress even after they'd left the Hub.

Although the Hub would only support health jobs in the first instance, the aim was to extend its reach into the social care sector. Members of the committee asked about this sector, noting that its status was generally perceived to be lower than that of health sector jobs. Mr Noble agreed, and said that one of the priorities of the new Integrated Care System (ICS) would be to ensure that social care was seen on the same standing as the health sector. Joined up working between local authorities and health partners would assist with this. However, he also pointed out that this was a national issue, and the issue of pay disparity was something that couldn't just be fixed locally.

Members asked about the quality of jobs available. Cllr Simon Miller noted that the Council paid the London Living Wage to its own staff and supported its commissioned providers to do the same; he also said that the Council had many pathways people working in social care could take to improve their skills.

Members asked about the Mayor of London's Good Work Standard¹³, and whether providers in the area had signed up to this. To achieve the standard, organisations must subscribe to a number of initiatives, including paying the London Living Wage and ensuring there are training or employment progression routes available to staff. Officers agreed that the Council could play a role when commissioning providers in ensuring that they sign up to the Standard.

There was a question about how to promote social care jobs to children and young people. Mr Noble explained that NEL already worked in schools and education institutes at all levels – Barts had a programme called 'Healthcare Horizons'¹⁴ which offered training and employment opportunities for students and young people in Hackney, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest. Additionally, NEL CCG ran a North East London Health and Care Partnership Careers Ambassador Programme, which attended schools and colleges to promote health and care jobs¹⁵. There was also an opportunity to use available apprenticeship levy funding to train people up further.

Key findings

The Committee recommends:

That services work with employers and businesses to focus on engaging people who aren't traditionally involved in the creative or cultural sectors in order to attract them into employment in that sector

¹³ <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/business-and-economy/supporting-business/good-work-standard-gws-0/how-achieve-good-work-standard>

¹⁴ <https://www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/healthcarehorizons>

¹⁵ <https://careers.eastlondonhncp.org.uk/help-advice/ambassadors/>

That services work to facilitate linking creative organisations with the wider community with the aim of introducing local people to arts jobs

The committee heard that cultural jobs were a growing sector in north-east London, but there was a challenge around encouraging people from different backgrounds to enter the sector. Waltham Forest Council has a huge cultural legacy, as the first London Borough of Culture; facilitating residents into cultural jobs could be a large part of this. The Council purchased the old Granada/EMD Cinema on Hoe Street in 2019, and in 2022 announced it would reopen as the Soho Theatre Walthamstow in 2023, in partnership with Soho Theatre. Part of working with Soho Theatre would involve strong engagement with the local community, in Walthamstow and across the borough.

The Committee recommends:

That the Council makes being part of the construction industry 'Fairness, Inclusion and Respect' programme a contractual condition for its development partners

That the Council works with schools and organisations providing career advice and development partners to promote education and career pathways into the construction industry particularly for underrepresented groups

Construction was an area that was particularly difficult to attract people from traditionally underrepresented groups. Although this problem is wider than the Council or the borough, there were actions the Council could take, and the recommendation to sign up to the 'Fairness, Inclusion and Respect' programme was a key part of this – the Council could use its procurement processes to make a change.

The Committee recommends:

That the Council works with its providers and partners to support residents looking or needing to retrain because of changing work practices and new opportunities for jobs in the green economy, focusing particularly on older workers, and identifying funding opportunities where available

That the Council works with its partners to actively promote green jobs to students of all ages at schools, Further Education colleges and other educational establishments, with a particular emphasis on demonstrating career progression after training or an apprenticeship

That the Council engages with groups such as Women in Construction and Black Professionals in Construction, and identifies any other relevant professional groups, in order to ensure green job opportunities are promoted to a diverse range of people

That there is a strong focus on progression within the health and social care sector especially for BAME employees

One of the underlying themes of the themed review was how to encourage people from underrepresented groups into the various sectors. The construction sector was particularly challenging for women and people of colour to enter. There were questions about how both younger and older people could gain the necessary skills to be ready for 'green jobs' of the future, and what role the Council could play in supporting this. It was also noted that people of colour and women were very overrepresented within social care, which is a low paid sector – the emphasis on how to progress within the sector to better paid roles was therefore key.

The Committee recommends:

That the Council continues to explore how small businesses can be supported to diversify into the green economy including maximising the potential of Council-owned buildings to enable the growth of the sector, and identifying any available funding

Supporting businesses to transition into the green economy was a way that the Council could continue to support jobs growth in the borough. The Council could use practical measures – such as better utilising its own buildings – to make this happen.

The Committee recommends:

That the Council, in its role within the Integrated Care System/Integrated Care Board, works with health partners to ensure that raising the status of social care is a long-term priority for the ICS

That the Council continues to work with commissioned social care providers to ensure that they understand the long-term benefits of paying the London Living Wage or higher

That the Council reviews the national work carried out by Skills for Care around what makes local authorities attractive to social workers and ensures that this is disaggregated to show the local picture and that this is taken into account in planning future recruitment

That the Council encourages commissioned providers to sign up to the 'Good Work Standard'

The Committee's key concern when hearing about health and social care sector jobs was around the status of the social care sector, and they discussed how to make it attractive to candidates. This problem was not unique to Waltham Forest. Some of this was around working across local authorities and health partners – which should be easier when the new Integrated Care System would be founded in July 2022 – and there were some practical measures the Council could take as part of its commissioning process, such as highlighting to providers the long-term benefits of paying the London Living Wage in retaining staff. It was acknowledged that all local authorities are competing for a small pool of social workers, so it was important to understand how Waltham Forest could position itself to attract the best candidates. The Committee also recommended using the Mayor of London's 'Good Work Standard'. This Standard has four pillars: fair pay and conditions; workplace wellbeing; skills and progression; and diversity and recruitment. Although the Standard can be applied to any sector, it is clearly relevant for the social care sector – particularly with the commitment to pay the London Living Wage and skills and progression.

That the new Hub encourages candidates intending to embark on health careers to gain initial experience through a job in social care

That there is a focus on extending the work currently undertaken with schools and colleges to further schools and colleges

In terms of progression, the Committee commended the work already taking place within schools and colleges and said that it should extend further where possible, particularly with the aim of making social care a more appealing sector for young people to move into. Additionally, the point was made that for those people seeking health jobs, social care should be promoted as an ideal starting point, particularly frontline roles working closely with people who need care.

Conclusion

This was a wide-ranging review – yet despite the many topics covered, certain themes stood out. The central theme was improving equity of access. In most sectors, it was women and people of colour who were underrepresented, particularly with regard to construction jobs and the cultural and creative sectors. In the social care sector, these two groups were highly overrepresented, particularly in the lowest paid roles, meaning that promoting progression and additional skills in this area would be key.

It was clear that in almost all the areas covered by the review, there were already a number of training schemes available – whether offered by the Council, health partners, private companies, central Government or the voluntary sector. Witnesses and committee members agreed that many of these schemes could be better promoted, or indeed better targeted at particular groups who would benefit from them.

The Council can promote good practice in its own recruitment and retention, particularly with regard to diversity. However, from the review, it was clear that the main role of the Council would be in linking with its partners and promoting opportunities to residents where relevant. The Council already has excellent links with some organisations, and these are formalised where it acts as commissioner or procures services. It continues to strengthen links with networking groups such as Black Professionals in Construction. It has many statutory links with NHS partners, and these will be tightened further when the local authority and NHS enter formally into the Integrated Care System, giving ample opportunity to work together to promote healthcare roles.