



# Northumberland

County Council

## **FAMILIES AND CHILDREN OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

**7TH APRIL 2022**

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### **NCC Digital Workforce & Digital Work-based Skills**

Report of: Cath McEvoy-Carr, Executive Director of Adult Social Care & Children's Services

Cabinet Member for Corporate Services - Richard Wearmouth

Cabinet Member for Children's Services - Guy Renner Thompson

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### **Purpose of report**

To communicate to FACS plans to accelerate the delivery of digital work-based skills within Northumberland County.

The proposal has internal and external facing objectives in developing digital work-based skills across the County of Northumberland to the advantage of residents and businesses but also providing a mechanism for NCC to build and sustain its own digital workforce within the area of Information Services and other areas with growing volumes of digital functions.

### **Recommendations:**

FACS is recommended to:

1. Acknowledge the proposal to appoint a specialist digital apprenticeship provider to partner with Northumberland County Council, enhancing the apprenticeship function of Northumberland Skills and delivering objectives within Northumberland Strategic Skills Plan 2021-25 (Funded by Levy & ESFA apprenticeship funding).
2. Acknowledge the proposal for NCC Education Directorate to appoint a Digital Development Lead (2-year FT) to accelerate digital skills and education advancements (within existing staffing budget).
3. Acknowledge the links between this proposal and the proposal of HR & OD to recruit a cohort of circa 10/12 digital apprentices to join Information Services on a pilot programme (funded by HR&OD apprenticeship wage support budget).

## Link to Corporate Plans

NCC Digital Workforce & Skills proposal is in strong accordance with the **Connecting**, **Learning** and **Thriving** priorities of NCC Corporate Plan 2020-21.

## Key issues

The current exponential growth of the thriving digital sector within the UK economy is well documented, as are the challenges around current demand and supply of digital skills.

This thriving sector is equally relevant locally within the north east region where the median digital tech sector salary is 26% greater than the all-sector median, with digital tech roles making up 16% of advertised roles in the North East region. Equally, new job roles are emerging in the work-from-anywhere environment with digital tech employers posting significant opportunities as '*location: anywhere*' and a new range of roles including directors and managers of '*remote work*' to oversee teams who will never enter the office, this bringing wider ranging opportunity to residents with digital skills and experience.

Despite the digital opportunities emerging, for young residents looking to move into digital sector careers in Northumberland, there are not yet sufficient well-defined and accessible pathways into work-based training and employment available.

Increasing accessibility for Northumberland residents to enter high value careers via work-based vocational pathways in the digital sector contributes to tackling the issues around low qualification attainment level where too many residents hold low level or no qualifications. It also brings opportunity to contribute to the problem of too few residents holding higher level qualifications compared to national levels, higher-level digital apprenticeships can be progressed to via academic or vocational routes on offer in this proposal. This in turn will provide benefits in respect of the clear link between qualification level and economic participation and those who hold no qualifications and who are unemployed.

As a result of the development of the digital work-based training and employment pathways described Northumberland County Council will have access to a previously unavailable mechanism by which to grow its own talent pool of digital technicians operating within Information Services area.

## **Background**

Northumberland Skills service area is undergoing transformation, a more current and fit for purpose digital curriculum is under development for school leavers and adults. With the recent appointment of an Apprenticeship Development Manager the capacity to further develop work-based education and training is in place with a key priority being developing provision to support and provide opportunity within the thriving digital sector.

Keeping abreast of growth and technological development in the digital sector creates challenges for education providers who are well established, let alone those on a development journey. As such, to allow Northumberland Skills to make sufficient development in this area, it is intended to enter a formal sub-contract relationship with a specialist digital provider with a strong track record.

This is intended to have both internal and external facing benefits, to contribute to building sufficiency and sustainability in NCC digital workforce as well as allowing Northumberland Skills to support training within digital roles for employers and residents in Northumberland.

The proposed vehicle for delivering this will be a formal apprenticeship provider subcontracting arrangement, implemented via a robust, transparent and ESFA compliant tendering process. Northumberland Skills, part of Northumberland County Council, would be the lead provider governing the delivery with programmes funded using apprenticeship levy.

It is also proposed that a Band 10 Digital Development Lead be appointed on a 2-year fixed term contract, reviewed after 2 years for impact and continuation, funded by Education Directorate staffing budget.

It is proposed that this role would be responsible for:

- Developing the digital apprenticeship offer within NCC to enhance the quality and impact of the internally grown digital workforce, this will include working with specialist digital apprenticeship providers to do so.
- Developing the digital apprenticeship offer more broadly across the county, again working with specialist digital apprenticeship providers to do so.
- Working alongside NCC School Improvement, including NCC ICT School Curriculum Team, to develop digital skills, digital innovation and digital provision within Northumberland schools.
- Promote digital careers throughout Northumberland schools, linking with all careers functions, linking schools to digital industry and opportunity.
- Provide digital provision development to support Northumberland Skills.

- Create closer links between the digital sector and education within Northumberland to catalyse local opportunity.
- Work closely with the NCC IT/Digital team to support the delivery of the digital strategy.
- Be an active member of the Digital Strategy Board to ensure that Digital Skills is represented in the board and digital skills related initiatives are prioritised and supported accordingly

The proposal will future proof NCC digital workforce via recruitment and training of an initial cohort of apprentices to operate within Northumberland County Council, then continue to maintain NCC digital workforce with recruitment of apprentices as/when demand emerges. The pilot cohort would work within NCC Information Services, allowing internally grown talent to develop the precise skills, knowledge and professional behaviours required by the directorate in which they operate.

HR & OD would recruit the apprentices with year 1 salary of £16,084 and year 2 & 3 at £19,312. Entry requirements will be to hold GCSE Maths and English Grade 4 as a minimum as well as those entry requirements recommended by the sub-contracted provider to support success on programme. The cohort would not be included in staffing ratios initially to allow trainees to undertake their 20% off the job training and engage in other developmental activities. HR & OD propose that wages for the posts would be supported via the Apprenticeship Wage Support budget which is reserved to build the skills required for NCC future workforce needs.

Wider than NCC, the proposal will support the economy of Northumberland by providing a range of entry level, technician level and higher-level digital apprenticeships, building sufficiency in the in-county digital workforce including serving employers wider than NCC operating in the digital sector and digital roles within all sectors, boosting Northumberland's contribution to the digital economy.

It will also provide greater opportunity for residents of Northumberland to enter high value digital careers including the emerging wave of high earning '*location anywhere*' roles in the digital sector, part of a growing fraction of the workforce which will never enter the office seen to emerge since the pandemic. This will bring regional and national earning potential to residents in the county without the need to leave the county, and potentially without the need to commute – contributing to carbon reduction priorities. This audience is intended to include full time learners progressing from digital programmes delivered by Northumberland Skills.

NCC will use current and new business networks to promote this opportunity to Northumberland employers. Given this will be a sub-contracted provision, NCC will also govern the programmes and their quality while benefiting from additional levy income created for Northumberland Skills service area.

**Implications:**

<b>Policy</b>	This proposal is in strong accordance with Northumberland County Council Corporate Plan 2020-21, Northumberland Economic Strategy 2019-24, Education & Skills Directorate priorities and Digital Strategy 2020-25.
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	<p>Digital Development Lead (band 10) will be funded by education directorate staffing budget on a 2 year fixed term contract.</p> <p>Apprentices entering NCC digital workforce will be trained by the appointed specialist digital apprenticeship provider and will funded via NCC apprenticeship levy.</p> <p>NCC Apprentice wages will be funded by HR&amp;OD Apprenticeship Wage Support budget, they will have starting salary £16,084.</p> <p>Apprentices of other Northumberland employers who are trained by the appointed specialist digital apprenticeship provider will be funded via the employers own Levy fund or by ESFA (with employer contribution) for those employers of wage bill less than £3m.</p> <p>Northumberland Skills will draw down the apprenticeship levy and ESFA funding for all apprentices, circa 85% will be passed to the appointed specialist digital apprenticeship provider, circa 15% retained to cover management/admin.</p>
<b>Legal</b>	Consideration of Public Contract Regulations 2015 must be given if sub-contract reaches threshold levels in future years.
<b>Procurement</b>	Formal tendering will be required to put in place a subcontracting agreement to be compliant with ESFA funding rules.
<b>Human Resources</b>	Coordination activity with departments via HR & OD is required in order to forward plan digital workforce demand and recruitment, this requiring a manageable amount of capacity to be allocated.
<b>Property</b>	NCC digital apprenticeships will be delivered in current work areas and some remotely in part, no property impact.
<b>Equalities</b>	Equalities impact assessment is appended to this briefing

(Impact Assessment attached)  Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	All activity of NCC digital apprentices will fall under current workplace risk assessment.
<b>Crime Disorder &amp;</b>	This report has considered Section 17 (CDA) and the duty it imposes and there are no implications arising from it.
<b>Customer Consideration</b>	The proposals set out in this report are designed to contribute significant value to residents (access to careers & earning potential) and to employers (building digital workforce).
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	This proposal brings potential for learning and working via digital platforms which will reduce carbon production by enhancing agile working capabilities of residents.
<b>Health and Wellbeing</b>	Indirectly, sustaining a high value career is inextricably linked to achieving greater levels of health & wellbeing of individuals.
<b>Wards</b>	Applicable to all wards.

### **Background papers:**

#### **Appendix 01 - NCC Digital Workforce & Digital Skills - Equalities Impact Assessment**



Appendix 01 - NCC  
Digital Workforce & D

### **Report Sign Off**

	Full Name of Officer
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Suki Binjal
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	Jan Willis
Relevant Executive Director	Cath McEvoy-Carr
Chief Executive	
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Richard Wearmouth Cllr Guy Renner-Thompson

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