

**Apprenticeship Update**

As reported at the last Rural Forum, the Government have introduced the 'Youth Contract' initiative to encourage and support young people to take up, and organisations to offer apprenticeships.

Kent County Council (KCC) introduced two new funding streams in April 2012. The Kent Employment Programme 1 is designed to specifically target those unemployed for more than nine months and cannot be combined with the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) funding; the Kent Employment Programme 2 is available for those that have been unemployed for between three and nine months and can be combined with the NAS funding.

Due to the range of different funding streams available, Swale Borough Council's grant funding to encourage apprenticeships ceased on 31 March 2012. Whilst available, the council's grant is supporting five apprentices in five different organisations that successfully applied before the closing date. Investigations into how the council's resources can best support and facilitate the creation and delivery of apprenticeships are currently ongoing.

The council are also currently recruiting to eight apprenticeship posts for employment across a range of departments within the council on a 12 month fixed term basis. Short listing for these roles has been completed and an assessment day is scheduled to take place on 4 July. The departments that will be taking on an apprentice are:

1. Facilities and Contract and Procurement
2. Customer Services
3. Legal and Democratic
4. Policy and Economic Development
5. Commissioning and Open Spaces
6. Revenues and Benefits
7. Human Resources
8. Environmental Response

A progress report will be provided at the next meeting.

Officers have had an introductory meeting with Rollo Parsons, the new Senior Group Secretary for the National Farmers Union (NFU), based at the office in Tunstall. A range of issues were discussed at this meeting, including apprenticeships. The challenges of delivering apprenticeships within the farming environment were re-iterated by Rollo, but overall this was a positive meeting with significant information sharing about regeneration priorities in the area.