

Agenda Item No. 8

Apprentices in Swale Schools Project

1. As reported at the last meeting a piece of work looking at potential apprenticeship opportunities that might be created through local schools, both secondary and primary, has been explored. It has not been possible to progress this at present, but it remains our intention to do so early in the new-year.
2. Since the last meeting the KCC has consulted on its 14-24 Skills and Employment Strategy, which includes a strong emphasis upon apprenticeships and sets a specific target of securing apprenticeships in at least half of all schools in the KCC area. This will help in terms of progressing discussions with the schools.

Business Support Programme for Swale

3. By way of reminder, a programme of business support has been introduced, sponsored by Swale Borough Council and delivered by Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce. The service is, provides workshops and 1:1 advice sessions, delivered in Sittingbourne, Sheerness and Faversham. The programme design caters for individuals and businesses working in the private sector or providing community services as a charity or not-for-profit organisation.
4. Take up at the start of the scheme was slow, but numbers accessing the service have increased over October and November. As at the end of November 27 clients had accessed the service, with many working through from half-day workshops to more involved support. Customer satisfaction feedback has been very high and we would encourage the Rural Forum to promote this free service to potential beneficiaries. Anyone interested should call the business support line on 01795 379012 or contact the Economy and Community Services team on 01795 417398.
5. A specific tourism business advisory service is also provided through Visit Kent. District Councils have access to quality programme and the dedicated resource of a professional tourism advisor. The cost of this service to District Councils is £1,100 per annum.
6. The quality programme comprises:
 - Advisory visits to existing, diversifying and new local tourism business in Swale (up to two, one hour appointments to meet the tourism advisor and a site visit if appropriate)
 - Telephone advice to local businesses in Swale and professional tourism staff
 - Promotion of tourism training courses
 - Advice on National Grading Scheme
 - Local Entry Scheme (LES) for Kent – includes listing on webs site, listing in local visitor guide, Tourist Information Centre listing

7. In the current financial year there have been 15 tourism referrals of which 14 businesses have been in rural communities across the Borough. The range of enquiries includes existing, diversifying and new local bed and breakfast establishments, guest houses and self-catering businesses.