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## WHAT MADE YOU APPLY FOR AN APPRENTICESHIP ROLE?

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I started my fantastic journey in March 2020 and have not regretted it for a second. I had a successful career in Retail/Customer Services but wanted to break away and move into Admin/Office work. This isn't always easy when your CV doesn't display the required skills you need, even if you know you have the capabilities. I was unable to go back to full time studying as I am a mother and needed an income, so being able to work and learn on-the-job was exactly what I needed to be able to make my goals a reality. At Thurrock Council apprentices are paid the National Minimum wage according to their age, which was a relief to hear as the National Apprentice Wage is usually much lower.

## HOW HAVE YOU FOUND THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING AN APPRENTICE IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT?

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I'm 10 months into my 18-month apprenticeship and have learned so much. I've already helped my team to improve some of the processes, which has been very welcomed by management. I have gained so much confidence. I put myself forward for things I would never have done before. This article is one of them. Becoming chair of the student council at college is another. Anyone who knew me before would be amazed.

## HOW DO YOU BALANCE WORKING AND STUDYING AT THE SAME TIME?

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If you're considering an Apprenticeship but worry about how you will keep on top of work and studying, please don't. I have found all my college topics tie in with my role. I'm putting my knowledge into practice whilst also finding the answers for written assignments. My managers are very supportive and flexible with study time, as is my tutor so I don't feel overwhelmed or pressured. I've already completed all of my written assignments in spite of the pandemic and having to home-school my son too. As long as you're dedicated and willing to put in the effort, it's most definitely achievable.

## **HOW HAS COVID-19 IMPACTED YOUR ROLE/APPRENTICESHIP?**

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A week into my apprenticeship I had to start working from home because of COVID-19. This was terrifying as I was brand new to the Council, but I needn't have been. Our organisation adapted very well and colleagues took time to teach me virtually, by screen sharing and guiding me through processes enabling me to work independently. College holds most of our classes virtually and, where the rules allowed, enabled us to attend college for exams and essential training. This regular contact with my group and video team meetings has helped ease the isolation and made me feel a valued part of the team, both in work and college.

## **YOUR BIGGEST ACHIEVEMENT SINCE BECOMING AN APPRENTICE?**

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My biggest achievement so far is winning 'Apprentice of the year' at my college. Which was so encouraging and I appreciated the acknowledgement for the hard work I had been doing. I've also received a nomination for 'Apprentice of the Year' at our Staff Awards. It would be amazing to win this. However, I would be over the moon for any of my fellow Apprentices to achieve this as well, as at Thurrock Council we are like one big family and all support one another.

## **WOULD YOU RECOMMEND AN APPRENTICESHIP IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT?**

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Whether you are a school leaver, a council worker in a different field, or even like me, wanting a career change to fulfil your full potential, an apprenticeship with the Local Authority is most definitely an incredible career development route for all ages and enables you to obtain valuable qualifications, all whilst gaining the essential skills you can only get from being in a role. I would love to continue my progression and work my way up to management over the coming years, as I have loved working for such an inspiring, supportive and dedicated organisation.

## **WHAT'S THE BIGGEST IMPACT YOU THINK YOU HAVE MADE IN YOUR COUNCIL?**

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Below you will find a few statements about the benefit and impact my role has had in our department from my terrific management team. Also, I reached out to our Chief Executive to provide her opinion on the value of apprentices as a whole to Thurrock Council, which just shows, all apprentices are valued and supported in our development from the very top to the bottom of the organisation. I hope my journey has inspired anyone who is considering an apprenticeship with the Local Authority and look forward to welcoming you to the #TeamThurrock family.

## **LYDIA BILLINGHURST - SENIOR BUSINESS ASSISTANT**

"Amy's apprenticeship in Business Administration L3 has many benefits to our team in the HROD Hub. Amy brings with her a breath of fresh air and new ideas that stem from the knowledge she is learning at college. Amy is able to be flexible in the work and areas she covers for us as her studies require her to develop skills in multiple areas, meaning we rarely have a skill shortage and productivity is increased. The apprenticeship programme allows this progression and development for individuals and really boosts team morale and diversity."

## **JOANNA MISTRY - HR OPERATIONS MANAGER**

"Amy works within our HROD Hub operations department, which is the spine of the HR operation within the council. We take the weight of administration away from Business Partners and develop processes to make the employee life cycle easier for all. Having Amy as our Business Administration apprentice is invaluable, I feel it's a win-win situation for both Amy and the department. We receive a hard-working enthusiastic employee who is learning skills through the apprenticeship programme and shares their knowledge with colleagues and Amy gets to implement her new skill set in a real-world environment, the education is both ways. Amy dispels the myth of Apprentices being college leavers with little to no work experience, she is an inspiration to people wanting to gain new skills or changing career paths, she is a true asset, not just for my department but to the council as a whole."

## **LYN CARPENTER - CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

"Here in Thurrock Council, we value all our officer team, so much so that I refer to us as #TeamThurrock. Effective teams constantly grow by the addition of new talent and one of our most successful ways of doing that is through our apprenticeship programme. For me, apprentices do more than just learn a new profession with on-the-job training combined with their classroom learning, they bring new ideas, energy, creativity and contribute hugely to the successful delivery of services to our residents. The council benefits hugely through the apprentice programme and a significant number of our apprentices secure permanent roles with us, a real case of 'growing our own'. Our apprentices come from a range of backgrounds, are different ages and bring a range of experience outside of the public sector including real learned life experience. This blend constantly adds value to what we do and how we do it, there is so much symbiotic benefit in that our apprentices often help us see what needs to be different in order to meet the constantly changing and evolving needs of the residents we serve. Apprenticeships have been a great way to build a diverse talent pipeline and I have seen new skills added to the organisation as a result. I see our apprentices as the local government workers of the future, by valuing them I hope to motivate them to commit to a life as a public servant, making a difference to the lives of our residents every day. Put simply, they are our future."