

[News story: Civil news: opportunity to deliver housing and debt services](#)

From:

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We welcome expressions of interest to deliver housing and debt services in North Hertfordshire.

We are inviting expressions of interest from 2013 Standard Civil Contract holders for the delivery of housing and debt services in the North Hertfordshire procurement area.

This opportunity is open to all holders of the 2013 Standard Civil Contract, and is not limited to current housing and debt providers.

You can apply to deliver services in North Hertfordshire by downloading and completing the relevant expression of interest document from our civil tenders' page on GOV.UK – see below.

We are interested in hearing from organisations able to meet the requirements of the 2013 Standard Civil Contract in full.

But we will also consider applications from organisations which feel unable to fully meet the 'permanent presence' or the 'supervisor' requirements.

Organisations interested in delivering any these services must complete and return the relevant expression of interest document(s) by the deadline of 12pm on Thursday 9 March 2017.

Further information

civil.contracts@legalaid.gsi.gov.uk – to return the expression of interest document

[Civil tenders](#) – to find out more and download documents

[Press release: Protection extended for mid Cornwall's wildlife-rich landscape](#)

Rare butterflies and birds will benefit from a much larger area of protected

land in mid Cornwall from today, says Government wildlife adviser Natural England.

The new Mid Cornwall Moors site of special scientific interest (SSSI) merges the six original SSSIs which previously dotted the landscape either side of the A30 and east of Indian Queens, extending their boundaries and protecting around 50% more of the countryside. The SSSI includes several closely located patches of land, connecting important habitats and helping wildlife to withstand pressures from climate change in the future, creating a stronger refuge and network for rare plants and animals.

The countryside across the Mid Cornwall Moors is a rich and varied mix of heathland, woodland, and wildflower meadows; a vital sanctuary for wildlife, as well as an important asset for local people, visitors, and businesses. Fens and mires in the headwaters of the Fal and Par catchments also help to provide clean water and have the potential to reduce flood risk to homes and properties located further downstream.

Natural England has joined forces with landowners, the Cornwall Wildlife Trust and Butterfly Conservation, building on the successes of the Mid Cornwall Moors LIFE project to create the perfect conditions for the rare marsh fritillary butterfly, which should see its fortune improve as a result. The wet woodlands throughout the area are important for the diminutive willow tit, which has virtually disappeared from large parts of the UK and declined by an estimated 81% since the mid-1990s. The new areas added to the SSSI include important breeding sites for both of these special species.

The former A30 at Goss Moor was downgraded to recreational use for cyclists, horseriders and walkers in 2008. Natural England has been working with Highways England, the Eden Project and Butterfly Conservation to create new habitat areas for butterflies and other wildlife on land alongside the new A30 corridor, several of which have now also been included within the new SSSI boundary. With help from the Eden Project, swathes of devil's-bit scabious flowers – the main food plant for the marsh fritillary butterfly – have been grown and planted alongside the A30.

Speaking at an event at the Eden Project today, Natural England's Chief Executive James Cross said:

The Mid Cornwall Moors are incredibly important areas for wildlife as well as people, and balancing the needs of both are critical to their conservation. Today's notification builds on the success of the LIFE project, providing protection for the much-improved breeding habitats for marsh fritillary butterflies along the A30 corridor – making it a valuable asset, not just for businesses and visitors – but also for wildlife. Mid Cornwall Moors is now one of our top wildlife sites and we are able to give it the protection it deserves.

Seán O'Hea, Mid Cornwall Reserves Manager, Cornwall Wildlife Trust said:

The Mid Cornwall Moors are special because of all of the patches of good quality wildlife habitat scattered across the landscape. This designation is very well thought out because it looks beyond the previous SSSI boundaries to consider what the wildlife really needs to thrive. It extends the protection given by SSSI status to many more important pieces of land, creating a wider network of protected sites.

Philip Hambly, Chairman of Cornwall Butterfly Conservation said:

The marsh fritillary is threatened, not only in the UK but across Europe. It is therefore essential that this rare butterfly is managed carefully and on a landscape scale so colonies remain connected. Mid Cornwall Moors protection as an SSSI will target conservation to help this butterfly's survival across this very important area. Cornwall Butterfly Conservation's volunteers have already worked in partnership with Natural England carrying out surveys and conservation work and very much look forward to continuing this together.

Dr Caroline Bulman, Head of Species Ecology at Butterfly Conservation, said:

Like many specialist butterflies, the threatened marsh fritillary can only survive when colonies are able to move between areas of suitable wet grassland – which provide the host plant and conditions for them to thrive. We welcome the expansion and changes to the new designation of the Mid Cornwall Moors SSSI, as this will help to protect this and other important species at a landscape-scale and help to reverse the decline, for such rapidly declining species.

The previous SSSIs now included within the Mid Cornwall Moors SSSI include Goss and Tregoss Moors, Red Moor, Retire Common, Breney Common, Tregonetha and Belowda Downs and Belowda Beacon. The area protected as a SSSI has increased by over two square miles and now covers areas totalling six and a half square miles across the wider Mid Cornwall Moors landscape.

The Mid Cornwall Moors SSSI comes into immediate effect from today, 23 February. Landowners, occupiers and interested parties have 4 months in which to make representations or objections to Natural England, who will then decide whether or not to confirm the notification.

[Press release: UK energy statistics: 2016 provisional data](#)

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December 2016 statistics that allow a provisional assessment to be made of trends in energy production and consumption in 2016.

December 2016 energy statistics that allow a provisional assessment to be made of trends in energy production and consumption in 2016. A more detailed analysis will be available in Energy Trends, to be published on 30 March 2017.

[Press release: DfE encourages more businesses to offer apprenticeships](#)

Get In Go Far – the government’s flagship campaign to promote apprenticeships – launched a new wave of activity today (22 February 2017), focused on promoting apprenticeships to employers.

The campaign highlights the wide range of benefits that apprentices can bring to a business, with the aim of increasing the number of apprenticeships offered in England.

Advertising on the radio and LinkedIn will tell the stories of several businesses currently employing apprentices. This activity will also be supported by telemarketing activity carried out by the Skills Funding Agency.

New analysis in support of the campaign highlights that small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are set to recruit 202,000 new apprentices in the next 12 months, helping more young people get their foot in the door at leading companies across the country.

Additional research also highlights the many ways in which apprentices boost the businesses they work for:

- more than 24,000 apprentice-employing SMEs in the private sector reported that hiring an apprentice has actually helped them win business

- 3 in 4 SMEs that employ apprentices report increased productivity thanks to apprenticeships with product/service improvement
- nearly all (96%) SMEs report at least one business benefit to hiring an apprentice

However, there is still more that needs to be done to ensure employers of all sizes gain the skills they need for their workforce. Almost three-quarters of SMEs still remain to be convinced about the merits of taking on an apprentice.

Apprenticeships and Skills Minister Robert Halfon said:

We know that apprenticeships give people of all ages and all backgrounds a ladder of opportunity to get the skills they need. That is why more than 90% of apprentices stay in employment after their scheme ends.

It's fantastic to see that so many SMEs are taking advantage of the programme, ensuring they get the workforce they need but we must do more to encourage SMEs to come on board and hire more apprentices.

Oliver Mangham, Applications Director at Fairfield Control Systems, who himself started as an apprentice and who features in the new campaign, commented:

For SMEs like ours, an apprentice provides a great way for a business to grow the talent we need.

Companies can shape their training to provide skills tailored to their business and, on top of that, the apprentices will bring enthusiasm, fresh ideas and aid innovation.

Mike Cherry, Chair of the Federation of Small Business, has backed the new government campaign. He commented:

Small firms understand that apprenticeships make good business sense. Having apprentices can be a real asset for many smaller businesses and are vital to the future of the UK economy.

FSB members are taking on more apprentices than ever before and are a fantastic way to enable young people to gain the skills they need to succeed. We'd encourage all small businesses to explore how an apprentice could fit in their organisation.

Berthon Boats, one of the stars of the campaign, advise customers internationally on buying and selling high-quality sailing, motor and performance yachts. They have taken on 65 apprentices in the last 6 years, helping them to bid on bigger contracts and ensure the future of their

business.

Fairfield Control Systems also feature. Their apprentices can gain a range of qualifications including a Higher National Diploma or Bachelors in Engineering (BEng). The knowledge and talent their apprentices bring have helped the company bridge a skills gap and grow rapidly.

The campaign is launched in advance of a new 'STEP' funding offer becoming available to SMEs from 1 May 2017.

For the purposes of this press release and calculations, an SME is defined as having 1-249 employees, excluding sole traders from the figures. This press release applies to England only.

1. Calculations to show projections of apprenticeship numbers:

Organisation size	Average number of apprentices at workplace (IFF Research)	Percentage of business likely to offer in 12 months (KANTAR)	Number of businesses*	Number of firms expected to hire apprentices in next 12 months**	Number of apprentices expected
1 to 9	0.7	0.26	932,310	142,643	99,850
10 to 49	1.9	0.34	175,175	38,889	73,889
50 to 249	3.3	0.43	28,735	8,621	28,449
Total (all SMEs)	–	–	1,136,220	–	202,189

Employer satisfaction survey of 4,000 apprentice employers conducted by IFF Research initially published July 2016. SME data revealing results of survey of 3,843 SMEs has not been published before.

500 businesses were interviewed by telephone on the IFF business omnibus survey by KANTAR Public. The survey data is weighted to be representative of the population of UK businesses. Interviews took place between 16 and 27 January 2017.

*[BEIS estimates of business population](#) are available.

**Allowing for "definitely" (0.9) and "probably" (0.5) factors in Kantar data

2. Perceived benefits of hiring an apprentice by SMEs [Kantar]:

- enthusiasm: 80%
- ability to mould staff to your business needs: 70%
- ability to future proof your workforce: 66%
- fresh ideas: 61%
- new skills: 53%
- productivity: 53%
- innovation: 40%
- the edge over your competitors: 24%
- creates a more diverse workforce: 1%

3. Benefits SME apprentice employers report in IFFR research:

- improved productivity: 74% of SMEs report this
- lower overall wage bill: 37% of SMEs report this
- improved staff retention: 68% of SMEs report this
- improved ability to attract good quality staff: 59% of SMEs report this
- brought new ideas to the organisation: 64% of SMEs report this
- improved staff morale: 71% of SMEs report this
- improved our product or service quality 72% of SMEs report this
- improved our image in the sector: 64% of SMEs report this
- 96% of SMEs report at least one of the benefits listed above

4. Government 'STEP' funding offer for SMEs:

The government's simplified 'STEP' funding arrangements for SMEs who don't pay the apprenticeship levy (firms with a wage bill of under £3 million a year) becomes available from 1 May 2017.

The 'STEP' arrangements provide 4 easy-to-understand ways non-levy-paying SMEs can access government funding for their apprentices:

- support: the government pays 90% of an SME's training and assessment costs for the lifetime of the apprenticeship, any age, any level (up to funding band maximum)
- teen grant: an extra £1,000 grant will be paid to any SME who takes on a 16- to 18-year-old, or a 19- to 24-year-old that has previously been in care
- entrepreneur offer: businesses with under 50 staff will also see 100% of training and assessment costs paid for if they recruit an apprentice aged 16-18
- provision for additional support for SMEs who take on those with additional learning needs further support is also available

5. Find out more about how apprenticeships can benefit businesses on the [Get In Go Far website](#).

[News story: Taxpayer's stake in Lloyds now below 4%](#)

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The government has continued to sell shares in Lloyds Banking Group, reducing its remaining shareholding to less than 4%.

The latest sales, conducted via the trading plan, mean the government has recovered over £19 billion of the £20.3 billion taxpayers injected into Lloyds during the financial crisis, once share sales and dividends received are accounted for.

Economic Secretary to the Treasury, Simon Kirby, said:

Since the decision to sell the government's stake in Lloyds we have now recovered over £19 billion for the taxpayer.

Lloyds' strong annual results show that we are in a good position to continue to reduce our shareholding and recover all of the money the tax-payer injected into the bank during the financial crisis.

A trading plan involves gradually selling shares in the market over time, in an orderly and measured way. The Lloyds trading plan initially ran from 17 December 2014 to 31 June 2016. The government [announced on 7 October 2016](#) that further sales of Lloyds shares would also be made through a trading plan.

On 9 January 2017, [the government announced](#) it had passed a significant milestone in returning Lloyds to the private sector when it confirmed it was no longer the bank's largest shareholder.

As required by Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) rules, Lloyds Banking Group announced today that the government's shareholding in the bank has crossed through a one percentage point threshold – therefore notifying the market that the government has reduced its shareholding in Lloyds to below 4%.

All proceeds from the sales are used to reduce the national debt.