

# Ambition Southend

Towards a Skills  
and Labour Market  
Strategy for  
Southend-on-Sea

Consultation Paper  
October 2017



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# About this paper

This paper is the product of a project to develop a Skills Strategy for the borough. Its aim is to enable an efficient, effective labour market with clear, accessible career pathways for residents, which is able to respond to emerging economic risks and opportunities.

The paper seeks to analyse and draw together key findings from the research to identify key priorities to improve the local skills system.

The paper has been informed by findings from an evidence review and series of initial consultation meetings. It forms an important part of the ongoing consultation process.

## Using the latest evidence

This report, and the evidence base that underpins it, uses the latest available evidence from sources such as: the Office for National Statistics, the Department for Education and the UK Commission for Employment and Skills. Recent updates to key national datasets and time series data have been incorporated so figures and trends quoted are in line with those in other Council strategies.

## Next steps

This paper provides some initial analysis, conclusions, proposals and questions for your consideration and feedback.

**We are seeking your written response to the questions included in the paper by Friday, 22nd December, 2017. These should be emailed to: [economicd@southend.gov.uk](mailto:economicd@southend.gov.uk)**

Once consultation feedback has been gathered, it will be used to produce a final strategy. We aim to publish this in early 2018.

The strategy aims to bring together the multitude of stakeholders across the borough and, critically, to generate a shared vision and agreed approach to improving the current position.

# The current skills support landscape

The skills and labour market support system is well developed in Southend-on-Sea. The key institutions and partnerships are illustrated in the diagram below. These include: primary, junior and secondary schools, FE colleges, universities, the South East LEP, the

Opportunity South Essex (OSE) Partnership and the Southend Business Partnership (SBP). Although not individually listed, many local businesses are also important providers of skills development activity in the borough.



# Strengths

The following highlights some of the key strengths of the borough in relation to skills and the work force:

## High economic participation

In 2016, 81.2% of Southend working age residents were either in employment or actively seeking work – above the England average of 78.1%.

## A growing workforce

**Southend-on-Sea workforce has grown over the past decade.** The borough's working-age, resident population (and potential local workforce) grew by 12,300 (or 12.5%) between 2005 and 2015, to reach 110,400 in 2015. This was slightly below the England average growth rate of 13.2%.

**The workforce is forecast to continue to grow** by 4.8% over the decade from 2015 to 2025; and by 2.5% over the following decade, from 2025 to 2035.

## Increasing workplace earnings

**Gross hourly earnings for full-time workers with jobs based in Southend** were £12.56 in 2016; and grew by 8.3% between 2010 and 2016, compared to 7.8% average for England.

**Residents' earnings are high and have grown at a rate over twice the national average.** Southend-on-Sea's average resident-based earnings, including local workers and commuters, were £14.75 an hour in 2016 - significantly higher than the England average of £13.80. Southend-on-Sea has experienced a high rate of growth in resident earnings – with 16.6% growth since 2011, compared to a national average of 7.8%. This is, in part, due to the proximity of the borough to London and

higher average earnings in the capital.

## Strong average school performance

**Southend-on-Sea performs highly in qualifications attainment.** In 2015/16, 61% of 19 year-olds resident in Southend-on-Sea gained a Level 3 qualification (A-level or equivalent). This was higher than the England average of 57% and higher than other neighbouring education authorities.

**In 2015/16, 65% of pupils in Southend-on-Sea gained at least 5 A\*-C GCSEs including English and maths.** This was a higher rate of attainment than the England average (54%) and again, it out-performed neighbouring education authorities. However, it is important to note that there is a wide variation in individual school performance.

## Good local FE and HE provision

South Essex College and the University of Essex are well regarded by stakeholders, and have a presence in the borough.

Q1

Should we consider other strengths?  
If so, which ones?

# Weaknesses

## The following details some of the key weaknesses of the borough in relation to skills and the workforce:

### Low and declining productivity

**Economic output per head is lower than the UK average and other neighbouring authorities.** Southend-on-Sea's average £17,500 of Gross Value Added (GVA) per person is below the UK average of £25,600; below Thurrock (£19,800) and below Essex (£21,300). This is also reflected in productivity rates, with Southend-on-Sea achieving £28 in GVA per hour worked in 2015; compared with the national average of £32 per hour worked.

### Low jobs growth

**There has been little overall jobs growth in Southend-on-Sea over the past decade.** There were 76,000 workforce jobs in Southend in 2015. This total has changed little over the decade (+3000 since 2009). The borough has only just recovered from the jobs lost during the 2009 recession. Other nearby authority areas, Dartford (+21.1%) and Thurrock (+10.8%) have experienced much stronger growth since 2010.

### Recruitment difficulties and skills gaps

**A higher share of employers in Southend-on-Sea reported that their vacancies were hard to fill,** compared to the national average. In 2015, 54% of all establishments in Southend reported that they had at least one vacancy that was 'hard to fill'. This is higher than the England average of 39%.

**Low numbers of applicants were the main reason for hard-to-fill vacancies (HTFVs).** In 2015, 39% of all employers with HTFVs claimed

that there were low numbers of applicants with the required skills (slightly higher than the England average of 37%). Additionally, 24% stated that there were not enough people interested in doing this type of job, higher than the England average of 20%. The majority of establishments with HTFVs reported that these had a negative impact on their business, resulting in increased workloads for existing staff, difficulties meeting quality standards, higher operating costs, and losing business or orders to competitors.

**Skills gaps exist in the current workforce and are slightly more prevalent in Southend-on-Sea than across England.** In 2015, 6% of staff in Southend-on-Sea were not fully qualified to undertake their current job, slightly higher than the England average of 5%. This was largely due to the significantly high proportion of staff undertaking elementary occupations<sup>1</sup> exhibiting skills gaps - 2.4%, compared to just 1.0% across England.

### A net exporter of skills

**The number of residents qualified to NVQ Level 4 or above is higher than the number of workers with jobs in Southend-on-Sea.** In addition, the resident population has a greater average level of educational attainment than the workforce population, suggesting that Southend-on-Sea is a net exporter of skills in labour market terms.

<sup>1</sup> Elementary occupations consist of simple and routine tasks which mainly require the use of hand held tools and often some physical effort. International Labour Organisation, 2013

## Less well qualified workforce

**Workforce qualifications attainment in Southend-on-Sea is below the national average.** In 2016, 26.0% of working-age residents in Southend-on-Sea were qualified to NVQ level 4 or above. This is below the national average of 36.8%. 64.9% of working-age residents were qualified to at least NVQ level 2 – again, lower than the national average of 73.4%.

## Attainment disparities between schools and neighbourhoods

**There is a significant variation in GCSE attainment between Southend-on-Sea schools.** The percentage of Southend-on-Sea pupils achieving 5+ A\*-C or equivalent, including A\*-C in both English and Mathematics GCSEs, ranges from 100% in the highest achieving school, to 23% in the lowest.

**Deprivation is, in part, linked to education and skills.** According to the 2015 Index of Multiple Deprivation, Southend-on-Sea had 13 out of 107 lower super output areas (LSOAs) that were among the top 10% of the most deprived LSOAs in England. Engagement in education and skills development in these areas are typically low.

## Youth unemployment

**Youth unemployment is slightly higher in Southend-on-Sea than the national average.** 23.4% of those claiming unemployment benefits were aged 16 to 24, in Southend-on-Sea, compared to 20.7% in England.

**Unemployment in Southend-on-Sea is slightly above the national average.** Unemployment in Southend-on-Sea has been slightly above the national average since 2009. The borough's unemployment rate is 6.1%, compared to 5.1% nationally, and is similar to the rate of Basildon (5.9%), Castle Point (6.0%), and Thurrock (5.8%).

## Q2

Should we consider other weaknesses?  
If so, which ones?

# Challenges

## Confusion over apprenticeships

**Stakeholders report confusion amongst employers over the new apprenticeship arrangements.** Employers consulted were critical of the specificity of new apprenticeship standards, and questioned the relevance of provision to their industry and how the new system would work in practice.

## Funding for schools

**There is concern that the new national funding formula for schools will have a significantly damaging effect on education provision in the borough.** Recent analysis of the funding formula projections identifies a significant variation in impacts between Southend-on-Sea schools, with the worst affected secondary school losing £190 per pupil and the least affected losing £97.

## Identifying pathways for all learners

**Pathways for more vocational careers are less well developed than traditional, academically supported career pathways.** The career pathways for individuals with high academic achievement (school-college-university-workplace) are often far better developed, promoted and catered for within the curriculum than more vocational career pathways (school-apprenticeship-workplace).

## Education policy focuses on qualifications attainment

**Current education policy is driven by qualifications attainment and OFSTED targets.** Stakeholders believe that current education policy, funding and performance

targets do not cater for the needs of many school leavers, who do not follow a traditional academically supported career pathway.

## Lack of resource for building industry awareness and ambition in school-age children

**Stakeholders report a lack of resource (but not will) to introduce school-age learners to industry.** It is recognised that, due to existing education policy, industry related-activities are often a low priority for school effort and funds.

## Meeting future skills needs

**There is a need to invest in the development of millennial skills in order to future-proof the labour supply.** Young people today will need a wide range of highly transferable skills in order to succeed in careers that are taking an increasingly non-linear path. Often termed 'millennial skills', these include: communications, digital literacy and entrepreneurial skills. Additional resources and efforts to develop these skills among our future workforce would maximise the mobility of labour required to meet the workforce requirements of future industry.

**Enterprise skills are increasingly important in the workplace.** Micro and small businesses now constitute over 86% of the Southend-on-Sea economy. Increasingly, young people are being required to become self-employed or self-reliant in the workplace. Enterprise skills provide initial guidance on starting out and succeeding in setting up a business, these skills are also transferable into employment and the workplace.

## Delivering an accessible and capable skills infrastructure

Stakeholders reported that the skills landscape is confused, constantly changing with too many separate initiatives and a lack of coordination. Stakeholders identified a need to improve clarity, coordination, and coherence of skills support provision. Some stakeholders argued that a 'one-stop-shop' or information brokerage service for skills would be helpful.

### Q3

Should we consider other challenges?  
If so, which ones?

# Opportunities

## Apprenticeship Levy

The Apprenticeship Levy is an opportunity for employers to pool resources and tailor an apprenticeship system that better responds to the needs of the local economy. The process and proposition must be relevant to Southend-on-Sea's unique economic characteristics.

There is also an opportunity to impart a range of core skills and competencies to all apprentices - such as digital, customer management, communication, literacy, numeracy, problem solving and project management – that will help us ensure that the local workforce can meet future industry skills requirements.

## Strong regeneration plans

Southend-on-Sea will be the location for some major regeneration projects during the next 15 years (Airport Business Park, Better Queensway, Thames Estuary Experience, etc.) that will generate local demand for skilled workers. A significant opportunity exists to harness the skills development capacity of these projects and ensure that local residents benefit.

## A growing skills infrastructure

Southend has been the location of a number of projects to expand skills support infrastructure in recent years (South Essex College, The Forum, Building Schools for the Future, University of Essex). There is an opportunity to build on existing progress and make Southend a hub for this type of development in future years. This would improve the borough's ability to meet future

workforce requirements and bring significant benefits to local residents.

## Strong labour demand in the future

The need to replace retiring workers will create labour demand across all types of jobs. The *Working Futures* forecast has predicted that job openings will be in a wide range of industries and occupations, particularly reflecting the need to replace retiring workers.

## A strong and willing stakeholder base

Key stakeholders are well-informed and ready to support improvement in local skills systems. Throughout the early consultation and workshops, there was a good degree of well-informed feedback and ideas for the future. There is a coalition of the willing: this is a significant local advantage.

### Q4

Should we consider other opportunities? If so, which ones?

# Main findings

This section identifies some of the key themes arising from the evidence review and initial consultation exercise, provides some further insight and identifies potential strategic objectives/outcomes.

## **Finding #1: There are multiple skills challenges facing Southend, but there are also key opportunities.**

There are multiple challenges and opportunities facing the borough. The solutions and the process of taking advantage of these will require strong leadership, effective co-ordination and joint working among stakeholders.

A key advantage for Southend-on-Sea is that it has a range of successful education and training institutions. The consultation exercise revealed that, among stakeholders, there is a broad awareness of the key challenges and potential solutions.

Shared vision and leadership, that is inclusive and builds on the commitment and knowledge already present, is clearly needed.

## **Finding #2: Driving up productivity and meeting industry's future skills requirements are key challenges for the borough.**

Raising productivity is a difficult challenge, as it involves changing the way businesses and employers operate.

A shift towards high value-added economic activities will require organisational development and investment in capital and skills. As such, the value of change must be realised by business and be in-line with market demand.

According to economic theory the following

aspects of skills formation and supply are significant factors in improving productivity:

- Improving leadership and management skills
- Addressing skills gaps that negatively impact organisational performance
- Developing skills that make the best of capital investment/new technology
- Skills planning for business growth
- Implementing improvements to HR management and in-work skills training

## **Finding #3: Southend-on-Sea has an open labour market**

Labour freely moves in, out and around the borough without regard to administrative boundaries. The wider South-Essex and London labour markets are closely linked to Southend's. A skills strategy and delivery plan must recognise the proportion of local people that work outside of the borough, and that many local employers employ staff that commute in from other boroughs.

## **Finding #4: Southend-on-Sea has significant disparity in deprivation and educational attainment**

There is a wide range of performance between schools in Southend. The percentage of pupils achieving 5+ A\*-C or equivalents including A\*-C in both English and Mathematics GCSEs – varies from 100 per cent, to 23 per cent.

Southend-on-Sea also has a wide variance

in deprivation, with some impoverished ward areas scoring highly on the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (Milton, Victoria, Kursaal). Other ward areas have low levels of deprivation and high average earnings (Leigh, Leigh West, Thorpe).

### **Finding #5: There is a common ‘millennial’ skillset needed by young people**

The ‘millennial’ skills challenge means that high levels of technical skills, soft skills, communication skills, project management and entrepreneurial skills need to be developed by young people in order to equip them for a lifetime of work and learning.

These skills will be integral to the ability of local employers to continue to trade profitably in the future. According to local employers, it is important to have a workforce who possess positive attitudes to work; as well as technical and professional expertise.

### **Finding #6: Meeting the millennial skills need and changing employer requirements, requires an agile skills infrastructure**

Creating a system that can consistently adapt to the skills needs of local employers is a significant challenge for Southend. Accordingly, it is important for employers to be part of the infrastructure that supports skills development. There also needs to be a productive and open dialogue with the many education providers in the town. Employers can also collaborate to achieve critical levels of demand for specialist skills, attracting training provision to the locality, or saving costs on off-site training.

With a national economy facing unprecedented change, it is difficult to predict specialist skills needs in 10 years’ time. Accordingly, it is important to focus efforts on encouraging the right attitudes and foundations (millennial skills as described above) – and to enable an agile response by skills support providers, including

both employers and public sector organisations. This should create the right foundations and core skills, along with a responsive, tailored, and effective skills infrastructure for specialist needs.

### **Finding #7: Current promotion of work skills and career resilience in young people is patchy and not sufficiently resourced**

Although there are a number of very good initiatives that bring employers into contact with primary and secondary schools and their pupils, there is no cohesive approach to building resilience in young people for their future career choices and pathways. Southend-on-Sea’s schools are becoming increasingly independent in terms of their management, finance and operations. This introduces new challenges in terms of aligning school education with the needs of the local economy.

### **Finding #8: There will be opportunities stemming from the major regeneration projects scheduled to take place in the borough over the next 15 years**

There is an estimated £1 billion of construction expenditure due to take place in Southend-On-Sea over the next 15 years.

Accordingly, there will be a significant number of construction jobs generated, as well as jobs connected to the new buildings and their final use.

### **Finding #9: Southend on Sea’s transport infrastructure links are critical in enabling businesses access to local and national labour markets.**

Southend’s international airport, nine rail stations and key arterial highways play a vital role in bringing workers in, and enabling commuters to work outside the borough. Protecting and developing these links is crucial to maintain a productive local workforce and to continue to generate wealth for local residents.

# Objectives and Outcomes

Before discussing the conclusions from the Review section of this document, it is important to acknowledge that the purpose of an efficient and effective labour market is to support Southend-on-Sea's local economy and population.

**Raised productivity** is a desirable outcome as it means that more value will be generated per unit of labour used in the local economy, which in turn will lead to increased organisational efficiency, higher levels of employment and increased average salaries. There is a direct link between higher productivity and higher salaries. Highly productive jobs add more value and tend to be internationally tradable, more resilient and adaptable to change.

**Jobs growth** is a desirable outcome in Southend-on-Sea, as the rate of jobs growth has been relatively low in recent years. In the context of a growing local population and local workforce it is important to create jobs to maintain employment levels and continue to generate wealth locally.

**Meet the current and future skills needs of employers.** For local employers to operate efficiently and successfully they need an adequate supply of labour with the right skills. Talent and skills are two of the main 'attractors'

for businesses seeking to invest in the area. It is also important to continue to provide local employment opportunities to residents.

**Increasing the skills attainment and wages of the lowest earners** is another desirable outcome. Improving attainment helps the economy by developing a more productive workforce. It helps individuals by developing their transferable skills, increases household income and reduces the number of hard-to-fill vacancies.

**An inclusive workforce** helps to build a healthy, sustainable community. Skills improvement can bring those at disadvantage or risk of unemployment nearer to the active labour market. This helps to reduce the spatial concentration of disadvantage and poverty.

## Q5

Are these the right outcomes to aim for?  
How would you adapt or add to these?

Desired outcomes from an effective skills and labour system and market

Raised productivity

Jobs growth

Meet the current and future skills needs of employers

Increase skills attainment and wages of lowest earners

An inclusive workforce

# Developing a strategy

The next step is to take these findings, and organize them into a coherent strategic response. The following chapter describes a response based on five key areas of focus. They are:

- 1. Leadership**
- 2. Life transitions**
- 3. Agility in provision**
- 4. Skills charter and a virtual academy for skills and employment**
- 5. Utilisation of assets and networks**

In order to provide greater definition and illustrate the potential of these areas of focus, we have provided some possible delivery ideas to support the implementation of a skills strategy. These are detailed at the end of each section. The ideas proposed are not fixed or prescribed to any particular stakeholder. They are designed to start a dialogue and we would welcome your feedback on these ideas.

## Q6

Are these the right areas of focus?

How would you adapt or add to these?

# Ambition Southend: (A) Leadership

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:

### 1) Create a shared vision and convene effective leadership in skills

Convening effective leadership from stakeholders across the borough is particularly important when seeking change in employer practices and lobbying for resources/powers from central government.

The principal functions for leadership in skills are to:

- Set out a shared vision for skills and communicate it simply and effectively
- Convene the borough's business and community leaders to champion the skills strategy, provide advocacy for skills development and influence other institutions and employers
- Encourage leadership and commitment from all stakeholders (this could form the basis of a 'skills pledge' tailored to different stakeholders)
- Engage employers in relevant skills issues
- Create and implement a delivery plan for a Skills Strategy, detailing the roles and responsibilities of the Council, employers, education institutions, local communities and individuals.

There are also a range of further actions which may bring additional benefits in this area:

- Develop positive, forward-looking messages about the local economy
- Highlight and communicate future local labour market needs and opportunities
- Provide a coherent information portal for skills and careers

- Offer tailored information for employers, parents, and individuals
- Be clear and open about the challenges in terms of deprived neighbourhoods. Publish neighbourhood action plans
- Set out and negotiate skills pledges for various constituencies.

### 2) Articulate the changing role of the Council from direct delivery to leadership and influence

It's important to recognise that, with declining council resources, there should be an emphasis on sustainable solutions that encourage self-help and which enable people and employers to help themselves.

Part of this role could be advocacy and coordination. Some stakeholders suggested a lead body or one-stop-shop that could broker solutions for skills.

## RATIONALE:

**There are many skills issues and challenges, and many institutions, employers and organisations. Progress can only be made through collaboration**

Making progress on skills and forging effective working relationships between stakeholders, employers, education and training providers, and residents is a significant challenge.

Leadership and engagement needs to be owned across public and private sector partners. Business leaders and skills exemplars can be champions for the agenda, and should be used to lobby other businesses and government for investment and change.

## The economy is diverse, with mostly small businesses as well as some large corporates

For example, Southend-on-Sea has a relative advantage in high-tech sectors such as aviation and engineering, cultural and creative industries, specialist manufacturing and specialist construction. Micro-businesses employing between one and four staff dominate the local economy.

Marshaling these industries and employers to create a coherent and integrated approach to skills will require cogent leadership.

It was suggested that perhaps the borough would benefit from better ambassadorial promotion in order to engage internal and external stakeholders productively in skills issues.

## The perception exists that the skills landscape is cluttered and uncoordinated

There were perceptions that there are a lot of skills initiatives, clutter and constant change.

There is scope for improving clarity, coordination and coherence of skills support.

Some consultees felt that a one-stop-shop or information brokerage service for skills would be helpful.

There was reported confusion amongst employers in terms of the new apprenticeship levy:

- Employers consulted were critical of the specificity of new apprenticeship standards and the practical implications of the new system
- There is a requirement for a mechanism for building clarity and awareness for employers on the Apprenticeship Levy scheme.

## There is the perception that the public sector has a wider role to play

Public sector bodies (the Council, Hospital, HMRC, etc.) spend significant amounts on providing services in the borough. These organisations should be encouraged to utilise their purchasing power to support skills development in the local population.

## DELIVERY IDEAS:

- Create a skills leadership group from the education, private and public sectors to champion skills development
- Engage with local businesses on their specific labour market priorities
- Drive a consistent message across local partners of the labour market requirements for employers and development opportunities.
- Increase awareness of skills development opportunities for employees and residents
- Council to highlight its own (and wider public sector) role in employment, training and skills development
- Develop an initiative to use the voluntary and social sectors as a means of providing work experience for young people
- Act as a navigator to local businesses and people to reduce confusion on skills and employment issues Identify key employment and skills gaps in the labour market and invite responses from the provider network

### Q7

Leadership – Are these the right objectives and delivery ideas?  
How would you adapt or add to these?

# Ambition Southend:

## (B) Life transitions

### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:

#### 1) Develop a 'life transitions approach' to supporting skills

Develop an action plan that seeks to intervene at crucial points of life transition for local residents, covering the following stages:

- Early years (0-4)
- Transition to high school and subject/option choice
- The transition from school to work
- Work-experience part-time work/volunteer opportunities from 14+
- University to work
- Parents - new parents, returners/role as influencers
- Redundancy/career change
- Up-skilling of existing employees, especially those with low wage, low productivity positions

This approach would involve establishing some key resources and initiatives for each stage.

#### 2) Focus on priority neighbourhoods and families

It was widely reported in consultations and workshops that skills and labour market disadvantage was spatially concentrated. In addition, it was also recognised that there were families with multi-generational unemployment and low aspirations.

The wards with the highest levels of deprivation are located within the east of the borough with Kursaal, Victoria and Milton being ranked the highest on the IMD (2010). 1 in 4 children live in poverty in these wards, compared with 1 in 5 across England.

Further, it is recognised that more can be done to better support vulnerable learners and those not in employment, education or training (NEETs). Developing a collective approach that seeks to attract external funding and investment in order to replicate the best of national projects targeting the issues associated with these learners would be beneficial. National funds such as European Social Fund, and likely successors, may offer a productive source of funding to trial and develop initiatives in this area.

### RATIONALE:

#### A life transitions approach builds on the key intervention activities currently delivered by the Council and other key stakeholders.

The approach taken by the Council and other stakeholders and institutions fits well with a life transitions approach, as many existing activities are targeted at these specific transitional stages. This also seemed to be a consistent theme throughout the consultation and workshop discussions.

According to consultees, and reflecting practice elsewhere over the past 30 years, there are several core skills for employability and career progression:

- Work readiness
- Attitudinal qualities and motivation
- Presentation and communication skills
- Self-reliance and problem solving
- Practical business and office IT skills

Many consultees regarded the transition from school and college to the world of work as a huge step and one in which intervention and support are required.

Further, with growing frequency, market forces will necessitate changes of job – with additional support required for those leaving/re-joining specific workforces.

Several employers who were consulted were critical of young people’s attitude to work and soft, or core skills such as time keeping and communications.

Primary school engagement with careers, work and employers was thought to be important. It was noted that the 60-Minute Mentor programme was well-received and had started to operate in some primary schools in the borough.

### **Parent workers and returners to work are an important resource**

Returners to work can offer useful flexibility to employers that are not seeking to employ a full-time member of staff. Many of the town’s employers in retail, banking and the care sector already recognise the important contribution of returners, but more can be done to communicate the benefits of this type of employment.

New 30-hour childcare provision for working parents will further support parents back into work and increase flexibility of the workforce.

### **Consultees reported that direct intervention with neighbourhoods and families was needed**

The influence of parents and guardians was also cited as being critical in school performance and career choice.

It was identified that direct intervention to engage disenfranchised families and communities would be beneficial; such as targeted counseling or support to enter the workforce. Community-based initiatives often work best with these groups.

The A Better Start Southend Work Skills Project has made some inroads in this area and is a model that could be expanded to increase the

scale and volume of support.

## **DELIVERY IDEAS:**

- Emphasise key role of attitudes, core skills and relevant vocational training in securing initial employment
- ‘Aspiration days’ and coaching in schools to highlight industry opportunities and career pathways
- Develop flexible careers information to provide residents with the skills to help them navigate the labour market themselves, now and in the future
- Re-build connections to employment networks in deprived areas through employer engagement programmes
- Promote the importance of maths and English to parents, new parents and those furthest from the labour market
- Shift in focus to highlight ‘blue chip’ employers’ use of apprenticeships to access high-demand technical professional roles
- Using new technologies to identify, understand and exploit labour market opportunities
- Develop apprenticeship routes to qualifications from 16 years
- Facilitating and encouraging part-time work alongside studying, to build experience

## **Q8**

**Life transitions – Are these the right objectives and delivery ideas?  
How would you adapt or add to these?**

# Ambition Southend: (C) Agility in provision

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:

### 1) Build aspiration, informed decision-making and work readiness among young people

It is felt that a significant number of young people lack aspiration and ambition, and do not have sufficient knowledge or familiarity with the world of work.

There is a need to provide pathways for all school pupils into suitable qualifications choice, careers choice, and training or job entry. In particular, this is needed for pupils in the most deprived areas who do not have access to a range of positive role models.

There needs to be a much stronger connection between the education system, pupils and the world of work. Careers education and guidance are not a significant priority in national education policy and resources to support careers guidance are pressured. New, flexible methods of providing this information should be piloted and, if successful, mainstreamed.

### 2) Develop enterprise skills

Micro and small businesses now dominate the Southend-on-Sea economy. Increasingly young people are required to become self-employed or self-reliant in the workplace. Enterprise skills obviously provide initial guidance on starting out and succeeding in setting up a business, but these skills are also transferable into a job and the workplace.

Enterprise skills also have a good tie-in to the transition to work; for example, managing your digital presence, knowing how to present yourself, doing market research and communication and client/customer-facing skills.

### 3) Develop “millennial skills” future-proofing skills and labour market provision

Young people today need a different range of core skills to succeed in their lifetime careers, which embrace communications, technical, digital literacy and entrepreneurial skills.

Increasingly, jobs require workers to have good technical skills and the ability to apply them across a range of industries, technologies, services and contexts. Therefore, communication skills, ICT and digital skills, and project management skills come to the fore in terms of employer requirements.

Some employers also need to improve their HR planning, recruitment and personnel training practices in order to remain competitive in their marketplace. These have been termed “millennial skills” among stakeholders in Southend-On-Sea. These skills, and the challenges facing employers, require a responsive education and training infrastructure and an understanding of the employer-base.

## RATIONALE:

### Current education policy results in an under-provision of vocational career pathways

There are a number of strong disincentives that discourage provision of vocational qualifications, careers advice and guidance, and personal development in school education. The current national curriculum and OFSTED performance criteria incentivise academic qualifications and attainment over other positive outcomes such as apprenticeship or job entry, which may better

suit certain pupils. Careers services are now an optional service to be organised and funded by individual schools. Pressures on education budgets, combined with the national curriculum, can mean there is little flexibility over educational provision. Also, with the focus on testing and qualifications results, schools can lack the resources or time to engage better with employers.

### **Current education policy and funding criteria lead to a lack of provision for pupils who do not wish to enter university**

Clearly, for a significant proportion of young people, apprenticeships and job entry post-16 are valid progression routes, and university is not a suitable option. Yet the education system currently does not provide sufficient support or positive outcomes for these pupils. There is a common opinion among all stakeholders in Southend that renewed effort on guidance, personal development, careers advice and work experience in schools is warranted. This will need a high-profile initiative with strong leadership across all stakeholders.

### **There are some successful initiatives operating in the borough on which to build**

Whilst the existing Connexions service and initiatives that involve employers and work experience were widely praised by stakeholders, it was acknowledged that more needs to be done. There is also some good work experience provision, but overall there is a critical lack of places, particularly as it is now mandatory for FE colleges to offer all students work experience placements.

### **The capacity of education and training provision will need to be increased to deal with future skills requirements in the borough**

There are a number of critical future skills requirements, including: construction projects, (e.g. Airport Business Park Southend, Better Queensway, etc.), increasing social care requirements, digitalization and technological advances. Currently, government funding is too rigid and does not enable providers to be agile in meeting these future requirements.

The inflexibility of central government controlled skills funding is also a challenge

There is also the challenge of fitting nationally-funded training schemes to local employer needs. An example was given of social care apprenticeship standards not being fit for purpose, and the challenge of finding sufficient construction trainers that will deliver what employers need.

### **The Southend-on-Sea economy is reliant on micro and small businesses**

There is a significant challenge in achieving enterprise growth and 'scaling-up' SMEs to become the large employers of the future.

Enterprise has become a significant strand of activity for FE colleges – as many young people have had to become self-employed as a means of getting their first source of work and income. There was a perceived gap in marketing skills in SMEs, particularly digital skills.

It was reported in consultations that employers don't always understand young people's skills and capabilities. There may be a tendency to write-off a lot of young people who, with the right support, could possess the right skills and talents to participate actively in the labour market.

### **Digital skills are a big opportunity**

Digital skills are a major opportunity for the borough and there are some dynamic start-ups and established businesses that would benefit from future digital transformation.

## DELIVERY IDEAS:

- Develop a guide to career pathways and transitions (such as 'career tube maps' for young people and parents)
- Entry-level 'taster' courses for skilled trades jobs supported by local employers
- A dedicated careers advice service and guaranteed work placements for those at risk of disengagement
- Develop information for workers on dealing with redundancy, career change and new qualifications requirements
- Develop local youth training and apprenticeship guarantee
- Introduce 'apprenticeship ambassadors' to promote apprenticeships to students
- Develop an employer youth skills pledge
- Measures to increase information exchange between employers and education providers
- Foresight programme to examine how the OFSTED regime and qualifications system can be adapted to better meet employer needs
- Develop an 'out of school' millennial skills programme for residents
- Employer engagement programme for schools to develop enterprise skills provision
- Engaging local recruitment agencies in the conversation around managing skills demand

## Q9

**Agility in provision – Are these the right objectives and delivery ideas?**

**How would you adapt or add to these?**

# Ambition Southend: (D) Skills charter and a virtual academy for skills and employment

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:

### 1) Encourage leadership and commitment from all stakeholders via a 'Skills Charter'

This could be furthered through the creation of a 'skills and careers pledge', with pledges tailored to suit a range of stakeholders. For example:

**Southend-on-Sea Borough Council** pledges to: champion an ambitious skills strategy, provide accurate information on skills; help employers find the right training and skills for their organization and provide intensive support for deprived communities/those at the furthest distance from the labour market.

**Businesses** pledge to: work with the Council and educational institutions to predict, plan for and communicate their future workforce requirements, to train their workforce; to engage in work experience programmes with schools.

**Individuals** pledge to: write a career plan; to attend meetings on time; to demonstrate serious and meaningful communication with employers, skills providers and other staff.

### 2) Wide leadership and ownership of the Skills Charter

Activity around a skills charter is to be owned and led by a broad leadership base incorporating public, private and education sectors. These leaders will become skills champions, and be able to influence, through their own informal networks, other stakeholders to progress the skills agenda.

### 3) Continue to develop a Virtual Academy for Skills and Employment

There is an estimated £1 billion plus worth of regeneration activity planned in Southend during the next 15 years. A Virtual Academy for Skills and Employment has been initiated with the intention of identifying and facilitating a pipeline of local talent in order to meet the workforce requirements associated with future projects.

Critically, the academy facilitates a ready flow of information between the Council, Council suppliers and local education institutions.

Information gathered through the academy enables the Council to utilise its procurement practices to further support the development of local skills initiatives. Through the academy, private sector suppliers can better access a ready supply of labour to support their businesses.

Although in its infancy, the academy shows promise and has potential to be expanded across a range of projects, institutions and suppliers in the future.

## RATIONALE:

### No single organisation can tackle the borough's skills issues alone

Progressing the skills agenda requires commitment and action from all stakeholders. Where resources are limited, particularly in the public and education sectors, they must be pooled, targeted and used to lever investment and engagement from other sources.

### Setting out clear expectations in a skills charter is an effective model to achieve social and economic inclusion

Skills charters that set out a vision, expectations, behaviours and commitments, have proved successful in other localities.

It is essential that social value agreements are built into the Virtual Academy for Skills and Employment. This would mean being explicit about the links between employment, social inclusion and sustainable communities. It should also lead to the explicit aims of economic inclusion of local residents and setting expectations for local employment, training and guaranteed interview schemes.

### **Significant development projects will be delivered in the borough**

There are many multi-million pound projects planned within the borough during the next 15 years. These include: The Airport Business Park Southend, Better Queensway and the Thames Estuary Experience. These projects will lead to the creation of new jobs in a wide variety of sectors and trades.

### **Growing sectors have been identified that will have significant labour needs in the future**

Human health and social care, education, public administration, cultural and creative industries, specialist manufacturing and specialist construction are all growing industries, with significant future labour demand, due to either expansion and/or the need to replace retiring workers

More thought and action needs to be put into creating the best entry level jobs and career progression routes through and between these industries.

### **Southend-on-Sea has an open labour market and wide labour catchment area**

Evidence on commuting patterns suggests an open labour market in South Essex.

There are opportunities for job growth from

regeneration activity, and with an open labour market there is a risk that residents from outside the borough will take these jobs if local career pathways are not sufficiently developed.

To increase local wages local jobs will need to become more productive and to add more value. As discussed earlier, this will require working closely with businesses to improve their performance and business practices.

### **The Apprenticeship Levy should be explored to maximise local benefit**

The apprenticeship system should be tailored to Southend's unique situation and proposition: its sectors, employers, and regeneration opportunities.

Apprenticeship schemes shared among employers could be considered or single schemes that can combine core skills such as digital, customer management, communication, literacy, numeracy, problem solving and project management – with specific employer and industry experience.

### **DELIVERY IDEAS:**

- Establish a network of industry/sector sources to support local knowledge and sharing of future employment opportunities and career pathways
- A consistent focus on the skills that enable individuals and employers to make informed decisions and use of (digital online and social media) connections to share available knowledge
- Facilitating a wide conversation around how skills support is essential to the borough's medium and long-term success
- Further developing the Virtual Academy for Skills and Employment to support local residents to access upcoming employment opportunities.
- Supporting and promoting volunteering as a route into work

## Q10

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Skills charter and a virtual academy for skills and employment – Are these the right objectives and delivery ideas?

How would you adapt or add to these?

# Ambition Southend:

## (E) Utilisation of existing assets and networks

### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:

#### 1) **Lever hard assets and infrastructure**

The existing capital assets (buildings, etc.) of the local schools, the Council, local FE and HE providers are significant. These assets could be utilised to provide live skills training opportunities to local people. This is particularly important in terms of providing skills for construction, and attempting to create opportunities for local residents.

#### 2) **Lever soft assets, digital opportunities and infrastructure**

From the business networks and political relationships that already exist, to the skills, experience and networks of workers who commute to London – there are a wide range of human assets, knowledge and connections that could be deployed to improve the skills and labour market outcomes in the local economy.

A skills strategy also needs to grasp the opportunities presented by developments in digital technologies and the significant investment in broadband technology, mobile technology and ‘smart cities technologies’ that is being made in the borough.

#### 3) **Create links between industries, businesses, individuals and the existing social and economic heritage**

Southend-on-Sea has been developing a strong social and historical narrative about its role on the Thames Estuary, and as a centre for the fishing industry, visitor economy and

restaurants. The links between heritage, industries and business activities could be further exploited to provide skills development opportunities for local residents.

### RATIONALE:

#### **There are existing institutional strengths and networks**

The borough has a range of education and training institutions, employers and the local authority itself which have capacity, capability, are dynamic, and are undertaking exemplary activities. Further, the borough is developing new international links, via London Southend Airport, with locations such as Groningen, Netherlands; Faro, Portugal, and Malta.

#### **There are industry strengths, as well as niche industries**

There is a small, vibrant fishing industry, and a range of high-quality seafood restaurants/businesses in Leigh-on-Sea. Other outlets may aspire to providing high quality seafood and traditional skills within the sector could be further exploited. There is no reason why apprentices, staff training, and HR development strategies could not play a significant role in developing these businesses further (organisations such as the North Thames Fisheries Local Action Group are seeking to do just that).

#### **The borough’s heritage is also an asset to be used as part of the skills strategy**

Another example is the proposed Thames Estuary Experience development. From an economic development perspective these

are assets and relationships which could be mutually reinforcing. For example, the local heritage story could be part of customer care and tourism information training among visitor economy staff. The recent UK-wide tour of the iconic poppies installation at Barge Pier Shoeburyness, and the interaction with local schools and colleges, is a good example of this.

### **Some existing firms are exemplars in employability, work preparation and skills training**

Work readiness is a big issue with employers – and this is one of the main motivations for them to take part in skills development initiatives.

Some large employers in Southend-on-Sea provide employability training, financial capability sessions, CV training to local communities and young people for free. This could be better promoted amongst local stakeholders and employers.

There are also local networks and partnerships that could be used to progress the skills strategy, such as Southend Business Partnership.

## **DELIVERY IDEAS:**

- Convene boards and provide information targeted at utilising existing hard assets to support skills development.
- Facilitate information exchange amongst local stakeholders to improve awareness of assets/support capacity in other organisations
- Utilise existing business to business networks to raise awareness among employers and unlock local knowledge as a resource for skills development
- Targeted communication with local business partners to encourage participation in skills initiatives
- Develop training materials and marketing collateral about the heritage of Southend to be produced and made available to schools and education staff
- Developing closer links between museums, visitor attractions and local, relevant businesses.

## **Q11**

**Utilisation of existing assets and networks – Are these the right objectives and delivery ideas?**

**How would you adapt or add to these?**

# List of consultation questions

## The consultation questions posed throughout this document are:

- Consultation question 1:** Should we consider other strengths?  
If so, which ones?
- Consultation question 2:** Should we consider other weaknesses?  
If so, which ones?
- Consultation question 3:** Should we consider other challenges?  
If so, which ones?
- Consultation question 4:** Should we consider other opportunities?  
If so, which ones?
- Consultation question 5:** Are these the right outcomes to aim for?  
How would you adapt or add to these?
- Consultation question 6:** Are these the right areas of focus?  
How would you adapt or add to these?
- Consultation question 7:** Leadership – Are these the right objectives and delivery ideas?  
How would you adapt or add to these?
- Consultation question 8:** Life transitions – Are these the right objectives and delivery ideas?  
How would you adapt or add to these?
- Consultation question 9:** Agility in provision – Are these the right objectives and delivery ideas?  
How would you adapt or add to these?
- Consultation question 10:** Skills charter and a virtual academy for skills and employment –  
Are these the right objectives and delivery ideas?  
How would you adapt or add to these?
- Consultation question 11:** Utilisation of existing assets and networks – Are these the right objectives and delivery ideas?  
How would you adapt or add to these?

# Responding to this paper

## We are keen to hear your feedback, suggestions and comment.

In order to take part in this consultation, please email your written response, clearly identifying the individual(s) or organisation that you represent, to: [economicd@southend.gov.uk](mailto:economicd@southend.gov.uk).

**The deadline for submitting your response to us is 17:30pm, Friday 22nd December 2017.**

Please ensure that the written feedback provided is constructive, productive and succinct.

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A summary of this publication can be provided in alternative formats such as Braille, audio-tape, or in large print and translated into alternative languages.

Please email [economicd@southend.gov.uk](mailto:economicd@southend.gov.uk)

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