

# Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

## Report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director (Growth and Housing)

Agenda  
Item No.

To : Cabinet

On: 25<sup>th</sup> February 2020

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### Skills Update

#### Cabinet Member: Councillor Anne Jones Part 1 (Public Agenda Item)

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#### 1. Purpose of Report

This report seeks to provide an update on the skills development work being undertaken by the Council.

#### 2. Recommendations:

- To note the progress of the skills development work and its contribution to 2050 ambition and outcomes.

#### 3. Background

3.1 In 2018, the Council adopted *Ambition Southend: A Skills and Labour Market Strategy for Southend-on-Sea*. The strategy was subject to a wide consultation amongst key stakeholders and concluded with a range of recommendations to progress the skills development activity that takes place within the borough, including focussing future activity on:

- convening skills leadership;
- ensuring agility in skills provision;
- supporting opportunities for *'experience of the workplace'*;
- supporting skills development at a range of *'life transition'* junctures; and,
- utilising existing networks and assets to maximise skills development opportunities.

*(An update on some of the key labour market statistics related to the strategy is included at Appendix 1).*

3.2 Since that time, based on extensive consultation with residents, the Council has confirmed its Southend 2050 outcomes, the results of which strongly echo the principles identified within the *Ambition Southend Strategy*. In relation to skills specifically, Southend 2050 Outcome 5.3 reads: *'Our children are school and life ready and our workforce is skilled and job ready'* – a clear articulation of the Council's aspiration in regard to skills development. Similarly, the skills development work undertaken by the Council makes a significant contribution to

a number of the Southend 2050 Roadmap milestones – *further details provided in section 13.*

- 3.3** At this time, the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) is developing a new Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) to drive productivity improvement in local businesses. Skills development has been identified as a crucial propellant of productivity increase. Accordingly, this review of skills development activities is timely and will enable the Council to tailor its approach to emerging policy evidence from the LIS.
- 3.4** A range of stakeholders have been working to advance skills development in the borough. The principle Council teams include: Learning and Education Directorate, Economic Development and Skills Team, Connexions, South Essex College, University of Essex and Southend Adult Community College. Wider partners include: school forums, business groups, other local authorities and funders.
- 3.5** The following gives an update on some of the key areas of activity currently taking place.
- 3.6** **Southend Skills Leadership Group** – following suggestions from local stakeholders for the Council to play an active role in leading positive change in the skills support system; Council officers have convened a ‘Southend-on-Sea Skills Leadership Group’. The group brings together stakeholders from: primary, secondary, further, higher and adult education, along with representatives of key employment sectors and the wider business community. The group meets on a quarterly basis. It aims to share labour market information, devise initiatives and monitor project delivery in order to collectively address local skills gaps and improve residents’ access to career pathways.

To date, the Group has: helped schools to schedule work experience placements; identified a partnership to pursue European Social Funding; and, generated a comprehensive ‘skills support provision map’ in the borough (*attached for reference at Appendix 2*).

- 3.7** **Industry Champions** – The ‘Industry Champion’ kite mark has been developed by the Council to recognise local employers that are actively contributing to skills development activities (through financial or time contributions). Businesses can achieve a bronze, silver or gold awards dependent on their level of contribution. Currently the scheme has recognised 5 ‘Gold’, 7 ‘Silver’ and 20 ‘Bronze’ local employers.
- 4.** **Construction skills** - as a ‘key growth sector’ in the borough, construction skills provision is key to achieving Southend’s growth ambitions and maintaining strong employment. Further, a strong construction labour supply will help the Council to enable regeneration projects and contribute to the achievement of local/regional housing targets. A pipeline of activities are currently taking place to support construction skills, labour market entry and training at different levels:
- 4.1** **Southend Adult Community College (SACC) construction courses** – in September 2018, SACC commenced provision of a new programme of level 1 construction skills courses for 16-18 year olds at risk of becoming NEET (Not in

Employment, Education of Training). Following the successful uptake of the course from students, the college has commenced the creation of a dedicated construction skills centre within the college. The programme is designed to support vocational training, English, mathematics skills and employability skills. The programme prepares learners for work in areas of significant skills gaps and is targeted to address local priorities for a skilled workforce. Work experience and regular contact with industry and trade specialists is provided to enable learners to be work ready. Demand has been so high that the college is preparing for a second intake during January 2020. The programme is also open to 14-16 year olds who are in 'alternative provision' at the college, in order for learners to prepare for further learning or work. The college is also developing a programme specifically targeting career pathways for females in the construction sector.

**4.2 South Essex College Stephenson Road Campus** – In 2019, South Essex College (SEC) formally opened a new 'Centre for Advanced Technologies' Campus on Stephenson Road, Leigh. The centre offers training courses in motor vehicle, engineering and construction skills. The Council supported South Essex College into the new facility by provision of a commercial loan, secured against SEC property assets. The expansion of the construction and engineering courses at the new centre has the capacity to give two thousand students per annum the opportunity to train using industry standard facilities.

**4.3 South Essex Construction Training Academy (SECTA)** – in late 2018 the Council was successful in securing nearly £1m from the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) on behalf of a South Essex partnership to deliver construction industry training to adults across the area. This programme of activity is delivered through a series of '*live-construction site training hubs*' across South Essex (in Southend, Basildon and Thurrock), one of which is located on the Airport Business Park Southend (ABPS). Recognising the need for construction skills in relation to the ABPS and other regeneration projects, SECTA seeks to meet the demand for skilled construction workers in a vast range of roles in the sector through training and support for individuals who might consider construction as a career path. To date the programme has supported:

- 852 clients;
- 423 completing their training;
- 118 into employment in the construction industry.

It also recently won the Skills category award at the Essex Housing Excellence awards. It is currently funded until March 2020 and whilst CITB have indicated that they do not have further funding available to support an extension of the programme, other sources are being sought given the impact of the programme and the continuing pipeline of regeneration projects, and therefore demand in South Essex (*further feedback from the project can be seen in Appendix 3*).

**5. Digital skills** – identified by Central Government as a crucial ingredient of future national economic growth, digital skills will play an important role in the future welfare of our citizens.

**5.1** With regards to digital skills and internet use in Southend, statistics show that Southend performs well compared with the rest of the United Kingdom:

Proportion of population that have not used the internet for a period of 3 months or more/have never used the internet:	
United Kingdom	9.1%
East of England	8%
<b>Southend-on-Sea</b>	<b>7.1%</b>
London	6.8%

ONS – Internet Users, May 2019

- 5.2** However, whilst not in demand in isolation, the 2016 business survey shows that 12-14% of Southend businesses reported a lack of specific skills in: advanced IT; software skills or basic computer literacy - with the most 'in-demand' skills being: Microsoft Excel, Microsoft Office, SQL, JAVA, Microsoft Word, Linux and Oracle. This contrasted against data which shows Southend is home to the third largest cluster of 'digital' businesses in Essex - behind Chelmsford and Epping Forest – indicates a digital skills gap and potential restraint on future industrial growth.
- 5.3** The Economic Development & Skills team is working in partnership with the Digital Southend Working Group, Tech-City-on-Sea initiative and the Southend Skills Leadership Group to ensure that access to digital skills provision is maximised across the borough. Key providers of digital skills currently include: The Hub, Barclays Bank, Lloyds Bank, Southend Libraries, SACC, SEC, Primary, Junior and Secondary Schools and BEST Growth Hub. The range of support varies across providers, but currently includes: 'get online' workshops; basic coding tuition; internet safety advice.
- 5.4 South East Digital Skills Partnership** – In 2019, the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) successfully bid for funding from DCMS to set-up a 'Digital Skills Partnership' (DSP). This partnership is intended to bring together key stakeholders from industry, education and the public sector to raise digital skill levels for residents across the South East area. This group features key representatives from Google, Huawei, CXK, Pfizer, Federation of Small Businesses and the Digital Southend Working Group. The Council will be working together with this group going forward to ensure that the benefit for Southend citizens is maximised.
- 6. Skills support for young people** – whilst our education system plays a central role in supporting the skills development of our young people, a range of additional activity is in place to address specific gaps or weaknesses within the current skills development system.
- 6.1 The Connexions Service** - delivers impartial careers advice and guidance to pre-16 students about their career choices to make sure that they are on the right career pathway. This is carried out either by one-to-one advice interviews or group work, depending on the needs of the school and their students. The work carried out aims to provide students with a positive career destination and prevent NEET-ism. The services provided by Connexions and others have contributed to the proportion of young people in Southend registered as NEET falling from 1.8% in 2018 to 1.3% in 2019 (98.7% in education training or employment - significantly above national and regional average).
- 6.2** In 2010, SBC funding for the Connexions Service ceased and it became an externally traded service. Since then, the service has grown by word of mouth

and is currently providing services to 13 mainstream schools and 3 independent schools in Southend; 18 Essex Schools and brings in an annual income of £245,000.

- 6.3** The Connexions Service has also received further external funding to deliver 'inspirational workshops' (Yr9–Yr13) to raise students' aspirations into Higher Education called '*#kickstartmyfuture*'. The project contributes to the Government social mobility goals by increasing the number of young people from under-represented groups who go into higher education. The project started in 2017 and is currently funded to 2021. It brings in an annual income of c.£57,000. The Connexions Team have also been asked to bid to extend the project from January to July 2020 - which will include provision of workshops for years, 7/8/12. The results of the bid are expected in January 2020.
- 6.4** The Connexions Service and Southend Adult Community College are currently working on a business proposal to offer Southend citizens an '*all age careers guidance service*'. This proposal will provide a seamless careers service which will support all citizens during their '*life transitions*' and improve productivity by supporting adults to progress in their careers.
- 6.5** **60 Minute Mentor** – in 2017 the Council was successful in securing c.£90,000p.a. from the Careers & Enterprise Company to deliver a student mentoring project across South Essex. The project targets year 8 pupils at risk of disengagement and matches them with a local industry mentor to provide insights on: local employment prospects; choosing year 8 options; and, an insight into life in the workplace. Since 2017, the project has supported 639 year 8 students at risk of disengagement (*further project performance and feedback can be seen in Appendix 3*). The Careers & Enterprise funding for this project came to an end in October, 2019. Since that time, a smaller project focussing on Southend and Thurrock has been funded directly from existing Council budgets and has an annual target of supporting 100 students. This smaller project also offers students an *in-situ* experience of the workplace – this was included in response to feedback from schools requesting help to achieve the '*8 Gatsby Benchmarks of Good Career Guidance*'. The benefits of this project have been recognised and continuation funding has been included in the overall Council budget.
- 6.6** **Enterprise Advisor Network** – The Council continues to deliver a programme of enterprise advice for local schools and colleges. This national project sees 17 senior leadership teams within Southend secondary schools and colleges matched with local industry volunteers (*enterprise advisors*), to: support the development of a locally relevant curriculum; support the development of a robust school plan for careers education; and, increase the number of meaningful employer encounters made available to Southend's young people. Currently, enterprise advisors from: Olympus Keymed, Cantel Medical, Ipeco, Marks & Spencer, Barclays, MLM Group and several other prominent businesses are actively working on the project. The project is jointly funded by the Careers & Enterprise Company Ltd and Southend-on-Sea Borough Council up to August 2020.
- 6.7** **Apprenticeship events** – in order to increase the uptake and availability of apprenticeships in the borough, the Economic Development and Skills Team

have delivered a series of large-scale events for employers and students to broker local apprenticeship placements. These events have been well attended and have attracted c.300 students and 37 local employers to date. Based on the success of the initial events, a future programme is currently being developed, with the next event organised for Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2020 at the Park Inn.

**7. In-work skills support** – with modern industry requiring citizens to have greater flexibility within career pathways and higher incidence of redundancy, ‘in-work’ skills is an increasingly important area of the Southend skills development system.

**7.1 The BEST Growth Hub** – the Business Essex Southend and Thurrock (BEST) Growth Hub and South East Business Boost (SEBB) programmes have worked collectively to bring forward a range of free, short ‘*in-work-training courses*’ specifically targeted at the SME market. Training topics have typically included: finance, enterprise, marketing and management. To date, 127 individuals who are starting a business and 160 established businesses have benefitted from one of the 45 two-day workshops that have been delivered across the Essex area (*further performance and feedback information can be seen in Appendix 3*).

**7.2** Recognising the key link between SME employment and skills attainment levels, the BEST Growth Hub Team are also organising a joint ‘Business Skills Show’ on the 27<sup>th</sup> February, 2020. This large-scale event will be delivered in partnership with SELEP, The Education Skills Funding Agency, DWP, Essex County Council and the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB). This project is currently seeking an extension from MHCLG and BEIS funders. If successful, this programme will be extended up to 2022.

**8. Into-work skills support** – enabling Southend citizens to access the employment market is one of the most significant determinants of life satisfaction. Accordingly, the Council plays a part in a number of projects that seek to improve access to the labour market.

**8.1 Sector-based Work Academies** - The Economic Development and Skills Team have been working to deliver a range of specialist ‘sector support’ programmes which offer citizens the opportunity to develop skills in a sector with a skills shortage (via a short course or similar) and then access employment opportunities via a guaranteed interview with a relevant employer. These programmes have been run in partnership with Southend Adult Community College and the Department for Work and Pensions. Events to date have supported 22 learners in the care sector – with a new academy planned for the manufacturing sector early in the New Year.

**8.2 A Better Start Southend (ABSS) Workskills project** – since 2017, the Council has been working in partnership with the Early Years Alliance to deliver a programme of events and activities to support parents and prospective parents of 0-3 year-olds, in the six ‘ABSS’ wards, back into work. These events have proved very popular and include: training, careers mentoring, new enterprise support, on-site introductions to local employers and job-seeking advice. To date, this project has supported:

- 43 residents gain employment;
- 23 residents enrol in further education;
- 11 residents commence volunteer placements;
- 7 residents start their own business; and,
- 27 residents gain a new qualification.

Project performance and feedback can be seen in Appendix 3. The project has been supported by input from: Marks & Spencer, Waitrose, Insure and Go, Holiday Inn, Southend University Hospital – amongst others. This project is currently funded up to September 2020. A further review will take place in March 2020 to confirm whether the funding can be extended for a further four years based on the outcomes achieved to date, which have exceeded all targets.

**8.3 Redundancy support** – The Economic Development and Skills team deliver a specific support service for workers in the borough that are being made redundant from local companies. This support is delivered in partnership with the Job Centre Plus National Redundancy team and seeks to inform redundant workers of local employment opportunities and provide careers advice. During the last two years this support has helped a number of high-profile redundancy situations within the borough, including: Homebase, Bourgee Restaurant, Patisserie Valerie, MDF Fantasy Bowl, and Santander.

**8.4 The Institute for Resilient Infrastructure** – following recommendations made within the Thames Estuary Growth Commission Report in June 2018, the Economic Development and Skills Team have convened a number of meetings to explore the potential to bring additional higher education provision to the area, specifically to support the large scale of regeneration plans for Southend and the wider area. This work has led to the formation of a new partnership with stakeholders from across the Thames Estuary area, and the subsequent submission of a bid for a maximum of £50,000,000 to support the development of a new '*Institute for Resilient Infrastructure*', from the Strength in Places Fund managed by UK Research and Innovation. This bid has been led by Anglia Ruskin University.

**9. The Council's skills support** – as a large employer within the borough, it is crucial that the Council leads by example and utilises its resources to actively support skills development of its own staff and the wider populous. It does this in a variety of ways.

**9.1 Procurement and social value** - as part of its commitment to supporting skills development, the Council has sought to utilise its purchasing power to maximise skills development opportunities. In particular, the Social Value Act has been used to set targets for skills development (apprenticeship placements, work experience opportunities, local employment opportunities) within large scale contracts being procured by the Council. This has been successfully included within contracts for Airport Business Park Southend and the Better Queensway project to date. The Economic Growth Team will continue to work to utilise this lever to maximise skills development opportunities across the borough. The team is also working with Council planning officers to assess the potential of utilising specific planning guidance in relation to large scale developments taking place within the borough to identify skills development

opportunities within them, and bring those opportunities forward for the benefit of Southend citizens.

**9.2 The Council's own Learning and Development Strategy** – extensive work has been undertaken to review the Council's approach to learning and development. Specifically, the organisation is seeking to develop a learning culture where all employees have equal access to relevant and innovative learning to ensure that the workforce has the skills to deliver the Southend 2050 vision. A review of the learning offer has taken place, concluding that the organisation needs to move away from a focus on formal classroom-based learning towards a collaborative learning model that utilises a range of modern learning methods such as: e-learning, blended training, a knowledge hub and bespoke learning toolkit(s). Going forward, the Council will be developing a range of new methods to enable learners to become more self-sufficient and self-directed in the way they learn.

**9.3 SBC Apprenticeship Programme** - The Council is continuing to grow its apprenticeship programme and is utilising apprenticeship levy contributions to offer new learning opportunities staff. This approach has been particularly successful in areas such as: business administration, ICT, leadership and management, human resources, accountancy, town planning and social work. As an organisation, the Council currently has a total of 54 apprentices (27 'New Starter' apprentices who have joined the Council to undertake an apprenticeship and 27 existing employees who are using a 'development' apprenticeship to upskill and obtain a professional qualification).

## **10. Next Steps**

A policy discussion including Councillors, officers and selected wider stakeholders is suggested to inform the next stage of development of the Council's work in this area.

## **11. Other Options**

- Cabinet could choose to take no action at this point. However, as we are seeing a number of new skills based projects formulated and a number of existing externally funded projects coming to an end, it would seem like an opportune moment to re-visit the Council's approach to skills development and direct future activity.
- Cabinet could choose to reduce investment in this area of the Council's work. This would have a negative effect on the range and cohesion of skills support provision in the borough – and subsequently negatively impact on the Council's ability to achieve the Southend 2050 ambitions and outcomes.
- Cabinet could choose to increase investment in the area of skills development. This would increase the Council's ability to act, improve career/learning opportunities for Southend citizens and accelerate the achievement of the skills development related Southend 2050 outcomes.

## **12. Reasons for Recommendations**

The Skills support activity undertaken by the Council and partners makes a demonstrable impact and important contribution to the achievement of the Southend 2050 ambition and outcomes.

## **13. Corporate Implications**

### **Contribution to Southend 2050 Roadmap**

**Our children are school and life ready and our workforce is skilled and job ready.** The desired outcome of all of the Council's skills development work is to improve the life opportunities of our citizens; maximise citizens earning potential; and, facilitate an efficient labour market for local employers. Accordingly, supporting an effective skills development system in the borough is crucial in achieving the Southend 2050 objectives.

Similarly, the skills development work detailed above has the potential to make significant contribution towards the following Southend 2050 Roadmap milestones:

- **Work with schools and Academy Trusts to secure improvements in performance in underperforming schools.**
- **The gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers continues to close.**
- **Enhanced skills provision, including through more apprenticeships.**
- **Raising aspiration and educational attainment in deprived areas.**

### **13.1 Financial Implications**

There are no immediate financial implications of this report. However, as a number of the projects delivered by the Council are currently externally-funded, the future provision of skills support projects may require the dedication of future Council budget. Where this is required, the appropriate Council process will be followed to dedicate any resources, in-line with the current scheme of delegation.

### **13.2 Legal Implications**

There are no legal implications of this report. Each of the externally-funded projects mentioned above has a specific legal-agreement in place to manage delivery, finance, governance, etc.

### **13.3 People Implications**

There are no new people implications at this point. Staff within a range of teams including: Connexions, Economic Development & Skills, Southend Adult Community College and Learning & Development are currently engaged in delivering the projects mentioned above. Staffing resource allocation changes will be subject to the usual processes.

### **13.4 Property Implications**

There are no property implications at this time.

### **13.5 Consultation**

This work is supported by two specific consultation exercises:

- Key stakeholder consultation for the Ambition Southend Skills Strategy
- Citizen consultation as part of the Southend 2050 process

### **13.6 Equalities and Diversity Implications**

There are no specific equalities and diversity implications of this report. Each of the Council delivered skills support projects has its own equalities analysis in place. All related EAs have been reviewed within the last six months and are currently up to date.

### **13.7 Risk Assessment**

Each of the Council delivered projects has its own risk register. These risks are monitored and managed through the Council's Pentana system. All appropriate projects have risks reviewed on a quarterly basis and are currently up to date.

### **13.8 Value for Money**

There are no current value for money considerations of this report. All aspects, funded by Council and externally-funded, have been appropriately procured so as to achieve value for money.

### **13.9 Community Safety Implications**

There are no community safety implications of this report.

### **13.10 Environmental Impact**

There are no environmental impacts as a result of this report.

## **14. Background Papers**

None

## **15. Appendices**

- Appendix 1 - Southend Skills Statistics Update December 2019
- Appendix 2 - Southend Skills Leadership Group Provision Map October 2019
- Appendix 3 - Southend Skills Project Performance Update December 2019