

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Agenda
Item No.

Report of Corporate Director for Place
to
Place Scrutiny
on
10th October 2016

Report prepared by: Scott Dolling, Head of Service -
Economy, Regeneration & Tourism

Skills Development

Place Scrutiny Committee
Executive Councillor: Councillor Ann Holland
Part 1 (Public Agenda Item)

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To set out the current skills priorities and action plan within the Council's Economic Development Team and ensure Member's views and aspirations are captured within its programme.
- 1.2 That Member's note that this is being considered as a Pre-Cabinet Scrutiny item prior to formal consideration by Cabinet.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Member's note existing Skills Programme and Action Plan.
- 2.2 Views are invited on the report to help inform a new Southend Skills Strategy.

3. Background

- 3.1 Southend's economy consists of a broad range of sectors with around 6,500 businesses with a working age population of 110,000 people. Most firms are small or micro within the government definition of SME (small to medium sized enterprises).
- 3.2 Educationally, Southend boasts some enviable academic results through its high performing schools. The growing Further and Higher Education Campus has also contributing towards improved trends of level 4 and 5 qualifications seen for Southend in recent years.
- 3.3 Despite these educational improvements, there has been significant commentary during consultation exercises with the business community that local employment opportunities are being lost due to lack of appropriate skills. This restricts our business community's development, the ability to attract new

businesses to the town and equally affects the opportunity for local people to find employment within the Borough.

- 3.4** The skills gap experienced in different ways by different sectors. Employers in engineering and medical technology sectors struggle to fill high skilled posts while across the board, employers report shortages of more common attributes such as customer service.
- 3.5** Some research has been delivered by the Essex Employment and Skills Board this year which provides an evidence base for key skills needs which can be used to assist our planning. It identifies that there are vacancies in a broad range of sectors which requires further focused local interpretation.
- 3.6** We recently appointed a Skills Officer to focus attention on delivering strategic objectives with partners and a much needed Action Plan. The role will provide a focus on meeting current and future skills needs as articulated by the business community.
- 3.7** The post is based within the Economic Development Team with its close connection to the business community, yet is also aligned with the Education Team within Southend Borough Council's People Department to ensure a seamless Council approach.
- 3.8** We are now seeking to ensure that the Skills Strategy and Action Plan will capture Members' aspirations as well as feedback from other stakeholders – business community and education providers.
- 3.9** Targeting young people in new and innovative ways to address issues of career choices and opportunities must be developed. The language and approach must be fit for purpose and relevant to the user. Initiatives such as the development of a game to inspire career options is one such example being considered. Other examples recently include a Southend school which considered the techniques in building an aircraft to excite young people in engineering.
- 3.10** Engineering is one such key area where recruitment locally has been challenging for employers. The development of a Studio School (a form of technical college linked to private enterprise) is an ambition for Southend and is included in aspirations for the town.
- 3.11** The CONNECT Project is led by London Southend Airport and partnered by a number of aviation and public sector partners including the Council and is exploring trade, tourism and education links between Southend and Carlisle utilising the recently announced route between these airports. Skills is recognised as a key element of the two economies and with synergies between them the opportunity for a cross region skills presence is being explored.
- 3.12** Essex is part of the fifth wave of Area Based Reviews, which are being carried out nationally and considering the shape of all post-16 education and training across the area and how well this fits with local economic and educational needs. In line with the Area Review Guidance (revised March 2016) the review will focus on colleges. This will commence in November and the Council will

have a role in supporting the review activity. The outcomes of which will be vital to the Action Plan going forward in identifying gaps and duplication in provision.

3.13 Southend and Thurrock Councils have already been successful in securing funding from the Careers and Enterprise Company to develop an Enterprise Advisor Network across the Boroughs. Enterprise Advisors (EAs) are volunteers drawn from businesses who work directly with the school's leadership team to develop effective employer engagement plans.

3.14 Career Ready is another initiative we are linking with that will help support the provision of practical and work based advice.

60 Minute Mentor

3.15 The 60 Minute Mentor Programme is a significant initiative that has proved successful in addressing some of the perceptions around business interaction. It is proposed that it will feature in an expanded role as part of the Action Plan.

3.16 The Council championed the 60 Minute Mentor Project which places key speakers from the business community in front of young learners 14-19 for an hour. The 60 minutes gives an insight into the world of work and the opportunities for employment and the associated skills needed for individuals to be successful. The process benefits both learners and the businesses who, as a result, understand more about each other's needs.

3.17 The benefits of 60 Minute Mentor have been demonstrated externally and it has been included in a recent funding application which we are expecting to be confirmed in the next few weeks. This should support the Programme's growth across South Essex.

3.18 A targeted variation of the 60 Minute Mentor to assist parents and future parents of vulnerable and deprived groups is being developed to assist the Better Start Programme.

3.19 The 60 Minute Mentor Programme and other initiatives will also include elements of entrepreneurialism to capture and support the business start-up culture which is very strong in Southend and South Essex. Equipping individuals with knowledge of how to avoid some of the common failures yet encourage the spirit of enterprise should help secure better starts for new business initiatives.

Virtual Skills Academy

3.20 Southend-on-Sea has some significant regeneration projects currently in development, including Better Queensway and the Airport Business Park. Using these projects as a stimulus, a project to deliver a Virtual Skills Academy is now in place.

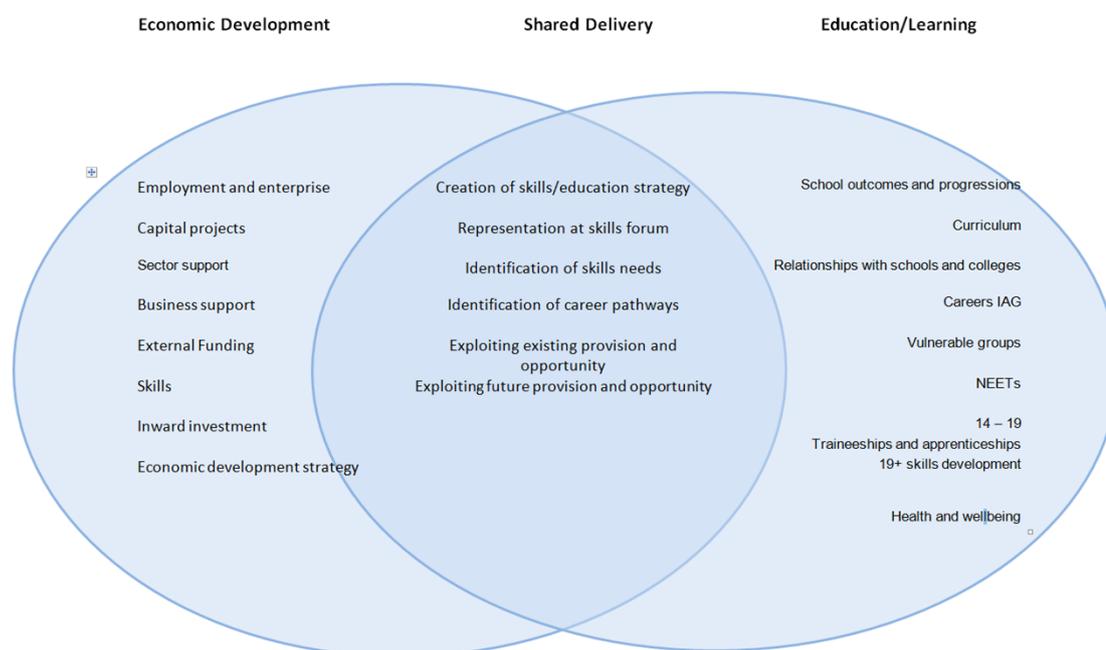
3.21 The Virtual Skills Academy will seek to address the future needs of developers and employers by linking with Education Providers and the Council. The key regeneration projects for the Borough have indicative employment numbers surrounding needs for construction, project management etc, which can help

determine pipeline of skills and training needed. An outline plan with milestones for this Academy is appended (see Appendix 1).

3.22 The Academy is not a new building, but a virtual concept. It will facilitate an active working relationship between the education, public and private sectors and help develop a pipeline of supply of suitably skilled people for future skills needs.

Broader Education Links

3.23 During the development of our outline Forward Programme, there has been some analysis of the joint and discrete roles within the Education and Skills Agenda by the Council’s People and Place Departments. The analysis is the result of positive and proactive interdepartmental working and are summarised in the diagram below:



3.24 A plethora of external forums and groups exist that relate to both Economic Development and Educational aspects of skills. The Place and People Departments align to participate as appropriate to focus on the overriding benefit for Southend.

3.25 Education, Economic Development and the external Further Education providers regularly network to ensure that opportunities are maximised for our communities. This work is leading to the development of a formal Skills Strategy. In particular, we have developed excellent relationships with Southend Adult and Community College and South Essex College.

3.26 The focus of the joint activity is on the following areas:

- Developing the Virtual Skills Academy
- Identification of career pathways
- Careers and Enterprise Initiatives/Connexions
- Targeted intervention and support for vulnerable groups
- Exploiting existing/future provision and opportunity
- Work with Education Providers to ensure students are work ready
- Engage Member's in actively promoting skills friendly policy

3.27 Following a recent successful bid by Essex University on behalf of partner organisations in Essex, including Southend, finance will become available to support targeted groups of students to aspire to, attain and stay in programmes of Higher Education. This initiative compliments our prioritisation of the skills gap for disadvantaged groups in Southend, and we will be working closely with the University and schools to make the most of this opportunity

3.28 Members' views are sought during this Pre-Cabinet Scrutiny period to provide specific outcomes on what they would like to see tackled in the Skills Strategy and Action Plan.

4. Other Options

4.1 This broad direction has been developed following feedback from partners and is the result of considerable consultation with education partners and the business community.

5. Reasons for Recommendations

5.1 Tackling skills gaps identified can assist our young residents into employment and enterprise in the Borough supporting overall prosperity.

6. Corporate Implications

6.1 Contribution to Council's Vision & Corporate Priorities

6.1.1 Ensuring that our local workforce is skilled for appropriate work in the local community assists all of our objectives to lead towards a Safe, Clean, Healthy Prosperous and Excellent Southend.

6.2 Financial Implications

6.2.1 The activity is funded through existing budgets and external partnerships and funding.

6.3 Legal Implications

6.3.1 There are no Legal implications.

6.4 People Implications

6.4.1 There are no People implications.

6.5 Property Implications

6.5.1 There are no Property implications.

6.6 Consultation

6.6.1 This Pre-Scrutiny process is designed to engage Member's prior to developing a full Skills Action Plan and Strategy

6.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications

6.7.1 There are no Equality and Diversity implications.

6.8 Risk Assessment

6.8.1 There are no Risk assessment implications.

6.9 Value for Money

6.9.1 There are no Value for Money implications.

6.10 Community Safety Implications

6.10.1 There are no Community Safety implications

6.11 Environmental Impact

6.11.1 There are no Environmental impact implications

7. **Background Papers**

7.1

8. **Appendices**

8.1 Appendix 1 – Outline Plan for Academy