



Agenda Item No: 2.2

Addressing Further Education 'Cold Spots' in East Cambridgeshire and St Neots

To:	Skills Committee
Meeting Date:	5 September 2022
Public report:	Yes
Lead Member:	Councillor Lucy Nethsingha, Lead Member for Skills
From:	Parminder Singh Garcha, Senior Responsible Officer – Adult Education
Key decision:	No
Forward Plan ref:	N/A
Recommendations:	<p>The Skills Committee is requested to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Recommend to the Combined Authority Board, approval for the creation of a new budget line in the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for the FE Cold Spots programme, allocating £225,000 for 2022/23, as per the allocated budget profile. shown in Table A in this report.b) Recommend the Combined Authority Board, to delegate authority to the Interim Associate Director of Skills in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer to procure, enter into and sign contracts with suitable consultants to produce business cases for the two projects.c) Note the timelines and delivery milestones for the two projects.
Voting arrangements:	A simple majority of all Members present and voting.

1. Purpose

- 1.1 Following preliminary discussions and unanimous support at the Skills Committee of 4 July 2022, the Further Education (FE) Cold spots programme in East Cambridgeshire and St Neots can now commence in earnest, through formally seeking authority to proceed at the Combined Authority Board on 21 September 2022.
- 1.2 This report seeks authority to formally commence the programme, which aims to develop two individual FE capital projects for East Cambridgeshire and St Neots. The Skills Committee are requested to recommend the Combined Authority Board to approve the creation of a new budget line in the MTFP for 'Further Education Cold-Spots' and allocate £225k of funding from Gainshare in this financial year as indicated in the Table A as per the funding profile which has been allocated as 'subject to approval' in the Combined Authority's budget.
- 1.3 To obtain the necessary delegations from the Board to Directors, to appoint and contract with consultants to undertake separate Business Cases for the two projects and sign contracts with them.
- 1.4 As we continue to co-produce our Employment and Skills Strategy Delivery Plan, in partnership with Place Leaders, including our constituent member councils.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Combined Authority Board on behalf of its constituent councils, unanimously approved the Employment and Skills Strategy on 26 January 2022. The Strategy aims to deliver inclusive and green growth throughout the sub-region, through the mechanism of a better joined-up and coherent formal education, skills, and employment system. The Strategy is aligned with the Strategic Growth Ambition Statement and the Combined Authority Business Plan.
- 2.2 Two of the transformational projects identified within the Delivery Plan within the Employment and Skills Strategy are the development of new FE provisions in East Cambridgeshire and St Neots, to address 'cold spots' in post-16 education and training. To note, the Combined Authority's definition of a 'cold-spot' in adult education, are those wards where participation in adult education is below average, relative to the population density.
- 2.3 Officers have been meeting with our constituent local authorities and wider partners to acclimatise the concept. While there is broad consensus among local authority partners for the need for the two projects, FE partners await further evidence of feasibility – in particular, viable student numbers, accessible locations with good public transport and evidence of employer demand.
- 2.4 A proposal was successfully submitted for Gainshare funding in March 2022, which secured an allocation of £4.8m, subject to Board approval. The £4.8m is mainly capital funding as a stimulus to **pump-prime** the projects over three financial years. The allocation, are set out below:

Table A	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	TOTALS
FE Cold spots – Capital		£2,400,000	£2,175,000	£4,575,000
Revenue	£225,000			£ 225,000
				£4,800,000

Critically, the funding allocations from Gainshare will be used as **leverage** to attract capital funding from the Department for Education’s (DfE) Capital Transformation Fund and Post 16 Demographic Growth Funds. In addition, to explore the opportunity for local match funds or asset transfers. There is also an opportunity to develop this programme as a future devolution ‘ask’ for capital funding, which requires further exploration. Sites and education delivery partners for both projects have not been identified at this stage, although some options are identified in the Project Initiation Document (PID).

2.5 The need for the programme is briefly summarised below:

- Cambridgeshire County Council published their Post 16 Sufficiency analysis in 2019 as part of their statutory duties, to secure sufficient suitable education and training provision for all young people in the area aged 16-19 or aged 19 to 25 and for whom an Education, Health, and Care (EHC) plan is maintained. Ely and Soham were identified as areas where additional post-16 places are required.
- The Combined Authority undertook an analysis of ‘cold-spots’ in relation to adult education since taking control of the budget following devolution. St Neots has consistently appeared as a ‘cold spot’. This was shared with Skills Committee at the January 2022 meeting. (Note: Appendix 2 spotlights ‘cold-spots’ by parish to evidence this assumption)
- Huntingdonshire District Council identified the economic benefits for St Neots town-centre that a new FE Campus could provide to service demographic growth in the town, with c.5000 new homes at major housing developments at Wintringham and Love’s Farm. In addition, as an anchor institution in the regeneration of the town centre to improve street-scene, footfall and be a catalyst for further investment.

2.6 The vision of the programme is to invest in two new ‘flagship’ local FE centres, that will ‘Future-proof’ FE provision, be net-zero and state-of-the-art in providing green skills and wider curricula that meets local employer demand. Investment in FE infrastructure, raises aspirations, improves education standards and the skills levels among Local communities. By creating local provision, travel and journey times will be reduced, decreasing the carbon footprint and providing local opportunities. In East Cambridgeshire it is expected that this will encourage the retention of more local young people, to continue to live and work in the area.

2.7 A Project Initiation Document (PID) was shared with Skills Committee on 4 July 2022 and **estimated** annual student numbers as in **Table B** below were presented. As part of the next stage of the projects, business cases will be developed, where more accurate forecasts of student numbers and the proposed curriculum will be mapped in greater detail. The Census 2021 data will now be available for the projections.

Table B	East Cambridgeshire	St Neots	Total
16-19 full-time	Year 12 - 500 Year 13 – 400 Year 14 – 200	Year 12 - 400 Year 13 – 300 Year 14 – 100	2080

	SEND 16-25 - 100	SEND 16-25 - 80	
Adult Education/Skills	800	600	1400
Apprentices	100	80	180

2.8 Subject to Board approval, the following milestones for year one are planned:

Table 3: Milestones for Stage One	Date	Status
Full PID Development and approval at PARC	June 2022	Complete
Initial PID discussion at Skills Committee	July 2022	Complete
Initial discussions with HDC, EDC and FE Principals Group	June – July 2022	Complete
Quotations sought for consultancy	August 2022	Underway
Report to September Skills Committee and CA Board to approve budget for programme and release year 1 funds	September 2022	
Procurement of Project Management support for CPCA Skills Team	September 2022	
Publication of revised Post 16 Sufficiency Data by County Council and 2021 Census analysis to demonstrate demographic growth	September 2022	
Establishing Local Project Advisory Groups	Sept 2022	
Establishing Internal CPCA Project Management Board	Sept 2022	
Procurement of consultants for Business Cases (incl. Feasibility)	October 2022	
Appointment of consultants for Business Cases (incl. feasibility)	November 2022	
Publication of SOBC and consultation with stakeholders Presentation to Advisory Groups	January 2023	
Recommendations to Skills Committee	March 2023	
Commencement of Stage 2: Selection process for FE Partners (subject to feasibility)	April 2023	

As shown in Table A, a budget of £225,000 has been allocated for year one. At the time of writing, quotations for the Project Management and Business Case development are being sought and the actual amount needed for this phase will be adjusted. Therefore, it is unlikely the full amount will be utilised in 2022/23 and carry forward will be requested once the precise figures are known.

A further report to Skills Committee will set-out the milestones for Stage Two at the March 2023 meeting.

2.9 In order to co-produce the programme with our partners, it is proposed to establish two Project Advisory Groups – one for East Cambridgeshire and one for St Neots.

Significant Implications

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 The CPCA Board approved an allocation for Further Education Cold Spots in the Medium-Term Financial Plan at the March 2022 Board meeting. These allocations are set out in Table A above. These allocations are still subject to Board approval.

4. Legal Implications

- 4.1 The FE Cold spots programme supports our constituent member council, Cambridgeshire County Council in their statutory duties under the Education Act 1996, to secure suitable and sufficient places in post-16 education and training in the area.
- 4.2 The recommendations in this paper are to discharge the Combined Authorities' statutory duties under the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009. Under the devolution agreement of 2016, specified adult education functions from the Secretary of State were transferred to the Combined Authority.
- 4.3 The Combined Authority discharges its devolved adult education functions in line with the DfE Statutory Guidance for Combined Authorities (July 2018).

5. Public Health implications

- 5.1 The report recommendations have **positive** implications for public health. Participation in Post-16 and adult learning improve the health and wellbeing of participants and wider society. In addition, post-16 funding provides training and qualifications for professionals working in the health care sector as well as short courses for adults on managing physical, mental health and wellbeing.

6. Environmental and Climate Change Implications

- 6.1 The report recommendations have **positive** implications for the environment. If approved and constructed the two new FE campuses will be net-zero and provide positive environmental benefits and promote active travel. Skills training for green jobs and retrofit trades will be provided.

7. Other Significant Implications

- 7.1 The recommendations in this report have due regard to the Combined Authority's Equalities duties under the Equality Act 2010 in implementing funding policies and projects which seek to widen participation and make learning opportunities more accessible for all citizens including all protected characteristics.
- 7.2 Within their funding allocation, all colleges and adult learning institutes have Learner Support Funds to enable them to discharge their duties under the Equalities Act 2010.

Funding is provided to enable reasonable adjustments and additional support to be provided for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, to access and progress in learning. Furthermore, the new campuses will create inclusive learning environments to ensure access to opportunities for all.

8. Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix 1 - FE Cold Spots 2020-21 Summary Analysis for Huntingdonshire and East Cambridgeshire.

9. Background Papers

- 9.1 [FE Cold Spots Project Initiation Document \(PID\) 4 July 2022](#)
- 9.2 [Statutory Guidance for Combined Authorities to discharge devolved Adult Education functions July 2018](#)