



Skills & Employment Committee		Agenda Item
4 September 2023		7
Title:	Further Education Cold-Spots Projects Update	
Report of:	Parminder Singh Garcha, Senior Responsible Officer – Adult Education	
Lead Member:	Cllr Lucy Nethsingha, Lead Member - Skills	
Public Report:	Yes	
Key Decision:	No	
Voting Arrangements:	No vote required	

Recommendations:	
A	To receive an update on the FE Cold-Spots projects in East Cambridgeshire and St Neots
B	To note the revised milestones for the FE Cold-Spots projects
C	To note the collaborative work with partners to establish new adult learning and skills provision in St Neots, Soham and Ely.

Strategic Objective(s):	
The proposals within this report fit under the following strategic objective(s):	
✓	Achieving ambitious skills and employment opportunities
✓	Achieving good growth
	Increased connectivity
✓	Enabling resilient communities
✓	Achieving best value and high performance
The Combined Authority's devolution agreement and commissioning of skills programmes contributes to the above strategic objectives, aligned to the pillars within the Employment and Skills Strategy (2022):	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pre-work learning and formal education: improving learning and experiences of work, including quality careers information, advice, and guidance, during formal education; providing a strong foundation for labour market entry and future working lives.• Employer access to talent: developing priority skills that support sustainable growth, improving employers' engagement with education and improving job quality• Life-wide and lifelong learning: improving access to life wide careers guidance and a rich learning and skills offer to upskill and reskill residents through their life-course• Support into and between work: Supporting the unemployed residents to transition into training and then employment and support to disadvantaged groups to access the labour market.	

1. Purpose

1.1	This report provides members of the Skills and Employment Committee with an update of the Further Education Cold-Spots projects in East Cambridgeshire and St Neots.
1.2	Members are requested to note the slow progress that has been made over the past year with delivering this project, which is due to capacity challenges within the Combined Authority.
1.3	Members are requested to note the revised milestones for delivery of the projects.
1.4	Members are requested to note the smaller adult education provision which is being brokered by the Combined Authority in East Cambridgeshire and St Neots for the 2023/24 academic year delivery.

2. Proposal

2.1	Creating two new FE provisions in East Cambridgeshire and St Neots are two potential infrastructure projects within the Employment and Skills Strategy, to address 'cold spots' in post-16 education and training. Initial funding of £4.8m to pump-prime these projects was secured from the Combined Authority Board in March of 2022. Approval to create a new budget-line in the MTFP and commission consultancy support was agreed at the September 2022 Skills Committee and Board.																																				
2.2	Local Advisory Groups were established, and an initial meeting was convened in November 2022 by the Combined Authority and the constituent district councils. The groups were chaired by the respective members of the Skills Committee: Cllr Sam Wakeford (St Neots) and Cllr Lis Every (East Cambridgeshire). Terms of Reference were agreed and plans for commissioning consultancy support to undertake the Feasibility Study were discussed. Membership of the Advisory Groups included Cambridgeshire County Council, local FE Colleges, Academies, Town Councils and local business and third sector.																																				
2.3	Despite the initial momentum in securing funding, support from members and the Board and consulting with members of the Advisory Group and wider stakeholders, progress has stalled. Due to constraints in capacity. This is being addressed and no further slippage is expected for stage one. No further discussions have taken place with FE Colleges or Academies at this stage; however, plans are in place to re-convene the Local Advisory Groups once the consultants are in place.																																				
2.4	<p>The milestones for delivery have been revised and are set out below:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Milestones for Stage One</th> <th>Date</th> <th>Status</th> <th>Comments</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Full PID Development and approval at PARC</td> <td>June 2022</td> <td>Complete</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Initial PID discussion at Skills Committee</td> <td>July 2022</td> <td>Complete</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Initial discussions with HDC, ECDC, FE Principals Group and ESFA</td> <td>June – July 2022</td> <td>Complete</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Quotations sought for consultancy</td> <td>September 2022</td> <td>Pending</td> <td>Request for Quotation (RFQ) being completed</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Report to September Skills Committee and CA Board to approve budget for programme and release year 1 funds</td> <td>September 2022</td> <td>Complete</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Securing Project Management support for CPCA Skills Team to deliver the project</td> <td>October 2022</td> <td>Pending</td> <td>Review of internal PM and team capacity</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Publication of revised Post 16 Sufficiency Data by County Council and 2021 Census analysis to demonstrate demographic growth</td> <td>November 2022</td> <td>Pending</td> <td>Awaiting data release</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Establishing Local Project Advisory Boards</td> <td>Sept 2022</td> <td>Complete</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Milestones for Stage One	Date	Status	Comments	Full PID Development and approval at PARC	June 2022	Complete		Initial PID discussion at Skills Committee	July 2022	Complete		Initial discussions with HDC, ECDC, FE Principals Group and ESFA	June – July 2022	Complete		Quotations sought for consultancy	September 2022	Pending	Request for Quotation (RFQ) being completed	Report to September Skills Committee and CA Board to approve budget for programme and release year 1 funds	September 2022	Complete		Securing Project Management support for CPCA Skills Team to deliver the project	October 2022	Pending	Review of internal PM and team capacity	Publication of revised Post 16 Sufficiency Data by County Council and 2021 Census analysis to demonstrate demographic growth	November 2022	Pending	Awaiting data release	Establishing Local Project Advisory Boards	Sept 2022	Complete	
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	Establishing Skills Programme Management Board	February 2023	Complete	
	Procurement of consultants for Business Cases (incl. Feasibility)	October 2023	Pending	Subject to procurement timeline
	Appointment of consultants for Business Cases (incl. feasibility)	November 2022		
	Publication of SOBC and consultation with stakeholders Presentation to Advisory Boards	January 2024		
	Recommendations to Skills Committee and CA Board	March 2024		
	Commencement of Stage 2: Selection process for FE Partners (subject to feasibility)	April 2024		
2.5	<p>While the FE Cold-Spots projects will deliver sustainable FE places in the medium term, particularly for 16–18-year-olds, there is a need for adult education and upskilling opportunities to be available in the current academic year for local residents aged 19+. Therefore, in the meantime, the following projects have been facilitated by the Combined Authority:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St Neots Citizen’s Hub – the Combined Authority has brokered a partnership between St Neots Initiative and Evolve Your Future (one of the newly commissioned AEB and Multiply training providers) to establish a new multi-agency learning hub in St Neots town centre. The Citizen’s Hub was officially opened by the Deputy Mayor, Cllr Anna Smith on 31 July 2023. A range of courses for adults through AEB and Multiply, careers advice and guidance and business start-up advice is being offered as well as meeting space and a community café. • Soham Skills Hub - the Combined Authority Board (July 2023) approved a small grant of £30,000 to start-up this project, based at Viva Arts at Spencer’s Mill in Soham. It is a partnership between West Suffolk College, WEA and Viva, to provide outreach and co-ordination of adult learning and skills opportunities for Soham residents and businesses. • WEA adult learning centre in Ely – working with ECDC, premises are being sought to enable WEA to establish a permanent home in Cambridgeshire to grow the learning offer for adults. Given the Cold Spots and declining rates of participation in adult education in East Cambridgeshire, WEA have been directed to set-up a new centre in the district. This will ensure residents of East Cambridgeshire have a dedicated adult learning institution within the district to improve rates of participation. An offer for the former Mayor’s offices on Market Street in Ely was unsuccessful and alternative premises are now being sought. 			

3. Background

3.1	<p>The Combined Authority Board approved an allocation from Gainshare funding for Further Education Cold Spots in the Medium-Term Financial Plan at the March 2022 Board meeting. These allocations are subject to Board approval. Approval to allocate £225,000 of revenue funding for Stage One of the project was secured in September 2022 and a funding line was created in the MTFP. The balance of the funding is capital over the subsequent years.</p> <p>Due to slippage in the timelines, carry forward of the funding was requested and approved into the 2023/24 financial year. It is unlikely that the full amount will be spent within this financial year.</p>
3.2	<p>As reported at the September 2022 Skills Committee meeting, officers have been meeting with constituent councils 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.</p>

3.3	<p>Critically, the funding allocations from Gainshare will be used – if appropriate demand is evidenced - 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 were identified in the Project Initiation Document (PID). The impact of inflation since the PID will be considered through the Feasibility Study.</p>
3.4	<p>The need for this project was shared with the Skills Committee previously and is summarised below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. <p>The vision of the programme – if demand is evidenced- 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.</p>

4. Appendices	
4.1	None

5. Implications																					
Financial Implications																					
5.1	<p>A budget of £4.8m was allocated, subject to approval, from the Mayoral Gainshare fund for the delivery of the FE Cold Spots programme. This is budgeted as part of the MTFP for the 2023/24, 2024/25 and 2025/26 financial years. There has not been any spend to date and carry-forward of funding will need to be requested in due course. A further report to request carry-forward of the capital funding will need to be taken to the Combined Authority Board as a key decision as proposed below. This will be set-out in the next report.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="185 1832 1385 2040"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>2023-24</th> <th>2024-25</th> <th>2025-26</th> <th>TOTALS</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>FE Cold spots – Capital</td> <td></td> <td>£2,400,000</td> <td>£2,175,000</td> <td>£4,575,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Revenue</td> <td>£225,000</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>£ 225,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>£4,800,000</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	TOTALS	FE Cold spots – Capital		£2,400,000	£2,175,000	£4,575,000	Revenue	£225,000			£ 225,000					£4,800,000
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Legal Implications	
6.1	The recommendations and activities outlined 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.
6.2	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.
Public Health Implications	
7.1	The report recommendations have positive implications for public health in the longer-term. 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.
Environmental & Climate Change Implications	
8.1	The report recommendations have positive implications for the environment in the longer-term. 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. environmental or climate change implications
Other Significant Implications	
9.1	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.
Background Papers	
10.1	Addressing FE Cold-Spots Skills Committee Report – September 2022 FE Cold Spots Project Initiation Document (PID) 4 July 2022