



Skills & Employment Committee – Draft Minutes

Monday 15 January 2024

Venue:	Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, Huntingdon PE29 3TN	
Time:	10.00 to 13.00	
Present:	Councillor Lucy Nethsingha Mayor Dr Nik Johnson Councillor James Lay Councillor Eileen Wilson Councillor Sam Carling Councillor Sam Wakeford Councillor Peter Hiller	Chair and Member for Cambridgeshire County Council CPCA Mayor East Cambridgeshire District Council South Cambridgeshire District Council Cambridge City Council Huntingdonshire District Council Peterborough City Council
Apologies	Councillor Ian Benney Mr Nitin Patel	Fenland District Council Business Board Representative

Minutes:

1	Announcements, Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest
1.1	The Chair agreed a change to the proposed order of the agenda so that Growing Sector Based Talent Pipelines would be heard earlier in the meeting at item 5 as this report would set the scene for the reports that followed. [These minutes are therefore laid out in the revised order with the numbers in brackets referring to the original agenda item number as published on the website]
1.2	Apologies were received from Councillor Ian Benney and Mr Nitin Patel.
1.3	No declarations of interest were made.
2	Minutes of the Skills Committee meeting on 6 November 2023 and Action Log
2.1	The minutes of the meeting on 6 November 2023 were approved as an accurate record subject.
2.2	Members asked that the outstanding actions from the Committee's November meeting be followed up on. These include inviting the principal of ARU, Ross Renton, to the March meeting of the Committee to update members on the development of the ARU Peterborough University campus and a briefing note on the concentration of PHD students to be sent to members.
3	Public Questions
3.1	No Public Questions had been submitted.

<p>4</p> <p>4.1</p>	<p>Combined Authority Forward Plan</p> <p>There were no comments from the Committee.</p> <p><u>RESOLVED:</u></p> <p>1. That the Combined Authority Forward Plan be noted.</p>
<p>5 (9)</p> <p>5.1</p> <p>5.2</p> <p>5.3</p>	<p>Growing Sector-based Talent Pipelines</p> <p>Claire Paul, Assistant Director Skills, gave a presentation to the Committee which outlined how partners across the region could work together to address the strategic priorities of the skills landscape and develop an approach to grow sector-based talent pipelines, in advance of a formal plan coming to the Skills and Employment Committee in March. Charlotte Horobin, CEO Cambridgeshire Chambers of Commerce, who was working closely with Claire on this issue, also addressed members.</p> <p>The presentation has been appended to the minutes and published on the website here: CMIS > Meetings under additional meeting documents.</p> <p>During discussion the following points were noted:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) A balance had to be kept between doubling GVA (gross value added) and doing it in a way that reduced inequality. b) Any approach taken needed to take into consideration four perspectives; People, Employers, Providers and Place in order to provide pre-work learning, employer access to talent, life-long and life-wide learning and support into and between jobs. c) The focus on the priority growth sectors (e.g. life sciences and advance manufacturing) and the enabling sectors, such as health, should be both for as they are now and how they would be in the future. d) A talent pool of individuals who had gone through pre-employment training courses could be created and shared so that employers could access ‘work-ready talent pools’. e) Strategic leadership was absolutely critical in ensuring that all sections of the ‘pipeline’ were linked and that there was an umbilical connection to employers running through it, so that the right talent was being developed in the right priority areas and at the required scale . f) Nationally over half of all employers were expecting their turnover to increase suggesting that confidence was up, but the number one issue was always about attracting and retaining people who had the right skills, aptitude, and attitude. g) Key to being competitive as a region was making sure that investment was aligned with the LSIP (Local Skills Improvement Plan) and its priority sectors, and that work ready talent pools were in place. h) In order to grow the pipelines there needed to be a strong, sustainable provider base across Higher and Further Education. i) The details of how the talent pools would work and where they would ‘sit’ would be developed with key partners. j) In talking to partners, a key area of discussion was how to engage with the disadvantaged in order to close the gap. k) East Cambridgeshire District Council was in the process of setting up a pilot scheme with West Suffolk college where it was proposed that all 28 councillors would be trained in becoming ambassadors for apprenticeships. A database of all employers in the area had also been created l) The spending to support any new initiatives would be considered very carefully in order to ensure it was the best use of public funding and that commissioning was done strategically. m) All the Constituent Council areas had different particular needs and care would be taken to ensure that all these needs were addressed over time. n) There was a difficult balance between developing your own talent and finding the capacity to invest in people, and the risk that once trained, individuals could move elsewhere. This risk was more easily absorbed if you were a larger employer. o) Employers needed to be shielded from the ‘wiring in the system’ and the complexity of moving people from education into jobs and careers.

RESOLVED:

That the Skills and Employment Committee:

1. Note the approach to growing Sector-based Talent Pipelines in advance of a formal plan coming to the Skills & Employment Committee in March.

ACTION:

1. Claire Paul to speak with Cllr Lay to understand more about the pilot scheme being set up between East Cambridgeshire District Council and West Suffolk College to promote apprenticeships.

6 (5) Adult Education Budget (AEB) External Evaluation

6.1 Claire Paul, Assistant Director Skills, gave a presentation on the external evaluation of AEB+,

6.2 The presentation has been appended to these minutes and published on the website here: [CMIS > Meetings](#) under additional meeting documents.

6.3

During discussion the following points were noted:

- a) An experienced external consultant had carried out the evaluation which looked at the first three years of the devolved Adult Education Budget. The final data for 2022-23 had not yet been verified and so was not included but as the evaluation was undertaken in 2023 the conclusions were current.
- b) The purpose of devolution was to buy differently, buy better and then buy the best and the consultant felt that the CPCA was now buying better and the next phase was to buy best.
- c) The CPCA had faced challenges on the resource side as it had the lowest allocated budget of all the Combined Authorities but administrative pressures remained very similar regardless of the number of learners.
- d) Covid had affected the number of learners and providers had adapted their premises and developed new methods to attract and retain learners.
- e) Providers had been reduced from 176 to 17 with most based within the CPCA area. The location mattered as this meant a better connection with employers and learners as they were more rooted in their communities.
- f) The consultant had noted that the CPCA had made very good use of its funding flexibilities.
- g) There was a drop off in learner numbers whilst this transition to fewer, more local providers took place, along with the effects of Covid, but encouragingly numbers were now up and stabilising.
- h) Peterborough was the greatest beneficiary of the AEB with 38% of all AEB learners and 43% of the budget.
- i) There had been increases in the percentage of learners from black and minority groups and learners with a disability
- j) An example of community learning, in comparison with adult education which concentrated on formal qualifications, was an introduction and development of IT skills along with a whole host of other things that improved confidence and wellbeing, so that learners were ready to connect with work. Community Learning was also about reducing isolation and improving mental health.
- k) Partners at the DWP and in Health were working closely with the CPCA to look at all the funding available in order to commission intelligently and to work on all of the problems together.
- l) The Chair asked for more information on the 20% of learners with a disability and the split between learning disabilities and other disabilities and how it was further broken down into different types of disability.
- m) The report that underpinned the presentation was just being finalised and would be shared with the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the Skills and Employment Committee:

1. Note the presentation on the external evaluation of AEB+, the changes to the AEB funding rules in 2024/25 and the potential impact on delivery.

ACTION:

1. Further information on the types of disability that made up the 20% of learners with a disability, to be shared with the Committee.

7(6) ESOL Planning Partnership Annual Report

7.1 Claire Paul, Assistant Director Skills, introduced the report which provided the Employment and Skills Committee with an annual update on the ESOL Local Planning Partnerships (ELPP).

7.2 During discussion the following points were noted:

- a) ESOL was one of the things that the external evaluator had cited as being done very much better.
- b) Officers were working on an impact framework as the organisation needed to get better at looking at outcomes not just outputs such as the number of ESOL student going on to get jobs.
- c) Members requested further information on why a tender for an ESOL Single Point Of Contact (SPOC) could not be awarded.

RESOLVED:

That the Skills and Employment Committee resolved to:

1. Receive the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Local Planning Partnerships Annual Report for the 2022-23 academic year, and to note the progress made with delivery and partnership development.
2. Note the outcome of the procurement for the ESOL Single Point of Contact (SPOC)

ACTION:

1. A briefing note on why the CA was unable to award a tender to the organisation who applied to manage and deliver the ESOL Single Point of Contact to be circulated to Members.

8 (7) Skills Bootcamps 2024-25FY

8.1 Melissa Gresswell, Project Manager: Skills Bootcamps and Special Projects, introduced the report which updated the Skills and Employment Committee on the progress of the proposal submitted to the Department for Education (DfE) in September 2023 for the delivery of the Wave Five Skills Bootcamps in the Combined Authority's area. The paper outlined the key considerations and actions required to take the proposal forward.

8.2 During discussion the following points were noted:

- a) Officers were keen to highlight that Skills Bootcamps could enable employers to access up to 90% of the cost of the bootcamps to upskill their staff.
- b) The CPCA was ranked 5th out of 21 areas in the DfE's performance league table based on the number of positive job outcomes secured by learners who had completed a Skills Bootcamp.
- c) There was an awareness raising marketing campaign that was due to go live to advertise the courses specifically to individuals and the self-employed.
- d) The funding stream would also secure the progression route that officers were beginning to see with learners who had, for example, completed a level two course in electrical vehicle maintenance and repair, coming back the following year for the level three.
- e) Officers were now seeing pre-expressions from providers before the official market engagement had been put out.
- f) Engineering employers had reported that they were struggling to fill apprenticeship slots but accessing learners who had completed specific Skills Bootcamp courses could help address this.

- g) Councillors expressed their wish to help disseminate the information on the bootcamp courses and would like to share information through social media.

RESOLVED:

The members of the Employment and Skills Committee resolved to;

1. Note the Combined Authority's Grant Proposal to the Department for Education (DfE) in September 2023 for £2,899,390 to deliver (Wave Five) Skills Bootcamp provision during the 2024-25 Financial Year – and to note that we received confirmation from the DfE on 12 December 2023 that our Grant Proposal has been successful.
2. Accept the full grant funding offer from the DfE of £2,899,390 and approve corresponding expenditure across two budgets: one for the training funding allocation totalling £2,635,800 and one for the management funding allocation totalling £263,580 of the Wave Five Skills Bootcamps in the 2024-25 budget.
3. Delegate authority to the Assistant Director of Skills, in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer to:
 - a. Arrange for the awards and enter into grant funding agreements or service contracts with training providers to deliver Wave Five Skills Bootcamps. This can either be with existing providers, or where the Combined Authority follows a procurement exercise compliant with the Combined Authority's Constitution and procurement legislation.
 - b. Extend and/or vary contracts with existing providers where appropriate.

ACTIONS:

1. Officers to provide members with the details off the current 19 Skills Bootcamp courses and where they were being run and by whom.
2. A briefing note to be circulated to members on the management costs associated with the Skills Bootcamp courses
3. Officers to provide members with some marketing material that could be easily shared on social media to help advertise and signpost the courses.

9 (8) Further Education Cold-Spots Feasibility Study

Rob Turner, Director at Grant Thornton, the consultants engaged to carry out the Further Education Cold-Spots Feasibility Study, gave a presentation to the Committee on the approach being taken.

The presentation has been appended to the minutes and published on the website here: [CMIS > Meetings](#) under additional meeting documents.

During discussion the following points were noted:

- a) The approach taken by Grant Thornton would be based on consolidating and balancing both the quantitative and qualitative findings.
- b) The Chair and members noted that it had taken longer to get to this stage than the Committee had expected or would have liked but all very much welcomed the study and felt it was vitally important that this work was done and undertaken in the objective way that had been described.
- c) There were concerns expressed about not destabilising the current system and existing providers' business models.

RESOLVED:

1. To note the approach being taken by external consultants engaged to carry out the Further Education Cold-Spots Feasibility Study.

<p>10</p> <p>10.1</p> <p>10.2</p>	<p>Employment and Skills Board Update</p> <p>Melissa Gresswell, Project Manager: Skills Bootcamps and Special Projects, and lead officer supporting the Board provided a verbal update on the meeting of the Employment and Skills Board which took place on 12 December 2023.</p> <p>The following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) In order to better link in with the work of the Skills and Employment Committee the agenda for the Board had replicated much of today’s meeting with positive discussions on building Sector-based Talent Pipelines and Skills Bootcamps b) There was a standing item on the agenda from DWP which looked at employment data and trends so there was a discussion around areas which had seen some increases in employment rates. One of the actions taken away from the meeting was to make sure that employers were linked into different resources to help facilitate inclusive recruitment processes. c) Two new members had joined the Board; Charlotte Horobin from the Cambridgeshire Chambers of Commerce and Michael Moriarty from Mick George Ltd. d) Work was being done on appointing a new Chair as Vic Annells had formally stepped down as Chair.
<p>11.</p> <p>11.1</p>	<p>Budget Performance Report</p> <p>Bruna Menegatti, Finance Manager, introduced the report which provided an update of the financial position for 2023/24 and analysis against the 2023/24 budgets, up to the period ending November 2023.</p> <p><u>RESOLVED:</u></p> <p>That the Skills and Employment Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note the financial position of the Skills Division for the financial year 23/24 to end of November 2023
<p>12.</p> <p>12.1</p>	<p>Skills and Employment Committee Agenda Plan</p> <p>There were no comments from the Committee.</p> <p><u>RESOLVED:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the Skills and Employment Committee Agenda Plan be noted.
<p>13.</p> <p>13.1</p>	<p>Date of Next Meeting</p> <p>The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Monday 4 March 2024</p>

Meeting Ended: 12.37pm