

Skills Committee Minutes

Meeting: Monday 13 September 2021

Time: 10:00am – 12:00pm

Venue: The Boathouse, Wisbech

Present:

Cllr Lucy Nethsingha – Chair and Member for Cambridgeshire County Council
Cllr Ray Bisby - Peterborough City Council
Cllr Rosey Moore – Cambridge City Council
Cllr Lis Every - East Cambridgeshire District Council
Cllr Eileen Wilson - South Cambridgeshire District Council
Cllr David Mason – Fenland District Council

Apologies:

Cllr Mike Davey - Cambridge City Council
Cllr Chris Seaton - Member for Fenland District Council
Cllr Jon Neish - Huntingdonshire District Council
Cllr Lynne Ayres - Peterborough City Council

Part 1 - Governance Items

13. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies received from Councillor Mike Davey substituted by Cllr Rosey Moore, Councillor Chris Seaton substituted by Councillor David Mason, Councillor Lynne Ayres, substituted by Councillor Ray Bisby and Councillor Jon Neish.

14. Approval of Minutes and Action Log

The minutes of the meeting on 14 June 2021 were approved as an accurate record and the action log was noted.

15. Public Questions

None.

16. Skills Committee Agenda Plan

It was resolved to note the agenda plan.

17. Combined Authority Forward Plan

It was resolved to note the forward plan.

Part 2 – Reports to Combined Authority Board

18. Adult Education Budget: Reserve Fund and Innovation Fund for 2021/22

The Committee considered a report that sought approval for the strategic approach to utilising the identified Adult Education Budget (AEB) Reserve Fund, which had been accumulated from underspends from 2019/20 and 2020/21 academic years. The report also requested that the Skills Committee recommend to the Combined Authority Board that funding from the reserve was allocated to the themes of the Reserve Fund and delegations provided to the Director of Business and Skills to contract with providers.

Introducing the report officers explained that table A in the report set out the strategic approach to utilise the AEB Reserve Fund. Officers stated that there was a report tabled on the Forward Plan for the November Committee meeting which would set out how providers would be commissioned for the 2021/22 academic year and beyond. Officers commented that £500,000 had been set aside to use as an innovation fund and the main focus was around employer responsiveness and acute skills shortages. Funding was also being retained in the reserve for over-delivery and unforeseen liabilities in the future.

In discussing the report:

- A Member stated that she was delighted that some of the budget would be used in Chatteris for the new Apprenticeship Hub and Training Centre. She sought clarification around how the additional £150,000 would be spent. Officers stated the money would be used to facilitate greater collaboration among the colleges in order to share resources and build capacity.
- A Member queried whether the courses would be diversified. Officers stated that the capacity building with providers would be aimed at supporting them to deliver more, particularly to meet skills shortages including 'green skills'. There were regular conversations to improve the provision.

- A Member queried which providers were offering level one courses. Officers stated that all of the providers in particular local providers were offering level one and below and approximately 50% of AEB investment has been in lower-level courses.
- A Member queried who the independent training providers would be. Officers explained that the independent providers were highlighted in appendix 1 of the report.
- A Member highlighted the need to focus on green jobs and questioned whether this would be a thread running through all of the themes. She queried whether there could be a paper to a future Committee meeting looking at green job provision currently and in the future. The Chair stated that this would be added to the agenda plan for a future meeting. **ACTION.** The Director of Business and Skills commented that officers would develop a report focusing on green jobs and skills gaps in relation to Brexit. He explained that there was a report on the skills strategy further in the agenda, and that the green agenda would play a key part in the updated strategy. He stated that there was work ongoing to bring several strategies together at the Combined Authority. He sought clarity from officers on how confident they were on whether there would be another underspend in 2021-22 and whether they could give an assurance to the Committee that the approach was specifically aimed at tackling the underspend. Officers stated that there would always be a small underspend due to holding some of the funds back. Officers stated that with the new light touch approach to commissioning and new providers they hoped that the underspend would be absorbed and that it would have the maximum impact on delivery. Officers stated that this was the first opportunity to see the impact of the policy changes.
- The Chair explained that part of the reason that there was an underspend is because officers ask providers how many courses they had provided and this would not have been known if it had not been checked. She explained that the underspend was a more accurate measure and the Combined Authority would not be paying for courses that had not been delivered.

It was resolved unanimously to recommend the Combined Authority Board:

- a) Approve funding to be allocated from the Adult Education Budget (AEB) Reserve Fund for the 2021/22 academic year to the thematic programmes as set out in Item 2.3, Table A;
- b) Delegate authority to the Director of Business and Skills in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer, to enter into grant funding agreements with providers on behalf of the Combined Authority, for projects under the themes;
- c) Delegate authority to the Director of Business and Skills, in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer to enter into grant funding agreements for the Innovation Fund, with existing AEB providers, as required;
- d) To note the approach to the Innovation Fund for 2021/22.

Part 3 – Delivery

19. Growth Works Management Review – September 2021

The Committee considered a report which gave an update on the financial and non-financial performance of Growth Works.

Introducing the report officers explained the report covered performance up until 31 July 2021. Officers stated that performance was robust, and that Growth Coaching was going well. Officers explained that there were 23 active clients in the pipeline for the Inward Investment Service and that there was a successful inward investment supply chain. Officers stated that the investment panel had last met in July due to holidays but that they were due to meet in the Autumn and this event would be focused on Artificial Intelligence. Officers explained that performance was good in relation to skills and that the numbers were only small now but that they would increase over time. Officers stated that there had been a huge turn around with the Growth Works for Skills contract and that they were in one of the top five Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPS) in the country for the Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) contract. Officers explained that Gateley had been developing a portal to communicate performance.

In discussing the report:

- A Member queried which companies had been unsuccessful in relation to Inward Investment Bids so that Members were aware of which companies had already applied. Officers explained that they would provide the Committee with this information. **ACTION**. Officers also stated that they provided aftercare services in relation to unsuccessful bids.
- A Member questioned when the shortlisted location would be known as detailed in 4.11 of the report. Officers stated that they had hoped to hear this morning and would communicate the final location to the Committee once known. **ACTION**
- A Member sought clarity on the work experience programme and when the Committee would get more detail on how they could collaborate to ensure that it was a success. Officers stated that there were a number of events with mixed success over the summer and there would be an event in late September with the Chamber of Commerce. Officers explained that they had found there had been online seminar fatigue and that they were encouraging businesses to provide work experience throughout the year for both school age and post 18.
- A Member questioned why the Small Business Capital Investment Growth Equity was showing as a red downward arrow. Officers stated that this related back to the gap in the Inward Investment panel meeting and this would pick up when the panel next sat.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the Growth Works programme performance up to 31 July 2021.

20. Employment & Skills Strategy – Update

The Committee received a report which outlined the progress made on the development of the Employment and Skills Strategy.

Introducing the report officers explained that all the engagement sessions that had been run throughout the summer had been positive. Officers stated that they would be taking on board the comments made earlier in the meeting in relation to the integration of green skills, impacts of Brexit and COVID into the wider strategy. Officers stated that there would now be a wider engagement exercise taking place to integrate several of the strategies. Officers clarified that the final draft of the Skills Strategy would be coming to the November Committee as the Combined Authority had to send their update on the local skills report to the Department for Education by January 2022.

In discussing the report:

- The Chair stated that it was good to hear how much work had gone into updating the strategy so far.
- A Member sought clarity on whether the wider learning from Pat Carrington's thesis, the Capitals Framework had been considered in relation to the strategy. Officers stated that there was a Steering Group set up which the Combined Authority was a part of, and they would feed into any actions taken.
- A Member stated that the word 'worklessness' should not be used in the document. Officers explained that they have debated the use of the word but as yet had not come up with an appropriate alternative.
- A Member questioned the use of the terminology from 'to progress' to 'in progress' as this did not highlight the progress that had been made so far particularly in relation to the University.
- A Member queried whether there was funding for careers advice in primary schools as it had been proven that dissatisfaction in education at this level could have a huge impact on future careers. Officers stated that currently there was only funding for secondary schools and this needed to be looked at further.
- A Member stated that careers advice was crucial in all stages of life as individuals are working longer.

In bringing the debate to a close, the Chair acknowledged that there were major concerns around apprenticeships before the pandemic and that they needed to be a key priority for the Combined Authority to rebuild this route into education.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the progress undertaken to develop the Employment and Skills Strategy and direction to complete the final Strategy.

21. Careers Hub

The Committee considered a report that gave an update on the proposed Careers Hub for the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough area funded by the Department for Education (DfE) through the Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC).

Introducing the report officers explained that a competitive bid was submitted in February 2021 by the CPCA for the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough area to form a Careers Hub. Officers stated that 30 schools, colleges and SEND schools from across the region had been identified to join the Careers Hub in the academic year of 2021/22. Officers highlighted that it was the intention that the Combined Authority would apply for a second Careers Hub in the next academic year, so that all schools in the CPCA would be able to join a Careers Hub. Officers clarified that the new Hub lead started in their role next Monday and that it was exciting times for careers across the region.

In discussing the report:

- The Chair sought further information on how the Careers Hub would be utilised. Officers explained that the Hub was predominantly virtual and there was a dedicated role working with schools to target resources.
- A Member questioned how teachers would be supported to provide careers advice in schools. Officers explained that Enterprise Advisors would be supporting teachers to provide this.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the report approved by the Combined Authority Board on 3 June 2021.

22. Digital Skills Bootcamps

The Committee received a report outlining the successful, competitive consortium bid submitted to the Department for Education (DfE) for the delivery of Digital Bootcamps in the East of England.

Introducing the report officers explained that the Combined Authority had received notification that it had been awarded £1,826,250 for the delivery of Bootcamps in the East of England. Officers stated that of the nine consortium delivery partners, the DfE had only approved two providers to deliver the Bootcamps in the Consortia; Cambridge Regional College and Purple Beard, an Independent Training Provider. Officers stated that the target was to have 805 learners over a 16-week period.

In discussing the report:

- The Chair requested that officers, on behalf of the Committee, sought an extension to the deadline due to the delay in the notification of the award. **ACTION.** The Chair also requested that officers report back on the progress of the contract at the Committee in January. **ACTION**

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the report approved by the Combined Authority Board on 28 July 2021.

23. Implications of the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill

The Committee considered a report that gave an overview of the implications of the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill for the Combined Authority.

Introducing the report officers explained that they had met with the team drafting the bill and had given feedback on several areas in the bill that would weaken the devolved powers the Combined Authority had in relation to Skills, it would diminish the Combined Authorities autonomy in its selection of providers and would affect sub-contractors of those providers.

In discussing the report:

- Members stated that the Combined Authority needed to be clear with government on what the issues of concern were in the bill. She stated that the region had been given providers in the past that they did not need.
- A Member stated that the Committee needed to lobby local MPs to ensure that the Combined Authorities concerns were heard. The Chair stated that the Committee would write to local MPs on behalf of the Mayor and the Board to raise these concerns and report back to the next Committee on progress. **ACTION**
- A Member questioned whether the restrictions on providers would affect apprenticeships. Officers stated that it would not affect apprenticeships as this was a separate register.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the potential implications of the Skills and post-16 Education Bill and risks to the Combined Authority's strategic role for accelerating the improvement of skills in the region.
- b) Note the Combined Authority will be responding to two of the Department for Education's open consultations on the National Skills Fund and Reforms to Further Education Funding and Accountability.

24. Employment & Skills Board Update

The Committee received a report that provided a summary of the recent meeting of the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority Employment & Skills Board (ESB), which includes the role of The Combined Authority's Skills Advisory Panel (SAP).

In discussing the report:

- The Chair requested that an updated list of the members of the board be circulated to the Committee. **ACTION**
- The Director of Business and Skills commented that the Combined Authority were currently reviewing how they could retain control of the skills agenda through the Board and Committee including the possibility of making the Chamber of Commerce the Chair of the Board if the current proposals in the White paper were accepted.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- c) Note the paper which provides a summary of the recent Employment and Skills Board held on 29th June 2021.

25. Budget and Performance Report

The Committee considered a report that provided an update and overview of the revenue and capital funding lines that were within the Business & Skills Directorate to assist the Skills Committee to enable informed decision making regarding the expenditure of these funds.

Introducing the report the Director of Business and Skills stated that Medium Term Financial Plan was outlined at 3.1 of the report and the Committee was asked to consider whether they wished to propose any changes to the Board.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the update and financial position relating to the revenue funding lines within the Skills Committee remit.
- b) Note the current Medium-Term Financial Plan and consider whether there are any recommendations they wish to make to the Combined Authority Board in November.

Part 4 – Date of the next meeting

26. It was resolved to:

Note the date of the next meeting as Wednesday 10 November 2021.