

Swindon Skills and Employment Strategy and the outcome of the Post 16 Area Review

Cabinet

Date: 6th September 2017

Author:	Cabinet Member for the Economy and Skills Cabinet Member for Children's Services and School Attainment Director of Children's Services
Wards:	All
Parishes Affected:	All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 This report seeks agreement on the priorities and activities outlined in the Skills and Employment Strategy for 2017 – 2020 which is a refresh of the 2013-2016 strategy. The draft Strategy has been developed to summarise the skills and employment priorities and activities that need to take place to achieve the vision and overall aims for skills as outlined in the draft Economic Strategy.
- 1.2 The paper provides an update on the Skills and Employment Board and its sub groups and key activity to date.
- 1.3 The report provides a summary of the outcomes and recommendations for the Swindon, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire Post 16 Area Review, completed in February 2017. The report was published on 3 August 2017.
- 1.4 This report supports Priority Two of the Vision to "Offer educational opportunities that lead to the right skills and right jobs in the right places" and Pledges 18 (Increase the number of businesses employing an apprentices) and 19 (secure a range of options to access Higher Education in Swindon').

2. Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1 Endorse the draft refreshed Skills and Employment Strategy for 2017-2020 as set out summarised in paragraphs 3.12 to 3.16 and set out in detail in Appendix 1 of the report.
- 2.2 Authorise the Director of Children's Services to make arrangements for the implementation of the delivery of the Skills and Employment Strategy, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for the Economy and Skills and the Skills and Employment Board.
- 2.3 Note the outcomes and recommendations of the Post 16 Area Review and the update on progress to implement the recommendations.

Swindon Skills and Employment Strategy and the outcome of the Post 16 Area Review

Cabinet

Date: 6th September 2017

3. Detail

Introduction

- 3.1 The current Skills and Employment Strategy for 2013-2016 was approved by Cabinet in December 2013 (Cabinet Minute 72, 2013/14 refers). It was developed by the Skills and Employment board, the governance structure for which is at Appendix 2. The Board has now reviewed and refreshed the strategy.

Management and delivery of the Swindon Strategy

- 3.2 As part of the review, the Board sub-groups were revised in December 2016 with an agreement to rationalise to just 3 groups in order to bring some overlapping agendas together and ensure efficient use of officer and partner's time. The 3 sub-groups are outlined below. Action plans have been drafted and these will be finalised by the sub groups once the strategy is agreed.

Skills for Growth	Skills for Inclusion	Higher Education
Apprenticeship growth. Employability including Careers Enterprise Network	Increasing participation in learning and reducing NEET (16-18 year olds). Improving routes to employment for vulnerable groups. Adult learning	Higher Education Strategy Higher and Degree Apprenticeships Higher Futures Programme.

The role of the Local Enterprise Partnership

- 3.3 The Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership (SWLEP) is a private sector led partnership between Swindon Borough Council, Wiltshire Council and local businesses. Its primary role is to drive economic growth, by creating jobs, attracting new investments and supporting new and growing businesses in Swindon and Wiltshire
- 3.4 The SWLEP Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) has Skills and Talent as its number 1 priority, outlining the 'need for an appropriately skilled and competitive workforce to achieve our growth ambitions'. The SWLEP Skills and Talent Sub Group oversee the implementation of the priority with SBC providing the 'Lead Officer' role to support the development and implementation of the Sub Group Action Plan.

Swindon Skills and Employment Strategy and the outcome of the Post 16 Area Review

Cabinet

Date: 6th September 2017

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- 3.5 The Swindon Skills and Employment Strategy aligns with the LEP Skills and Talent strategic priorities and action plan. The strategy also acknowledges the potential strategic investment opportunities that are presented, particularly related to higher level skills and apprenticeships.
- 3.6 Currently, there are two skills programmes that are delivered by Wiltshire Council (WC) and Swindon Borough Council (SBC) which receive funding through the LEP. These are the Careers Enterprise Network and the Higher Futures Programme (previously City Deal).

The Swindon Economic Strategy (draft)

- 3.7 The draft Economic Strategy for Swindon sets out the Council's ambition 'to grow Swindon's economy, create jobs and attract inward investment, to create wealth and prosperity for local people and communities, ensure our residents have the skills they need and to promote Swindon as a key location for employment and for people to live'. The Council's vision for Swindon's Economy is that by 2026, Swindon will aim to be the UK's most innovative, productive, fastest-growing city, and will grow sustainably by up-skilling our workforce to enable our businesses to compete, whilst enhancing residents' quality of life.
- 3.8 The strategy outlines six ambitious objectives for skills and are as follows:
- Meet the skills and technical needs of Swindon businesses.
 - Inspire young people to further their skills and education.
 - Grow the number of businesses who use apprenticeships.
 - Increase number of Swindon residents with degree-level qualifications.
 - Drive higher level apprenticeships that meet the technical needs of employers.
 - Support the social inclusion agenda by reducing the proportion of young people who are not in education employment or training (NEET) and increase the number of vulnerable residents including Care Leavers and those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) accessing education, employment and training.
- 3.9 The draft Economic Strategy provides the wider strategic framework for the Skills and Employment Strategy, skills being one of four themes outlined to achieve the vision.

Swindon Skills and Employment Strategy and the outcome of the Post 16 Area Review

Cabinet

Date: 6th September 2017

The Swindon Challenge Board and work with Schools

- 3.10 The proposed Skills and Employment Strategy contributes to the objectives of the Swindon Challenge Board with a number of projects specifically working with schools to improve outcome of young people in education. Schools are represented on the Skills and Employment Board and each of the sub groups and there are good links to the Swindon Association of Secondary Headteachers (SASH). Work with schools includes the work to reduce NEET, Careers Enterprise Network to improve employability, and work to raise awareness of Apprenticeship opportunities and to improve progression to University level education. A paper outlining the work of the Skills and Employment Board and its sub groups with schools is being presented to the Swindon Challenge Board in November 2017.

Review of progress of the Skills and Employment Strategy to date

- 3.11 The Skills & Employment Board has reviewed its progress to deliver the strategy, and it has been successful in achieving the following:
- 3.11.1 The successful set up and management of the partnership with appropriate representation of SBC, the LEP, employers, schools, colleges, training providers, commissioners, voluntary sector and wider delivery partners.
 - 3.11.2 The successful implementation of the Raising Participation Age/NEET Strategy. Effective partnership working is taking place between schools, colleges, training providers, the voluntary sector and employers. Work has specifically focused on strategies to ensure young people remain in learning after one year to their 18th birthday.
 - 3.11.3 The launch of the Careers and Enterprise Network. A network between senior business representatives and schools with the aim of ensuring robust Careers and Employability Plans are in place. All schools and colleges including special schools are part of the network.
 - 3.11.4 The launch of the first Jobfest in 2015 for young people aged 16-24 years and a third successful event in 2017. Over 40 employers and over 400 residents came together to showcase employment opportunities in Swindon.
 - 3.11.5 The implementation of the Higher Futures Programme in partnership with Wiltshire Council. The programme offers impartial information, advice, guidance and brokerage to Swindon employers on Apprenticeships and higher level skills training.

Swindon Skills and Employment Strategy and the outcome of the Post 16 Area Review

Cabinet

Date: 6th September 2017

- 3.11.6 The Implementation of the Apprenticeship Growth Strategy in partnership with employers. A number of events and activities to promote Apprenticeships to employers and to raise awareness and understanding of the Apprenticeship Levy. Work has been commissioned to ensure schools, young people and parents are aware of Apprenticeships as a progression pathway. Apprenticeship growth is strong with an annual average increase in starts of 9%. Work to ensure more Higher and Degree Apprenticeship are available is underway.
- 3.11.7 The implementation of the Community Learning Trust, a partnership between Community Learning providers. The Trust has worked together to reduce duplication and ensure we are working towards one single curriculum in Swindon. The Trust aims to improve the number of referrals between providers to ensure that learners are able to access progression to further learning, work or volunteering.
- 3.11.8 Effective partnership working to shape the spending specifications across the LEP for European Social Funding (ESF) programmes and co-ordination to ensure the programmes are integrated into the wider skills and employment offer.
- 3.11.9 A refresh of the Higher Education Strategy has taken place with a successful partnership workshop to drive this forward in September 2016. Work to submit a bid for a Higher Education Centre was submitted to the SWLEP Board in June 2016 but was unsuccessful. Work to ensure future successful working across the LEP and to ensure the development of a strategy for the area with a strong evidence base of need for Swindon and Wiltshire led to a paper outlining the direction of travel for a HE Strategy being agreed by the SWLEP Board in May 2017. The strategy is due to be finalised in April 2018. Work is also underway to prepare a bid for an Institute of Technology, focusing on the needs of Swindon (refer 3.23). SBC is working in partnership with Oxford Brookes University to ensure the successful delivery of the Study Higher Programme, a project working with 14-19 year olds to raise the aspiration and improve progression to University.

The Skills and Employment Strategy 2017-2020

- 3.12 Having achieved a number of successes in the 2013-16 strategy, the refreshed document outlines the specific outcomes and performance measures that it aims to achieve in the period 2017-2020. Draft action plans outlining the detail of the activities planned to achieve the strategy would be finalised once the strategy is approved by Cabinet. The priorities and outcomes are summarised below.

Swindon Skills and Employment Strategy and the outcome of the Post 16 Area Review

Cabinet

Date: 6th September 2017

- 3.13 **Ensure the skills system meets the needs of employers and learners** and facilitate collaborative approaches to the delivery of provision as outlined in the Post 16 Area Review recommendation.
- 3.14 **Skills for Growth** – Ensure business have the skills for the future and present workforce, including growth of apprenticeships and young people have the technical and employability skills needed.
 - 3.14.1 Inspire young people to further their skills and improve young people's preparation for the world of work by ensuring all schools and colleges have effective Careers and Employability Plans in place through the Careers and Enterprise Network.
 - 3.14.2 Increase the number of businesses employing an apprentice (Pledge 19) and raise awareness of apprenticeships amongst young people.
 - 3.14.3 Deliver the outputs in the revised Higher Futures Plan, working with business to meet their workforce skills needs and increase the number of residents embarking on a level 4 qualification.
- 3.15 **Skills for Inclusion** – Reduce unemployment and promote social inclusion by improving the participation of young people and adults in learning and securing progression to sustainable employment.
 - 3.15.1 Ensure all young people NEET or at risk of NEET have opportunities to progress to a positive and appropriate destination after 16.
 - 3.15.2 Increase the proportion of young people from vulnerable groups in learning, particularly Looked After Children/Care Leavers and young people with Special Educational Needs/Disabilities. Support the work of the 'Reducing Demand' Swindon Programme to increase the number of adults with a Learning Disability and with an Adult Social Care Package to access paid employment.
 - 3.15.3 Increase the proportion of Adult Learners progressing to further learning, work or volunteering.
 - 3.15.4 Develop Post 16 engaging and relevant sector based routes with skills providers to increase the percentage of young people achieving a Level 2 (GCSE level) by 19.
- 3.16 **Higher Education** - Secure a range of options to access Higher Education in Swindon that is responsive to employer need, contributes to narrowing the participation gap, makes sustained improvements in participation rates of young people and offers an opportunity for up-skilling whilst in employment.

Swindon Skills and Employment Strategy and the outcome of the Post 16 Area Review

Cabinet

Date: 6th September 2017

- 3.16.1 Clearly outline the options to grow University level provision in Swindon and outline the opportunities for investment. Submit a bid for an Institute of Technology within the timeframes outlined by the DfE.
- 3.16.2 Engage with Swindon employers to develop an attractive and sustainable curriculum that maximises the uptake of the improved Higher Education Offer.
- 3.16.3 Work with the LEP to ensure a LEP wide Higher Education Strategy is in place with the needs of Swindon employers and learners clearly articulated.
- 3.16.4 Create a greater learner demand by raising aspiration & achievement amongst Swindon residents (young and old). Specifically, increase the percentage of young people (under 25) moving from an A level programme or equivalent into University level provision.

Gloucestershire, Swindon and Wiltshire Post 16 Area Review

- 3.17 The Gloucestershire, Swindon and Wiltshire Post 16 Area Review took place between September 2016 and February 2017. The review was part of national post 16 reforms which focuses on Sixth Form Colleges and Further Education Colleges. The guidance outlines that Government expects the area reviews to “enable a transition towards fewer, larger, more resilient and efficient providers, and more effective collaboration across institution types.” The reviews were managed and chaired by the Further Education and Sixth Form College Commissioner (now part of the DfE). The review was overseen by a local Steering Group consisting of college chairs of governors and principals, LEP representatives, the local authorities, FE and Sixth Form College Commissioners and Regional School Commissioners. Swindon College, New College, Wiltshire College, Cirencester College, Gloucestershire and Hartpury Colleges were all included in the review. The review started by assessing the educational and economic needs of the area before evaluating institutional options to meet that need. For Swindon and Wiltshire, the LEP and the two LAs worked together to commission an evidence base and report to summarise the needs of employers and learners in the area and these findings were presented to the Steering Group and are summarised in the final report.
- 3.18 Despite the review being finalised in February 2017, the publishing of the final report was delayed until 3rd August 2017 due to the election. The Steering Group was required to keep the report confidential until the date of publication.
- 3.19 It should be noted that Institutions are responsible for deciding whether to accept any recommendations arising from a review. However, the Government has stated that it expects institutions to take action in light of the review’s findings.

Swindon Skills and Employment Strategy and the outcome of the Post 16 Area Review

Cabinet

Date: 6th September 2017

- 3.20 Reviews aim to achieve the following but it should be noted that the focus is on point 1, delivering institutions that are financially viable.
- 3.20.1 Institutions which are financially viable, sustainable, resilient and efficient and deliver maximum value for public investment. This may mean rationalised curriculum; multi campus colleges sharing back office functions.
 - 3.20.2 Delivering an offer that meets each area's economic and educational needs. This means that the skills vision of the LEP has been clearly articulated, and that consideration is given about how existing structures can be adapted to deliver provision more effectively and efficiently.
 - 3.20.3 Providers with strong reputations and greater specialisation. An important outcome will be clear progression routes to higher level skills, with providers focussing on what they can deliver effectively to a high standard.
 - 3.20.4 Sufficient access to high quality and relevant education and training for all. The curriculum on offer is inclusive to enable participation by all those with SEND.
 - 3.20.5 Colleges well equipped to respond to the reform and expansion of the apprenticeship programme. The government intends that apprenticeships are the biggest part of the vocational market. Innovative preparation by colleges in responding to the new employer led environment must be considered in the review.

Post 16 Area Review recommendations relating to Swindon

- 3.21 The recommendations were agreed by the Steering Group at its last meeting in February 2017. The review recommended that New College Swindon and Swindon College develop a proposal to merge by March 2017 with a view to implementing the merger by January 2018.
- 3.21.1 The LEP and LA supported this model as it would ensure the long term financial viability of both colleges with one cost effective FE College offer in Swindon to support the overall aim of improving post 16 attainment and progression. It would also ensure one 'single curriculum' for Swindon aligned to the skills needs and employment opportunities (a technical and academic offer) and maximise the use of resources to enable strong Apprenticeships delivery, an enhanced Higher Education offer and a curriculum which meets the needs of more vulnerable young people and adults.
 - 3.21.2 The merger proposal was not accepted by both colleges and there are no plans to implement the merger at this time although the situation may

Swindon Skills and Employment Strategy and the outcome of the Post 16 Area Review

Cabinet

Date: 6th September 2017

change in the future. The final report outlines that 'The New College Swindon Corporation declined to pursue this option and wishes to remain a stand-alone institution'. Swindon College Governors supported the recommendation for the two colleges to merge. Opportunities to move forward with collaborative approaches across the colleges are being followed up through the LEP wide Strategic Planning Group and locally through work between SBC and the colleges. This includes a collaborative approach to the development of Apprenticeships and Higher Education provision. The 2 colleges are key strategic and operational partners in the Swindon Skills and Employment Board and its sub groups and have a significant role in delivering the Skills and Employment Strategy.

- 3.21.3 Swindon Borough Council has no formal authority to compel change. However, the Council, through the Cabinet Member for the Economy and Skills along with the relevant senior officers, is able to act as a broker or facilitator between the two separate institutions.
- 3.22 The LEPs, local authorities and colleges should form 2 strategic planning groups (one for Gloucestershire and one for Swindon/Wiltshire).
 - 3.22.1 These should be co-terminus with each LEP and should monitor implementation of the review recommendations and drive the collaborative agenda relating to post-16 learning and skills. This is in addition to the formal review of the recommendations between the colleges and the DfE.
 - 3.22.2 The first meeting of the Swindon and Wiltshire LEP-wide Strategic Planning Group took place in May 2017, chaired by the LEP Director and attended by Wiltshire College, Swindon College, New College, Cirencester College, SBC, Wiltshire Council, and a DfE representative. The meeting focused on the plans for a collaborative Higher Education Strategy and the preparation of a bid for an Institute of Technology (IoT).
 - 3.22.3 Approaches to move forward with a Higher Education Strategy and an IoT bid were approved at the Swindon and Wiltshire LEP Board in May. It has been agreed that the IoT will focus on the needs of Swindon and meet the needs of Swindon and the surrounding area in N. Wiltshire. Swindon College is the lead FE college, working with the LEP, Employers and Universities to prepare for a bid. (Bid details are due out in the autumn).
- 3.23 The strategic planning groups should review the potential for the development of an IoT for their area.
 - 3.23.1 The government has outlined plans to create a number of Institutes of Technology with the aim of improving progression routes to higher level

Swindon Skills and Employment Strategy and the outcome of the Post 16 Area Review

Cabinet

Date: 6th September 2017

technical skills and meeting the skills gaps outlined by employers, particularly in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths) subjects. The guidance to date suggests that IoTs will be the next step for learners after 'A' level or equivalent and provide a route into a Degree level programme. They would be employer-led, with employers setting the vision, being part of the governance and having a key role in delivery.

3.23.2 If the bid is successful, the IoT would build on current provision and be an important part of wider work to raise aspirations and strengthen the local higher level skills provision. It would support the delivery of Pledge 19 to 'secure a range of options to access Higher Education in Swindon'. Work in preparation to submit a bid is underway, focusing initially on ensuring employer commitment and buy in.

Next Steps

3.24 If Cabinet approves the Strategy, the Skills and Employment Board would oversee implementation, with key links into the Economic Strategy and the Swindon Challenge Board. The Director of Children's Services is the officer responsible for its implementation in consultation with the Cabinet Member for the Economy and Skills. The three sub groups are in place, action plans have been drafted and these will be finalised once the strategy is agreed.

4. Alternative Options

4.1 Cabinet could decide that a Skills and Employment Strategy is not the best way forward or to focus on a different set of priorities for Skills and Employment and a different approach to their implementation. A coherent approach to skills and employment however is recommended to ensure that the large number of partners involved in funding, commissioning and delivering skills and employment solutions are all working to clearly defined outcomes and priorities with links to the LEP.

5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

5.1 Skills and Employment Provision is currently delivered by a wide range of providers, principally funded by the Education Funding Agency/Department for Education (DfE), Skills Funding Agency, Department of Work and Pensions and via European Funding. As part of Children and Families Integrated Teams, the Council provides support to 16/17 year olds who are NEET and the Skills and Employment team manage a small budget to commission activity to support Skills and Employment provision. Additional resources are available through the

Swindon Skills and Employment Strategy and the outcome of the Post 16 Area Review

Cabinet

Date: 6th September 2017

Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership, for example the £43M Structural Investment Fund.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.2 All legal and human rights implications have been taken into account in preparing this report. It is considered that the report's recommendations are compatible with Convention Rights.

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.3 There are no immediate implications for staff although, through the Economy Programme, officer priorities roles and capacity will be reviewed on an on-going basis.

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.4 A Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA) has been undertaken. The DIA supports work to target interventions where there is a demonstrable need, for example to particular age groups such as young people and reducing disparity of outcomes on the basis of protected Equality groups, for example reducing the employment gap between all residents and those with a disability. A copy of the report is available from the report author.

Risk Management

- 5.5 Skills and Employment funding and delivery presents a complex picture. Much of the funding is allocated based on a national system and maximum flexibilities and freedoms will need to be adopted in order to focus resources on the priorities and ensure provision is having an impact. Opportunities to be innovative and use funding differently will need to be explored in order to achieve the outcomes in the strategy and address some of the challenges. A risk register is kept up to date as part of the wider business planning process.

6. Consultees

- 6.1 The Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) and the Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports. .

7. Appendices

- 7.1 Appendix 1: Swindon Skills & Employment Strategy (*This appendix can be inspected on the Council's website and copies can be obtained from the Committee Officer*)

Swindon Skills and Employment Strategy and the outcome of the Post 16 Area Review

Cabinet

Date: 6th September 2017

7.2 Appendix 2: Skills and Employment Governance and Sub Groups (*This appendix can be inspected on the Council's website and copies can be obtained from the Committee Officer*)

8. Additional Documents

8.1 A copy of the Post 16 Area Review Report can be inspected on the Council's Cabinet website and is available on request from the report author.

9. Key Decision/Decision in Cabinet Work Programme

9.1 This is not a Key Decision and is included in the Cabinet Work Programme for September 2017.