

## **NOTE OF EMPLOYERS' SKILLS AND EDUCATION BOARD MEETING ON 16 FEBRUARY 2022**

### **The main purpose of the meeting was for Members to:**

- Review key developments since their last meeting on 19 January (including the Levelling Up White Paper and the latest information on the Shared Prosperity Fund) and respond to any issues raised during meetings of key groups held since last Board meeting
- Explore with Alice Choi, Chair of the LEP's Growth Board how the Employers' Skills and Education Board and the Growth Board might work together more effectively
- Reflect and agree next steps following the refresh of the Skills Report and the Labour Market Assessment and provide a steer on developing a purpose pyramid for the Employers' Skills and Education Board
- Receive an update on Local Growth Fund skills investments and identify any follow up action needed
- Review and comment on the Cheshire and Warrington proposal for a programme of skills bootcamps

### **KEY POINTS DISCUSSED**

- 1. Welcome, declarations of interest and sharing information on any key developments**
  - Nicola Dunbar welcome Alice Choi (Chief Operating Officer of McCann Medical and Chair of the LEP's Growth Board)
  - List of attendees and apologies attached (Annex A)
  - There were no additional declarations of interest.
- 2. Note of last meeting and outstanding actions**
  - The note of the last meeting was approved, and the list of updated actions noted.
- 3. LEP's Growth Board**
  - Nicola Dunbar and Alice Choi, Chair of the LEP's Growth Board led a discussion on how the Employers' Skills and Education Board and the Growth Board might work together more effectively. During the discussion Alice shared a number of slides and the following points were made:
    - The Growth Hub is an important asset for the LEP. It supports business (supporting innovation, and infrastructure as well as skills). It also collects intelligence from business about the current economic climate for local businesses.
    - The Growth Board wants to increase collaboration with other LEP Boards and wants to establish a clear strategic understanding of the issues facing business so that their work programme can be prioritised.
    - The Growth Hub's customer relationship management system enables more effective targeting of businesses – e.g., the recent targeting of employers interested in skills bootcamps.
    - Growth Hubs in different LEP areas are very different and reflect local circumstances – e.g., Oxfordshire Growth Hub makes extensive use of Instagram/social media. There is a lot of sharing of good practice between Growth Hubs.
    - Every business is different – so need to tailor the Growth Hub offers but Nicola Dunbar stressed the importance of strengthening the focus on digitalisation
    - Lots of businesses are struggling but there is a growing interest in healthy workplaces and preparing to return to workplaces – Warrington Council health teams are gearing up to provide support on these issues
    - Is there some way of taking forward the peer network programme (the focus on developing business resilience is particularly important)?
    - Businesses are struggling to fill vacancies and grappling with how to become more inclusive – how can we help employers to develop more diverse talent? Could we run workshops for employers (building on the good practice being developed by the Pledge)?

- A check list/good practice guide for employers to use when recruiting could be helpful in promoting diversity (improving the content of job adverts, recruitment practices)
- The Growth Hub is focused on providing proactive responses to business - could there be more support for social enterprises?
- The public sector could do more to ensure that public investments include commitments to support local communities

- In conclusion Nicola thanked Alice and Andy for attending the meeting and Alice agree to share her slides and ask Members to suggest follow up actions **ACTION ALICE CHOI AND ALL MEMBERS**

#### 4. **Feedback from key meetings/activities since last Employers' Skills and Education Board**

- Members noted the meetings that have taken place since the last Employers' Skills and Education Board meeting.

##### 4.1 **LEP Board**

- Nicola noted that the LEP CEO's latest report to the LEP Board had been circulated to Members.
- A key recent focus for the LEP Board has been the Levelling Up White Paper and the conclusion of the LEP Review.

##### 4.2 **Accelerate**

- Kurt was not present at the meeting and was asked (via Pat Jackson) to provide a progress report. **ACTION PAT/KURT**

##### 4.3 **Institute of Technology (IoT)**

- Dhesi reported that the first meeting with DfE had been held and 2 DfE project officers have now been appointed. The focus is to move forward over the next 6 months to achieve sign-off of the capital and governance arrangements. It is also important to further strengthen the employer representation on the IoT Board

##### 4.4 **Work Force Recovery and Economic Resilience Group**

- Pat Jackson reported that the Group are focusing on the long-term unemployed – initially in Warrington, Crewe and Ellesmere Port. Lead operational managers and partnership managers have been identified in Crewe, Ellesmere Port and Warrington and raw data about the longer term unemployed in Crewe has now been collated and similar data is being collated for Crewe and Ellesmere Port. Jobcentre Plus colleagues are hopeful that they will be allowed to use trackers to assess the literacy, numeracy and digital skills of unemployed people. The work programme in Crewe, Ellesmere Port and Warrington is due to start in late March/early April.

#### 5. **Levelling Up White Paper, Shared Prosperity Fund and Refresh of Skills Report – Next Steps**

##### 5.1 **Levelling Up White Paper and UK Shared Prosperity Fund**

- Members noted the publication of the Levelling Up White Paper and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund prospectus and expressed some concern at the Government's approach to focus on variations in disadvantage between regions of the country rather than within regions. Members were concerned about the impact of this approach on investment decisions which might be formula based. They agreed that it is important to ensure the Government has a better understanding of local challenges – e.g., in North Warrington, Crewe and Ellesmere Port.
- Members also noted the focus in the White Paper on systems changes needed to address levelling up
- Concern was expressed about the divides that exist between the ageing population, the numbers of people who are seeking work and the nature of current vacancies
- There was concern about the gap between ending of European Social Funding and the start of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund as well as a recognition that the current support for unemployed might need to be refocused on the long-term unemployed and those choosing economic inactivity.

- It was noted that the UK Shared Prosperity Fund has to be run at local level so administrative machinery will be needed – possibly to involve joining up across Cheshire and Warrington to create economies of scale.

## 5.2 Skills Purpose Pyramid

- Members noted the proposed changes to the Skills Purpose Pyramid – the pyramid might need to be revised following the meeting of the Task and Finish Group on 23 Feb when they will be focused on impact measurements.

## 5.3 Funding Priorities and the Future of the Jobs Portal

- It was noted that the LEP has not yet received their funding allocation but will need to prioritise funding.
- Nicola commented that it was a good time to review the Jobs Portal and the changing need for a portal – it had originally been set up in response to Covid in the expectation of large numbers of people seeking work – it was now being used by unemployed people but also increasing by local partners to develop a better understanding of current vacancies and the gap between the skills employers need vs the skills of unemployed people.
- Tim Smith commented that the Portal was useful in terms of real-time analysis of vacancies but advisors in the local authority tended to use other sources (Indeed) to help identify job opportunities for unemployed people.

## 6. Local Growth Fund Skills Investments

- Sarah Williams provided an update on progress to date for each of the Local Growth Fund skills investments and asked Members to make contact with the investments they are sponsoring to identify any key issues or areas where the investments might need support. It was noted that all the investments are struggling to engage employers.

## 7. Skills Bootcamps

- Pat reported that a proposal for a programme of skills bootcamps had been submitted to the Department for Education on 14 February. Pat thanked Members for their support in helping to develop the proposal at such short notice.
- Member expressed concern at the time the Department for Education had allowed for preparing the proposals but were impressed by the way local partners had worked together with Pat and Sarah William to develop a proposal with support from local employers. The Department for Education response to the proposal is expected by 28 Feb.

## 8. Pledge and Career Hub

- In Paul Colman's absence, Grace Sheldon provided an update on the Pledge and the development of a Cheshire and Warrington Careers Hub. Key points to note:
  - The Careers Hub priorities for 2022/23 were submitted to the Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) on 14 January. Initially the Hub will provide more strategic support for 21 schools/colleges with high numbers of students on free school meals in areas of deprivation.
  - On 9 Feb there was a quarterly review with CEC – the CEC are pleased with progress and work is under way across the Pledge team to prioritise support for schools/colleges that are struggling with their careers work. The CEC are keen to accelerate the development of the Careers Hub - all our schools/colleges will be invited to join the Hub over the next year. Members agreed that this was an important opportunity to accelerate progress.
  - A core element of the Careers Hub includes a cornerstone employers' group that can provide strategic leadership and work collaboratively to improve outcomes for our disadvantaged young people. A small group of employers will initially be invited to join the group. The first

meeting will be 3<sup>rd</sup> March 9.00- 10.00 and Members were asked to identify any individuals from local businesses that might join the group. **ACTION ALL MEMBERS**

- Another key requirement of the Careers Hub is a steering group to provide strategic direction and oversee delivery of the strategic hub plan and performance against key performance indicators. Members agreed that it would be important that the steering group fits within the existing governance structures whilst maintaining a focus on Careers Hub issues.
- Members agreed that the Careers Hub Steering Group should be established as a new governance group with a clear careers hub remit with members to include representatives of local schools in Crewe, Ellesmere Port and Warrington and some joint membership with the Pledge Management Board. The Careers Hub Steering Group would meet quarterly immediately following Pledge Management Board meetings (reduced to quarterly).
- The 26<sup>th</sup> January careers conference had a good attendance from schools and colleges who are keen to collaborate and share good practice. A recent survey of career leads in schools had identified resourcing problems and the need to increase engagement with senior leaders and governors in schools
- On the 1<sup>st</sup> July the Pledge intend to host a face-to-face network event that brings together approximately 150 stakeholders to celebrate successes, highlight future priorities, share best practice and build momentum for the next phase of work including the Careers Hub. Members were asked to put the date in their diaries and suggest suitable venues **ACTION ALL MEMBERS**

#### 9. **Any Other Business and Date of Next Meetings**

- There was no further business. Date of next meetings 16 March 2022
- Items for the next agenda include:
  - A presentation from Hartree (suggested by Phil Atkinson)
  - A discussion with Colin Billingsley (Jobcentre Plus) about planned work with longer-term unemployed people in Crewe, Warrington and Ellesmere Port
  - A discussion about the consultation by Cheshire and Warrington's Sustainable and Inclusive Growth Commission
  - Update from Employers' Skills and Education Board Local Growth Fund Skills investment sponsors

The following members of the Employers' Skills and Education Board attended the meeting:

- \*Nicola Dunbar (Deputy Chair)
- Tim Smith representing \*Eleanor Blackburn (Warrington Borough Council)
- Dhesi (Cheshire College South and West – representing the training providers)
- \*Matt Smith (Cheshire West and Chester)
- \*Lucy Liang (AUE Ltd)
- Maggie Chen
- Kevin Hutchinson (SISK)
- Julia Teale Mid Cheshire Health Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
- Pat Jackson (LEP) \*With voting rights

**Apologies**

- \*Kath Mackay - Chair
- \*Phil Atkinson (Daresbury)
- \*Bill Carr (Carpe Diem)
- Sarah Hopkinson (Engie)
- Nicola Johnson (Bentley Motors)
- Cllr James Nicholas (Cheshire East)
- Paul Colman (South Cheshire Chamber)
- Kurt Allman (University of Chester)
- Kim Hardman (Astra Zeneca)
- Ben Longworth (BAE Systems)

**Also attending**

- Alice Choi (Chair of Growth Board)
- Umu Timbo (Department for Education – working on skills bootcamps)
- Sarah Williams, David Brennan, Grace Sheldon, Andy Devaney and Trevor Langston for specific agenda items

**Papers copied to:**

- Trevor Brocklebank (Deputy Chair of LEP)
- Martin Wood (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy)
- Jamie Zucker (DfE)
- Clare Cassidy (DfE)
- Mike McLouglin (DfE)
- Peter Skates (Cheshire East Council)
- Kirstie Simpson (University of Chester)
- Nicola Said (LEP)
- Joe Manning (LEP)
- Andy Devaney (LEP)
- Sarah Williams (LEP) and Trevor Langston (LEP)
- Andrew Bridge and Dave Rowlands (CITB)