

## **NOTE OF CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON - EMPLOYERS SKILLS AND EDUCATION BOARD MEETING ON 14 JULY 2021**

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

- Members to review key developments since the 16 June including changes to Covid restrictions
- Members to receive feedback from meetings/activities of key groups held since last Board meeting
- To provide a steer on how skills and education should fit within the wider longer-term ambition for Cheshire and Warrington to have a sustainable, healthy, inclusive and fast-growing economy

### **KEY POINTS DICUSSED**

**1. Welcome, and declarations of interest - list of attendees and apologies (Annex A).**

Kath Mackay welcomed everyone to the meeting. There were no declarations of interest.

**2. Key developments since the last meeting on 16 June**

Members noted the key meetings held since their last meeting (as listed on the agenda).

Members noted the recent good news about the reinvestment in the Vauxhall plant in Ellesmere Port. The announcement was the result of good collaborative work amongst partners to secure the investment which would safeguard local jobs and provide a basis on which to build for the future.

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

**3.1 Accelerate**

Kurt Allman updated Members on his recent discussions with the Department for Work and Pensions about a project change request. Kurt also updated Members on the current numbers of learners being funded via Accelerate.

**3.2. LEP Board meetings**

Kath Mackay reported that since the 16 June there had been a LEP Board meeting and a LEP Board awayday. The last LEP Board meeting had focused on the current local Covid situation and any associated significant disruption to business.

Kath noted that businesses appeared to be relatively content with levels of trade and were, in general not taking advantage of business grants – they wanted to get back to 'business as normal' as quickly as possible. There was general concern about the impact of the planned removal of Covid restrictions on 19 July and the likely increase in cases.

The LEP review was currently on hold because of a focus on the levelling up agenda but Ministers are keen for LEPs to work strategically.

Kath also noted the work of the Sustainability and Inclusion Commission and Pat Jackson reminded Members that there was an outstanding action to invite the Chair of the Commission to a future meeting of the Employers' Skills and Education Board.

**3.3. Digital Skills Partnership (DSP) Board**

Nicola Dunbar was not present at the meeting and no update was provided.

### 3.4 **Institute of Technology**

Dhesi noted that since submitting the bid for an Institute of Technology he had only received one technical enquiry from the Department for Education. He expected to hear more towards the end of October.

### 3.5 **Skills Accelerator**

Dhesi reported that successful bids for the Skills Development Fund and the Local Skills Improvement Plan would be announced on 16 July.

**Update** - Minister announced that the Skills Development Fund bid from the local colleges (led by Cheshire College South and West) has been successful but the bid from the Chambers (led by Chester and North Wales Chamber) was unsuccessful.

### 3.6 **Pledge**

Paul Colman reported that the Pledge was performing well and hitting the targets set by funders. The Pledge Management Board are now taking stock and developing plans for the longer term. They are reviewing data, overall impact and supporting infrastructure.

### 3.7 **Data and Labour Market Steering Group**

Pat Jackson noted that the Low Carbon report was almost finished but had been delayed until the publication of the Siemens report – this would enable the Low Carbon report to make appropriate references to the Siemens report.

The Data and Labour Market Group are now overseeing the preparation of the next Covid report – this will provide information about real-time data as well as historical data.

Work is also underway to build on the occupational maps produced by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education by setting the maps within the context of the Cheshire and Warrington labour market.

### 3.8 **Local Growth Fund**

Sarah Williams reported that during the breakout sessions that followed the recent Local Growth Fund Show Case event a number of themes for future action emerged:

- Develop a clear, collective future strategy so everyone is pushing the same vision and objectives
- Starting to inspire a younger age – working with primaries
- Projects to share the experience of working with local communities (possibly via a small workshop and a potential theme for the next showcase)
- Digital inclusion to consider skills and internet connectivity as well as access to equipment
- Projects to work together to develop a clear marketing and engagement strategy

A summary of the reflections made by Dhesi and Phil Atkinson had also been prepared and this together with a summary of key points from the other presentations would form the basis of a short video.

At the end of June there had also been a workshop with the Local Growth Fund projects to establish a common understanding of the LGF outputs.

The next reporting on outputs from each of the projects is due in September and reports will be discussed at the October Employers' Skills and Education Board meeting. Members were

asked to contact the projects they are sponsoring during September. **ACTION ALL LOCAL GROWTH FUND PROJECT SPONSORS**

#### **4. Sustainable, Healthy, Inclusive and Fast-Growing Economy**

Members reviewed the skills-related evidence base. They considered the evidence for each of the 4 themes (sustainable, healthy, inclusive, fast-growing), identified any gaps in evidence and/or in the proposed actions set out in the Skills Report Action Plan

##### **4.1 Sustainable**

Lucy Liang and Dhesi facilitated the discussion during which the following points were made:

- Sustainability is a big agenda - do we have a shared understanding of 'sustainable', where do we want to focus of efforts and what do we want to achieve for Cheshire and Warrington in 5 years?
- Decarbonisation, reduction of carbon emissions and working with net zero businesses are all important issues if we are to deliver clean growth, a carbon neutral economy and sustainable cities and towns where people want to live and work.
- There is still a level of uncertainty around how we will decarbonise (do we have the right technologies?). The technologies are changing very rapidly and there is uncertainty around where to invest for the future – both the Institute of Technology and the Skills Accelerator will help to address the challenges of developing a sustainable economy.
- Sustainable, healthy, inclusive, and fast growing are cross-cutting themes which need to be applied to the Skills Action Plan.
- The Action Plan should be modified to indicate the actions which address each of the 4 themes.
- We also need to consider the environmental aspects of sustainability (land use and potential links to the rural economy).
- Changes in working practice (e.g., more hybrid working) as a result of/accelerated by Covid, will also impact on sustainability.
- Decarbonisation is important but we also need to consider sustainable decision making to support all areas of growth to ensure a clean, low carbon impact.
- Innovation will be important to enable the use of new, low carbon materials and more sustainable business practices within supply chains.
- Bentley is already carbon neutral and keen to share their experiences.
- In Crewe they have started to introduce the concept of a '20-minute community' within which people should be able to walk and access a range of facilities.
- We need to consider how to reduce energy use (e.g., thermal insulation and heat pumps) not just develop different ways to generate energy.
- How can we address the current levels of unemployment and the current numbers of vacancies – what more can we do to help individuals develop the skills they need for employment and to help employers adjust their expectations and align them more with young people's passions. More jobs e.g., in the care sector need to be professionalised.

##### **4.2. Healthy**

Leah facilitated the discussion during which the following points were made:

- The health and care sector are likely to offer longer-term job opportunities. There are examples of good practice, but it is important to manage the expectations of employers and unemployed people seeking work. Employers might need to consider offering more flexible working arrangements e.g., job sharing.
- Unemployed and economically inactive individuals with health-related barriers to employment is also an issue - as well as individuals having the digital skills to access health and community services.

- The impact of mental illness is also a big issue – we need to understand more about the impact of mental illness within the workplace and, also in accessing training.
- The information being collected by the Workforce Recovery Group will help us to understand more about the labour market and know more about the barriers faced by unemployed people and the support available to them.
- We need a multi-agency approach to address these issues.
- There is some good practice in helping people with health-related issues to get into work – we need to share good practice.

#### 4.3 **Inclusive**

Maggie and Eleanor facilitated the discussion during which the following points were made:

- The statistics were very powerful and quite shocking. The statistics need to be used to help argue the case for additional Government funding.
- We need to consider inclusivity in terms of digital, work and school/college.
- Warrington has good digital connectivity but the situation in Cheshire East and West is more challenging. In addition, older people have lower IT access and affordability is a big issue.
- It was noted that the recently published Lloyds Digital Index quoted the following national statistics:
  - 55% of those offline earn under £20k
  - 1 in 10 of those offline are under 50 years old
  - 14% of people offline don't have access to broadband in their area
  - 26% of people offline don't understand the benefits
  - 50% of people think the internet is too difficult to use
  - 51% are worried about having their identity taken
  - 51% are worried about their privacy and security
- In addition, many people use their mobile phones to access digital services (83% of users of the Job Portal are accessing via their mobile phones).
- Volunteering is a potential opportunity that would encourage younger people to mentor people needing to access the internet and digital services.
- David Brennan shared a set of slides showing the sharp increase in long-term unemployed and the concentration of longer-term unemployed people in areas of multiple deprivation.
- We also need to consider actions to attract and retain talent – providing information about lifestyle, housing, and restaurants as well as jobs. We need to develop a stronger proposition. (Some of these issues are being considered as part of the Growth Hub's work on inward investment).
- We also need to consider more about inclusivity in terms of gender and ethnicity and are we being proactive in ensuring young people with disabilities are able to access work experience.

#### 4.4 **Fast Growing**

Phil Atkinson, Paul Colman and Kurt facilitated this discussion during which the following points were made:

- What does 'fast-growing' mean – is it in terms of jobs or gross value added? Will it benefit the citizens of Cheshire and Warrington?
- We need more highly skilled jobs and need to address the challenges of replacement demand as well as new jobs.
- Significant numbers of people are removing themselves from the labour market in response to Covid - what can we do to attract them back to the labour market –

reskilling and upskilling are key issues to be addressed as well as encouraging more flexible and blended learning.

- The Pledge needs to do more to make young people aware of new technologies and career opportunities – this should include young people in primary as well as secondary and further education.
- There is a tension between growth and sustainability - chasing growth can result in leaving people behind.
- We must not ignore the fact that the majority are looking for jobs to enable them to live comfortably and enjoy a particular lifestyle.

Kath thanked everyone for their contributions, and it was agreed that Kath, Pat and Sarah Williams would follow up by reviewing the points made during the discussion, checking the extent to which they are reflected in the action plan and then propose additions to the plan where necessary.

#### **ACTION KATH, PAT AND SARAH**

#### **5. Jobs Opportunities Portal**

Sarah Williams presented a series of slides that summarised the recent developments of the Jobs Portal.

Recently on average each week:

- we have reached 30k people via social media
- we have had a click through rate from social media to the Portal of 4.3% (significantly above the average click through rate from Facebook of 0.55%) this was 2.11% in March 2021
- we have had 2,509 unique visits to the site, the most popular pages visited being the jobs search pages and the apprenticeship page

The most popular search terms include:

- Part time
- Administrator
- Healthcare
- Retail
- Life Sciences
- Business and Finance

#### **6. Note of last meeting on 16 June and Action list**

The note of the last meeting was agreed, and the updated action list noted.

#### **7. Any Other Business**

There was no further business.

#### **8. Date of next meeting - 15 September 2021**

The following members of the Employers' Skills and Education Board are expected to attend the meeting:

- \*Kath Mackay - Chair
- Kurt Allman (University of Chester)
- \*Eleanor Blackburn (Warrington Borough Council)
- \*Phil Atkinson (Daresbury)
- Paul Colman (South Cheshire Chamber)
- \*Cllr James Nicholas (Cheshire East Council)
- Dhesi (Cheshire College South and West – representing the training providers)
- Gemma Betteridge (representing Nicola Johnson from Bentley Motors)
- Nicola Merriman (National Skills Academy Nuclear)
- Maggie Chen
- \*Lucy Liang (AUE Ltd)
- Paul Kelly (BAE Systems)
- \*Leah Maltby (representing Clare Latham from Cheshire West and Chester Council)
- Pat Jackson (LEP) \*With voting rights

**Apologies**

- \*Nicola Dunbar (Deputy Chair)
- \*Bill Carr (Carpe Diem)
- Kim Hardman (Astra Zeneca)
- \*Clare Latham (Cheshire West and Chester)
- Louise Higgins (United Utilities)
- Nicola Johnson (Bentley Motors)
- Sarah Hopkinson (Engie)
- Martin Wood (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) – observer

**Also attended**

- Trevor Langston, Sarah Williams and David Brennan for specific agenda items

**Papers copied to:**

- Trevor Brocklebank (Deputy Chair of LEP)
- Jamie Zucker (DfE)
- Clare Cassidy (DfE)
- Mike McLoughlin (DfE)
- Peter Skates (Cheshire East Council)
- Maud Duthie (University of Chester)
- Chris Koral (University of Chester)
- Nicola Said (LEP)
- Joe Manning (LEP)
- Andy Devaney (LEP)
- Sarah Williams (LEP)

Trevor Langston (LEP