
Meeting: Executive
Date: 27 March 2012
Subject: Central Bedfordshire All Age Skills Strategy
Report of: Cllr Ken Matthews, Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Strategic Planning and Economic Development
Summary: The report presents the All Age Skills Strategy for consideration and proposes that the executive approve the role of the Council in supporting the delivery of the strategy.

Advising Officer: Gary Alderson, Director of Sustainable Communities
Contact Officers: Kate McFarlane, Head of Community Regeneration and Adult Skills
Liz Wade, Assistant Director, Economic Growth, Regeneration and Skills
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Executive
Key Decision Yes
Reason for urgency/ exemption from call-in (if appropriate) N/A

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

The vision of the Sustainable Communities Strategy is “To ensure Central Bedfordshire is Globally Connected, Delivering Sustainable Growth to ensure a Green, Prosperous and Ambitious Place for the Benefit of All”.

The Strategy will be delivered through two underpinning key themes of creating the conditions for economic success and community prosperity and raising standards and tackling inequality in order to deliver 26,000 new homes and 27,000 new jobs by 2026.

The All Age Skills Strategy will underpin the Economic Development Plan (EDP) themes by supporting business to grow and thrive, getting our residents into work and increasing the supply of our skilled people. It will also support the implementation of the 2012/13 EDP priorities of youth unemployment and employer engagement. The strategy will build on the educating, protecting and providing opportunities for Children and Young People as stated in the Children and Young People’s Plan.

The All Age Skills Strategy supports the emerging political priorities for the medium term by:

- Enhancing Central Bedfordshire as a place, through increased jobs
- Improving educational attainment
- Promoting health and well being and protecting the vulnerable
- Offering value for money by maximizing the impact of Council skills investments

Financial:

1. The development of the All Age Skills Strategy and the costs of consultations have been met through the 2011/12 Economic Development, Skills and Regeneration budget. Future activities in delivering the strategy will be funded through a mixture of direct support through the Council’s existing budgets, re-aligning partners’ core budgets, seeking to maximise private sector funding and leverage of external funding.
2. The Council is in receipt of significant external grants to support the delivery of skills activity and into work activity including Skills Funding Agency (SFA) allocation of £1.6M in 2011/12, European Social Fund (ESF) 2007-2013 co-financing programme of £4.4M, and Department for Education and Skills. Each grant scheme has its own allocation criteria and the Council will need to recognise the possibility of changes in the future to funding streams and associated activities.
3. As the All Age Skills Strategy outlines three priorities there will be a need to optimise the level of resourcing amongst the three areas. The medium term outlook for the economy is for relatively low growth and the implication is that governmental funding may remain uncertain, less than demand or targeted to specific purposes. The Council and its partners will need to remain alert to funding opportunities, and to continue to enhance its reputation for successful delivery so as to remain at the forefront of accessing funds. The success of executing the All Age Skills Strategy is highly reliant on accessing external funds and influencing and organising the various partners and delivery agents. There is some risk that funding restrictions over the medium term may impede the delivery of aspects of the All Age Skills Strategy.

Legal:

4. There are no statutory requirements for the Council to produce an All Age Skills Strategy. However, the Council will be able to demonstrate its leadership and being open for business on the economic development and skills agendas under Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 to promote or improve the economic well-being of its area.
5. Within the 2008 Education and Skills Act, the Council has a statutory duty to secure sufficient suitable education and training opportunities to meet the reasonable needs of young people in the Council area. This includes all young people up to the age of 18 by 2015 as defined within the Raising of the Participation Age.

Risk Management:

6. Risk of doing nothing: Would perpetuate the disconnect between the needs of the economy, employers and aspirations of our residents. There has been a significant level of skills partner engagement to date and lack of progress moving forward could reflect negatively on the Council as the organisation who has led the work to date
7. Failure: Risk of failure to deliver the priorities identified in the All Age Skills Strategy due to lack of engagement of employers, skills partners unwilling to move to taking a more central role in driving the agenda forward in the future.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

8. No implications are directly raised by the adoption of this policy. However, the priorities, and implementation of this strategy will shape the further review of direct services provided by the Council. This could result in there being future staffing implications. In these circumstances the Council is required to undertake consultation with our recognised Trade Unions and affected employees and will be taken forward in accordance with Central Bedfordshire Council's Managing Change policy.

Equalities/Human Rights:

9. Public authorities have a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and to foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
10. In developing the All Age Skills Strategy the findings from the Local Economic Assessment on equalities considerations and target groups have been utilised to inform key priorities. A full thirteen week public consultation process has been implemented to maximise engagement with the development of the strategy as has a series of workshops, focus groups and meetings with individuals, providers, stakeholders and employers.

11. A comprehensive Equality Impact Assessment has been completed. The target groups identified within the Local Economic Assessment and the Equality Impact Assessment as requiring additional support to access the labour market and develop their skills are: 18-24 year olds and over 50s, disabled people and ethnic minorities, especially gypsies and travellers. These groups have been prioritised within priority 3 of the strategy “Raising Individuals Aspirations and Achievements” which proposes to Promote the benefits of learning to individuals of all ages, promote the opportunities available and to support the provision of opportunities that are appropriate to the needs of particular groups and areas.

Public Health:

12. There is a strong relationship between skills and employment and health and wellbeing. Those who are more highly skilled are more likely to secure employment and to enjoy higher standards of living, contributing to better physical and mental health. Concurrently, poor health and disability can contribute to lower attainment and economic inactivity. The All Age Skills Strategy recognises the need to support individuals for whom health issues and disabilities represent a barrier to accessing learning opportunities.

Community Safety:

13. Access to skills, training and employment are key factors in preventing offending behaviour and breaking historic patterns of offending for individuals and within families. The Council has a statutory duty to do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area. The All Age Skills Strategy, particularly in relation to the priority around raising individuals’ aspirations and achievements by working with partners such as Youth Offending Services, Bedfordshire Probation Trust, Integrated Youth Support Services and Community Safety Teams, will help to fulfil this duty.

Sustainability:

14. Fundamentally matching employment with the needs of our growing resident population is directly addressing the longer term sustainability of Central Bedfordshire by reducing out commuting. The All Age Skills Strategy is aligned to the Economic Development Plan which fits with the Council’s Climate Change Strategy.

Procurement:

15. Where necessary the services required to support this strategy will be exposed to competition in accordance with the procurement procedure rules.
16. Any engagement with partner organisations or external service providers will be formalised through an appropriate agreement (prepared in accordance with the procurement toolkit) which contains a statement of requirements (or specification), a set of contract terms and conditions, performance metrics and remuneration arrangements.

Overview and Scrutiny:

17. The draft All Age Skills Strategy and role of the Local Authority in supporting its delivery has been considered at the 28 February 2012 Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee joined by the members of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

The Executive is asked to:

1. **Approve the Central Bedfordshire All Age Skills Strategy as an integrated part of delivery against the Council's Economic Development Plan.**

Reason for Recommendation(s): To put in place a Central Bedfordshire wide All Age Skills Strategy that sets the strategic direction for the Council and its partners in addressing the skills needs of employers and individuals and aims to better align local provision to meet those needs in order to enhance Central Bedfordshire as a place to live and work.

Executive Summary

18. The All Age Skills Strategy provides the strategic direction for the Council and its partners in addressing skills needs across Central Bedfordshire. The strategy has a critical role to play in delivering the EDP themes of supporting business to grow and thrive, getting our residents into work and increasing the supply of our skilled people. It sets out the ways in which Central Bedfordshire skills partners will work with individuals, businesses and the wider economy.
19. It has been developed as a way to better integrate the skills that employers and the Central Bedfordshire economy need now and in the future, with the provision of local providers. It aims also to meet the needs of individuals and local communities. Whilst the Council has led the development of the strategy to date, it has done so by working together with employers, providers, individuals and stakeholders through a formal thirteen week consultation period including a series of stakeholder workshops, focus groups with individuals and interviews with employers. The council has a role to play in delivering the strategy but it is clear in many cases that the actions needed and leadership required will not be our responsibility but the Council will actively support and facilitate partners to achieve the strategic priorities.

All Age Skills Strategy

20. The All Age Skills Strategy, attached at Appendix A contains three high level priorities around working together, developing the current and future workforce and raising individuals' aspirations and achievements. The priorities are underpinned by key actions for all skills partners.
21. **All Age Skills Priorities and Actions**
The three high level priorities contained within the strategy are:

- (a) Priority 1: Working Together : Enhance partnership working and improve the availability and dissemination of local labour market intelligence

Key actions:

- Build employer ownership of the skills agenda through ongoing dialogue with employers about skills in order to promote how skills can improve competitiveness, to understand what is needed, provide support to navigate skills training options and drive up quality of provision.
- Develop an effective skills partnership by bringing together an employer led skills forum

- (b) Priority 2: Developing the Future and Current Workforce : Increasing the proportion of the workforce with recognised skills and supporting access to academic and vocational opportunities

Key actions:

- Ensure that Central Bedfordshire businesses can improve their competitiveness through investment in workforce skills by encouraging businesses to invest in upskilling their workforce through promoting examples of successful outcomes
- Promote the value and awareness of academic and vocational qualifications to employers and current and future workforce by building on employer-learning provider relationships
- Encourage training providers to respond to the future skills requirements of employers by sharing and providing local business information to inform future provision

- (c) Priority 3: Raising Individual Aspiration and Achievements: Promote and raise awareness of the support and opportunities locally available for our residents of all ages and the importance of gaining appropriate skills in achieving those ambitions

Key actions:

- Support careers advice to incorporate local labour market intelligence to better equip young people and adults to make better informed decisions
- Promote the benefits of learning to individuals of all ages and promote the opportunities available through local case studies and role models
- Support the provision of opportunities that are appropriate to the needs of particular groups and areas through a better match job of vacancies with job seekers
- Support the development of employability skills, through training, work placements, volunteering and enterprise by encouraging local employers and educational establishments to strengthen focus on preparation for the workplace

Implementing the Strategy

22. **The role of Partners**

Central Bedfordshire Council is committed to working with all partners to strengthen the links and understanding between local employers and providers to ensure that a stream of appropriately skilled people is able to progress in and through employment across our area. The Council will seek to encourage local employers or providers to step forward to lead a dialogue that will establish new ways to better meet those needs against the priorities set out in this strategy. This will benefit the Central Bedfordshire economy, businesses, people and communities. In developing the strategy the consultation and recent conversations suggest that this approach by the Council to bring employers and providers closer is welcomed by skills partners and business representatives. Offers to lead, contribute and to build on existing local good practice and emerging models are being received.

23. **The Central Bedfordshire Council Contribution**

As the largest employer in the area hundreds of Council staff are engaged in the delivery, commissioning or policy development around enhancing the skills of business, residents and Council as an organisation. This wide range of provision includes professional workforce development in education, Adult Social Care and Housing and other professional service disciplines; family learning; apprenticeships; those Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs); helping those that have specific learning needs and disabilities to progress into employment; informal learning; statutory education provision; and equipping volunteers and community members to engage in providing better public services and contributing to the place they live. Leading to thousands of our residents and our staff being trained each year. Rarely brought together, this contribution to the general workforce skill levels across our area is significant and could be better focussed and promoted.

24. **Working within the Council**

We will review, better co-ordinate and promote the range of skills activity we deliver to maximise the impact of our skills investments to include the current Economic Development Plan priorities.

Specifically by September 2013:

- (i) Target funded skills provision to those with the lowest skills and furthest from the labour market by utilising robust local intelligence. In 2012/13 the priority as stated in the EDP will be unemployed 16 – 24 yr olds
- (ii) Support and deliver workforce development activities to key sectors, such as adult social care and children's workforce, including increased focus on apprenticeships
- (iii) Enable a cross council approach to working with local providers to inform future provision based on the needs of employers
- (iv) Develop progression routes from statutory education and training into higher education or employment in line with the Council and partners' plans for the increasing school leaving age

Working Outside the Council

25. Over the next two years we will support the development of a collaborative employer engagement framework across the skills partnership area to encourage greater engagement with our businesses in shaping local provision. Increasing shared understanding of both opportunities and workforce needs now and in the future. Specifically by April 2014:
- (i) Facilitate the integration of local employers with providers to establish new ways of joint working to drive forward the skills agenda and increase local prosperity
 - (ii) Roll out a Central Bedfordshire wide employer engagement framework that builds relationships with key employers and provides a mechanism to gather and impart data and share information to assist the new All Age Career Service and influence skills agencies
 - (iii) We will extend the strategy approach beyond the Central Bedfordshire Council area to other south East Midland Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP) partners recognising the economic geography and the need to join up and seek benefits for business across a wider area as well as achieving local authority efficiencies through collaboration
 - (iv) To make the case to employers and individuals, including through intermediaries, on the need to invest in skills, use case studies and local role models

Measuring Success

26. It is proposed to monitor the success of the strategy on an annual basis using the following core indicators as part of an annual review of the Local Economic Assessment to inform future years' delivery plans. The key measures of success, which will be supported by a wider basket of indicators, are:
- (a) Reduced level of reported business skills gaps and shortages
 - (b) To maintain the employment rate of Central Bedfordshire, so that it is 5% higher than the national average
 - (c) To be in the top 50% nationally of Key Stage 4 results for (1 measure) 5 A*-C, including English and Maths GCSE by 2014
 - (d) % of working age people with level 2, 3, 4 qualifications

Consultation

27. The All Age Skills Strategy, at Appendix A has been developed through a series of external stakeholder workshops attended by 60 people, over 100 individuals participating in a number of focus groups or interviews and business interviews with 20 employers.
28. The full findings from the workshops and focus groups are available online at <http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/learning/adult-learning/all-age-skills-strategy.aspx> and can be summarised as:

- (a) Businesses have to be at the heart of delivering the Strategy with a coordinated and commercially valuable skills improvement offer, based on up to date local labour market intelligence, to ensure that businesses “buy-in” to the local skills
- (b) The need to support aspirations to generate demand for skills improvement
- (c) Continued support for the principles of the All Age Skills Strategy and enthusiasm to support its implementation with a focus on partnership working
- (d) Need to roll out best practice across all provision to be better co-ordinated and focused in a common direction
- (e) The importance and challenge of effective business engagement is key to delivering the strategy
- (f) A key focus for the strategy should be on schools and young people

Appendices:

Appendix A – Central Bedfordshire All Age Skills Strategy

Background Papers: (open to public inspection) -
All Age Skills Strategy Equality Impact Assessment
Local Economic Assessment
Business Survey 2011
Consultation Reports