

Central Bedfordshire Council

EXECUTIVE

11 October 2016

All Age Skills Strategy (AASS)

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This report relates to a Key Decision

Purpose of this report

1. To seek Executive approval of the All Age Skills Strategy (AASS).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive is asked to:

1. **approve the All Age Skills Strategy to provide the framework of the Council's employment and skills activities from 2016-2020 with performance reported through the Council's Five Year Plan monitoring arrangements.**

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

2. The AASS was considered by a joint meeting of the Sustainable Communities and Children's Service Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 18 August 2016. The Committee recognised the importance of ensuring the focus is on all age skills that spans from young people through to adults. It was recommended that Executive approve the All Age Skills Strategy with performance reported through the Council's Five Year Plan performance monitoring arrangements.

Background

3. Central Bedfordshire Council's (CBC) first All Age Skills Strategy was approved by Executive on 27 March 2012. This refreshed All Age Skills Strategy 2016 – 2020 has a critical role to play in enabling Central Bedfordshire to achieve its full economic potential and in delivering the Council's 5 Year Plan priorities to support education and skills, and business growth and prosperity.

4. In an increasingly competitive world, skills have a critical role to play. Individuals require skills to enable them to secure and progress in employment; businesses need a skilled workforce to stimulate productivity, encourage competitiveness and innovation; and collectively skills are required to support the local economy to compete nationally and internationally.
5. The aim of the strategy is to enable the delivery of a flexible and responsive workforce that meets the needs of employers, ensuring that our residents have the opportunities to develop the skills they need for work.
6. This Council wide strategy responds to the need to better align skills provision, provide employer-informed careers advice and progression pathways for young people and adults of all ages with routes into employment. It seeks to move away from an approach that has been developed around each directorate to one that is built around local demand and need for services.
7. Key partners and stakeholders have been engaged in reviewing the strategy, including local employers through the private sector Employment and Skills Board, Jobcentre Plus, South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP) Skills Forum, CBC Welfare Reform Board, leaders from schools at the CBC Not in Employment, Education and Training (NEET) Strategy Group and the Herts and Beds Provider Network. Focus groups were held with service users of the local workclub and with the Youth Parliament.
8. The aspiration of the All Age Skills Strategy is “To provide the best possible opportunities for our residents to develop their skills and reach their potential so that local businesses can prosper and grow.”
9. The Aims and objectives of the strategy are:

Aim 1: Working Together

Objective 1: Bringing together partners to ensure that the skills needs of employers, schools, individuals and the growing economy are understood and met. We will:

- Share local economic intelligence to inform local evidence based commissioning and provision
- Establish a Central Bedfordshire Employment and Skills Partnership to share intelligence and shape local provision
- Maximise opportunities for funding
- Work in partnership with SEMLEP and engage with wider partnership networks
- Build on evidence of Area Based Reviews and develop sufficiency statements for 16-19 provision

Objective 2: Responding to employer skills and employment needs and building employer ownership. We will:

- Facilitate an employer-led Employment and Skills Board to provide critical intelligence on business skills requirements
- Develop an in-depth understanding of our key growth and employment sector skills' needs
- Use local intelligence to inform commissioning priorities
- Work with partners to develop skills packages and pathways tailored to employer requirements
- Encourage local Skills Champions and Business Skills Ambassadors
- Develop a new local offer to schools to improve effectiveness of 14-19 provision

Aim 2: Raising Individuals' Aspirations and Achievements

Objective 3: Supporting careers advice to incorporate local labour market intelligence to better equip young people and adults to make better informed decisions. We will:

- Encourage schools to sign up to the Minimum Standards for Careers Education, Information Advice and Guidance (CEIAG)
- Work in partnership with SEMLEP Careers Enterprise Company to maximise benefits for local schools
- Work with partners to influence impartial careers advice in schools
- Embed employer informed Information Advice and Guidance in our adult skills provision
- Raise the awareness of the provision available through publicity and targeted communications

Objective 4: Supporting the access and provision of learning opportunities that are appropriate to the needs of all, recognising the needs of our vulnerable residents. We will:

- Develop a new commissioning framework for bespoke learning opportunities for young people with complex needs
- Promote careers pathways for young people who are (or are becoming) NEET
- Facilitate work based opportunities for vulnerable adults and young people
- Deliver tailored programmes to unemployed, those with low skills and those impacted by welfare reform
- Develop a personalised and holistic approach for those facing barriers to employment, supporting pathways into employment
- Target support in our most deprived areas, and in locations which engage vulnerable residents

Aim 3: Developing the Workforce

Objective 5: Ensuring that Central Bedfordshire businesses can improve their competitiveness through investment in the workforce. We will:

- Raise employer awareness of the qualifications and skills opportunities available, showcasing best practice
- Work with our partners to provide flexible responses that address the higher level skills needs identified by our businesses
- Facilitate employer / provider partnerships to develop skills progression pathways into employment
- Deliver basic and functional skills training to existing and future employees
- Provide guidance to employers on the financial incentives for investment in training

Objective 6: Maximising work based learning particularly Apprenticeships and Traineeships. We will:

- Support employers in maximising opportunities through the Apprenticeship Levy
- Ensure Information, Advice and Guidance includes signposting to work-based learning
- Support national apprenticeship programme events in partnership with schools, highlighting higher and degree level apprenticeships
- Refresh the Council's apprenticeship and work experience programme to respond to the new levy and targets
- Pilot a Traineeship programme with local employers
- Maximise recruitment and training opportunities through planning obligations

10. The Strategy will be refreshed after two years to ensure it keeps pace with the needs of employers and residents, along with the changes in the skills provision landscape including the anticipated changes to apprenticeships, the impact of Brexit, devolution, Post-16 Reform and the SEMLEP Area Based Review of further education and sixth form colleges to ensure that there is the right capacity to meet the needs of students and employers provided by institutions that are financially stable.

Measures of success in Central Bedfordshire

11. The following measures will be used to assess the impact of CBC's approach:
 - Reduced level of reported business skills gaps from 29% in 2015 to 20% by 2020
 - Employment rate maintained to at least 5% above the national average

- Increased % of working age residents with level 2 or above qualifications
 - Reduced % of working age residents with no qualifications
 - Reduced % of out of work benefit claimants
 - Increased participation of 16-18 year olds and 19+ year olds in Apprenticeships
 - The % of EETs (in education, employment or training) and % of those who remain NEET or unknown to the local authority – to ensure we remain in the top quartile of national performance
 - The following indicators will be monitored annually to measure the impact that the All Age Skills Strategy, the integrated approach and its accompanying actions are having on skills and the local economy.
12. The strategy sets out the high level activities over the next two years and measures of success. A detailed performance monitoring framework will track performance against actions to support the activities identified in the Action Plan. Performance will be reported through the Council's Five Year Plan monitoring arrangements and reviewed by the Employment and Skills Scrutiny Board who meet on a quarterly basis.

Reason for Decision

13. The Council's Executive Arrangements and Regulation 8 of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 confirm that key decisions must be taken by the Council's Executive. Central Bedfordshire's first AASS was approved by Executive on 27 March 2012. Building on the good work to date, this Strategy refresh sets out our priorities and actions for the next 4 years.

Council Priorities

14. The Council's 5 Year Plan sets out our vision for Central Bedfordshire to be a great place to live and work, with six priorities:
- Enhancing Central Bedfordshire
 - Great resident services
 - Improving education and skills
 - Protecting the vulnerable; improving wellbeing
 - Creating stronger communities
 - A more efficient and responsive Council.
15. The AASS supports all of these priorities, but particularly the priority for improving education and skills through creating opportunities for lifelong learning with routes into employment for all ages.

Corporate Implications

16. This Council wide strategy responds to the need to provide employer-informed careers advice and progression pathways for young people and adults with routes into employment for all ages.
17. In order to have the desired impact, we have to work with a range of external partners to ensure a coordinated approach that maximise delivery of agreed outcomes. Key partners and stakeholders have been engaged as part of the Strategy development.
18. The implementation of the AASS will require the local authority to have an enhanced role as a local employer, commissioner and direct provider of services. This includes its own offer of Apprenticeships, internships and work experience.

Legal Implications

19. There are no statutory requirements for CBC to produce an AASS however in doing so CBC is able to underline its leadership and commitment to not only the skills agenda, but wider promotion of sustainable growth across Central Bedfordshire.
20. The local authority holds a number of statutory duties in relation to securing employment and skills for young people, including:

Education and Skills Act 2008 (as amended by the Education Act 2011):

- Holding a strategic overview of 14-19 provision in order to secure participation of young people
- Make available to all young people aged 13-19 and to those up to age 25 with an LDA or EHC plan, support that will encourage, enable or assist them to participate in education or training
- Identifying young people who are not participating and take steps to ensure their participation in Education, Employment and Training (e.g. an identification and tracking system).

Education Act 1996 (as amended by the Apprenticeship, Skills and Children and Learning Act 2009)

- Secure sufficient suitable education and training provision for all young people aged 16 to 19 and for those up to age 25 with a learning difficulty assessment (LDA) or Education, Health and Care (ECH) plan in their area.

21. When implementing the AASS, compliance with general legislation and legal requirements will need to take place. These will include requirements under the Data Protection Act 1998 and safeguarding duties. Practical matters such as the need to conduct DBS checks should be determined at a local level depending upon the circumstances and applicability of the legislative requirements.
22. In addition, the governance arrangements, including expectations and responsibilities, the AASS should be regularly reviewed to ensure continued effectiveness.

Financial Implications

23. CBC is dependent on external grant funding to support the delivery of skills and employment related activity for adults, including a Skills Funding Agency (SFA) allocation of £1,163,800 in 15/16 and bidding for £2M European funding for Central Bedfordshire for 2017-2020. If this funding reduces, this will impact upon the level of delivery.
24. To ensure we can meet the needs of vulnerable groups, we will need to retain the capacity to commission bespoke learning opportunities that are not provided by schools, colleges and training providers. For example, pre-entry level learning for looked after children that would provide a stepping stone to an Apprenticeship. This should be taken into account in future financial planning.

Risk Implications

25. The AASS mitigates the risk of not achieving the Council's objectives and discharging our legal responsibilities. The delivery is dependent upon effective partnership working.

Equalities Implications

26. CBC has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
27. The AASS supports targeted and tailored approaches to meet the specific needs of groups who are vulnerable to exclusion, particularly:
 - those furthest from the labour market, particularly Employment Support Allowance claimants
 - those living in areas of deprivation
 - NEET young people
 - looked after children and young people leaving care
 - those with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND)
 - those in the Criminal Justice System

- those with learning difficulties or disabilities
- those with mental health issues
- black and minority ethnic groups (BME)
- asylum seekers – including unaccompanied children
- those aged 50yrs+
- lone parents

Sustainability Implications

28. The AASS will meet the key objectives of CBC's Sustainable Development Policy:
- Social progress that recognises the needs of everyone;
 - The maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.

Conclusion and next Steps

29. A detailed work programme with clear outcomes and measures will be further developed.
30. Governance will be via the Employment and Skills Scrutiny Board with performance reported through the Council's Five Year Plan monitoring arrangements. Updates will be reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Board as requested.

Appendix

31. Draft All Age Skills Strategy 2016-20

Background Papers

32. Central Bedfordshire All Age Skills Strategy 2012
http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/Images/all-ages-skills-strategy_tcm3-14688.pdf