
Report to: Inclusive Growth and Public Policy Panel

Date: 16 September 2020

Subject: **Employment and Skills Plan Refresh**

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1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Panel on the refresh of the Employment and Skills plan.
- 1.2 A presentation on the key elements of the refreshed plan will be given, and the Panel is asked to comment in order to inform the development of the plan.

2 Information

- 2.1 The current Employment and Skills Plan runs until the end of this year. Since it was written significant progress has been achieved. There has also been significant change in the skills landscape, including devolution of the Adult Education Budget (AEB), the economic impact of COVID-19 and the UK's exit from the European Union.
- 2.2 The skills and training action area covers many issues considered frequently by the Employment and Skills Panel prior to COVID-19. These are now critical to recovery and, in relation to employment and skills, the COVID-19 economic recovery plan identifies five Must Win Battles:
- Prevention of NEETs and youth unemployment
 - Address inequality of access to learning
 - Building a strong skills offer for the West Yorkshire labour market
 - Delivering relevant and transferable skills
 - Improved skills utilisation in the workplace

2.3 The refresh the Employment and Skills Plan, will also need to consider the following:

- Proposals from the Future-Ready Skills Commission
- Business Plan priorities from employment and skills programmes
- Combined Authority's Economic Recovery / COVID-19 response
- Labour Market Intelligence
- Strategic Economic Framework priorities
 - Boosting Productivity
 - Enabling Inclusive Growth
 - Delivering 21st Century Transport
 - Tackling the Climate Emergency
- West Yorkshire Devolution Deal

2.4 The devolution deal agreed for West Yorkshire earlier in the year has secured a number of strategic skills and employment commitments including the following which relate to delivering more inclusive growth:

- **Adult Education Budget (AEB) Devolution Implementation** - underway, with an internal project board undertaking technical and capacity preparation. An **AEB Strategy** has been developed with key stakeholders and publicly consulted on. This AEB Strategy will shape commissioning and help to ensure this devolved budget better meets our regional needs and aspirations, and was taken to the Combined Authority for approval on 4th September. The strategy has identified a number of priorities including the following:
 - Support the unemployed to gain and sustain employment
 - Unlock progression opportunities and career adaptability through skills, particularly for those on low wages and with insecure work
 - Making learning more inclusive to support disadvantaged residents
- Maximising the investment in **apprenticeships** including convening employers to increase the number of apprenticeships available, including via levy transfers.
- West Yorkshire and Government will continue to work together to **prioritise support for under-represented groups** in the labour market (including women, people from BAME groups, and those with a disability or health condition). This includes a government commitment to working with the Region on how to provide the targeted support needed for people who are furthest away from the labour market, and those in low pay who need support to stay in work and progress.
- Collaboration on design of local **careers** and enterprise interventions, for all ages.
- To deliver these and other priorities, we have in place **Delivery Agreements** with all West Yorkshire FE Colleges to link their delivery and curriculum planning to the region's skills priorities. This will be extended as a minimum to all AEB grant recipients and could be included for all AEB provider recipients (grants and procured).

- 2.5 The refreshed Employment and Skills plan will set out the City Region's vision and ambitions in relation to its priorities, as well as the actions that we and our partners can take forward over the next five years, to 2025.
- 2.6 The refreshed plan will cover the geography of West Yorkshire, while also having regard for programmes and projects that involve partnership work across the functional economic area of the region, in particular European-funded projects with delivery in York and North Yorkshire.
- 2.7 Current themes and priorities in the existing Skills Plan include:
- More and Better Apprenticeships
 - Employability, Accessing Jobs, and Realising Potential
 - Great Education Connected to Business
 - Building Workforce Skills and Attracting Talent
 - Raising the Bar on High Level Skills
- 2.8 Many of these continue to be a priority for the region, despite the progress that has been made over the last four years. As a result of COVID-19 and the impact on the job market, it is expected that the focus on employability, accessing jobs, and realising potential will increase.
- 2.9 The proposed timescales and plans for the refresh are as follows:
- Stage 1: Scoping and appraising current priorities (May – July 2020)
 - Stage 2: Consultation with key stakeholders and partners, and open consultation (July – September 2020)
 - Stage 3: Preparation and sign-off of the refreshed plan (October – December 2020)
- 2.10 Presentation slides summarising the work of the Plan refresh are included at Appendix A and will be presented at the meeting.
- 2.11 The Panel is asked to consider the key Inclusive Growth priorities in relation to skills and employment that need to be captured in the refreshed plan.
- 2.12 As the implications of COVID-19 continue to develop, it is expected that the plan will be further updated, which will be tested with the Employment and Skills Panel to make sure priorities remain relevant and are amended as required to meet the recovery needs of the region.
- 2.13 Once agreed, the Employment and Skills Plan will form part of the Strategic Economic Framework.

3 Financial Implications

- 3.1 There are no financial implications directly arising from this report.

4 Legal Implications

- 4.1 There are no legal implications directly arising from this report.

5 Staffing Implications

5.1 There are no staffing implications directly arising from this report.

6 External Consultees

6.1 No external consultations have been undertaken.

7 Recommendations

7.1 The Panel is asked to comment on Inclusive Growth elements and priorities for a revised Employment and Skills Plan.

8 Background Documents

None

9 Appendices

Presentation

Appendix A – Review of priorities from Employment and Skills Plan 2016-2020