

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS COMMITTEE
HELD ON THURSDAY, 23 MARCH 2023 AT WELLINGTON HOUSE,
LEEDS, LS1 2DE**

Present:

Councillor James Lewis (Chair)	Leeds City Council
Professor Shirley Congdon (Deputy Chair)	Private Sector (LEP Board)
Councillor Silvia Dacre	Calderdale Council
Councillor Jessica Lennox	Leeds City Council
Milton Brown	Private Sector Representative
Tim Craven	Private Sector Representative
Nav Chohan	Advisory Representative (West Yorkshire Skills Partnership)
Alex Miles	Advisory Representative (West Yorkshire Skills Partnership)

In attendance:

Jo Ledgard	DWP
Phillip Day	TUC
Frances Burkinshaw	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Michelle Burton	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Peter Glover	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Michelle Hunter	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Sonya Midgley	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Phillipa Syers	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Philip Witcherley	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Janette Woodcock	West Yorkshire Combined Authority

32. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors - Imran Khan (Bradford) Lynn Masterman (Wakefield), Graham Turner (Kirklees) and Andrew Waller (York). Private Sector Representatives - Mark Cowgill, Orlagh Hunt, Richard Mason, Liz Needleman, Claire Paxman, Michelle Chappell Dixon, Phil Lautman. Advisory Representatives - Tim Thornton (West Yorkshire Skills Partnership), David Cooper (Headteachers Network), Peter O'Brien (Higher Education), Colin Booth (Further Education), Mike Curtis (NHS), Sharon Riding (DWP) and Bill Adams (TUC).

33. Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

Members of the committee were asked to make decisions that related to Skills Bootcamps. In the interests of transparency, members with an interest in the delivery of Skills Bootcamps were asked to declare.

Cllr Silvia Dacre (Calderdale Council) declared an interest.

34. Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There was no exempt information requiring the exclusion of the press and public.

35. Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 January 2023

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2023 be approved.

36. Chair's Update

The Chair read out a statement regarding the pre-election period and advised members that the period commenced the day of this meeting.

Members noted that the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Jeremy Hunt, delivered the Spring Budget, setting out measures to reduce inflation and debt and grow the economy. The budget featured a number of employment and skills measures, intended to support people to (re)-enter work, increase their working hours and extend their working lives.

The Chair requested that the Head of Employment and Skills Policy present the Budget Update as follows: -

Skills

- There would be £34.4m funding for an additional 8,000 Skills Bootcamps placements in 2024-25, to reskill in high value sectors such as construction and digital.
- The expansion of the Sector-Based Work Academy Programme (SWAPs) placements by 40,000 over 2023/24 and 2024/25, with £28.8m new funding to provide those who were currently out of work with the training and work experience they needed to secure careers in high-demand sectors.
- An extension of the government's support for Ukrainians who had arrived in the UK under the Ukraine Visa Schemes. Along with £11.5m to offer intensive English language courses and employment support to up to 10,000 individuals.

Work and Health

- The Health and Disability White Paper published on 15 March, set out plans to reform the welfare system and make it better to meet the needs of disabled people in the United Kingdom. This included removing the Work Capability Assessment (meaning that claimants

would now only have to undertake one health assessment rather than two) and support claimants to secure work without fear of losing their financial support.

- Pilot WorkWell Partnerships for delivering integrated work and health support in local areas. Linking JobCentres, health services and other local organisations to provide 'wraparound' health support for jobseekers, benefits claimants and those at risk of falling out of work because of their health condition.
- Introducing a Universal Support programme matching disabled and sick people who want to work with existing job vacancies, and ensure they are supported to succeed in work. Ambition to support 50,000 people annually with a £4,000 allocation per person
- New funding to expand an existing programme that provided tailored Work Coach support to help disabled people find suitable work.
- Expansion of the existing Individual Placement and Support scheme, which supported people with severe mental illness into employment.
- Introduction of employment advisors in Musculoskeletal Health services (MSK), helping individuals with MSK conditions to return to or remain in employment and scaling up MSK hubs in community settings so that more people could access treatment.
- Digitising the NHS Health Check to identify and prevent more cases of cardiovascular disease; and the introduction of world-leading free access for digital resources for management of mental health and MSK conditions on the NHS website and NHS app.
- Expansion of funding for the forthcoming SME subsidy pilot for occupational health services and bring forward two new consultations on how best to increase occupational health across UK employers.

Over 50s

- Enhanced digital midlife MOT offer and expansion of the Job Centre Plus midlife MOT offer, which provided in-person financial planning and awareness sessions for Universal Claimants (UC) aged over 50.
- Returnerships, this was a new offer targeted at the over-50s, which would bring together existing skills programmes, focusing on flexibility and previous experience to reduce training length. They would promote accelerated apprenticeships, Sector-Based Work Academy Programme placements and Skills Bootcamps to the over-50s.
- Pension Tax Changes to incentivise staying in/returning to work:
 - Increase to the Annual Allowance, limit on annual tax-relieved pension savings, from £40,000 to £60,000 from April 2023, and remove the Lifetime Allowance charge.
 - Increase to the Money Purchase Annual Allowance, a restriction of annual tax-relieved pension savings once an individual has flexibly accessed their pension saving, from £4,000 to £10,000.

Universal Credit (UC) Claimants

- Increase to the Administrative Earnings Threshold (AET), the minimum amount a person can earn without being asked to meet regularly with their Work Coach, from the equivalent of 15 to 18 hours of earnings at the National Living Wage for an individual claimant. The couples AET, where a second member of a household may not be asked to look for work if their partner is working, would be removed entirely.
- Expanding work search requirements to encourage over 700,000 lead carers of children on UC to look for work or increase their hours and would receive additional Work Coach support to do so.
- Strengthening the application of the UC sanctions regime.
- Extending the Youth Offer until 2028, maintaining job search support for young people who were Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) and expand eligibility for the Youth Offer to support young people on UC who were not currently searching for work, including young parents and carers.
- Expanding the Additional Jobcentre Support Pilot to test how intensive support for a period of two weeks can further support claimants, who remained unemployed after 13 and 26 weeks into their UC claim or on low earnings, into work.

Childcare

- Working parents would be able to access 30 hours of free childcare per week, for 38 weeks of the year, from when a child was 9 months old to commencing school. This would be rolled out in stages from April 2024.
- Uplift to the hourly rate paid to providers to deliver existing free hours offers (£204m of additional funding this year, £288m by 2024-25).
- Confirmed changes to the staff-to-child ratios for 2-year-olds, moving from 1:4 to 1:5.
- Start-up grants for new childminders, including for those who chose to register with a childminder agency.
- Local Authorities in England to receive £289m over two academic years, from September 2024, to set up 'wraparound' childcare in schools.
- Parents on UC would receive childcare support up-front when moving into work/increasing their hours, rather than in arrears.
- Increase of the U C childcare cap from £646 to £951 for one child and £1,108 to £1,630 for two children.

In addition to the workforce measures, the Chancellor also announced West Yorkshire as one of the places to get a new Investment Zone with £80m over 5 years. £35m flexible spend, split 40:60 between resource spending and capital spending.

Local Skills Improvement Plans

Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) were funded by the Department for Education (DfE) to provide an agreed set of actionable priorities that employers, providers, and stakeholders in a local area could get behind to drive change. They were led by employer representative organisations and in West Yorkshire this was Mid-Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce and West and North Yorkshire Chamber.

Martin Hathaway, Managing Director of Mid-Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce, and the nominated representative on the Employment and Skills Committee on behalf of the LSIP, gave a verbal update to the Committee.

Officers of the Combined Authority and Local Authorities are members of the (advisory) board of the LSIP. The Chamber has been made aware around concerns about the scope, timescales and coordinating messages to providers and business, including some escalation to DfE. A report on the LSIP's priorities is due to be submitted to DfE at the end of March. Chamber representatives have been invited to attend a Directors of Development meeting but are not available until the May meeting

In addition, The DfE had written to colleges inviting their applications for the Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) to support the LSIP. Members were advised that applications were due before the timescales for the LSIF report.

In addition to the above, committee members discussed and provided comments which were duly noted by officers.

37. Green Jobs Taskforce

The Committee considered a progress report regarding the progress and next steps of the Mayor's Green Taskforce.

Over the last year the Mayor had led a Taskforce on green jobs and skills. As outlined in the submitted report, the Taskforce sought to bring together a range of experts from business, education and training to unlock the potential in West Yorkshire to develop the right skills needed to achieve our climate ambitions.

The Committee was presented with an overview of the Taskforce's work, along with its draft report and recommendations. Members discussed the report and the next steps to support the development of a robust action plan to deliver on the recommendations that would be overseen by the Employment and Skills Committee. It was anticipated that the draft report would be published in Summer 2023.

Members commented that this is a huge issue to be tackled as skills are needed to respond to demand but it is difficult to encourage people when funding is not forthcoming and there are limited funding resources within the region. It was felt it was a great opportunity to link to Climate work and maybe students could be invited to be involved.

It was highlighted that at the TUC Annual Conference, Green Jobs was on the agenda for discussion and all delegates were fully engaged.

Resolved:

- (i) That the contents of the submitted report be noted.
- (ii) That the update on the work of the Green Jobs Taskforce and feedback from the Committee on the considerations and next steps be noted.

38. Adult Skills and Approval of Bootcamp Funding

The Committee received a progress report regarding the latest data on the challenges West Yorkshire faced in Adult Skills. They were provided with an overview of Combined Authority led provision which tackled these issues, as well as an outline of future activity on adult skills in the region. Members were also provided with the Adult Education Budget End of Year Report, which outlined the progress made in year 1 of devolution. Approval was also sought from members to extend the delivery period for the Department for Education (DfE) funded Bootcamps from September 2023 to September 2024 and to accept and spend an additional £3,649 for the next wave of delivery, as shown in Appendix 3 of the submitted report.

At the last meeting of the Committee, it was agreed that different employment and skills topics be considered, starting with the evidence base and current labour market information, current delivery activity and the next steps to address gaps and innovations prompted by the labour market intelligence and performance of current programmes and landscape.

The Head of Employment and Skills introduced the paper to members. Officers provided a summary of the labour market context and the end of year report for Adult Education Budget (AEB). This was followed by an outline of the recommendation for Skills Bootcamps.

It was questioned if there was already a programme in place for graduates and SME's as there needs to be a transition relationship in place. It was felt that businesses are concerned as to where they can obtain guidance.

Officers responded to say there is a pilot for 50 graduates.

It was noted that this would be a broad endorsement and will be followed by a workshop to work through the detail.

Resolved:

- (i) That the contents of the report be noted.
- (ii) That comments from the Committee on the Adult Education Budget End of Year report be noted.
- (iii) That the following recommendations be approved by the Committee.

The change request to the Skills Bootcamps programme to accept and spend up to £3,649,369 from the Department of Education, increasing the total programme value to £7,338,369 and to extend the delivery timeframes from September 2023 to September 2024.

Future approvals be made in accordance with the assurance pathway set out in Appendix 2 of the submitted report. This would be subject to the scheme remaining within the tolerances outlined in the report.

- (iv) That the Committee approve the request to accept and spend 'Wave 4' funding for Skills Bootcamps and to extend the delivery timescales from September 2023 to September 2024.

39. Future Funding Priorities

Members considered a report seeking endorsement to proceed with the development of employment and skills packages for future funding and received an update on UKSPF Pillar 3 – People and Skills with further information to be brought to a future meeting of the Employment and Skills Committee.

It was reported that the next phase of support for Investment Priority 2 - Skills and Training for People would focus on digital and green skills and employer support. The submitted report provided an overview of the rationale and envisaged outcomes for the proposed skills packages across two key themes and skills interventions:

1. Workforce Development and Growth
 - a. Digital and green skills offer for businesses
 - b. Mayor's SME graduate pilot
 - c. Skills support for employers
2. Workforce for the Future
 - a. Digital Inclusion
 - b. Regional careers campaign
 - c. Green skills engagement with young people from primary age
 - d. Further education development fund
 - e. Digital Workforce for the future

Resolved:

- (i) That the contents of the report be noted.
- (ii) That the development of employment and skills packages for future funding be endorsed.
- (iii) That the update on UKSPF Pillar 3 – People and Skills be noted.

40. Monitoring Indicators

The Committee considered a verbal report which presented the latest State of the Region monitoring indicators, relating to employment and skills, together with an analysis of more time timely labour market indicators.

Resolved:

- (i) That the contents of the report be noted.
- (ii) That the latest intelligence relating to employment and skills in West Yorkshire against the current performance of West Yorkshire against the State of the Region indicators be noted.