

**NOTES OF THE INQUORATE MEETING OF THE ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON FRIDAY 17 NOVEMBER 2023 IN CONFERENCE ROOMS 1/2, WELLINGTON HOUSE, 40-50 WELLINGTON STREET, LEEDS, LS1 2DE**

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**Present:**

Councillor Aneela Ahmed	Bradford Council
Councillor Bob Felstead	Bradford Council
Councillor Helen Brundell	Calderdale Council
Councillor Katie Kimber	Calderdale Council
Councillor Richard Smith (Chair)	Kirklees Council
Councillor Manisha Roma Kaushik	Kirklees Council
Councillor Colin Campbell	Leeds City Council
Councillor David Pickersgill	Wakefield Council
Councillor Tony Wallis	Wakefield Council
Councillor Conrad Whitcroft	York City Council

**In attendance:**

Khaled Berroum	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Michelle Burton	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Felix Kumi-Ampofo	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Peter Glover	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Philippa Syers	West Yorkshire Combined Authority

**1. Apologies for absence**

The meeting was **inquorate**, with 10 members present out of 11 needed for quorum.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Iqbal, Almass, Robinson, Caffrey and Moore.

**2. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests**

None.

**3. Possible exclusion of the press and public**

None.

**4. Minutes of the meeting held on 15 March 2023**

As the meeting is inquorate, the minutes must be approved at the next quorate meeting, currently scheduled for 12 January 2024.

#### 5. **Notes of the inquorate meeting held on 15 September 2023**

As the meeting is inquorate, the notes must be acknowledged at the next quorate meeting, currently scheduled for 12 January 2024.

#### 6. **Chair's comments and update**

The Chair expressed disappointment that the meeting was inquorate for the second time in a row this year and said he would write to political group leaders to suggest that members unable to attend meetings regularly due to other commitments consider be replaced.

#### 7. **Adult Education Budget (AEB) update**

An additional verbal update was provided providing some economic context, including reduction in inflation, the MPC's decision to keep interest rates the same this quarter, GDP remaining static, and 'flattening' of employment levels. In employment and pay terms, median pay was 16% higher than in May 2021 (during COVID) but had fallen by 2% since June 2023 in WY, compared to a 1% fall nationally, which could lead to stronger demand for adult learning as criteria for subsidies is based on pay.

Discussion covered the following points:

- **Measuring success:** Destination and progression data is difficult to collect, but there is an increasing focus on it. The programme asks learners what their plans are, and more effort is undertaken to follow up and find out where they ended up. Some data is clearer as the training is linked to specific vacancies and can be tracked easier.
- **Demographic, strategic focus of AEB:** Post-devolution, the strategic focus has been on the poorest communities. AEB is the largest adult learning fund, but not the only one, and there is alignment and co-working with other programmes such as "Multiply" which focuses on adult basic numeracy.
- **Reaching those most in need:** £8m of the £66m is dedicated to community learning and delivered in locations identified as being most in need and targeted at hard to reach and 'disengaged' demographics. Some areas have higher instances of 'disengaged' communities than others due to local social and cultural factors amongst certain groups related to access and trust in local government. Reaching them requires engagement with local stakeholders which is resource intensive. Creative methods are adopted to reach them e.g. parents dropping children at school and frame support as helping children with homework as a beginning point. The CA could also leverage assets such as bus stops to support further outreach in future.

- **Data discrepancy:** The disparity between two figures for 2021/22 (43k and 46k) of adult learner participation in the reports is due to differences in data accounting between different programmes and funds; the 46,000 figure includes community learning participant overlap. This explanation will be reflected in future papers. Total figures are 52,000 starts, 47,000 retained and nearly 45,000 completions.
- **Regional data breakdown and focuses:** The CA works with local council colleagues to determine which wards are in most need. Councillors will benefit from knowing the picture in their own wards, to better assess where there is most need, and help to connect AEB programmes to local 'hard to reach' communities and programmes. Officers will send a breakdown to members following the meeting.
- **ROI and wider outcomes:** A greater analysis of "return on investment" (ROI) not only the AEB programme in terms of outputs (learners etc) but also on wider economic outcomes and corporate strategic goals would be useful for members to analyse in future.
- **Reskilling needs and green jobs:** Mayor launched a Green Jobs Taskforce to determine what a green job is and what the economy's demand and need is and how to frame future jobs and education programmes to support that to both young people beginning and those already in employment.
- **"Travel to Learn":** Some students are limited by their location and means to studying only locally and not where they need to for their desired course and career path. The "Travel to Learn" programme helps to subsidise students in need so they can attend the right institution and not just the nearest one.
- **Older workers and learners:** There are schemes and marketing which is directly targeted at older learners, as education and skills should be a lifelong opportunity, and data shows that the programmes are currently engaging well with all age groups including over-50s – however, retired over-50s are harder to persuade to the benefits of adult learning.
- **"Skills ceiling":** Further work is needed to support more workers who are willing to upskill/reskill but are limited by other duties. There are many examples of a "skills ceiling" where workers who could receive good promotions, earning good money, in needed professions, e.g. Nursery Nurse / TA > Nursery Teacher / Teacher, but it requires many years and costs of further education at university and college that the worker cannot do due to cost and child/care responsibilities. The best route around university level education is an employer-supported high-level apprenticeship, but funding is required to make it free for the employee.

## 8. School engagement and apprenticeships

Discussion covered the following points:

- **Measuring success with NEETs:** Success on NEETS is defined by absolute reduction in number of NEETs ('Not in Employment, Education or Training') and increase in participation levels, as they are linked. There is a need to focus beyond simply numbers in absolute terms, and also focus on the economic and social impact and picture. There is a role for local government and the CA to be 'system leaders' and 'enablers' in reducing NEET levels.
- **Gender stereotyping and progress:** Although there is more press and public attention on instances of gender-based discrimination and issues, the data shows that the picture is improving across the board thanks to various programmes. Attitudes around certain jobs and careers is still shaped by society, media and culture in both directions so it is necessary to target children at school with role models and examples so that they know any career is open to anyone. Even in areas of progress, there remain some discrepancies; there are many more women in surveying, but the trades are still male dominated. In some businesses different departments are still skewing towards particular demographics e.g. marketing is young, manufacturing was male, and textiles still female. There are also structural challenges, such as childcare duties falling disproportionately more on women and at-work creches benefiting all parents balance life and work.
- **FutureGoals participation rate:** FutureGoals is aimed at all age groups and there has been a big increase in usage due to successful marketing campaigns, with digital channels emerging as one of the most successful ways of reaching those who could benefit most from the programme, and its increasing promotion by careers facilitators in partner sectors such as college/university advisors, prisons, rehab etc. Data does not capture the ages of the users, as that would require an additional 'data capture wall' (i.e. asking for more information) which is proven to turn people off, if they have to sign up – which is currently only done by the training providers etc.
- **Local university retention rates:** The 23% rate referenced in paragraph 2.17-18 refers to those employed in the area they were educated in, as a retention rate, and not the wider post-university employment rate. The "Russell Group" universities' retention rates tend to be lower, which is normal for that level of university, e.g. Harvard University's retention rate is around 10% as most students do not stay in the immediate area. Retention is one of the areas that West Yorkshire performs better in than some other regions.
- **Type of study vs local job supply:** The graph in 2.17 shows that the "STEM" subjects of sciences, technology, engineering and maths have relatively low retention rates. This is largely due to the "Russell Group effect", since the university of Leeds is the main provider in these subject areas. It may also be due to fewer employers in those sectors in the region, compared to other regions, and also an inability of local

firms to match the salaries offered in other areas – although students don't go to London at as high levels as previously thought. It is harder to track the most recent trends affected by homeworking and new technology, as many people live in different places to their work and their location choices are motivated by personal reasons as much as economic reasons. It may take many years to track and analyse trends to understand people's habits and decisions.

- **Graduates in non-graduate work:** There is an issue with some graduates working in non-graduate jobs, especially since COVID where many took jobs in call centres, admin, and sales (from home) while waiting for other jobs. The data shows that graduates know how to apply for jobs in their sectors, but there are not enough jobs; it is a supply side issue. Current programmes aim to work with businesses to create those jobs. Although people in other regions applying for local jobs cannot be stopped, programmes can help ensure that local students and workers are sufficiently educated and skilled to compete for those jobs.
- **School engagement and link to 'real life':** School engagement is pivotal in shaping future decisions and habits. Children are influenced by non-school matters and the more their education, and engagement at schools, addresses the external issues and make a link between their studies and the real-life application of studies to work and life, the more engaged they are in their studies and more prepared when entering work.

It was noted that some of the pie charts in the report did not have legends and some of the graphs were cut off, to the right. These will be corrected and reissued.

## **9. Economy Scrutiny Work Programme**

It was agreed that:

- The Economic Strategy update be moved from the 12 January meeting to the 8 March meeting, as January is too soon for an update and is the Mayors Questions sessions.
- That a (virtual) planning session be arranged in December for members to discuss their approach to Mayor's Questions, which is taking place at the next meeting on 12 January 2024.
- Members were reminded that they should look in advance to see if they can attend a meeting and then arrange a substitute from the substitute pool if they cannot attend, as it is vital that meetings are quorate.

## **10. Date of the next meeting – 12 January 2024**