

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS EXECUTIVE MEETING



Date: 29 March 2019

Subject: **Shaping skills to fill gaps in the South East economy: a proactive role for local authorities**

Report of: SEEC Secretariat – Heather Bolton, Nick Woolfenden and Emily Duddy

Recommendations:

Members are invited to:

- i) Discuss with today's expert panel the opportunities for local authorities to be proactive on skills to help ensure the right workforce is available to meet local economic needs.
- ii) Identify any issues to raise with Government that could further support local authority work on skills and apprenticeships.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 At a meeting between SEEC and Skills Minister Anne Milton MP in January, the Minister encouraged local authorities to take a proactive approach to skills rather than waiting to be asked.
- 1.2 Following that meeting, SEEC members expressed interest in sharing good practice on councils' proactive skills work. Today's meeting brings together a panel of speakers with direct experience in projects where local authorities have played a key role in shaping and funding skills initiatives. The panellists are:
 - **Nigel Duncan**, Principal of Fareham College, Hampshire. Rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted, the college has worked in partnership with Hampshire County Council on projects including CEMAST – a Centre of Excellence in Engineering, Manufacturing and Advanced Skills Training.
 - **Tracy Sherriff**, Apprenticeship Co-ordinator at West Berkshire Council. The council is working to change perceptions of apprenticeships and overcome barriers that can make it challenging to spend the apprenticeship levy.
 - **Simon Harris**, Enterprise Co-ordinator for West Kent local authorities, and **Georgina Angele**, South East Regional Lead, Careers and Enterprise Company. Three West Kent councils have joined forces with a local college and the national Careers and Enterprise Company to improve local careers advice and bring local employers into schools.

2. Key issues to shape discussion

- 2.1 SEEC members have previously highlighted the need for action to address the skills needs of businesses and the public sector in the South East. This was reinforced by [research](#) for SEEC last year, which showed emerging skills gaps. Following the Minister's encouragement for councils to be proactive on skills, today is an opportunity for members to explore opportunities and challenges in doing this, and to learn from speakers' examples.
- 2.2 Members are also invited to highlight local examples of how councils are being proactive in addressing local skills needs, and any steps which Government could take to enable councils to do more. These will inform any SEEC follow-up with the Minister. Issues that members may want to consider further with today's speakers include:
 - **Speakers have provided examples of good practice – are there more in your area?**
 - **How can councils best work with colleges/ other providers to ensure training provision meets the needs of businesses and the public sector locally?**
For example: Are there barriers to greater co-operation eg. organisational silos? Are there different challenges in influencing particular types of training eg. higher or lower skill levels, and why? How could Government help tackle any barriers which hinder council involvement in shaping training provision?
 - **How can councils maximise the opportunities for apprenticeships within their organisation?**
For example: What are the barriers to effective levy spending eg. time restrictions? How can poor perceptions of apprenticeships be addressed? How could Government help tackle any barriers to provision, or uptake, of apprenticeships?

- **How can councils help engage businesses or key public sector employers to inform good careers advice for young people?**
For example: How can councils help ensure young people get the right information at the right time to inform training decisions? How can employers help inspire and shape training decisions, and are there barriers to effective engagement with schools/young people? How could Government help tackle any barriers?
- **Are there other actions that councils are, or could be, taking to help improve skills in their area?** Are there other barriers that Government needs to tackle to enable councils to do more?

3. Some background examples

3.1 SEEC is collating skills good practice to be circulated to members and published online. A preview of some of these examples is included below to help members understand some of the local authority initiatives underway in the South East to identify and fill gaps in the local labour force.

West Berkshire – Apprenticeship Levy

West Berkshire Council has taken major steps in committing spend from their apprenticeship levy. The council currently has a fund of approx. £660K, with a committed spend of approx. £580K. Challenges identified include lack of knowledge and poor perceptions about apprenticeships, lack of resources within organisations to manage schemes, lack of take up from schools and misunderstanding about the requirement for 20% off the job training. West Berkshire is working to overcome these challenges and has a number of recommendations for improving the national approach to apprenticeships. These include: removing maintained schools from the public sector target; basing targets on FTE rather than head count; and extending the expiry date for levy funds from 24 months to 36.

West Kent – Enterprise Co-ordinator

Three West Kent local authorities have partnered with Hadlow College to raise funds for a local enterprise co-ordinator, with match funding from the national Careers and Enterprise Company. The co-ordinator works with local schools and businesses to address low take up of apprenticeships and help employers access a pipeline of talent directly from local schools. Tangible results starting to emerge include: one person being offered a degree apprenticeship; enhanced economic development officer networks; and young people making considered choices on training that are consistent with the local labour market. Success factors include having the largest local employer (AXA) as a major stakeholder, a strong relationship with council economic development teams, qualified and experienced enterprise co-ordinators and good links with businesses at district/borough level.

Hampshire – Construction Skills

Hampshire CC has secured £1 million from Department for Education and the Construction Industry Training Board to help deliver part of Government's National Retraining Scheme. The project targets people with no construction experience, people at risk of redundancy and people from under-represented groups such as women, NEETs, young offenders and children in care. Training opportunities, delivered through employer partners, include plant operator qualifications, and civil engineering/highways options. The first four months saw 82 people new to construction engaged in training, 10 new Employment and Skills plans, and 14 district and borough partners contributing to the project.

Surrey – The Surrey Skills Scape: an employer perspective

Surrey CC set up the Surrey Employment and Skills Board in 2013 as an employer-led initiative. The board is a highly experienced, influential group which provides a strategic view of the local skills scape of Surrey. The board has conducted primary research with a cross-section of apprenticeship levy payers to understand their experiences and identify recommendations to improve the process that would enable employers to maximise the levy. The board also responds to Government consultations and provides skills advice and steer to Surrey's LEPs.