

CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
COUNCIL

Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel

21 June 2023

Time 6.00 pm **Public Meeting?** YES **Type of meeting** Scrutiny

Venue Committee Room 3 - 3rd Floor - Civic Centre

Membership

Chair Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman (Lab)

Vice-chair Cllr Udey Singh (Con)

Labour

Cllr Mary Bateman
Cllr Philip Bateman MBE
Cllr Ciaran Brackenridge
Cllr Claire Darke
Cllr Jasbinder Dehar
Cllr Sally Green
Cllr Celia Hibbert
Cllr Harbinder Singh
Cllr Iqra Tahir

Conservative

Cllr Ellis Turrell

Quorum for this meeting is three Councillors.

Information for the Public

If you have any queries about this meeting, please contact the Scrutiny Team:

Contact Lee Booker

Tel/Email Lee.Booker2@wolverhampton.gov.uk

Address Scrutiny Office, Civic Centre, 1st floor, St Peter's Square,
Wolverhampton WV1 1RL

Copies of other agendas and reports are available from:

Website <http://wolverhampton.moderngov.co.uk/>

Email democratic.services@wolverhampton.gov.uk

Tel 01902 555046

If you are reading these papers on an electronic device you have saved the Council £11.33 and helped reduce the Council's carbon footprint.

[NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED]

Some items are discussed in private because of their confidential or commercial nature. These reports are not available to the public.

Agenda

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

- | <i>Item No.</i> | <i>Title</i> |
|-----------------|--|
| 1 | Apologies
[Chair to request any Apologies] |
| 2 | Welcome and Introduction
[Chair to welcome Panel and introduce Agenda] |
| 3 | Declarations of interest
[Members to declare any Interests] |
| 4 | Minutes of previous meeting (15 February 2023) (Pages 5 - 10)
[To approve the minutes of the previous meeting as a correct record] |

DISCUSSION ITEMS

- | | |
|---|--|
| 5 | Portfolio for City Inclusive Economy about his Plans and Priorities for the Municipal Year
[Member of Cabinet to Brief the Panel verbally] |
| 6 | Supporting the City's Businesses (Pages 11 - 16)
[Report] |

PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY

- | | |
|---|--|
| 7 | Supporting more people into jobs and training (Pages 17 - 46)
[Report – Pre-Decision Item] |
|---|--|

This page is intentionally left blank

Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel

Agenda Item No: 4

Minutes - 15 February 2023

Attendance

Members of the Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Mary Bateman
Cllr Philip Bateman MBE
Cllr Dr Paul John Birch J.P.
Cllr Craig Collingswood
Cllr Wendy Dalton
Cllr Celia Hibbert
Cllr Sohail Khan (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Zee Russell
Cllr Mak Singh
Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman (Chair)

In Attendance

Cllr Stephen Simkins (Cabinet Member for City, Economy and Growth)

Employees

Martin Stevens DL (Scrutiny Team Leader)
Lee Booker (Scrutiny Officer)
Richard Lawrence (Director of Regeneration)
Liam Davis (Head of City Development)
Ian Fegan (Director of Communications and Visitor Experience)
Jon Roseblade (Director of Resident Services)
Oliver Thomas (Service Manager Green Cities)
Isobel Woods (Head of Enterprise Regeneration)

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 **Apologies**
Apologies received from Cllr Darke

- 2 **Declarations of interest**
Councillor Birch declared a pecuniary interest in Agenda item 6.

3 **Minutes of previous meeting**
Minutes 30 November 2022 resolved

4 **The Green Economy**

The Deputy Leader Inclusive City Economy expressed his view that the Green Economy was the future in industry. Statements were made surrounding the history of the Black Country and the Industrial Revolution.

The Director of Regeneration opened the presentation (a copy of the presentation is attached to the signed minutes). The Head of City Development informed the panel that the Green Economy was a growth economy and had huge opportunities for the City. He informed the Panel that partners would lead a Green Growth Strategy Plan. He discussed the National Centre for Sustainable Construction, explaining that The City of Wolverhampton was experiencing the alignment of unique local conditions and drivers for change. He told the Panel that the future success of Wolverhampton, if it was to be an innovator, would rely on leveraging physical, networking, and economic assets. He discussed the National Brownfield Institute (NBI), which was located in the City, specifically as part of the University of Wolverhampton's Springfield Campus. The NBI provided vital information through its research to enable a brownfield first approach to future construction methods and techniques within the City. This would contribute to and enable carbon neutral construction standards and help reduce building on Green sites, protecting British eco systems. The site provided great opportunities for students and jobs in the City. The Director of Regeneration was pleased the City had gained a National Asset, which was a real boost for the City. The Head of City Development then discussed the Green Innovation Corridor (GIC); a "Place-Based Approach" developed in partnership with the Council, the University and the private sector. The priority of the GIC was to contribute to the development of sustainable construction and a circular economy, to support inclusive growth, transform the local economy, create quality jobs and new skills for the emerging green sectors and help align the City's existing strengths to high value manufacturing, green technologies and digital innovation.

The Head of City Development raised the i9 building, which was the second headquarters for the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The i9 was designed and built with locally sourced materials which reduced the carbon footprint during its construction period. It was designed for energy efficiency which included low to zero carbon emission technologies. The Head of City Development felt this was an example to highlight, displaying the Council's approach to development. He then informed the Panel that the City of Wolverhampton Council in partnership with the Canal and Riverside Trust had appointed Legal and General Modular Homes to build the regions first Net Zero carbon residential development. This was called the Canalside South zone development. It was to be built on former industrial land, in line with the Council's brownfield first approach and would incorporate eco-friendly green technologies in all its houses. He also discussed the i54 Business Park, one of the most successful enterprise schemes in the region. He informed the Panel that green technologies were actively promoted by all partners on the site, with further expansion of the site to include a sustainable energy business, who aimed to be a net-zero enterprise. In addition to this, a further 10,000 new trees had been planted at the site extension to contribute to offsetting emissions.

The Service Manager for Green Cities discussed the transitional plan and the stage the City was in. They highlighted the need to install roof top solar panels across all domestic and commercial buildings to contribute to the reduction of the City's carbon emissions. This would contribute to 350 local jobs a year, reduce energy prices, and reduce local energy bills from up to 50%. A former landfill site had been commissioned by the Council, in partnership with New Cross hospital, to be the site of a 6.9mw solar farm. This was designed to power

the hospital specifically. Domestic Energy remained a challenge for the City; to tackle this the Council needed to retrofit 6000 properties a year up until the year 2041. Investment of up to £0.5 billion would be required by the year 2030. The average energy efficiency rating of properties across the City was D/E and they would need to achieve a minimum C/B rating to be in line with the City's targets which was why the retrofitting scheme was required. The Council was working with the local College and University to offer the necessary skills for the green transition in the industry. Upskilling would also be required for those currently working in the industry. The response to this was being developed with the West Midlands Combined Authority to secure £15.2 million in funding to skill the future workforce for retrofit construction as well as electric vehicle technologies.

A Councillor raised concerns about the availability of charging points for cars as the market grew and more people relied on electric powered vehicles. The Head of City Development replied that the i54 site would be developing 30 charging points and that it must be understood this was an emerging sector. The Head of City Development believed those who lead in the industry private sector would develop more and faster charging sites in line with demand. The Service Manager for Green Cities discussed the 2030 ban on petrol and diesel vehicles and stated that the Council with regional partners was tracking the infrastructural development of charging points across the city over the course of the next decade. The Black Country Transport Team would be delivering 80 charge points across 40 different locations within Wolverhampton across the next year. These would be for residential areas, such as those who did not have their own driveways.

The Councillor requested a plan for the charging points, which the Service Manager for Green Cities agreed he could provide for the Panel. The Director of Resident Services explained that there was planning guidance to new housing which also included provision of charging points. The Deputy Leader Inclusive City Economy re-affirmed the points made by Officers about what the City needed and how it would benefit through partnership working; he also mentioned a Green Investment Bank as a proposed idea to allow the Council to have better control over industry finance in the future.

A Councillor asked if a communication plan would be available to help deliver these changes across the next 5 years so that residents understood what was occurring. He also asked how the work translated locally.

The Director of Communications and Visitor Experience said their team was supporting this and that further focus with more investment was required to meet the pace with which these changes needed to be done. The Service Manager for Green Cities understood the need for local level communications and investment to win local people to adopt the changing technology and economy. He explained that people would need to see local level short term benefits to their communities and that communicating this and engaging with the public was key.

The Vice Chair expressed his view that this was a major project with a relatively short window of time to achieve it in. He said it was funding dependent and therefore wanted to know if the Council had a funding strategy plan to ensure the money required would be available throughout the project so that the Council could achieve its goals. The Deputy Leader Inclusive City Economy replied that this would be a collaborative project, with government intervention and private sector funding, as well as Local Authority level, Combined Authority Level and National government level partnerships.

The Director of Resident Services cited some examples where money had been secured and was being invested into communities, such as the new developments in New Park Village and Heath Town.

The Chair enquired into the managerial structure of funding, noting that a Green Partner Board was being created. She asked where the Council was in the development of this. The

Service Manager for Green Cities replied that the Council was in the procurement stage on this and once done, would approach potential partners to convene with the aim of having the first Board meeting by the end of Summer 2023. The Chair confirmed a progress report on this would be available as an item in Autumn for the Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel.

A Councillor raised concerns about the length of charging leads at charging points for electric vehicles, stating that European built cars had their chargers on the driver's side. Currently charging ports offered a 3-metre length lead to plug into the vehicle, when the actual length required for cars with ports on the driver's side was around 5 metres. He wanted to know if the Council was aware of this and would plan accordingly. The Councillor also discussed rates of charging costs and wanted to know if the Council would be negotiating to ensure the most cost-effective energy supply deal. He specifically suggested using the cheaper night-time rates to charge fully whilst utilising solar panel reserve energy sources to top up during the day.

The Director of Resident Services replied that his recently bought Electric Vehicle came with a 5-metre long charging cable, suggesting that manufacturers were perhaps beginning to adapt to this demand, specific to left hand side driving countries like the United Kingdom. He said the issue was being considered in location selections.

A Councillor wanted to know how the Council planned to tackle the climate change issue, specifically whether it was to be looked at on an individual basis or as part of a joined up approach. The Deputy Leader Inclusive City Economy believed the Council was in a good place on this matter, and said he was happy to take questions and feedback from Scrutiny seriously, he pointed to the combination of government, local government, the private sector as working within the limits set out to tackle the issue.

A Councillor stated that solar wasn't the best option for the country and asked how this would impact on the Council's plan. The Director of Resident Services replied that the relevant experts had done the surveys and research and confirmed solar power would be suitable to the plan.

A Panel member stated that their concern was small businesses, they felt too much responsibility was being put on businesses in the City to reduce their carbon emissions and instead wanted to know if the Council could do further retrofitting to older buildings across the City to reduce carbon emissions and offset some of the responsibilities currently aimed at businesses. The Director of Resident Services replied that the housing renewal plan was already focused on retrofitting buildings across the City. The Councillor disputed this, referring to a previous meeting she had attended that work was not being done in her ward. The Director of Resident Services stated he would take up the conversation with the Councillor outside the meeting to clarify the information.

A Councillor stated the City of Wolverhampton's college training for the necessary skills was 3 years behind other Local Authorities within the Combined Authority area. He asked how much power the solar farm would provide and how many houses would it cover. The Deputy Leader Inclusive City Economy replied that the City was the last to be granted the funds necessary to update the local college by the government and that this was why they were behind.

5 **Business Support Activities within the City Council Wards**

The Head of Enterprise began the presentation (a copy is attached to the signed minutes) and displayed a map of Wolverhampton's wards and businesses which received support, 499 had received funding, with 1066 interventions, subject to European Union funding criteria. She then displayed a map of Wolves at Work links to local businesses, with 206

businesses supported and 388 interventions. The Head of Enterprise summarised the “Let’s Talk Jobs” events that had occurred around the Local Authority, 283 jobs gained through this scheme went to Wolverhampton residents. The Head of Enterprise encouraged Councillors to share a business survey which had been launched to gather further information on the makeup of businesses across the City of Wolverhampton.

The Director of Regeneration added that these schemes were in line with and reliant upon European Union funding, which was coming to an end. He informed the Panel that regional support funding packages were currently being drawn up as a replacement scheme for the near future.

The Vice-Chair asked if a report of the breakdown of businesses helped at ward level could be provided to the Panel in the future. He commented that night-life economy applied to wards outside of the main city also. The Vice-Chair praised the Wolves at Work scheme, but cited the Office for National Statistics which showed that Wolverhampton had higher than average unemployment rates nationally. He wanted to know why people were not taking up the opportunities being provided.

The Head of Enterprise replied that they did have the information in reference to ward level businesses and would have a conversation about it with the Councillor at a later date. She then stated that Wolves at Work were hosting events and doing outreach in communities to attempt to communicate to local people about the services they provided and the jobs available. Businesses had also expressed openness to learn and make their job application processes easier for people. The Council was aware of the work needed to be done to try and get more people into employment.

A Councillor praised the Council’s work in this area and felt they were listening to Councillors and improving their communications.

A Panel member asked how the United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund would compare in funding levels to the European Union funding and where would these new funds be targeted.

The Head of Enterprise said the funding plan from the National Government would be significantly less than the funding from the European Union. She explained that because of this, ensuring well targeted funding was more crucial than ever and stated the new business survey was exactly the type of work the Council was doing to get more detailed information on businesses so they could make more informed choices on where funding is utilised.

6 **Public Realm - Support Package to Businesses**

The Deputy Leader Inclusive City Economy gave background information on the trader’s board, which had formed to give local businesses a direct voice to the Local Authority on business disruption caused by the City’s regeneration works. The Director of Regeneration began the presentation (a copy is attached to the signed minutes) and gave more detailed background information on the Public Realm Improvement Works. £15.5 million had been invested into the City as part of the Government’s Future Highstreet Programme.

The Director of Resident Services summarised the interactions the Local Authority had had with businesses disrupted by the works. The Council had been clear to state that it was not legally responsible to make disruption payments, but had given a commitment to support local businesses where clear and substantiated evidence had been provided. Transparency and Scrutiny on this matter was fundamental. The Head of Enterprise set out in chronological order the planning, interaction with partners and business representatives and construction periods from the end of 2018 until present. The main contractor for the development had a liaison officer for businesses on site every day, with multiple outlets utilised for communications with businesses. Businesses had engaged and inputted with the contractor and the Local Authority throughout. Further reviews had been taken since then

with another report planned in the near future. Business support was changing as European Union funding was coming to an end post-Brexit. The Council was now working with the West Midlands Combined Authority and other stakeholders to develop a new business support programme in place of the EU schemes.

The Vice-Chair asked how many advisors had been employed by the Council to deal with the issues facing businesses and the development. He also enquired about business support payments and wanted to know if the 6 businesses that had gone out of business could provide evidence that their loss of earnings was caused by the developments that they would be given money.

The Deputy Leader Inclusive City Economy explained that the Trader's Board agreed with the investment and works that were being done in the City and that the reduced footfall had occurred post-pandemic due to people increasingly moving to online shopping. This market fact, he argued, complicated matters and that a legal framework had to be followed when handling public money. He said that all works had been done in consultation with and in agreement with the local traders.

A Councillor gave examples of the entertainment industry and asked if the Council was reaching out to those within that industry to look to set up businesses within the City, as he felt the City and Council shouldn't just focus on retail trading. The Director of Communications and Visitor Experience agreed and said the Council was looking towards all investors to increase footfall in the City centre.

A Councillor cited newspaper articles which discussed issues with business viability in the City centre due to the roadworks and asked how the Council could change the perception of the City to attract new investors. The Director of Communications and Visitor Experience explained to the Panel that as new projects completed, this would help alter perceptions and increase footfall in the City, he cited the newly renovated Civic Halls as an example. He explained that events were planned in the future in the City which would attract people and business, which would help transform the perception of the City as it moved through and out of its transition period.

A Councillor asked if the RSN report would be made available for the Panel to view. The Head of Enterprise replied confirming it would be made available to the Panel. The Deputy Leader Inclusive City Economy added that some content would be redacted for data protection purposes.

Briefing Note

Title: Future of Business Support in Wolverhampton Date: 21 June 2023

Prepared by: Isobel Woods

Job Title: Head of Enterprise

Intended Audience:

Internal

Partner organisation

Public

Confidential

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To share with members the approach that is underway to shape the emerging business support model for the city.
- 1.2 Members are asked to note the work that has been underway with the West Midlands Combined Authority and local businesses, and to seek views on the direction of travel as we build the new business support programme.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 In autumn 2021, Metro Dynamics (a business strategy consultancy) were appointed by the Council to review how the council uses its economic, administrative and regulatory powers to shape the city's business environment. In December 2021, it submitted its final report to the Council with 4 recommendations;
 1. Go further and faster on relationships, touch points and evidence
 2. Integrate place and investment marketing with opportunities for local businesses
 3. Put in place a small number of new, targeted, local programmes
 4. Work with regional / sub-regional partners to design at-scale interventions on big issues that work for local businesses
- 2.2 These recommendations produced by Metro Dynamics form the basis of the future direction for business support in the city.
- 2.3 The Council has established an internal programme group to oversee this work which reports into the Councils Strategic Executive Board. A report is scheduled later this month, following a presentation on 31 January 2023.
- 2.4 There are a number of considerations that continue to influence the approach to business support for Wolverhampton. These include significant policy changes at a national and regional level and the vital role of ensuring we

meet the needs of local business and the strategic objectives of the council and the City of Wolverhampton.

2.5 National Position

- 2.6 In April 2022, the government announced a £2.6 bn fund to replace the European Union funding that had for some time been the source of business support programmes. The new fund, called the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) is for 3 years, up to March 2025.
- 2.7 Noting in 2020 the EU allocated £4.5bn to the UK government to manage, alongside direct funding to organisations of £2.5bn, which gave the UK an annual total of £7 bn.
- 2.8 Earlier this year the government announced in the budget statement that Local Enterprise Partnerships across the UK would close, and functions would transfer over to Local Authorities by 2024. On 31 March 2023, all LEP's and Business Growth Hubs in England closed. In its place is the new regional business hub, Business Growth West Midlands, that is being led by the WMCA working with the 7 Local Authority partners, details shared in paragraph 2.16 of this report.

2.9 Regional Position

- 2.10 At a regional level business support, led by the WMCA Economic Growth Board (EGB) chaired by the Leader of Wolverhampton Council, submitted the Trailblazer Devolution Deal. This presented to government the role of WMCA to address business needs and remove barriers.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/west-midlands-combined-authority-trailblazer-deeper-devolution-deal/west-midlands-combined-authority-trailblazer-deeper-devolution-deal#business-productivity>

- 2.10 West Midlands Trailblazer identifies :-
'At the firm-level, the uptake of business support is one of the key determinants of productivity, and businesses that seek external advice are more likely to experience high growth. The proportion of businesses in the UK accessing support and particularly for growth, however, is low compared to other countries, which evidence suggests is partly due to the complexity and fragmentation of the business support landscape. External finance, and particularly growth finance, can also help companies to achieve their entrepreneurial potential'

'The government welcomes and will support WMCA's desire to bring greater coherence to the business support and finance landscape. This will be a key part of our joint efforts to boost local growth, and to raising living standards across the city region'

The government recognises the WMCA as the lead institution for integrating business productivity interventions at the city region level. The WMCA will develop a service, working in conjunction with private sector providers, to make it much easier

for enterprises to access programmes to boost productivity. The WMCA will, through this deeper devolution deal, have a new, empowered role in integrating, promoting and overseeing access to business support and advisory services, small and medium-sized enterprise finance and the broader commitments agreed as part of the deal. This will strip inefficiencies out of the system and increase small and medium-sized enterprise access to support.

- 2.12 Work is ongoing with government to ratify the regional Devolution Deal and Levelling-Up, an outcome is anticipated later in the year.
- 2.13 Leaders across the West Midlands agreed that current business support, due in part to the funding regimes of EU programmes, felt fragmented and inconsistent. In response to this, and to achieve the strategic objectives set out in the Devolution Deal the WMCA EGB approved (28 October 2022) an allocation of £42m, from £88m of the regionals' 3-year UKSPF, to deliver specialist regional business programmes (ref para 2.16). These will complement existing local and regional business support services as well as helping to deliver key aspects of the region's focus on "Supporting Local Business" as set out in the West Midlands Plan for Growth (<https://www.wmca.org.uk/what-we-do/economy-and-innovation/plan-for-growth/>). The remaining £46m to be passed direct to the 7 local authorities.
- 2.14 Leaders agreed that a review of current business support working would be undertaken with a range of stakeholders and those delivering business support. This would inform and shape a new regional approach to business support working with the 7 local authority constituent members.
- 2.15 Wolverhampton officers have and continue to be heavily involved in the shaping of this model to ensure the emerging business support approach and programmes meet local business needs and the strategic objectives of Wolverhampton.
- 2.16 On 1 April 2023, following the closure of the LEPs and Growth Hubs, a new regional business support portal went live. [Business Growth West Midlands](#). (ref para 2.8) At present the site signpost businesses to the relevant local authority area but it will shortly include regional business support programmes supported from a number of funding sources include UKSPF. These include, SME Grants aligned to business plans of growth, Investor Readiness and Decarbonisation programmes. The WMCA, at the time of this paper, is awaiting receipt of this financial year allocation of UKSPF from government that will enable the delivery of regional programmes and funds for Wolverhampton's local allocation

2.17 Wolverhampton's Position

- 2.18 In July 2022, the council in partnership with the University of Wolverhampton and the Black Country Chamber of Commerce launched IGNITE (Innovate, Grow, Navigate, Ideas, Technology, Entrepreneurship). The purpose, to provide the opportunity to engage with businesses and build a client base for the facility. It is a physical space to offer joined up and comprehensive business support delivering a combination of new and existing activity. The facility includes presence from project partners the Black Country Chamber

of Commerce, City of Wolverhampton Council and University of Wolverhampton.

- 2.19 In November 2022, Cabinet approved Wolverhampton's local UKSPF allocation which included a £650,000 package of business support that would focus on start-up, supporting those hard to reach and affected by unemployment or not working, and to invest in Ignite with new programmes and potential expansion.
- 2.19 On 3 April 2023, Wolverhampton launched [Wolverhampton Employer Support](#). Providing a direct link for businesses and a connection to the regional Business Growth West Midlands portal. Businesses are encouraged to contact the council either by phone, online or by visiting the IGNITE offices, where an officer will discuss their needs and help connect to relevant business support programmes and services in the council.

3.0 Current Position

- 3.1 A key priority for the council is to ensure Wolverhampton Employer Support is informed by strategic intelligence and the local needs of the businesses in the city, capturing the city's growing and emerging sectors and our diverse business population.
- 3.2 The intelligence coming from the regional Plan for Growth (ref 2.11) and the emerging work with the Wolverhampton Strategic Economic Plan is helping the city understand current and future challenges and opportunities. This is helping inform our approach in areas around decarbonisation, innovation, future skills, and investor readiness that will shape appropriate business support programmes and delivery partner(s).
- 3.3 We also need to consider the success of current activity such as AIM for GOLD, a SME targeted programme supported by EU funding. In the presentation to Scrutiny Panel on 30 November 2022 <https://wolverhamptonintranet.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=505&MIId=18045&Ver=4>) Members welcomed how the programme had helped businesses and the city to achieve a number of outcomes and outputs. In total, 286 new jobs, salaries above £27,000, private sector investment of £2.5m and a contribution of £9.5 m to Wolverhampton's GVA (on average 7.5% growth from each business on the programme). As well as helping businesses to access new markets, business owners shared that they felt more confident as business leaders and the future of their business.
- 3.4 Intelligence from a recent business survey (many of the respondent were SMEs and a high proportion from retail and hospitality) highlighted local businesses are looking for support with access to finance, recruitment and upskilling, networking and digital and IT.
- 3.5 Alongside this is the work from partners such as NatWest with Aston University Centre for Research Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship (CRÈME) who identified

challenges for ethnic business in the region, including raising finances and the importance of finding routes outside of their own communities to help business survival and growth.

- 3.6 Officers are working across the council to ensure the work and intelligence with the future of business support connects with the emerging Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) the Education Skills and Employment Plan (ESEP), the Investment Strategy which sit under Our City Our Plan.
- 3.7 It is important to emphasise that this is a city led approach. The model is being developed through a co-design, co-create and co-produced approach to ensure that the city engages and maximises support from key stakeholders including the private sector, to give businesses in the city appropriate, excellent quality services which will deliver the city's objectives.
- 3.8 Whilst this work is underway day to day activities continue. Officers regularly engage and responding to business enquiries and connecting businesses to appropriate support either service areas in the council or programmes such as Wolves@Work and Invest. Officers also help businesses to connect to current business support programmes available from local regional and national partners, relevant to their business needs.
- 3.9 The team have been involved in a number of local business support events including the Kings Award for Enterprise supporting the Deputy Lieutenant and with the African Chamber of Commerce who hosted an African Celebration Day at the Art Gallery on 27 May 2023.

4.0 Next Steps

- 4.1 The officer's group is shaping the next steps, building on the strategic and local intelligence and learning from current programmes, and will be engaging with stakeholders to shape the business support approach
- 4.2 The outcome will be brought back to Scrutiny Panel later in the year, for members views and comments.

This page is intentionally left blank

CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL	Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel 21 June 2023
--	---

Report title	Education, Skills and Employment Strategy 2030	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Louise Miles	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable Director	Emma Bennett, Executive Director of Families	
Originating service	Policy and Strategy	
Accountable employee	Laura Collings Tel Email	Head of Policy and Strategy 01902550414 laura.collings@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	Strategic Executive Board	2 May 2023

Recommendation(s) for decision:

Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel is recommended to:

1. Consider and comment on the Education, Skills and Employment strategy 2030, at appendix 1, as pre decision scrutiny.

1.0 Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the development of a new Education, Skills and Employment (ESE) strategy which sets out the Council's approach to supporting local people into good quality careers and work.

2.0 Background

2.1 We want to ensure local people can access new opportunities in our city, and that employers have access to a talent pipeline which meets their needs and helps the city to grow. A key priority in Our City: Our Plan is to 'Support local people into good jobs and training'. Across the city's education, skills and employment system there are many encouraging signs and much to positive about.

- 89% of the city's schools are rated good or outstanding by OFSTED.
- We are delivering first class learning facilities with a seamless learner offer through the City Learning Quarter.
- There are growing sectors in digital, creative industries and professional services bringing new jobs as well as established clusters in advanced manufacturing and aerospace.
- Thousands of fantastic employment opportunities in our foundational sectors of health and social care, hospitality and retail, and logistics which provide vital services to local people.
- The city is a national leader in low carbon research and development through the new National Brownfield Institute at the University of Wolverhampton.

2.3 However, some of our residents find it harder than others to access learning and work opportunities in our city. There remain areas of challenge, many of which are not unique to Wolverhampton and arise from a legacy of deindustrialisation and more recently the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic and cost of living crisis. This strategy sets out how working alongside our partners we can leverage our collective influence to improve skill levels and employment outcomes for local people.

3.0 Education, Skills and Employment Strategy 2030

3.1 Across our communities, employers and partners there is a common desire to build a system where children, young people and adults thrive, which adopts a whole life approach to learning and work, where children are ready to learn, achieve well and attain good numeracy and literacy skills. A system which recognises achievement and provides opportunities for progression and the development of highly skilled individuals, with fulfilling careers and employment prospects for local people. To deliver on this the strategy will focus on five overarching priorities.

- Children have the best start in life

- High quality education which prepares young people for work
- Post 16 provision which meets the needs of city employers
- Lifelong learning and employment pathways to good quality work
- A new employer support offer

3.2 Our priorities are supported by the three cross cutting principles.

- **Climate Conscious:** Harnessing the potential of the transition to a green economy by equipping local people with the skills they need to access jobs in low carbon sectors.
- **Driven by Digital:** Ensuring that every resident has the digital skills they need to gain, retain and progress in work.
- **Fair and Equal:** Inclusive and accessible lifelong learning and employment opportunities for all in our city.

4.0 Strategic Framework

4.1 The plan focuses on aligning strategic objectives with operational delivery and performance. Each of the five overarching priorities includes:

- A policy position outlining the Council's key areas of focus, challenge, and opportunity under the priority.
- Key activity highlighting planned projects, investment and activity which will support delivery of the priority areas.
- Key indicators which demonstrate how we will develop evidence-based activity and measure our impact.

5.0 Consultation and Engagement

5.1 The ESE strategy builds on already extensive engagement with residents and key stakeholders. Including:

- In depth work with young people through our Wolves at Work 18-24 programme to understand barriers to employment.
- Education and skills providers through our recently completed review of post 16 provision in the city.
- Employer perspective from the development of the West Midlands and Warwickshire Local Skills Improvement Plan
- Wider engagement with residents through our Cost Living support, Healthy Lifestyles survey and other citywide engagement.

5.2 A consultation process on the strategy will be held throughout June, July and August 2023 to gain further input on our proposed priorities. This will include focus groups and workshops with young people and Youth Council, refugees and migrants, equality groups, adult learners and public sector partners. In addition, there will be a digital survey to give all residents and stakeholders opportunity to provide their views.

6.0 Performance Framework

6.1 The Council continues to use a variety of means in which to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of operations against organisational strategic priorities and statutory requirements. Using data and analysis across all areas of the business, the Council actively encourages a golden thread of performance monitoring throughout all parts of every service.

6.2 Contained within the draft strategy is an emerging city performance framework which aligns key indicators to each of the five overarching priorities. Further work will be undertaken to refine these throughout the consultation period. The final framework will also be aligned to the Our City: Our Plan performance framework.

6.3 The framework will provide high-level city data on key priorities, benchmark city performance against national and regional data, highlight the impact of targeted interventions and inform strategic decision-making.

7.0 Evaluation of alternative options

7.1 Option 1 would be to not to develop an overarching framework for the Council which sets out key priorities relating to education, skills and employment. This could mean that local people are not able to access the existing and emerging opportunities in our city and local business do not have access to a talent pipeline which supports their growth.

7.2 Option 2 and the chosen option is to develop an Education, Skills and Employment strategy for the Council which will provide a framework to maximise economic prosperity for local people.

8.0 Reasons for decision(s)

8.1 The priorities and activity identified in the strategy have been developed through a robust evidence base and engagement with residents and city stakeholders.

9.0 Financial implications

9.1 There are no direct financial implications associated with the strategy itself although the subsequent actions, projects and programmes will have financial implications. Any further budget approvals will be sought in line with the Financial Procure Rules.

9.2 All costs associated with engagement and the preparation of the plan will be accommodated within existing resources.

[LD/13062023/Z]

10.0 Legal implications

10.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

[SZ/13062023/P]

11.0 Equalities implications

11.1 An equalities analysis for the strategy will be undertaken and mitigations to any negative impacts identified. Fair and Equal is one of the three cross cutting principles of the refreshed plan. All activity noted in the plan will also be subject to individual equalities analysis.

12.0 All other Implications

12.1 The strategy has implications across the Council, including climate change, health, and wellbeing and digital which will continue to be considered and managed as part of the delivery of this plan.

12.2 Health and wellbeing is an important part of everyday life. It is integral to leading a happy and healthy lifestyle. There is an inextricable link between health and employment prospects. Through this strategy and Our City: Our Plan priorities we will ensure that our communities are stronger, healthier, and thriving places to live.

12.3 The plan is aligned to the Digital Wolves strategy setting out how as a city and as a council we can support local people to develop the digital skills they need to gain and sustain employment.

1.1 The performance framework for each thematic area of the plan will enable continued oversight of the indicators that underpin the central commitment to Wulfrunians living longer, healthier lives.

13.0 Schedule of background papers

13.1 N/A

14.0 Appendices

Appendix 1: Education, Skills and Employment Strategy 2030

This page is intentionally left blank

Education, Skills and Employment Strategy 2030

Draft for Consultation

Contents

Foreword	2
Introduction	3
Working with Our Partners	5
Our City: Our Plan	6
Plan on a Page.....	7
Children have the best start in life.....	8
High quality education which prepares young people for work.....	11
Post 16 education provision that meets the needs of city employers	15
Lifelong learning and employment pathways to good quality work.....	18
A new model for employer support	21
Delivering the Strategy	24

Foreword

We want all of our residents and businesses to benefit from the new investment and new opportunities in our city. We will deliver this aim through inclusive growth, increasing access to good quality jobs, raising skill levels and improving health and wellbeing outcomes for all in our city.

This includes an emphasis on support for young people as they make the transition from school into further learning or work and support for adults, both in and out of work, to connect to and progress in employment and training. We also recognise the key role of employers in creating opportunities that are high quality and sustainable with decent levels of pay and conditions for workers.

This Strategy presents a major opportunity to improve the chances, opportunities and aspirations of local people and their economic prosperity. It sets out a collaborative approach to meet future skills and employment needs in the city, linking up new and emerging business sectors with the city's training and skills offer to create a local talent pipeline which stimulates growth.

Introduction

Skill levels in the city have been steadily increasing with the numbers of local people securing higher level qualifications at record numbers. However, there remain areas for improvement and the current education, skills and employment system in the city faces a number of challenges arising from a legacy of deindustrialisation, low aspirations, pockets of entrenched worklessness, relatively low pay, low skill levels and more recently the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic and cost of living crisis.

Through consultation with our communities and partners there is a common desire to build a system where children, young people and adults thrive, which adopts a whole life approach to learning and work, where children are ready to learn, achieve well and attain good numeracy and literacy skills. A system which recognises achievement and provides opportunities for progression and the development of highly skilled individuals, with fulfilling careers and employment for local people.

To deliver on this vision we will focus on five overarching priorities.

- Children have the best start in life
- High quality education which prepares young people for work
- Post 16 provision which meets the needs of city employers
- Lifelong learning and employment pathways to good quality work
- A new employer support offer

Our priorities are supported by three cross cutting principles of climate conscious, driven by digital and fair and inclusive.

We are taking a long-term holistic view for education, skills and employment. We need to deliver a system fit for the future; and a system which benefits everyone. We can achieve this by working collaboratively to leverage our community assets, raise aspirations and improve outcomes.

Working with Our Partners

The Council can facilitate local education, skills and employment partnerships but our success is dependent on a strong partnership between employers, education and skills providers, voluntary and community sector and local anchor organisations. This strategy is not owned by one organisation but by all stakeholders who have a role to play in improving the economic prosperity of people in Wolverhampton.

This Strategy provides a framework for action through which the Council and partners can work together to maximise the benefits of growth for our residents and to achieve the wider priorities of Our City: Our Plan. We will build on our strong, local partnerships and good practice to put our resources to the very best possible use.

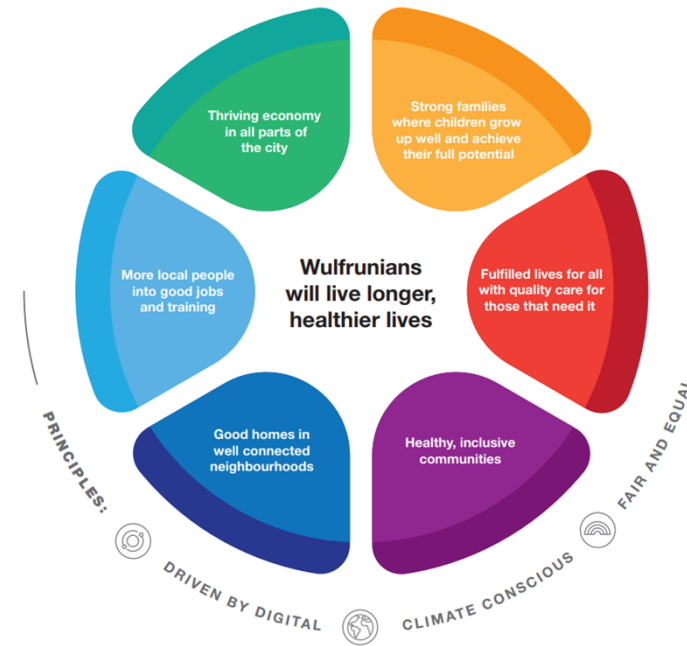
Our ask of city partners is:

- Continue to engage meaningfully with our different communities in the city to understand their needs and ensure pathways into employment, training and education are created.
- Continue to engage with our local businesses across different sectors to understand their short, medium and long-term skills needs.
- Ensure that we align our activity with robust data so that the decisions we make are evidence based and our resource is targeted at those most in need.
- To work with the Council to design and deliver innovative solutions to some of the skills and employment challenges in the city.

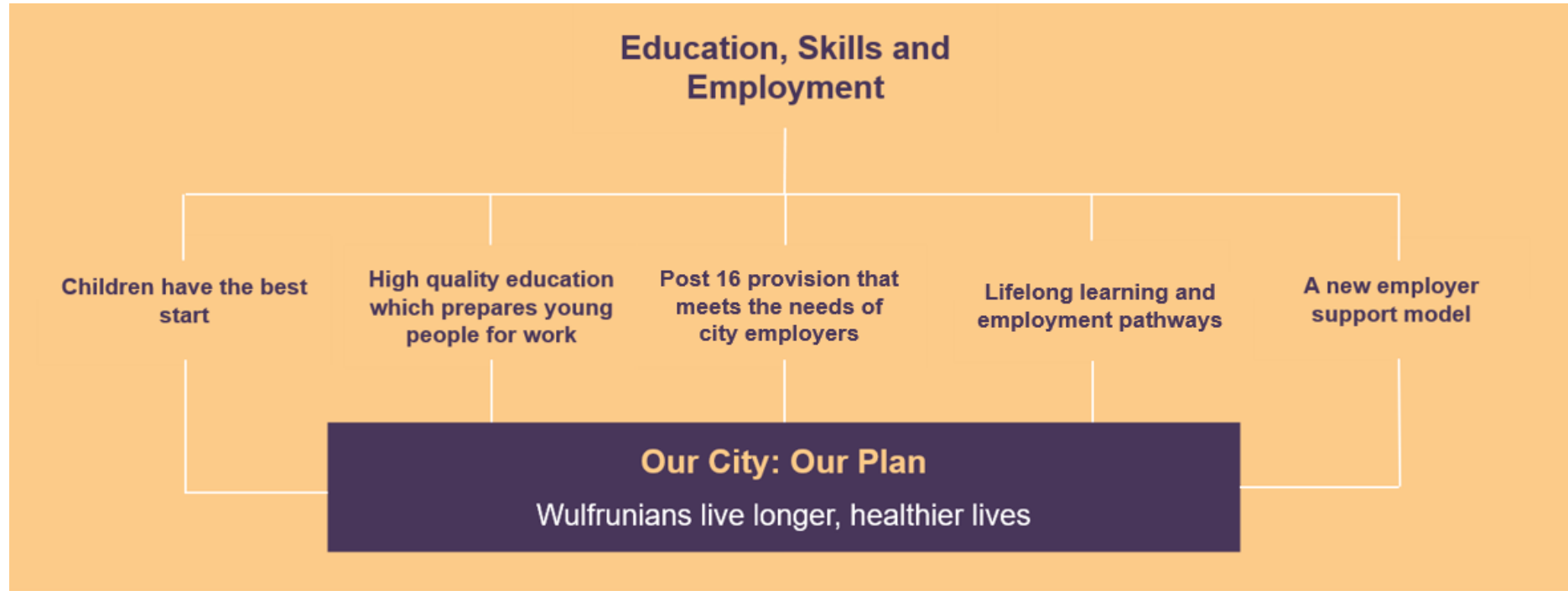
Our City: Our Plan

Our City: Our Plan is the Council's overarching strategic framework. It sets out how we will work with our partners to improve outcomes for local people.

This strategy supports delivery of Our City: Our Plan through its focus on supporting families from the earliest point, providing high quality education and lifelong learning opportunities that improve skill levels and open up opportunities to better work.



Plan on a Page



Page 29

OUR PRINCIPLES

We will underpin our work with the following key principles;



CLIMATE FOCUSED

We will grasp the opportunities of a green industrial revolution and meet the challenges of supporting high carbon sectors, their workers and our residents through the transition to net zero. Growing our green skills base so that local people can access new and higher paid jobs in the low carbon economy.



DRIVEN BY DIGITAL

Digital skills are now more important than ever to securing employment. Many businesses will see their operations transform in the coming years through the adoption of digital technology. Through joined shared data practices deliver insight led skills and employment services to local people.



FAIR AND INCLUSIVE

Ensuring communities have the skills to benefit from growth. Addressing educational and skills disparities across our communities and the issue of social mobility. Providing inclusive and accessible lifelong learning for all in our city. Working with our city employers to embed fair pay and employment.

Children have the best start in life

The first 1001 days from conception to the age of two sets the foundations for many aspects of a child's life, including their cognitive, social and emotional development. Parents and carers have a crucial role in ensuring children have access to positive early life experiences and a strong start to learning by providing a nurturing, secure and healthy environment. Building on the learning which has taken place at home, high quality early years settings are a key enabler of positive outcomes for children equipping them with core skills in literacy and numeracy as well as social and emotional skills. The benefits of early years education are particularly acute for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Children who receive these strong foundations typically go on to do better at school, secure better employment, undertake further learning and have improved health and wellbeing outcomes. The mental health and wellbeing of mums, dads, partners and carers is also important for the development of the baby. It is important that parents and carers get the right type of support to help them give their babies the best start in life. Wolverhampton has a strong city-wide Family Hub offer which brings together a number of key services to provide vital support and opportunities for families to learn and grow together.

Areas of Focus

Wolverhampton has consistently high levels of funded early years provision with age 2 at 99% and age 3 and 4 at 95% of settings rated as 'Good' or 'Outstanding' in 2022. This is above both regional and national average for provision at age 2 and age 3 and 4.

Studies show positive links between access to early education and a child's long term educational attainment. To ensure children in our city benefit from the excellent early years provision we will continue to work with our partners to increase overall uptake of funded childcare entitlement. In 2022;

- The proportion of eligible 2-year-olds accessing their funded entitlement was at 76% surpassing the national average but slightly below the regional average;
- 90% of 3- and 4-year-olds accessed free early years education which is below the national average of 92%.

More children accessing early education will help to sustain the increase in outcomes at Early Years Foundation Stage which have risen steadily over the last 10 years, in 2022 61.9% of children achieved a 'Good' level of development at reception stage. There is still work to do to close the gap on the national average and reduce the variation in outcomes across different localities in the city and pupil groups. Wolverhampton has high levels of deprivation in some areas and one of the most common disparities is between

disadvantaged pupils and their more affluent peers. Closing the attainment gap across all pupil groups is vital to improving outcomes.

Challenging the health, environmental and social factors which impact strongly on educational outcomes remains a high priority. Health and social care as well as community providers play an important role in supporting good early development of children. This is particularly important in Wolverhampton where incidence of smoking and obesity in early pregnancy are high compared to national averages. Through joined up multi agency working we will continue to strengthen families where children need extra support or are at risk, and to mitigate the negative effects of the wider determinants of educational outcomes.

Going Forward

To deliver against our action areas, we will:

- Deliver joined up multi agency support at the earliest opportunity through our family hubs, delivering our Start for Life offer.
- Roll out a programme of activity which promotes the importance of the first 1001 days of a child's life, and how everyone in Wolverhampton can play a part in developing resilient children who are ready to learn and are school ready.
- Launch a programme of targeted engagement through our Family Hubs across the city to drive uptake of funded early years provision to ensure all eligible children can benefit.
- Continue to build relationships with parents and carers through local forums to increase parental engagement on the importance of good early development for children.
- Continue to support Early Years settings across the city to deliver consistently high-quality provision.
- Provide more free opportunities for parents and carers to develop their skills and support children to learn through our Family Community Learning offer
- Take action to improve mental health and wellbeing in the city including support for families to enable children and young people to thrive.

City Indicators

To help shape and inform our key activity under this priority we will monitor the following city indicators.

- % of Early Years and Childcare settings rated Good or Outstanding
- % of take up of 2-year-olds benefitting from early education
- % of pupils achieving the Early Learning Goals in Communication and Language and Literacy at Early Years Foundation Stage

High quality education which prepares young people for work

Our Education Excellence strategy 2021 – 2024 sets our strategic framework for driving improvement across all education settings in the city as well as driving up attainment levels. The strategy sets out a vision to create an inclusive education system which promotes the highest standards for all children and young people, closes the attainment gap and allows every pupil to achieve their full potential. In 2023, 89% of the city's schools were rated as 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by OFSTED, an increase of 14% points since 2014. This is compared to 88% nationally and 86% in the West Midlands. We will build on this upward trend ensuring that all children whatever their background leave the education system with the skills, confidence, and drive to succeed.

Preparing young people for the world of further education, training, and work in an increasingly uncertain economy with rapidly changing skills needs requires a greater focus on high quality careers information, advice and guidance which is aligned to local labour market need. We will support all young people to make successful transitions into adulthood in particular those who are looked after, with special education needs, disabilities or vulnerabilities. Children and young people's emotional wellbeing, physical and mental health are vitally important and underpin positive outcomes in childhood and success as an adult.

What do we need to focus on?

The Covid 19 pandemic forced an unprecedented interruption in education for thousands of children and young people across the city. Despite the difficult times of the pandemic, the city's KS2 and KS4 have continued to show positive trends, but there is still work to do to bring levels of attainment in line with the national average, so that more of our young people leave school with the qualifications they need to succeed.

Moving from secondary education at 16 into further education, training and employment is a critical transition point for young people. It is important that we support young people to make the best possible decisions on their future employment prospects. This is a real area of strength for the city with our participation levels at 16 and 17 being some of the best in the country. Going forward we will have a continued focus on consistent and effective transition planning at years 11. Explored under our priority three on post 16 education is a proposal to enhance support at year 13 so that all young people get the support they need to make a successful move into work.

We also know from employer feedback as part of the development of the West Midlands and Warwickshire Local Skills Improvement Plan that essential or 'soft' skills are as important to being successful in the workplace as qualifications. These essential skills include communication, team working, innovation and problem solving as well as more general office etiquette. To support young people to develop these critical skills we will develop a best in practice work experience offer in Wolverhampton as

part of a wider career's advice, information, and guidance offer. Working with families, local employers and schools we will ensure that our young people can access hands on experience of the workplace.

Low aspirations hold back some of our young people in the city. This can be due to a range of factors including intergenerational workless, and there are some parts of our city where consecutive generations of families have struggled gain and sustain employment. This can be down to a range of factors including economic restructuring of the local economy over many decades. In addition to our enhanced work experience offer we will also bolster mentoring opportunities through a targetted programme to raise aspiration across the city.

The Wolverhampton Strategy for Children and Young People with Special Education Needs and Disabilities 2020 – 2023 was co-developed with the Wolverhampton SEND Partnership Board. It sets out how we will ensure that all children and young people with SEND and their families have the opportunity to achieve a good quality, ordinary life. Through this strategy and our partnerships, we continue to work with education providers and the city's Education, Employment and Skills Board to improve availability of and access to inclusive employment pathways and opportunities for all children and young people.

Going Forward

To deliver against our action areas, we will:

- Through our #YES and Hy5 Youth commitment we will continue to help our young people be healthy, be connected and be heard, valuing their contribution in making Wolverhampton a great place to grow up and learn.
- Continue to deliver consistently high-quality services to children and families.
- Co-produce a post 16 transition policy and supporting activity programme with partners in the city to ensure young people receive the very best support to help them make a successful transition from secondary education into further and higher education, training or employment.
- Support the Black Country Careers Hub to go beyond the Gatsby Benchmarks to ensure students leave schools and colleges with the employability skills businesses need.

- Continue to be a Cornerstone Employer within the BC Careers Hub, offering opportunities for young people within our schools and colleges to experience first hand employment experience within the city council.
- Through our Education Excellence strategy, we will have a continued focus on the recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers and education leaders, strong school improvement offer and effective transition planning at all key stages and phases.

City Indicators

To help shape and inform our key activity under this priority we will monitor the following city indicators.

- % of schools in the city that are rated Good or Outstanding
- Average Attainment 8 score per pupil
- % gap in Attainment 8 score gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children
- Levels of 16-17 year olds Not in Education, Employment or Training
- % of 16- and 17-year-olds with SEND in education, employment or training
- Gatsby Benchmarks

Post 16 education provision that meets the needs of city employers

The options for post-16 education, training and learning are now very diverse. The range of pathways allow more choice to suit different strengths, learning preferences and aspirations. Since 2015, school leavers are required to continue full-time education, training, apprenticeships; or to undertake part-time education or training whilst in employment until they reach age 18. Training providers, colleges and universities have a key role to play in increasing opportunity and prosperity, whilst also developing skills that meet the needs of the local and regional economy.

Traditionally skills policy has been highly centralised and driven largely by central government, often this approach has failed to recognise the needs of local labour markets. We want to develop a place-based approach to post 16 education which supports a range of learning styles, needs and careers ambitions. An inclusive, accessible model of post 16 education which supports traditional academic routes but also embraces vocational centred further and higher education which is delivered in partnership with business and industry.

Areas of Focus

In 2023, the Council alongside city training and education providers conducted a review of post 16 provision in the city with the purpose of understanding whether the current offer met the needs of learners and local employers. The review identified areas of good practice, as well as opportunities to better prepare our residents for available jobs and future careers.

While our participation levels for 16- and 17-year-olds are amongst the best in the country these levels are not sustained and there is a drop off in participation in education, training, or employment post 18 which is demonstrated by the high level of youth unemployment in the city. Our attainment rate as a city at Key Stage 5 are below the national average with results at A level in 2022 being a C+ in Wolverhampton compared to a B nationally. Raising attainment rates at key stage 5 will be critical to improving participation rates. We will enhance transition support for young people at 18 to ensure they have the support they need to make a successful move into further education or work.

Many young people still follow traditional academic routes when they leave secondary school. We know that across our business base and more widely residents there is a lack of awareness about technical and vocational, education and training pathways. We will raise awareness of these pathways and boost careers advice and transition support at key points in the learner journey.

A key challenge to developing a more coherent skills offer is that funding of post 16 provision is complex, with numerous funding streams and criteria. This makes skills pathways for local people difficult to follow, and often encourages providers to shape

provision to meet funding criteria rather than focus on learner and employer need. Working collaboratively with industry, employer representative bodies and education and skills providers we must move towards a more agile and place-based skills system in the city.

Demand for technical skills in new sections of our economy is growing rapidly. Digital skills will have increasing prominence; there are anticipated to be increases in demand for workers skilled in AI, automation, and software engineering skills, as well as data analysis and modelling skills, particularly as homes and businesses move to becoming “smart” with smart energy solutions, demonstrating the interconnectivity between digital and green skills needs. As part of our wider skills offer, we will seek to increase the amount and range of higher-level technical provision at levels 3-5 in skills gaps areas in the city, to ensure we are responding to the labour market growth in higher skilled occupations.

Going Forward

To deliver against our action areas, we will:

- Work with schools, colleges, training providers and other partners to implement the recommendations of the Wolverhampton Post 16 review to establish a new model of place-based post 16 provision in the city.
- Work with secondary schools sixth City of Wolverhampton College to review the employment and careers support offer for 18-year olds and the way young people’s participation is tracked to ensure clear and consistent support is provided as they transition from young person to adult.
- Establish the City of Wolverhampton Post 16 Pathways Partnership to bring together education and training providers to ensure that there are consistently strong academic, technical, training and engagement pathways in high quality settings across the city, and meet the needs of local employers.
- Build stronger links between business, education and local public sector anchor institutions to ensure alignment of local labour market need and the city’s post 16 offer.
- Work with partners to promote technical level qualifications, including T levels and apprenticeships as positive study choice with clear articulation of career pathways.

- Work with our partners to deliver high quality careers information, advice and guidance throughout every stage of the education system, to prepare children, young people and adults as they transition in to work and progress throughout their careers.

City Indicators

To help shape and inform our key activity under this priority we will monitor the following city indicators.

- KS4 and KS5 attainment
- Destination data, year 14 onwards
- % of care leavers in education, employment or training
- % of 19 year olds with a level 3 qualification
- Number of apprenticeship starts
- %of young adults (18-24) claiming unemployment benefits

Lifelong learning and employment pathways to good quality work

Many young people today will work 50-55 year careers with participation in the labour market until they are in their 70's. Alongside this advances in technology and innovation, as well as changes to the way we work (facilitated in some part by the pandemic), have caused us to reassess the skills we need to thrive in the workplace. In the future many people will need to upskill or reskill two or three times over their working lives. As a result, we now must place a stronger emphasis on lifelong learning and skills development. This includes working closely with industry to develop sectoral career pathways, strengthening our all-age careers advice and guidance offer, and improving the availability and accessibility of adult learning.

To support our lifelong learning offer we are investing in state-of-the-art learning facilities in the city to ensure our residents have access to first class facilities to grow and build their skills. The City Learning Quarter a partnership between the Council and City of Wolverhampton College will co-locate the college, Adult Education Service and city centre library in one location. This isn't just about new physical space but a new seamless learner offer for the city, which will support new school leavers, those looking to upskill and local people who want support to move back into work.

Areas of Focus

Some of our residents find it harder than others to secure work and good quality careers. This is reflected in the levels of economic inactivity and workless households across the city. Barriers to employment can be driven by several factors from caring responsibilities, ill health, or low skills. Around 1 in 10 adults in the city have no formal qualifications. The city adult learning offer plays a crucial role in supporting local people to develop the core skills and behaviours they need to gain, retrain and progress in work. The benefits of adult learning are much wider than just improving resident's qualifications and skills, also making a positive impact on health and wellbeing, community cohesion and confidence.

The Council's Adult Education Service has a focus on widening participation in learning for those furthest from the labour market and supporting them to move towards further learning, skills and employment. The Service works closely with ACL partners in the voluntary and community sector to deliver learning opportunities directly within communities this can include basic English and Maths as well as ESOL. Provision seeks to support those with low or no skills to advance their employment prospects in an inclusive and accessible environment. There are many fantastic employment pathways across the city for local people in our foundational sectors (hospitality, health, social care, logistics and retail) which provide vital employment opportunities to residents as well as our higher growth sectors.

Working with the City of Wolverhampton College, University of Wolverhampton, and other training providers we will also look to further increase the number of residents with higher level skills. Just over half of residents (54.1%) are qualified at level 3 or above, compared with 60% nationally. As a result, employers in the city often face skills shortages, with hard to fill vacancies particularly in roles that require advanced or higher skills. Narrowing the qualifications gap is important for individuals if we are to increase the economic prosperity of local people. People with a level 3 qualification are more likely to be employed, earn more when employed and less likely to claim out of work benefits than those qualified at level 2 or below. People with higher level qualifications who develop higher level skills throughout their working lives are more resilient to labour market change. Analysis of job postings in Wolverhampton over the past 6 months show that, on average, vacancies requiring a level 3 qualification have an advertised salary nearly £6,000 higher than those requiring a level 2 qualification.

We will continue to work closely with industry to develop sectoral career pathways, strengthening our all-age careers advice and guidance offer, and improving the availability and accessibility of adult learning. We will develop a single front door for all skills and employment support in the city reducing the complexity, making it easier for local people to find and access education and training opportunities. This will ensure that local people can develop new skills, improve performance in their current role, support progression at work, increase income, change careers and meet employers' skills needs. The opportunities secured through the West Midlands Deeper Devolution Deal will ensure we have much greater flexibility of skills funding and policy at a local level to deliver our ambitions.

Going Forward

To deliver against our action areas, we will:

- Grow and diversify our adult and community learning offer to support local people to develop English, maths, ESOL, digital and other skills to increase their employability and wellbeing.
- Provide wrap around support and dedicated work coaches for local people looking for work or to retrain through our dedicated employment service, including targeted support for those 18-24 and 50+.
- Through our Wolverhampton Anchor Network, we will develop skills plans for the digital, health and wellbeing, cultural and creative and green sectors in the city so we can align training and education opportunities to the industries of the future.
- Deliver employment support programmes for our most vulnerable residents, including adults with learning disabilities.

- Building on the city's Youth Skills Hubs we will launch our city centre Adult Skills Hub at i10 which will support local people into work, improve their career prospects and gain new skills.
- Provide a one stop shop for employment and skills support in the city through our Wolves Workbox digital platform making it easier for local people to find advice and support, and for businesses to advertise and fill their vacancies.
- Continue to build closer links between the Council and Department for Work and Pensions, including greater data sharing to understand customer needs, monitoring impact of city employment support and to deliver joint interventions to support local people back into work.
- Work with regional employers and the West Midlands Combined Authority to influence and implement the West Midlands Local Skills Improvement Plan so that business and local people have the skills they need to thrive and succeed.

City Indicators

To help shape and inform our key activity under this priority we will monitor the following city indicators.

- % of population with no qualifications
- % of working age population qualified to level 3 and 4
- % of population in skilled occupations
- Number of working age adults (16-64) claiming unemployment benefits
- Total £ spent in Wolverhampton and number of participants on Adult Skills and Community Learning courses funded through the devolved Adult Education Budget

A new model for employer support

Wolverhampton is home to thousands of businesses which offer fantastic employment opportunities. Our economy has emerging sectors in professional services, creative and digital as well as green technologies and sustainable construction which have the potential to create new local jobs with higher wages. There are already well-established sectors in advanced manufacturing aerospace and logistics. Through our inward investment offer we continue to attract national and international businesses to locate to the city bringing with them new jobs and strengthening local supply chains. Working with regional and national partners across the public and private sector we will deliver joined up and insight led initiatives that support all of our city businesses to grow.

To help our businesses maximise the opportunities in our local economy we need to establish a talent pipeline of well skilled people who can meet the needs of local businesses. There is a positive link between the number of high skilled workers in an area and the generation of new and innovative ideas and ways of working which support higher output and productivity. Improving the city's economic growth and tackling poor levels of productivity, relies in part on boosting the skills of the workforce. To do this we want to forge ever closer links to our local businesses base so that we can work together to fill skills gaps and plan for future skills needs. Working collaboratively to build a flexible, adaptable and resilient skills system which is able to respond to existing and emerging opportunity areas. We will align our education and skills system with our business support offer to ensure local people have the skills employers need now and in the future.

Areas of Focus

Despite the pandemic, the number of active businesses in the city increased from 8,715 in 2019 to 8,780 in 2020. This represents 0.7% growth, a higher rate of growth when compared to national (+0.5%). A report from the British Business Bank in November 2022 identified the city as the top local authority in the West Midlands to start a business. We will continue to support new and existing businesses in our city to understand their business support needs and simplify routes to independent growth advice and finance.

A key priority for our city employer offer is to raise levels of productivity to generate more and better jobs for local people. Wolverhampton's output gap (GVA per head in Wolverhampton compared to national average) was £2.7bn for 2020 and since 2004 economic output in the city has increased by £2bn. This output gap reflects that the Wolverhampton economy is less productive and dynamic than the national average.

Addressing the output gap and increasing productivity is made more challenging due to global economic instability driven by the war in Ukraine and the energy crisis. The rapid shift to digital technologies and the climate crisis will also change the way businesses

operate. Working with the West Midlands Combined Authority we will roll out a new package of support for city businesses which will help them to transition to the low carbon economy and harness the power of digital innovation.

The city's business base is predominantly comprised of micro and small businesses with up to 15 employees. This can make upskilling existing employees, recruiting new ones to meet skills gaps and understanding future skills needs challenging. We will roll out a programme of support to help businesses with their recruitment and work force planning so we can link more local people and businesses with opportunity.

Going Forward

To deliver against our action areas, we will:

- Build on our city charter and work with employers and other city partners to champion inclusive employment practices to ensure there is a pathway to success for all residents in our city.
- Be the best place in the region to start and grow a business bolstered by a new, first-class employer support service shaped by city businesses.
- Leverage the Wolverhampton Pound's spending power so millions more are spent in our city to create job and business opportunities.
- Support local businesses with workforce recruitment and planning particularly in those sectors which face recruitment and retention challenges.
- Support local companies to upskill and reskill their staff in order to improve productivity, diversify and growth their business.
- Support local people who want to start their own business through our city centre business support hub, IGNITE which offers new business workspace and start up support.
- Launch a new social value policy to leverage maximum return from city investment for local people to generate new jobs and opportunities.

City Indicators

To help shape and inform our key activity under this priority we will monitor the following city indicators.

- Business that survive one year in city
- Businesses that survive five years in the city

Delivering the Strategy

This strategy is a 'living' document and we will regularly review and refresh it to ensure that it continues to reflect the priorities of local people and capture the fast-changing nature of the local economy and impact it is having on the city's residents.

We will use this plan to align service area plans and operational activity with the strategic objectives in our priority areas. It will support decision making and determine how we use the resource we have to deliver the best outcomes, in the most effective and efficient way. We will monitor and closely manage our performance against this plan, use it to drive delivery of our objectives.

Supporting the plan is our corporate performance framework. A set of key indicators aligned to our priority areas informed by national and local data sets. This framework will be reported alongside an update on deliver of this plan to Cabinet on a quarterly basis.

This page is intentionally left blank