

Education, Skills and Employment Strategy 2030

Draft for Consultation

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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.

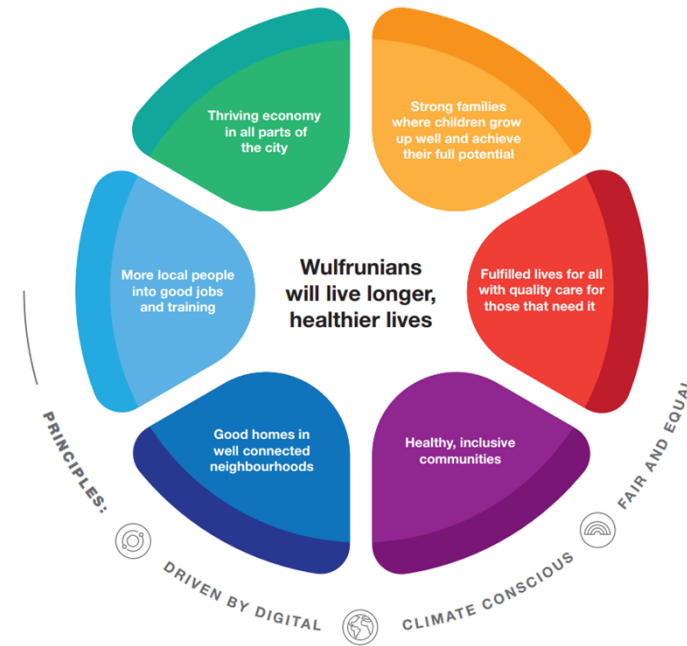
Our ask of city partners is:

- 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



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.