



## Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee Learning and Skills Focus Group

Minutes of the meeting held at County Hall, Colliton Park,  
Dorchester, Dorset, DT1 1XJ on Thursday, 29 June 2017

### **Present:**

Councillor Deborah Croney – Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, Education, Learning and Skills

Councillor Daryl Turner – Cabinet member for the Natural and Built Environment  
(facilitating)

### Committee Members

Councillors Andy Canning, Jean Dunseith, Peter Hall, Jon Orrell, Margaret Phipps and David Shortell.

### Members Attending:

Councillors Ray Bryan, Steve Butler, Graham Carr-Jones, Katharine Garcia, Nick Ireland and David Walsh.

Officers Attending: Mike Harries (Corporate Director for Environment and Economy), David Northover (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Jay Mercer (Education Transformation Lead), Matthew Piles (Service Director - Economy) and David Walsh (Economy & Enterprise Team Leader Economy), Andy Smith (Group Finance Manager), Jay Mercer (Assistant Director, Prevention and Partnerships, Children's Services), Rosie Knapper (Acting Senior Advisor, Prevention & Partnerships) and Sarah Johnstone (Communications Commissioning Manager).

### Participants:

Kelly Bush, Assistant Principal - Curriculum, Weymouth College

Luke Rake, Principal at Kingston Maurward College, Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership Board Member and Chairman of the Dorset LEP's Rural Enterprise Group

Helen Sotheran, Learning and Development Lead, Dorset County Council

Rod Davis, Chairman and Managing Director, Dorset and Somerset Training Provider Network

Note: These minutes have been prepared by officers as a record of the meeting and of any decisions reached. They are to be considered and confirmed at the next meeting of the Committee to be held on **Monday, 16 October 2017.**)

### **Welcome, Introductions and Apologies for Absence**

20 By way of introduction, the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, Education and Learning and Skills, Councillor Deborah Croney, took the opportunity to welcome all those participating in the meeting, thanked them all for attending and clarified the basis on which the meeting of the Committee's Learning and Skills Focus Group was being held, what it was designed to achieve, how this would be done and what outcomes might be expected.

She explained that in the absence of a Chairman or Vice-Chairman on this occasion, the Committee would be convened as a Learning and Skills Focus Group and would be facilitated by her and Cabinet Member for Natural and Built Environment, Daryl Turner. In doing this, the opportunity could be taken to benefit from a better understanding of what learning and skills entailed, the importance of this in benefitting economic growth, what opportunities there were for this to be applied and how outcomes might be best delivered.

An invitation had been extended to all members to attend this meeting so that a more inclusive working group approach might be adopted, in encouraging participation and for contributions to be made to this important issue so that a better understanding of how the learning and skills agenda was being applied might be gained. Councillor Croney was pleased to see that so many members had taken this opportunity.

So that full justice could be done to this matter, the Group decided that all other items scheduled for consideration at the meeting should be deferred, for consideration at the Committee meeting on 16 October 2017, with any agreement being made by the Group, in principle, likewise being able to be ratified by the Committee at that meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jon Andrews, Cherry Brooks (Vice-Chairman) and Spencer Flower.

Apologies were also received from Rob Dunford - Head of Programmes, Dorset LEP who was due to participate.

### **Minutes**

- 21 The Group decided to defer confirmation of the minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2017 until the meeting of the Committee on 16 October 2017.

### **Terms of Reference**

- 22 The Group decided to defer consideration of this item until their Committee meeting on 16 October 2017.

### **Putting the Committee into Context - Prosperous**

- 23 The Group decided to defer consideration of this matter until the Committee meeting on 16 October 2017

### **Skills and Learning - An Assessment Opportunity**

- 24 In looking at how economic growth might be stimulated across Dorset so that communities might prosper and thrive, the Focus Group took the opportunity to look at what part skills and learning could play in this - in so far as its importance in benefitting economic growth, what opportunities there were for this to be applied and how outcomes might be best delivered. In doing this, an assessment could be made to determine what was being done, how it was being done and if there was the opportunity, or need, for improvements to be made. It was considered that the benefits to Dorset from this could well lead to the generation of significant economic and social prosperity.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, Education, Learning and Skills set in context the importance of skills and learning: in being seen to be a fundamental and integral part of all that the County Council was trying to achieve, in enhancing economic growth and providing every opportunity for Dorset to be as successful as it could be by providing the opportunities for this to be realised.

She advocated that what was being done and the way in which it was being done should be used as a basis for improving the learning opportunities for the people of Dorset so that they might be better equipped in meeting employment needs and, in doing so, have the ability to contribute towards improvements being made in sustaining economic growth.

As part of this process, the opportunity was being provided for skills and learning service providers to join the meeting to explain to the Committee:-

- what part they were playing in delivering the skills agenda; the means by

which this was being achieved within their organisation; and what outcomes they hoped to derive from this;

- what part they felt the County Council could play in facilitating this process to ensure that it was as successful as it could be.

The invitees were given the opportunity to address the Group so that they could learn what part was being played in delivering the skills and learning agenda and for members to be able to ask questions of them in order to gain a better understanding of what was being delivered across the county, the means by which this was being done and what part the Committee might play in enabling this.

In sharing these experiences, it was anticipated that the Group might gain a better understanding of what was being done to enhance and improve skills and learning and help determine how the County Council could better play its part in helping to facilitate what was necessary in order to deliver this more effectively.

As part of this, a report by the Assistant Director, Prevention and Partnerships, Children's Services Directorate set out what was being done, in the first instance, by the County Council on the skills agenda; what this entailed; how it was intended for this to be delivered; what it was hoped would be achieved and/or the desired outcomes; the part that the County Council was playing in facilitating this; and what partnership/joint working arrangements were in place.

The Assistant Director, Prevention and Partnerships informed the Group of what academic performance was being achieved by Dorset's young people and what Dorset's educational provision was able to offer them in terms of choices and opportunities. Whilst it was considered that this was as successful as it might be, there was seen to be room for improvement and the means by which this might be achieved was identified in the Assistant Director's report in terms of how academic results might be improved and the means for doing this and what was needed for this to be achieved. Developments continually were being made to ensure the best possible outcomes were achieved.

In particular, skills projections indicated the continued need to focus on upskilling young people and the working age population to Level 4 (higher education) and beyond.

Access to education, employment and training was seen to be a fundamental obligation of the Local Education Authority and every effort was being made to achieve this. The part various education providers played in ensuring that those opportunities were available was explained, together with their relationship with the County Council and the working arrangements with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and the Western Dorset Growth Strategy Board to ensure that the priority actions identified by the skills agenda were being delivered. Members noted that the Economic Prosperity Board and the Skills and Progression Board both played a fundamental part in this process too.

The Group's discussion identified the following:-

- in order to entice highly skilled employers into the area there was a need to ensure that the workforce was suitably skilled in preparedness to contributing towards the growth of the local economy, to ensure that its sustainability would be maintained.
- accordingly there was a need to ensure that the necessary housing needs were met - and at an affordable cost - to attract and, importantly, retain the local workforce. Improvements to infrastructure was essential to this too.
- a need to provide the opportunities to ensure that it was attractive for young people to remain local and to not have to find work or accommodation elsewhere.

- ensuring that the right conditions applied to meet their particular circumstances with a range of taster opportunities in schools, colleges and workplaces being available to stimulate them.
- there was a need to ensure that the education system was designed to build up and enhance skills so that transferable, employable skills were achieved in preparedness for what challenges and opportunities lay ahead in the working world and having the ability to do so.
- there was a need to provide the opportunities for young people to be able to make decisions for themselves on what choices they were able to take, to take responsibility for their actions and have the motivation to access those opportunities and to be stimulated by what opportunities and options there were.
- such issues could only be addressed with the cooperation of schools, colleges and business partners all participating in the means of achieving this, with key partners such as the Dorset LEP providing the necessary leverage for it to be applied.

Kelly Bush of Weymouth College then explained how his College was run and the partnerships it was involved with, what it had to offer students and the opportunities they were being given and, from this, how skills and learning could be best applied. In being a leading proponent of academic and skills based courses for Dorset including – in particular stone masonry and engineering – the part it played in providing much needed skills and learning, with the benefits this brought was much appreciated by the Group. The Group saw how successful the College was from the results attained and the standards being set. Courses on offer were outlined, especially those for mature students in higher education and foundation courses, with increased employer links providing the scope for putting both training and qualifications received into practice. Of particular interest to the Group was the work with Plymouth University and Bournemouth University in media 3D animation and what prospects there were in that profession.

What the College was offering met identified Dorset LEP priorities and played a significant part in ensuring there were continued improvements to learning and skills across South Dorset, in complementing and enhancing the prospect of economic growth.

The Group were pleased to learn of the successes achieved by the College and hoped these could be maintained. They considered that the collaborative work was very encouraging and was seen to be vital in ensuring that the students and College alike had the best chance of continued future success.

Luke Rake, Principal at Kingston Maurward College and Chairman of the Dorset LEP's Rural Enterprise Group informed the Group of the part Kingston Maurward College was playing in enhancing and improving skills and learning, how it was doing this and by what means. The Rural Enterprise Group provided the means by which the economy of a rural areas remained viable, was accessible and remained vibrant.

In being a leading land-based studies and related subject areas college - with an active working estate - the Group were interested to learn of the benefits this brought and what contribution it was making to the rural economy. Mr Rake explained how the College was run, what it had to offer students, the opportunities they were being given and, from this, how skills and learning could be best applied. Of particular interest was the way in which the AgriTech strategy was being applied, what that entailed and how modern and progressive farming methods were being adopted so as to optimise food production, food security and national self sufficiency. The investment being made by the Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership in ensuring that the rural economy remained viable was significant and members were pleased to know that this was the case.

The way in which the College addressed and invested in land management; agriculture - both arable and livestock farming – and countryside pursuits demonstrated the means by which rural productivity was being enhanced and those industries which utilised the land - including horticulture, market gardening, animal sciences, veterinary and arboriculture – all had a part to play in this.

Given that the rural economy played such a significant part in the prosperity of Dorset and was integral to all it did, the role of the College and what it had to offer, was essential to all this and the Group was pleased to see the how successful it was in doing that. It was felt that the work that it did served to actively complement the County Farms Estate and the opportunities which this provided.

The practices used to develop skills and learning were explained and the Group was pleased to see how successful the College was from the results attained and the standards being set. Courses on offer were outlined - not only for those core, land management based ones – but vocational, foundation and academic courses, offering a breadth of transferable skills and qualifications. Of importance - not only in agricultural business, but all business - was sound financial management and business acumen, with an understanding of what this entailed and how it should be applied to improve productivity, work more efficiently and in reducing costs.

In particular, Weymouth and Kingston Maurward Colleges had been working towards some form of combined prospectus which would encourage students to be able to remain locally to study and work, so there was no need for them to have to move away. Working collaboratively with other institutions and organisations – including the County Council - was seen to be highly beneficial. It was considered that in facilitating small, rural businesses to be able to make incremental improvements to what they were doing was the right means of achieving success. The general challenge was to ensure that the viability of communities was maintained, by making them attractive places for small businesses to prosper and having a skilled workforce to draw upon.

Transportation infrastructure as a means of accessing the courses available was critical to their success and this should be maintained and enhanced wherever possible. Moreover, the benefits of improvements to digital infrastructure - by way of accessibility to Superfast Broadband and 4G/5G mobile coverage - was essential to how successful rural business could be and how the learning and skills provided by the College could contribute towards this was essential. It was considered that the learning of business skills, as well as their practical application, was fundamental to the success of the rural economy.

Mr Rake emphasised the importance of being able to access good quality broadband in a rural setting as an essential means of being able to run a rural business on a daily basis. Having access to reliable Superfast Broadband was now considered to be a fundamental requirement in how farming businesses were managed, with this being essential in how submissions were able to be made to Defra. Equally important was the need for accessibility to a strong and dependable mobile signal for communication purposes and in addressing rural isolation. What options were available for providing this he felt needed to be explored more readily, so as to meet the needs of particular circumstances.

The Focus Group thanked Mr Rake for the positive work his College was doing, in investing in skills and learning that would benefit the rural economy and by providing the means by which businesses could be successful and rural communities thrive. It was considered that the understanding between the College and the County Council served to improve the opportunities local communities had in benefiting from enhanced skills and leaning which could be readily applied.

Helen Sotheran, Learning and Development Lead at the County Council then took the

opportunity to explain what part the County Council was playing in providing opportunities for young people to succeed through the Apprenticeship Scheme and the benefits this brought. She explained how the Scheme was being applied, what it entailed and the way in which it was funded, developed and being delivered. Whilst the available funding for this could, as it stood, only be used for specific purposes, officers hoped that there might be a certain degree of flexibility in how this could be used to meet particular needs which had been identified regarding accessibility issues. The recruitment process was also outlined and what this entailed. Members learnt what it could offer young people by way of a career in public service and what benefits it was hoped would be gained.

There was seen to be an attractiveness in being able to offer the prospect of both academic and vocational achievement for those wishing to make a career for themselves in local government. She explained that there were three strands to how the Scheme was being applied and delivered. This not only provided opportunities for a career within the County Council and other public sector partners, but the transferable life skills necessary to be able to contribute to the workplace and society, wherever this prevailed.

The role of the Dorset Apprenticeship Forum as a means of establishing a collaborative approach between public sector partners - in them being able to pool their resources - was seen to be beneficial, as was the work being done in schools towards recruitment. The use of social media in doing this was seen to be a practical and pragmatic means of reaching the desired audience in a way in which would be attractive and receptive to them.

The Group were pleased to learn that the County Council remained committed to investment in the future of their young people and the benefits this brought and that an enhancement of their skill sets went a long way towards achieving this. In being seen to provide them with the opportunities to be able to succeed in their working life and to make a contribution towards economic success and prosperity, the example being set by the County Council in investing in its workforce in this way was considered to be of significant merit and would hopefully encourage other employers to do the same.

Rod Davis, Chairman and Managing Director, Dorset and Somerset Training Provider Network (DSTPN) took the opportunity to explain what part his organisation was playing in helping to facilitate how skills and training was delivered across Dorset. He outlined how DSTPN operated; what was entailed in delivering the training on offer and what needs were being met by what was being provided. The Group learnt that the Network's vision was to encourage and support providers to operate in a culture of collaborative working for the benefit of member organisations, whilst continually enhancing the experience, learning and achievement of learners and meeting employer and community needs. The development and improvement of an organisation's workforce meant that they would be more efficient in what they did and how they did it. The way in which the organisation operated meant that, if necessary, there was flexibility to adapt to the needs of its membership.

Engagement with businesses and organisations on their training needs to ensure that their workforce was readily equipped to meet whatever demands faced them was seen to be an essential requirement of the way in which modern enterprises were run. The benefits of having an independent organisation like DSTPN to facilitate this process was self evident. What partnership arrangements they had were described, with the work between employers and schools on the importance of governance; finance; management and sales in the success of a business being emphasised. DSTPN was a mechanism by which businesses could get the best out of their employees by providing them with the right resources, training and learning to be able to do that.

Of particular prominence was the skills and training that would be required for employment at the new Hinkley Point C Nuclear Power facility, which was anticipated to be a significant employer in south west England and would undoubtedly attract a considerable sized workforce from all across Dorset, and particularly from its north western quadrant. Those wishing to play their part in this development could do so by having access to the necessary skills and training, and what DSTPN was offering would go a considerable way towards this. Members recognised however that given the draw the Hinkley Point development was likely to have on the finite skills and resources within Dorset, strategies should be put in place to ensure that sufficient skills and service supply remained in order to sustain local needs and demands.

One of the biggest challenges was to ensure that outstanding apprenticeship vacancies were addressed so that, as far as possible, the right person was in the right place for the right job. DSTPN offered a mechanism by which employment, learning and skills opportunities could be widely publicised so that economic aspirations might be fulfilled.

The Group were pleased to learn about what DSTPN had to offer and were encouraged that it was working in partnership with the County Council in enhancing its Apprenticeship Scheme and how this could best be delivered. How DSTPN operated and the role it had in facilitating training needs and advising on how organisations should go about this was seen to be invaluable and the Group hoped to see continued success with what was being done.

The Group's attention was also drawn to the receipt of a written representation from Dave Barnes – Strategic Director at Christchurch and East Dorset Partnership and Dorset LEP's Bournemouth International Growth (BIG) Programme Lead on Skills Accelerator on what work was being done by BIG on skills and learning.

Having received the various presentations, members thanked all those who had contributed to the debate. How the meeting had been conducted reflected a positive approach that was designed to be more dynamic in its delivery process so that members could have that better understanding of what was being done to facilitate, deliver and access training and skills needs across Dorset and the means by which this was being achieved. The Group appreciated having the opportunity to hear direct from those providers of skills and learning to understand what was being done and the way in which it was being done. Hearing from a cross section of Dorset's providers on what they considered worked well, the benefits this brought, the challenges to be met and how improvements could be made was fundamental in their understanding of what outcomes might be able to be realised.

In summarising, the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, Education, Learning and Skills acknowledged the ongoing partnership working arrangements between the County Council, local employers and skills and training providers in establishing the means of accessing learning and skills opportunities so that transferable employability and business skills; skills progression and the practicalities for doing this might be achieved.

In enhancing those interpersonal skills required for forming successful relationships – in business and in life - and motivational techniques for getting the best out of people, there were accrued benefits to be gained which would serve to enhance economic growth and prosperity across Dorset. The need for rural productivity to be optimised was critical in ensuring successful outcomes were achieved. The emphasis being placed on apprenticeship schemes was seen to add value to what an organisation was able to offer and the investment it was making in its product or service.

Accordingly the Group hoped that what had been heard at the meeting from the

invitees could be built upon and what was being done used as a basis for making improvements to the learning opportunities of Dorset residents as preparation for equipping them better for meeting employment needs and, in doing so, in contributing towards improvements in sustaining economic growth and prosperity.

In agreeing - in principle - to what courses of action were being proposed, the Group agreed to recommend that the Committee endorse these at their meeting on 16 October 2017.

### **Recommended**

That the information included in the Assistant Director's report, together with that provided by those partner bodies attending the meeting be noted, with the actions being taken, and proposed to be taken; the issues raised in the course of discussion and; the outcomes from these - as set out in the minute above - being agreed in principle, to be endorsed by the Committee at its meeting on 16 October 2017, in being seen to be sufficient, satisfactory and a sound basis on which to build, namely:-

- in order to entice highly skilled employers into the area, there was a need to ensure that the workforce was suitably skilled in preparedness to contributing towards the growth of the local economy, to ensure that its sustainability would be maintained.
- accordingly there was a need to ensure that the necessary housing needs were met - and at an affordable cost - to attract and, importantly, retain the local workforce. Improvements to infrastructure was essential to this too.
- a need to provide the opportunities to ensure that it was attractive for young people to remain local and to not have to find work or accommodation elsewhere.
- ensuring that the right conditions applied to meet their particular circumstances with a range of taster opportunities in schools, colleges and workplaces being available to stimulate them.
- there was a need to ensure that the education system was designed to build up and enhance skills so that transferable, employable skills were achieved in preparedness for what challenges and opportunities lay ahead in the working world and having the ability to do so.
- there was a need to provide the opportunities for young people to be able to make decisions for themselves on what choices they were able to take, to take responsibility for their actions and have the motivation to access those opportunities and to be stimulated by what opportunities and options there were.
- such issues could only be addressed with the cooperation of schools, colleges and business partners all participating in the means of achieving this, with key partners such as the Dorset LEP providing the necessary leverage for it to be applied.
- acknowledgement of the ongoing partnership working arrangements between the County Council, local employers and skills and training providers in establishing the means of accessing learning and skills opportunities so that transferable employability and business skills; skills progression and the practicalities for doing this might be achieved.
- development of transferable skills to readily equip the workforce in being adaptable to changing needs and demands
- accessibility to physical and digital infrastructure and the enhancement, where practicable, of broadband and mobile signal connectivity
- Investment in small rural businesses in order to make incremental improvements
- strategies to be put in place to ensure sufficient skills an service supplier remain local to meet local needs and demands
- how the funding of the County Council's Apprenticeship Scheme might be reengineered to be able to accommodate the accessibility issues raised.



Reason for Recommendation

Skills and learning are key components of a prosperous economy and should be enhanced, wherever practicable.

**Mobile Phone Coverage in Dorset**

25 The Group decided to defer consideration of this item until the Committee meeting on 16 October 2017.

**Progress being made with the rollout of Superfast Broadband**

26 The Group decided to defer consideration of this item until the Committee meeting on 16 October 2017.

**Corporate Plan: Draft Refresh 2017-18 / Outcomes Focused Monitoring Report , May 2017**

27 The Group decided to defer consideration of this matter until the Committee meeting on 16 October 2017.

**Work Programme**

28 The Group deferred consideration of this matter until the meeting of the Committee on 16 October 2017.

Meeting Duration: 11.00 am - 1.00 pm