

Cabinet

5 October 2021

Dorset Skills Commission

For Decision

Portfolio Holders: Cllr A Parry, Children, Education, Skills, and Early Help, and Cllr T Ferrari, Economic Growth, Assets and Property (joint leads)

Local Councillor(s): All Cllrs

Executive Director: John Sellgren, Executive Director of Place

Report Author: Jon Bird

Title: Interim Service Manager, Growth and Economic Regeneration

Tel: 01305 221895

Email: jon.bird@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Report Status: Public

Recommendation:

- a) To create a Dorset Skills Commission between November 2021 and September 2022
- b) For this Commission to facilitate the skills delivery needed for an effective and at-pace response to a jobs-led approach to COVID-19 economic recovery across Dorset
- c) That the Commission undertakes a review into the Dorset skills landscape – with a particular consideration of the National Skills White Paper, producing a report that lays out a potential skills journey and opportunities/needs based on 10-, 20- and 30-years trajectories
- d) That the Commission works closely with the Dorset Skills Board and Panel to support immediate implementation of the wider skills priorities within the agreed Dorset Skills Plan and Dorset Investment Prospectus.
- e) That the Executive Director for Place, after consultation with the Cabinet member for Children, Education, Skills, and Early Help, and the Cabinet member for Economic Growth, Assets and Property be given delegated authority to agree with BCP Council and the Dorset LEP the governance structure and membership of the Board for inclusion in the Terms of Reference.

Reason for Recommendation:

“Delivering sustainable economic growth, increasing productivity and the number of high-quality jobs in Dorset, creating great places to live, work and visit” is one of the five Corporate priorities in the Dorset Council Plan. People and Skills is one of the six foundations of the Dorset Council Economic Growth Strategy.

The establishment of a dedicated Commission will oversee an effective and at pace response to a jobs-led approach to COVID-19 economic recovery. It would also provide an objective and independent review of the future Dorset Skills landscape, helping to shape a world-class skills and learning infrastructure for all communities.

The Commission would report to the Council’s Cabinets and the Dorset LEP Board during September 2022.

1. Executive Summary

The importance of a skilled labour market and the link between skills and social mobility has been recognised and embedded across all recent work associated with economic growth at Dorset Council and Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP): In addition to inclusion in the Dorset Council Plan and Economic Growth Strategy, Dorset Council has worked with the Dorset LEP Skills Advisory Panel and Board, including on the Dorset Skills Plan, focussing on providing the skills needed to meet demand, harness future growth opportunities, and attract and retain talent.

A critical focus for Dorset’s successful economic future is ensuring an increase in the availability of a local labour market, with the right skills. At the same time, it has to ensure that these people have the ability to live and move effectively across the region.

The ‘demographic crunch’ across our area (i.e. our rapidly ageing workforce) will put significant pressure on our skill base, social infrastructure and economic development potential. This represents one of the biggest challenges to our economic strategy and ambition, with many businesses struggling to recruit the key skills that enable them to meet demand, to innovate and to grow. This has been further exacerbated with the economic impacts of COVID-19.

Headlines from the wider-Dorset area economic evidence base show that, out of a total population of some 800k (of which 350k are of employment age):

- 25% of people working are due to retire in the next 10 years
- 24% of the working population are furloughed – with a high % risk of redundancy
- We have seen over 150% increase in claimant count (which rises to 190% for 16-24yr olds) – i.e. a high % of people have already experienced job loss.

The evidence base would lead us to infer the following ‘take-away’ points:

- The demographic impact in Dorset is leading to a critical replacement demand issue (i.e. those leaving the workforce to retire are relatively well-qualified/skilled – an equivalent workforce is not ready ‘in the wings’).
- Hard to fill vacancies are marked in Dorset.
- Skills levels fluctuate across the area – with the lowest skilled in areas of relative deprivation.
- Graduates and highly skilled people are leaving the area, with low numbers of those with equivalent skills coming into the area
- COVID-19 has created a significant exposure in key industries: *Hospitality & leisure, manufacturing, construction, arts/creative, tourism*.
- Dorset has a high % of people in self-employment - many of whom have been unable to access additional support in last 12 months.

We need to act now to address these issues and identify the most effective responses.

This report recommends the creation of a time-limited Dorset Skills Commission to oversee an ‘at pace’ response to critical skills issues across Dorset.

Draft Terms of Reference (see appendix) are appended to this report. In summary, we would seek high level business leadership of the Commission, by appointment – with an emphasis on independence and objectivity as well as an understanding of the skills agenda in Dorset, the UK and beyond. It should be led by a figurehead skills expert, preferably from outside Dorset, who can claim the national stage on Dorset’s behalf. The Commission will be established in November 2021, with a final report by 30 September 2022.

The Commission would report to both Councils and the Dorset LEP Board. It is envisaged that the Commission would focus on 3 tasks.

First, to oversee and help shape the most effective response to deal with the immediate implications on skills and learning (for those aged 16 and above) as a result of COVID-19 across Dorset. Whilst partners are already working on recovery and response activity, it is felt that a dedicated, high-level Commission would give added impetus and focus, helping to ‘cut through’ barriers to progress. At this stage, it is envisioned that focus will be on:

- Establishing demand-led rapid retraining/reskilling programmes (potentially targeting worst hit areas, sectors and groups, such as 16 to 24-year olds and the visitor economy).
- Unlocking bespoke support to the self-employed (e.g. local procurement, supply chain network growth, ‘buy local’ etc).
- Identifying support for business to achieve increased vacancy opportunities (e.g. Dorset co-ordination of Kickstart for micro and SMEs)
- Aligning local and national responses for ‘seamless’ approach with maximum impact.

Second, and the *primary* role for the Commission will be to oversee a review of the Dorset skills landscape, with a particular focus on responding to the Government’s

[Skills White Paper](#) and enabling a plan for the future economy (10- 20- and 30-years) based on the future skills needs to improve and accelerate the productivity values of the economy.

The White Paper notes the role of skills as “critical to our future success” noting *‘the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic, the commitment for net-zero by 2050 and to embrace the new opportunities that exiting the European Union brings’*. It also supports the delivery of the Prime Minister’s commitment to a “Lifetime Skills Guarantee”. It is anticipated that the Commission would also seek to identify optimum implementation arrangements, particularly for Further Education, as well as the opportunity to deliver a devolved Adult Skills budget for Dorset.

Finally, to ensure alignment and continuity, the Commission would be expected to work closely with the existing Dorset Skills Board and Panel to support, where appropriate, their implementation agenda across the Dorset Skills Plan and Dorset Investment Prospectus.

2. Financial Implications

The cost of delivering the work of the Commission is estimated to be some £25,000. This includes remuneration for the Chair of the Commission, operating costs and production of final report material. Several organisations, including Arts University Bournemouth and Dorset LEP have expressed interest in sponsoring the Commission so the cost for each of the Councils is likely to be in the order of £5,000, plus officer time in support of the Commission. Actions arising will be delivered through a combination of committed resources, securing external funding and bids for additional funding as and when appropriate.

3. Health and Wellbeing Implications

Health and wealth are closely related, with those on higher incomes having longer life expectancy and significantly longer healthy life expectancy than those on lower incomes. The Skills Commission is a key element in long term plans for better, more productive jobs for Dorset residents.

4. Climate implications

The report acknowledges the commitment of the Council to the climate and ecological emergency. The Dorset Skills Plan and Investment Prospectus prioritises ‘green and blue skills’ which highlight the importance of skills needs and opportunities to support delivery of sustainable and clean growth, achieving progress towards a zero-carbon economy.

5. Other Implications

The Dorset Skills Plan and Investment Prospectus also prioritises a focus on inclusive growth – with skills as a critical driver to ensure that all of the Dorset community benefit from an overall increase in prosperity and opportunity. Dorset

Council cannot achieve the ambitions of a drive to improve the skills and learning of all our communities by acting in isolation and will need the support and collaboration of a broad range of national and local partners, including the voluntary and community sectors.

6. Risk Assessment

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

7. Equalities Impact Assessment

There are no immediate equalities impacts associated with the report. A full equalities impact assessment would be undertaken with any direct action as a result of delivering the recommendations in the report. As noted in section 4 above, 'inclusive growth' is at the heart of an effective skills and learning programme.

8. Appendices

Appendix 1: Dorset Skills Commission – Terms of reference

9. Background Papers

Dorset Local Skills Report and Action Plan, Dorset Skills Advisory Panel and Board:

[Local Skills Report 2021 | Dorset LEP](#)

Appendix 1: Dorset Skills Commission – Terms of reference

1. Purpose

- 1.1. **The Dorset Skills Commission** (referred to as the ‘Commission’ hereafter) will be established as a time-limited, high-level Board to oversee an effective and at pace response to achieve a jobs-led approach to COVID-19 economic recovery. It will also provide an objective and independent review of the future Dorset Skills landscape, helping to shape a *world-class* skills and learning infrastructure for all communities.
- 1.2. The Commission will bring together senior representatives from industry, education and public life. It will be led by research and an evidence base from industry and global academic research reports and local information. The Commission will ultimately report to the Cabinets of the Dorset Unitary Councils (Dorset and BCP) and the Dorset LEP Board.
- 1.3. The aims of the Commission are:
 - 1.3.1. To oversee an effective Dorset post-COVID skills and jobs ‘at pace’ response to a jobs-led approach to COVID-19 economic recovery across Dorset **response early 2022.**
 - 1.3.2. To undertake a review into the Dorset skills landscape – with a particular consideration of the National Skills White Paper producing a report that lays out a potential skills journey and opportunities/needs based on 10-, 20- and 30-years trajectories **To report findings by 30 September 2022.**
 - 1.3.3. To work closely with the Dorset Skills Board and Panel to support immediate implementation of the wider skills priorities within the Dorset Skills Plan and Dorset Investment Prospectus, and **to ensure an effective handover at the end of the Commission’s lifetime in 2022.**

2. Status

- 2.1. The Commission is established as an independent Board, ultimately reporting to the Cabinets of the Dorset Unitary Councils (Dorset and BCP) and the Dorset LEP Board.
- 2.2. All business of the Commission will be conducted in accordance with the Principles of Conduct in Public Life (see Appendix 1).

3. Commission membership and structure

- 3.1. The Commission membership is by appointment and drawn from senior and respected individuals from within and external to Dorset. Members have been

- chosen for their independence and objectivity, as well as understanding of the skills agenda in Dorset, the UK and beyond.
- 3.2. An agenda item of an early meeting will review and finalise the governance structure and membership.
 - 3.3. Where required the Commission may co-opt relevant specialists or organisational representatives to serve as members or advisors if there is a clear requirement for additional expertise and experience.
 - 3.4. A chair will be appointed jointly by the Dorset Unitary Councils and the Dorset LEP.

4. Core focus

- 4.1. To oversee an effective Dorset post-COVID skills and jobs 'at pace' response early in 2022. Work will be delivered by key agencies and organisations in Dorset – the role of the Commission is to:
 - 4.1.1. Ensure that activity is targeted for most impact.
 - 4.1.2. To unblock issues which are preventing pace or innovation in delivery
 - 4.1.3. To oversee performance of the Dorset-wide response
- 4.2. To undertake a review into the Dorset skills landscape – with a particular consideration of the recent National Skills White Paper – to identify an optimum solution for Dorset's current and future skills opportunities/needs based on 10-, 20- and 30-years trajectories. Core focus on the following:
 - 4.2.1. To assess the optimum solution for delivery of Further Education across Dorset
 - 4.2.2. Develop a strong dialogue with business and industry to future proof emerging markets and talent gaps
 - 4.2.3. To investigate and, potentially, to propose the most effective framework for negotiation of an Adult Skills Devolution Deal with Central Government
 - 4.2.4. To report findings by 30 September 2022
- 4.3. To work closely with the Dorset Skills Board and Panel to support immediate implementation of the wider skills priorities within the Dorset Skills Plan and Dorset Investment Prospectus.
 - 4.3.1. Ensuring alignment with the skills landscape review and local partner priorities as appropriate
 - 4.3.2. Ensuring alignment with the post-COVID response
 - 4.3.3. Offering advice and expertise to drive innovation and future-facing solutions for skills needs and opportunities over the next 10 years in Dorset.
 - 4.3.4. Undertake a comprehensive handover to the Dorset Skills Board and Panel at the end of the Commission's lifetime.

5. Representation and attendance

- 5.1. Commission members are expected to attend not less than 75% of meetings.
- 5.2. Commission members are appointed for their individual expertise and insight – and rigorous approach to independence and objectivity.
- 5.3. Deputies shall not attend Commission meetings.

6. Decisions

- 6.1. The Commission shall operate on the basis of consensus.
- 6.2. In the event that a consensus cannot be achieved on a matter requiring decision, that decision shall be taken by vote and carried if it is supported by over 50% of those present.
- 6.3. In the event of a tied decision, the Chair of the meeting will cast the deciding vote.
- 6.4. There should be a quorum of [TBC] members.
- 6.5. There will be no Written Procedure decisions.

7. Meetings and papers

- 7.1. Commission meetings shall initially be held on a [TBC] basis. A calendar of future meetings and enquiry days will be established early in the Commission's time, although the minimum notice required for a meeting is two weeks, to ensure that all members are afforded the opportunity to attend.
- 7.2. The agenda and papers for meetings shall be approved by the Chair and issued at least five working days in advance of the meeting by the Secretariat (Dorset LEP).
- 7.3. Meeting minutes shall be approved in draft form by the Chair and disseminated to members no later than ten working days following the meeting. Minutes shall remain in draft until approval by the Commission at the next meeting.
- 7.4. Minutes shall be made publicly available on the Dorset LEP website. Minutes will be redacted were they contain personal information about individuals or commercially sensitive data or for good legal reason.

8. Conflicts of interest

- 8.1. The Commission shall ensure that all conflicts of interest are fully disclosed.
- 8.2. The Secretariat shall maintain a Register of Members' Interests and publish these on the Dorset LEP website. Members shall supply information to the

Secretariat for inclusion in the register, or a nil return, on joining the Commission, in response to any request for an update and on becoming aware of any new interest. The Secretariat will circulate a request for information about interests annually.

- 8.3. Should a member's interests change, s/he shall inform the Secretariat at the earliest opportunity.
- 8.4. Should an issue be discussed by the Commission which presents a conflict of interest to a member, the member shall declare the conflict of interest, regardless of whether s/he has previously declared the interest in the Register of Members' Interests. Such declarations shall be minuted.
- 8.5. Members shall not vote or participate in discussions on any issues on which they have registered an interest

9. Review

- 9.1. The Commission shall arrange for periodic reviews of its own performance and review its terms of reference to ensure it is operating at maximum effectiveness.

Appendix 1

Principles of Conduct in Public Life

Selflessness

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

Integrity

Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

Objectivity

Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

Openness

Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

Honesty

Holders of public office should be truthful.

Leadership

Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.