

# **Full Council**

## **15 July 2021**

### **Social Mobility in Dorset**

#### **For Recommendation to Council**

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr A Parry, Children, Education, Skills and Early Help

**Local Councillor(s):** All

**Executive Director:** J Sellgren, Executive Director of Place

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**Report Status:** Public

#### **Recommendation:**

That the Council:

1. Welcomes the Economic Development Strategy approved by Cabinet on 28 July 2020 and recognises the important part that the strategy will play in improving social mobility throughout Dorset.
2. Notes the lead responsibilities of the Cabinet Member for Children, Education, Skills and Early Help and the Executive Director for Place in relation to economic development and for improving social mobility.
3. Agrees that a strategic alliance be formed with partners and community representatives to build upon the objectives of the Economic Development Strategy by co-producing a targeted plan to improve social mobility in Dorset
4. Asks that the Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee undertake quarterly monitoring of progress towards achieving the objectives of the Economic Development Strategy and the plan to improve social mobility in Dorset as part of its ongoing performance management scrutiny responsibilities.

## **Reason for Recommendation:**

Improving social mobility aligns with the corporate aims for economic growth and strong healthy communities.

### **1. Executive Summary**

This report provides the Economic Development Executive Advisory Panel's response to the matters raised by the motion presented Dorset Council on 18 July 2019.

### **2. Financial Implications**

All costs relating to this report can be met within existing budgets.

### **3. Well-being and Health Implications**

It is noted that the matters of economic and social well-being are closely inter-related. The recommendations in this report, if agreed will therefore have a positive impact on the well-being and health of Dorset residents.

### **4. Climate implications**

There are no direct climate implications arising from this report.

### **5. Other Implications**

There are no specific further implications which need to be considered other than those set out in the report.

### **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**

The Economic Development Strategy was informed by an Equality Impact Assessment approved of by the Equality and Diversity Action Group.

## **8. Appendices**

Appendix A – The motion submitted to Full Council on 18 July 2019.

## **9. Background Papers**

Motion submitted to Full Council on 18 July 2019.

## **10. The motion**

- 10.1 The motion considered by Council on 18 July 2019 was unusual in nature being in the form of a statement rather than identifying specific actions or measures which the council could consider. The full text of the motion as agreed by Council is set out in Appendix A of this report.

## **11. The considerations of the Executive Advisory Panel for economic growth**

- 11.1 At its meeting on 18 July 2019 Council considered a motion proposed by Cllr P Barrow on social mobility in Dorset. The motion was remitted to the Economic Development Executive Advisory Panel for further consideration.
- 11.2 The matter was considered by the Economic Development Executive Advisory Panel on several occasions between August 2019 and February 2020. At the first meeting the Panel received a presentation from the former Information and Intelligence Unit on data used in the identification of low social mobility and multiple deprivation. This demonstrated the incidence of issues right across Dorset and highlighted a concentration in the more populous area of Weymouth and Portland. Most strikingly the South Dorset Parliamentary Constituency ranked lowest in the country for social mobility.
- 11.3 The Panel focused on aspirations of young people and their ability to achieve ambitions. This was followed up at the subsequent meeting when Senior Officers from Children's Services focused on the responsibility of Dorset Council in promoting high standards in education provision whilst recognising increased autonomy and

accountability within schools. Also covered the Young People's Skills and Progression Plan.

- 11.4 Professor Marfleet presented to the same meeting on social mobility, focusing on low wages, child poverty and widespread ill health in the Weymouth and Portland area.
- 11.5 At its meeting in October 2019 the Panel agreed to address social mobility through the emerging Economic Growth Strategy, the draft of which was approved for wider business community engagement.
- 11.6 Following the engagement programme the Panel received a request from Cllr Peter Barrow that a sense of urgency to be applied to improving the local economy and also that as one of the largest employers in the area the Council become a Real Living Wage employer with consequent implications for employment terms and conditions and procurement practices.
- 11.7 The Panel concurred with the first element of this request and incorporated priorities and actions accordingly in the Economic Growth Strategy for Cabinet approval. However, the Panel was not minded to pursue the Real Living Wage employer status at this point in time noting that the implications and potential impact would need further consideration.

## **12. The requirements of the motion**

- 12.1 In its final consideration of the motion, the Economic Development Executive Advisory Panel concluded that the substantive matter raised by the motion was addressed through the draft Economic Development Strategy which had been prepared by the Panel and was subsequently approved by Cabinet on 28 July 2020.
- 12.2 In as far as the motion identified consideration of specific actions, these are set out below and the Portfolio Holder has set out his response on these detailed matters.
- 12.3 A Cabinet member, together with an Executive Director being accountable for improving social mobility:

Portfolio Holder's response : Agree - Cabinet Member for Skills & Executive Director for Place have these accountabilities.

- 12.4 A multi-agency team be created developing and delivering an overarching plan

Portfolio Holder's response : Agree - In the same way, long standing issues affecting Children's Services are being addressed, I would propose a "Strategic Alliance" operating at the highest levels with our partners in the co-production of a targeted approach to key agreed objectives.

- 12.5 Inviting community representatives to be part of the team:

Portfolio Holder's response : Agree - This would be achieved by the formation of the strategic alliance, which can ensure a "seat at the table" for all views.

- 12.6 Quarterly progress review by the relevant overview / scrutiny committee:

Portfolio Holder's response : Agree - I would suggest 3 out of the 4 quarterly reports are short reports for noting progress purposes, with an annual report being subject to scrutiny and comment.

- 12.7 A progress report as a standing item on every Cabinet meeting:

Portfolio Holder's response : Withdraw - given the recent comments by some Members regarding the length of Cabinet agendas already, and a general awareness of medium-term nature of the objectives set out in the council's approved Economic Development Strategy, a standing item would not be effective and actually risks being counter-productive to the aims.

### **13. Conclusion**

- 13.1 Having considered the matter within the Economic Development Executive Advisory Panel it was concluded that the substantive matter raised by the motion was addressed by the council's Economic Development Strategy. Given that this Strategy has now

been approved as council policy by the Cabinet at its meeting on 28 July 2020, the Portfolio Holder wishes to recommend to the Council that the substantive issue raised by the motion has been responded to and is now enshrined as the policy of this Council through the Economic Development Strategy. Further, in response to the specific matters of detail raised by the motion as set out in Paragraph 12 above, the Portfolio Holder wishes to recommend the approach he has set out in his responses to the Council.

## **Appendix A – The motion submitted to Full Council on 18 July 2019**

Recent reports have revealed that low wages and poor social mobility are key issues in some areas of Dorset. Weymouth and Portland is particularly disadvantaged, but so are some other areas of the County.

The Social Mobility Commission's "State of the Nation 2017" report, assessed social mobility across all local authority areas in the Country. Weymouth and Portland was placed third from bottom of England's 324 local authority areas.

A House of Commons Library Briefing Paper, CBP 8400, published in 2019, assessed social mobility across all parliamentary constituencies. South Dorset was placed last among the 533 constituencies in England.

A report on the future of seaside towns, published in 2019 by The House of Commons Select Committee on Regenerating Seaside Towns and Communities assessed challenges faced by all seaside areas. Weymouth and Portland was referred to on several occasions, with the report noting particularly severe problems with low levels of attainment in secondary schools; reliance on part-time jobs, with the lowest wages in the UK; severe difficulty in encouraging students to return after graduation; and a population of transient renters in low-cost housing that is three times higher than the rest of Dorset.

End Child Poverty released a report in May 2019 on children living in poverty across the UK. In Weymouth and Portland 30% of children live in poverty, with particularly high levels in Weymouth East (39%), Melcombe Regis (39%) and Underhill (40%).

The GMB Union released a report in May 2019 that assessed wage levels across the UK using ONS statistics. This revealed that 25% of jobs in Weymouth and Portland pay less than the Real Living Wage with 6,500 working residents in Weymouth and Portland being paid less than £9 an hour.

More than half of this total was represented by part-time jobs, giving evidence of an under-employed workforce on poverty wages. There are also many other areas in Dorset that have similar issues with low pay.

Many of our most disadvantaged residents are denied life chances to which they aspire. If we fail to improve social mobility we risk parts of our County becoming blighted communities.

Dorset's micro-climate and world-class environment attracts older more affluent residents to live in the County and our economy benefits significantly from their personal spending. They in turn rely on a resilient and economically successful semi-skilled and skilled workforce for their lifestyle aspirations. It's in all our interests that the workforce is supported and encouraged to remain in Dorset. Improving social mobility will provide the key underpinning to Dorset's aspirations of future prosperity and is therefore vitally important to all of us. It is recognised that work to improve social mobility is already underway with activity in areas such as economic growth, housing, community safety, health and education. However, given the evidence in recent reports we need to acknowledge that we need to do more. There is much to do to set up our new council and it is appreciated that it is very early days. However, surely this does not stop us being ambitious for our community and committing to a clear course of action from the very beginning.

### **Motion**

"Council acknowledges that improving social mobility requires a decisive coordinated effort. Council needs to provide visible and effective leadership to lead a multi-agency approach that drives improvement.

Council resolves that a Cabinet member, together with an Executive Director, will be accountable for improving social mobility in Dorset, with an initial focus on Weymouth and Portland. Together, they will be tasked to create and lead a multi-agency Team that will develop and deliver an overarching strategic plan.

This Team should ensure all action is effectively targeted, accountability is clear and that progress can be effectively assessed. The initial Team meeting should take place as soon as possible and an initial Plan should be in place within twelve months.

Council has already declared it will work in an inclusive manner across all its work. Council will ensure that the Team involves all stakeholders with relevant experiences and skills. There is a pressing need to ensure that action is taken where it is most needed and that communities can see progress being made. To this end Council will invite relevant community groups to join the Team, both to provide valuable inputs and to provide progress reports to the community. Council will task the relevant overview and scrutiny committee to review progress at quarterly intervals so that independent challenge and scrutiny is in place.

A progress report should be a standing agenda item for all Cabinet meetings, so that progress can be assessed and momentum maintained."