



Skills & Employment Committee – Draft Minutes

Monday 21 October 2024

Venue:	CPCA Office, Pathfinder House, Huntingdon PE29 3TN	
Time:	10.00 to 12.00	
Present:	Cllr Lucy Nethsingha Cllr Sam Wakeford Mayor Dr Nik Johnson Cllr Julia Huffer (substitute member) Cllr Eileen Wilson Cllr Alice Gilderdale Charlotte Horobin Katy Davies	Chair and Member for Cambridgeshire County Council Huntingdonshire District Council CPCA Mayor East Cambridgeshire District Council South Cambridgeshire District Council Cambridge City Council Business Board Co-Opted Member Business Board Co-Opted Member
Apologies	Cllr Samantha Hemraj Cllr Kellii Pettitt Cllr Dr Haq Nawaz	Peterborough City Council East Cambridgeshire District Council Fenland District Council

Minutes:

1	Announcements and Apologies for Absence
1.1	The Chair welcomed Cllr Gilderdale from Cambridge City Council.
1.2	Apologies were received from Cllr Hemraj, Cllr Nawaz and Cllr Pettitt who was substituted by Cllr Huffer.
2	Declarations of Interest
2.1	There were no declarations of interest.
3	Minutes of previous meeting and action log
3.1	The minutes of the meeting on 29 July 2024 were approved as an accurate record.
3.2	The Action Log was noted by the Committee.
4	Public Questions
4.1	Two Public Questions had been submitted. These were read out by the Governance Manager and a response to each was given by the Chair. The questions had been previously circulated to members of the Committee and published on the website. Following the meeting the responses would also be published on the website here: Public Questions
5.	Combined Authority Forward Plan
5.1	<u>RESOLVED:</u> A That the Combined Authority Forward Plan be noted.

<p>6.</p>	<p>Director’s Highlight Report</p> <p>The Assistant Director Skills introduced the report which provided the Committee with a general update on the key activities of the Economy and Growth Directorate in relation to Skills and Employment.</p> <p>During discussion the following points were noted:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Members expressed appreciation for the progress on the work with the DfE to shape Skills England and reaffirmed the importance of the Combined Authority's (CA) ongoing involvement in the development of Skills England policies. b) Concerns were raised about whether the CA’s work with the Careers Hub, which had transitioned from being outsourced to being managed in-house, was being sufficiently recognised by local business. The Assistant Director acknowledged that there was room for improvement in employer engagement and assured the Committee that efforts were being made to address this. c) Further information on the internship programme funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund was given and detailed the following aspects of the programme: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Co-designed with Employers:</i> Program was developed based on feedback from a range of small and large employers. • <i>Progression Pathways:</i> Included opportunities for those further from work readiness, with mechanisms for businesses to provide additional support. • <i>Sustainability and Job Creation:</i> Ensured roles were sustainable and led to long-term employment. • <i>Digital Badging:</i> The program incorporated a framework for tracking and demonstrating core skills, aiding participants in future job applications. • <i>Success Stories:</i> There had been positive employer feedback and numerous successful placements. <p><u>RESOLVED:</u></p> <p>The Skills and Employment Committee resolved to:</p> <p>A. Note the contents of the report.</p> <p><u>ACTION:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Officers to share case studies on the internship programme with the Committee.
<p>7.</p> <p>7.1</p> <p>7.2</p>	<p>In Year Performance Review: Skills Funded Provision 2023-24</p> <p>The Assistant Director Skills introduced the report which was part of an on-going reporting cycle, via the Skills and Employment Committee, in furtherance of the Single Assurance Framework (SAF) and which supported the Committee in their oversight of the Combined Authority’s funding and delivery of Skills programmes.</p> <p>During discussion the following points were noted:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) The Assistant Director outlined plans for future reporting, aiming to provide more detailed data sets and trends over time for better performance monitoring. She also discussed the challenge of timing due to programs running across financial and academic years, which could cause delays in ratifying data, especially regarding adult education funding, which would be finalised next week. b) Members agreed that future reports should be delivered at a more appropriate time in the year to provide a fuller more accurate dataset. c) The challenges regarding capacity within schools, particularly in terms of balancing the demands placed on teachers with the expectations for delivering work inspiration activities, was highlighted by Members. Business leaders often expressed a desire to engage with schools and inspire students, especially regarding apprenticeship opportunities and the Committee asked what more the CA could do to assist in fostering these relationships and enhancing employer engagement in schools.

d) Whilst there were strong relationships with many schools, capacity building was crucial for delivering the agenda effectively. Officers worked closely with schools on the Gatsby benchmarks for career guidance and the Assistant Director emphasised the role of the Committee in signposting and facilitating engagement between schools and employers.

RESOLVED

A. The Skills and Employment Committee noted and commented on the update provided within the report.

ACTION:

1. The Assistant Director to work with the team to improve the performance reporting, both in terms of presentation and timing of reports.

8 Further Education Cold Spots

8.1 The Committee received a presentation from Rob Turner from Grant Thornton which gave an update on the Further Education (FE) Cold Spots work.

8.2 During discussion the following points were noted:

- a) Rob Turner thanked the Committee for being invited back to provide an update on the cold spots project, emphasising the value of engaging with the Committee to share progress and seek feedback.
- b) The presentation focused on three main areas: an overview of the investment and implementation plan, re-engagement with providers, and next steps for the procurement process. Feedback from today's meeting would help refine the scope and expectations for the procurement process.
- c) Since the summer meeting, where feasibility report findings were presented, the focus had shifted from identifying broad needs in St. Neots and East Cambridgeshire to targeted provisions..
- d) The procurement process timeline was outlined, aiming for the procurement to launch in January with awards anticipated by March.
- e) The team had re-engaged with several providers across East Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire, as well as stakeholders from the Combined Authority regions.
- f) Providers had expressed enthusiasm about the initiative, particularly in a tight funding environment. They appreciated the continued engagement and consultation and provided feedback on timelines, processes, and potential project ideas. Projects under consideration included green technology centre development, digital skills hubs and mobile teaching solutions. These ideas would help shape the procurement process and the allocation of funds.
- g) A workshop was planned for November to ensure that the procurement process was being closely aligned with the CA's goals including focusing on impact rather than just value for money.
- h) Feedback from all stakeholders would be incorporated to ensure the focus remained on impactful interventions, particularly for East Cambridge and St. Neots.
- i) It was confirmed that the second round of consultation focused on providers, particularly around entry-level skills and NEET (not in employment, education or training) populations. The approach involved re-engaging with those consulted in the first round to ensure continuity. However, it was acknowledged that there might still be groups not fully engaged, and efforts would be made to review and ensure all key providers were consulted.
- j) The consultation team reassured attendees that providers were focused on the geographical needs, with some providers choosing to target specific areas like East Cambridge and St. Neots, while others were looking at broader combined authority-wide solutions.
- k) Providers had also demonstrated a thoughtful approach in aligning their proposals with existing provision and considering the feasibility of delivering outcomes within the proposed infrastructure.
- l) There has been active engagement with providers around sector-specific needs, such as health and social care, ensuring a mix of expertise and new opportunities were being considered.
- m) Providers had been asked about their relationships with local businesses and how they planned to work together. Some providers had strong relationships with larger businesses, but this was not universal.
- n) There was a plan for additional engagement with businesses to map current vacancies to the opportunities being procured.

- o) The procurement team was open to creative solutions from providers and was considering flexible funding mechanisms to encourage participation.
- p) A phased approach to procurement was discussed, allowing providers to submit smaller, initial bids, with the possibility of follow-up bids for more detailed project plans.
- q) The team would continue to monitor major infrastructure projects in the region, such as a potential reservoir near East Cambridge and a Universal Studios project near St. Neots, to ensure that future procurement aligned with local economic development needs.

RESOLVED:

A. The Committee noted the presentation.

9. Skills Bootcamps – Wave 5 Commissioning Update and 2025-26FY (Wave 6) Plan

The Skills Partnership Manager introduced the report which provided an update on the current status of procurement and funding related to Wave 5 and Wave 6 boot camps

During discussion the following points were noted:

- a) The bid for Wave 6 boot camps has been submitted, seeking £3.5 million in funding.
- b) The Department for Education's decision on funding was expected towards the end of the year.
- c) The decision would impact the timeline for Wave 6's commencement, determining whether it would align with the current financial year or undergo changes in coordination with Skills England and their boot camp calendar discussions.
- d) Unfortunately, officers were unable to provide any updates on Wave 5 due to the ongoing standstill period. The standstill period for contract awards, initially set to conclude last week, had been extended due to a query from one of the providers. The team was working to conclude this standstill period and move forward with Wave 5 and would inform Members of the outcome as soon as possible.

RESOLVED: (Unanimous)

On being proposed by the Chair and seconded by Cllr Wilson, the Committee resolved to:

- A. Note the update of the outcome of the Wave 5 procurement
- B. Note the update on the bid submitted to DfE to secure funding for Skills Bootcamps for FY2025/26
- C. Subject to confirmation of grant funding of £3,511,946 from Department for Education (DfE), the Skills and Employment Committee recommends that the Combined Authority Board accept the grant funding to deliver Wave 6 Skills Bootcamp for FY 2025/2026
- D. Subject to confirmation of grant funding approval from Department for Education (DfE), the Skills and Employment Committee recommends that the Combined Authority Board delegate authority to the Assistant Director for Skills and Employment, in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer to:
 - Enter into, sign and award grant agreements;
 - Enter into, sign and award contracts and extend contracts with existing providers where appropriate;
 - Carry out a relevant procurement exercise, for the delivery of wave 6 Skills Bootcamps funding and award and sign contracts with successful providers

ACTION:

- 1. Officers to circulate a briefing note once the standstill period for Wave 5 had ended and further details could be shared.

10. Future Brokerage and Skills Support for Business

The Senior Programme Manager (UKSPF Delivery) introduced the report which provided Members with an outline of the regions Skills Brokerage Service's (Growthworks with Skills) evolution to date and proposed plans to transition the service when the existing funding stream (UKSPF) came to an end in March 2025.

During discussion the following points were noted:

- a) Members expressed enthusiasm for the development of the service and emphasised the importance of clear language and branding as there was an ongoing need to educate people about broader apprenticeship opportunities.
- b) Stronger, clear messaging was essential to communicate the Combined Authority's efforts effectively and the importance of fully resourcing the rebranding to ensure wide recognition and impact was stressed.
- c) The Chair highlighted the progress made in recent years and welcomed the next steps in the service's evolution.
- d) The officer thanked members for their feedback and confirmed the intention to return with a more detailed service outline and strategy in the new year.

RESOLVED

The Committee resolved to:

- A. Note the current plan to transition the regions Skills Brokerage Service (Growthworks with Skills) post UK Shared Prosperity (UKSPF) funding in March 2025
- B. Endorse proposals to continue service delivery through CPCA funds

11. Adult Skills Fund – Current and Future Commissioning

The Assistant Director – Skills introduced the report which looked at future commissioning for the Adult Skills Fund

During discussion the following points were noted:

- a) The Adult Skills Fund (ASF), previously known as the Adult Education Budget (AEB), was the largest funding source (amounting to approximately £12 million from Gainshare funding) devolved to the Combined Authority (CA).
- b) The current commissioning strategy, last updated in 2020, required a full revision and refresh to align better with sector needs, employer demands, and evolving policy landscapes.
- c) There were significant national policy changes that needed to be taken into account, including the consolidation of adult skills funding, skills boot camps, and free courses for jobs into a single funding stream, and the need to comply with changes under the Public Procurement Act and ensure future-ready procurement and commissioning structures.
- d) Providers had responded positively to the plans for a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS).
- e) Members expressed support for the development of a new Strategy particularly in relation to economic development and regional growth.
- f) A concern was raised about whether the newly introduced Single Assurance Framework might impede the commissioning process. Officers acknowledged the potential risks but expressed optimism that the framework would enhance governance without creating bottlenecks.

RESOLVED (Unanimous)

On being proposed by the Chair and seconded by the Mayor the Committee resolved to:

- A. Note the CPCA's approach to commissioning adult skills for 2025 and beyond
- B. Recommend that the CA Board approves the transitional commissioning plan for private and third-sector providers for delivery from 1.8.25 and beyond as set out in section 3.6 of the report.
- C. Recommend that the CA Board agrees to the development of an Adult Skills Commissioning Strategy 2025-2028

<p>12</p> <p>12.1</p>	<p>Employment and Skills Board Update</p> <p>Charlotte Horobin, Business Board Representative and Chair of the Employment and Skills Board (ESB) provided a verbal update on the meeting of the Employment and Skills Board which took place on 24 September 2024.</p> <p>The following points were noted from the update:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The Board appreciated Andrea’s proactive engagement across the region, sharing valuable insights into what Skills England could bring to the table. b) A comprehensive presentation from Cambridge County Council highlighted several key economic trends: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Economic activity in the region was slightly lower than the national average. 2. Unemployment had increased and was higher than the UK average. 3. A decline in job vacancies was noted, with particular challenges in areas such as Peterborough (44% of total claimants) and Fenland, where unemployment remained a concern. c) The annual report for the LSIP, published in August, emphasized the region's four key growth sectors: Advanced Manufacturing, Life Sciences, Digital & IT, and Agritech. Additionally, the cross-cutting themes of digital and green skills were addressed, with a strong focus on collaboration and transferable skills, particularly communication, which was in high demand by employers. d) Charlotte highlighted trends from the quarterly labour market analysis, such as shortages in teaching occupations, high demand in care, and the need for employer investment in digital technologies and AI-related skills. e) The ESB noted the importance of collaborative work across the region, with stakeholders coming together to address these challenges, ensuring activities were not isolated but collective in their efforts. f) The Board discussed potential key performance indicators (KPIs) that could measure the effectiveness of regional economic interventions, focusing on making meaningful impacts rather than just value for money. g) The ESB reviewed the Work and Health strategy aimed at improving health and employment outcomes, particularly for individuals suffering from ill health who were unable to return to the workforce h) Andrea and the team would establish a working group, keeping in mind the implications for the Good Work Charter and Universal Support. The strategy also raised the need for a health representative on the board to address health-related challenges affecting employment. i) The ESB acknowledged the need to review its membership, ensuring the inclusion of the right representatives to address key issues. The idea of forming spin-off project groups to tackle specific challenges was suggested as a more efficient way to progress certain areas, rather than handling all work centrally.
<p>13.</p> <p>13.1</p>	<p>Budget Performance Report</p> <p>The Finance Manager provided a financial update for 2024/25 up to the period ending June 2024.</p> <p>Members acknowledged the challenges faced with certain projects and commended the report for showing minimal variance, especially in light of past difficulties</p> <p><u>RESOLVED:</u></p> <p>A To note the budget of the Skills Division for the financial year 24/25.</p>
<p>14.</p> <p>14.1</p>	<p>Skills and Employment Committee Agenda Plan</p> <p><u>RESOLVED:</u></p> <p>A To note the Skills and Employment Committee Agenda Plan</p>
<p>12.</p>	<p>Date of Next Meeting</p>
<p>12.1</p>	<p>The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Monday 9 December 2024.</p>