

**BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL**

**ECONOMY AND SKILLS O&S COMMITTEE**

**1000 hours on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2023, Committee Room 2, Council House**

---

**Present:**

Councillor Katherine Iroh (Deputy Chair), Jon Hunt and Richard Parkin

**Also Present:**

Corin Crane, Chief Executive Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce

Spencer Wilson, Interim Head of Service, Employment and Skills

Amelia Wiltshire, Overview and Scrutiny Manager

Baseema Begum, Scrutiny Officer

---

The meeting began at 10:04 hours.

**1. NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST**

The Chair advised those present that the meeting would be webcast for live and subsequent broadcast and that Members of the press/public may record and take photographs except where there are confidential or exempt items.

**2. APOLOGIES**

None.

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

**4. MINUTES**

(See Item No.5)

The action notes of the last meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2023 were approved.

## **5. ACTION TRACKER**

(See Item No.6)

The action tracker was noted.

## **6. COMMISSIONER'S REVIEW AND COMMENTS ON THE AGENDA**

The Chair outlined the comments made and stated that these would be discussed under the work programme item.

## **7. WEST MIDLANDS AND WARWICKSHIRE LOCAL SKILLS IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

(See Item No. 7)

Corin Crane, Chief Executive, Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce and Spencer Wilson, Interim Head of Service, Employment and Skills were in attendance for this item.

Corin Crane, Chief Executive, Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce highlighted the key points from his presentation circulated with the agenda and during a discussion with Members the following were among the points made: -

- Corin Crane explained that broadly the skills system was set up to sell skills and training to businesses rather than put them at the forefront of the skills process. Ideas formed at Government are packaged into funding grants for regions. Further Education Colleges in the regions are then engaged to develop courses that emphasise the skills and training opportunities that can be sold to businesses.
- The Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) was developed with input from all the Chambers of Commerce in the West Midlands. Businesses were approached about their skills needs and a bid was then submitted to government for funding that was approved. This funding is in place until 2025.
- Having engaged with approximately 1000 businesses across the region it was clear that potential employees not being qualified was not the key issue rather the priority was ensuring that people are job ready with 'softer skills' in place to join the workforce immediately.
- Most of the businesses spoken to as part of the research for the LSIP were small and medium enterprises (SMEs). A particular issue for SME's is access to training and skills offers. It was noted that in addition to further and higher education providers there were also over 500 private providers across the region, and this made it very difficult for businesses to navigate what was best for their needs. Businesses reported that they preferred short, face to face training rather than online with a preference for bespoke courses delivered by sector experienced professionals. Businesses were also more likely to invest in training if there was a commercial opportunity to do so.

- The Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership previously offered support through a specific skills hub however this business support is now being provided by the Council and the offer is not as extensive.
- In respect of the skills gap facing the region it was highlighted that there are many vacancies that businesses cannot fill especially in areas such as hospitality. Ensuring that there were a pool of people ready with generic skills in customer service ready to enter the jobs market was felt to be a game-changer. The over 50's age group was highlighted as a group who may be able to fill the gaps that exist with this sort of training, and this has generated a lot of interest post pandemic.
- A pilot has been run in Coventry with funding from the West Midlands Combined Authority that focuses on upskilling people and presenting businesses with skilled people that are job ready. Concerns were raised particularly about young people in regard to this and it was felt that with new areas of opportunity such as retrofitting the skills and training could be catered to ensure that young people are ready to take up these jobs when they become available.
- There is scope for local authorities in the region to become much more engaged with the work on the LSIP. In particular it would be helpful in the future for there to be dialogue between Councils officers and those involved in working on the LSIP so that the key issues can be discussed on a regular basis with Members.

**RESOLVED: -**

1. The report was noted.
2. That Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce attends a future meeting of the Post 16 Executive Board in Birmingham.

## **8. WORK PROGRAMME**

(See Item No. 8)

The Chair noted the recommendation from the Commissioner in relation to the disposal of assets and the Committee's role. She shared with Members that some background research had been undertaken by scrutiny officers in respect of what other local authorities who had been through government intervention had done in this area. This would aid the Committee's future discussions.

The Committee welcomed the Commissioner's recommendation and agreed to further discuss its approach in January. The Committee agreed that Paul Kitson, Strategic Director, Places, Prosperity and Sustainability would be invited to the next meeting to input into this report, including information on the role of planning in supporting asset sales, and how to maximise opportunities for micro-regeneration from asset disposals.

The Chair highlighted that following the governance review and comments from the commissioner's there is a changing focus for scrutiny committees ensuring that items relate directly to the improvement journey of the Council. Members then discussed the current items on the work programme and agreed that items could be deferred

with the committee's focus being on undertaking work that supports the Council's improvement journey.

**RESOLVED: -**

1. The report was noted.
2. Paul Kitson, Strategic Director, Places, Prosperity and Sustainability would be invited to the January meeting to discuss asset disposals.

**9. REQUEST(S) FOR CALL IN/COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION/PETITIONS RECEIVED (IF ANY)**

None.

**10. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

**11. AUTHORITY TO CHAIR AND OFFICERS**

Agreed.

---

The meeting ended at 11:16 hours.