

# **ECONOMY & SKILLS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**WEDNESDAY 5 JANUARY 2022**

## **REPORT OF COUNCILLOR JAYNE FRANCIS - CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION, SKILLS AND CULTURE**

### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

This report gives an update on my portfolio priorities relating to the Economy and Skills Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

### **2. ACCOUNTABILITY**

Skills, expansion for key growth sectors enterprise and innovation	Developing the skills and employability of Birmingham's workforce, thereby enabling each citizen to realise their potential. Engaging with the skills agenda throughout the Council and Birmingham in liaison with local, regional and national partners.
Youth Engagement and Youth Service, along with Lifelong Learning (post 14 skills and adult education)	Clear progression and vocational pathways from education into further and higher education and employment. Provision of all-age guidance, skills development, training and work experience to meet the economic needs of the city now and in the future.
Skills and Entrepreneurship in Schools	Development of 14-19 career pathways, enterprise and entrepreneurship in Birmingham schools.
Development of 14-19 career pathways, enterprise and entrepreneurship in Birmingham schools	Enabling all residents to access employment through the development and delivery of local employment plans

### **3. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT**

The annual Birmingham Economic Review for 2021, produced by the University of Birmingham's City- REDI and the Greater Birmingham of Chambers, sets out the impact of COVID-19 on the local economy and its citizens. It also captures the signs for economic recovery.

Birmingham has a young and diverse population with 46% aged between 0-29 years and 1 in 4 born outside the UK, with youth unemployment in Birmingham rising to 13.8% in 2020 and young people having a higher instance of furlough. For the three months to July 2021, regional unemployment stood at 5.3%. During

a period of strong labour market recovery, UK job vacancies exceeded 1 million for the first time in August 2021.

Skills gaps, however, have restricted business growth - 57% of Greater Birmingham firms attempted to recruit in the third quarter of 2021 with 62% experiencing difficulties in doing so. Consequently, the focus of the Council and its partners such as WMCA, GBSLEP and DWP is a twin-track approach.

Firstly, to 'support and broker' people into current vacancies such as the November Jobs Fair at Aston Villa FC with over 50 employers present and nearly 1,000 people attending. The Breaking Down Barriers Report, launched in the summer, has a focus on creating a clearer pathway for young people towards good jobs/careers with higher skill sets and consequently a reduction in work poverty.

There is a need for stronger linkage between providers, brokers and employers across the full age range and funding landscape so that every young person receives a full and seamless quality jobs and skills package.

Longer term strategies will need to be fully addressed and be supported by additional central government resources (eg levelling up) and flexibilities (ie Partnerships for People and Place) for impact to be accelerated.

This report endeavours to capture activity and progress towards these short-term operational outcomes, as well as longer-term system-change goals.

## **4. UPDATE ON DEVELOPMENTS**

### **4.1 Kickstart update and Apprenticeships**

As at 17 December 2021, there were 40 Kickstart placements in BCC with a further 10 starting in January 2022.

The Council has received bronze membership accreditation from the 5% Club. The 5% Club is a dynamic movement of employers committed to earn & learn as part of building and developing the workforce they need as part of a socially mobile, prosperous and cohesive nation. We participated in an audit and had 2.4% of our workforce in 'earn as you learn' roles only missing silver by 0.1%.

**Apprenticeship Levy Transfer** – in partnership with the GBSLEP, we have now started to levy transfers to support SMEs. So far, we have committed over £70,000 to supporting apprenticeships.

**New Apprentices into the Council** – we have and will have a number of new apprentices joining the council with roles in Finance, Procurement, HR and Customer Services. The Council also had a winner at the recent Greater Birmingham Apprenticeship Awards. One of our apprentices won the category for Apprentice of the Year – Professional Services.

## 4.2 Support for those with SEN and Children in Care

Birmingham Careers Service (BCS) has a dedicated post 16 team in the 'virtual' school. BCS trades with Birmingham Virtual School offering a guidance service for young people they wish to refer to us who are in care.

BCS offers a free impartial careers information advice and guidance service for SEN young people who are NEET and aged 16-24. In addition, BCS delivers this service to nine special schools who chose Birmingham Careers Service as their preferred supplier in line with schools having the statutory duty to ensure their pupils access a careers guidance service.

## 4.3 Careers advice and support in schools/YP at risk of being NEET

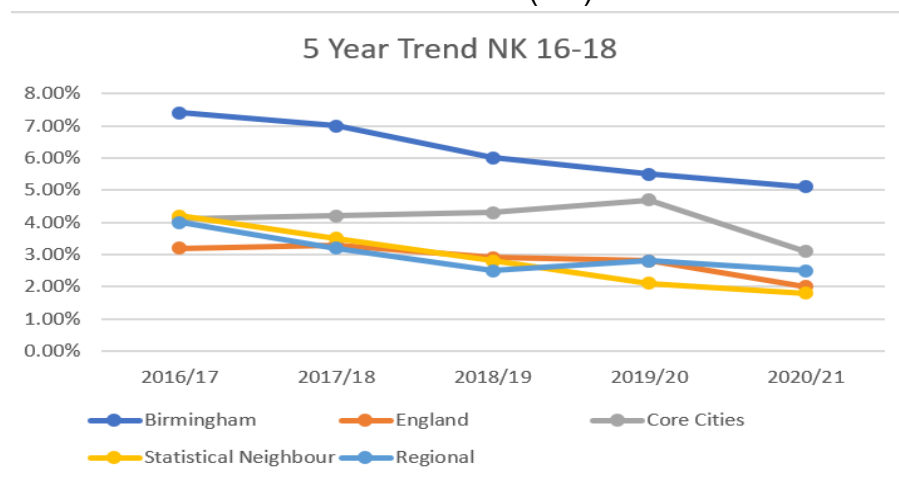
As stated above, Birmingham Careers Service (BCS) delivers an independent careers information advice and guidance service for young people who are NEET (not engaged in education employment or training) aged 16-19.

The statutory responsibility for careers advice and support in schools sits with the schools themselves. Schools should deliver their careers education, information and guidance packages in line with the Gatsby Benchmarks -

<https://www.gatsby.org.uk/education/focus-areas/good-career-guidance>

During Spring and Summer terms 2021, 1513 careers guidance interviews and careers plans were produced from year 11 referrals within our traded schools. Over 5,709 students aged 16-18 have had careers advice given on a one to one basis during 2021.

The risk of NEET indicator (RONI) process is an ongoing development and we can see year on year improvement. This has been possible due to the team having a greater focus and prioritising the tracking of young people in this cohort. Performance to date of Not Knowns (NK) is as follows:



- Progress in reducing Not Known figures from 7.4% to 5.1% over five years

- Approx. 1400 young people March 2021
- Position at 23/11/21 is 5.97% not known - 1,847 young people with live data currently being processed and cleansed in line with tracking cycle.
- Previous Not Known figures have been at rates of 16.9% (and higher) at comparative times
- Bottom quintile of Councils nationally for tracking - combined NEET and NK at 7.4% (NA: 5%) March 2021 LA tables.

### **Youth Promise Plus Project**

Our major Youth Promise Plus employment project supports around 1,500 young people per year and has been extended to December 2023. Resourcing for this service funds the Council's Careers and Youth Services for NEETs. Five partner organisations and contractors to deliver a range of very specialised support for unemployed young people. This is delivered by internal and external partners. Partnership organisations facilitate routes to employment, education and training based on mentoring and engaging training and work experience programmes.

The success of delivering YPP-funded services to those furthest from jobs and skills in a climate of virtual working and stop-start services against the background of the pandemic and lockdowns is credit to the staff and young people of Birmingham. We have seen engagement with just over 700 unemployed/NEET young people into support from January–June 2021, with around 300 young people moving into employment/education or training which indicates strong performance in-year. The appendix has a detailed summary of referrals/outcomes to September 2021.

#### **4.4 Birmingham Adult Education Service (BAES)**

Since September 2021, there have been 10,500 enrolments in BAES courses, which is 4,600 more than at the same time last year.

Enrolments in English, Maths, Digital, SEND and Health and Social care are back to 2017-18 levels. This has been possible through the individual support that our learners received throughout this year, which help them achieve and progress into the next level for this year. In addition, this year we have recruited 48% more new learners.

Our Health and Social care provision has also attracted more learners than 2018-19. The majority of the current enrolments (450) are in Level 2 and Level 3 courses. These include our Healthcare Support - Level 3 Diploma, Understanding Autism and Understanding Mental Health at Level 3 and Working in the Health Care Sector Level 2 amongst others. These courses have a high rate of

employment outcomes and are valued by learners who are seeking employment or looking to change career as a result of the pandemic.

During the pandemic, the service launched the Route to Work programme (2020/21 academic year) with more than 1,000 enrolments. This programme is aimed at learners looking for work, to complement the skills they are learning in a vocational course, English, Digital, Maths or ESOL. The programme is now open to members of the public and enrolments are expected to reach 2,000 by the end of this year.

Learner destinations (where learners progress to after completing their studies at BAES) are good. Most are first steps courses at entry level and Level 1. Many of our learners come to us for reasons other than to gain employment or pursue further study.

In terms of outcomes, 75% of 4,585 learners had positive destinations with nearly 50% going into education. Some 26% went into employment and 0.5% into voluntary work as at 16 November 2021.

The proportion of learners who moved into work is more than double the 12% who did so in 2019/20. In IT and business, the proportion of learners moving into employment increased from 22% to 38% and in Health and Social Care from 7% to 30%.

Some 64% of learners on our pre-employment training programmes secured jobs. This reflects the greater focus of the vocational curriculum on qualifications which lead directly into work plus the good support provided to learners by 'Route to Work'.

In 2020/21, 48% of learners have moved on to further study, much of it with BAES. This is much higher in ESOL where learners are further from the labour market, where 67% of learners returned to study.

A recent survey of 1,569 learners found that of 692 who did not have a recognised positive destination at the time of the survey, 29% were due to start or were looking for a full or part-time course, 16% were full time homemakers or carers, 3% were recovering from illness, 21% were retired and 20% were actively seeking employment.

## **5. PRIORITIES FOR THE YEAR AHEAD**

### **5.1 Levelling Up Strategy**

BCC's Levelling Up strategy was launched at a cross-party Parliamentary reception in November 2021. Led by the Inclusive Growth Directorate, the strategy takes a cross-council approach with explicit linkage to skills, employability and good jobs.

With an initial focus on the communities, citizens and business of East Birmingham, the strategy contains the following projects:

- Early Intervention and Prevention
- Delivering Net Zero
- Skills and Employment
- Enhancing Connectivity

The proposal for Skills and Employment has three elements.

Firstly, the strategy will seek to enhance the accessibility and quality of careers-related support and advice available to school pupils in East Birmingham. Following the launch of the Breaking down Barriers report, the Council will work closely with local schools, employers, the WMCA and the Department for Education to explore how it can:

- Reshape careers advice and guidance services;
- Facilitate accessible work experience opportunities; and
- Develop a comprehensive city-wide mentoring scheme.

The aim is to ensure that all school leavers in East Birmingham are equipped with the skills and knowledge that they need to succeed. In order to achieve this, the Council will:

- Provide support to facilitate access to work experience so that all young people have an equal opportunity to gain experience and skills and to support all businesses to identify and recruit the talent that they need; and
- Explore options for developing an easily accessible, city-wide mentoring scheme to connect young people with mentors from business, including entrepreneurs and the self-employed.

Secondly, the Council and the WMCA will boost their partnership working arrangements with JCP and GBSLEP to create an “Adult Hub” which integrates mass local growth sector recruitment into JCP mainstream support.

Thirdly, the Council will accelerate and scale up its existing initiatives which connect residents seeking employment and/or career progression to the employment opportunities which are already available and expected to materialise in the coming years.

Specifically, the Council will seek to extend its activities to support workforce pipeline management with the NHS and HS2 to other sectors where significant employment opportunities exist to enable forward planning for local people to be encouraged and prepared to attain high level jobs. These include:

- Hospitality;
- Professional services;
- Social care; and

- Other anchor institutions.

## **5.2 Partnerships for People and Place**

In November, the Council was informed by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities that its Expression of Interest (EOI) was successful (along with twelve other local authorities in England). The programme seeks to make an impact:

- At central government level: improving coordination between government departments and their arm's length bodies.
- Between central government and local places: improving coordination between central and local government.
- At an individual level: improving outcomes for people as a result of better central and local government coordination.

The EOI focussed on piloting some of the recommendations contained in the Breaking Down Barriers report in East Birmingham. A detailed project plan is currently in development in partnership with WMCA, University of Birmingham, Birmingham Education Partnership, Anchor Partnership and other partners and is due to be submitted in February 2022 for financial support of up to £300 000. The project will be delivered in 2022/23 financial year.

## **5.3 Commonwealth Games**

Officers from Education and Skills are working with the CWG Jobs and Skills Academy to promote training pathways alongside the Volunteer Programme. This includes links to the Youth Programme and the focussed NEET support/Functional Skills delivery for 17-year olds (joint development work with the 14–19 Tracking Service).

We are also linking to the CWG cultural programme team to provide an offer of advice and support to the arts and events companies involved. The CWG team are running a volunteer programme around the cultural programme, and the providers will be encouraged to provide legacy via links to business start-up (referrals to Library of Birmingham team) and job creation/traineeships with advice from the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership Apprenticeship Hub.

BAES supported the CWG volunteering programme running information sessions in collaboration with CWG and WMCA between May and July 2021 in Birmingham. Dudley Adult Learning and Wolverhampton Adult Education also offer these sessions, with Birmingham leading its organisation.

BAES ran courses in volunteering, workshops with a volunteering theme and "Interview Preparation for The Commonwealth Games Volunteering Opportunities"

workshops. These programmes attracted approximately 200 enrolments between May and July 2021.

BAES is scheduled to run further courses in volunteering to support the legacy/importance of volunteering as a step into employment with a potential 200 enrolments between October 2021 and May 2022.

#### **5.4 Youth Hubs**

We have collaborated with Jobcentre Plus and WMCA to open a city-wide network of Youth Hubs and a central Hub at the Library of Birmingham. These activities are delivered by Jobcentre Plus and the Council's Employment and Skills Team and include project partners such as the Prince's Trust.

Officers attended a Ministerial Roundtable in October to share learning and best practice. The initial aim was to support 200 people per week by December 2021, with priority for delivering Kickstart through weekly events and support workshops. There have been challenges with referrals from DWP and BCC is awaiting the final data (last quarter of 2021) on the opportunity outcomes from that agency.

The focus of the Youth Hubs will broaden beyond Kickstart in the first quarter of 2022 to include apprenticeships and other career opportunities beyond DWP programmes, including more engagement with employers through the support of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP).

The Council will formally launch the Youth Hub programme at the LoB, jointly with WMCA in January 2022.

#### **5.5 SEND Improvement Programme - Accelerated Progress Plan**

The Council is committed to fully co-produce a new SEND Improvement Programme (SIP) based on identifying desired outcomes, which will be appropriately scrutinised by an Improvement Board chaired by the DfE appointed Commissioner.

Four objectives for Children and Young People with SEND in Birmingham have been identified. Objective 4 includes a ***14-29 review of employment and education pathways for young people with SEND***. This workstream will be co-led by the Assistant Director for Skills and Employability and the Assistant Director for SEND and Inclusion to deliver a fully integrated progression pathway in place for the 2022/23 academic year.

#### **5.6 Jobs and Skills Plan**

The Employment and Skills Service will support the development and delivery of the Council's Covid 19 Economic Strategy Taskforce Action Plan.



Delivered through the Skills and Employability Portfolio, the partnership is a coalition of stakeholders under the leadership of the Council and aims to maximise an inclusive economic recovery by the improved coordination of resources.

Councillor Jayne Francis  
Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Culture

22 December 2021