

13 February 2025

Skills Strategy Development and Employment Pathways

1. Aim

- 1.1 To provide an update on the development of a Walsall Employment and Skills Strategy, which is a workstream led by the Walsall Employment and Skills Board (WESB). WESB is an established strategic partnership board of key stakeholders working in the employment and skills areas. The current strategy is in draft format and is subject to final approval by the WESB following a full consultation process.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee review the current position on the development of the Walsall Employment and Skills Strategy and consider its content, in particular the sector analysis which focuses on the available employment pathways for our residents.

3. Report detail – Know

- 3.1 The Walsall Employment and Skills Strategy aims to build a more sustainable, inclusive and stronger local economy in Walsall, through the creation of growth for the place, businesses and people residing in the borough. The strategy creates a more equal borough by ‘closing the gap’ between local and regional disparities, understanding and addressing issues such as poor education attainment, unemployment, low skills and skills deficits at all levels such as within key populations, target groups, geographical hotspots, neighbourhoods and business sectors areas.
- 3.2 The strategy provides a clear evidence-based overview using data and information on the current economic position. The strategy has been prepared by the Employment and Skills Team working with several Council service areas and external partner organisations to shape the narrative within the document and creating clear tangible areas of focus with actions to drive improvement in the economic growth of the borough. The priorities set within the document have been clearly aligned to the Skills pillar of the emerging Walsall Place Based Strategy.
- 3.3 Members of Cabinet have previously received and approved the Walsall Economic Strategy and its recommendations, which set out the need for a Walsall Employment and Skills Strategy to clearly understand the challenges and issues faced in relation to poor skills, economic inactivity and unemployment to agree a clear set of actions to address these specific concerns.
- 3.4 The WESB considered the recommendations, who up until this point were working towards the priorities set within the West Midlands Skills Strategy and Walsall Corporate Plan, however agreed the value and benefit of creating its own strategy.

- 3.5 Following the recommendation to create a local strategy, a framework for a Walsall Employment and Skills Strategy was prepared and presented to the WESB, and a decision was made that the document would be developed by officers within the Council Employment and Skills Team, in consultation with members of the WESB.
- 3.5 The strategy was intended to be a high-level document, with cross cutting themes which may not feature as separate sections but would be blended and embedded within the document. This will help the strategy to reference issues such as poor education attainment, housing, health diversity and inclusion ie SEND, young and older people, marginalised communities and the working poor.
- 3.6 The structure of the document includes a visual display of data and information, and holds the following content:

Foreword – delivered from the Leader of the Council and Portfolio for Education and Skills which sets the reason for the strategy as a clear framework which sets out an agreed focus and plan, having understood the boroughs skills challenges but also recognising the value and benefits that an inclusive skills system has across all education and skills stages, in order to achieve the best outcome for our residents.

Executive Summary – a summary of the key points from the strategy document.

Setting the Scene - highlighting the key economic challenges in the borough

Economic Overview - in terms of population, households, benefit, earnings, skills, unemployment, apprenticeships.

Strategic Ambitions - setting out the agreed three core ambitions of the strategy:

- A skills ecosystem which is accessible for all and particularly those disengaged from education and those people most in need.
- A skills offer which raises aspirations and allows everyone to thrive to reach their full potential.
- A flexible responsive skills system that works to create a growing and expanding economy for businesses and future investment.

Economic Overview - in terms of population, households, benefit, earnings, skills, unemployment, apprenticeships.

Alignment – reviews how the strategy aligns to other strategies and plans.

Pillars - will provide a clear overview and highlight areas of focus to developing solutions to key employment and skills challenges across 6 key pillars.

- Inclusive Communities
- Children and Youth People
- Post 16 Education and Skills
- Employment and Labour Market
- Unemployment and Economic Inactivity
- Entrepreneurship and Self Employment

- 3.7 The work of the Walsall Employment and Skills Board clearly aligns and contributes towards the priorities set within the Walsall Council Corporate Plan 2022-2025:
- *Economic – Enable greater local opportunities for all people, communities and businesses*
 - *People – Encourage our residents to lead more active, fulfilling and independent lives to maintain or improve their health and wellbeing.*
 - *Communities – Empower our communities so that they feel they are connected and belong in Walsall, creating safe and healthy places whilst building a strong sense of community.*

The emerging Walsall Employment and Skills Strategy recognises and responds to all the priorities set within the We are Walsall 2040, which creates a key framework to ensure we are creating a strong and prosperous borough with opportunity for all:

- *We are thriving and happy*
- *We are proud of our Borough*
- *We are healthy and well*
- *We are prosperous and innovative*

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 There are no direct or specific financial implications of this report as it concerns the adoption of the strategic document. However, as we progress into implementation of recommendations and seek funding, we will prepare any financial business cases for each priority or programme activity and funding applications will be development for submission through the formal governance structures and approval processes.

5. Reducing Inequalities

- 5.1 The strategy recognises the correlation and importance of health and wellbeing as a fundamental contributor to economic prosperity. As such health is a cross-cutting theme through the pillars within the strategy as a promotion of economic regeneration. The strategy will outline clear areas of focus to improve health interventions and health indicators to measure impact and monitor success.
- 5.2 It is essential that all of Walsall's residents, communities and any protected groups are identified and benefit from the required actions and any proposed interventions and planned activities in the strategy. Any programme or project activities will be subject to a full Equality Assessment and peer challenge from colleagues in terms of equality and diversity.

6. Consultation

- 6.1 The drafting of the strategy framework and subsequent draft copies of the strategy have been consulted on with members of the Walsall Employment and Skills Board. The board members have been invited to present the drafts to their respective organisations which represent a cross section of partner organisations include services of the Local Authority, Public Health, Department for Work and Pensions, Further Education, Higher Education, Housing, Health, Voluntary Sector, Schools and

Community. The members have helped to shape the document so it responds to their respective organisations, other key strategies and aligns to any key priorities.

Consultation at every stage of the strategy will be key to ensure it meets the needs of existing governance structures, Strategic Boards, Anchor Institutions, stakeholders and partners, ie Proud Partnership, Walsall Employment and Skills Board, Walsall Economic Board, Walsall College Strategic Board, Walsall Association for Secondary Headteacher, Virtual Headteachers Forums etc.

7. Decide

- 7.1 To support development of Skills strategy and identify if this committee would wish to receive a copy of the final strategy following consultation.

8. Respond

- 8.1 Delivery of the strategy will commence once the final version has been accepted and approved by members of the WESB. Any specific business cases, funding applications or requests for investment will be presented through formal structures.

9. Review

- 9.1 To agree a process for the continuous review of the strategy to ensure this is updated to reflect any emerging key changes to the local economy or regional priorities.
- 9.2 Annual updates will be presented to Members, highlighting performance against each pillar and to raise any concerns against delivery of priorities.

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