

CABINET- 25 OCTOBER 2022

CABINET RESPONSE TO THE REPORT OF THE COMMUNITIES, ENVIRONMENT AND HIGHWAYS SELECT COMMITTEE

Recommendations:

The Select Committee:

1. Agrees that private sector employers (large, medium and small) should take the lead in improving skills with important roles for public sector organisations (Universities, Schools, NHS, Surrey County Council, Districts and Boroughs etc.) but these need robust definition and clarity of their input.
2. Accepts the ambitions of the Plan and the eventual Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) but needs assurance that a robust performance measurement system will be put in place to monitor progress and to adjust the strategy if evidence so requires.
3. Appreciates the inevitably limited role that Surrey County Council will play in the plan but argues that its practical role as one of the key procurers and deliverers of services, as well as of strategic leadership be better defined.
4. Requests that the final version of this report to Cabinet on 25 October 2022 addresses the aforementioned points.

John O'Reilly

Chairman of the Communities, Environment & Highways Select Committee

Response:

1. It is right that employers are put at the heart of the skills system – ultimately it is the challenges they face with skills and recruitment that can undermine the economic growth we want to see in Surrey. However, as the Plan makes clear and as you have identified, it is also right that they must take greater responsibility for ownership of the skills activity that they want to see within the system to help drive both productivity and growth. The Plan now makes clear their responsibilities and where there are expectations of ownership from businesses to drive this forward. This will be further reinforced through the upcoming Surrey Skills Summit, a core aim of which is to create a sense of responsibility and accountability for activity amongst all partners in the room, including businesses of all sizes.
2. The Skills Plan builds in progress measures to ensure that we are capturing the impact we are having against each of the four objectives. These measures are a mixture of those we have direct control over (i.e. number of people supported through a specific skills intervention) and more contextual factors, such as long-term unemployment and economic inactivity rates. The latter are factors we can look to influence through the work we are doing but are also impacted by wider economic conditions.

The Plan is fully intended to be a living document and we expect that it will have to adapt to both business need and to economic conditions in the future. Whilst we will want to make progress on all the activity set out in the Plan, if the economic conditions require then we will re-prioritise activity to deliver against what will have the most impact for both businesses and our residents.

The Plan's progress will be reviewed at key points including on an annual basis and an update report will come back to the Committee each year.

3. Surrey County Council (SCC) has primarily developed this Plan in recognition of our role as a key influencer and enabler in Surrey's skills system. We are able to convene partners and offer a 'One Surrey' voice, working with our skills providers, businesses, Surrey's 11 districts and boroughs, anchor institutions and all our people to help drive change across our skills system. It is this responsibility for strategic system leadership which is at the heart of the County's role in the Surrey Skills Plan.

However, we recognise that SCC is also a significant employer, spender and service provider in the regional economy, and as such plays a key direct role in creating opportunities for residents. Examples include the work we are doing to utilise our apprenticeship levy through direct employment or transfers to local businesses, and through our approach to social value through procurement which supports employment and skills outcomes. We recognise the size and scale of our organisation is a positive and we must harness this to help create high quality opportunities for our residents. In light of this, and the feedback from the Committee, we have strengthened this role for SCC within the Plan itself and have committed to developing our own internal action plan to maximise our role within the County.

4. The report for Cabinet has taken all of this feedback into account and been amended accordingly.

Matt Furniss
Cabinet Member for Transport, Infrastructure and Growth
25 October 2022