

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**ECONOMIC AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT OVERVIEW &
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

TUESDAY 25 NOVEMBER 2014

**REPORT OF HEAD OF COMMERCIAL AND ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT**

Report prepared by Abi Lewis

1. SKILLS AND EMPLOYABILITY UPDATE

1.1 Issue for Consideration

1.1.1 To consider the update for skills and employability projects the Council and its partners are currently undertaking, as well as those to be pursued in the future.

1.2 Recommendation of Head of Commercial and Economic Development

1.2.1 That the committee notes the skills and employability update and makes recommendations as appropriate.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

1.3.1 At the meeting on 22 April 2014 the Committee requested an update in six months' time on the skills and employability projects the Council are undertaking.

1.4 Background

1.4.1 Prior to December 2013, the skills and employability agenda was delivered by the Employability and Worklessness Project Officer, and projects delivered predominantly from a resident perspective, utilising small-scale grassroots projects.

1.4.2 The remit of skills and employability was transferred to the Economic Development department in March 2014, with an Economic Development Officer recruited to support the delivery of this work. Since this transition, the agenda has been re-aligned with a greater focus on business needs and business engagement.

1.4.3 This report sets out the direction that this work is now taking following its transfer to the Economic Development team to:

- Ensure that Maidstone's business community are supported in the recruitment of local labour with the skills required to enable growth; and,
- Ensure that Maidstone's unemployed residents receive interventions that support them into work.

1.4.4 Progress to date

Under previous work streams, the following skills and employability priorities have continued, as detailed below:

1.4.5 Business visits and engagement

The Council continues to work with local businesses to identify their current and future skills needs. Acting as a facilitator, the Economic Development team coordinates tailored support through organisations such as Jobcentre Plus, MidKent College and other training providers to ensure that the support they offer is relevant and applicable to the needs of local businesses.

1.4.6 Support is also provided to companies to help them understand the broader Government agenda on skills to identify suitable initiatives to enable the up-skilling of their current workforce.

1.4.7 Work experience

Working in conjunction with Jobcentre Plus, the Council continues to offer work experience placements across a range of departments. Since April 2014, 22 placements have been completed, with opportunities extended to jobseekers outside of the original 18-24 year old cohort. Economic Development is looking to replicate the coffee morning concept at Maidstone Studios, as a precursor to wider business engagement on work experience.

1.4.8 Jobs fairs

Two jobs fairs have been delivered in partnership with Golding Homes and Jobcentre Plus this year, with over 1,900 customers attending. There has been an increased focus on securing exhibitors with live vacancies, as opposed to training providers.

1.4.9 Jobs Fairs are increasingly becoming an out-dated, resource intensive means of recruitment, which are not necessarily the most effective way of supporting unemployed individuals in finding a job (particularly given the shift to online jobs advertising and applications). The Council is leading discussions with Jobcentre Plus and Golding Homes to consider the delivery of small outreach sessions focussing on CV and job application advice, as well as offering information sessions with companies recruiting in a specific sector.

1.4.10 Evolving work streams

The development of the Council's Draft Economic Development Strategy has prompted a refocusing of the skills and employability agenda towards supporting indigenous business growth in the borough. An extract of the draft action plan is attached as *Appendix 1*.

1.4.11 Total unemployment across all age groups in Maidstone continues to fall month on month, with numbers in September 2014 at 1,257 (1.3%), equaling the average unemployment rate in the South East. However, proportionately unemployment rates of 18-24 year olds within the borough remain higher than the South East average (2.2%), measuring 2.5%.

1.4.12 Under this new, strategic and business driven direction, work is underpinned by two key enabling projects: a survey to understand the skills needs of businesses; and a survey of training companies and courses to identify gaps and duplication in provision. These projects will inform and facilitate conversations between education providers and business.

1.4.13 Business skills survey

Economic Development will continue with proactive engagement with local businesses, utilising the new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, to understand their in-depth skills requirements now and in the future. Initially this will focus on sectors identified as having growth potential. The information gained from this will be used to help inform education and training providers to ensure course delivery reflects the local economic need.

1.4.14 Training provider mapping

Work has commenced on 'mapping' the wide variety of provision delivered by the numerous training providers operating within the borough to better understand the range of courses available and to

identify both gaps and over provision based on the survey of business skills' needs.

1.4.15 Education provider and business discussions

The Council continues to be represented on the MidKent College Advisory Committee, ensuring that information pertaining to skills and qualifications demanded by industry are translated into the College's curriculum offer. The Economic Development team will be increasing communication with other local education providers to ensure that courses and careers advice and guidance delivered at Secondary, Further and Higher Education levels of local need.

1.4.16 Communications campaign

A comprehensive communication and engagement strategy to dispel myths amongst businesses and young people about the range of opportunities in the borough is also required:

1.4.17 Initial work has been done through collaboration with Downs Mail Publications to promote the range of opportunities available to young people in the borough (*Appendix 2*). To date, editions have covered work experience, apprenticeships and starting a business, and will later profile jobs in Maidstone's key growth sectors.

1.4.18 Skills Exchange Hub

The Economic Development team is also developing a mechanism to maintain or support individuals into employment, and help businesses retain the correct labour required to grow:

1.4.19 Prior to the responsibility for skills and employability shifting to Economic Development, the Community Development team developed a bid to the Department for Communities and Local Government's Transformation Challenge Award. The Council has since been awarded £100,000 for the implementation of a 'Skills Exchange Hub' - a business to business online portal aiming to prevent skills wastage in the labour market. It will also incorporate an existing website aiding young people in finding suitable training opportunities.

1.4.20 Support for individuals

Work has been undertaken to engage with a company in the borough that is relocating abroad to support workers facing redundancy, linking them with companies facing skills shortages and dealing with broader

recruitment issues. This work has highlighted the need for this type of support for both businesses and employees.

1.5 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

1.5.1 An alternative action could be not to engage in activities relating to skills and employability. However this would have implications for the overall economic prosperity of the borough, including inadequate labour in industry and increased rates of unemployment.

1.6 Impact on Corporate Objectives

1.6.1 The work undertaken on the skills and employability agenda support the Council's priority: 'For Maidstone to have a growing economy'.

1.7 Other Implications

1.7.1

1. Financial	x
2. Staffing	x
3. Legal	
4. Equality Impact Needs Assessment	
5. Environmental/Sustainable Development	
6. Community Safety	
7. Human Rights Act	
8. Procurement	
9. Asset Management	

1.7.2 Financial and staffing: The projects detailed in this report are incorporated into the existing Economic Development financial allocation.

<u>IS THIS A KEY DECISION REPORT?</u>		<u>THIS BOX MUST BE COMPLETED</u>	
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If yes, this is a Key Decision because:			
.....			
Wards/Parishes affected:			
.....			

1.8 Relevant Documents

1.8.1 Appendices

Appendix 1 Economic Development Strategy Actions detailed under the priority of 'Meeting Skills Needs'

Appendix 2 Downs Mail 'Working for the future' project articles

1.8.2 Background Documents

None

Appendix 1: Economic Development Strategy Actions detailed under the priority of 'Meeting Skills Needs'

		Action / Milestones	S / M / L	Resource	Lead	Partners
D1	Work closely with Mid Kent College and other relevant education and training providers to forge closer links with business to help ensure that the skills needs of employers are met.	Engage with local businesses to gauge their awareness of the existing training provision available to them and the relevance and quality.	Short	Existing	MBC	All training providers All businesses
		Undertake a baseline survey to determine the skills needs of our local businesses.	Short	Existing		
		Develop a comprehensive web based application incorporating the principles behind the big exchange, access to skills for young people, a business to business skills exchange portal and an ability to aggregate business training needs.	Medium	Transforming Local Government Fund (secured £100k) and ESF bid		
D2	Increase the number of businesses in Maidstone that take on apprenticeships.	Link with programme of business engagement see A5	Medium			
		Use social media, website, e-newsletters, editorial, case-studies and other to promote apprentice opportunities to businesses.	Short			
D3	Increase awareness of the sector growth opportunities in Maidstone to training providers so that they can gear their provision to meet the future needs of	Provide regular briefing notes, information and newsletters to training providers to give them a wider understanding of the boroughs business composition and likely trends to enable them to gear provision accordingly.				

	employers.					
D4	Work with KCC to encourage greater take up of the 2-1-2 programme which addresses the education and training needs of school leavers qualified at below level 2.	Support KCC to identify businesses willing to provide the work experience element of this project	Short	Existing resources	KCC	MBC, Education Business Partnership
D5	Support KIMS in their discussions with universities to expand the HE offer on the MMS site.	Establish working group Identify drivers for HE investment Any barriers Consider funding options	Medium	Unknown at this stage	KIMS	MBC, Canterbury Christchurch University
D6	Support discussions between UCA and KIMS on looking to enhance the overall student experience for HE students at Maidstone Studios and at Maidstone Medical Campus.	Evolve the joint working group with KIMS to include UCA	Long	Unknown at this stage	MBC	UCA , KIMS, Maidstone Studios
D7	Work with UCA to further develop the business case for their proposed new facilities at Maidstone Studio.	Support the Studios bid to create a Media Village to SLGF	Long	Existing	Maidstone Studios	UCA