



Report to Cabinet

Date:	4 January 2024
Title:	Buckinghamshire Skills and Employment Strategy
Cabinet Member:	Cllr Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services Cllr Joseph Baum, Deputy Cabinet Member for Skills
Contact officer:	Steve Bambrick, Corporate Director
Wards affected:	None specific
Recommendations:	To adopt the Skills and Employment Strategy 2024-29 as a key corporate document of Buckinghamshire Council.
Reason for recommendation:	Adoption of this Strategy will provide the strategic context to facilitate joined up discussions and design the County's approach to increasing productivity through skills and employment interventions.

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 This Skills and Employment Strategy introduces an ambitious agenda for raising the productivity of Buckinghamshire through place-based skills and employment priorities. It shows the role people, communities, employers, learning providers and investors can play in achieving the Buckinghamshire vision for growth.
- 1.2 We will continue to build on our reputation as a great place to live and work, with our clear skills and employment vision and ambitions helping to maximise on our local opportunities and minimise our challenges. The delivery of our skills and employment priorities will improve the quality of life, and help more people benefit from the opportunities our county has to offer.

2. Proposed approach



- 2.1 The Skills and Employment Strategy, delivered by the Skills Strategy Board, utilises key partnerships and intelligence to set out the county's approach to increasing productivity through skills and employment interventions.
- 2.2 The Buckinghamshire Skills and Employment Strategy brings together the latest analysis, stakeholder vision and the tertiary education providers to ensure that Buckinghamshire's current and future workforce are equipped with the skills to reach their potential, gain meaningful employment and boost productivity.
- 2.3 The Skills and Employment Strategy:
- Sets out our vision for place-based skills and employment priorities that will underpin delivery of our ambitions for Buckinghamshire.
 - Establishes our approach to economic growth through investment in skills and employment and focuses action.
 - Enables effective local partnership working, encouraging collaborative approaches to addressing local challenges and sharing best practice.
- 2.4 Our vision for skills and employment in Buckinghamshire is:
- Buckinghamshire: A place with a future-focused, agile and dynamic employment and skills system that assures the needs of employers, individuals and communities are met in order to contribute to the growth and productivity of the local economy.*
- 2.5 The Skills and Employment Strategy meets the priorities of the [Place Based Growth Boards Strategic Vision](#). Created in collaboration with partners and building on the work of the [Skills Strategy 2017-22](#) and [Local Skills Reports 2021 and 2022](#), as well as dovetailing with [Buckinghamshire's Local Skills Improvement Plan](#).
- 2.6 The Skills Strategy Board endorsed the Skills and Employment Strategy on the 8 November 2023. The Place Based Growth Board endorsed the Strategy on the 4 December 2023.
- 2.7 The Buckinghamshire Skills and Employment Strategy 2024-29 is available at appendix A and supported by the action plan of interventions at appendix C. Note, this draft has been designed in line with the [Buckinghamshire Regeneration Framework](#) style.
- 2.8 A high-level logic chain has been developed to specify the short- and long-term outcomes at the request of the Skills Strategy Board, available at appendix B. This logic chain has been devised for officer use to track the agreed high-level metrics and so that unintended consequences can be mitigated. It will not be published alongside the Strategy because the complexity of the logic chain cannot align with web-accessibility standards.

- 2.9 A dashboard is in the process of being created by the officer working group. This dashboard will track the key statistics and provide a helicopter view of progress against the aims of the Strategy.
- 2.10 The intention is to launch the Buckinghamshire Skills and Employment Strategy in January 2024 on site within the facilities for the Skills Bootcamps programme, also launching in January 2024.

3. Other options considered

- 3.1 No other options considered.

4. Legal and financial implications

- 4.1 The action plan details interventions which already have existing funding in place, some within the Council and some with external partners. The Council provides 18% of the total funding stake through Opportunity Bucks, Apprenticeship Levy funding and through core funding to partners. The remaining 82% of the total funding for interventions is provided through receipt from partners including the Department for Education, Education and Skills Funding Agency, Department for Work and Pensions, Adult Education Budget, and others, mainly on a year-by-year basis. The Council MTFP budget includes the UK Shared Prosperity Fund People and Skills and Skills Bootcamps elements.
- 4.2 As skills and employment programme priorities and projects emerge over the course of the Strategy, we will continue to explore funding opportunities working with partners both internal and external. Any resulting contracts will be subject to Legal and Finance approval in line with the council constitution.

4a Director of Legal & Democratic Services comment

- 4.3 The Director has read and approved the report.

4b Section 151 Officer comment

- 4.4 The delivery of the Action Plan is predominantly funded through and by Partner organisations, rather by the Council; those elements which are Council-funded using UKSPF Grant, and the staff coordinating the delivery of the strategy, are budgeted for within the MTFP.

5. Corporate implications

- 5.1 This Skills and Employment Strategy supports and aligns with Buckinghamshire Strategic Vision, Buckinghamshire Local Industrial Strategy, Opportunity Bucks, Education Strategy, SEND Inclusion Strategy, and the emerging Local Plan for

Buckinghamshire and Local Transport Plan 5, all of which are cross-referenced within the Strategy.

5.2 The Strategy has been developed by an officer working group including internal and external colleagues. Engagement with the Strategy has taken place through the Planning, Growth and Sustainability Management Team meeting, the Children's Services Senior Leadership Team meeting and the cross-directorate Workforce and Skills Board. Directorate management team briefings can be made available on request.

5.3 The Strategy also directly supports the Council's Corporate Plan priorities:

Increasing prosperity – The Skills and Employment Strategy will encourage sustainable economic growth, working with our partners to maximise opportunities and boost productivity. It proposed that investment in skills, innovation and connectivity, will continue to enable high quality jobs and keep Buckinghamshire one of the best places to do business.

Protecting the vulnerable – the Skills and Employment Strategy specifically sets out to support individuals to overcome barriers to learning and employment through the 'Improving Opportunities to Achieve' priority.

Strengthening our communities – the Skills and Employment Strategy supports interventions which will enable communities to access high-quality skills and learning opportunities, and access to employment opportunities.

- a) Property – no property implications have been identified as a result of this Strategy.
- b) HR – Human Resources have been party to the development of this Strategy and the proposed interventions, such as the inclusion of 'Horizons', Buckinghamshire Council Human Resources' job-matching service to individuals with additional barriers to employment.
- c) Climate change – the Skills and Employment Strategy suggests training and learning opportunities which will enable residents and workers to upskill in green technologies, supporting the net zero mission.
- d) Sustainability – the Skills and Employment Strategy suggests training and learning opportunities which will enable residents and workers to upskill in green technologies, supporting the net zero mission and encouraging sustainability.
- e) Equality – The Skills and Employment Strategy includes 'Improving Opportunities to Achieve' as a key priority to support inclusive and diverse learning and employment opportunities. Thus, this Strategy will not have any disproportionate impact upon people with protected characteristics. An

Equalities Impact Assessment has been prepared with no negative impacts identified. Further EQIA's will be prepared at the appropriate time for any resulting interventions listed within the Action Plan.

- f) Data – data used in this Strategy has been from publicly available sources and has been referenced throughout. If a data protection impact assessment is required, it will be prepared at the appropriate time.
- g) Value for money – this Strategy proposes that a key measure of success will be to increase the funding receipt from external sources for skills development in Buckinghamshire. It is suggested that £10million is the target for additional funding from external sources to be delivered on initiatives proposed within this Strategy.
- h) Health & Safety – no health and safety implications have been identified as a result of this Strategy.

6. Local councillors & community boards consultation & views

6.1 Cllr Joseph Baum (Deputy Cabinet Member for Skills) set up and chaired a Member Engagement Forum to steer the development of the Strategy. Members of the forum were Cllr Mimi Harker, Cllr Howard Mordue, Cllr Caroline Cornell, Cllr Shade Adoh, Cllr Carl Etholen, Cllr Arif Hussain and Cllr Michael Bracken.

6.2 Feedback from the Member Engagement Forum focused on:

- i. Whether the proposed priorities were correct, which was positively agreed.
- ii. Reviewing the metrics used to measure the success of the Strategy, which resulted in the inclusion of further metrics.
- iii. The importance of work experience and careers fairs as a route to engage young people in employment. This has resulted in interventions in the action plan.
- iv. That care leavers, women returners and skills programmes for older workers should be included as key target groups. As a result, key information has been included in the 'Improving Opportunities to Achieve' priority.
- v. To promote the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector, which has resulted in both the promotion of this sector as a route to gaining employability skills and as a sector to work in.

7. Communication, engagement & further consultation

7.1 Stakeholder engagement has been conducted through the following avenues:

- i. Buckinghamshire Employability Support Partnership
- ii. Buckinghamshire Careers Hub of school leaders
- iii. Voluntary and Community Sector Partners including Community Impact Bucks, Adviza, Fedcap, Jobs22 and SeeTec Pluss.
- iv. Youth Voice Bucks, with the request to present interventions for young people for direct consultation
- v. Employers have been consulted through two consultation events (Shape the Future: Skills Strategy Employer Consultation) and through presentation of the draft Strategy to the Bucks Business Group on 10 October 2023.

7.2 Feedback from the stakeholder engagement is summarised as follows:

- i. All responses to the consultation question 'do the proposed themes feel right?' were 'yes' or positive.
- ii. Work experience was cited as an issue by several sources, including all members of the Careers Leaders Hub. Work experience is detailed within the 'Facilitating collaboration' priority and features as an intervention in the action plan.
- iii. Employer consultation detailed concerns on the 'work readiness' of young people and how businesses require support to access interventions, such as apprenticeships. As a result, employers have been invited to develop a Buckinghamshire-specific approach to apprenticeship support, and 'work readiness' features within the action plan.
- iv. Employers also queried the return on investment for businesses when investing in training and skills. Information on retention, increases in productivity and innovation have been highlighted in the Strategy.
- v. Throughout the consultation process, several sources stated that transport was the key issue for employers and learning providers. One individual noted 'transport issues makes it difficult for people to access our apprenticeship vacancies', while another stated 'we have people who live in Aston Clinton who can't get to Aylesbury for an 8am shift on a Sunday'. While these concerns sit outside of the Skills

and Employment Strategy, these concerns have been raised with the Transport team for the relevant Strategy.

7.3 A communications plan to launch the Skills and Employment Strategy is in development with the Communications Team. The outline plan is to launch the Skills and Employment Strategy on site in the first Skills Bootcamp to be funded by the Council (through a contract with the Department for Education).

8. Next steps and review

8.1 The current proposed programme for adoption of this Strategy is as follows:

Next steps	Date
Official launch	12 January 2024

9. Background papers

9.1 The following Strategy documents are attached as appendices:

- i. Appendix A: Skills and Employment Strategy 2024-29
- ii. Appendix B: Logic chain (internal use only: not for publication)
- iii. Appendix C: Action Plan

10. Your questions and views (for key decisions)

10.1 If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report, please contact the author of this report. If you have any views that you would like the cabinet member to consider, please inform the democratic services team. This can be done by email to democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk.

