

ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

25 March, 2013

PRESENT: Councillor Miss P Lewis (Chairman), Councillors Beall (in place of Stuchbury), Mrs Bloom, Mrs Glover, Hawkett, Lambert, Monger, Mrs Phipps, Poll, Mrs Renshell (in place of Mordue), Richards, M Smith, Strachan and Tyndall.

1. **APOLOGIES:** Councillors Mrs Davies, Mordue and Stuchbury.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

Nominated by Councillor Poll, seconded by Councillor Mrs Glover that Councillor Strachan be nominated for the position of Vice-Chairman.

There being no other nominations it was:

RESOLVED –

That Councillor Strachan be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the remainder of the Council year.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 4 February, 2013, be approved as a correct record.

4. BUSINESS SKILLS AND TRAINING REVIEW.

Following on from the meeting on 4 February 2013, Members received a report that set out the current position on the subject of Skills Provision following reports that local businesses were finding it difficult to recruit staff with suitable skills or training.

To determine the exact position it had been proposed to conduct a review that encompassed the skills needs of Aylesbury Vale businesses whilst scrutinising the level of education, training and skills that were available through local education facilities and training organisations with the overall aim to understand the biggest barriers to future employment growth.

To enable Members to fully appraise the situation the following people attended to give presentations which clarified the present situation within each of their respective organisations:-

Heather Dean – Bucks Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership (BTVLEP)

Jane Mason – Bucks Business First (BBF)

Christopher Edwards – ARLA

Tim Keighley – Aylesbury College

Bev Flanagan – University Technical Centre (UTC)

Ian Harper – Aylesbury Training Group (ATG)

- a) The BTVLEP, working in partnership with BBF, explained that a skills group had been formed to analyse the evidence received from researching 700 employers. Various skills gaps and the need to gather more information had been identified.

Phase 2 of work had been agreed as,

- Consultation with specific employment sectors: learning networks
- 'Skills and Recruitment' portal in development
- Opportunities for local employers to provide work experience
- Improve the supply chain of suitably skilled people for specific sectors
- Opportunities for local employers to work with graduates inside and outside the county

The short term aim was to establish a "1 stop shop" as a single point of contact for employers looking for skills supply.

Long term the aims were to promote Apprenticeships, enhance work experience opportunities and to improve graduate retention in Bucks.

- b) Similarly, BBF had collaborated to research on a skills study. An aging workforce had been identified which made raising the awareness of the work possibilities, via training and apprenticeships, open to young potential workers, most important. A major consideration would be changing the mind-set of young people to encourage them into engineering related jobs via apprenticeships.

Events aimed at raising work readiness were planned via a "Work Wise Week", promotion of work experience and establishment of a recruitment and skills portal.

Grants up to £4,000 had also been put in place for employers that recruited an apprentice.

- c) The presentation from ARLA showed the frustration suffered by a major employer in trying to recruit educated people that had been trained to a reasonable standard.

Criticism was placed on the present education system that targeted scholars for university but placed no priority on the education of those that either were not capable of obtaining the requirements of university or wanted to obtain more "hands on" skills to work in engineering or associated trades.

In the short term ARLA required people with key skills in engineering disciplines and dairy competence. Engineers had been impossible to find in the Aylesbury Vale area.

In order that their new venture opened on time, with staff that had the basic skills required for the dairy industry, ARLA had instigated their own operational plan whereby potential workers would be given the required skills to a basic level of competence.

Also, in partnership with Aylesbury College and Aylesbury Training Group, ARLA would be putting in place a series of three month training sessions and had introduced the Eden Engineering Apprenticeship scheme. Eden Engineering is a ground-breaking apprenticeship driven by the whole dairy industry to provide an Advanced Apprenticeship for maintenance technicians and engineers with the aim of producing world class staff for tomorrow's dairy industry. Bids for funding had been placed with Central Government.

- d) Aylesbury College was the number one provider of apprenticeships in Buckinghamshire in partnership with business to develop skills and to build and grow the workforce. After approaches from Taylor Wimpey and ARLA, partnerships had been formed to put in place specific training schemes that would produce young workers with the dedicated skills required.
- e) UTC was a new venture, built within the grounds of the Aylesbury College that would take students at 14 – 16 years old. Training was technically focused and shaped by employers to meet their specific needs. Specialisation of this nature gave students a very high employability within their technical environment.

Major employers in the construction and ICT industries had approached UTC with their specific needs and training was being tailored to satisfy those shortcomings.

- f) ATG was a 22,000 sq. ft. training facility specialising in Levels 2 – 4, advanced apprenticeships, work experience and young apprenticeships (Diplomas). One of its speciality courses was to train cycle engineers. It considered itself to be an independent employment agency.

Members expressed a general disappointment and concern that there was such a wide disconnect between education and employment and welcomed any initiative that would redress the balance whilst recognising that training organisations should not shoulder all the blame as funding issues had often dictated which training they were able to offer. However, there were a number of issues concerning which Members expressed a view on or commented generally, including the following:-

- Members expressed an interest in knowing more about what can be done to tackle the 30% of young people that had no interest in participating in any training and what schools could do, at a lower level to encourage participation.
- It had been reported that Buckinghamshire had a record of only retaining one in five of the graduates that passed through the counties universities. Members were interested to know if this had been investigated and if it had what the reasons were.
- Schools that pushed pupils towards university rather than promoting an equal route towards NVQ training were producing a lot students that graduated with a degree in a diverse subject that did little to enhance their work ready skills or attractiveness to potential employers. Members were of the opinion that Bucks County Council Education should be asked to give their opinions/reasons as to why the education system was working in this way.
- Schools and employers should also be encouraged to spread the message to parents that young people can benefit from NVQ/Diploma or apprenticeship training.

- Availability of apprenticeships needed to be made more accessible and better exposure given to encourage young people to take up the training being offered. Although the hourly rate of £2.65 per hour for an apprentice was recognised as a major obstacle to achieving progress.
- Some Members advocated that AVDC should fund a number of apprentice placements and that AVDC should also compel its suppliers to take on apprentices.

RESOLVED –

1. That the disconnect between education and employment be recognised.
2. That Bucks County Council Education be asked to explain the workings of an education system that did not produce young people that had the necessary work readiness skills and had not been encouraged to participate in training by raising awareness of the training on offer to pupils.
3. That the education system better involve parents to further raise awareness.
4. That AVDC continued to work in partnership with organisations that were likeminded to encourage a change in mind-set so that, in the near future, employers were able to take advantage of a ready supply of young, potential engineers that already possessed a basic level of training and were mindful of progression.

5. BROADBAND DELIVERY UPDATE

Members received a report and a presentation that provided Members with an update of progress on the county's programme of broadband activity which centred on the Bucks-Herts Broadband Project and the direct investment of public and private sector funding to deliver enhanced connectivity to communities and businesses who currently sat outside of the commercial rollout of superfast broadband.

Previous reports had provided information which focused on the development of a robust evidence base, data analysis, the establishment of a regular dialogue with suppliers and the seed funding of small-scale community trial Projects. This had yielded good progress, particularly in relation to understanding the impact of commercial rollout plans, assessing technological developments and delivering small-scale solutions.

The current report communicated the significant progress that had been made with regard to development of the Draft Invitation to Tender, additional funding and information that had been provided to communities and Parishes.

The Project was now due to commence in May 2013 and be concluded by March 2015 with a minimum of 90% access to superfast services. A clear schedule of works would be produced by the autumn and would contain details of when each area was to be progressed and would be communicated to the AVDC Planning Team and Parishes.

RESOLVED –

That the Economy and Business Development Scrutiny Committee support the progress made with delivery of the Bucks/Herts Project and that the report be noted.

6. ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME 2013 - 2014

A Work Programme for the period to end March 2013 was presented for Members approval. Following a short discussion it was

RESOLVED –

That the Work Programme as presented be approved with the following amendments:

1. The Aylesbury vale Visitor Economy Action Plan report for 3 September 2013 to be moved to the 28 October 2013 meeting.
2. The Skills Provision topic to be continued at the meeting of 4 June 2013 when BCC Education be asked to attend.
3. The 28 October reports on Aylesbury Town Centre and Markets be limited to a five minute presentation on each.
4. No Corporate Plan reports were to be scheduled into the work programme. Instead, as each quarterly report was made available, it was to be emailed to Members of the Committee together with a feedback form to capture any Member comments.