

## Briefing Paper – PAF Scrutiny Committee

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| <b>Cabinet Member</b> | Cllr Tony Ball – Education, Excellence, Lifelong Learning and Employability |
| <b>Lead Officer</b>   | Ruth Gilbert – Head of Service (Employability & Skills)                     |
| <b>Title</b>          | Lifelong Learning and Belonging (LLL)- Strategic Approach                   |

### Background & Scope

#### In summary...

The Lifelong Learning and Belonging (LLL) Strategic Approach brings together the work of Directorates/Teams across the Education Excellence, Lifelong Learning and Employability Portfolio. We aim to accelerate impact of our work to local imperatives by:

- Identifying the workstreams and activities that are improved/accelerated through collaboration, for the next 2 years.
- Identifying means of supporting vulnerable groups by effectively working-together (pooling resources and expertise).
- Identifying funding for collective working- both secured already and where it is needed in future.
- Measuring progress and impact of workstreams/project and identify gaps and opportunities to collaborate internally and make the best use of our expertise.
- Provide clear performance targets/achievement milestones and report on these regularly to the Portfolio Holder.
- Identifying and managing partnerships and collaborations with stakeholders outside ECC.

This paper sets out our approach, its benefits and next steps.

### What is Lifelong Learning and Belonging & how does it link with Everyone's Essex?

**Lifelong learning (LLL)** covers learning from Early Years to Further Years, incorporating Early Years settings (0-5) [within Cllr Egan's Portfolio], schools (5-16), the FE and HE sectors and adult learning (16+). Lifelong learning encourages positive outcomes for individuals, communities, the environment, and the economy. On the individual level, participation in learning activities has been shown to improve life satisfaction, health and well-being and self-confidence.

#### Why include *Belonging*?

This was added in December 2022 to ensure “stay local – go further” (rather than leave to achieve- a big issue for Essex) had due emphasis in action planning across the functions of the portfolio:

- Anchors (public bodies, charities, linked to Essex e.g. local NHS)
- Adult Community Learning (ACL)
- Education (including specialist education and all schools)
- Employability & Skills (projects, funds, brokering jobs, apprenticeships)
- Sector development (industry analysis of growth opportunities for Essex)

Linked functions include Youth Service, Children & Families, Adult Social Care & Active Essex.

#### How does this fit with ECC's Strategy- Everyone's Essex?

The LLLB Strategic Approach sets out how Cllr Ball's portfolio functions, plans and officers work together to meet key ambitions as set out in [Everyone's Essex](#). It is about the children, young people, and adults of Essex having equal access to excellent learning and training opportunities throughout their life-course – from early years to further years. This means access to opportunities that are clearly aligned to future need and relevant to local areas; Levelling Up success, driving down inequalities, considering environmental imperatives, and providing the means for success in achieving each person's ambitions.

## Local imperatives and drivers for the LLLB Strategic Approach

The current *Skills and Employability Offer*<sup>1</sup> in Essex is fragmented and challenging for businesses, residents, and skills training providers to navigate. It is not clear what can be accessed and when e.g. career planning/signposting to stepped training and wider support interventions- by sector and locality. There are many different sources of information and routes to funding, which is challenging for the 90% of micro businesses in Greater Essex. For example:

- despite the wealth of information about the Apprenticeship Levy, many employers struggle to navigate and use the guidance provided, evidenced by employers choosing to pay the Levy as tax (to HM Treasury) rather than assigned for training staff or third parties- hence ECC offering an Apprenticeship Brokerage service.
- local businesses (surveyed by ECC) confirm that a lack of employee/applicants' digital skills is impeding access to work and career progression.
- navigation of the barriers for adults with learning difficulties to be supported into employment requires bringing together information on training, transport and consideration of digital/wider accessibility.

The LLLB Strategic Approach draws together colleagues and planning of services from the Education Directorate, the Sustainable Growth Directorate, and wider ECC services, to ensure experts and support services for individuals, the environment and local economy work together, to address clear skills gaps in the county - notably a relatively low proportion of working age adults qualified to Level 4+.

If Essex is to deliver on the aims in Everyone's Essex for business growth and Levelling Up the county, we need to maximise impact of ECC's activities - collectively, and avoiding duplication. The LLLB Strategic Approach identifies themes and workstreams (set out under Delivery Approach in this paper) to maximise impact by working together.

## Delivery Approach

The Education, Excellence, Lifelong Learning and Employability (EELLE) Portfolio spans a range of Services and Projects, including:

- Education – Statutory services and ongoing input to significant Projects like the Greater Essex Careers Hub; Year of Numbers and Multiply;
- Skills – Apprenticeships; Green Skills; Levelling Up; support to the Essex Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP); Multiply; Essex Heroes/Shujaaz intervention (name TBC by young people); Essex Anchors Network; Careers Guidance via the Essex Opportunities Portal and Careers Magazine;
- Lifelong Learning (ACL) – FE and Adult Learning in Levels 1 – 4; Levelling Up Projects; Multiply; Year of Numbers; Retrofit and Digi-Hub.

A number of ECC Services feed into this work including ACL, Education, Sustainable Growth (of which Skills and ACL are part), Youth Services, Children & Families and Adult Social Care, Digital Inclusion and Targeted Employment to name a few. Whilst this provides a myriad of expertise to draw on internally, it presents a potentially disjointed picture to Essex Employers and Residents, who struggle to navigate opportunities.

We are therefore developing, with Cllr Ball's support, a new way of working, through which we intend to prioritise Skills planning and delivery through coordination of activities across Directorates e.g. employability skills are critical to younger students in a school setting, just as much as they are fundamental to our work in ACL for adults. They are also critical to be

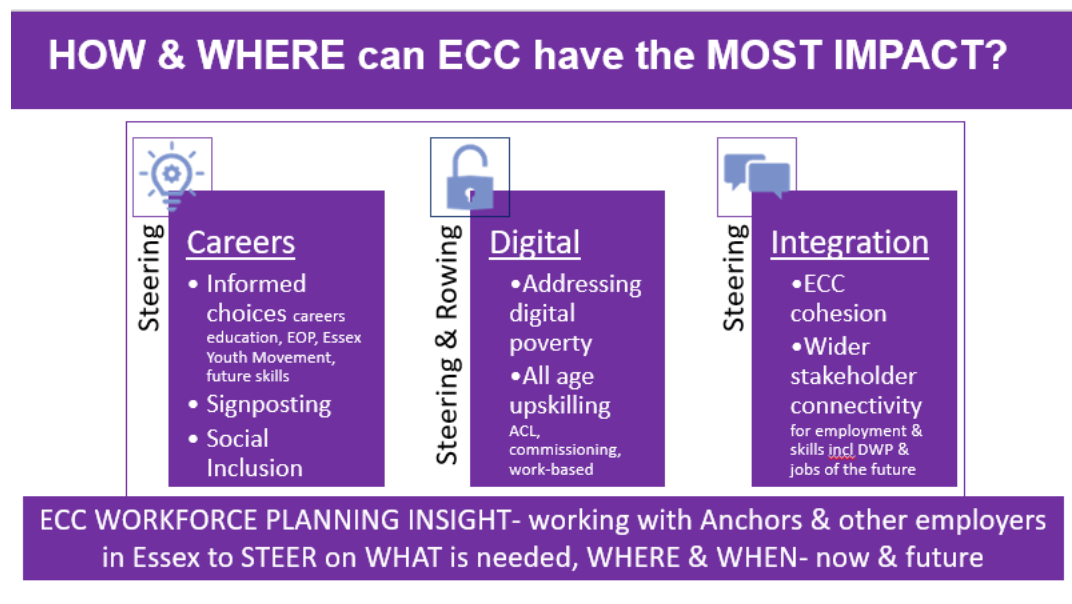
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<sup>1</sup> *Skills and Employability Offer* is reference to training (related to work preparation/upskilling/reskilling/technical professional skills) and wider preparedness for work e.g. signposting to jobs, support applying for jobs, and support to develop soft skills, digital literacy, interview skills- work readiness.

embedded in signposting through transport services for those with disabilities and information for Carers, via Social Services.

Our guiding principles can be described in 5 C's of "Co-creation; collaboration; coherence, convening and communication". This will inform the way we work in the Lifelong Learning and Belonging (LLLb) space.

With young people, low paid/skilled adults, the unemployed, and other vulnerable groups facing some challenging barriers to (better) employment, including basic skills (reading/literacy, numeracy), digital skills, soft skills and connectivity (either via the Internet or physically via effective, sustainable transport links), we are proposing to adopt 3 key pillars of *Skills & Employability* delivery: **Careers** (information, advice and guidance is produced in an effective, accessible way); **Digital** (digital poverty is addressed and all ages are able to upskill to industry requirements); **Integration** (ECC-wide Skills & Employability initiatives are delivered coherently and there is connectivity with wider stakeholders, including the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)). Focussing our efforts in this way will ensure we have the most impact. We will take a locality approach, where the projects we work on should target impact in specific areas.



Adopting the foundations visualised above, we are ensuring 'Workforce Planning Insight' by:

- Working closely with the Essex Chambers of Commerce to develop and shape the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)
- Increasing our direct engagement with employers in Essex, by building connections with businesses like Microsoft and Ford- to understand their recruitment and upskilling requirements for their workforce and capitalise on their resources for Essex residents.

This is a transformational way of working for ECC, as the Lifelong Learning and Belonging (LLLb) Strategic Approach brings several key services together. For example, in developing closer links with the Careers Enterprise Company (CEC), we are collaborating closely with colleagues in Education to ensure Essex Schools, FE colleges and employers all engage effectively. The Skills & Employability Team are also reviewing the approach to Apprenticeships, with the Education Directorate, ACL, and Sector Growth Team, to ensure they are used effectively and, as mentioned, working closely with partners at Essex Chambers of Commerce to support them and the Employer Representative Body (ERB) deliver the Essex LSIP.

### **Data-demand driven services**

We are using evidence to inform our thinking. From initial discussions and surveys, we have identified a possible 214 Skills and Employability Projects delivering 'Skills outcomes' across ECC. With Cllr Ball's support, we are mapping them in more detail and understand impact, and wider opportunities to bring together expertise and learn from good practice. We are liaising with colleagues, across all ECC Directorates, to understand this in more detail as part of "Project Jigsaw"- *bringing the pieces of the Skills & Employment puzzle together*. This will be an iterative process, completed alongside existing priorities, so we will update Cllr Ball on a regular basis.

### **Preparing for the future- with or without Devolution**

With one of the potential benefits of Devolution being greater Essex-based (local) control of the Adult Education Budget, we are preparing for this possibility, by working with the Federation of Essex FE Colleges (FEDEC) to ensure coherency to the existing landscape. ACL Essex are now an active member of FEDEC and we have commenced the briefing process of the potential impact of Devolution.

We are also working with local authority partners across Essex to explore the power of working together, more closely, where this supports benefits to our residents- with or without devolution. A good example of this is current work with ASELA and industry partners to coordinate an Essex-based approach to work-based training in higher level technical skills in engineering, logistics and technology- with aspirations to use the power of bringing together employers (for greater scale) to attract a training provider(s) to work with Essex-based companies, in locality, to provide vital training in these skills shortages, which then benefit Essex residents through local training e.g. Ford currently work with Greenwich University and the University of Warwick, in the absence of Essex-based training provision.

### **Recommendations and Next Steps**

We therefore recommend that the PAF Scrutiny Committee:

1. Supports the approach detailed within the LLLB Strategic Approach.
2. Supports Cllr Ball's decision to progress Project Jigsaw to support us further understand the existing Skills offer/projects/imperatives across ECC services and greater cohesion in our activities, to increase pace and scale of our impact.
3. Supports us to publicise and encourage stakeholders to promote/collaborate to scale up services to residents, using established services, such as the Essex Opportunities Portal (for signposting to training and jobs).

Our next steps are:

1. Complete the first phase of "Project Jigsaw" to understand the skills projects and workstreams within ECC (April 2023).
2. Report back to Cllr Ball and colleagues at Portfolio Board on Project Jigsaw and progress to collaborative Milestones for the next 6 months+ in development with stakeholders (monthly).
3. Consider further opportunities to maximise impact (scope, scale and pace) of 'skills and employability' activity through Project Jigsaw outcomes (monthly).
4. Report back to PAF Scrutiny Committee in the Autumn this calendar year.