

SKILLS AND WEST KENT PARTNERSHIP (WKP) UPDATE REPORT

People and Places Advisory Committee - 30th November 2021

Report of: Detlev Munster, Strategic Head of Property and Commercial

Status: For Comment

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary: The purpose of the report is to provide the People & Places Advisory Committee with an update on skills activities being undertaken within the Commercial and Property Service and the work of the West Kent Partnership in supporting the local economy and delivering skills projects.

This report supports the Key Aim of: Dynamic Economy - funding secured for business support programmes and rural businesses.

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Lesley Dyball

Contact Officer: Wendy Wood Ext. 7470

Recommendation to People and Places Advisory Committee:

- (a) To note the various initiatives and activities that have been undertaken and remain current in supporting the District's economy

Reason for recommendation: To note the work plan of the Economic Development Team and how it is supporting the District's economy.

Introduction and Background

West Kent Partnership General Update

1. The West Kent Partnership (WKP) is a public-private sector economic partnership of some 20 years standing, funded by Sevenoaks District Council and borough councils of Tonbridge & Malling and Tunbridge Wells. Partners include representatives from business support organisations, businesses, Further Education (FE) Colleges, third sector organisations, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP), Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP) and Kent County Council (KCC).

2. The partnership promotes West Kent, champions key economic issues, engages with industry and business, delivers business support initiatives and pursues investment and funding to underpin innovation and growth.
3. Cllr Peter Fleming has been requested to Chair the WKP meetings following the resignation of the previous chair-person. Cllr Fleming has accepted.
4. The last WKP meeting in October had a major focus on skills. David Gleed, Chief Executive of North Kent College attended alongside Principals of (the former) West Kent College and Hadlow College who both sit on the Partnership. The West Kent skills sub group is chaired by KCC and includes representatives from training providers, colleges, universities and ED officers. The group is following up on issues raised at the meeting which includes high levels of vacancies and skills gaps for some sectors, barriers to employment and high levels of youth unemployment in Swanley.
5. A consultant was procured to refresh “The Case for West Kent” and an outline was presented to the WKP meeting in July. The study reviews how best to encourage and enable greater investment into the economic development and regeneration of West Kent. Evidence from this study will help to inform strategies to successfully bid for investment in both West Kent and Sevenoaks District Council. A first draft report was received on 1 October 2021 and a brief presentation was given to the WKP Board on 8 October (see highlight summary in Appendix A).
6. The Recovery Action Plan is updated quarterly and the Partnership is on track with its delivery. The action plan was amended during 2020 to align with the Kent and Medway Renewal and Resilience Framework in response to the pandemic. The action plan is part of the economic strategy for West Kent - ‘West Kent Economic Priorities for Growth’.
7. WKP officers are in the process of identifying bids to submit to the “Farming in Protected Landscape Programme” which is being administered by the AONB authorities.
8. A West Kent Jobs Fair was held in October at the Assembly Hall Theatre, Tunbridge Wells in Partnership with the DWP. The event attracted 29 employers/providers and 162 attendees. The feedback has been really positive from both businesses and attendees, some of whom left with multiple interview offers.

Kickstart West Kent

9. Sevenoaks District Council is the Gateway for Kickstart West Kent and has a role in facilitating access to the Scheme for West Kent employers. 83 Young people have started in post, with a further 40 posts being actively recruited to.

10. Nineteen young people have reached or are reaching the end of their 6 month placement. Of these, 16 have progressed to permanent employment, the overwhelming majority with their Kickstart employer.
11. Jobcentres are working hard to match young people and employers and are delivering face to face recruitment events from Tonbridge. Direct engagement between employers and young people is very effective in bringing forward applications.
12. DWP are actively encouraging Gateways to reallocate placements between approved employers where an employer is not in a position to recruit to an approved place.
13. DWP have extended the Scheme to 31 March 2022 when young people must have started in post. The Scheme closes to new applications on 17 December 2021.
14. SDC has been a great supporter of the Scheme and the following opportunities have been made available:
 - Enterprise Assistant within the West Kent team working with schools and businesses in Commercial and Property - Ben has completed his placement and is looking to move to Bristol, also to start teacher training
 - Open Spaces Ranger - Leonie has just finished and plans a return to study around ecology and volunteering
 - Economic Development/Tourism Assistant - Henry has been in post a couple of months and is making a full contribution to the work of the ED team
 - Community Development Project Assistant - Daniel has been in post a couple of months
 - Health and Communities Assistant - Hanan has just started
 - Property Assistant, Isabelle has just started
 - Administrative Assistant, Democratic Services - live
 - Environmental Health Assistant - application made
 - Empty Homes Assistant - application made

Skills - Partner activity

15. DWP have a strong focus on developing skills as part of supporting both their customers and businesses. WKP partnered on an online event on 20 July organised by the Tonbridge Jobcentre and presented on the advantages to employers of working through a Kickstart Gateway.

16. There is a huge breadth of Jobcentre support available

- Work trial - employee stays on benefits
- Work experience - doesn't have to be an actual vacancy - useful if out of work for a long period
- Sector based Work Academy Programme - SWAPs
 - Eg - national careers service - new amazon warehouse in Dartford/Gravesend - jobcentre source employees, deliver 3 day training session, including employer QA, video of warehouse. Amazon then interviews those that want to go for role
- Find a job - recruitment portal
- Redundancy support - advice and support for employers and their employees
- National Careers Service - deliver redundancy support for JCP
- Traineeships - get young people ready for an apprenticeship
- Apprenticeships for people of any age
- Recruiting older workers and the benefit they bring to the workforce
- Disability confident - 3 different levels an employer can sign up to
- Access to work - making adjustments to workplace to accommodate those with disability or health concern to move into or stay into employment - focused on individual needs
- Kickstart - their flagship Scheme

17. Kent has been successful in becoming one of 8 pilot areas to become Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) trailblazers. Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce is the employer representative body lead.

18. LSIPs will help transform how we assess, agree and plan for skills provision and, in time, tackle the pervasive skills shortages that put a brake on business productivity and growth

- Funding framework that colleges have to operate under is one of main blockers - opportunity to re-write rules so can be more responsive, set pilot programmes and set agenda for change across funding architecture
- The WKP is engaging with Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce

19. West Kent Housing Association is delivering Job Clubs in Swanley, Sevenoaks and in Edenbridge from September.

Young People and West Kent Enterprise Adviser Network

20. The ED Team will be leading a workshop this autumn with some of the Business Board Members to look at issues around the recruitment of young people into sectors that are really struggling to recruit such as rural, hospitality and care and how a different approach to marketing these sectors and the opportunities they offer could be taken forward

21. A challenge is to be set to students at Hadlow Rural Community School through the West Kent EAN to produce a video and other material focused on the recruitment of young people into the rural sector

Jump4Health

22. A national initiative run by Sports Traider. Sports Traider is a Charity that gives young people employment and sports participation opportunities. It employs young people in their professionally run chain of charity sports shops to help develop confidence, self-esteem, retail skills and improve mental and physical health.
23. The Jump4Health initiative is to encourage as many young people to skip for 20 seconds and upload their video (need only show their feet) and challenge others (a bit like the ice bucket challenge) on social media. The Challenge came to Kent & Medway during Stress Awareness Week in November (1st to 5th) to help raise awareness around stress and how to combat it through skipping.
24. The motion of skipping helps to de-stress, re-focus and clear the mind. Many young people have been struggling with stress over the last 2 years and still are with the challenges of returning back to school brings. Focus will also be made around the young person's overall wellbeing and the importance of self-care and their mental health as they prepare for the world of work.
25. This has been promoted to schools in West Kent by their Enterprise Coordinators

Public Realm

26. A challenge set by Cllr Hogarth for Media students at Knole Academy.
27. The project is for the students to create a short 2-3 video/film illustrating their personal experience of and reactions to the Public Realm.
28. The video could be in the form of still and/or moving images, with or without written and/or audio narrative. For example, it could be left entirely up to the viewer to interpret what they are seeing and hearing or it could be a polemic arguing for change. Or the entire time could be spent looking at insects they come across, or potholes, or they could present a multi-faceted walk-through. The students have the freedom to explore their creative side.

29. This opportunity will give students an amazing experience and will be meaningful both in film studies, careers education and developing future skills.
30. Students will present their video/film to a panel of judges on 18th November and the winning team will be presented with a Film Maker of the Year Trophy.

Retrofit Skills

31. Discussions to be initiated with Retrofit Academy to set-up an academy in Sevenoaks and also to pilot their 10 week “bootcamp” programme which provides NEETs with employability skills.

Other options Considered and/or rejected

Not applicable.

Key Implications

Financial

All activities highlighted are funded by current budgets.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

Not applicable

Equality Assessment

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

Conclusions

32. This report has provided a snap shot of some of the key activities of the West Kent Partnership focussing on skills and employability. Sevenoaks District Council
33. supports the Partnership and continues to identify new activities and initiatives that assist in strengthening the District’s and sub-region’s economy.

Appendices

Appendix A - Case for West Kent Highlight Summary Draft

Background Papers

None

Detlev Munster

Strategic Head of Property and Commercial

Appendix A - Case for West Kent Highlight Summary of Draft Report

West Kent economy

- Performs very strongly when compared to other sub-areas of Kent & Medway;
- Experiences low workplace-based earnings and very challenging housing affordability;
- Has room for growth when compared to other edge of London areas.

Key issues - West Kent needs to do

- Understand in detail the opportunities and challenges resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic changing working and commuting patterns;
- Avoid complacency, and focus on growing its own economy; and
- Tackle the challenges of housing affordability and a lack of development land.

Key Actions - resourcing economic development and regeneration

West Kent has been successful in securing funds through competitive bidding, particularly given its relative affluence; (see appendix 2, page 19)

- The changing funding landscape will be more challenging. As a result, West Kent should focus on:
 - Developing high quality projects with robust business cases and clear deliverability;
 - Collaborating with a wide range of partners; and
 - Building links with local MPs and Central Government