

Report to the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Supervisory Board

2nd April

Resourcing the Skills Agenda

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1. To create immediate capacity for an initial 2 year period to support a refreshed skills to employability programme for the GBSLEP. The purpose is to make a rapid impact on the employment and skills outcomes for local people in GBSLEP area.

2. Recommendations

That Members are asked to:

- 2.1. Agree to a contribution of £220,000 from the business rates pool over two years, to resource a surge in immediate activity whilst providing greater coherence within the skills system and a step change in the GBSLEP's impact upon it.

3. Background

- 3.1. When the Greater Birmingham & Solihull LEP was created it was agreed that Solihull MBC would take the strategic lead for employment and skills. Originally it was assumed that this would involve setting up and supporting the GBSLEP Employment & Skills Board, supporting the development of the strategy and gaining the buy in of local partners to deliver the strategy. Over time the expectation and demands have grown beyond the original remit. Appendix 1 provides a snap shot of the range and volume of work now expected by Government and by the GBSLEP to deliver the agenda.
- 3.2. Initially Solihull Council supported this area of work through its own staffing resources funded by the Council. The GBSLEP was able to secure funding through the City Skills Fund to pay for a dedicated post, employed by Solihull MBC, to support the GBSLEP skills agenda from April 2012 to March 2016. However, this post is not sufficient to cover all of the work required and as a result significant additional input has been provided both by Solihull and Birmingham City Council officers, as well as other partners, to deliver the GBSLEP level agenda. In addition, officer support is provided by local authorities to support local Employment & Skills Boards in Birmingham, Solihull, Southern Staffordshire and North Worcestershire. The combined resources to deliver the GBSLEP level agenda are now insufficient to meet the increased demand placed upon it. This level of demand is expected to grow as increasing emphasis is placed upon securing a step change in employment and skills outcomes for local people through the GBSLEP.

4. Key Issues

- 4.1. The GBSLEP Board and GBSLEP Employment & Skills Board are developing a new strategic narrative for employment and skills, a high level policy and strategies to ensure robust delivery and outcomes. This report identifies the initial funding that is required to support this scaling up.
- 4.2. Government has announced its intention to offer a skills devolution deal to the Midlands. Therefore it is important that the GBSLEP is in a strong position to shape and deliver the potential of a skills devolution deal. Equally a significant test will be that

Government has the right level of evidence and confidence that we have the necessary capacity in place to land a deal.

4.3. As part of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Growth Deal, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has attached an Assistant Director of Vocational Education to the GBSLEP for two days per week between January and June 2015. The objectives of the attachment are to:

- a) Support GBSLEP to develop a strategic narrative around skills that is clearly understood by and resonates with Government;
- b) Test the potential of GBSLEP to be seen as a flagship for change across core cities and associated LEPs;
- c) Consider an outline case for the implementation of any new policy interventions that could be included in future Growth Deals.

4.4. Through this work, BIS have highlighted a significant shortage in the GBSLEP capacity to deliver on current commitments and as importantly on its future ambitions. It has also provided a number of draft recommendations for the GBSLEP to strengthen its approach to employment and skills. Without immediate additional resource the GBSLEP will be unable to take forward these recommendations.

5. Financial Implications

5.1. Costs are based on the following:

- Two Employment & Skills Project Officers budgeted at top of band E (£26,539 - £33,128)
 - 15/16 – 10 months
 - 16/17 – 12 months
- One Strategic Lead for Employment & Skills (existing post) band G (£38,422 – £47,560)
 - 16/17 – 12 months (funded through City Skills Fund 15/16)
- Equipment and mileage allowance
- Employer's National Insurance and pension contributions

5.2. Actual costs will be subject to job evaluation and appointment within the scale.

5.3. Funding to off-set the call on business rates pool funding will be sought and bid for as appropriate. This may include technical assistance funding through the European Social Fund, subject to the eligibility of activity.

6. Legal Implications

6.1. Solihull MBC will act as the employer for the posts outlined above.

7. Equalities

7.1. None directly arising from this report.

8. Consultation

8.1. The resource issues described above have been discussed and recognised as a priority at GBSLEP Board and GBSLEP Employment & Skills Board.

9. Conclusion

9.1. The allocation of resources requested within this report would enable the GBSLEP to demonstrate to Government that it has the capacity and commitment to deliver a refreshed skills to employability programme across the GBSLEP area and free up officer resources at local level to focus on the delivery of local initiatives.

10. Appendices

Appendix 1 – GBSLEP Employment & Skills Activity

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