



Staffordshire Leaders Board
Employment and Skills Strategy

Vision & Priorities

9th March 2023

1. Summary

- 1.1. The Staffordshire Leaders Board has agreed an economic vision and priorities and a pipeline of priority economic growth projects to support the future development of the local economy.
- 1.2. An Employment and Skills Strategy is being developed to support the delivery of the economic vision and priorities. The Employment and Skills strategy can be used to guide future employment and skills work programmes, to support external funding bids, to enable effective communication of Staffordshire’s shared employment and skills goals, and to inform the development of the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) for Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire.
- 1.3. The employment & skills priorities set out in this report, form the framework for the design of the Staffordshire Employment & Skills Strategy and for the “asks” of the LSIP.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. The Staffordshire Leaders Board:
 - a. Consider and comment upon the draft Employment and Skills Strategy vision and priorities set out within this report.
 - b. Agree that the Economic Growth Directors Group develop the vision and priorities into a succinct document to guide future work programmes and enable effective communication of Staffordshire’s shared employment and skills goals.
 - c. Agree that the final draft of the document to be circulated electronically to Leaders for comment and agreement prior to the Summer 2023 Leaders Board meeting.
 - d. Consider for sign-off the final version of the Employment and Skills Strategy at the Summer 2023 Leaders Board meeting.





- e. Agree that the appointed representatives of the Economic Growth Directors Group lead on the dialogue with Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire Employer Representative Body in the development of its LSIP with the aim of ensuring that the LSIP contributes to the delivery of Staffordshire’s Employment and Skills vision and priorities.

3. Building on recent employment and skills improvement and success

- 3.1. Through strong partnership working and significant capital and revenue investment e.g., City Deal, Growth Deal, ESF, Getting Building Fund etc. over recent years Staffordshire has seen significant improvement and success in developing local skills, with faster improvement than nationally in reducing the number of residents with no formal qualifications and those with higher skills at Level 3+ (A Level equivalent or above) and 4+ (Degree equivalent or above).
- 3.2. By developing local skills, we have helped ensure that more residents can access better paid jobs and play an active and productive role in the local economy. Our unemployment and economic inactivity (worklessness) rates remain well below the national average meaning that significantly more of our residents are in work and fewer are reliant on state support.
- 3.3. Overall, this recent employment and skills improvement and success has contributed to greater local economic growth and increased productivity, with more businesses choosing Staffordshire as a place to invest and operate creating more better paid jobs and closing the productivity gap to national.

4. A united vision and mission

- 4.1. We are now looking to build on this recent employment and skills improvement and success across Staffordshire and ensure that the county has the highly skilled workforce it needs to reach its full potential.
- 4.2. Working with key partners such as the DWP, Job Centre Plus and Skills Providers we will look to provide the employment and skills support needed for residents to access the better paid jobs being created across Staffordshire.
- 4.3. We will continue to develop inspirational Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) through our Careers Hub to ensure that all residents have access to the information and advice they need to make informed career choices and manage their career.
- 4.4. Through our strong Colleges and Universities, we will increase the supply of higher-level technical skills and develop new skills needed by businesses in our priority sectors, with a particular focus on cross-cutting digital skills development through new state-of-the-art provision and green skills vital for the county’s net zero ambitions. We want the needs of business to be at the heart of





transformation and seek to forge new and lasting partnerships to make this happen. Key to this is building on the recent development of the £16m Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Institute of Technology (IoT), with business and education providers increasingly working together to deliver the facilities and technical provision needed in Staffordshire to provide the future skills for growth.

- 4.5. We will also look to ensure that there are fully effective pathways for all learners to achieve higher technical qualifications. An important aspect of this will be addressing the current progression issues from level 2 to level 3 and the requirement to reform level 3 alternative academic and technical qualifications that sit alongside A Levels, T Levels and apprenticeships in order to support progression and attainment for all students. This will provide the opportunity for all students to move into high-skilled jobs, either directly, or through progression into good quality higher education courses.
- 4.6. We also want to ensure that residents have access to the support and provision in order to develop entrepreneurial and innovation skills that support greater local enterprise.
- 4.7. Staffordshire is resilient and we have put in place skills support for our residents and workers to deal with change and access support and training when they need it. This includes ensuring that those people more adversely affected by economic shocks such as Brexit, the pandemic and energy/cost-of-living crisis (young people, women and those with lower-level skills and workers from hardest-hit sectors) are front and centre of our plans for the future. Transferable skills are at the heart of this, especially for those leaving rapidly shifting sectors such as retail and hospitality.
- 4.8. Given the speed with which the economy is now changing we also recognise the need to develop a stronger culture of life-long learning in Staffordshire to ensure that all residents can continue to benefit from continued economic growth and the better paid jobs being created.
- 4.9. Models of delivery are changing, and we will support that change so that businesses, especially small ones, can be instrumental in crafting new courses in modular, bite-size, and on-demand formats. We want individuals to be able to access qualifications, especially for digital and green skills, at a time and in a way that suits them to upskill or reskill, improving social mobility, inclusion, and lifelong learning.
- 4.10. These better local skills and stronger workforce can support the delivery of our shared economic strategy and vision alongside the wide range of ambitious current and pipeline projects being delivered by our Local Authorities.
- 4.11. To achieve these aims a potential shared vision and mission are set out below. These are to be considered and shaped by Staffordshire Economic Development





Officers, the Economic growth Directors and Chief Executive Officers groups prior to being presented to the Staffordshire Leaders Board. If agreed, it would be our intention for this to be further developed into a succinct document.

4.12. The proposed vision for our Employment and Skills strategy is:

4.13. **“To help deliver a diverse, inclusive and sustainable economy across Staffordshire, developing local skills which enable more people to access higher value, better paid jobs across a wide range of priority and locally important sectors.”**

4.14. The mission for local employment and skills stakeholders is to:

4.15. “Create strong and effective partnerships which support our people to gain the knowledge, skills and confidence to achieve their ambitions and play a productive role in the growth of the Staffordshire economy.”

5. Our shared employment and skills priorities

5.1. Fundamental to our strategy are the cross-cutting priorities of developing **digital and green skills** to support the adoption of new innovative and productive technologies and to transition our economy to net zero.

5.2. Beyond these cross-cutting priorities, we recognise the similarities but also the diversity that exists across the county and with this in mind our suggested employment and skills priorities are:

Priority 1: Creating an Aspirational and Active Workforce – Work across our communities to provide employment and skills support to ensure all can access work and be productive, creating a more inclusive local economy with reduced labour shortages, increased economic activity and greater transition to work.

Priority 2: Providing Inspirational Careers Advice - Continue to develop inspirational Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) to ensure that all residents have access to the information and advice they need to make informed career choices and have a productive and prosperous career.

Priority 3: Developing Technical Skills to Drive Productivity and Growth – Create a flexible Staffordshire-wide skills system that responds to local business needs now and, in the future, particularly in priority growth sectors which increases productivity and economic growth through technical skills development (including apprenticeships, T- Levels, Institute of Technology) e.g.

- Engineering & Advanced Manufacturing (Automation/AI/Machine Learning)
- Construction including Modern Methods (Automation/AI/Retrofitting)
- Advanced Logistics (Automation/AI)
- Health and Social Care (Digitisation of Services/New Technologies).





Priority 4: Supporting Innovation and Enterprise – Support entrepreneurial, enterprise and innovation skills that enable more residents to start-up and grow their own business.

Priority 5: Creating a Place of Learning - Embed the culture of life-long learning into the local labour force to support upskilling & retraining and progression to higher value, skilled and paid jobs.

- 5.3. These priorities are aligned to our shared and individual strategies and plans.
- 5.4. Our priorities have clear interdependencies and the action we take to deliver on each of them will have broader impact on local employment and skills.

6. Our approach

- 6.1. Our approach to deliver this strategy across Staffordshire and its districts and boroughs will be:
 - To work in partnership to leverage and align public sector investment e.g., the Levelling Up Fund, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund
 - To match and maximise public and private sector investment e.g., Apprenticeship Levy
 - To work with government on the opportunities for more powers and funding through devolution e.g., Adult Education Budget
 - To maximise employer investment in skills and involvement in the design of skills provision
 - To shape and influence the strategic commissioning of other funds and priorities e.g., HS2, West Midlands Freight Interchange, A50 A500 Strategic Corridor, the LSIP as a route to delivering technical skills

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