

## WMCA Board

<b>Date</b>	9 February 2024
<b>Report title</b>	Employment & Skills Strategy for Deeper Devolution
<b>Portfolio Lead</b>	Employment & Skills - Councillor George Duggins
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<b>Report has been considered by</b>	Mayor & Portfolio Leads Liaison - 26 January 2024 Overview & Scrutiny Committee - 29 January 2024

### Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

#### The WMCA Board is recommended to:

- (1) Approve the WMCA Employment & Skills Strategy 2024-27 and endorse the approach being adopted through the strategy to ensure the integration of employment and skills across the region.
  1. **Purpose**
    - 1.1 To approve the Employment & Skills Strategy for the period 2024-27, included as annex 1.
  2. **Background**
    - 2.1 In the context of the deeper devolution deal for the WMCA area, and our preparations for a single settlement, we have reviewed and refreshed our current Adult Education Budget Strategy to create a wider Employment and Skills Strategy that sets out our priorities for the next 3 years.

2.2 The strategy will also inform the development of a functional strategy for the adult skills pillar of the single settlement, though it seeks to have a broader and deeper focus given the importance of employment support and careers to our work across all local authority areas.

### **3. Approach**

3.1 The WMCA Employment & Skills Strategy builds on our current Adult Education Budget Strategy, with a stronger focus on supporting inclusive economic growth, higher level skills, the work of universities, employment support, and business support and innovation. Through this strategy, we have sought to deepen both our economic policy and social policy focus over and above our funding stream implementation and objectives.

3.2 The strategy highlights the impact of devolution to date and sets out a strategy for its future, focused on four key areas:

- building strong and inclusive communities.
- providing a good education up to level 2, as a foundation for level 3.
- moving residents into employment and supporting career progression.
- meeting future skills needs through upskilling and reskilling to level 3 and above.

3.3 The final section outlines our approach to creating an effective employment and skills ecosystem for the region, including our provider strategy, approach to employer engagement, support for workforce development, strengthened governance arrangements and focus on outcomes and impact.

3.4 The strategy brings together a wide range of development work undertaken with partners over the previous year. Throughout the drafting process, we have consulted widely with stakeholders including LA Employment and Skills Officers, Colleges, Universities, and the Skills Advisory Board, as well as with wider national, regional and sector organisations. We will continue to work with this full range of stakeholders as we implement the Strategy.

3.5 Our monthly meetings of Employment and Skills Officers along with our Skills Advisory Board will continue to develop the thematic work that will need to take place to implement the various aspects of the strategy.

3.6 Overview & Scrutiny Committee have also reviewed the strategy and provided endorsement.

### **4. Next Steps**

4.1 Subject to approval, the Employment & Skills Strategy will be launched on 15 February 2024.

4.2 The functional strategy for the adult skills pillar of the single settlement will be developed in summer 2024 along with place-based implementation plans.

4.3 A workplan taking forward the ambitions in the strategy will be developed and overseen by the Skills Advisory Board.

## **5. Financial Implications**

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications from the proposals set out within this report and Employment & Skills Strategy. The strategy will focus investment into four themes at an estimated value of £166m per annum, which is within the agreed current allocations from DfE across AEB, Bootcamps and FCFJs of circa £169m. As part of the single settlement agreement WMCA are expected to receive at least this level of funding. All the funding streams identified are all subject to full WMCA SAF/governance processes, which include value for money assessments.

## **6. Legal Implications**

- 6.1 There are no direct legal implications from the proposals set out within this report. As activity develops legal colleagues in the WMCA will be engaged to ensure alignment with contracts developed/issued.

## **7. Equalities Implications**

- 7.1 This Employment & Skills Strategy recognises that challenges and opportunities vary considerably by place and for different groups of people. It seeks to help tackle these challenges and to deliver for both people and place. As set out, we will work closely with our Local Authority partners to ensure that this Strategy supports the delivery of local place-based plans. We will closely monitor the offer to and impact on each place and on the different communities that we serve.

## **8. Inclusive Growth Implications**

- 8.1 The ambition outlined in this paper align closely with, and support, our inclusive growth framework, in which education and learning and inclusive economy are key fundamentals. The Strategy will shape investment that supports a wide range of metrics within the framework.

## **9. Geographical Area of Report's Implications**

- 9.1 Full WMCA area

## **10. Other Implications**

- 10.1 None