



Briefing Note

Meeting: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Title: Skills & Productivity Task and Finish Group Update

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1.0 Recommendation

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the draft proposals for the work programme for the Skills & Productivity Task and Finish group.

2.0 Purpose

- 2.1 The Skills & Productivity Task and Finish Group has a remit as broad as that of the Commission itself, and as there is nothing in the way of post-decision scrutiny that can yet be undertaken. Cllr Spencer (Chair) has been exploring ways to focus the committee's resources, with a view to advancing the work of the Commission – this has included several meetings with Nick Page (Chief Executive, Solihull MBC), Rachel Egan (Skills Lead, WMCA), and several meetings with representatives from the West Midlands Further Education Skills and Productivity Group, including with its Chair, Lowell Williams (Principal, Dudley College).
- 2.2 Pending discussion with the S&P Task and Finish Group at their first meeting at the end of November, the Chair suggests the following areas of focus:
 - 2.2.1 ***What is the CA doing to ensure that children and adults choose the skills pathways we need?*** This enquiry would contain two elements. In one session, the committee would receive a comprehensive briefing on the skills challenge, to cover our regional skills base and demand, the nature of apprenticeship take-up, and the tensions between supply of and demand for technical skills. In

the second session, the committee will call a series of expert witnesses – including from the Welsh Assembly – to push them for solutions, encouraging them to think beyond the boundaries of the mooted skills devolution.

2.2.2 ***How do we compare to the world's most productive city regions?*** The WMCA Strategic Economic Plan aims to bring the region in line with the UK average – but globally, UK cities lag behind their counterparts in other parts of the world. Cllr Claire Spencer has arranged a briefing from Delma Dwight at the Black Country Economic Intelligence Unit to assess the availability of benchmarking data.

2.2.3 ***Sector skills plans:*** Cllr Peter Hughes has requested that we examine the skills gaps in one of the two areas that the WMCA is preparing sector skills plans for – namely construction. Cllr Claire Spencer is also exploring the potential for skills plans linked to Public Service Reform objectives, which she has raised with the Interim Director of Public Service Reform, Henry Kippin.

2.3 Next steps – the Skills and Productivity sub group will meet to discuss and refine these objectives, and to arrange the timetable for this work to be concluded and reported back to the full Overview & Scrutiny Committee before the May 2018 elections.

3.0 Background

Devolution of Adult Skills Budget

3.1 On 4th August, the Department of Education wrote to WMCA to confirm that delivering full devolution of the Adult Education Budget (AEB) as originally intended could not take place without unmanageable risks to the Further Education sector and learners due to time lost during the General Election period.

3.2 Initial proposals for the transitional year were outlined and confirmed in a further letter from the Department received on 1st November. This letter outlined two options for consideration: a transition option and a delegation option. WMCA Board approved the transition option at the Board meeting of 10th November.

3.3 At WMCA Board on 10th November, Mayor Andy Street suggested that there would be news on this area of devolution in time for the Budget statement on 22nd November.