

Regeneration and Property Committee	
Meeting Date	26 th September 2022
Report Title	East Kent Skills Summit
EMT Lead	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Head of Service	Joanne Johnson, Head of Regeneration, Economic Development and Property
Lead Officer	Kieren Mansfield, Economic Development and External Funding Manager
Classification	Open
Recommendations	To agree to continue to work with East Kent partners on the development of an East Kent Skills Pledge and a clear action plan.

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report presents the themes and suggested actions that came forward from an East Kent Skills Summit, held on 7th June 2022. Hosted by East Kent College (EKC) Group, attendees included local authority and business representatives from across the area in which EKC Group operates i.e. Thanet, Canterbury, Dover, Folkestone & Hythe, Ashford and Swale.
- 1.2 The report also considers the initial actions suggested by EKC Group, with a commentary provided as they relate to the Council and its operations.

2 Background

- 2.1 The East Kent Skills Summit was organised by East Kent College Group to bring together civic and business perspectives on the skills challenge across East Kent, including:
 - lower skills levels than the national average, particularly at level 3 and above, alongside higher levels of people with no qualifications.
 - a need to upskill and re-skill the existing workforce.
 - poor perceptions of what career opportunities exist locally amongst young people
 - a gap between new entrants to the labour market and industry and employer demand.
- 2.2 The summit was based around a series of facilitated workshops and the themes that came to prominence have been summarised as follows:-
 - Civic and business leaders should set an example by investing in skills

- Use of a collective voice to emphasise the importance of skills, to influence policy and funding, and to make a positive difference to our communities
 - High quality, accessible careers education, information, advice and guidance is critical and should be developed collaboratively with employers
 - Upskilling and retraining the existing workforce across East Kent in key transferrable skills such as digital skills and green skills
 - The same transferrable skills for our young people need to be embedded and enhanced
 - The importance and impact of environment and place on people's aspirations and the decisions they make about where they live and develop careers
- 2.3 East Kent College has also provided a list of suggested actions, circulated to attendees, which can be found at appendix 1. The table in appendix 1 also sets out some commentary against each of the actions, as they relate to Swale Borough Council.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 The principle of what the East Kent Skills Summit is seeking to achieve aligns closely with the Council's position in respect of skills, reflected in both the Corporate Plan and the Council's Economic Improvement Plan. The Summit and the subsequent suggested actions arising from it are intended to be the start of the conversation between stakeholders and this is reflected in the commentary provided at appendix 1.
- 3.2 The actions arising from the Skills Summit are early-stage proposals and, as per the commentary provided at appendix 1, the detail, resource and wider implications of any commitments need to be much better understood. The recommendation is, therefore, to agree to continue to work with East Kent partners on the development of an East Kent Skills Pledge and a clear action plan.

4 Alternative Options

- 4.1 Do nothing. This is not recommended. Skills remains one of the most significant issues impacting on the Borough and it is a shared agenda with many other districts in Kent. East Kent College Group are also a key partner for the Borough Council and we continue to work closely with them, most recently in respect of the Levelling-up Fund bid and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund Investment Plan. Working within available resources, and mindful of the medium-term financial plan, participating in strategic partnerships with goals that align to the Council's own priorities can only support progress.
- 4.2 The proposals are too early a stage to identify a clear alternative mix of approaches against the proposed actions.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 The report sets out proposed actions from the East Kent Skills Summit and reflects discussion involving senior representatives from District Councils and business. To date it has not involved a wider discussion with other stakeholders, including learning and skills providers, other than East Kent College Group.
- 5.2 Further consultation will be required. EKC Group will continue to facilitate discussions across the East Kent area to further develop proposals. The Council will need to consult further, both internally (e.g. HR and procurement) and with local stakeholders relevant to those actions to which it may consider making a commitment.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	The Corporate Plan identifies the following objective which relates directly to the report. <i>“Support residents and businesses to improve the borough’s vocational skill levels, and vigorously pursue all opportunities to enhance the provision and accessibility of further and higher education for Swale residents at all stages of their careers.”</i>
Financial, Resource and Property	At this early stage, each of the actions need to be considered through service planning and in the light of available resources and the emerging Medium Term Financial Strategy. There is a specific concern in respect of the action relating to procurement and contracting, which if implemented as a contractual obligation could have cost implications for the Council and may deter potential suppliers. There are also no identified staff or financial resource for the suggested skills fairs.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	As noted in appendix 1 there are concerns in respect of the suggested action in relation to the Council’s procurement procedures. Practically, it is unclear how this would be applied and managed especially for suppliers that are not local to the Borough or providing relatively specialised goods or services. Any contractual condition has the potential to increase cost pressures and/or dissuade potential bidders to consider Council contract opportunities. In light of further discussion and detail there may be opportunities to work positively with appropriate suppliers.
Crime and Disorder	None identified at this stage
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	None identified at this stage

Health and Wellbeing	None identified at this stage, although the underlying objective to improve access to skills and related employment opportunities can have a significant positive impact on health and well-being.
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	None identified at this stage
Risk Management and Health and Safety	None identified at this stage.
Equality and Diversity	None identified at this stage
Privacy and Data Protection	None identified at this stage

7 Appendices

7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

Appendix 1 - Actions proposed from the East Kent Skills Summit

8 Background Papers

None.

Appendix 1 – Actions proposed from the East Kent Skills Summit

Action Proposed	Commentary
<p>East Kent Skills Pledge, which might include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a commitment to carrying out a skills health check on our organisation • a commitment to engaging with learning providers on careers information • a commitment to provide apprentices, work placements and other activities to support young people and adults 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As an organisation Swale Borough Council is already largely committed to what is suggested. • The nature of a skills health check is not clearly defined at this stage. • The Council’s approach to staff reviews and service planning includes a review of learning need within the organisation. The staff resources available have placed some limitations on the ability to engage with learning providers as regularly as was once the case • The more dispersed pattern of working since COVID has impacted on the ability to provide work placements and similar, with close, on-site supervision required.
<p>Partners commit to 5-year workforce development plan to consider apprenticeships and other entry routes for adults and career pathways for college leavers, as well as existing staff development. Use our collective voice to encourage other East Kent organisations to develop these.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council currently has a Workforce Strategy covering the period 2019-2022, The theme “Developing the workforce of the future” covers much of the suggested approach. • A review could consider the timeframe suggested and the specifics of apprenticeships. • Campaigns can be developed to encourage other local employers to engage in workforce development • UK Shared Prosperity Fund proposals submitted include activity to engage employers in this agenda from 2024/25, a timeframe set by Government.
<p>Public sector partner procurement policies and processes include the need for suppliers to commit to a skills health check, as a contractual condition. Potentially to be developed into an East Kent procurement framework.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The nature of and means by which a skills health check is carried out and any costs is not clear at this stage. • Practically, it is unclear how this would be applied and managed especially for suppliers that are not local to the Borough or providing more specialised goods or services.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any contractual condition has the potential to increase cost pressures and/or dissuade potential bidders to consider Council contract opportunities. • Procurement processes currently seek to ensure that sufficient skills are in place to deliver against the specification. • The Council's current procurement includes 20% of the scoring to take account of social value. • Potential to adapt existing procurement approach to encourage take up of skills related activity within the context of social value.
<p>Holding an annual Skills Fair in each District and Borough, that include separate sessions for children, young people and adults across multiple days to find out about different sectors, job roles, career pathways, and what skills and qualifications are required.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is not included in the Council's existing set of priorities, and staff and financial resource would need to be made available to facilitate. • Partners to support delivery would need to be engaged, including business, schools, Jobcentre Plus, private learning providers as well as the local Further Education Colleges. • For children and young people in particular there is existing information advice and guidance provision through the national careers service, KCC and others, that would need to be considered. • The approach to delivering an effective skills fair would need to be explored. More recent experiences of officers indicates that traditional, open events have proved of more limited value.
<p>The development of an East Kent Prospectus to promote the area as place to live work and learn and the career opportunities. This could include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summit partners to act as East Kent Ambassadors • the development of a training programme module to educate about the area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within the sub-areas of Kent, Swale is currently positioned primarily as a part of Greater North Kent. • However, Swale's identity is complex and it can align according to need/opportunity, being positioned at the meeting point between East, North and mid-Kent • Careful thought would need to be given as to how the Borough might present itself within this context.

