

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

Date of Meeting: 31 May 2022

REPORT TO COUNCIL

Date of Meeting: 19 July 2022

Report of: Director Net Zero Exeter & City Management

Title: Exeter Skills Strategy

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Council

1. What is the report about?

This report is about the new Exeter Skills Strategy

2. Recommendations:

That Executive recommends to Council:-

- 2.1 To approve the Exeter Skills Strategy; and
- 2.2 To approve development of the associated action plan to enable the Skills & City Inclusivity Manager to address the identified priorities.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

3.1 The current Skills Strategy was approved by Executive in March 2020. Taking account of the significant changes to the labour market and economy which have been impacted by the pandemic, a new strategy has been developed.

3.2 In March 2021 Executive approved the commissioning of research to refresh the evidence base, which has been done to support the development of the new strategy.

3.3 Skills are a key pillar of productivity, and learning provides opportunities for engagement. Through the adoption and delivery of the Exeter Skills Strategy, Exeter City Council will be supporting businesses, the workforce and residents of the city, through facilitating a contribution to the economic success of the city and supporting inclusion.

4. What are the resource implications including non financial resources?

4.1 The annual financial resource requirements for the delivery of the strategy will be highlighted through the action plan. These will be in line with current budget allocated and available c. £50,000.

4.2 For any identified priority areas that require budget and do not have any allocated, external funding will be sought to support the delivery of the associated actions.

4.3 The budget allocation takes account of a contribution to the Building Greater Exeter Project in the current financial year.

4.4 The non-financial resources are primarily provided through the Skills and City Inclusivity Manager post, who will be responsible for overseeing the delivery of the strategy, and all the associated work streams. This will be with support from a Graduate Business Placement, seconded from the University of Exeter, and funded from external sources until 31 March 2023.

4.5 There will be a requirement for support from, and collaborative working with, other officers and services, such as; Net Zero and Business Service Lead, Communications Team, Communities Team, Customer Services and Housing.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

5.1 Other than already approved budget allocation, there are no further financial implications for Council to consider. Where additional external funding is received and managed by the Council, further supplementary budget requests will be required to ensure Council approval of all expenditure made by the Council.

6. What are the legal aspects?

There are no legal aspects to this report or the Skills Strategy.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

This report raises no issues for the Monitoring Officer.

8. Report details:

Background

8.1 The original Skills Strategy was approved in March 2020 by Executive. The delivery of that strategy was severely impacted by the pandemic and associated National restrictions. In March 2021, Executive approved the commissioning of a piece of research to refresh the evidence base in relation to the labour market in light of the pandemic.

8.2 The evidence base has now been refreshed, with a thorough review of the available data. A consultation has also taken place including in-depth interviews with a number of partners, stakeholders and organisations across the city.

8.3 An event was held on 6th April to bring together a wide range of businesses, representative groups and organisations with an interest in skills. The event presented the initial findings from the evidence base refresh, and used workshops on a number of topics to gain insight and feedback from attendees.

8.4 All the data, evidence and feedback gathered - which includes a wide range of other reports and sources – such as the Civic University Agreement and the recent Social Mobility report, both from the University of Exeter - has been used to develop the Skills

Strategy and to set the priorities. The full evidence base is available as an annexe to the Strategy.

8.5 The current Skills Advisory Group met to review the proposed priorities and agree those contained within the Strategy, ensuring endorsement from a range of relevant stakeholders.

Priorities

8.6 Through the evidence base and feedback review, the following areas have been identified as priorities within the strategy.

8.7 There are 2 overarching areas of focus, and a number of subsequent priorities fit under these.

- **Inclusivity** - Utilise skills and employment to improve social mobility and overcome inclusion barriers through equality of opportunity. This includes a specific focus on those furthest from the labour market.
- **Productivity** - Enhancing productivity is a key driver for enhancing skills. This will have a key focus on workforce development and progression.

8.8 The specific priorities, which will form the basis of the action plan are as follows;

- **Talent retention and attraction**
 - Supporting a strong training environment to provide career development opportunities locally.
 - CEIAG to ensure young people leaving education are aware of the opportunities locally.
 - Internships and graduate programmes to aid with local recruitment – with a specific focus on working with SMEs.
 - Business skills development to encourage start-ups and key self-employment skills (managing accounts, cash flow, marketing etc.) – particularly in relation to the traditional trades, and also among graduates.
 - Encourage businesses to look at their 'offer' to prospective staff, linking in with the attractiveness of the area (This has strong dependencies on housing, transport, education and the wider city 'offer', there need to be strong links to Liveable Exeter and Exeter Live Better to address these challenges).
- **Alignment of training provision and future skills needs**
 - Gather LMI that can help identify future skills needs (links to Local Skills Improvement Plans).
 - Ensure effective employer engagement is in place to facilitate the development of appropriate courses and skills provision throughout the provider base.
 - Encourage collaboration between training providers to learn from each other, reduce duplication and maximise the impact of available funding.
 - Balance between future skills needs and current demand.
 - Ensure that high level training opportunities are available to support specialist skills development, aligned to priority sectors.

- Ensure there is some resilience in the system able to respond to exogenous shocks such as recession.
- Continue to support the development of digital skills – particularly in relation to progression in the workplace.
- **Clear map of available skills provision**
 - Ensure that individuals and businesses are aware of the courses, providers and careers available in Exeter.
 - Facilitate careers guidance and signposting for all age groups – particularly older age groups and career changers - through Exeter Works
 - Road map of career pathways with skills needs, corresponding qualifications/courses and providers (focus on priority sectors). Also demonstrate transferability of skills.
 - Support campaigns that reduce the stigma associated with some roles and sectors.
- **Support those furthest from the labour market**
 - Social support including employability and wellbeing for those who face multiple barriers to the labour market.
 - Respond to the effects of the pandemic and encourage those who are long term unemployed back into work, working in partnership with Job Centre Plus and a range of other organisations.
 - Work with Co-Lab, Exeter College, Eat That Frog and Learn Devon to provide community and bespoke individual support
 - Encourage the development of training that is more accessible, such as shorter boot camps, evening sessions and potentially community based initiatives to overcome barriers.
 - Ensure digital skills – at entry and lower levels – are embedded in learning for this group.
 - Ensure Life skills are embedded within learning for this group.
 - Explore the development of an Urban Learning Academy with Exeter College and Co-Lab to focus on those most disengaged from learning.
 - Encourage supported employment to give opportunities for those who face barriers to get into the workplace. Support employers to develop their approaches to recruitment and retention.
- **Raising aspirations**
 - Work with the Careers Hub to address this within secondary schools and further education, ensuring the business community are supported to engage.
 - Raise ambition through celebration of the opportunities and organisations locally.
 - Ensure life skills are an integral part of raising aspirations and providing experiences to young people in particular.
 - Encourage more self-employment through aspiration for entrepreneurship.
- **Apprenticeships**
 - Encourage everyone to consider apprenticeships and work-based training as a route for entering work and progression once in work, including support to overcome barriers.

- Support businesses to overcome barriers to taking on apprentices.
- Support the expansion of degree apprenticeships at the university and in the business community as a means of delivering high level qualifications.
- **Supporting Sectors**
 - Construction
 - Continue to support the sector through the Building Greater Exeter project.
 - Health and Social Care
 - Work with Devon County Council, Proud to Care and the NHS Trust's to encourage individuals into the sector
 - Support core and soft skills offer
 - Help identify clear pathways into the social care sector
 - Creative arts and culture (Inc. Digital media)
 - Encourage individuals in or interested in the sector to undertake enterprise training
 - Identify clear pathways

8.9 In addition to the priorities outlined above, there are a number of underpinning areas of work that need to be undertaken to support the overall delivery of the Strategy, these are:-

- **Funding**
 - Supporting the devolution process, being clear about the need and ask for Exeter in relation to the funding available through the process.
 - Identifying suitable funding streams for the priorities identified within the action plan that don't currently have funding associated with them.
- **Labour Market Intelligence**
 - Continue to ensure that our LMI is up to date and relevant to support ongoing decision-making.
- **Partnerships**
 - Identifying the actions that need to be delivered in partnership with a range of other organisations, including those which will be led by others.
- **Communication**
 - Ensuring that all the work that is undertaken by the City Council in relation to supporting the development of skills and learning in the city is communicated.
- **Governance**
 - Reviewing the current governance arrangements for the Skills Group to ensure that they are fit for purpose, amending and updating where required.
 - Ensuring this is reviewed on a regular basis.

8.10 The Action Plan to deliver the Skills Strategy will cover an initial 3 year period, with an annual review of progress.

Next Steps

8.11 Finalise the Action Plan with the Skills Advisory Group.

8.12 Publish the Skills Strategy and associated documents as appropriate.

8.11 Review the current Terms of Reference and membership of the Skills Advisory Group, updating as required to support the delivery of the Strategy and Action Plan.

9. How does the decision contribute to the Council’s Corporate Plan?

9.1 Whilst a new corporate plan is being developed, the table below sets out how the Skills Strategy contributes to the current plan:

CORPORATE PLAN 2019 – 2021	
PRIORITY	Contribution of Skills Strategy
Tackling Congestion and Accessibility	Linked to the priority of attracting and retaining the right workforce. Supporting businesses to address these challenges with flexible and agile working.
Building Great Communities	Supporting inclusion – economically and socially. Access to the labour market, utilising programmes such as Exeter Works and Building Greater Exeter. Supporting skills development and lifelong learning.
Promoting Healthy and Active Lifestyles	Supporting the link between physical health, mental wellbeing and being economically active, enabling inclusion.
Providing Value for Money Services	Maximising partnership working opportunities, funding streams, supporting collaboration to address the priorities within the strategy.
Leading a Well-Run council	Taking a role of leadership and influence to address the priorities in the strategy.

9.2 The strategy also works to deliver the Exeter 2040 vision in making Exeter a more inclusive, healthy and sustainable city:

“By the time they are an adult, a child born in Exeter today will live in a city that is inclusive, healthy and sustainable – a city where the opportunities and benefits of prosperity are shared and all citizens are able to participate fully in the city’s economic, social, cultural and civic life.”

10. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

9.1 The identified risks are highlighted in the table below.

Risk	Likelihood	Mitigation
Identified priorities need significant budget (more than available) to deliver	Medium	The City Council needs to be aware of this, and be prepared to support bids and applications to external funding streams in order to meet the needs of the strategy. Engagement and support to partners may also secure funding and delivery of priorities.
Lack of partner support / engagement	Low	A range of organisations / partners / stakeholders have already been engaged in the process, and thus far have been very supportive.
Unable to deliver against the priorities identified	Low	Currently, it is considered that the priorities that have been identified and the resulting actions are achievable in terms of delivery, This will be monitored on an ongoing basis by the Skills Advisory Group.
New priorities and opportunities are identified not currently in the Strategy – potential to detract from existing work plan	Medium	The Skills Advisory Group will take responsibility for supporting and guiding on changes to the agreed strategy and action plan, taking account of the impact on existing work programmes.

11. Equality Act 2010 (The Act)

11.1 Under the Act's Public Sector Equalities Duty, decision makers are required to consider the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct;
- advance equality by encouraging participation, removing disadvantage, taking account of disabilities and meeting people's needs; and
- foster good relations between people by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

11.2 In order to comply with the general duty authorities must assess the impact on equality of decisions, policies and practices. These duties do not prevent the authority from reducing services where necessary, but they offer a way of developing proposals that consider the impacts on all members of the community.

11.3 In making decisions the authority must take into account the potential impact of that decision in relation to age, disability, race/ethnicity (includes Gypsies and Travellers), sex and gender, gender identity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, pregnant women and new and breastfeeding mothers, marriage and civil partnership status in coming to a decision.

11.4 In recommending this proposal potential impact has been identified on people with protected characteristics as determined by the Act and an Equalities Impact Assessment has been included in the background papers for Member's attention.

12. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

12.1 No direct carbon/environmental impacts arising from the recommendations.

13. Are there any other options?

13.1 The alternative options were explored as part of approval by Executive in November 2018, with the chosen approach to develop the Skills Strategy for Exeter. This report presents a revised version of the Strategy originally approved in March 2020.

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Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None

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