

Heart of the South West Skills Advisory Panel

9th September 2021

from

14:00pm – 16:00pm

Via Microsoft Teams

14:00pm Welcome, Introductions and Declarations of Interest

Attendees:

- Vince Flower
- Bill Blythe
- Stuart Elford
- Phill Adams
- Sharron Robbie
- Sarah Gough
- Jackie Grubb
- Rosie Bates
- John Laramy
- Laurence Frewin
- Gabrielle Climie
- Sean Mackney
- Nora Corkery
- Mark Shepherd
- Mike Matthews
- Mel Roberts
- Julie Hawker
- David Ralph
- Keri Denton
- Carl Wyard
- Neil Radford
- Andy Berry
- Hilary Stevens
- Chris Evans
- Tina Brinkworth
- Charlotte Collyer
- Pam Cole
- Simone Marillier-Roberts
- Cheryl Ward
- Stephen Henagulph
- Steve Cardew
- Nicky Keast
- Helen Higgs
- Lee Tozer
- Katy Quinn
- Mike Green
- Tony Skeel
- Joanna Caine
- Rod Davis
- Emma Hewitt
- Kristine Norton
- Paul Blackmore
- Chris Young
- Paul Turner
- Jo Holmes

Apologies:

- Rob Bosworth
- Alan Denby
- Jamie Evans
- Debbie Wright
- Nicola Williams
- Suzanne Bond
- Victoria Hatfield
- Edward Coley

14:00pm Welcome, Housekeeping and any new Declarations

- Julie Hawker, Laurence Frewin and Bill Blythe recorded a declaration of interest with regards to the Digital skills agenda item.

14:05pm Declaration of Interest Form

- **All to ensure a completed DOI form is sent to Simone Marillier-Roberts by COP Friday 24th September 2021.**

14:10pm Minutes of Last Meeting

- Actions from last meeting:
 - All previous actions had been completed.
 - Board members approved the minutes from the meeting held on 12th July 2021.

14:15pm ESF programmes update – Pam Cole

Pam Cole presented an update to the group on the current ESF programmes, a copy of the slide deck which was presented during the meeting has been circulated to members.

During the presentation there were various points highlighted and addressed. It was evident from the performance table on slide 5 that Serco are underperforming within some areas. Pam advised that the reason for underperforming within the progression for paid employment is because Serco work predominately with employed people and to qualify for this the person engaged must be unemployed. Pam recognised that progression for apprenticeships was also underperforming and advised that new providers have been bought in to try and address this.

On slide 6, it was also evident that Serco are underperforming in the progression for paid employment within the performance table for Devon. Similarly, to the above, the reason for this is because there are few unemployment people engaged with the project.

Pam highlighted a key challenge is keeping up with newly funded projects within the area and asked all members to contact Serco if they were aware or will be running any new projects.

An update was provided on priority groups and how performance is going within these areas. Figures within the table on page 12 show some underperformance in certain areas. It was advised that the team are experiencing difficulties in identifying single adult households with dependant children which is why there is an underperformance showing within both areas. The table also shows an underperformance in engaging participants from ethnic minorities within Somerset. It is thought that this is because the target is a National target and therefore difficult to achieve however Pam advised that any further advise on this would be welcome.

14:45pm Recruitment and Retention – Phill Adams

Phill Adams advised the group SAP have been tasked by HEROG to assist with the recruitment and retention crisis by looking at short term measures that could be taken forward to alleviate the supply problems. The five key asks HEROG have asked SAP to take forward include; Promote and provide funding for the 'Your Country Needs You' Tourism Campaign, take forward a programme of virtual jobs fairs for Tourism sector and other high need areas, work with SAP to identify key areas of need and opportunities for recruitment, consider the potential for a brokerage service, promote opportunities in Tourism Sector to Schools and College.

Phill advised that some of the actions including funding and brokerage are already underway. A discussion was opened up to the group on how we may take forward the remaining actions including the virtual jobs fairs.

Andy Berry advised that they have a task and finish group to address the current issue within Exmoor so would be keen to ensure this is linked up with work the SAP do.

Tina Brinkworth advised that there are high vacancies in the area. There is a feel that currently we are competing for skills within the area so we need to align opportunities better across the various sectors.

Laurence Frewin highlighted that there are a lot of meetings they are engaged with surrounding this issue and more that is being planned so happy to ensure this is all joined up accordingly. It was advised that they have been approached by significant employers who are desperate for employees, it is important to join up across the sectors.

Sharron Robbie advised that job vacancies are currently at a record high. DCTPN have lobbied to extend apprenticeship incentives alongside other requests such as introducing wage subsidies to try and alleviate some of this. A slide deck highlighting some of the current issues has been circulated to the group.

Carl Wyard highlighted that 54% of businesses are paying better salaries. 41% of businesses are reducing their capacity and 40% of businesses are hiring unskilled staff and providing them with the training.

Mark Shepherd updated the group on a recent survey which suggests that it will take 2 years to sort the skills shortage out across the country. It was highlighted that there are currently 1.6million people on furlough, it is unsure what will happen when this ends. The high street is losing 8,000 shops. On the plus side, wage increases will help to close some inequality gaps further there is also the option for businesses to provide better incentives in order to try and retain their current staff members. It was highlighted that due to Covid, many young people have not experienced work placements therefore it is important to help them understand career opportunities available to help inspire young people who have missed out on this opportunity.

Phill Adams concluded the conversation with the following actions:

- **PA/Secretariat to organise a task and finish group to take work forward. All to link in with activity that you are already doing.**
- **PA/Secretariat to coordinate a skills gap response to feed back to Government.**
- **PA/Secretariat to complete a grid to link up projects.**

15:00pm Roundtable of Members – All

Stuart Elford advised the group that unfortunately the trail blazer bid was not successful however the 4 colleges, DCC and the Chamber are still meeting to discuss taking this forward to maintain the collaborative working approach and how to take this forward.

Mike Matthews emphasised the need for long term solutions to be made following the pandemic. Any short term funding for projects need to have a flexible approach to allow for quick delivery in response to what we are seeing on the ground.

Rosie Bates emphasised the impact the Youth Hub in Exeter is having with recognising and encouraging collaborative working.

John Laramy advised that the labour market is tight at the moment and questioned if we are expecting a bounce in productivity?

Sean Mackney highlighted that wages increase can indicate a higher rate in productivity which is positive. Government have announced several programmes such as CRF which is still awaiting a decision and will have an impact on future work.

Laurence Frewin advised that there is a consultation regarding level 3 qualifications, this is one to revisit.

Jackie Grubb advised that they have seen a rise of higher technical skills within Plymouth and the surrounding areas.

Mike Matthews emphasised the benefits of WFH and that this has meant that people can work for any company/organisation regardless of location therefore allowing to get better paid jobs outside of the County.

15:30pm Digital Skills funding – Phill Adams

Phill Adams updated the group on digital skills funding that is available. It was advised that LEP Board have decided to reconsider the prioritisation of some of their contribution towards the Connecting Devon and Somerset programme. A proposal of different options has been submitted to LEP Board and SAP Board members have been asked for their advice. The meeting was opened up to Board members for discussion.

John Laramy suggested that it would be beneficial to put money towards IT equipment by giving the money to local providers to deliver rather than corporate companies.

Tina Brinkworth advised that it would be beneficial to invest this money into the education system to future proof young people.

Charlotte Collyer highlighted that the Microsoft offer is a free package so the money will not go to Microsoft if this is agreed.

Mike Matthews emphasised the need to invest in the education system and questioned how we will retain investment to keep these skills in the South West.

Sean Mackney questioned if we are completing test locations by 5G activity? He reiterated the point about investing in the education system to support schools in digital packages and ensure the circular approach.

David Ralph emphasised that the LEP will still be funding the infrastructure work however the voucher scheme proposal did not provide good value for money therefore it has been agreed to reinvest this money. The money needs to be spent by March 2023.

Mark Shepherd advised that digital skills and leadership are vital however this needs to be delivered locally.

Phill Adams wrapped up the agenda item by concluding that all comments from SAP Board members would be taken back to LEP Board in October. The following actions were agreed.

- **SM-R to circulate a copy of the slides and accompanying paper to SAP Board members.**
- **All to offer comments and feedback on the preferred options by COP Thursday 16th September 2021 to Simone Marillier-Roberts.**

15:45pm Skills Strategy Action Plan and LMI update – Phill Adams

Phill Adams updated the group on the current labour market intelligence data. It was advised that the claimant count has dropped significantly since July. Currently there are on 30,000 people on furlough and intel suggests that most of these people will not end up on UTC when furlough ends as was originally forecasted. NEET levels are also below the historic average and a large number of young people are going into the education system rather than taking on work/apprenticeships. Unique job postings have risen significantly. Overall, we are seeing a good recovery from the predictions forecasted at the beginning of the pandemic.

Phill Adams moved onto updating the group about the skills strategy review. It was advised that Government have asked that SAP update these by March 2022. The update will include progress on actions, updated evidence on local need and demand and revised assumptions/asks. Currently a third of the actions are active with a third waiting on funding announcements being agreed. It was advised that this would be picked up again at the next SAP Board meeting.

**15:55pm AOB
Tech Charter update – Charlotte Collyer**

An update on current programmes Digital Skills Partnership are delivering was provided to members and a copy of the slide deck was circulated to the group.

Charlotte updated the group on the tech talent charter and advised of the following asks:

- LEP sign up as a signatory
- Anyone interested in finding out more about the tech talent charter and the offer/how to sign up to contact Charlotte Collyer directly so details can be shared to sign up to the next quarterly meet up on 16th September.

16:00pm Close

Vince concluded the meeting by advising that Simone Marillier-Roberts would be going on maternity leave in October and offered his appreciation for the secretariat support to the SAP group.

The next SAP Board meeting is scheduled for 1st November 2021.