

## **STOCKPORT SKILLS PLAN**

### Report of the Director of Education, Work and Skills

## Purpose of the Stockport Skills Plan

**‘Stockport is an ambitious place. We want to be the best place to live happy and healthy lives, a place where anything is possible, a place that everyone, right across the Borough can be proud of.’ [One Stockport: One Future, 2024]**

This Work and Skills Plan is key to securing to a more sustainable, inclusive and diverse economy that benefits everyone. The plan sets out how we will work in partnership across the Borough to support accessible, fair and good opportunities for residents to learn the skills they need to achieve their ambitions, and to get into good work, while ensuring that business and other organisations have access to the talent that they need to be successful and grow.

It sets out how we support our residents to have access to the best education, skills, qualifications, and employment at all stages of their lives, as well as ensuring we support those who most need it to access the work and skills they need to succeed.

The Work and Skills Plan is a Borough-wide plan that supports the One Stockport Borough Plan and One Stockport: One Future. The priorities set out in the plan directly connect to each of the four One Stockport themes:

- **To deliver a more enterprising and productive Borough**
- **To contribute to the delivery of a fair and inclusive Borough, with high quality opportunities available to all**
- **To support a climate friendly and resilient Borough**
- **To support an accessible and connected Borough**

Whilst the Council has a vital role in shaping, defining and driving forward this Work and Skills Plan, its delivery will be led by **our strong network of colleges and training providers.**

The Council is committed to act as a Borough wide strategic leader to enable and drive systemic improvements, provide constrictive challenge, and to hold partners to account.

## Vision and ambition

Our vision is:

- To have the **best schools and colleges** in the country with every child included in their success.
- Every young person is empowered to **make a positive and well-informed choice** about their post 16 learning and future career.
- Everyone has the opportunities and skills to **successfully achieve their ambitions.**
- Stockport has a **thriving economy, with good employers offering good work**, which benefits all our residents.

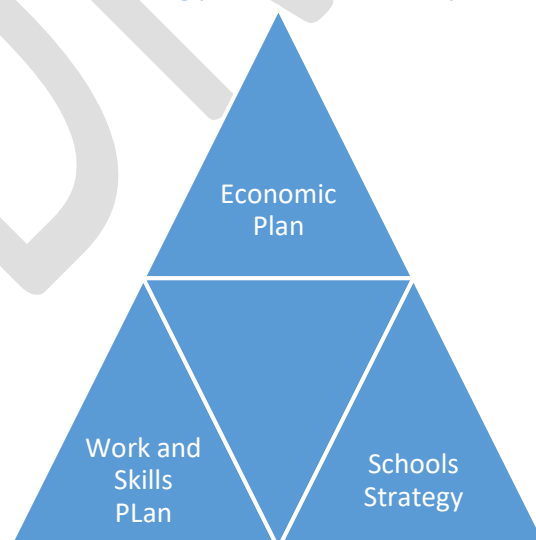
Our ambitions are:

- We will work in partnership to ensure we have the very best schools, colleges and training providers.
- We will ensure there is choice and high quality opportunities available to all - maximising the opportunities generated for our residents through the investment into our Borough and strengthening the pathways into those opportunities through good quality workplace interactions and closer working between employers and education / training providers.
- We will ensure continued economic growth through a strong and diverse pipeline of good work and appropriately skilled workers.
- We will ensure every partner in the education, work, skills and employment system understand their role and significance in delivering the above.

Our Plan has a specific focus on:

- Vulnerable children including those that are cared for or who have Special Educational Needs and / or Disabilities
- Focussing our efforts and resource on those who are least likely to have the same access and opportunities
- Workplace interactions
- Technical education,
- Information, Advice, and Guidance
- Key industries

How the Stockport Skills Strategy has been shaped



A key determinant of our success will be the extent to which partners work together towards a common aim. It is for that reason that we have engaged with a wide range of partners to develop

this plan, to ensure it is representative and proportionate to the challenges our Borough and our partners face.

*As part of a significant engagement period, members of this committee are asked to comment on the structure, direction and efficacy of the following plan.*

DRAFT

## Stockport in 2024 – our challenges and opportunities

Stockport is strategically located within one of the most important, exciting, and dynamic city regions in the country. The Borough has experienced rapid and sustained economic growth and is home to a range of nationally and internationally significant companies. Stockport is a significant economic engine in the area and makes a distinctive contribution to the Greater Manchester (GM) economy.

Underpinning the success of Stockport's economy is a highly skilled workforce supporting growth in particular knowledge intensive business sectors:

- 3rd largest workforce within Greater Manchester, with 124,000 people employed in 13,000 businesses;
- 41.1% of Stockport's residents qualified to NVQ level 4 or above;
- GCSE attainment consistently higher than the Greater Manchester and UK averages;
- 99,000 students across 4 local universities with 33,000 graduates per annum;
- over 35% (63,000) of the working population have professional occupations;
- 8,800 are employed in digital and creative industries and over 10,000 employed in manufacturing;
- over 26,000 are employed in business, financial and professional services in the borough.

According to the 2023 [State of the Borough Report](#):

- Our population has grown by 4% since 2011 from 283,000 to 295,000
- International immigration is a key driver of population growth, 9% of Borough's residents were not born in the UK in 2020.
- Employment rates have not yet recovered to pre-pandemic levels with 77.8% of residents 16-64yrs in employment in September 2019, to 75.9% of residents 16-64yrs in employment in September 2023
- Since 2013 there has been a 14% rise in active enterprises, from 11,845 in 2015 to 13,520 in 2023.

However we face many challenges.<sup>1</sup>

**Overall, the UK's skills system is complex and largely fragmented and Stockport is no exception to this.** Activity generally is driven by funding policy and takes place on an institution-by-institution basis; whilst colleges, universities and businesses connect with each other, there has been no coherent Stockport-wide perspective on what good practice is being delivered and where opportunities to operate at scale and make improvements might be implemented.

In Stockport we are fortunate to have several effective and well-respected education and training providers including our schools and sixth form colleges, further education colleges, and independent training providers. However, at a GM level, feedback is being heard from businesses, both large and small, that the current skills system is flawed in that it can be difficult to engage with and is not always effective in providing the right skills or flexible enough to respond to modern day business demands.

In Stockport, through the Stockport Economic Alliance, Work and Skills Partnership, and strategic business relationships established through SMBC, we are aware that businesses across every

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<sup>1</sup> Please see appendix for more detailed analysis

sector and at every skill level are facing significant recruitment challenges. However, most importantly perhaps, they have indicated a desire to be part of the solution and have offered to get directly involved; this offer presents an invaluable opportunity which must be seized, and this is a key feature of our plan.

**Some of our learners face barriers within the skills system too** and find it is hard to understand, enter, navigate and progress through the system, as a consequence:

- an increasing number of learners are on waiting lists for courses and not actively participating in education, employment or training (NEET);
- an increasing number of learners don't attempt to access the system at all;
- an increasing number of learners ultimately face significant barriers to employment, often without the qualifications, capabilities or skills they need for lifelong learning.

Our schools need more support to meet the Gatsby benchmarks for impartial careers advice. There is a real need for schools to better link up with businesses not only to shape curriculum delivery but to understand the non-academic options for the students for whom that might be a positive choice. From January 2023, schools have been required to provide meaningful encounters in the workplace and the delivery plan being developed from this Work and Skills Plan should recognise and foster this opportunity.

Within the skills system there are a number of stakeholders and delivery agents. From primary schools through to the prospect of in-work progression and the retention of imminent retirees there are opportunities to promote new careers of the future and to educate and train people to continue to learn and build their experiences through a lifetime of learning. Work already undertaken nationally has highlighted the importance of improving relationships between education and business and this is likely to be needed at Year 7 (or earlier) and at Years 11 / 12.

**The national rise in learners leaving KS4 in coming years will affect choice and availability.**

The ONS population estimates forecast that the 15-19yrs population in Stockport will grow by 8.8% by 2030, DfE projections estimate that growth in this population could be as much as 12.7%. We must look at how we can create more places, above that of anticipated population growth, to provide choice and opportunity for those learners who would ordinarily have sought places outside of Stockport but who cannot secure a place.

In addition the increase in pupil numbers generally and those who have some form of SEND, has put a significant strain on post-16 provision in local colleges and training providers who are reporting on-going waiting lists for young people to access their provision. The impact of Covid has also exacerbated anxiety and mental health issues with young people; this is also a contributory factor in the increase in NEET numbers locally, as well as reduced attendance in secondary phase education which will compromise the achievement of skills and qualifications in young people

Whilst it is clear that increased capacity is needed generally in the system, specific capacity and resource is needed at foundation level, level 1 and 2 courses. Consideration also needs to be given as to how the post-16 system engages with and prioritises the placement of disadvantaged learners. In a competitive market for places it is these learners that will be at the back of the queue and potentially without any form of provision, particularly if they have not achieved level 2 maths and English.

Students who are not inclined towards traditional academic subjects often face a curriculum that does not cater to their needs, interests or skill sets, which in some cases is leading to disengagement and can compromise their educational outcomes. However, the existing education system may not fully support or nurture this divergence in interests, which can impact their overall educational journey and future career prospects.

**The traditional approach to work experience may not always effectively engage or inspire young students**, especially if the work does not align closely with their interests or is not presented in an engaging way. There is a crucial distinction between traditional work experience and creating engaging workplace interactions that excite young people about future careers.

For young people – particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds – have reported that they want more. They want to learn and practice skills like speaking and listening and want a greater focus on the practicalities of applications for jobs. Employers, for their part, still talk of skills gaps and of young people ill-prepared for the realities of the workplace.

For businesses, it's about moving away from a rigid view of two weeks of work experience, for which the opportunity has disappeared in too many secondary schools. Instead, there needs to be an ongoing, meaningful relationship with schools and colleges, capturing imaginations as soon as young people enter secondary school.

For schools and colleges, it's about embedding this activity in the curriculum, focussing on the skills that young people will find useful whatever industry or sector they set their sights on. It's also about seeing work readiness as a key part of school life. In the mainstream not at the margins.

**Workforce problems persist across public services, from loss of experienced staff to high turnover and vacancies.** The government's focus has been on recruiting more staff: 50,000 more nurses, 6,000 more GPs and 20,000 however, this approach is welcome and necessary however new recruits will only ever make up a minority of total workforces, and take time to acquire the knowledge, experience and organisational memory that makes public services tick.

Public service effectiveness depends therefore on keeping existing workforces skilled, motivated – and, crucially, in post.

Key drivers for retention difficulties include:

- Public sector pay ;
- High Workloads;
- Cost of living including housing and childcare;
- Some key roles involve unsociable hours;
- There can be limited avenues in some roles for development and progression.

Nationally a partially effective workforce strategy, deployed in recent years, is the DfE demand-led teacher workforce model to calculate the number of teacher and training places that are needed. This model was linked to an overall strategy for recruitment and retention and used to evaluate the impact of those policies at a national level where sufficient information is available to do so. Similar initiatives have been implemented for nursing and for policing and we would welcome a broader national strategy for all public sector jobs.

We need to examine as a group what local levers are available to grow, develop, and attract the very best talent to Stockport.

***Our Borough stands at an exciting juncture, poised for growth and equality. We are committed to harnessing the resilience, agility, and ingenuity of our residents, businesses, and anchor institutions to build a brighter future. The challenges we've faced through Covid-19 and continue to face have only strengthened our resolve and revealed new opportunities for innovation and community strength. Our collective actions over the next decade will set the stage for a vibrant and thriving Borough, benefiting generations to come.***

## Strategic Context

**The Marmot report 'Build Back Fairer in Greater Manchester: Health Equity and Dignified Lives'** highlights how levels of social, environmental and economic inequalities in society are damaging health and wellbeing. It explores how these inequalities have been exposed and magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts. It provides a framework for how Greater Manchester can 'Build Back Fairer' in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. The framework calls for health equity to be placed at the heart of governance in Greater Manchester (GM), including resource allocation, and for all policies in the region to be geared towards achieving greater health equity.

The report states that to achieve a permanent reduction in health inequalities GM needs to focus on the social determinants of health; those factors outside health care that affect health, of which include:

- income, poverty and debt
- work and unemployment

The Build Back Fairer report summarises that:

- *Being in good work is usually protective of health while poor quality work, stressful jobs, and unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment, contribute significantly to poor health and low wellbeing and increase the risk of mortality. Manchester needs to ensure all jobs are of good quality as efforts to increase employment are introduced after the pandemic. The labour market situation before the pandemic influenced and impacted the labour market during the pandemic.*
- *The impacts of COVID-19 containment measures have fallen the most on low paid workers and have had significant health and health inequality impacts.*
- *As Manchester's economic challenges become clearer through 2021, it is important that those most at risk of being employed in poor quality work or of being unemployed are supported the most to protect their health as well as livelihoods. This includes younger people, those on low pay and insecure contracts and some workers from ethnic minority groups. Manchester is seeing positive indicators that the economy is recovering and the Council and partners have promoted groups such as long term unemployed or those with health conditions into sectors with vacancies or labour/skill shortages.*

Through the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022, the Government has set out its intent that every area would have a Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) agreed with Government by Summer 2023. Stockport's own approach is part of the Greater Manchester wide strategy drafted by GM Chamber of Commerce. The primary purpose of the LSIP is to put the voice of employers front and centre of the development of skills provision, using an evidence led approach to make sure that the LSIP is capable of underpinning future funding decisions and directly influencing future provision.

Government has made it clear that the purpose of a post-16 education system is to support people to move into high-skilled jobs, either directly, or through progression into good quality further and higher education courses. To enable their objectives for post-16 education, the government is in the process of reforming current post-16 qualifications at Level 3 and below.

Greater Manchester's most recent devolution deal is regarded to be the most significant yet in terms of embedding the role of local decision-making through additional powers, new financial freedoms, and new accountability arrangements. Part of these new freedoms allows Greater Manchester the ability to create the country's first integrated technical education city-region. The

deal extends existing devolved adult skills functions to include further areas of post-19 education and skills activity; and provides greater oversight of post-16 technical education and skills and careers. The partnership between the GMCA and DfE will focus and aid:

- Responsiveness of the system, connecting commissioners with funders.
- Strategic oversight of the implementation of local skills improvement plans.
- Support for effective planning functions linked to both sufficiency and alignment between the technical education offer and local labour market needs.
- The autonomy to develop an all-age careers strategy for Greater Manchester that responds to the local skills improvement plan and reflects the skills ambition for the city region.

Greater Manchester has plans to introduce a Greater Manchester Baccalaureate (MBacc) for technical education, which would sit alongside the existing English Baccalaureate (EBacc) for those wanting to pursue a university education. The MBacc will guide students towards subjects which will maximise their chances of getting a good job in the region in areas such as Engineering, Computer Science, Construction, Education, or the creative subjects. A pilot is planned to launch in September 2024.

## Priorities

### To deliver a more enterprising and productive Borough

#### Why it is important?

- GVA growth has been sluggish, Stockport's economy grew by +24% between 2008 and 2018, which was below the national (+35%) and Greater Manchester (+38%) averages.
- The Stockport economy is dominated by small and micro businesses, but business growth has lagged behind the national and regional averages due to poor survival rates. We need to do more to support small and micro businesses
- Decline is forecast across many of Stockport's key employment sectors and our economy needs diversifying
- Stockport's Local Skill's Improvement Plan provides detailed analysis of labour market information and provides clear recommendations that both employers, and education and training providers can follow to create short- and medium-term delivery plans for skills shortages. We need to ensure this is joined up across our key stakeholders and is pointed towards our economic diversification
- There is not enough collaboration, cohesion or integration between students, education / training providers, and employers resulting in a lack of visibility and awareness in the system of each other and the opportunities that exist. We need to bring key stakeholders together and establish clear roles and responsibilities
- It is forecast that there will be a shortfall in post-16 education and training places over the next 5 years. Vulnerable learners such as those with SEND, who are in care, or have isolated themselves in some way are likely to be worst affected.

Our priorities to deliver a more enterprising and productive Borough are to:

1. Develop and grow Stockport's business support ecosystem and promote awareness of the Stockport business support offer to our business community to enable them to innovate and grow, while increasing productivity.



2. Encourage and support employers to offer good quality employment, including secure contracts, predictable hours, Real Living Wage pay levels and good quality work experience and placement opportunities.
3. Work with our partners to develop and deliver specific labour market interventions to connect residents to more highly paid opportunities in growth sectors.
4. Ensure the maximum possible skills and employment benefit from the Borough's capital investment pipeline, including the opportunities presented by the MDC.
5. Maximise the skills and employment benefit from place based public and private investment and regeneration in the town centre.
6. Ensure all 16 and 17 year olds are in education, employment or training.
7. Work with employers to understand barriers to employment and ensure careers, skills and employment services actively reduce and remove these barriers.
8. Work with training providers to ensure training meets the needs of businesses and the labour market, and that it is of good quality and responsive to changes in the economy.
9. Maximise the impact of available government funding (including levelling up fund and shared prosperity fund) on employment and skills outcomes in Stockport.
10. Ensure that good quality careers education, information advice and guidance, supported by labour market intelligence, is available to all Stockport residents and supports them to learn about higher skilled and higher paid employment opportunities.
11. Influence the development and delivery of the GM Local Skills Improvement Plan to ensure the best outcomes for Stockport residents.

The outcomes we expect to achieve by meeting these priorities are:

- To increase the proportion of Stockport residents who are paid a Real Living Wage.
- To increase the number of active enterprises operating in the Borough.
- To increase the proportion of Stockport residents working in growth sectors.
- To improve the quality of careers education, information, advice and guidance in the Borough.
- To have a greater range of choice in learning and qualification routes in Stockport.
- To reduce the number of people with no or low qualifications and increase the number of people with higher level qualifications.
- To have fewer businesses citing skills needs as a barrier to growth.
- To have more businesses offering work experience and placements.
- To reduce the number of young people who are NEET.
- To increase the take up of technical and vocational education.

We will use the following indicators to track progress against this theme:

- The number of Stockport residents being paid a real living wage (Office of National Statistics, Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, Annual).
- The change in and number of Active Enterprises (Office of National Statistics, Business Counts Data, Annual).
- The number of opportunities created through the council's capital projects pipeline, including the MDC.
- The number of Stockport businesses signed up to the GM Good Employment Charter, (GMCA).
- The % resident working age population (aged 16 to 64) with zero qualifications (Annual).
- The percentage of working age residents with qualifications at level 4+.
- The number of residents starting technical and vocational education (Annual).
- The number of schools achieving the Gatsby Benchmarks.

To contribute to the delivery of a fair and inclusive Borough, with high quality opportunities available to all

Why is it important?

- Stockport already had stark polarisations in its communities, with significant differences across income, employment, health and wellbeing outcomes, the COVID-19 pandemic has served to make these disparities even more pronounced.
- As with many of our other demographics, the age of the population is not consistent across the borough. In parts of Stockport town centre, residents are up to 22 years younger than some of the borough's suburbs such as Windlehurst. The average age mirrors Stockport's deprivation patterns – with the most deprived neighbourhood's typically having the lowest median age.
- On average, disadvantaged children do not perform as well at GCSE as children with SEND acting as a barrier to further learning, training or employment
- The number of children and young people not in education, employment, or training after they leave school is rising due to a number of factors which include mental health, disengagement, lack of choice and availability of suitable courses

Our priorities to create fair and inclusive systems are to:

1. Use data and intelligence to identify residents most in need of learning and employment support, and design and target interventions accordingly.
2. Pro-actively work to reduce and remove the barriers that some people and communities face when accessing learning and employment.
3. Work with employers to adopt and promote flexible recruitment and working practices that make employment accessible to more of our residents.
4. Use social value to leverage and connect learning and employment opportunities, created through supply chains and investment in Stockport, including the MDC, to the people and communities who will benefit most, particularly those experiencing inequalities.

The outcomes we expect to achieve by meeting these priorities are:

- Improved health and wellbeing of residents.
- Reduced inequalities in access to skills and employment opportunities.
- Increased volume of learning and employment opportunities through social value.
- Residents increase their earnings.
- Reduced number of working age residents dependent on out of work benefits.

We will use the following indicators to track progress against this theme:

- The number of residents claiming Universal Credit & JSA out of work benefit, (ONS, Quarterly)
- Further indicators for this theme will be developed with Business Intelligence as part of the consultation process.

To support a climate friendly and resilient Borough

Why is it important?

- Stockport has an ambitious target to become zero-carbon by 2038, 12 years ahead of the Government's target for the UK of 2050.
- As we invest in infrastructure to become a zero-carbon Borough, we need proportionate investment in the skills sector to ensure that our education and training providers can respond. In particular, we need to develop the 'green skills' the Borough and region needs to deliver its ambitions.
- Economic Plan recognises that the Borough's economic success must be built on clean growth, green innovation and the development of green skills.
- Making sure that the Borough's workforce has the necessary skills to make this transition in a way which is fair and equitable is crucial to helping us meet this goal. The Work and Skills Plan will play a role in the delivery of this vision and ensure that we have a work and skills system in Stockport that supports the Borough to meet its 2038 zero-carbon target.
- It is important that we understand the skill gaps that will emerge within the low-carbon sector and that it capitalises on the opportunities for reskilling the workforce.
- We know that one of the main barriers to delivering the right training and qualifications at scale is a lack of demand for training from employers and residents. Without significant incentives or regulatory change, we must look at other ways to create demand using the assets that we have available to us.

Our priorities to support a climate friendly and resilient Borough are to:

1. Use our collective influence and spending power to create demand for green skills such as in retrofit and construction, maintenance of green infrastructure, green energy and biodiversity.
2. Support and enhance ongoing carbon literacy and communications with businesses, schools, colleges and other learning and training providers.
3. Use research and intelligence to ensure that information about future job opportunities in the zero-carbon economy is included in labour market information and guidance that is shared with schools, colleges and other learning and training providers.
4. Work with training providers and employers to plan for and build capacity for identified future skills needs.
5. Identify employment land supply to support growth in the Local Plan.

The outcomes we expect to achieve by meeting these priorities are:

- Increase the volume of learning and training to support transition to a zero-carbon economy.
- Reduced carbon emissions.
- Increase the commissioned provision providing green skills training in Stockport.

Indicators for this theme are less available than other themes, and data relating to green skills is not routinely collated and published by statistical agencies at a frequency that allows us to track progress. Historically, we have commissioned bespoke research work to gather this information at a local level. For Example, the Office for National Statistics produces two different estimates of "green jobs" and they indicate that the term "green job" has no one particular meaning. This is a complex area and ONS highlight the challenges of obtaining data under the various definitions. We will continue to work with colleagues at GMCA, and others to develop new sources of information, intelligence and explore use of proxy indicators.

To support an accessible and connected Borough

Why is it important?

- The role of digital skills has become ever more important in almost all jobs and in almost all sectors. Entry level digital skills are required for jobs that traditionally may not have required any use of technology at all, while those roles that require advanced digital skills are some of the most highly skilled and highly paid roles available in the Borough today.
- Transport is also a key issue for residents accessing learning and employment opportunities. We know that lack of good quality public transport and the cost of transport can be a barrier for many. The Greater Manchester Transport Strategy provides an overall framework for transport in the region, and both recognises the importance of connecting residents to opportunities.

Our priorities to support an accessible and connected Borough are to:

1. Ensure that residents have the digital skills they need to find and access learning and employment opportunities, especially highly skilled opportunities that meet the needs of the digital sector in the Borough.
2. Encourage and support digital and tech businesses to be based in Stockport.
3. Influence transport policy in Stockport and use the opportunity of the reregulation of bus services in Greater Manchester, to ensure that residents are connected to opportunities through public transport and good quality active travel options.

The outcomes we expect to achieve by meeting these priorities are:

- More residents have the confidence to use digital skills to find and access learning and employment opportunities.
- More residents accessing learning to enhance digital skills at all levels, from wherever they are and using a device which suits them.
- More digital and tech businesses are base din Stockport.

We will use the following indicators to track progress against this theme:

- Digital Exclusion Index

## Delivering the Work and Skills Plan

### Governance

The Work and Skills Partnership is a key advisory group with the Stockport Economic Alliance having overall oversight.

Whilst the Council has vital role in shaping, defining and driving forward this Work and Skills Plan, its delivery will be led by **our strong network of colleges and training providers.**

The Council is committed to act as a Borough wide strategic leader to enable and drive systemic improvements, provide constructive challenge, and to hold partners to account.

The Work and Skills Partnership will review progress against the agreed priorities, outcomes and indicators on a periodic basis, taking action to celebrate success, remove barriers and solve issues or problems. The Council's Scrutiny Committees will be invited to review regular updates on progress.

At a more strategic level the Work and Skills Plan will be monitored through its connection to the One Stockport Economic Plan.

Once the plan has been adopted, the Work and Skills Partnership, working with Council officers, will develop a full delivery plan to implement the identified priorities. The delivery plan will be monitored quarterly and reviewed annually to ensure that it remains responsive to changing labour market and wider economic circumstances. This delivery plan will contain the detailed actions and outputs that guide the day-to-day work of colleagues and partners in other learning and employment organisations in Stockport.

Our Priorities in delivering and governing the plan include:

- Creation of a detailed annual delivery plan that sets actions and milestones for delivery of the plan.
- Creation of an index of the indicators identified in this plan to track progress and act accordingly.
- Maintain a productive partnership of stakeholders.
- Working to align Work and Skills Plan priorities to emerging funding opportunities created by central government and other funding agencies.

## Partnerships

The successful delivery of the Work and Skills Plan will rely on joint work with our partners and stakeholders across the Borough and wider region. A significant part of our work will be to manage these relationships and ensure that people and organisations are joined up and are working collaboratively to achieve our priorities.

Our main partners are:

- Learning and training providers, including schools, colleges and universities, apprenticeship providers, un-accredited providers, registered housing providers, and other accredited providers of qualifications such as community-based learning institutions.
- Employers, including Stockport's anchor institutions, employers in our growth sectors, the foundational economy and within our and our partners' supply chains.
- Voluntary and Community Sector, including organisations that support our residents towards and into learning and employment and organisations that work specifically with people experiencing inequalities.

The Council's Work and Skills Team will lead on managing this network of relationships and providing opportunities for partners to connect, share best practice and remove barriers. At a strategic and senior level, the Work and Skills Partnership is made up of senior representatives of the organisations listed.

## Engagement

The development of the plan will be supported by wide ranging consultation and engagement. This engagement will be with businesses, employer representative bodies (such as GM Chambers of Commerce), schools, training providers (including colleges, universities and independent training providers) and those who play a key role in supporting people into employment (including the Department for Work and Pensions and other GM Councils).

This first draft of a Work and Skills Plan will go to the Children and Families Scrutiny Committee in February and their comments will be incorporated into the final publication of this document.

## Risk and Implications

The risk of SMBC not taking any action is that the skills system continues to be fragmented and, in some ways, difficult to access from both a business and learner perspective. If we do not act, we will miss out on opportunities for collaboration and sharing, which will harm both the economic growth of Stockport's business community and the skills development opportunities for our residents. Taking no action also increases the risks of Stockport becoming a less desirable place for investment; skills problems are already a significant concern of many established Stockport businesses who could look elsewhere for future investment if they felt the right talent pool was available to them.

## Financial Implications

The vast majority of activity outlined in the Plan will require support and delivery through a wide range of partners, largely meaning that our commitment is focused on staff time and resources. Any financial contribution from SMBC will come from existing and future budgets, as well as through securing devolved GM funding, such as the Local Skills Improvement Fund.

## Equality and Diversity

The potential activity outlined in the Skills Plan is intended to be wholly inclusive and as such will not have a negative impact on any protected characteristics.

## Appendix 1 – detailed analysis of challenges and opportunities

Our Borough stands at an exciting juncture, poised for growth and equality. We are committed to harnessing the resilience, agility, and ingenuity of our residents, businesses, and anchor institutions to build a brighter future. The challenges we've faced through Covid-19 have only strengthened our resolve and revealed new opportunities for innovation and community strength. Our collective actions over the next decade will set the stage for a vibrant and thriving Borough, benefiting generations to come.

### Populations and Demography

Local partners have a role to play in tackling inequality. Stockport is the 8th most polarised Borough in England in terms of deprivation (out of 317 local authorities) and borough-wide averages mask acute and highly localised challenges. Source: Economic Plan

Stockport's population is older than other many other areas in England.

- The population aged 16-39 accounts for 47% of people in Stockport compared to 50% in England.
- Similarly, the working age population (aged 16-64) accounts for 60% of people in Stockport compared to 64% in Greater Manchester and 62% in England.
- The working age population has also remained relatively stagnant over the last decade, with -1% change since 2010 in Stockport compared to 4% across Greater Manchester and 3% nationally.
- The population aged 0 to 15 accounts for 20% of Stockport's population, which is slightly below Greater Manchester (21%) but above the national average (19%).
- On average, men die 11 years earlier in our most disadvantaged community compared to our most prosperous area, and there is a significant difference in how early people start to experience life limiting illnesses.

As with many of our other demographics, the age of the population is not consistent across the borough. In parts of Stockport town centre residents are up to 22 years younger than some of the borough's suburbs such as Windlehurst. The average age mirrors Stockport's deprivation patterns – with the most deprived neighbourhood's typically having the lowest median age.

Mapping the education attainment of learners in secondary schools for English and Maths shows that the lowest levels of attainment are located in the areas with highest deprivation, whereas schools in Cheadle Hulme and Bramhall have over 80% of pupils achieving the equivalent of grade C or above in both English and Maths.

Stockport has the second lowest child poverty rate of all GM Borough's after Trafford. Despite this, one in four children (25.4%) live in poverty after housing costs. The highest concentration of child poverty is in Brinnington, Stockport town centre and Reddish.

Disadvantaged<sup>2</sup> children and young people living in Stockport on average achieve lower grades at GCSE than our children and young people with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) according to attainment 8<sup>3</sup> data.

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<sup>2</sup> Disadvantaged pupils are those who were eligible for free school meals (FSM) at any time during the last six years and children looked after (in the care of the local authority for a day or more or who have been adopted from care).

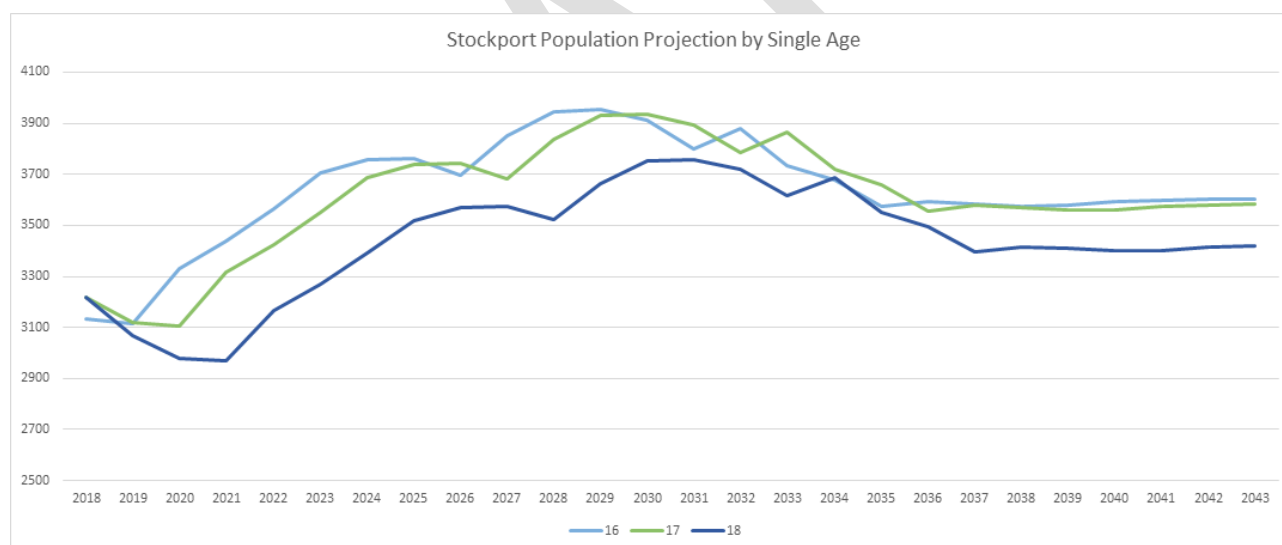
<sup>3</sup> An Attainment 8 score is a measure published annually showing the average academic performance of a secondary school. It is calculated by adding together pupils' highest scores across eight specific school subjects. While these numbers are not made publicly available on a pupil-by-pupil basis, scores taken from across a school year group are averaged to produce a school's overall score.

*A good example is a child who is behind in their reading at five years old. That child is seven times more likely to be behind in their maths when they are seven and 11 times more likely to be behind in their maths when they are 11. If you take a child who gets to secondary school not reading at the level you want at secondary school—we think there will be more of those this year—only one in 10 of those children go on to achieve a good clutch of five GCSEs. It is not something you can pick up later. You get this compounding deficit, and you get compensatory learning.*

EXCERPT FROM PUBLIC SERVICES COMMITTEE: THE ROLE OF PUBLIC SERVICES IN ADDRESSING CHILD VULNERABILITY, WITNESS EVIDENCE FROM SIR KEVAN COLLINS.

### Forecasted demand

The ONS population estimates forecast that the 15-19yrs population in Stockport will grow by 8.8% by 2030, DfE projections estimate that growth in this population could be as much as 12.7% whereas GP registrations of all school age pupils in Stockport indicate that growth is around 11.1%. GMCA are currently estimating the Greater Manchester populations of the same age will grow by 11.4% in the same period.



Actual and forecasted numbers of 16, 17 and 18 year olds by academic year – Source: Public Health

In terms of Stockport residents attending Stockport schools, we know the number of pupils leaving KS4 and entering the post-16 skills system has/will be approximately:

Academic Year	Total Cohort	No SEND	Identified as having SEND	EHCP
2019	2892	2360	532	234
2020	3067	2393	674	289
2021	3116	2431	685	268
2022	3254	2531	723	336
2023	3473	2523	950	373
2024	3570	2658	912	319



2025	3669	2663	1006	341
2026	3576	2629	947	310
2027	3665	2660	1005	345
2028	3858	2891	967	345*
2029	3845	2965	880	295*
2030	3828	2941	887	330*

Actuals and forecasts for pupils entering the post-16 skills system, (\* may have significant variation due to policy and practice changes relating to the assessment of EHCPs) Source: SMBC pupil forecasting model

Of our pupil population in Primary and Secondary schools, 17.92% had a special educational need or disability compared with 16.8% based on a mean average of CIPFA nearest neighbours. 5.33% of pupils had an Education Health Care Plan in comparison to 4.2%, whilst 12.63% had their needs met through SEN Support in comparison to 12.6%.

Autism; Social, Emotional, and Mental Health (SEMH); Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN); and Moderate Learning Difficulty (MLD), represent the four biggest areas of growth in the past five years. SEMH specifically bucks national trends, whereby nationally SEMH numbers have risen to 1 in 5 children having a primary need of SEMH, in Stockport 1 in 4 children have a primary need of SEMH. This equates to approximately 396 more pupils with SEMH in Stockport than another typical authority in England.

### **Post-16 education, training, or employment – Access, visibility, and awareness**

Of all learners that left KS4 in July 2022:

- Approx. 91% remained in full-time education;
- Of the above who remain in full-time education, approx. 32% attended provision outside of Stockport (68% access places in Stockport);
- Approx. 1% entered training ;
- Approx 4% started an apprenticeship;
- Approx 3% were not in any kind of education, employment, or training, the vast majority of these learners have some form of identified vulnerability.

The national rise in learners leaving KS4 in coming years will affect choice and availability of places across provision external to Stockport and as such we must look at how we can create more places, above that of anticipated population growth, to provide choice and opportunity for those learners who would ordinarily have sought places outside of Stockport but who cannot secure a place.

We must plan on the assumption that as much as 80% of Stockport learners in full-time education will need to access a place in Stockport – this equates to approx. 472 additional places (3845 pupils forecasted to leave KS4 in 2029 minus 3254 pupils leaving KS4 in 2022 multiplied by 80%) compared with 2022 by 2028. This is equivalent to an uplift of 14% and equates to an additional small sixth form campus.

Careers education, information, advice and guidance is provided in schools, across key stages, and is supported by The Gatsby Benchmarks which are:

- A stable careers programme
- Learning from careers and labour market information
- Addressing the needs of each student
- Linking curriculum learning to careers
- Encounters with employees and employers
- Experience of workplaces
- Encounters with further and higher education

- Personal guidance

The quality of support for young people can vary and schools would benefit from support in working towards the Quality in Careers Award. The Quality in Careers Standard is the national quality award for careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) in secondary schools, colleges and work-based learning.

Anecdotally we know that the quality of the careers advice available in our secondary schools is variable depending on the school you attend. We also know that a number of secondary schools have outsourced their careers advice resulting in little or no direct interaction between local employers, post-16 providers, or school leaders is taking place. As such no meaningful advice can be given, no curriculum development can occur, and there is no feedback mechanism or responsibility taken in terms of the role the school has in preparing the pupil for a productive life.

Stockport Council's Education and Careers Advice Service (ECAS) target those young people in year 11, who are most in need of support, to ensure a positive transition into education, employment and training. Those identified possess either an EHC Plan, are in receipt of SEN support, are children in care, or who are for other reasons at risk of becoming NEET. They are targeted in all Stockport mainstream schools and PRUs and receive one to one bespoke support to transition into the next phase of their life.

The increase in pupil numbers generally and those who have some form of SEND, has put a significant strain on post-16 provision in local colleges and training providers who are reporting on-going waiting lists for young people to access their provision. The impact of Covid has also exacerbated anxiety and mental health issues with young people; this is also a contributory factor in the increase in NEET numbers locally, as well as reduced attendance in secondary phase education which will compromise the achievement of skills and qualifications in young people. Whilst it is clear that increased capacity is needed generally in the system, specific capacity and resource is needed at foundation level, level 1 and 2 courses. Consideration also needs to be given as to how the post-16 system engages with and prioritises the placement of disadvantaged learners. In a competitive market for places it is these learners that will be at the back of the queue and potentially without any form of provision, particularly if they have not achieved level 2 maths and English.

Students who are not inclined towards traditional academic subjects often face a curriculum that does not cater to their needs, interests or skill sets, which in some cases is leading to disengagement and can compromise their educational outcomes. However, the existing education system may not fully support or nurture this divergence in interests, which can impact their overall educational journey and future career prospects.

The low uptake of technical education pathways seen nationally, particularly in digital, health and healthcare science emphasises the need for more cohesive and integration among schools, post-16 providers, and employers. This points to 1. a lack of awareness and value perception; these technical education pathways are not as well-promoted, understood, or valued as traditional academic routes, leading to fewer students choosing these options, 2. insufficient career advice and guidance; Students and parent/carers alike have not been receiving enough information about the benefits of technical education and how it aligns with viable career opportunities, 3. disconnect between education/training providers and employers: any kinds of gap between the skills taught in technical courses and the actual needs of employers diminishes the attractiveness and perceived value of these pathways.

### **Work experience or career exploration**

There is a crucial distinction between traditional work experience and creating engaging workplace interactions that excite young people about future careers. Work experience programs have historically focused on placing students in a work environments to observe and occasionally assist in daily tasks. However, this traditional approach may not always effectively engage or inspire young students, especially if the work does not align closely with their interests or is not presented in an engaging way.

Young people – particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds – have reported that they want more. They want to learn and practice skills like speaking and listening and want a greater focus on the practicalities of applications for jobs. Employers, for their part, still talk of skills gaps and of young people ill-prepared for the realities of the workplace.

Careers Education: Now and Next was compiled and published by the Careers and Enterprise Company giving the most clear-eyed view of the challenges facing the country as it seeks to build its future workforce. The data shows clearly how the improving careers system in England can help. When it comes to work experience however, the evidence argues for reinvention.

For businesses, it's about moving away from a rigid view of two weeks of work experience, for which the opportunity has disappeared in too many secondary schools. Instead, there needs to be an ongoing, meaningful relationship with schools and colleges, capturing imaginations as soon as young people enter secondary school.

For schools and colleges, it's about embedding this activity in the curriculum, focussing on the skills that young people will find useful whatever industry or sector they set their sights on. It's also about seeing work readiness as a key part of school life. In the mainstream not at the margins.

Linked to the Gatsby benchmark's, career exploration has the potential to engage and inspire however as outlined already, individualised careers advice, information and guidance (for student and parent/carer) needs to be better and focussed of the interests and talents of the student. Furthermore cohesion and integration between students, education/training institutions and employers needs to be better.

Beyond, fairs, presentations, open days, career exploration in schools does not have to be transactional and instead may be subtly represented through curriculum development/enrichment, integrated technology, project-based learning, and employer/student mentorship programmes.

## **Recruitment, Retention, and Future Skills**

Workforce problems persist across public services, from loss of experienced staff to high turnover and vacancies. . The government's focus has been on recruiting more staff: 50,000 more nurses, 6,000 more GPs and 20,000 however, this approach is welcome and necessary however new recruits will only ever make up a minority of total workforces, and take time to acquire the knowledge, experience and organisational memory that makes public services tick.

Public service effectiveness depends therefore on keeping existing workforces skilled, motivated – and, crucially, in post.

Key drivers for retention difficulties include:

- Public sector pay ;
- High Workloads;
- Cost of living including housing and childcare;
- Some key roles involve unsociable hours;
- There can be limited avenues in some roles for development and progression.

Nationally a partially effective workforce strategy, deployed in recent years, is for teachers;

The Department for Education operated a demand-led teacher workforce model to calculate the number of teacher and training places that are needed. This model was linked to an overall strategy for recruitment and retention and used to evaluate the impact of those policies at a national level where sufficient information is available to do so. There have been huge successes in this work however there remain shortfalls across certain subject areas which have not been filled in recent recruitment rounds.

Similar initiatives have been implemented for nursing and for policing and we would welcome a broader national strategy for all public sector jobs.

We need to examine as a group what local levers are available to grow, develop, and attract the very best talent to Stockport.

Whilst there are issues which can only be resolved through national government policy, there is a lot we can do locally to address these challenges. One such local lever is scaling the childcare offer in Stockport. Access to affordable childcare is a major barrier to parents and carers, particularly women being able to work, study and train. The cost of childcare can be a barrier to employment for single parent households, most of whom are female. In many cases, and especially for single mothers, the cost of childcare outweighs their wages, making it financially restrictive for mothers to return to work. From April 2024, eligible working parents of 2-year-olds can access 15 hours childcare support. By September 2025, most working families with children aged between 9 months and 5 years old will be entitled to 30 hours of childcare support.

The LA has a statutory duty to Secure sufficient childcare, so far as is reasonably practicable, for working parents, or parents who are studying or training for employment. The Statutory guidance requires us to have consideration of:

- Supply and demand for places across the Borough;
- The state of the local labour market including the sufficiency of the local childcare workforce;
- The quality and capacity of childcare providers.

Put simply, to scale capacity where demand outstrips supply, there needs to exist an available workforce, that workforce needs to have a depth of knowledge and experience, and childcare providers need to have sufficient quality and capacity to absorb and mitigate an uplift in workforce (and inevitable dilution of knowledge and experience in a setting). If the workforce does not exist, and/or is not of sufficient quality, and/or the providers expanding don't have sufficient quality and capacity to absorb the impacts of increased workforce then scaling will be limited and/or quality of provision will be impacted.

We have yet to see the impact of scaling activity of childcare places across Stockport. As such this could be a risk to work and skills in the future.

More broadly across all sectors (public and private), Stockport has the highest number of recruitment difficulties in the public sector compared with other GM authorities, with 79% of businesses reporting they struggled to recruit staff. Stockport's employers especially had problems recruiting 'professional / managerial' roles, as 43% of them reported that getting people for these roles presented a challenge. This was followed by 'skilled and technical' (38.7%), 'clerical' (23.2%) and 'unskilled and semi-skilled' (14.1%). Notably, recruitment problems for every role were greater in Stockport compared to the Greater Manchester average.

The hardest-to-obtain technical skills from candidates were 'specialist skills/knowledge to perform the role' and 'knowledge of products/services offered by their organisation' with 46.3% and 45% of businesses reporting these. These two skills areas exceeded the others by

far. In third and fourth place came 'advanced IT skills' (16.2%) and 'basic IT skills' (15.3%).

Regarding soft skills, 'ability to manage own time and prioritise own tasks' (33.3%), 'sales' (31.5%) and 'managing own feelings or the feelings of others' (29.6%) were the most difficult to find in candidates. 'IT skills' (both advanced and basic) and 'sales' were identified as being in short supply more often in Stockport than in Greater Manchester.

The training courses with highest demand in Stockport were 'basic functional skills for business' (33.6%), 'digital marketing' (31.4%) and 'sales & business development' (30.5%). Other popular training courses were 'business leadership & management' (30%) and 'specialised functional skills for business' (25.9%). Compared to Greater Manchester, businesses in Stockport were substantially more interested in 'digital marketing' courses and less interested in the 'soft skills' and 'business leadership and management' courses.

The below table shows a sample of occupations by total number of vacancy postings in Stockport from 2017 – 2022. Source: Adzuna.

Vacancies	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Social Care worker	1702	1845	1757	2246	3048	2546
Customer service advisor	1686	1442	1050	336	1054	1297
General nurse	1623	1325	1350	1318	1214	1015
Mental health nurse	880	779	622	359	NO DATA	NO DATA
Administrator	654	447	524	342	710	884
Teacher	NO DATA	NO DATA	255	NO DATA	NO DATA	565
Teaching assistant	NO DATA	NO DATA	470	426	718	835

Diversifying Stockport's economy is vital for future resilience. A potential lack of business dynamism and poor survival rates risks undermining Stockport's recent growth. Despite hosting a micro-business dominated economy, there is a lack of evidence of an entrepreneurial start-up culture. Existing employment specialisms are forecast to decline, making economic diversification an urgent necessity. Key employment sectors such as manufacturing, and utilities are forecast to shrink by over 5,000 jobs by 2040. Current trends around automation in key sectors, such as logistics and distribution, further strengthens the need for diversification, and there is an opportunity to harness and grow green economy technologies and businesses. *Source: Economic Plan*

The Council has declared a climate emergency. Issues of congestion, air quality and the carbon footprint of our buildings and business activities need to be addressed if we are to meet regional and national net zero targets. Greening our borough also represents an economic opportunity. The development of skills to support the 'green economy' is a key priority. In addition to supporting climate adaptation, we will enable businesses and residents to take advantage of new opportunities in the green economy. Supporting businesses to help make the necessary adaptations to achieve net zero targets are part of the Economic Plan. *Source: Economic Plan*