



# SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE

**MONDAY, 24 FEBRUARY 2025 -**

Venue:	CPCA Meeting Room, Pathfinder House, Huntingdon	
Time:	10.00 am	
Present:	Councillor Lucy Nethsingha (Chair)	Cambridgeshire County Council
	Councillor Ian Benney	Fenland District Council
	Councillor Elieen Wilson	South Cambridgeshire District Council
	Councillor Kevin McNally (substitute)	Peterborough City Council
	Mayor Dr Nik Johnson	CPCA Mayor
	Katy Davies	Business Board Representative
	Charlotte Horobin	Business Board Representative

## Minutes

1	<b>Apologies for Absence</b>
	The Chair welcomed Cllr Kevin McNally from Peterborough City Council who was attending as a temporary substitute, representing Peterborough City Council. Apologies were received from Cllr Gilderdale, Cllr Pettitt and also from Cllr Hemraj who was substituted by Cllr McNally.
2	<b>Declaration of Interests</b>
	Katy Davies, Business Board Representative, declared two interests, the first as a non-executive Director of the Cambridgeshire Chamber of Commerce and the second as a Director of Citizen Hub St Neots Community Interest Company (CIC). This interest was related to the FE Cold Spots Programme, but Ms Davies was assured by the Assistant Director that no decision was required on this matter as it was only an update that was included in the Director's Highlight presentation.
3	<b>Minutes of the previous meeting</b>
	The minutes of the meeting on 20 January 2025 were approved as an accurate record. The Action Log was noted by the Committee.
4	<b>Public Questions</b>
	One Public Question had been submitted. This was read out by the Governance Manager and a response was given by the Chair. The question had been previously circulated to members of the Committee and published on the website. Following the meeting the response would also be published on the website here: <a href="#">Public Questions</a>
5	<b>Forward Plan</b>

	<p><b>RESOLVED:</b> A. That the Combined Authority Forward Plan be noted.</p>
6	<p><b>Director's Highlight Report</b></p>
	<p>The Assistant Director Skills gave a verbal update providing a summary of significant national policy changes that were influencing local initiatives.</p> <p>During discussion the following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The Youth Guarantee Trailblazer proposal has been compiled and shared as an exempt item in the meeting packs. A verbal update was provided on key aspects.</li> <li>b) The Department for Education (DfE) has announced a reduction in adult skills funding, impacting all Mayoral Combined Authorities and grant-funded providers. Nationally, the DfE was reducing the budget by approximately £25 million, equating to a 3% cut for the Combined Authority. Efforts were underway to assess the impact and potential response strategies. A formal letter to the Secretary of State for Skills was under consideration to express concerns, particularly regarding the contradiction between this reduction and the broader ambitions for growth and opportunity.</li> <li>c) The Government had introduced national reforms to apprenticeships, which included:</li> <li>d) The relaxation of mandatory Maths and English qualifications for adult apprentices (19+), addressing a barrier for those who had otherwise completed their vocational training.</li> <li>e) A proposed reduction in the minimum apprenticeship duration from 12 months to 8 months. The Growth Works for Skills team was monitoring these changes and supporting employers accordingly.</li> <li>f) The Combined Authority Board had approved the Adult Skills Commissioning Strategy, as discussed in the previous meeting. The procurement process for independent training providers was set to launch this week.</li> <li>g) The Third Sector Community Grants programme, funded through an innovation grant as part of adult skills funding, would continue from 1st April. £300,000 would be made available for third-sector organisations to deliver community skills provision. An open application process would be launched, and a report on the outcomes of the previous round of funding would be presented at the next Committee meeting in June.</li> <li>h) On 12 February, a roundtable was co-hosted with the Department for Education (DfE) on employer investment in Skills. The event saw 46 participants, including a significant number of employers. This provided an opportunity to influence future government policies in this area. The Combined Authority was one of only two Mayoral Combined Authorities selected to host such an event, alongside West Midlands Combined Authority.</li> <li>i) The Secretary of State had been expected to publish a vision for skills last week, ahead of a broader Skills Strategy anticipated in May/June. The Strategy was expected to outline the role of Skills England and the collaboration with Mayoral Combined Authorities to improve clarity in the skills landscape across the UK. Members would be updated once the Strategy was published.</li> </ul> <p><b>RESOLVED:</b> A. To note the contents of the report.</p>
7	<p><b>Skills and Employment Board: Update and Revised Terms of Reference</b></p>
	<p>Charlotte Horobin, Chair of the Skills and Employment Board, introduced the report which gave an update on the work of the Board and presented the Revised Terms of Reference.</p> <p>During discussion the following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The Terms of Reference had evolved over time, and a review was necessary to ensure clarity and focus. Andrea and Charlotte had worked on refining the document into a more concise and purposeful format.</li> <li>b) The Board has been rebranded from the Employment and Skills Board (ESB) to the Skills and Employment Board (SEB) to align with the Skills and Employment Committee.</li> <li>c) Charlotte confirmed that the Terms of Reference had been presented to the Skills and Employment</li> </ul>

	<p>Board and received unanimous approval with no amendments.</p> <p>d) The Mayor raised the question of whether union representation was included in the Board's membership. He noted that unions could play a valuable role, particularly in representing workers' interests within the business community. Charlotte acknowledged this point and expressed willingness to explore adding union representation, noting that unions were previously considered but did not appear in the final list; she welcomed Nick's support in engaging unions. It was also noted that some existing representatives might already be affiliated with unions, providing another avenue for union perspectives.</p> <p>e) The next steps would involve finalising the membership list to ensure alignment with the approved Terms of Reference.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <p>On being proposed by Cllr Nethsingha and seconded by Cllr Benney, the Committee unanimously resolved to:</p> <p>A. To approve the revised terms of reference for the Skills &amp; Employment Board as attached at Appendix A.</p>
8	<p><b>Combined Authorities (Adult Education Functions) (Amendment) Order 2025</b></p> <p>Andrea Woods, Assistant Director Skills gave an introduction to the report.</p> <p>During discussion the following points were noted:</p> <p>a) The amendment order, proposed by the Department for Education (DfE), pertained to the devolution of skills and employment. The amendment allowed Combined Authorities to utilise Adult Skills funding for a range of technical qualifications without requiring separate applications.</p> <p>b) The proposed amendment granted Combined Authorities the authority to allocate funding for technical qualifications directly, thereby reducing administrative bureaucracy. The benefits of this amendment were emphasised and its acceptance by the Committee recommended.</p> <p>c) Concerns were raised regarding potential challenges for individuals with Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs), particularly those aged 19-25. Officers clarified that funding for individuals with EHCPs remained ring-fenced within the 16-19 budget and the high-needs budget. Individuals up to 25 years old with EHCPs would continue to receive funding, ensuring no disadvantage in accessing training opportunities. The available funding for individuals with EHCPs was more generous, and they had access to a broader range of training options.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED:</b></p> <p>On being proposed by Cllr Nethsingha and seconded by Cllr Wakeford the Committee unanimously resolved to:</p> <p>A. To approve the amendment proposed to the Combined Authorities (Adult Education Functions) (Amendment) Order 2025.</p> <p>B. To confirm the Order does not place any additional burdens on the Combined Authority.</p>
9	<p><b>Skills Bootcamp 2025-26 FY (Wave 6 ) Plan</b></p> <p>Nick Speroni, Skills Partnership Manager introduced the report which provided an update on the Skills Bootcamps Wave 6 submission to the Department for Education (DfE) and outlined the intended plans for the allocated funding.</p> <p>During discussion the following points were noted:</p> <p>a) The Wave 6 bid submitted had been for a total of £3.5 million. Last week the DfE confirmed that the full amount of £3.5 million had been awarded.</p> <p>b) Prior to confirmation, planning for Wave 6 had been challenging due to uncertainties around funding allocations for the 2025/26 financial year. The funding confirmation now allowed CPCA to move forward with implementation plans.</p> <p>c) The "Flex" mechanism allowed Wave 5 training providers to continue delivering courses into</p>

2025/26.

- d) Many Wave 5 courses were near capacity, with some training providers unable to enroll additional learners due to time constraints.
- e) 'Flex', as outlined in the report allowed training providers to continue their delivery from 2024/25 into 2025/26 and therefore enable learners to enrol in these courses as long as certain milestones were met by 31st March.
- f) Existing contracts with training providers for Wave 5 had included an option to extend delivery into 2025/26. This approach avoided the need for a new procurement process if providers had demonstrated successful and impactful delivery.
- g) A procurement process would be undertaken to introduce new training provisions based on labour market information and identified regional needs.
- h) Some Further Education (FE) colleges had expressed interest in delivering Skills Bootcamps, particularly in light of reductions in Adult Schools Funding (ASF).
- i) The overlap between ASF and Skills Bootcamp provision was increasing, supporting regional skills continuity.
- j) Training was delivered both online and in-person across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.
- k) Some training providers operated nationally, offering places to local residents using CPCA funding.
- l) Localised provision was also available, with some courses running from facilities such as the Allia Future Business Centre in Peterborough.
- m) Discussions were ongoing with the CPCA Transport Team regarding bus driver training as the Combined Authority recognised the importance of expanding bus driver training, given increasing demand for public transport services. Further engagement with transport and net-zero teams would be undertaken to explore opportunities for expansion in this area.
- n) Members acknowledged the significant progress made by CPCA in managing Skills Bootcamp funding. Past challenges included difficulties in spending allocated funding due to the stop-start nature of annual settlements. The CPCA has successfully improved delivery mechanisms, ensuring that funding was now fully utilised.
- o) The recent funding award demonstrated increased confidence from the central government in CPCA's ability to deliver effective training programs.
- p) Members reiterated the challenges posed by single-year funding settlements and advocated for multi-year funding allocations.
- q) The long-term goal was to secure integrated skills funding that provided both multi-year certainty and flexible resource allocation.
- r) It was noted that some Skills Bootcamp participants did receive a qualification, while others did not. The flexibility in the program allowed employers and training providers to design Bootcamps based on specific skill requirements, which may not always necessitate formal qualifications. Instead, the focus was on equipping participants with the necessary skills to enter employment successfully.
- s) It was confirmed that qualitative research and monitoring were conducted for each wave of Bootcamps. The team tracked participant outcomes, including progression into full-time or part-time employment, volunteering, or further training. This data was used to report back to the Department for Education (DfE) as part of funding requirements.

#### RESOLVED:

On being proposed by Cllr Nethsingha and seconded by Cllr Wilson the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- A. To receive an update on the bid submitted to DfE to secure funding for Skills Bootcamps for FY 2025/26
- B. Subject to confirmation of grant funding of £3,511,946 from Department for Education (DfE), to recommend to the Combined Authority Board to accept the grant funding to deliver Wave 6 Skills Bootcamp for FY 2025/2026 and to enter into a grant funding agreement for delivery of this funding.
- C. Subject to confirmation of grant funding approval from Department for Education (DfE), to recommend that the Combined Authority Board delegate authority to the Assistant Director for Skills and Employment, in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer to:
  - Extend Wave 5 contracts with existing providers where appropriate.
  - Vary Provider contracts and apply 'Flex' to Wave 5 providers that will allow them to enroll Learners into Wave 6 and utilise the Wave 6 grant to fund Learner Completion and Progression outcomes

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enter into, sign and award grant agreements</li> <li>• Carry out a relevant procurement exercise for the delivery of Wave 6 Skills Bootcamps funding and award and sign contracts with successful providers.</li> </ul> <p><b>ACTION:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Officers to schedule a skills Bootcamp performance report for the June meeting of the Committee</li> </ol>
10	<p><b>Connect to Work Service</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">---o0o---</p> <p>Alexis, McLeod, Senior Programme Manager, gave a collective introduction to items 10, 11 and 12 in regard to their progress through the Single Assurance Framework (SAF)</p> <p>It was noted that all three items were subject to the Combined Authority's SAF, which was introduced in 2024 to ensure consistency and transparency in the appraisal of new projects and activities funded and delivered by the CPCA. The SAF was designed to ensure value for money for taxpayers, promote transparency, and uphold accountability within program design. While each of the three papers represented distinct projects and programs, they shared interconnectivities and followed the same governance mechanism in their development.</p> <p>The papers had undergone an initial internal review and were now presented to the Committee for noting and potential endorsement. The next step would be submission to the formal Investment Committee for further evaluation in the coming weeks. Specifically, the 'Connect to Work' project would proceed to the Board for full approval following Investment Committee review.</p> <p>Members of the Committee emphasised the importance of ensuring alignment between the work of various committees and the Investment Committee. It was noted that this stage provided an optimal opportunity for the Skills Committee to review and provide feedback on the papers before they advanced further in the approval process.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">---o0o---</p> <p>The Assistant Director gave an overview of the Connect To Work programme which was a five-year initiative targeting economically inactive adults with health conditions. The programme aimed to support these individuals through a structured employment route.</p> <p>During discussion the following points were noted:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The business case for the programme outlined the Combined Authority's commitment to accepting the grant.</li> <li>b) A formal process with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) was required to confirm the delivery profile, including participant numbers and learning milestones.</li> <li>c) The Programme followed a performance-based funding model rather than a lump-sum grant and initial projections estimated funding of approximately £16-20 million over five years.</li> <li>d) The anticipated start date for delivery was September-October of this year, subject to approvals.</li> <li>e) Emphasis was placed on working with constituent councils and strategic partners to align resources and optimise delivery.</li> <li>f) Members also stressed the importance of integrating with existing work and health support systems.</li> <li>g) There was recognition that identifying economically inactive individuals would be challenging and would require collaboration with third-sector organisations, local councils, and healthcare providers.</li> <li>h) A query was raised regarding the frequency of reporting to the Combined Authority and government, with officers confirming that quarterly (or potentially monthly) reporting to DWP would be required.</li> <li>i) The Committee noted that additional staffing would be needed, including at least one full-time role within the Combined Authority and up to 60 work coaches at peak delivery.</li> <li>j) A 'Fidelity' model of supported employment was the gold standard. An example of this would be a work coach who would go to work with an individual, learn the job alongside them and support both the employee and employer. This model was very intensive as the work coach would also continue to stay in touch and track progress.</li> <li>k) It was acknowledged that employer engagement would be crucial for the programme's success</li> </ol>

	<p>and early involvement of employers in co-designing the programme was suggested.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <p>A. To note the formal business case which has been submitted into the Combined Authority's Single Assurance Framework process to enable the development and delivery of a Connect to Work service for the region as part of the Governments 'Get Britain Working' strategy</p>
11	<p><b>UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) Transitional Fund (People and Skills)</b></p>
	<p>The Assistant Director gave an update on the UKSPF People and Skills project, outlining the commitment to continue the three key workstreams from the previous financial year; Skills Brokerage, Internships and All-age careers support.</p> <p>During discussions the following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The existing internship model could be leveraged to support the "Connect to Work" Programme. The possible integration of Digital Badging into the initiative could also be explored.</li> <li>b) The transitional funds provided much-needed flexibility for program continuity.</li> <li>c) A long-term strategy was required to embed the initiatives beyond current funding arrangements.</li> <li>d) There was general acknowledgment of the success of the internship program, particularly in supporting businesses hesitant to commit to hiring during economic uncertainty.</li> <li>e) Members recognised the need for increased awareness and communication regarding available programmes.</li> <li>f) The importance of linking successful pilot projects to wider initiatives such as the Trailblazer programme was also stressed.</li> <li>g) An Internship impact report, including data on where individuals progress to, would be circulated to committee members following the Internship Celebration Event.</li> </ul> <p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <p>A. To note the proposal to utilise UKSPF Transitional Funds to enable the continuation of services currently delivered under the CPCA 'growth works with skills service' into 25/26 financial year, which has been submitted into the Combined Authorities Single Assurance Framework process.</p> <p><b>ACTION</b></p> <p>1. Officers to circulate to Members an Internship Impact Report.</p>
12	<p><b>Youth Guarantee Trailblazer</b></p>
	<p>The Committee received an update on the Government's Trailblazer initiative, which aimed to support 18 to 21-year-olds who were not in education, employment, or training (NEET). Cambridgeshire and Peterborough were identified as one of eight regions nationally to participate in this programme, which would start in April 2025.</p> <p>During discussion the following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The Committee noted that collaboration with Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council, the statutory bodies responsible for tracking and monitoring NEETs aged 16 to 18, was essential. Presently, there was no single body responsible for tracking 18 to 21-year-olds, and the Committee was informed that the Government had indicated that the Combined Authority might take on this role in the long term. Beyond the Trailblazer funding, there was an assurance that the government's spending review would include a continued commitment to the Youth Guarantee.</li> <li>b) The Committee recognised that extensive collaboration with constituent authorities, partners, stakeholders, and employers would be necessary to ensure the success of the programme. It was also noted that an officer would be recruited to support the programme, similar to the Connect to Work initiative.</li> <li>c) The challenge of identifying young people who were NEET, particularly those who might be unknown to existing support services, was discussed by the Committee. Close collaboration with schools, further education institutions, independent training providers, and third-sector organisations was highlighted as a crucial aspect of the strategy.</li> <li>d) The newly established Youth Forum was expected to play a key role in ensuring young people's</li> </ul>

	<p>voices were considered in the programme's development. One of its initial tasks would be to assist with a marketing and awareness campaign to ensure young people knew about available support outside of traditional settings such as Jobcentres.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>e) Concerns were raised about the intersection between unemployment and health issues, particularly mental health conditions. The Committee acknowledged that many young people who were economically inactive cited long-term health conditions as a barrier to employment. It was noted that engagement with primary and secondary healthcare services would be necessary, with a social prescribing approach being considered to help young people view employment as part of their long-term well-being strategy.</li> <li>f) It was also recognised that this age group, particularly those transitioning out of paediatric care, often faced challenges in accessing adult healthcare services. The need to liaise with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) to improve healthcare transition pathways was highlighted.</li> <li>g) The Committee reflected on existing work related to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and pathways to adulthood, noting that there were opportunities to integrate learnings from these areas into the Trailblazer initiative.</li> <li>h) The importance of the Trailblazer programme and its potential to make a significant impact was acknowledged by Members who emphasised the need for collaboration across different sectors to ensure a holistic approach to supporting young people into employment.</li> <li>i) It was agreed that further discussions would take place at the Investment Committee, and updates would be provided to this Committee as the programme progressed</li> </ul> <p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. To note the formal business case which has been submitted into the Combined Authority's Single Assurance Framework process to enable the development and delivery of the 'Youth Guarantee Trailblazer' opportunity area granted to Cambridgeshire and Peterborough as part of the Government's 'Get Britain Working' strategy.</li> <li>B. To note the proposal that has been submitted by the Authority to the DfE/DWP to secure funding.</li> </ul>
13	<p><b>Budget &amp; Performance Report</b></p> <p>The Assistant Director- Finance introduced the report which outlined the Skills Service income and expenditure budgets up to the end of Quarter 3, including the service's forecasted end-of-year financial position.</p> <p>During discussion the following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The majority of income for the year had been received by the end of Quarter 3, which was standard practice. The adult skills funding was typically received in a lump sum in April or May, with smaller amounts, such as Skills Boot Camp payments, claimed retrospectively.</li> <li>b) The forecasted income for the year was projected to be £2.9 million less than initially budgeted, with £2.8 million of this variance attributed to the Skills Boot Camps (Wave 4). The shortfall was due to lower-than-anticipated enrolments in the early phase of the programme.</li> <li>c) Income for Wave 5 was forecasted to be £1.7 million under budget for this financial year. However, due to agreed flexibilities with the DfE, this funding would be carried forward into the 2025/26 financial year, running until September 2025. Details regarding the financial management of the two parallel programs were still being finalised and would be reported in Quarter 4.</li> <li>d) Expenditure related to Skills Boot Camps reflected the corresponding reduction in income, resulting in no net financial impact.</li> <li>e) The Adult Skills Funding (ASF) delivery budget recorded a £3 million overspend at the end of Quarter 3. However, £2.3 million of this difference was due to timing variances between the profile budget and actual expenditure, which was expected to balance out by Quarter 4.</li> <li>f) The remaining £700,000 overspend was due to contracted overperformance by Independent Training Providers (ITPs). This was considered a positive development, as historical under-delivery in ASF has led to an accumulation of reserves within the Combined Authority. The Committee had previously approved an over-contracting approach, ensuring payment to providers that exceeded their initial delivery commitments.</li> <li>g) The success of capacity-building efforts within the region has resulted in a shift from</li> </ul>

	<p>underperformance to overperformance, highlighting the effectiveness of the Skills Team at the CPCA and the commitment of training providers.</p> <p>h) The overspend emphasised the disparity between the increased delivery capacity and the reduction in ASF funding for 2025/26. This issue would be addressed in an upcoming letter to the Government.</p> <p>i) The Committee acknowledged the unusual but positive nature of an overspend in this context, crediting the Skills Team and training providers for exceeding delivery expectations.</p> <p>j) Members reiterated ongoing frustrations regarding Skills Boot Camp Wave 4, noting consistent challenges in this program's implementation.</p> <p>k) Optimism was expressed regarding Wave 5, particularly given the ability to carry funding forward, with hopes for future multi-year funding settlements to enhance long-term planning.</p> <p><u>RESOLVED</u></p> <p>A. To note the financial position of the Skills Division for the financial year 24/25 to December 2024.</p>
14	<b>Work Programme</b>
	<p><u>RESOLVED:</u></p> <p>A. To note the Skills and Employment Committee Work Programme</p>
15	<b>Date of Next Meeting</b>
	<p>The next meeting would be the first of the new municipal year and was scheduled for Monday 16 June.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">---o0o---</p> <p>Before closing the meeting, the Chair extended her thanks to the Mayor for all of his hard work on promoting the Skills agenda.</p> <p>The Mayor reflected that the Chairs stewardship and knowledge, and that of the whole Skills team had been invaluable and expressed his gratitude for all their hard work during his term of office.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">---o0o---</p> <p>.</p>

Meeting Ended: 11.40am