

**Report to:** Lead Member Economy

**Date of meeting:** 23 February 2022

**By:** Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

**Title:** Working together partnership agreement between East Sussex County Council and the Department for Work and Pensions.

**Purpose:** To seek Lead Member endorsement of the proposed working together partnership agreement between ESCC and DWP in relation to employability and skills work.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:** The Lead Member is recommended to:

- 1) Review and approve the actions proposed in the appended Department for Work and Pensions – East Sussex County Council partnership agreement titled ‘Working in Partnership Across East Sussex’ and
  - 2) approve that the agreement is reviewed annually by the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport and amended if required.
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## 1 Background Information

1.1 Following discussions with East Sussex County Council, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has drafted a partnership agreement (Appendix 1). The agreement explores ways that the DWP can work with the County Council to better align their delivery with the wider work undertaken by the County Council and Skills East Sussex (SES), the recognised local strategic employment and skills board.

1.2 The DWP sits on the Skills East Sussex Board, but with an undefined remit, and the partnership agreement sets out a specific role for DWP and a commitment to joint working between the County Council and the DWP within the context of the Board and its task groups.

## 2 Supporting Information

2.1 East Sussex has a high proportion of low qualified adults in the county (approximately 50% are only qualified to Level 2) and significant numbers of unemployed adults (December 2021: 14,560 people), a proportion that has increased significantly since the start of the pandemic. The county is also concerned with addressing the needs of its young people, including care leavers, preventing them from becoming NEET (Not in Education Employment or Training) and where they are unemployed, to help them move swiftly into meaningful work or learning.

2.2 The Government’s ‘Plan for Jobs’ outlined a range of measures and programmes to address unemployment nationally, which are overseen by the DWP such as:

- Kickstart which focuses on unemployed young people aged 16-25 and is due to end in March 2022
- Job Entry Targeted Support (JETS) programme which focuses on those most recently unemployed
- Restart programme which addresses employment among those who are furthest from the workplace

The proposed partnership agreement recognises that there needs to be collaboration between the DWP and the County Council to identify how to ensure that these programmes link to other relevant provision in the county for these groups and to determine effective referral mechanisms between

Job Coaches and other agencies to enable individuals to access the most relevant and useful provision to support them on their pathway into work.

2.3 Furthermore, the DWP needs to work more closely with businesses to address unemployment via the commissioning of Sector Based Work Academy Programmes (SWAP) with Further Education providers locally. The DWP has had some success with this working with the SES Construction task group and Visitor Economy task group to create the successful 'Hospitality Rocks' SWAP model, which is now being rolled out nationally. The intention in the partnership agreement is to expand on this work with other SES task groups in 2022.

### **3. Risks and Challenges**

3.1 The partnership agreement commits to delivering a set of actions which focus on:

- sharing information
- ensuring that DWP staff and SES partners are aware of the range of opportunities available to address unemployment in the county
- improving referral pathways into unemployment interventions delivered by a range of stakeholders in the county
- maximising use of resources
- avoiding duplication

3.2 In order to mitigate the risk of these actions slipping, the agreement proposes that the DWP and County Council meet six-monthly to monitor and review progress against targets to ensure that commitments are being adhered to on both sides of the partnership.

### **4. Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations**

4.1 The proposals in the partnership agreement will have a positive impact on the ability of the DWP, ESCC and all SES Stakeholders to address the employment needs of East Sussex residents. Active participation by DWP in the Skills East Sussex Board, the Skills East Sussex Task Groups and the sharing of labour market information will enable better alignment of provision and a stronger offer for those who are unemployed, which is to be welcomed.

4.2 It is therefore recommended that the Lead Member approves that the proposal is formally adopted by the County Council and is reviewed annually thereafter.

#### **RUPERT CLUBB**

**Director of Communities, Economy and Transport**

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#### LOCAL MEMBERS

All members

#### BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None