

**Report to:** Lead Member for Economy

**Date of meeting:** 22 January 2025

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

**Title:** Department for Education Skills Bootcamps devolved funding

**Purpose:** To seek approval to submit a final proposal to the Department for Education for devolved Skills Bootcamp funding

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

- 1) Approve the County Council’s headline proposal for Skills Bootcamps funding to be submitted to the Department for Education; and**
  - 2) Delegate authority for the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport to take any actions necessary in relation to the implementation of the Skills Bootcamps programme.**
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**1. Background Information**

1.1 The Government through the Department of Education (DfE) wishes to devolve skills funding, previously commissioned nationally, to Upper Tier local authorities to manage at a place-based level. Similar to the recently approved ‘Connect to Work’ funding, Skills Bootcamp funding, overseen by the (DfE), is another such fund. The process for allocating the funding is similar to that for Connect to Work.

1.2 Skills Bootcamps are flexible short vocational courses for adults aged 19 and over. Up to 100 hours of learning is provided over a course of up to 16 weeks at level 3 for unemployed people, self-employed people and employees to improve the skills of the workforce in key sectors. They are funded at £2,500-£6,500 per course depending on the nature of the provision.

1.3 The DfE contacted County Council Officers in April 2024 advising that there was likely to be Bootcamps funding available for 2025-2026 and asking the County Council to submit a ‘headline proposal’ outlining the Bootcamps provision that local stakeholders would like to see provided, should the Government Spending Review in October 2024, approve the devolution of the fund to Upper Tier authorities. The headline proposal was submitted in May 2024.

1.4 Following the Spending Review, the DfE has confirmed that funds are proposed to be issued to the County Council for the delivery of Bootcamps and that the precise sum that will be afforded to East Sussex County Council (ESCC) will be confirmed in January 2025. At that point the Council will be asked to revise and adjust the headline proposal to reflect the spending allocation.

1.5 The timing (January 2025) means that the County Council will have to act very swiftly to be able to mobilise training from April 2025 as required. The timeline for Bootcamps mobilisation and provision will need to be:

January 2025	Information re DfE funding allocation to ESCC for Bootcamp delivery received
	Revised proposal submitted to DfE (Appendix 1)
January 2025 – February 2025	DfE funding grant agreement issued and signed
	ESCC Procurement process to identify local training providers
March 2025	Contracts issued to suppliers
April 2025 – December 2025	Training delivered
January 2026 – March 2026	Outcomes period (qualifications and into work progressions) and end of year reporting

1.6 Bootcamps are initially intended to be contracted for one-year, but it is understood that DfE officials contend that it will likely whilst not certain become a rolling annual programme, with potential for growth year on year. Decisions will be made each October about continuation funding.

1.7 Skills Bootcamps will contribute to the objectives laid out within the recently approved [East Sussex Economic Prosperity Strategy 2024-2050](#) and support all 4 of the County Council's core priority outcomes (i) driving sustainable economic growth; (ii) keeping vulnerable people safe; (iii) helping people help themselves; and (iv) making best use of resources now and for the future.

## 2. Supporting Information

2.1 The county's workforce has a low qualifications base, with only 54% educated at Level 3 or above, hindering the county's productivity. The predominantly small and medium sized enterprise (SME) base in East Sussex means that employers struggle to release employees to undertake learning, and often cannot afford to pay for training. Self-employed people also face challenges with upskilling – deterred by costs and time.

2.2 In East Sussex, there are known skills gaps in construction, engineering, green jobs, adult social care, the visitor economy, the land-based and food production sector and in digital skills and leadership and management across all sectors. The Council needs to ensure that local businesses and providers have the workforce that can enable them to meet forthcoming pressures in line with new Government policy (i.e. early years childcare provision, teaching, green energy and the industrial strategy).

2.3 Skills Bootcamps offer the short, sharp training interventions that local employers have been calling for. SMEs only need to contribute 10% of the costs of a Bootcamp course worth £4,000-£6,000 and the learning is specific and delivered in a hybrid way (some face-to-face and some online). Those who are unemployed or self-employed pay no contribution.

2.4 East Sussex has pockets of unemployment across the county and Bootcamp training could enable unemployed residents to gain Level 3+ skills to help them move into vacancies in the local workforce.

2.5 The proposed East Sussex Bootcamps programme would commission local providers to deliver training to address known vacancies and future skills needs. The in-

house Apprenticeships and Qualification Training centre may deliver a small volume of leadership and management training to generate income and/or train County Council staff.

#### Mapping provision

2.6 Skills East Sussex employer-led Task Groups, the Department for Work and Pensions and East Sussex Training providers were consulted in July 2024, to identify the range of Bootcamps that they would wish to see delivered locally. The Local Skills Improvement Partnership research and the Council's Institute of Employment Studies Future Skills report have also been used to support and evidence ESCC's headline proposal.

2.7 Discussions have taken place with neighbouring authorities Essex, Kent, Brighton and Hove and West Sussex, who are all at the same point in the process, to ensure that East Sussex's approach aligns.

2.8 The Employment and Skills Team liaised with Devon County Council, who has grown its Bootcamps provision from 300 learners and a budget of £1.2m to over 1,000 learners and a budget of £4m. They have provided substantial advice about volumes, risk management, project management and process to the County Council's Employment and Skills team.

#### Resource capacity

2.9 The project will be led by the County Council and managed by the Employment and Skills Team. Staff are already in place to manage the programme and management, finance and legal costs have been factored into the Headline proposal project budget.

2.10 Finance Officers and the external funding team have reviewed the current headline proposal and costs and procurement and legal officers are ready to support commissioning and contracting.

#### Risk and liability for ESCC

2.11 At this stage no formal bid has been submitted to the DfE, but due diligence has been applied to creating an evidence-based 'headline proposal' and discussions undertaken with other authorities with experience of delivery has been taken on Board to ensure that the proposed model is realistic.

2.12 To mitigate risks, the DfE reviews provision and enables ongoing project amendments such as moving funds between providers, from less successful courses to those that are achieving their goals.

2.13 As the accountable body for the programme, the County Council would be responsible for ensuring that the grant funding is spent in accordance with the grant agreement (which has not yet been issued).

2.14 As the accountable body, the Council will also be required to allocate contracts to local providers, using an approach that the County Council determines meets its financial and legal obligations. This is likely to be best served through an open procurement call in February 2025 using the same model applied to Multiply procurement.

2.15 The County Council would be responsible for reporting on project activities, outputs and outcomes throughout the project at regular intervals via the same DfE online system and processes that are currently used by ESCC to manage the Multiply programme.

### **3 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations**

3.1 The County Council has developed a Skills Bootcamps offer that will provide Level 2 and Level 3 training that supports local businesses and residents by upskilling the East Sussex workforce, moving people from unemployment into work and addressing vacancies.

3.2 The Lead Member Economy is therefore recommended to consider the proposed County Council's headline proposal (Appendix 1) for Skills Bootcamps and to agree for an amended proposal to be submitted to the Department for Education for Skills Bootcamps provision in quarter 4, once funding allocations have been formally agreed.

3.3 The Lead Member Economy is also recommended to agree to delegate authority to the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport to take any actions necessary in relation to the implementation of the Skills Bootcamps programme.

#### **RUPERT CLUBB**

Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

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#### **LOCAL MEMBERS**

All members

#### **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None