

From: Derek Murphy, Cabinet Member for Economic Development
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To: Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee – 14 May 2024

Subject: Kent County Council's support for Apprenticeships, Community Learning and Skills in the context of the Kent economy

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Past Pathway of report: N/A

Future Pathway of report: N/A

Electoral Division: All

Summary: This report describes Kent County Council's support for apprenticeships, community learning and skills in the context of the Kent economy and KCC's Strategic Aims and makes suggestions for action to be taken to improve the effectiveness of the apprenticeship programme, reduce the numbers of the economically inactive, raise skills levels and improve job prospects.

According to the most recently available statistics, in December 2022 60 per cent of Kent's population was aged 16 to 64 ("working age"): The statistics for December 2023 will be available later in April.

Of the 951,000 of this working age population, 79.4 per cent are categorised as "economically active" and 20.6 per cent as "economically inactive".

Of the 195,899 economically inactive 16- to 64-year-old people, 52,200 are "students", 45,000 are defined as "sick", 39,200 are "retired", 36,200 are "looking after someone else or their home", 5,800 are on "government training schemes", and 20,200 are uncategorised.

Of the 727,100 "in employment", 602,100 are employees and 119,200 are self-employed.

The relevant Strategic Aims adopted by the County Council are to support the Kent economy, support the most vulnerable children and families in the county, promote healthy, creative and active communities, and to offer an inclusive curriculum which widens participation.

As these aims are shared across different teams in the County Council, the Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee and the Kent and Medway Employment Task Force will also discuss this report.

This report and its accompanying slides describe the actions being taken to meet the current challenges to delivering KCC's strategic aims.

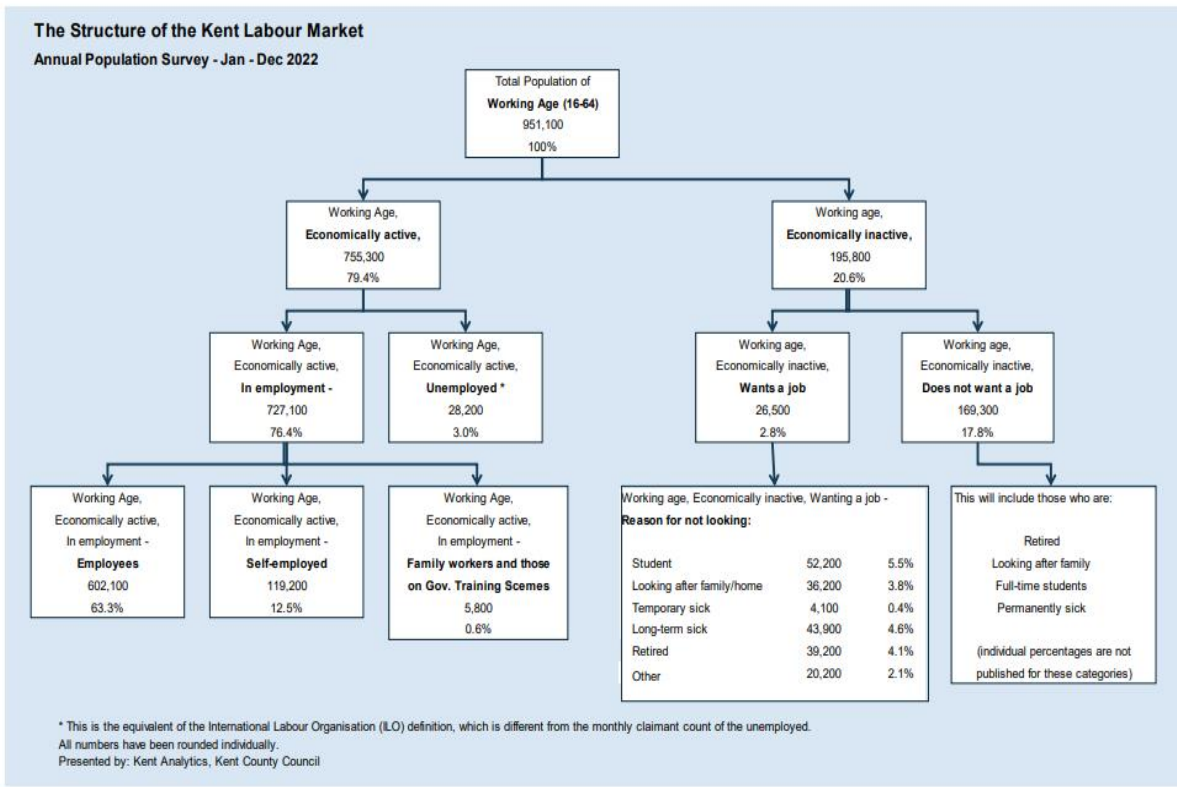
Recommendation:

The Cabinet Committee is asked to COMMENT on the suggested actions being taken to meet current challenges

1. Background

- 1.1 In 2022 Kent had a lower percentage of residents with qualifications at level 4 and above (41.1 %) than the England national average (45.1%). The conventional measure of productivity is “gross value added” per filled job: productivity in Kent is approximately 6 percentage points lower than the England average. This corresponds to the lower average income level in Kent compared to the rest of England.
- 1.2 There are significant differences between productivity in the 12 Kent districts: the productivity average in West Kent is 10 per cent above the national average and East Kent is 20 per cent below it. Overall, Kent also underperforms its neighbours in the Southeast of England. More productive jobs generate higher levels of pay locally, and this is associated with higher living standards and better health outcomes.
- 1.3 Kent also has a workforce “skills deficit”: Workforce qualifications at intermediate and higher qualification levels in Kent lag behind the national average. At Level 2 (GCSE grades 4 to 9 or C to A*), attainment levels are higher than the national average but at Level 3 (A levels) there is a 2.5 percentage points gap, with Kent below the national average, widening to over 5 percentage points at Level 4. The percentage of the workforce qualified to both Levels 3 and 4 is lower than the national percentage in nine of the twelve Kent districts, with especially low rates in East Kent: Swale, Thanet, Dover and Folkestone and Hythe
- 1.4 Consequently, there has been a strong focus on addressing workforce skills challenges in recent years. The provision offered by Kent’s three Further Education Colleges has been consolidated and strengthened alongside significant improvements made in developing links between skills providers, employers and other strategic providers. These are being reinforced through the Kent and Medway Employment Task Force (chaired by the Leader of the County Council) and the commissioning of a detailed evidence base of skills requirements in all local sectors. This was the basis of the employer-led Local Skills Improvement Plan and sector specific initiatives which have been endorsed by the Department for Education leading to significant new Government funding for capital projects and multi-year revenue funding for courses.
- 1.5 The Department for Work and Pensions has recently announced changes to its administration of Universal Credit and the introduction of Universal Support. The Department for Education has announced an expansion of child care support to help working families alongside support for childminders, new financial support for those seeking a Level 3 qualification and new funding for Skills Bootcamps to be administered by local authorities. Both main political parties have announced plans to reform the apprenticeship system should they form the government after the next General Election.

1.6 The structure of the Kent Labour Market is shown below.



2. Schools, FE Colleges and Universities, KCC Adult Education and Community Learning, and Apprenticeships

- 2.1 Secondary education in Kent could be radically affected by the Government’s reform of the funding for Level 3 qualifications. The impact on the 6th Forms of Kent’s schools is described in the attached slides. The proposed actions include strengthening the links between schools and the local economy, greater support for the Careers and Enterprise Company and putting the case to Government for the restoration of funding for applied general qualifications (such as BTEC).
- 2.2 Kent is characterised by the absence of 6th Form Colleges. Children at 16 and over have a choice between schools, FE colleges and work, which might include training such as an apprenticeship.
- 2.3 The slides address these issues and suggest areas for discussion including how to work with the Department for Education to bring sustainable funding into the county and how best to reform the apprenticeship system.

The actions proposed are:

Skills

- Improve links between local employers.
- Support for the Careers and Enterprise Company.
- Lobbying for applied general (BTEC etc) qualifications.

Apprenticeships

- Working with the DFE/ESFA to bring sustainable apprenticeship funding into the County.
- Lobbying for a more sustainable system.
- Need to look at ways to work with employers, apprentices and training providers to improve the successful completion of apprenticeships.
- Relaxation on Maths and English element to support more people into apprenticeships and support Training Providers.
- Have a central point where all apprenticeship vacancies are advertised.
- More flexibility in how the apprenticeship levy is used.

3. Implications

Financial

- 3.1 There are no direct financial implications for KCC arising from the discussion of the issues in this paper. However, it ought to shape KCC's future work programme in relation to apprenticeships, community learning and skills within the constraints of the KCC budget.

Equalities

- 3.2 Equalities impact assessments have been prepared for each of the relevant KCC programmes.: The actions suggested are aimed at improving access for disadvantaged groups and removing inequalities: future changes will require new assessments to be undertaken.

Data protection

- 3.3 There are no data protection implications.

4. Next steps

- 4.1 Papers covering the same issues will be discussed later in May by the Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee and the Kent and Medway Employment Task Force.

5. Recommendation

The Cabinet Committee is asked to COMMENT the suggested actions being taken to meet current challenges.

6. Background Documents

PowerPoint presentation slides: KCC's support for Community Learning, Skills and Apprenticeships in the context of the Kent economy.

7. Contact details

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