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Telford & Wrekin
Co-operative Council

Protect, care and invest
to create a better borough

Borough of Telford and Wrekin

Communities Scrutiny Committee

Thursday 12 February 2026

6.00 pm

Council Chamber, Third Floor, Southwater One, Telford, TF3 4JG

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Committee Members: Councillors E Davies (Chair), E Aston (Vice-Chair), F Doran, S Handley, G Luter, P J Scott and G Thomas

Agenda

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5.0 Telford & Wrekin Skills Strategy

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To receive an update on the effectiveness of the strategy against the five key principles and its impact on improving skill levels across the Borough.

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Communities Scrutiny Committee

Thursday 12 February 2026

Telford and Wrekin Skills Strategy

Cabinet Member:	Cllr Shirley Reynolds - Cabinet Member for Early Years, Children, Young People, Education and Skills
Lead Director:	Simon Wellman - Director: Education & Skills
Service Area:	Education and Skills
Report Author:	Tara Foran & Richard Probert - Strategic Skills Leads
Officer Contact Details:	Tel: 01952 382888 Email: Tara.foran@telford.gov.uk / Richard.Probert@telford.gov.uk
Wards Affected:	All Wards
Key Decision:	Not Key Decision
Forward Plan:	Not Applicable
Report considered by:	Communities Scrutiny Committee – Thursday 12 February 2026

1.0 Recommendations for decision/noting:

The Committee is asked to:-

- 1.1 Note the broad range of activity that is taking place to support the objectives set out in the Skills Strategy and the positive impact that is having on local people.
- 1.2 Note that the national policy and funding landscape around skills and employment is currently evolving significantly, which will have an impact on the range and type of support available to local residents. This presents opportunities to influence how this looks locally for maximum impact and possibly funding opportunities, however it is currently too early to be clear what this could be.

2.0 Purpose of Report

2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a progress update regarding the attached Skills Strategy, which reaffirms the Council's commitment that every child, young person and adult will live well in their community and everyone will benefit from a thriving economy.

3.0 Background

3.1 The Skills Strategy sets out our vision for Telford and Wrekin to become 'a learning borough for all', so that whatever an individual's aspiration, current skill base or age, they can access learning opportunities relevant to employers today and in the future. The strategy's vision will be realised through 6 objectives and aims:

- Improve the overall skills levels of residents.
- Nurturing and supporting aspiration whatever an individual's background or existing skill level to fulfil their talent.
- Developing progression pathways to provide a clear route for people to progress through the skills system to employment.
- A skills system which is fully inclusive and representative of our borough.
- A skills system which provides the skills required by businesses, both current and future, and contributes to economic growth and the prosperity of the town.

The structure of what follows outlines progress so across a broad range of service activity to support the above 6 objectives. Much of the activity spans multiple objectives, so has been broken down into relevant sections. The report also provides some context on relevant initiatives that have been announced by the government that will have a significant impact in the area of skills and employment.

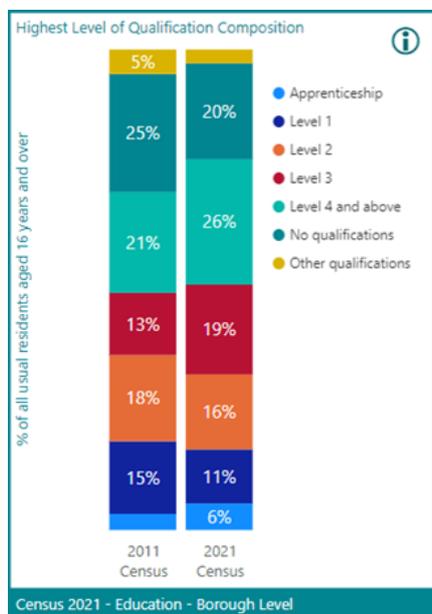
4.0 Summary of main proposals

4.1 Local Curriculum Offer

- The Borough continues to have a broad and successful range of provision, with over 300 courses available and accessible through the Telford 16 – 19 website. This includes A levels, BTECs and T levels in an array of vocational subjects, including those of identified skills shortage areas such as digital, health, engineering and construction. The curriculum at Level 4 and above is in place locally, with recent additions around digital skills, leadership and management, and nursing, and is being further developed with local FE and HE providers.
- The skills strategy outlines the picture of qualification levels amongst the local population, with the borough having higher proportions of the population qualified at Level 3 or below than the England Average (NOMIS, Annual

Population Survey). However the borough has 28.4% qualified at Level 4 compared to the England average of 37%.

- Progress is being made in raising the qualification levels of the borough. The most recent census data (2021) shows a significant increase in the numbers of people with Level 4 and above qualifications compared to 2011.



- Developing pathways through to higher level qualifications (Level 4+) remains a priority and partnerships with providers such as Harper Adams University and Telford College, delivering new routes such as the innovative digital skills provision now running at The Quad in Station Quarter.
- Looking forward, there are further changes coming that will evolve the local curriculum offer. In October 2025, the Government published the Post16 Education and Skills White Paper, which outlined the introduction of V Levels, designed to streamline and simplify the current landscape of vocational qualifications and sit alongside A Levels and T Levels. The reforms also include new English and maths qualifications aimed at better supporting progression for learners who do not achieve Grade 4 or above at age 16.

4.2 Learn Telford

- Learn Telford is the adult and community learning service operated by the Council using DfE/DWP funding. It offers a range of courses to adults aged 19+. The core of the Learn Telford curriculum is improving essential skills such as English, maths and digital skills.

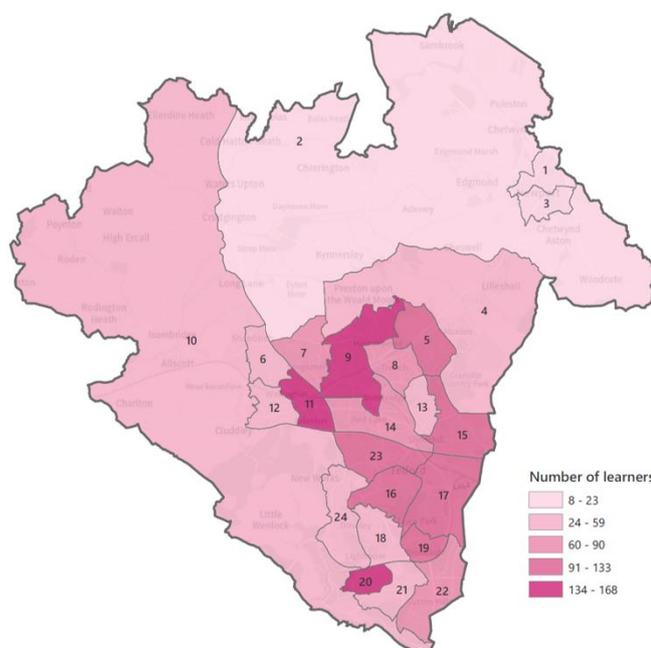
Telford and Wrekin Skills Strategy

- However, many adult learners need ‘stepping stones’ of shorter, lighter courses to build confidence, aspiration and motivation before engaging in longer learning to address gaps in essential skills.
- Of the 7,480 adult learners in the borough (DfE Data). Learn Telford is the largest provider of adult learning having over 40% of the total adult learning enrolments, with Telford College second at 22%.
- The service runs courses in a wide range of local community venues, to help remove barriers to learning. The image below shows the effectiveness of the service at engaging learners in the areas with greatest need.

Learn Telford Learners by Postcode

Key to MSOAs

- 1 Newport North
- 2 Edgmond & Church Aston
- 3 Newport South
- 4 Muxton & Lilleshall
- 5 Donnington
- 6 Dorthill & Shawbirch
- 7 Apley & Leegomery
- 8 Wrockwardine Wood & Trench
- 9 Hadley & Horton
- 10 Ironbridge, Admaston & High Ercall
- 11 Wellington East
- 12 Wellington West
- 13 St Georges
- 14 Oakengates & Ketley
- 15 Priorslee
- 16 Malinslee
- 17 Hollinswood & Randlay
- 18 Dawley & Aqueduct
- 19 Brookside
- 20 Woodside
- 21 Madeley
- 22 Sutton Hill
- 23 Town Centre, Overdale & Dawley Bank
- 24 Lawley, Horsehay & Lightmoor



- In the last academic year, Learn Telford had over 1200 adult learners undertaking over 3000 instances of learning (many learners taking more than one course). 80% of learners were unemployed. 73% of learners had low (Level 2 or below) or no qualifications. 50% of learners were from black and minority ethnic communities. Over 90% of learners completed and achieved their qualification and learning outcomes, and 80% of learners progress into further learning or employment.
- Learn Telford also offers a range of Family Learning courses, by working in partnership with local schools. Delivered in schools by Learn Telford tutors, these courses support parents to develop their skills to be able to better support their child’s learning and development.

- Learn Telford is targeted at adults with the greatest need and the data shows it is effective at reaching them, and that the learning empowers them to achieve and progress. Learn Telford contributes significantly to all the objectives within the Skills Strategy. The website for Learn Telford can be accessed at: www.learntelford.ac.uk

4.3 Youth Unemployment

- The figure for NEET & Not Known young people aged 16 – 17 continues to be below both regional and national averages, with recent figures (December 2025 DfE LA tables) showing Telford & Wrekin at 5.2% against England at 6.3% and the West Midlands at 6.4%. This has remained consistent, with Telford & Wrekin being below England & the West Midlands in both December 2024 and December 2023 (DfE LA tables). Strong risk of NEET work undertaken by FutureFocus, the careers team for young people, during Year 11 has positively impacted Year 11 young people moving into a successful post 16 outcome, along with ongoing supportive casework for post 16 NEET young people. However, the numbers of 18 – 24 claimants have seen an increase of just under 6% (ONS taken from NOMIS December 2025). National issues are reflected locally, including ‘the experience paradox’, with employers often preferring experienced candidates and the rise in long-term sickness, particularly due to poor mental health. This report outlines the initiatives being developed and/or delivered under the umbrella of the Skills Strategy to look to address these figures.

4.4 Tackling Inequality

Stay Near Go Far

- Our Stay Near, Go Far campaign supports the aims of the Skills Strategy, by raising awareness of the wide range of skills, learning and employment support on offer in Telford and Wrekin to help residents thrive.
- Whether leaving school, changing careers or returning to work after a break, the message is there is no need to move away to succeed.
- From apprenticeships and adult learning courses to careers in global industries based locally, the borough offers a wealth of options, all accessible right on the doorstep. It shines a spotlight on local talents and aims to support those who may have been out of work due to illness, caring responsibilities or other challenges.
- Developed with and supported by key partners, including educational providers, employers and skills networks, the campaign supports the Council's wider skills strategy and vision 2032 ambition to build a strong, more inclusive

local economy. To date there have been 24 posts and across all networks, these have generated 284 total clicks, 33.6k reach and 49.3k impressions.

Employer & School Engagement

- Employer and school engagement in Telford is supported by our "Telford Together" initiative, which connects local businesses with schools to strengthen talent pipelines through career interventions and work experiences. The initiative is supported by key partners, including Telford College, Harper Adams and local employers. The Council promotes work-based learning, including Year 10 work experience, and connects students with industries through initiatives like 'Digital Sparks', featuring partners such as Capgemini and Harper Adams University.
- The Marches Careers & Enterprise Hub is a partnership between the Careers & Enterprise Company and the three local authorities of Telford, Shropshire and Herefordshire. It works to transform careers education across The Marches region by linking education with business and helping secondary schools, colleges, and specialist institutions achieve the standards set out in the Gatsby Benchmark framework. It recruits industry volunteers as Enterprise Advisers, who work with schools as a strategic critical friend and helps employers provide work experience days and teacher encounters. Cornerstone employers locally include Cap Gemini, Housing Plus Group and the Shrewsbury & Telford Hospital NHS Trust, who work together with their networks and wider business community to provide opportunities for young people to be prepared for the world of work.
- The Telford Skills Show also supports school to employer engagement as referenced later in this report.

Young Carers

- Young carers are identified as a sub-group of the Get Marches Working plan, recognising that they face major barriers to employment due to their caring responsibilities. We know that numbers of young carers increased in Telford to 236 in 2025 up by 0.7% from figures in 2024. Work is planned in partnership with schools to identify and support young carers and will be a focus in terms of considering transition and opportunities post 16.

4.5 Employment Support Summary

Connect to Work

- Connect to Work is a DWP funded programme being delivered by the Council, that was created by the Get Britain Working white paper (November 2024). Its purpose is to provide intensive 1:1 case-loaded support to adults with

disabilities, health conditions and other complex needs to move into and/or sustain employment.

- Local delivery launched in October 2025. The service has DWP set targets that will see it engage with over 900 people over the initial 5 years of delivery. As of end of January 2026 local delivery has achieved 41 starts which is ahead of the expected profile.
- Demand for the programme has been positive in these early stages. Employment Specialists from the team are already co-located in the Armed Forces Hub in Dawley, Stirchley Medical Practice, and Telford Job Centre. There is structured partnership working in place with the Care Leaver Team and the Autism Hub. As the team's capacity increases in line with funding, co-locations and partnerships will be expanded to support additional referral pathways.
- The service is also working with Telford College to transition young people with SEND into Connect to Work if they have not already achieved a learning progression or paid job outcome at the end of their course.
- Locally, Connect to Work is delivered as part of our Job Box branding and people can find out further information about the support available via the details on the Job Box website – [Connect to Work](#)

Job Box Services

- Telford Job Box is the brand for the Council's employment support services, of which Connect to Work is part. However there are additional elements including outreach activity, drop-in service, and case-loaded employment support for those not eligible for Connect to Work.
- The Job Box drop-in desk operates on the ground floor of the Southwater One building in Telford Town Centre. The desk is open Monday to Friday from 10am-5pm, where adults can stop by without an appointment and see an advisor to get information, advice and guidance regarding skills and employment. This includes CV support, tailoring job applications, job searching, interview preparation, skills needs, and local learning opportunities.
- New for this year, Job Box now has the ability to provide 'better off in work' calculations, which supports people to understand the financial implications of moving into employment and how it will affect and change their benefit entitlements.

Telford and Wrekin Skills Strategy

- The Job Box outreach team operate out in the community. They run pop-up events in local communities to promote the wider Job Box and Learn Telford offer. They also engage with communities, groups and local organisations to promote the services and support people to engage with them.
- Over the past 12 months, there have been over 1314 appointments delivered at the drop-in desk and over 100 outreach events have taken place in the local community. Case loaded support has led to 204 people moving into employment, and 182 people moving onto education/training.
- The Job Box service make a significant contribution to the objectives set out in the Skills Strategy.

Job Box website refresh

- To ensure that learners have a clear 'line of sight' of where learning and opportunities can lead, work is ongoing to refresh the Job Box website. To encourage use, young people and adults were surveyed, so they could inform content, identify any gaps and advise the type of resources and support they want to access. A comprehensive review of the current site has taken place to ensure currency of existing content but a full refresh will be launched in Spring 2026.
- The site will retain the Job Box identity but will be clearer, simpler and easier to navigate, supporting residents to both self-serve and access relevant support when needed. It will provide an opportunity to showcase work sectors and promote the Stay Near, Go Far campaign, along with the Skills Show, Learn Telford adult learning and careers advice and guidance services.

Link to [Telford Job Box](#) website

Skills Show

- The annual Telford Skills Show brings together major local and regional employers and training providers to showcase career, training and apprenticeship opportunities to residents of all ages. It forms part of the Council's wider investment strategy to support jobs, skills and education and ensures residents can access high-quality employment and training opportunities in Telford and Wrekin. In addition to the many adults that access the Show, school pupils from across the Borough also attend, providing them with hands-on activities and direct encounters with employers, designed to inspire our future workforce and create a talent pipeline to meet future skill demands. Last year's Show saw:

Telford and Wrekin Skills Strategy

- Over 2,300 school pupils from local schools booked to visit the show
- A further 2,500 people of all ages booked online to attend
- Overall numbers were 1500 up on previous years
- More than 50 regional and national employers and training providers attended
- 300 staff and volunteers supported the show

Link to [Telford Skills Show 2026](#) website

Get Marches Working Plan

- The Get Marches Working Plan has been developed under the Get Britain Working White Paper and is a local strategy designed to reduce economic inactivity across the Marches region. It is a joint plan shared by the three Local Authorities of Telford & Wrekin, Hereford & Shropshire, as determined nationally.
- The Plan sets out a clear vision - to create an inclusive, dynamic labour market that helps people into sustainable employment.
- The plan aligns employer-led initiatives with training provision, strengthens links between schools and businesses and provides employability support within community services to unlock new pathways into work. Regional partners including the Integrated Care Board (ICB), Jobcentre Plus (JCP), voluntary and community sector organisations (VCSE), local employers and further and higher education providers (FE and HE) have collaborated to shape a plan which highlights the challenges across the region and the actions needed to tackle them.

[Get Marches Working Plan - Telford Job Box](#)

National Jobs & Careers Service

- Looking forward there are forthcoming changes to the employment support available to people in the borough. Following the Get Britain Working White Paper (November 2024) Job Centres will be merged with the National Careers Service and will provide a unified and joined-up system.
- The details about how this will look locally in Telford are not yet available but it is due to launch in October 2026. However, the new look service is intended to provide cohesive support to help people to move into work, progress in work, deliver skills assessments and careers guidance.

- We have close working relationships with our colleagues in DWP and will ensure that we continue to work effectively with them through the transition to the new merged service, to ensure we maximise our collective impact for local residents.

Youth Guarantee

- Also announced in the Get Britain Working White Paper that will bring some changes to the local offer is the government's Youth Guarantee. This will expand the number of 'Youth Hubs'. It will provide more intensive support for unemployed young people, and it will also introduce a jobs guarantee for those aged 18-21 who are long-term unemployed, as well as bring increases to the numbers of placements and training opportunities.
- These policy developments may bring funding opportunities for local authorities and this is something we will monitor closely. Should opportunities arise we will work to maximise the impact they have for local people.

5.0 Alternative Options

- 5.1 Given the intention of this paper is to provide an update on activity under the Skills Strategy it is not an intended to provide a range of options for a decision.

It is important to note that much of the activity outlined above is fully funded by external funding sources from the DWP and/or DfE and is therefore subject to the specifications and limitation of the funders. However, where these services are delivered by the council, we work to ensure they support and align with our strategic objectives and make the most impact for local residents.

Given the statutory or contractual nature of the majority of the above services there are no alternative options to outline at this time.

5.0 Key Risks

- 6.1 Given the majority of activity is reliant on external funding sources from central government, should this cease or change, it will likely have an impact on our capacity to deliver the objectives set out in the Skills Strategy. It is therefore critical that we remain flexible and adapt to any future changes and work to maximise any new opportunities for the benefit of local residents.
- 6.2 Failure of deliver against any contractual obligations could jeopardise service delivery, therefore effective monitoring of performance, and robust governance is maintained to identify any issues and undertake any necessary mitigation swiftly.

7.0 Council Priorities

- 7.1 The proposals set out in this report support the following council priorities:

- Every child, young person and adult lives well in their communities.
- Everyone benefits from a thriving economy.
- A community-focussed, innovative council providing efficient, effective and quality services
- Vision 2032
- Child Friendly Telford

8.0 Financial Implications

8.1 As noted above, much of the funding for skills comes through government grants, some of which have delivery criteria attached. The financial position of the area will be kept under review as part of overall financial monitoring, to ensure that it remains within the financial resources that are available.

9.0 Legal and HR Implications

9.1 The Council has the power to undertake the activities contained within this report and the programme's purpose is aligned to the Council's objectives.

10.0 Ward Implications

10.1 The activity outlined in this report spans the whole borough, and supports residents and families to improve their skills and progress into work, or in work. Increased skills and employment levels is a positive outcome for all wards.

11.0 Health, Social and Economic Implications

11.1 Improved support for adults will lead to increased skills and employment levels. Adults with higher skills and in employment typically have better health than adults who are unemployed, in terms of both physical and mental health.

11.2 Increased levels of skills employment will have a positive impact on the Borough's economy.

12.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

12.1 The service activity outlined in this report serve to broaden access to services and reach those who experience barriers to improved skills and employment outcomes. Therefore, these services have a positive impact on equality and diversity, by leading to improved skills and levels of employment.

12.2 There are aspects of services outlined above that are specifically designed to increase the support available to the Armed Forces community, in terms of improved skills levels and employment outcomes.

12.3 There are also aspects of services outlined above that are specifically designed to increase the support available to Care Leavers, with a particular focus on removing barriers to engagement.

13.0 Climate Change, Biodiversity and Environmental Implications

13.1 The climate change and environmental impact of the above activity under the Skills Strategy is expected to be minimal.

14.0 Background Papers

- 1 Get Marches Working Plan
- 2 Post-16 Education and Skills Whitepaper
- 3 Get Britain Working White Paper

15.0 Appendices

- A Telford and Wrekin Skills Strategy

16.0 Report Sign Off

Signed off by	Date sent	Date signed off	Initials
Director	03/02/2026	04/02/2026	SW
Legal	04/02/2026	04/02/2026	RP
Finance	04/02/2026	05/02/2026	TD



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SKILLS
TELFORD

Telford and Wrekin skills strategy:

“A learning borough for all”

2025



FOREWORD

Cllr Lee Carter

Leader of Telford & Wrekin Council

Cllr Shirley Reynolds

Cabinet Member for Children,
Young People, Education, Employment & Skills
Telford & Wrekin Council

Telford and Wrekin is a vibrant, successful borough and in recent years it has grown rapidly – creating jobs and raising aspirations in the process.



Our challenge is to sustain this growth and address the challenges facing all towns and cities across the UK. That means attracting new investment and ensuring we have a workforce with the skills to meet current and future employer needs.

But if we are to use economic growth to tackle inequalities across our communities we must also ensure all residents have the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

This document sets out a strategy to drive improvement in the borough's skills levels. It has been developed in collaboration with key partners including skills providers, education settings and employers.

It supports **Telford's Vision 2032**, which sets out an ambition for a robust economy with growth in new sectors that delivers well-paid jobs, many of which are linked to our carbon neutral agenda. Delivering these ambitions will require clear pathways through education driven by new infrastructure that develops individuals so they have the right skills for a changing, dynamic economy – enabling them to meet their aspirations and fulfil their potential. This is essential if we are to create a more equitable borough.

We look forward to working with our Partners to achieve this vision.



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6 Building an inclusive economy

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WHY DO SKILLS MATTER?

This strategy aligns with our Council Plan's vision "to protect, care and invest to create a better borough" and its commitment to ensure:

- Every child, young person and adult lives well in their community
- Everyone benefits from a thriving economy
- All neighbourhoods are great places to live
- Our natural environment is protected, and the council takes a leading role in tackling the climate emergency
- We are a community-focussed, innovative council providing efficient, effective and quality services.

Ensuring that all residents have the best possible skills is core to them accessing the best jobs and fulfilling their aspirations while also driving social mobility so that everyone prospers. It's also key to retaining our talent because currently too often young people leave the borough.







BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE ECONOMY

Telford and Wrekin has a diverse economy and with that comes a wide variety of opportunities. By ensuring all residents are able to access those opportunities, we can achieve inclusive growth.



Businesses are increasingly talent-led and inward investors will locate where they can hire the people they need. Increased mobility and post-Covid hybrid working patterns bring challenges and opportunities as companies rethink their location strategies.

Our Strategy for Fair and Inclusive Growth sets out seven pillars to drive our economy. Pillar three is to enhance 'Telford's Talent Pipeline' and describes the importance of having the right people with the right skills and talents to attract inward investors and deliver residents' ambitions and aspirations.

It's vital that Telford prioritises the skills our businesses need and that also create the best jobs for our residents. We recognise that places which take a holistic approach to growing, attracting and retaining talented people are also the most successful. That's why this pillar is central to Telford's attractiveness as a place where people want to live: creating a borough where there are outstanding economic opportunities; great schools; strong further and higher education offers; outstanding quality of life; and value-for-money housing.

THIS STRATEGY

The development of this strategy will complement the Marches-wide Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) published in late-2023.



Skills Shortages in our Local Area

- Manufacture – unskilled and highly skilled operatives, engineers and IT specialities.
- Construction – wet and dry trades, planners, surveyors.
- Professional – all areas of digital and Information Technology (IT).
- Health Care – Medical, doctors to porters, GPs to specialist admin and maintenance trades all required.

It also recognises the formation of Skills England and the context of a developing and evolving policy and funding landscape. This includes the modified UKSPF funding and further changes introduced by the white paper 'Get Britain Working'.

The 'Get Britain Working' white paper sets out several key changes:

- Creation of a National Jobs and Careers Service
- Introduction of a Youth Guarantee for those aged 18-21, to ensure all are learning or earning
- Establish a 'Connect to Work' programme that will support people with disabilities and health conditions into work

This strategy is focussed on responding to the identified local skills needs of Telford and Wrekin, which also reflect the key themes as set out by Skills England in their publication, 'Driving Growth and Widening Opportunities'. In particular, it is responding to skills shortages, improving pathways through learning to higher skilled jobs, and maintaining a focus on the core skills needed to help residents gain and sustain employment.

It is acknowledged that as the skills and funding landscape evolves, all partners will adapt and shape their provision in response to any changes and maximise new opportunities to support the achievement of the aims set out below. This will include considering the extended UKSPF funding as well as the emerging support through the DWP initiative 'Connect to Work'.

The three local authorities that comprise the Marches area (Telford & Wrekin, Shropshire, Herefordshire) share key areas of concern, such as retaining our young people and students after they leave school or university, ensuring everyone of employment age can keep learning and developing key skills, and making our economies work for all residents. Core to this is minimising duplication across education and training providers while making it as easy as possible for employers and providers to work together to develop modules for upskilling and reskilling.

To address these issues requires local knowledge, local endeavour and buy-in from businesses, education providers and residents in the area so that we develop tailored placed-based solutions which support market engagement and enable local skills providers to meet the needs for both residents and employers.

That's why the borough requires a local strategy in addition to the Marches plan which recognises and complements national skills policy. It will enable the development of a programme of provision that creates pathways from school to employment that has Government funding aligned to it. Through greater coordination and collaboration we can avoid duplication and reduce the negative impacts of competition within the market which sees providers competing with each other for the same pots of Government funding.

A local offer of quality lifelong education, underpinned by a joined-up approach that brings together providers and business, is key to Telford's future success being built upon inclusive growth.



THE BOROUGH

POPULATION

It is important that we invest in skills and the opportunity for our employers to draw upon a young workforce.



Ranked one of the top 10 fastest growing areas in the UK*.

*Centre for Cities report 2024.

Median age of the borough 39.

Young people key to accelerating growth in the borough.

4.7% increase in those aged 0-19 in the borough*.

*Between 2011 – 2021.

75 years+ represent 7.76% of the boroughs population. UK average 8.6%.

10.5% increase to 17% in residents from a minority background.

CHALLENGES

This strategy is central to tackling areas of economic challenge by ensuring residents living in those neighbourhoods can access the necessary training to develop the skills required to secure employment and better jobs.

18 neighbourhoods ranked as UK's most economically challenged.

A key focus of this strategy is to ensure residents can access the best skills provision to help them into work or to progress to better-paid roles, through training and education that's delivered with the right flexibility and accessibility to childcare provision and transport. More widely, the way we work is changing, with more people working from home, and we can expect changes in technology to drive different work patterns as well as the jobs and skills needed.

Weekly wages for women in full-time employment are 20.3% lower* than men.

*Compared to the national average.

It is vital that we enable the local education and training system to produce a local labour force with the requisite generic, leadership and management, and technical skills, to fill new roles.

Professional occupations make up a 16.4% of employment compared to 23.3% nationally.

We aspire to create further growth within the sector, specifically within advanced manufacturing and engineering linked to green growth. It is crucial that the borough continues to produce a supply of local labour with high-level technical skills and associated leadership and management training.

Manufacturing makes up 15.7% of the workforce, 3x national average.

The same aspiration applies to the health and care sector, which continues to face significant challenges around recruitment and retention and has wider implications, for example in relation to the borough's growing older population.



A DIVERSE SKILLS OFFER

Telford has experienced strong economic growth in recent years and has the potential to continue doing so. We have a well-placed, well-connected town with the capacity for further growth and it is important the borough has a skills strategy that allows us to continue to attract businesses and people.

Our town offers a rich diversity of skills provision – both academic and vocational – delivered by major institutions and specialist providers that supports employability skills through to technical specialisms. Our anchor FE institution, Telford College, is the largest further education centre in Telford & Wrekin and Shropshire. It is recognised as a major skills hub delivering provision spanning A levels, T-Levels, apprenticeships, degree-level higher education programmes, blended and virtual learning and sector-specific specialist training hubs to help plug skills gaps. Its twin campus provides academic and technical centres with specialisms in engineering, construction, retrofit and health. The college engages with around 2,000 young people, plus more than 500 apprentices and over 4,000 adult learners and has links with 700 employers.

The pathway to further and higher education in Telford is strong, anchored by the college and Harper Adams University – whose specialisms in agriculture and agri-tech cross over into the wider engineering, manufacturing and tech sectors. Telford employers can also draw on a large pool of graduates from the region's nine universities, many of which have specialisms relevant to our borough's strong manufacturing and engineering base along with digital and tech skills linked to business and professional services sectors.

Although we have a wealth of provision, this strategy is about how we shape the landscape so it delivers for all, regardless of age, background or stage of life – and for all employers who need tailored solutions. To achieve our aspiration of a truly inclusive borough it must include those furthest from the workforce, for example those not in education, employment or training (NEET). It's clear this will require a range of different providers.

The development of Telford's new Station Quarter sees a step change in the borough's education offer. It includes a highly accessible academic campus with A Level provision delivered by Telford College in a new Telford Sixth Form Centre alongside the Quad – a Digital Skills & Enterprise Hub with pathways from FE to HE delivered by the college and Harper Adams University. Learn Telford, the council's own adult education service, is also present,

OUR STRATEGY TO CREATE A LEARNING BOROUGH FOR ALL



ensuring pathways exist for lower-skilled adults to progress through to higher-level provision. The Quad – opened in 2024, brings world class education and training facilities targeting critical areas required by business that are vital to future resilience. It provides seamless pathways for young people and adults in an aspirational setting, playing an important role in attracting and retaining graduates. We know that adults are less able to move from the area to study due to family and caring commitments, so it's key to have a local offer that they can access.

The Quad also includes business incubation space, which raises the visibility of starting a business as a viable career pathway to our local talent and fosters entrepreneurial ambition. It enables direct connections between providers and business making it easier for them to collaborate to diversify, innovate and grow.

- Telford College offers dynamic and employer-driven packages including digital, IT and maths programmes focussed on hardware, software, data analysis, coding and cyber security skills with links to the Marches Institute of Technology.

- Harper Adams University boosts high-end skills through world class engineering, robotics and technology provision that crosses over from its agricultural training heritage into the wider manufacturing and engineering sectors. More widely, it benefits businesses across sectors through research and development and its data science expertise.

Challenges still remain, with Telford and Wrekin's working-age skills profile being behind that of many other places in the country. Cities Outlook 2024 includes a narrative on the competitiveness of 63 cities and large towns across the UK and it shows that half (50.8%) of the borough's adults possess a Level 3 qualification or higher, putting Telford in the fourth quartile nationally.

Children in the borough perform well at primary age, achieving results that are above the national average, however there are some challenges at secondary age including differences in qualification and skill outcomes.



This translates into very different levels of skills across our communities with Priorslee having 38% of residents aged over 16 having a level 4+ qualification. In Woodside the proportion falls to 16%. Areas with the lowest levels of qualification are typically found in our neighbourhoods with the greatest level of economic challenge including Sutton Hill 17%, Donnington 18% and Brookside 19%.



WHAT PARTNERS TOLD US

EMPLOYERS TOLD US

- they wanted to attract more local people to take up their job opportunities. Employers are keen to offer work experience opportunities to young people and view this as a pipeline of local talent.
- they recognise the value of work experience for young people, giving them the opportunity to understand the breadth of roles on offer locally.
- they are keen to encourage a culture of learning in the workplace, to upskill the workforce and ensure diversification across roles.

YOUNG PEOPLE TOLD US

- they felt confident about their next steps, with many having aspirations for Higher Education pathways. However, the majority told us they wanted to attend a University outside of Telford and move away to study.
- they were confident they could realise their ambitions and had the information, advice and guidance they needed to make well-informed choices.
- they are keen to find part-time work to fit around their studies, but many had struggled to achieve this.
- they would like more support with life-ready skills, to prepare them for adulthood.
- they felt they knew some of the skills and qualities that employers looked for but would have liked more work experience whilst at school to support with this.



OUR VISION

Our vision is for Telford and Wrekin to become “a learning borough for all”. So, whatever an individual’s aspiration, current skill base or age, they can access learning opportunities relevant to employers today and in the future. We also recognise the growth opportunities within our businesses and the need to continue to upskill to support them to compete, innovate and adapt to technological and digital change.

This strategy’s vision will be realised by delivering on the following objectives:

Objective 1 – Improve the overall skills levels of residents

Our aim: To raise working age skills at qualification levels 1, 2 and 3+ to higher than the national average.

We will achieve this by:

- **Ensuring all children and adults fulfil their potential.** We will continue to ensure that education is focusing on giving every child, young person and adult the skills they need to realise their potential. We will continue to invest in our collaborative approach, working in partnership with all schools and learning providers.
- **Ensuring success at level 2 as a foundation to further and higher education, work-based learning and employment.** Outcomes are currently too inconsistent. Our ambition is for all schools to be better than the national average for attainment of Grade 5 or above in English and maths at GCSE. This will be driven through our strategic partnership with schools.

- **Providing holistic support for whole families.** Building on our family first approach, we will work in our communities and in collaboration with key partners to provide wrap-around support for families with wider issues which affect educational attainment by focussing on the prevention of NEET and unemployment at an early stage.
- **Supporting our further education and training providers to provide a high-quality offer.** Ensuring high levels of participation from all communities – particularly those with lower levels of attainment – and a high-quality offer at all levels for all ages.
- **Increasing participation in adult education and ensuring its quality.** We will do this by supporting skills providers to provide courses of the right quality that are well marketed and meet the needs of business and residents alike.
- **Ensuring access to high quality, impartial careers information, advice and guidance.** This will be delivered through Telford & Wrekin Council’s Job Box Service.

Measuring progress: The percentage of the working age population with each level of qualification; the change in percentage from a baseline year, and its comparison to the national average. Tracking building blocks to success including attendance and absence rates.

Objective 2 – Nurturing and supporting aspiration whatever an individual’s background or existing skill level to fulfil their talent

Our aim: For aspiration to be built into our local skills system from a young age right from primary school all the way through to lifelong learning.

We will achieve this by:

- **Supporting parents to have high aspirations for their children.** This support, starting from early years, will include helping parents to improve their own skills levels and move into or progress within employment. This can improve parental well-being, including self-esteem, and positively impact the aspirations they have for their children. For some, this will mean removing barriers including:
 - Nurturing those without aspiration
 - Providing wraparound support to prevent drop-out
 - Removing barriers to learning, e.g. transport
 - Access to suitable childcare provision
 - Recognising that aspiration to learn starts at home and families need to be supported to nurture ambition in the home.

For others it will mean ensuring there is access to the learning and development opportunities they require to fulfil their ambition with a focus on professional qualifications and essential skills (maths, English, digital and computing etc.).

- **Supporting our schools to increase employer interactions.** We will build on the existing school engagement activities and offer from large employers and develop a suite of age-appropriate activities which can be supported by employers of all sizes.

- **Using council-led networks and partnerships to provide inspiring employer interactions – developing even higher ambitions for Telford’s children and their families.** Using Government funding to increase SME interactions in our secondary schools and colleges, we will seek to effectively link small and medium sized employers to local schools to help schools diversify their careers offer.
- **Increasing higher education engagements in our schools.** We will partner with universities and FE to encourage more children and their parents to see higher education as an option. Importantly, this will demonstrate alternative pathways to higher level qualifications such as work-based learning and apprenticeships.
- **Continuing to build on the success of the Marches Careers Hub.** Currently, 19 out of 20 of Telford’s schools/college are signed up to the Hub. This supports schools/college careers leaders to embed the 8 Gatsby benchmarks, including increasing employer engagement, embedding careers into the curriculum, encounters with further and higher education and informing students and their parents of their options.
- **Continuing to host our successful annual Telford Skills Show.** This facilitates connections and meaningful encounters between employers, training and education providers, schools, parents/carers, young people and adults. It highlights and promotes local opportunities and pathways to support aspiration and talent retention.
- **Increasing the uptake of in-work adult skills provision to drive upward mobility.** This will involve working with employers to increase skills training within working hours and effectively using any available in-work skills funding. It will ensure skills providers have a flexible offer that can meet the differing needs of residents and employers.

Measuring progress: The percentage of the population progressing through levels of education and take up of adult training and retraining courses.



Objective 3 – Developing progression pathways to provide a clear route for people to progress through the skills system to employment

Our aim: For residents to easily re-engage with the skills system whatever their circumstances and for them to recognise the benefit, whether accessing employment, increased earning potential or facilitating career development.

We will achieve this by:

- **Ensuring learners have a clear line of sight of where courses can lead.** It's important to enable learners to see the value of continuing in education and achieving higher skills levels which can lead to higher-paid work. We will work in partnership with employers, employer representative bodies and our education and skills providers to develop pathways across different sectors and providers and the appropriate means to share and promote this to target audiences.
- **Raising the profile of businesses, the types of jobs within business/sectors and skills requirements on a very practical, accessible basis.** This will include making more use of the Career Guide we already have produced with businesses.
- **Continuing to encourage progression through 'lifelong learning' including adults who are 'In Work'.**

Measuring progress: Take up of training and education courses.



Objective 4 – A skills system which is fully inclusive and representative of our borough

Our aim: Ensure all residents and communities, including the business community, are well-served by the skills system, and that engagement practices reflect our communities' needs. There should be appropriate provision and support available for everyone, to enable full participation and progression at all educational levels.

We will achieve this by:

- **Building on our record of consultation and community engagement.** We will ensure all communities can access adult skills provision at all levels, focusing particularly on evidence of good progression to higher education levels and jobs outcomes for all groups. We will have a specific focus on those who may need additional support to access skills provision due to disability, health and mental health conditions, and drug and alcohol misuse.
- **Strengthening partnership working.** Through partnerships, we will provide “holistic support to succeed” to families with barriers that can impact educational attainment, such as mental health issues, drug and alcohol misuse, homelessness and domestic abuse.
- **Using adult skills provision as a driver to reduce inequality.** It's vital we enable out-of-work residents to attain the right skills to meet the needs of the local labour market and move into sustainable and well-paid employment. In addition, targeting skills provision at those in low-paid and insecure work to address in-work poverty.

- **Ensuring adult skills provision is fully inclusive.** We need to support adult skills providers to be inclusive in their offers to residents who may be considered to have higher learning needs by ensuring appropriate classroom and wraparound support and flexible course delivery.
- **Supporting the learning of English.** Many businesses have migrant workers and support around the learning of English will enable these employees to progress. Provision of “ESOL” (English for Speakers of Other Languages) is currently limited.
- **Maximising opportunities for in-work learning.** This includes apprenticeships and supported internships.
- **Supporting employers to navigate the skills provider market.** It's important they can access timely, appropriate provision to support upskilling and reskilling. This provision must be flexible to meet the needs of the employer, for example enabling shift workers to access learning.
- **Building on our success in supporting SEND learners to progress into paid employment.** We will develop our supported internship programmes while exploring offer options to help SEND learners progress into meaningful paid employment.
- **Building a Sector Work Academy Programme (SWAP) for adults with learning disabilities.** This will support people into employment and embed a “supported employment” approach within adult skills provision.
- **Promoting volunteering opportunities.** We will ensure that people are more aware of the benefits volunteering can bring, which includes work skills and experience, health improvement, and community cohesion.

Measuring progress: Narrowing the attainment gap between students in our most and least deprived areas; skills system access rates by ward; skills system accessed by demographic and protected characteristics.



Objective 5 – A skills system which provides the skills required by businesses, both current and future, and contributes to economic growth and the prosperity of the town.

Our aim: To create a responsive skills eco-system, built on effective joint working between skills providers, education settings and employers. We will foster and promote better, more effective linkages between providers and employers, to share opportunities in sectors, and ensure provision is both meeting local employers’ needs, and strengthening schools’ relationships with post 16 providers.

We will achieve this by:

- **Getting the skills and opportunities right for investment.** We will do this by continuing to drive our existing “business supporting, business winning” approach where we include support on skills, recruitment etc as part of our investor “red carpet” offer and our account management approach working with existing employers to connect them into provision, funding and ‘hide the wires’.
- **Co-designing skills solutions with businesses and skills partners.** This will ensure the skills system is responsive, innovative and produces the right skills mix for now and the future, delivered in the way that businesses need. This includes engaging with employees and supporting employers to maximise social value commitments.

- **Working with local employers to promote in-work upskilling.** Collaborations which encourage access to skills and workplace development at all levels including apprenticeships, work experience and internships are critical to creating the workforce we need.
- **Lobbying for streamlined budgets tailored to need.** We will also work to “hide the wires” in how we support employers and further develop links to our Skills for Growth programme.
- **Supporting those at risk of redundancy.** This is about enhancing the work we already do around recognising transferable skills and matching employers downsizing with those recruiting as well as tailored programmes of support for employees facing redundancy. Again, there is an important role for our Skills for Growth programme to play.
- **Facilitating and enhancing the relationship between providers and employers.** The council will facilitate collaboration between employers and providers to create the solutions to skills and training needs in the borough.

Measuring progress: Achieve the Targets/outcomes from LSIP; number of businesses involved in school engagement; number of apprenticeships advertised in borough; Quad outputs including business skills activity; evidence of more flexible provision such as modular, evening etc.

BUSINESS SUPPORTING BUSINESS WINNING

GOVERNANCE AND DELIVERY

Executive oversight of this strategy will sit with Telford & Wrekin Council's Cabinet

Telford Education Strategic Partnership will have ongoing responsibility for the implementation and monitoring of the strategy. It will have strong links with the Invest Telford Partnership, providing input from a business perspective, and further connections to business groups, eg Telford Business Board. This will ensure businesses understand the strategy and can support with shaping and delivery.



SKILLS
TELFORD