

Cheshire+ Warrington Joint Committee

OPEN

26th July 2024

**Finance for the Skills Bootcamp
Programme**

Report of: Peter Skates, Acting Executive Director - Place, Cheshire East Council, Gemma Davies, Director Economy and Housing, Cheshire West and Chester Council and Steve Park, Director of Growth, Warrington Borough Council

Report Reference: CWJC/03/24-25

Significant/Key Decision?	Yes/No	Definition (to be deleted once completed)
Cheshire West and Chester	Yes	Constitution Page 115.
Warrington	Yes	Constitution page 41
Cheshire East	Yes	Constitution Page 78

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report seeks approval from the Joint Committee for Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington (ECW) to accept, spend and submit further bids for funding for the Skills Bootcamp Programme as set out in the business plan.

Executive Summary

2. This report updates the Joint Committee on the Skills Bootcamp Programme that forms part of the ECW's business plan and asks for approval to vary the plan to:

- Accept and spend additional funding of around £5 million from the Department for Education (DfE) for our Cheshire and Warrington 2024/25 Skills Bootcamp programme
- Prepare and submit a bid of around £9 million for the 2025/26 Skills Bootcamp programme. At this stage the 2025/26 bid will be indicative of the size and nature of individual bootcamps – the final shape will depend on demand from employers and learners.

Recommendations:

The Joint Committee is recommended to:

1. Agree ECW should accept and spend further funding of around £5 million for our 2024/25 skills bootcamp programme if it is offered post-election or subsequently during this financial year
2. Agree that the Chief Executive of ECW in consultation with the Chair of the Joint Committee and the sub-regional Growth Directors Board and with agreement of the Skills Bootcamp Steering Committee should prepare and submit a bid for the 2025/26 skills bootcamp programme.
3. Approve a variation in the ECW Business Plan to include the proposals to accept and spend £5 million for 2024/25 and the submission of a bid for 2025/26.
4. Give delegated authority for Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington to award Skills Bootcamp delivery contracts exceeding £100,000, subject to compliance with procurement and subsidy regulations, to the Chair of the sub-regional Growth Directors Board in consultation with the Chair of the Joint Committee; the Growth Directors from the two remaining Local Authorities; and the Monitoring Officer and S151 Officer from the Local Authority with lead accountable body status.

Background

- 3 Skills Bootcamps are designed to focus on the needs of the Cheshire and Warrington economy. The programme enables employers to fill vacancies and develop the skills of their workforce whilst also allowing residents to develop the skills they need to move into a job or progress in work. A key requirement of each bootcamp is that employers must be involved in the design of the training and be prepared to offer job interviews for unemployed people or to offer to change the nature of the job for employed people. Further details of the Skills Bootcamp programme are in the attached slides.

Additional Funding for 2024/25

4. The Cheshire and Warrington Skills Bootcamp programme is growing in strength. The LEP ran programmes in 2022/23 (£1.04 million budget) and

2023/24 (£1.2 million budget) and ECW is continuing to run the programme in 2024/25. It has engaged a wide range of local employers in a variety of sectors. In 2022/23 and 2023/24 C&W's bootcamps supported a total of 559 learners whilst, to date in this current year we have received £2.46 million from DfE and have contracted to support 801 learners.

5. With encouragement from DfE, who recognise the strength of our Cheshire and Warrington bootcamp programme (we are amongst the top performers), all of this year's funding was committed by 30th April and we have started to develop a reserve list.
6. DfE have indicated that, following the General Election, they expect to be able to offer us further funding for this financial year (at least an initial £2.8 to £3m million to support an additional 808 learners with the potential of further funding later in the year).

Funding for 2025/26

7. DfE have also invited bids from all sub-regions for funding for 2025/6. The deadline for submission is 31 August. At this stage the bid would be for an overall budget along with a broad indication of our priorities for how we would spend the money in C&W. Half must be deployed on priority areas dictated by DfE, but the remaining 50% can be spent on local priorities provided we can demonstrate to DfE that there is evidence of strong demand and engagement with employers. The final shape of the programme will, however, depend ultimately on the demand from employers and learners during 2025/6 itself.
8. With agreement from the Joint Committee officers are working up a bid for 2025/26 that builds on the 2024/25 programme but adds some new proposals that build on lessons learnt to date. Drafting of the bid is being overseen by the Skills Bootcamp Steering Group which comprises representatives of all three Local Authorities (LA) plus the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Against the background of anticipated total spend in 2024/5 of £7 million a bid for £9 million is being considered for 2025/6 with the expectation that as in previous years we would be offered further funding from DfE during the year if our programme continues to grow.
9. Approval is sought for the Chief Executive of ECW to prepare and submit a 2025/6 bid to DfE, in consultation with the Chair of the Joint Committee and the sub-regional Growth Directors Board, and with agreement of the Skills Bootcamp Steering Committee.

Background

10. Skills Bootcamps is a DfE-funded programme of short training sessions focused on intermediate (A-Level or equivalent) level skills but not necessarily full qualifications. The bootcamps must be designed around the needs of employers to help recruit or train existing staff and provide individuals with the skills needed to move into work or progress in work. Each bootcamp must be designed in consultation with employers and at the end of each bootcamp

employers **must** be prepared to offer job interviews to unemployed learners or opportunities to change the nature of existing jobs for employed learners.

11. To date, approx. 35% of our bootcamp learners have been unemployed, 45% employed and 18% self-employed. Learners are guaranteed job interviews at the end of the training. Slides summarising the nature of our bootcamps and progress to date (spend and learners moving into jobs or progressing in work) are attached.
12. ECW is working closely with DWP colleagues to ensure our Jobcentres are aware of the Skills Bootcamp programme and are able to identify suitable individuals who would benefit from training through a bootcamp. DWP is also working with the bootcamp providers to ensure they are aware of the support available from Jobcentres to help remove any barriers (e.g., child-care, transport costs, clothing for work) to employment when the learner is offered a job.
13. The current ECW business plan provides for a commitment to deliver the DfE Skills Bootcamp programme and at the time of approval at the last Joint Committee meeting, it was based upon an expected grant of £2.459 million. The plan therefore requires a variation to consider the additional funding available.

Consultation and Engagement

14. The Steering Group that oversees the programme comprises the three local authorities and DWP and is supportive of accepting additional funding from DfE in this financial year and submitting a bid for 2025/26 that gives an indication of the types of bootcamps we would fund. Inevitably the final shape of the programme will depend on demand from employers and learners but we would build on the successes of the 2024/25 programme and include some new proposals that build on lessons learnt to date.
15. It is essential that the final programme comprises bootcamps that are designed in consultation with local employers who will need to guarantee job interviews at the end of each bootcamp. Funding for individual bootcamps is reviewed and approved by the Skills Bootcamp Steering Group.

Reasons for Recommendations

16. Further funding for 2024/5 would enable the Cheshire and Warrington skills bootcamp programme to continue to support at least another 808 local people into jobs and/or enable them to continue to grow their skills. It would continue to enable employers to fill vacancies and grow the skills of their workforce. We have a growing waiting list of bootcamps that are ready to start delivering if funding becomes available this financial year.

Other Options Considered

17. Not accepting the DfE offer of further funding for 2024/25 and not submitting a bid for funding in 2025/26 would result in a failure to attract between £12 and

£15 million of additional funding into Cheshire and Warrington in this and next financial year to the detriment of our residents and local employers.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

18. The current ECW business plan was approved by the Joint Committee in April and made a commitment to the DfE Skills Bootcamp Programme.
19. The Joint Committee has power to vary the business plan and the proposal to increase the level of funding set out in the plan is appropriate and the current proposals are within its terms of reference. It can also delegate decision making to relevant officer. It is recommended that this is done with a requirement for reporting back.
20. ECW will be required to ensure that it complies with relevant procurement legislation.
21. In addition, the proposals do amount to key and significant decisions as defined by the Constitutions of the Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Warrington Council's. Relevant notification of the proposed decisions is required via the respective forward plans and appropriate notices may be required for the decision to be made.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

22. Funding from DfE includes a fee to cover management costs and 100% of these and 50% of the programme costs (ie the amount anticipated to be paid to training providers) are paid "upfront" within the first quarter of the financial year.
23. Skills Bootcamp providers are only paid when they achieve key milestones. Milestone 1 (40% of funding paid to bootcamp provider), is achieved when learners have started the training and completed at least 10 guided learning hours, milestone 2 (30% of the funding paid to bootcamp provider) is achieved when the learner has completed all the training and been offered a job interview or different roles and responsibilities, milestone 3 (final 30% of funding paid to bootcamp provider) is achieved when a relevant job offer has been accepted and the learner has moved into a job or taken up different responsibilities that relate to the training.
24. Skills Bootcamp monies are held within Cheshire East Council's finance system. The are allocated out as directed by staff at ECW with necessary documentation and interest is earned on balances held. A summary of the position is provided to ECW on a monthly basis.

Policy

25. This will ensure we maintain the momentum of the Cheshire and Warrington skills bootcamp programme and support more employers to fill vacancies and

upskill/reskill their employees and support more people into jobs and progression in work

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

26. Equality, diversity and inclusion considerations are embedded in the skills bootcamp programme.

Human Resources

27. There are no implications.

Risk Management

28. There are no implications.

Communities

29. There are no direct implications.

Public Health and All Together Better

30. There are no implications.

Climate Change

31. There are no implications.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Pat Jackson, Director Skills and Education, Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington Pat.jackson@cheshireandwarrington.com
Appendices:	Appendix A - Joint Committee Background Skills Bootcamp Slides July 2024
Background Papers:	