

Meeting Notes – One Surrey Growth Board (23.09.2025, 09:00-11:00)

Welcome and Introductions

Matt Furniss (Chair)

Welcomed Board members and introductions. Request for declarations of interest from Board members – none raised.

Workforce, Employment and Skills

This item was the main focus of the meeting, which highlighted six programmes within the workforce, employment and skills work area.

Strategic Framework

Simon Griffin (Head of Economy & Growth – Place Delivery, Surrey County Council)

This item provided an overview of the Strategic Framework that is in development, aiming to align national and local priorities relating to work, health, economic inactivity and skills.

Recent national government priorities and funding streams have a refreshed focus on work, health, employment and skills. This SCC framework is designed to combine the national policy landscape with local insights, coordinating a response for Surrey residents, unlocking resources and identifying cross-cutting objectives within the work, health and skills landscape.

Objectives and operating principles define the proposed approach (slide 7) – framework being taken to Cabinet this afternoon (23rd September). There are several strategies that feed into the delivery of the framework such as Get Surrey Working (GSW) Plan, Adult Skills Fund (ASF) Commissioning Framework and the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP). Highlighted economic growth delivery activity that sits under the framework (slide 8).

Next steps:

- Ongoing engagement to drive collective actions against the objectives of the Skills and Workforce Strategic Framework.
- Board input to Get Surrey Working Plan ahead of submission in October.

Actions:

SCC – share GSW Plan draft with Board for comments by 9th October deadline.

Surrey Baccalaureate

Marie Tulley-Rose (Head of Economy & Growth – Operations, Surrey County Council)

This item was an introduction to the Surrey Baccalaureate workstream that is in development, based loosely on the Greater Manchester (MBacc) pilot.

Aim is to develop an education and training system to meet Surrey's skills and workforce demands. Current pathways for 14–18-year-olds often create uncertainties and there is an opportunity to connect young people to an employment pathway focused on the technical education route, aiming to give it equal parity with the university route. Developing data and insight from employers and will engage with young people to co-design a pathway that connects young people to employers and priority skills.

The programme will focus on specific professions, to align with the needs and opportunities identified in the LSIP and [Modern Industrial Strategy](#). Will create visual aids to use in schools to highlight which subjects lead to which employment options. Construction, digital and IT, health and social care were noted as key areas of focus during a recent meeting with Higher Education and Further Education stakeholders.

Discussion:

LSIP engagement with employers and young people has raised the issue of readiness for work, as many do not feel prepared to succeed in a work environment.

Opportunity to align work with the Innovation Board and encourage informative and engaging innovation learning experiences earlier on in education.

Clear need for early support in school settings to make the most impact and enable successful skills and workforce programmes – requires partnership connections to access and influence these opportunities. Consistent connection during education will provide insight into how skills will translate into tangible employment opportunities.

Ongoing Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) initiative to visit schools in the most deprived areas to conduct workshops (co-designed with young people and employers) to build skills and confidence for work. Opportunity to replicate model in Surrey.

Opportunity to work alongside the Surrey Careers Hub to access existing work experience opportunities – Hub already identifies the 15 schools in Surrey with the highest need.

Need to ensure that talent is also being attracted into teaching roles – noting the importance of interacting with schools so teachers understand the skills relating to local career opportunities, introducing more innovative ways to bring previous careers experiences into teaching.

Agreed with the focus on professions rather than whole sectors – for example, micro-precision skills are often a weakness within computer hardware sector.

Actions:

SCC – connect with DWP regarding pilot for workshops in schools in deprived areas.

Connect to Work

Marie Tulley-Rose (Head of Economy & Growth – Operations, Surrey County Council)

This item provided a progress update on the Connect to Work programme and related activity (Skills Conference and STEP Surrey launch).

Connect to Work is a supported employment programme for those that struggle to find or keep a job. Employment specialists will provide 1:1 support to participants, engage with and guide employers, find suitable jobs and support applications. The support is available for 12 months for those out of work and 4 months for those in work. The programme is at the final stage of implementation before going live – the team is being recruited and is beginning to receive a pipeline of referrals.

Skills conference: taking place on 17th October, hosted jointly by Surrey County Council and Surrey Chambers of Commerce. The conference will bring together employers, skills providers and partners to align efforts to build a future ready skills force. There will be a combination of keynote speakers (Robert West, Confederation of British Industry and Holly Hobbs, Founder and Entrepreneur of Urfuture app), panel session for future visioning, and interactive workshops based around work programmes and related themes.

STEP Surrey: front door skills and training portal connecting residents with local support to gain skills and access employment. Will also be the entry-point for the Connect to Work programme and will showcase opportunities / training from local employers and providers.

Discussion:

The importance of role modelling at the start of a development journey as an example of fluid entry to career opportunities was noted. Widened recruitment approaches to focus on aptitude and applicability are also key, particularly considering careers that will need to become resilient to AI and the balance between human interaction and technology.

An inclusive recruitment approach and the opportunity to co-design the Surrey Bacc programme with young people who may have been previously excluded from engagement, to understand their needs and how the programme can benefit them.

The importance of a local talent pool to benefit the county was considered and understanding the future of national jobs (such as Defence and agricultural roles) and how we position Surrey's workforce to take up those opportunities – important to review the approach to skills / pathway development and the future of businesses to leverage our local economy and establish Surrey in a beneficial position for future needs.

It was noted the geographical spread of learners has reduced (average 60-mile radius), with a high percentage of students living at home during university due to the cost of living – key opportunity for businesses to link with local students.

Construction Technical Excellence College (CTEC)

Simon Griffin (Head of Economy & Growth – Place Delivery, Surrey County Council)

This item introduced the Department for Education initiative Construction Technical Excellence Colleges (CTECs), that has recently been announced by Government.

North Kent College is confirmed as the CTEC for the South East and will work with providers via a hub to share curricula, attract learners, facilitate teaching exchange, and identify pathways in conjunction with schools and job centres. There will be £500,000 revenue funding per year to be spent on in-year initiatives.

Plans for 5 Defence TECs have been confirmed with further details to be announced. Surrey County Council is committed to working with colleges and partners to maximise future opportunities.

Discussion:

There has been feedback that the identified CTEC regions are too large to understand specific needs for each area, and the approach would benefit from being more localised.

2 Surrey based colleges submitted a CTEC bid but were unsuccessful – there have been valuable learnings from the process and NESOT College and Activate Learning are now working with other colleges to develop a proposal for a Surrey CTEC.

Adult Skills Fund

Simon Griffin (Head of Economy & Growth – Place Delivery, Surrey County Council)

This item provided an overview of the approach and progress of the Adult Skills Fund (ASF).

Planned devolution of Adult Skills funding to Surrey County Council in advance of the 2026/27 academic year – the Secretary of State will make a final decision in November to agree funding, and amount to be agreed early next calendar year.

The ASF priorities and commissioning principles were highlighted (slide 20) – with a focus in the initial year on market stability to avoid disruption. Opportunities for engagement with Further Education, providers and other partners – inc. DWP – to draw on insights and experience, create new provision in line with demand, and targeted commissioning to ensure involvement of local providers. Key link with the LSIP, utilising existing data and feedback to focus on future quality provision and vocational pathways that will support the needs of Surrey employers.

Discussion:

The complexity of the skills and employment funding and support landscape was raised. The Strategic Framework and STEP Surrey are key initiatives that will ensure alignment across work programme areas and streamline navigation / access for residents.

Opportunity following devolution for the ASF to drive innovation, align with local demand and contribute to more bespoke support for individuals. support is required as each participant will have an individual journey with different services required to get into / maintain work. Jobcentres provide varying levels of support such as skills plans, work coaches, confidence building etc. to understand barriers and find employment opportunities.

Noted the importance of stability and not unsettling current provision within the first year. Agreed that devolution is a great opportunity to bring provision back into the county and meet local demand, allowing for more freedom to deliver resident and business needs.

The Growth Board and LSIP can help to bring coherence, coordinate activity across partners and expand the innovation and skills offer.

Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)

Louise Punter (Chief Executive Officer, Surrey Chambers of Commerce)

This item highlighted the LSIP that will be in development from October for the Surrey geography, and how this plan will connect with other related initiatives.

The previously developed LSIP has been in delivery for over 2 years and will continue until summer 2026 – it covered all of Surrey and part of Hampshire. Existing intel will feed into the development of the Surrey LSIP, as well as engagement with employers, providers, Department for Work and Pensions and other key stakeholders to understand the future focus of skills provision.

The plan is due to be published in summer 2026 – support will be required from Board members to contribute to information gathering, highlight skills issues, and encourage

networks to complete the open survey / take part in upcoming engagement. Particularly prioritising engagement with more employers, to create a strong evidence base and guidance to enable skills opportunities for residents and employers.

Discussion:

The limited capacity of small businesses to respond to engagement requests was raised – the idea of incentives for small businesses was raised as well as the importance of understanding how it will benefit them.

Further discussion focused on the importance of providing clarity to young people at an earlier age about the skills and pathways that are required for a particular role, as often information can be overwhelming. Often an individual's employability, approach, or attitude (such as resilience and adaptability) is more important than technical skills.

Actions:

TN and LP to connect offline regarding small businesses engagement.

Surrey Innovation Board and Local Innovation Partnership Fund

Caroline Fleming (Director of Surrey Innovation District, University of Surrey)

This item outlined the Surrey Innovation Board focus and introduced the Local Innovation Partnership Fund opportunity.

The Surrey Innovation Board is formed of the 3 Surrey universities, recognising the ambition to generate new knowledge that will have a positive impact on the region. They have a role in regional growth such as supporting spin-outs and start-ups and enabling knowledge exchange between universities. The Board covers a broad landscape with focus on the commercialisation journey and emerging themes including AI strategy, innovation clusters, and creating conditions for skills in the innovation space. There is a triple helix approach with the aim of developing innovation in the county engaging civic, university and business stakeholders to benefit the region. The Surrey Civic Agreement underpins the approach – the Board now focuses on coordinating associated funding aligned to key objectives, with 2 recent successful Economic Growth Fund bids to deliver combined programmes for all 3 universities.

The Local Innovation Partnerships Fund is currently the only visible national fund for innovation on a regional level. Mayoral Strategic Authorities do not have to bid whereas other strategic authorities do. As part of the bid, it will be key to focus on Surrey's innovation vision / narrative and strengths to potentially lead to future opportunities. The Surrey Innovation Board is currently building the evidence base utilising existing cluster

work that has been developed (focus on CreaTech, Space, and Animal Health evidence). Noted that health innovation is more challenging as the evidence tends to be pan-regional. The bid requires civic leadership and governance, match funding and a board assembled to develop the bid. Gaining insight into other regions' bid progress through university networks and clusters – key for bid to map to neighbouring regions to complement South East capabilities.

Discussion:

Queried the requirements around the funding split and an offer to inform further medtech insight. Still awaiting final guidance – there will be the ability to pool funds from the region to progress smaller initiatives for higher delivery value. Strict criteria around the bid not being research-based and focusing on innovation leading to commercialisation.

Noted the need to build out from the existing Civic Agreement also now including Further Education which can inform the innovation agenda locally.

Further clarity required between innovation research / proposals and the connection to business innovation – historical challenges around businesses engaging with the Higher Education sector to create value. Businesses can innovate within service delivery methodology as well as new products.

Actions:

CF and TN to pick up medtech insight offline.

CF – report on Innovation Partnerships Fund bid progress at next Board meeting.

Reflections and Close

Matt Furniss (Chair)

AOB

- Ask for Board members to provide suggestions for next meeting agenda.
- Noted businesses require an adaptable and evolving plan in the context of Government initiatives and how to connect with existing mechanisms. Devolution will allow for the Board to have a more dynamic and flexible approach – by January there will be more awareness about future implications of reorganisation.

Actions:

SCC – December Board meeting to be rescheduled to January.

Appendix: Attendees and Apologies

Attendees

Matt Furniss (Chair)	Surrey County Council	
Chris Hurren (Vice-Chair)	RSM UK	
Andrew Pritchard	Runnymede Borough Council	Attended virtually
Will Davies	University of Surrey	
Gary Headland	Activate Learning	Attended virtually
Mike McNicholas	AtkinsRéalis	
Terence Naidu	Envisionit Deep AI & Truzo	
Helen Foord	McLaren	Attended virtually
Louise Punter	Surrey Chambers of Commerce	
Tilini Sharland	Department for Work and Pensions	
Dawn Redpath	Surrey County Council	

Observers / speakers

Harry Colquhoun-Flannery: Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Marie Tulley-Rose: Surrey County Council

Simon Griffin: Surrey County Council

Caroline Fleming: University of Surrey

Beth Reeder: Surrey County Council

Apologies

Cllr Ann-Marie Barker: Woking Borough Council

Andrew Cawthorne: Surrey Satellite Technology

Tracey Palmer: Business Improvement District