

Natural Infrastructure and Growth Scrutiny Panel

Wednesday 10 September 2025

PRESENT:

Councillor Ricketts, in the Chair.
Councillor Holloway, Vice Chair.
Councillors Allen, Bannerman, McCarty, McLay, Morton(substitute for Councillor Goslin), Raynsford, M.Smith and Sproston.

Apologies for absence: Councillor Goslin.

Also in attendance: Councillor Sally Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships), Councillor Tudor Evans OBE (Leader of the Council), Tina Brinkworth (Head of Skills and Post 16), Glenn Caplin-Grey (Strategic Director for Growth), Victoria Cope (Programme Manager), Karen Dalton-Fyfe (Ministry of Defence), Amanda Davis (Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills), David Draffan (Service Director for Economic Development), Paul Fanshawe (City College Plymouth), Toby Hall (Funding and Partnership Manager), Isabelle Kolinsky (Service Manager for Inclusion and Welfare), Jake Metcalfe (Democratic Advisor), Lucinda Sanders (On Course South West) and David Wales (Connect to Work Delivery Manager).

The meeting started at 2.00 pm and finished at 4.04 pm.

Note: At a future meeting, the Panel will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.

10. Declarations of Interest

The following declarations were made:

Name	Minute Number	Reason	Interest
Councillor Sarah Allen	13	Employed by an education trade union	Personal
Councillor Steve Ricketts	13	Employed by Plymouth City College	Personal

11. Minutes

The Panel agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 09 July 2025 as an accurate record.

12. **Chair's Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business, but the Chair did mention how interesting a recent visit to the dockyard for Panel members had been.

13. **Skills (Economic Strategy Pillar 5)**

Councillor Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships) introduced the item and highlighted:

- a) The Growth Alliance Plymouth was formed as a partnership between Plymouth City Council, Babcock, and the Ministry of Defence (MOD), now transitioning to be known as “Team Plymouth”.

Victoria Cope (Programme Manager) and Toby Hall (Funding and Partnership Manager) also made an introduction which included the following points:

- b) The MOD had committed £4.4 billion in long-term investment in Devonport Dockyard, representing a once-in-a-generation opportunity for the city;
- c) The Team Plymouth partnership aimed to ensure sustainable growth and avoid economic imbalance;
- d) The aims and outcomes had been aligned with the Plymouth Economic Strategy;
- e) A 50-year defence programme would require a future workforce, including individuals who were not born yet or currently in primary education;
- f) Devonport was the only UK site with deep-water capacity for submarine maintenance, making it critical to national defence;
- g) Evidence-based planning had identified barriers to growth and skills attainment, forming the foundation of the programme;
- h) A projected shortfall of 25,000 workers over the next decade had been identified, with the current working-age population unable to meet future demand;
- i) Monthly job vacancies averaged 2,500, with growth across healthcare, hospitality, education and engineering;
- j) Skills commitments include collaboration between schools, further education institutions, and employers to support progression and upskilling;
- k) Commissioned research by Stantec was underway to identify specific skills needs;

- l) Aspirations include flexibility in apprenticeship levy use and further government support.

Supported by Councillor Evans OBE (Leader of the Council), in response to questions, the following was discussed:

- m) The rebranding to Team Plymouth reflected broader partnerships across the city and region, and it followed a government preferred model;
- n) Immediate priorities were governance, delivery planning and funding bids;
- o) A written response would be provided about whether military communications were to be improved within Devonport dockyard
ACTION;
- p) More information would be provided with regards to data on the specific job roles that would make up the 25,000 additional workers needed in Plymouth within the next 10 years **ACTION;**
- q) Plymouth had a desire to become a pilot area for the apprenticeship levy and use that as an investment in skills;
- r) Support for displaced workers due to automation and artificial intelligence (AI) was being considered when looking to the future, but more detail was anticipated as part research projects;
- s) A project in Barrow had worked with SEET (Seeking Education, Employment or Training) young people, and the feasibility to duplicating that project in Plymouth was being looked into.

Paul Fanshawe (City College Plymouth), supported by Councillor Cresswell, gave a presentation relating to further education and highlighted:

- t) It was critical to ensure that children, young people and residents had the skills needed now and, in the future, to access future high-level jobs;
- u) Plymouth City College trained over 11,000 students annually, including 3,500 16–18 year olds and 1,600 apprentices;
- v) Plymouth City College delivered education from pre-entry to BSc level, with strong achievement rates above national averages;
- w) £42 million worth of education was delivered by Plymouth City College annually;
- x) Significant investment of over £5 million had been made in facilities for construction, engineering, health, cybersecurity, and business, which had stimulated growth in T-levels;

- y) There had been significant growth in the number of people accessing education through Plymouth City College in recent years and this was expected to continue;
- z) The Blue-Green Skills Hub would open in September 2029 at the Civic Centre, offering 60 new courses with a capacity for 2,000 students annually;
- aa) Plymouth City College aimed to become one of five Defence Technical Excellence Colleges (DTECs), focusing on marine autonomy, cybersecurity, and advanced manufacturing, with more details on funding available expected before the end of December 2025.

In response to questions, the following was discussed:

- bb) Cyber security training for defence was an area of focus for Plymouth City College, and described partnerships with Bits Group and MOD input into curriculum;
- cc) Plymouth City College celebrated diversity and understood its importance in inspiring people, and highlighted the importance of specific programmes, for example encouraging more women into engineering.

Lucinda Sanders (On Course South West) added:

- dd) On Course South West supported over 7,000 learners across various different programmes, across Plymouth;
- ee) On Course South West worked with partners on delivery of education and had diverse funding streams;
- ff) 98% of On Course South West learners would recommend them to friends or family;
- gg) Partnerships were key to make the most of funding opportunities;
- hh) There was a focus in increasing internship, skills boot camp and apprenticeship opportunities;
- ii) It was important to educate people about the new opportunities in the pipeline, but also make the pathways to these careers clear.

In response to questions, the following was discussed:

- jj) It was important to work with parents on how internships could benefit SEND learners and NEET young people;
- kk) The Family learning programme was innovative and could adapt to learner;

- ll) NEET young people numbers were low in Plymouth, compared to other cities.

Councillor Cresswell introduced the section on Connect to Work and highlighted:

- mm) Connect to Work was a £7 million Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) funded programme for five years, focused on inclusive employment;
- nn) It aimed to support 2,000 residents into employment, targeting care leavers, veterans, homeless individuals, and those with complex barriers.

David Wales (Connect to Work Delivery Manager) added:

- oo) The programme would be delivered in-house, based at Cobourg House alongside On Course South West and Skills Launchpad;
- pp) The programme looked to encourage people into work and support people who were economically inactive, or at risk of becoming economically inactive;
- qq) It included two models: Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF) and Individual Placement and Support (IPS);
- rr) It would be important to work across Council teams to connect with relevant residents;
- ss) Plymouth City Council (PCC) would also be working with partners including Livewell Sout West, Plymouth Community Homes, Shekinah, Improving Lives and wellbeing hubs;
- tt) Employment specialists will work with low caseloads (20-25) to provide tailored support;
- uu) An innovative, place-based approach was being taken, working with people with lived experiences in apprenticeships and peer support roles and would have support from University of Plymouth as a critical friend.

In response to questions, supported by David Draffan (Service Director for Economic Development) and Tina Brinkworth (Head of Skills and Post 16), the following was discussed:

- vv) It was key to showcase the opportunities available with Plymouth, in order to retain talent;
- ww) There was guideline was to work with people for 12 months, but there was flexibility and bespoke support for placements;
- xx) This approach provided a personalised action plan for each person;

- yy) Caseworkers would work with health and mental health practitioners as well as employment coordinators to support workplace adjustments;
- zz) The IPS and SEQF had been successful elsewhere;
- aaa) A skills escalator would be created to support people from unemployment into employment, but also to encourage lifelong learning to elevate people throughout their working lives;
- bbb) The foundations for this work had been built over a number of years and a number of tests and trials had taken place with the DWP, so the existing delivery was being scaled up;
- ccc) Data would be provided on how many Councils had chosen to deliver the programme in-house and how many had commissioned, but most had chosen to take a blended approach **ACTION**;
- ddd) PCC was confident in its ability to deliver in-house.

Councillor Cresswell introduced a presentation on inclusive employment and education:

- eee) Nationally, only 7% of young people with EHCPs entered paid employment, but Plymouth had increased this to 25% through supported internships;
- fff) Discovery College achieved 100% employment offers for supported interns for the second year running.

Tina Brinkworth and Isabelle Kolinsky (Service Manager for Inclusion and Welfare) added:

- ggg) Skills Launchpad had supported over 1,900 residents and young people who were economically inactive since 2020;
- hhh) 60,000 people had accessed the Skills Launchpad website for support since 2020;
- iii) Supported internships had grown from 9 in January 2023 to 72 in September 2025, 75% of whom were 18 or younger, and were on course to secure 100 placements in the future;
- jjj) Other local authorities were learning from Plymouth's good practice;
- kkk) NEET figures had dropped from 10% to 4.5%, below regional and national averages;
- lll) Plymouth was leading the way in inclusive employment;
- mmm) Some programmes had received national awards;

- nnn) Educational outcomes were shaped by schools and partners across the city;
- ooo) The data set was unconfirmed data, with the confirmed data expected in Autumn 2025;
- ppp) Key Stage 4 results showed slight declines in Grade 4 attainment, a national trend, but increases in Grade 5+ and Grade 7+;
- qqq) Disadvantaged pupils performed above national benchmarks;
- rrr) Key Stage 5 showed positive progress, and early years and Key Stage 2 outcomes were also improved;
- sss) There was an intervention that a student had a Science Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) intervention at least once a year.

In response to questions, supported by Councillor Evans OBE, the following was discussed:

- ttt) There was ongoing lobbying of the Department of Education (DfE) for support for inclusion, family first programmes and early help;
- uuu) PCC had been innovative in their work on inclusion for SEND (Special Education Needs and Disabilities) children and feedback was being sent back into the DfE to shape future policy;
- vvv) 60% of employment was in STEM sectors, but these types of employment were often hidden, so PCC was bringing partners together to deliver programmes to all ages from through outreach, site visits, workshops, work experience and curriculum integration;
- www) Children might not aspire to be “what they couldn’t see” so it was important to make sure all Plymouth children had equal chance to find out about these future opportunities;
- xxx) STEM ambassadors logged interventions in national database, allowing the PCC team to see which school might not be getting as much engagement, or might not be getting any at all;
- yyy) It was estimated that for every recorded STEM intervention, a further two unrecorded interventions were taking place;
- zzz) One of the biggest challenges was to promote future opportunities to the people of Plymouth;
- aaaa) There were skill shortages in engineering and construction, but research that was being undertaken would provide more detail in this area;

bbbb) Cross-departmental lobbying was taking place with national Government;

cccc) Plymouth was engaging with regional leaders as there were opportunities for them with this exciting development for Plymouth;

dddd) It was the aim of the Council to ensure that every community in Plymouth felt the benefit of this opportunity.

Recommendations:

The Panel agreed to:

- I. Note the report and the continued focus on skills as a key element of the Plymouth Economic Strategy.

14. **Work Programme**

It was mentioned that:

- a) An item on the Plan for Nature and People would come to the next meeting as it was timely.

The Panel agreed to note its work programme.

15. **Action Log**

It was confirmed that:

- a) The Tinside visit had initially been pencilled in for September 2025, but this was likely delayed and a date would be confirmed within the next week.

The Panel agreed to note its work programme.