

**The Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce LSIP: Thames Valley Berkshire**

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce (TVCC) has been designated by the Secretary of State for Education as the Employer Representative Body (ERB) for Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) for the area of Thames Valley Berkshire. It has also been designated as the ERB for Oxfordshire. The areas are defined by Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) boundaries.

Our areas encompass rich and diverse business eco-systems with Reading, ranked as one of the top performing locations (4th) in the UK in PwC’s Good Growth for Cities Report. Elsewhere, Reading has been named number 2 in top 5 UK towns for Start Ups; Lambert Smith Hampton’s (LSH) Vitality Index (2022) revealed Windsor and Maidenhead to be the UK’s best-performing location, closely followed by Reading (4th) as four of the Thames Valley towns and cities featuring in the top ten; Berkshire towns, including Newbury, Maidenhead and Reading, scored highly in an array of categories for the annual fDi Magazine report on Europe’s Top Cities and Regions of the Future for 2022/23.

Berkshire’s sector strengths have been highlighted in Department for international Trade (DIT) sector propositions - including artificial intelligence, cyber-security and datacentres;

We are the home to innovative and resilient businesses, based in the UK’s key high-growth sectors, and are well placed to be a key contributor to the future economic success of the UK economy – see Why Thames Valley. However, there are challenges and risks to growth and productivity as the labour market continues to tighten and acute and chronic skills needs continue.

Now in its sixth year, the TVCC’s Business Manifesto (BM), sets out a dynamic, business-led, strategic work programme with clear and ambitious goals and objectives that speak for many across the region. At the local level our work has impact. The BM is supported by four local policy priority statements across Berkshire which in 2022 placed an emphasis on skills, including ambitions to:

* **Foster stronger business-focused relationships with all levels of education, to build a greater understanding of the world of work and the skills and knowledge required of business for its future workforce**
* **Promote initiatives that encourage business and academic institutions to focus on skills transfer and diversification**

**1.1 TVCC Business Manifesto Priorities and the Role of the LSIPs**

The TVCC’s 2023 BM, as yet unpublished, will set our four main priorities for the Chamber’s work programme:

1. **Secure investment in resilient infrastructure and utility networks**: promote the continued investment in key digital and transportation networks to ensure they remain resilient to the future needs of business.
2. **Expand the depth of our support and services to enable trade and inward investment flows to continue:** provide our members with the relevant, direct, practical support and policy information required to operate efficiently and effectively.
3. **Delivering regional leadership:** support initiatives and promote the contribution our members are making to deliver the region’s future sustainable economic well-being, productivity growth and pathway towards net-zero.
4. **Put employers at the centre of the skills system and build a stronger and more dynamic partnership between employers and further education providers**: through our leadership of two Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs).

The ‘working Thames Valley’ theme within the BM outlines further the TVCC priorities across the important skills agenda for our members, wider business community and the economic growth and potential of the Thames Valley – our workforce remains our greatest asset.

**1.2 LSIP Guidance**

The LSIPs are a process for change as well as a report. In developing the LSIP, the DfE stipulates that Employer Representative Bodies (ERBs) should engage all the relevant local stakeholders including local employers, providers, LEPs and other agencies.

The Skills for Jobs White Paper set out an ambitious employer-led approach aimed at making FE provision more responsive to local skills needs and ultimately local economic needs. As part of this new approach, HMG are introducing LSIPs to give employers a stronger voice in shaping local skills provision working closely with FE providers and engaging effectively with local leaders and other stakeholders.

The aim is to forge a stronger and more dynamic partnership between employers and FE providers that will enable provision to be more responsive to skills needs of employers in local labour markets. LSIPs will do this by providing a clear articulation of future skills need and setting out the priorities for change in local provision that will help people develop the skills they need to get good jobs and increase prospects.

The development of the LSIP in Berkshire will build on the effective collaborative network of stakeholders and engagement with employers that benefits from the strengths of the Chamber as well as the specific LSIP engagement work led by the Chamber since 2021.

**2.0 OUR LSIP AMBITIONS AND APPROACH**

The most important word in the LSIP programme title is ***improvement.*** The Chamber values the strength and current successes of Berkshire’s existing policy and skills strategy infrastructure and provider networks. The LSIPs are an opportunity to add value.

The LSIP in Berkshire will:

* **Engage businesses directly and through their networks to input needs and insights to the shaping, implementing, and updating of the LSIP plans**
	+ To undertake a range of agreed activities, communications, and interventions to engage businesses for discovery, learning and analysis of the needs, obstacles, and solutions for improving skills take up and development.
	+ Through such activity to seek to understand the underlying causes of any lack of skills progression and productivity within the businesses.
	+ To agree gaps in skills needs and provision.
	+ To collaboratively design solutions with providers and businesses
	+ And engage the business community and providers in effective feedback loops throughout the stages of the LSIP project and report publication.

The LSIP programme will utilise the Chamber’s unique position as the ***regional independent voice of business*** and its ability to use the strength of the Chamber network through, for example, Local Chamber Advisory Groups (LCAGs), business-led sector groups, specific consultation responses, events, digital events and inclusive engagement with employers through our partnerships with other agencies and organisations.

As the designated ERB, the Chamber will drive a process that will sense-check what we already know (or think we know) and find out what we do *not* know about skills and the barriers or obstacles for employers to identify improvements, broker collaboration and design solutions.

To do this, we will establish a new ***Thames Valley Skills Unit (TVSU) within the TVCC***. This will be a new resource, charged with the responsibility of impartially leading the LSIPs for both Thames Valley Berkshire and Oxfordshire. We will ensure each area’s distinct needs are met, as well as identify when collaboration across borders can bring greater benefits and economies of scale. Ultimately, the Skills Unit will serve employers and broker strong engagement with business, providers and other stakeholders.

The work of the LSIPs and the new TVSU will be overseen by the Oxfordshire and Thames Valley Berkshire LSIP Advisory Panel. This will be employer-led and include provider, LEPs and other stakeholder representatives. Each LSIP will be overseen and interrogated separately. It is intended to convene one LSIP Advisory Panel to aid identification of congruences and collaboration across sectors as well as respond to the providers across Berkshire and Oxfordshire who are coming together as one Project Meeting, across county borders, to manage the Strategic Development Fund (SDF) work.

The aim is to reach employers, not just communicate- so that employers engage and feel engaged- to create a ***shared understanding of skills challenges and solutions*** across the business and skills provider communities. This also means strong engagement with providers and other stakeholders. This shared understanding will not be simple or easy. It will consist of many conversations, debates and feedback loops. From our work with business-led sector groups, experience informs TVCC that we anticipate assumptions may be challenged, myths will be busted and not everyone will agree all of the time.

Improvements and change will only come about when we come together as ***communities of practice*** and develop strong relationships that can identify practical and real solutions.

**Phase 1**

We intend to drive an ***intensive period of engagement*** over the next few months to June 2023. This first phase of the LSIPs will include secondary research to assimilate and evaluate the excellent work and intelligence that already exists as well as primary research to engage with employers of all sizes, across our sectors. This engagement work will use a variety of methodology (digital and face-to-face) and will approach employers and businesses in a range of innovative ways informed by best-practice research, benefitting from existing Chamber fora as well as partners.

This initial piece of work will culminate in the publication of the Oxfordshire LSIP in June 2023.

**Phase 2**

During the second phase, from June 2023 to March 2025 the new Thames Valley Skills Unit will lead work to ***keep the LSIP relevant and used***, forging relationships and conversations to implement skills solutions that arise from the LSIP.

The work does not finish with the publication of the LSIPs. The Skills Unit will help to accelerate improvements, identifying the practical and financial obstacles and resulting solutions to ensure employers are able and willing to take up skills opportunities from providers.

**3.0 THAMES VALLEY SKILLS UNIT- THE LSIP TEAM**

The LSIP Team will jointly work on both Berkshire and Oxfordshire LSIPs. As such, economies of scale and efficiencies have been planned.

**Phase 1**

The team will be augmented in Phase 1 by consultant support and strategic advice to ensure the project can be put into operation as soon as possible, and that the work can flex to meet the intensive demands of the first few months.

This consultant support will also be directed to coach and develop the new Skills Unit Team as the LSIP work matures in both Oxfordshire and Berkshire.

The directly employed team will be recruited as soon as possible and be in place, fixed-term for the duration of the project until March 2025. These comprise in summary:

* LSIP Project Lead
* LSIP Marketing and Events Officer
* LSIP Officer (focus on provider and partner engagement)
* LSIP Officer (focus on employer engagement)
* LSIP Research Analyst
* LSIP Administrator

In addition, contracted consultants and resource will be used to augment the intensive period of Phase 1. These comprise in summary:

* LSIP Strategic Project Consultant
* LSIP Senior Project Consultant
* LSIP Officer (focus on provider and partner engagement)
* LSIP Officer (focus on employer engagement)

The following organogram does not illustrate line-management relationships. It sets out the roles and responsibilities in relation to the LSIP project only during Phase 1 and Phase 2.

**PHASE 1**

**PHASE 2**

**Roles and Responsibilities**

In summary, the contracted senior consultants (LSIP Strategic Project Consultant and LSIP Senior Project Consultant) will provide strategic advice, support and direction to design and implement the LSIPs. This includes the input of specialist expertise in skills, curriculum and workforce development, and project management, funding and audit compliance. In addition, these roles will provide coaching and mentoring support to the other members of the LSIP Project Team to build capacity and knowledge in the new Thames Valley Skills Unit. These contracted roles will focus on Phase 1 work and provide much reduced support during Phase 2.

The Chamber will recruit an experienced Project Lead and recruit new employees to fulfil the operational aspects of the project including employer, provider and partner engagement. These roles will be part of the new Thames Valley Skills Unit and the postholders will benefit from the coaching, support and strategic leadership of the consultant support.

In addition, during Phase 1, and to provide sufficient capacity and flexibility during this intensive piece of work, further contracted resource will augment the capacity of the Unit. These contracted roles will be discontinued in Phase 2 (except for a small number of continuing days).

**4.0 PROJECT PLAN AND WORKSTREAMS**

**4.1 Deliverables Year 1 (based on published LSIP guidance)**

**Stage A-** **Articulating employers’ skills needs**

Identification, aggregation and prioritisation of the skills and training needs of employers.

Broader perspective on local economic needs and drivers

**Stage B - Translating employer demands into provision**

These should be aligned, where appropriate, with Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) occupational routes and pathways.

Providers to understand how these can be taken forward.

Identifying existing provision of which employers are unaware

*2023 LSIP only – need to use draft priorities to feed into Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) proposals and Accountability Agreements/plans*

**Stage C: Addressing learner demand and employer engagement:**

Developing the demand on the learner side through Careers Education Information Advice & Guidance providers (CEIAG), Job Centre Plus (JCP) and employers’ offers

**LSIP Report**

Part 1: LSIP priorities

Part 2: Taking forward the LSIP priorities

Part 3: Delivering the LSIP Priorities

Annex: Background and Method

**4.2 Sub-Plans**

Following considerations of these deliverables that have been stipulated by the project funder, the DfE, a delivery plan is in place and the following workstreams will be implemented in Phase 1:

* **Governance and Compliance**
* To establish and agree credible and meaningful governance structures through the Advisory Panel that ensure the independent voice of business
* To ensure coherence with existing Chamber governance structures and compliance with the funder’s requirements
* To create and embed strong processes to ensure adherence to audit and funding requirements.
* **Research**
* To establish a baseline position sourced from secondary research of available reports and data
* To test assumptions and establish skills priorities
* To establish robust design principles for the engagement and research that will inform the LSIPs
* To design and test credible and innovative methodologies to engage hard-to-reach businesses in a meaningful dialogue
* **Marketing and Business Engagement**
* To promote the role of the LSIPs across Berkshire and Oxfordshire to stimulate interest in engagement
* To engage a wide range of businesses in a community of practice for the LSIPs
* To design and implement a wide range of activities and events, based on the design principles established in the research workstream, to ensure meaningful feedback and dialogue are gathered from businesses and employers.
* To undertake a range of agreed engagements and interventions working with employers and partners to provide discovery, learning and analysis of the needs, obstacles, and solutions for improving pertinent skills delivery.
* To engage employers in effective feedback loops throughout the stages of the LSIP project and report publication
* **Provider Engagement**
* To design and implement a wide range of activities and events, based on the design principles established in the research workstream, to ensure meaningful feedback and dialogue are gathered from providers
* To undertake a range of agreed engagements and interventions working with skills delivery partners to provide discovery, learning and analysis of the needs, obstacles, and solutions for improving pertinent skills delivery.
* To engage skills delivery partners in effective feedback loops throughout the stages of the LSIP project and report publication.

**The following diagrams illustrate the responsibilities and outputs of the delivery plan, and a logic change model for the LSIP process.**

**RESPONSIBILITIES AND OUTPUTS FOR THE DELIVERY PLAN**

**OVERSIGHT AND QUALITY ASSURANCE:**

**THE LSIP ADVISORY PANEL**- The role of the Advisory Panel will provide strategic oversight and direction to ensure that both the Oxfordshire LSIP and the Berkshire LSIP achieves their objectives as set out by the DfE guidance.

**EXTERNAL AUDIT**

**PLANNED OUTPUTS**

To ensure all plans and funding claims are eligible and related to the LSIP programme and are managed effectively for the benefit of employers and the area

**CONTRACT COMPLIANCE, MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING**

Senior Project Consultant

**DELIVERY PLAN LEADERSHIP, QUALITY ASSURANCE AND MONITORING**

Strategic Project Consultant

**PLANNED OUTPUTS**

**LSIP ADVISORY PANEL ESTABLISHED**

To oversee mobilisation and engagement of a range of relevant employers, providers and other stakeholders to take forward the actions as outlined in section 5 of the guidance and to develop the LSIP report as set out in section 6.

**STAGE A- ARTICULATING EMPLOYERS’ SKILLS NEEDS**

A broad perspective of the labour market

A set of high-level outcomes reflecting the priority skills needs

**STAGE B- TRANSLATING EMPLOYERS’ DEMANDS INTO PROVISION**

Providers to understand how these can be taken forward.

Identifying existing provision of which employers are unaware

*2023 LSIP only – need to use draft priorities to feed into LSIF proposals and Accountability Agreements/plans*

**STAGE C- ADDRESSING LEARNER DEMAND AND EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT**

Developing the demand on the learner side through CEIAG, JCP and employers’ offers

Phase 1 Output (June 2023)- establishing strong platform of relationships

**LSIP REPORT PUBLISHED JUNE 2023**

**SUB-PLAN: GOVERNANCE**

Senior Project Consultant

**SUB-PLAN: RESEARCH**

Senior Project Consultant

**SUB-PLAN: EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT AND MARKETING**

Project Lead

**SUB-PLAN: PROVIDER AND PARTNER ENGAGEMENT**

Project Lead

