

Report to Cabinet



Date of Meeting	25 th February 2021
Portfolio	Leader of the Council
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Public/Private Document	Public

A University for Rochdale

Executive Summary

1.
 - 1.1 There is an aspiration to improve Rochdale's higher education offer in an attempt to address Rochdale's earnings, education and skills gap. This report is to inform Members of the steps which are currently being undertaken with a view to establishing a University Campus or University Centre in Rochdale and to seek approval for the Council to work in partnership with Hopwood Hall College to achieve this

Recommendation

2.
 - 2.1 That members note the actions and discussions which are in progress and to approve the Council's intention to work in partnership with Hopwood Hall College to deliver on the joint aspiration for a university.

Reason for Recommendation

3.
 - 3.1. The proportion of residents living in the Rochdale Borough who are educated to NVQ4 (HND, degree level and above) is currently 25.5%. This is notably lower than the North West region, which is 35.5% and significantly lower than the Great Britain average which is 39.9%.
 - 3.2 Rochdale has the lowest proportion of residents qualified to NVQ4 of all the GM authorities. So whilst the majority of residents have at least basic qualification there is a prevailing lack of aspiration to higher education.
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 - 3.3 Rochdale is suffering from a 'brain drain', around 80% of young people who attend the Rochdale Sixth Form College go on to study at University. These residents who do progress to NVQ4 level education at university do not typically return to the town to live and work.

Additionally, there is a significant number of students who perform very well in Further Education in Rochdale but do not progress to Higher Education out of town, for a variety of cultural reasons.

- 3.4 There is a significant proportion of the Rochdale population who do not succeed academically. A study by the Office of Students found white youngsters on free school meals or from disadvantaged areas, predominantly former industrial towns, like Rochdale, formed 92% of those in the bottom fifth, in terms of the likelihood of going to university.
- 3.5 These low levels of academic attainment are reflected in the weekly earnings and relative lack of affluence in Rochdale. There is a high proportion of workless households and those who are in work, are earning significantly less than their regional and national counterparts. The average weekly earnings in Rochdale is £486.50, significantly lower than both the North West and Great Britain averages of £529.60 and £571.10 respectively. Rochdale has higher numbers of people working in the lower skilled, lower paid sectors typically in retail, manufacturing, social care, schools and transport/storage than either the regional or national average.
- 3.6 It is notable that, with the exception of Tameside – the second lowest performing authority at NVQ4 level, all other GM authorities have either a fully functioning University or a University Centre delivering degrees accredited by other universities. All these boroughs have a higher proportion of residents qualified at NVQ4 with between 27.9% (Oldham and Wigan) to 49.5% (Trafford) of their population having a degree or higher.

Key Points for Consideration

4.
 - 4.1 The Higher Education market in Greater Manchester and the wider North West is very heavily saturated with University centres attached to Further Education colleges and fully functioning universities within both first and second tier, all in close proximity to Rochdale. Rochdale's University must provide something new and unique
 - 4.2 Hopwood Hall College currently has a small offer at Higher Education level offering several Foundation Degrees which provide a Foundation to degree level education which is offered in partnership with the University of Bolton and the University of Salford. In order to boost academic aspiration and success in the borough, there is a shared appetite and an eagerness from both the Council and Hopwood Hall College to build on and extend their current Higher Education offer. Given the market saturation locally it is essential that any offer from Rochdale brings something which is new, fresh and distinct from the established provision in the other boroughs. In doing so Rochdale must

look to capitalise on growth sectors both in Rochdale and in the wider Greater Manchester area

- 4.3 There is a skills gap within the manufacturing sector at local, regional and national level. This was highlighted in the 2019 GM Local Industrial Strategy, which detailed Advanced Materials and Advanced Manufacturing as growth opportunities regionally and introduced an aspiration to establish a Technology Park at Junction 19. There is also growth in the following sectors across GM; Financial & Professional Services (including Business Services), Digital and Creative Industries, and Health Innovation.
- 4.4 There is great scope to focus on advanced manufacturing technology and other elements that form the growth economy in Rochdale. Given the borough's particular expertise in such fields, these areas could also provide a source for expansion into the wider areas highlighted in the 2019 GM Local Industrial Strategy. Partnership with Rochdale's existing industry provides a great opportunity to build upon existing skills which can be exported to anywhere else. Rochdale must create an offer which employers in the region, who are upskilling their staff, will be keen to use
- 4.5 Alongside this, there is a further opportunity to create degree level apprenticeships, educating and upskilling the next generation as a dynamic workforce in these growth industries. There are currently three GM universities (Bolton, Manchester Metropolitan and Salford) who are offering Degree Apprenticeships in specific sectors; offering Healthcare, Construction and Engineering and IT and Digital and Digital Marketing respectively. There is great scope to provide an Advanced Manufacturing offer in Rochdale delivered in conjunction with existing local industry.
- 4.6 There would be a requirement to identify and develop a site and for Hopwood Hall to develop their relationship with an HE provider to develop a wider but still relevant offer. There will be a need to align the funding, site/property and HE offer on a similar timescale, as any bid would need to demonstrate deliverability. The property/site and the offer would need to be identified and established before any bid was submitted. There is an expectation that the prospective funding would need to be spent within the current parliament so there is an impetus to act swiftly.

Alternatives Considered

- 4.7 The Council could abandon this aspiration to address the gap in education, earnings and skills by the establishment of a university and continue with the current situation or attempt to establish other means to address the education and earnings gap.

Costs and Budget Summary

- 5.
- 5.1 The cost of establishing an HE offer in Rochdale would inevitably be substantial and investment would be required from key stakeholders; the Council, Hopwood Hall College, University partners and industry links. There would inevitably be a requirement for funding from the council's capital programme to match fund any bids. This scheme will require significant funding from Government. Funding could potentially be sought from The Levelling Up Fund, the Shared Prosperity Fund and other regional and national funding streams.

Risk and Policy Implications

- 6.
- 6.1 Given the market saturation regionally, existence in the HE sector is both highly competitive and economically brutal. If Rochdale is to establish a successful HE offer it must create something which is unique and ensure it does not simply replicate something at very great cost, which is available to residents elsewhere relatively locally.
- 6.2 There are no specific legal and financial implications associated with this report, the matters detailed are for information only.

Consultation

7. Consultation will take place as the project develops.

Background Papers	Place of Inspection
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8. Note applicable	
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