

Policy Committee

16 September 2026



Reading
Borough Council
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Title	Employment And Skills Plans Delivery Review 2024/26
Purpose of the report	To note the report for information
Report status	Public report
Report author	Emma Gee / Nigel Horton-Baker
Lead Councillor	Cllr Terry, Leader of the Council
Corporate priority	Inclusive Economy
Recommendations	1. That the Committee notes the report and welcomes the delivery of employment and skills outcomes by REDA (Reading's Economy and Destination Agency) over the last 2 years as enabled by Section 106 funded Employment and Skills Plans. 2. The Committee supports the development of further similar programmes of activity delivered by REDA working with Council officers and their extensive partnership network, with Section 106 funds being made available through officer delegated authority.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This information report updates the Committee on the delivery of Skills, Employability and Training programmes managed by REDA (the trading name of Reading UK CIC) in line with the planning policies which promote Employment and Skills Plans, designed to support local growth for both residents and businesses.
- 1.2. The report notes that delivery has been aligned with other important programmes delivered across the Borough – notably UK Shared Prosperity Fund (completed in March 2026) and Social Inclusion and Placed Based ongoing programmes. The next 2 years will also see further engagement with, and contributions from, both developers and the end users of completed developments, which will be used to create employment and skills opportunities to assist local growth and to reach all parts of Reading's community.
- 1.3. Going forward the work of Employment and Skills Plans will be set against the context of the new Reading Economic Framework 2025-35 (see Appendix 1) and the emerging Berkshire Economic Growth Plan, while recognising the focus on the "lost generation" of young people at national level. RBC and REDA are responding to this report and subsequent updates through the Berkshire Prosperity Board.
- 1.4. Case studies of local Reading participants are included at the end of the report.
- 1.5. The programme of interventions, described in detail in Diagram 1 and Table 1 below, have been evaluated and it is felt provides a very good cost-effective record of achievement in supporting local residents who are struggling to find and sustain work, become self-employed or retrain in new skills. Just as important the programme begins to prepare the young people in our schools and colleges for the world of work. A new

plan will be agreed under officer delegated powers to continue to support local residents and young people into training and sustainable employment and self-employment.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1 Reading Borough Council adopted the requirement for Employment and Skills Plans (ESP) under a 2013 Supplementary Planning Document that seeks to implement adopted (2008) Core Strategy Policies CS9: Infrastructure, Services, Resources and Amenities, and CS13: Impact of Employment Development. Policy CC9 'Securing Infrastructure' of the recently adopted Local Plan continues the policy basis for the SPD. The original drafting of the SPD relied on detailed discussion between Reading UK CIC (now t/a REDA) and the Borough Council's Planning Service, with REDA being identified as the main agent for implementing the policy. The aims of the ESP requirement as part of a planning permission have been clearly defined in working with employers to improve the work and training opportunities of local people. ESP financial contributions also support other skills and employment training to benefit the local economy and its skills and employment base, being delivered by REDA.
- 2.2 An ESP requirement is attached to any new development or any regeneration or extension programme where more than 1,000 square metres of new non-residential floor space or 10 dwellings are being created, or it is costing more than £1million.
- 2.3 A developer can choose to either enter into a delivery plan, with advice from REDA and working with local partners, or pay a financial contribution towards the delivery of training and employment programmes, developed by REDA on behalf of the Borough Council. The financial contribution is based on a simple percentage of the anticipated construction costs and floor plans and will typically be confirmed by a S106 legal agreement which is entered into by the developer before planning permission is granted.
- 2.4 The programmes of work described below were accordingly funded from a pipeline of S106 agreements applied to the 2024-2026 programme. There are 32 current Section 106 agreements to support the next delivery phase (2026-28).
- 2.5 The Head of Economic Development (EDM) at REDA advises and assists developers to prepare plans that are deliverable, with clear outcomes and shaped to the needs of the relevant sector. The EDM co-ordinates partners such as schools and training providers to deliver the plans, provides ongoing monitoring of the delivery and outcomes, and feeds back to Reading Borough Council utilising the new joint working Economic Development Framework Task Group
- 2.6 Key delivery partners supporting this work include DWP Job Centre, New Directions, Activate Learning (Reading College), REDA Business Network and local schools such as The Wren and Reading Girls, amongst others working with Education Business Partnership. The ESP programme, alongside other employment and skills initiatives are developed, consulted on and monitored through the joint working arrangement between REDA and officers in the Directorate of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services and reporting to the REDA Board.

3 Review - Current Position

- 3.1 REDA has a strong track record of delivering benefits to the local community through using S106 developer contributions stretching back over a decade. These programmes provide outcomes benefiting local people and the economy (e.g. Job and Career Events) and in some cases supporting community programmes (Community Outreach Programme). Over the last two years REDA has worked with and supported in the region of 16,000 people and small businesses, through both the ESP programmes and other activities funded by UKSPF which are designed to develop routes forward in the jobs market or self-employment. These programmes are providing support to residents

who would not otherwise benefit from these opportunities or are provided by other agencies or organisations in an inclusive way. The recent ESP programmes alone have helped over 13,000.

- 3.2 Partnership working has been pivotal in ensuring our reach into the community and providing real value for money. Partnership with both public and private sector partners continue to be central to delivery of REDA's programmes. Match funding and support in kind from companies and organisations such as Green Park, Abbey Rotary Group, Hilton Reading, Activate Learning and the University of Reading continue to play a major part in shaping delivery.
- 3.3 In September 2024 a drawdown of funds from ring-fenced S106 contributions to a total cost of £245,000 was agreed by Officer Decision Notice. These funds were for REDA to deliver a plan of economic development activity specifically aimed at supporting local residents to benefit from the successful economy in and around Reading and support local businesses. The projects and services undertaken between July 2024 to June 2026, along with the key outputs, outcomes and value for money, follow in the report below.
- 3.4 The importance of this work to ensure local residents benefit from the town's economic prosperity can be demonstrated by the fact that Reading's level of Universal Credit claims is currently *above* the southeast average and has now also risen above the national average (Reading 4.3% / South East 3.1% / UK 3.9%) with 5,455 claimants in June 2026 (against 5,180 claimants in June 2024). Young claimants fare better against the national picture, though the total continues to rise year on year, with 880 claimants aged 18-24 in June 2026 (4.2% of Reading's working population against a national percentage of 5.7%). This is set in a challenging context of restricted entry level recruitment, previously unseen in Reading. There is still a persistent level of "hidden" unemployed, and workless people including people who would like to work if given the opportunity. There are currently 16,900 economically inactive – the last available figures (December 25) showed 2,900 inactive people wanting to work. Long term sickness/incapacity, seen initially as a short-term impact of Covid has now become an embedded issue for the employment market, with serious repercussions on a personal and societal level. Though Berkshire's figure of 14,900 (15.4%) compares well against the national rate of 27.8%.
- 3.5 The rate for Over 50's claiming Universal Credit sits at 4.5% (June 2026) - significantly higher than the southeast rate of 2.5% and the UK rate of 2.9% - although the figure has held steady for the last few years. Universal Credit is a key in-work benefit, and many working people are still reliant on additional financial support to make ends meet or are suffering from the longer-term impacts of the cost of living crisis.
- 3.6 **The Skills and Employment Programme 2024 – 2026:** In response to the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis, REDA's programmes have been delivered within the framework of the Borough's Social Inclusion Board strategy and its Place Based programme work. This identifies the indices of deprivation that adversely affect opportunity across Reading including parts of Whitley and Norcot amongst others. Both strategies aim to drive community participation and equality of opportunity across all parts of the Borough, providing support to access training and employment and ensure our economy is able to adapt to changing demands for both existing and new skills sets. A sectoral based approach delivered within local neighbourhoods will enable more people to find good quality work, develop the skills demanded by employers and continue to support those with multiple barriers to employment. In addition, taking delivery to the heart of communities would potentially utilise neighbourhood community space.
- 3.7 REDA's private/public sector Board, and two Business Improvement District Committees representing 750 businesses in the town centre inform this programme and have identified the following priority areas for support: Job Fests, Self-Employment Training, Growing Sectoral Skills, Young People and Work, Outreach Programmes in the Community and Support for people with Additional Barriers to Work.

- 3.8 ESP delivery between 2024 - 2026 outlined in detail in Summary Diagram 1 and Table 1 below has responded to known demand with a particular aim to upskill and retrain residents, helping them access better paid, better-quality work with an eye on emerging skills including the “green” economy and the rapidly developing creative screen sector.
- 3.9 The programme has begun to embed outreach activity through the community and voluntary sectors to ensure it is more accessible and targeted, delivering in user-friendly spaces such as libraries and community centres.
- 3.10 Specific groups targeted through 2025/26 included Reading’s priority secondary schools, the over 50s, women and people from minority ethnic communities. Work has therefore included closer working with New Directions, statutory agencies and voluntary organisations dedicated to supporting specific communities through adult employment support, sector skills training, as well as government led programmes such as Multiply and UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Diagram 1: Summary of Outputs from ESP funded Programme Delivery July 2024 – June 2026:

Key Outputs of 2024-26 Programmes



Table 1: Report on the Outputs and Outcomes of the Programme of ESP Activity 2024-2026

Theme 1: Working with the local community to provide useful 1:1 advice and guidance on self-employment, jobs and training			
This a pilot to identify how we can provide cost effective outreach advice and guidance in communities exhibiting higher levels of unemployment and low benefit take up, working with local community centres and coordinating with other charity and voluntary organisations. This programme has provided 1:1 session with over 250 residents seeking to be self-employed and/or looking for a job and training. For most it is a last resort. It has provided opportunities for local people to move on to our startup business courses and receive a grant and/or be signposted to New Directions and other agencies for further job support. The work has given us an evidence base to consolidate our work going forward in South Reading and to develop a job club and more integrated local support on a regular basis based in a local community centre. As the service develops and becomes more embedded locally, we will be able to gain more permission to track how residents progress as a result.			
Project Title	Programme Content	Total Outputs (courses / events) and benefits to local people	Notable Outcomes
Outreach jobs programme in the community Cost: £59,534 (Unit cost £184/hr/resident)	Self-Employment Support and Skills in the Community. Outreach programme to find “hidden” unemployed – including sign posting, advice and potential small business support, linked to building on the UKSPF small business development project. successfully run with the ‘Launch Reading’. Delivered in Whitley Community Hub; Tilehurst, Caversham and Battle Libraries, Broad St Mall, Weller Centre and specific sessions for migrant communities.	Phase 4 April 2024- March 25 122 resident engagements in numerous settings across Reading Phase 5 Oct 2025 – March 2026 new programme of regular clinics in south Reading working closely with Whitley CDA and RBC South Reading project. The project met its target with over 200 conversations (132 individuals) aimed at encouraging and supporting residents into work and/or self-employment. Requests for help in finding a job were numerous and signposting was given to New Directions and DWP. The Law Centre and CAB are regular attenders at clinics in south Reading.	The programme has become well established within the WCDA café, engaging with good numbers of local residents. Residents are now requesting a meeting and asking for our advisor by name. It is proposed to continue the regular outreach sessions in this location to build on existing relationships and help establish word of mouth. One to one voluntary engagement sessions have been assessed as very successful by the WCDA and has allowed us to gauge demand and shape delivery of this ongoing service and closer involvement of all advice, guidance and training partners. With increased support of WCDA, and having established more trust in the community there, we will now pilot low key methods of tracking those who participate. Work is now ongoing to make available a pilot job club, helping with job search, job applications, interview preparation and online learning. Launch Reading, the REDA supported self-employment programme, attend many WCDA outreach sessions so that all residents interested in starting up a business can be assessed for the training, mentoring and grant programme which was UK SPF funded. This work will also support the community led Whitley Carnival in 2027
Theme 2: Ensuring everyone has access to jobs, training and careers.			
Complimenting Theme 1 these recruitment activities provide a one-to-many opportunity for those furthest from the labour market, not confident about approaching statutory services or who have been unable to gain access directly to employers with job opportunities. The Job Fests provide extensive reach, have a strong reputation gained over many years, with repeat attendance by employers and more wanting to attend (200 stands in total over 2024-26). Activities reached over 3400 residents, the majority through The Town Hall with its accessible town centre location, but additionally through local events in Whitley using the Councils community buildings. The overall budget under this theme was £31,000 - representing an investment of £8 per resident. We plan to maintain Jobs Fairs in the town centre, available to all our residents, and local events in south Reading, while maintaining work in the schools.			

Project Title	Programme Content	Total Outputs (courses / events) and benefits to local people	Notable Outcomes
Job Fests Cost £16,642 Unit cost £5 per resident	Four focused jobs and skills events: Sept 2024, June & Sept 2025, March 2026 Working with DWP and other key partners to deliver the area's biggest job events for employers, job seekers and those wanting access to training and guidance	Four Job Fests successfully delivered over period. 180 employers engaged + 20 training providers Approx 3,300 local people attended.	An exit survey is now organised for every Job Fest. Over the past two Jobs Fests we achieved on average a 6% response rate (114 individuals in total). This was governed by willingness to participate, our staff resources and logistics of the venue, something we are addressing. Results showed that among under 35's IT was the most sought-after job or career. While the over 35's were more likely to be looking for admin, social care, support and cleaning roles. Construction at both events was also popular with all age groups and REDA is now planning to provide CSCS card certification opportunities. This is the entry requirement for gaining entry to work on a construction site. Tracking actual outcomes remains difficult. Around 70% of Job Fair attendees are DWP clients, however DWP cannot share data on their customers, even as a result of the event. However, the event remains the lead job fair in the town with job seekers able to interact with up to 40 employers (all with real time jobs) and a series of career and training specialists. Employers are always keen to book for future events and others join the waiting list. We are aware that most employers are offering interview and meeting opportunities to 10-20 people on the day, though on follow-up are unable to provide information on take-up or successful employment.
Jobs and training Pilot Event - Whitley Wood Community Centre Cost £4,902 Unit cost £70 per resident	Up to 4 small, targeted events set in the south Reading area, working with 3-4 local employers, and partnered by New Directions (advice and guidance) and Ideas Fishing (startup guidance)	Two community events delivered in Whitley Wood (Oct 24 and Feb 26) 15 local employers and providers 70 attendees Advice and support were given to: - young job seekers, at least 2 people with barriers to employment - a group of skilled residents about to be made redundant.	See attached Case Study At the February 2026 event we undertook exit interviews with 20 of the 35 attendees. The most sought-after jobs were in catering, admin, construction, and marketing roles - which will be a focus for future events. REDA was able to contact the company making the redundancies and ensure they had links with DWP for redundancy support. REDA are now supporting RBC, South Reading outreach team and local partners to deliver the community job events directly in partnership with RBC's recruitment team and New Directions
Future Skills Careers Event 2025 Cost £9,500 Unit cost £24 per student	Organised with Education Business Partnership and key partners within RBC – promoting a broad range of STEAM based career options. Delivered in collaboration with Museum of Reading "Reading's Digital Revolution" exhibition	Destinations Expo delivered in Nov 2025 390 Yr 11 students from 7 schools attended. 25 science and technology related employers exhibited.	While attendance was strong, many students had hoped for a broader range of employers to attend. Survey results were mixed. Teachers scored the event 9.5/10, but students were less positive, which suggests that students were not filtered to attend based on their interest in science and technology-based careers. The event will remain a one-off linked to the Digital Revolution exhibition, though other wider ranging jobs and careers events will continue.

Theme 3: Training and supporting residents in to work.

Green skills in the form of ground works is a key skill supporting the Council environmental services and many large establishments such as hospitals, the university and many small businesses. This programme was hands-on, practical, suited to many jobseekers who want outdoor or physical work. The training was fully supported by the Council Parks team and provided a range of additional soft skills including pathways into employment and further training which some took advantage of. The courses provided an investment of £2,200 per participant (21 residents).

Project Title	Programme Content	Total Outputs (courses / events) and benefits to local people	Notable Outcomes
Growing Sectoral Skills: GREEN skills Cost: £46,842 Unit cost: £2,230 per resident	Programme with Groundworks – delivering landscaping, arboriculture, water conservancy and other blue/green skills working with people with barriers to employment and supported by RBC Parks Department.	Three 6-week courses completed with Groundworks, Jan–July 2025 44 referrals - 21 participants 16 achieved a certificate in ground maintenance. Skills covered included: • Health and Safety onsite • Risk Assessments • How to use hand tools safely in open spaces • How to use petrol tools • How to maintain tools Soft skills included • Behaviours in workplace • Strengths/ weaknesses • CV's • Effective job searching • Interview techniques • Social media • Employer visit	50% moved into employment and further education. All are still in employment or finished the courses in May 2026, Others decided not to pursue ground maintenance or are still applying. See case study. Having reviewed the course, it is felt to be well-run and comprehensive, managed well in partnership with RBC Ground Maintenance team, giving them access to future recruits already job ready and trained. – 9 participants moved in to work and or training e (7 directly related to the course) However, it is a very high unit cost activity provided by Groundwork, with high dropout rate and low attainment level. It is not planned to repeat the programme, but other ways of delivering the course at lower cost are being explored.
Screen Skills and Supply Chain Cost £0	This planned programme was subsequently funded via a much larger package of funding through the Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) allowing the funding to be used for additional activity in Theme1 and 4 - building on REDA's previous engagement with the film sector locally and procurement events for trades - supporting the supply chain to the screen sector. (Both previously funded through ESP funded projects, which it is proposed will be	The associated activity that was funded by (UKSPF) expanded what was proposed, building on REDA's previous engagement with the film sector locally and aimed allowed us to undertake: -3 more focused supply chain events - pilot a programme of financial grant support for local film makers in Reading - support a local film festival - to highlight opportunities of the film sector to young people and adults -	----- The associated programme of work undertaken benefited our existing work, including: - Engaging 160 film sector business and connecting them directly with Screen Berkshire and Shadowbox Shinfield Studios, so they are listed for future work - Highlighting 3 key challenges to the film sector, creating a trilogy of films of the events, as a basis for ongoing development work addressing AI in film, Sustainability in Film and Financing Film - supporting the development of a Reading film festival – Through a Different Lense which aims to showcase local independent short films and highlight the work of underrepresented filmmakers attracting support of the University, over 100 attendees through out the day and 10 showcased entries. - a local resident-made short film, used as a pilot for local film maker grants.' Just a Mum' has been completed and now being promoted at a range of film festivals across the country. - A Screen Skills career fair for students and residents providing more information and contacts in this sector for local people in addition to the broader careers and jobs event REDA organises - A resident's filmmaking and performance training course in south Reading now being developed in a broader programme by the Council led Whitley Heritage Partnership

			All of which has elevated REDA to a position on the Board of Screen Berkshire now co-ordinating and delivering a new £1m fund across Berkshire to support the development of skills and inclusive job opportunities and careers for residents across Berkshire. The work has also provided evidence for continuation of activity to enable local people to benefit from the film sector that has been ignited by Shinfield Studios.
Developer Construction Employment and Skills Plans (ESP's) Led by Developers under management of REDA Cost: £15,000 Unit cost per ESP: £1,364	Working with developers through the planning process (£106 and Conditions) to develop site specific employment and skills plans for primarily construction but some end-use outcomes for residents. Delivery includes apprenticeships, work experience, education outreach, employment and training	452 Construction Jobs paid by developer. 25 Apprenticeships paid by developer and govern funded training Total of 11 ESPs signed in the period. Work on five new plans proposed during the period. Plus, four end-use plans developing with Station Hill occupiers.	The programme continues to support the delivery of skills outcomes for local people – £106 funds provide first level of support for people trying to get into work including IAG, and sign posting to intensive help from New Directions, DWP, Connect to Work and reaching out into the community. Outcomes from construction sites are limited to the build period, but we understand that the training received does prepare the students for the next job and encourage the developers to assist with referrals and references.
An exemplar ESP was conducted with Lincoln Property at the £81m Station Hill Phase 2 development. REDA supported construction firm Sir Robert McAlpine over 3 years. During this time SRM successfully worked with local and regional providers including CITB, Reading College/Activate Learning, Central Berks Education Business Partnership, Jelly, University of Reading, several local schools and DWP Job Centre. Outcomes (2022-25) included: 30 apprentices on site (including electrical and technical, levels 2-5) 26 local people at DWP events providing information on jobs and training in construction 290 students visited the site (against a target of 122) including attending masterclasses in bricklaying and drylining working directly with contractors on site. 53 students attended a CSCS workshop supported by CITB and Activate, 148 gained work experiences. SRM successfully delivered Women in Construction and Open Doors events as part of national campaigns. Upskilling training on site achieved remarkable levels of involvement – 2,878. While SRM recorded a figure of just 27% local labour this was still a significant number (802 people) on site and was probably much higher as agency staff did not provide postcodes. Following the successful ESP delivery Station Hill continues to undertake regular Student Events, College visits and training opportunities. Further jobs and training opportunities will now be available through the granting of planning permission for phase 3 of the Station Hill development.			
Project Title	Programme Content	Total Outputs (courses / events) and benefits to local people	Notable Outcomes
Support for people with additional barriers to work Start Up Costs: £7,500	Initial development planning for employer led interventions to support local people with barriers to work, who want to work, to take first steps into the workplace. REDA will work with all supported	REDA staff are members of the Berkshire Prosperity Board Employment and Skills Group responsible for the Ways into Work and Get Britain Working programme. Staff time has been invested in supporting the	Now the contracts are up and running support will be given to Palladium. REDA have established a good working relationship with Palladium and New Directions to support engagement of employers, supporting the programme when recruiting. REDA is currently approaching all its Board Members to support the scheme. Five have currently agreed to use the scheme in recruitment.

	employment providers and agencies to widen employer engagement. Client groups will include young people with special needs, those with underlying health conditions or disability. Working with DWP JobCentre Plus.	contracting of the CTW programme to Palladium which was delayed until Jan 2026 start. Links to potential individual beneficiaries and participating employers is being undertaken through a direct marketing campaign.	Palladium will attend the next two Jobs Festivals in September and March 2027 hosting a stand or recruit new participants that meet the criteria and networking with employers also exhibiting in order to recruit them to the scheme.
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Theme 4: Preparing Reading's Young People for Work

This has been a recurring programme over several years, providing consistently strong outputs. REDA has worked with local provider Education Business Partnership with the aim of preparing young people for the world of work, including events to give students a taste of the work environment. In addition, we provide access to work sites that they wouldn't otherwise get a chance to visit and soft skills training such as managing budgets and interview skills. Pupils have also had the chance to look at sectors such as media, AI and Low Carbon. It represents an investment of £85,000 in 57 events (£1,500 per event) and equates to £12,000 in each of 7 Reading schools.

Project Title	Programme Content	Total Outputs (courses / events)	Notable Outcomes
Young people and work Cost: £85,080 Unit costs: £12,154 per school £9.39 per student engagement	Programme of skills and employment interventions delivered with Education Business Partnership in 2025 and 2026. Tailored to support UKSP funded projects. NB: 2026 delivery was funded by reallocated Screen Skills funds – see below. Working with Years 10 & 11 in schools identified as in most need of employment support, access to work advice and life skills. Events around the Borough.	57 Careers Events 7 Secondary Schools 9,063 Students engaged This was an extended programme of activity on schools made possible through links to other sources of funding: Skills developed included: - self-awareness assessment - interview technique - choosing a career with company visits to learn about film jobs and green (low carbon) jobs. - meeting with employers -Guess My Job - what it's like to be self employed - Learning about AI - financial skills for life	All EBP delivery is evaluated by students, teachers and business volunteers. See case study showing excellent outcomes. A full evaluation report is provided by EBP and headlines include: 90% satisfaction- students would participate again. 92% of teachers were 80%+ satisfied with the content organisation and relevance to students. All employers agreed to be involved again. As a result of feedback, the next programme has been adapted to be more focused on employability skills and work readiness. We also monitor student performance by schools to ensure we are targeting the students that need the most help. REDA is now working with the Dir of Education to engage Headteachers in better tracking outcomes from school in employment and training, as a result of the EBP programmes.
Total Expenditure: £245,000			

- 3.11 Work in schools has been undertaken by the Education Business Partnership which has delivered great outcomes through previous ESP programmes. Working with employers in sectors where skills shortages or emerging skills are to the fore gives our pupils the opportunity of challenging work experiences and helps cultivate an ethos among employers for growing local talent. Support is typically for years 10 - 12 and in schools identified as most in need of pupil support. These have included Hartland High School (formerly JMA), Reading Girls, Maiden Erlegh Reading and Blessed Hugh Faringdon.
- 3.12 Support for self-employment is a route that works well for many local residents. This current programme has seen strong (and highly cost effective) results from "Launch Reading" – providing training, workshops and mentoring programmes with Abbey

Rotary Club. REDA has been able to empower these local start-ups with small business grants, made available through UK SPF funding.

- 3.13 Community Outreach sessions have run throughout 2025 and 2026, where appropriate providing advice on self-employment, signposting to employability training, upskilling, careers advice and financial advice from partner organisations. In particular the emerging opportunities for trades people and the self-employed to gain contracts with Film companies utilising Shadow Box, Shinfield Studios. Ongoing outreach work at Whitley Community Café has now become well bedded within the community.

4 Contribution to Strategic Aims

- 4.1 The outcomes of the Employment, Skills and Training SPD contribute to achieving the Council's Plan, 2025/28. In particular: its vision "to help Reading realise its potential and to ensure that everyone who lives and works here can share the benefits of its success" and its priorities:

- Promote more equal communities in Reading.
- Secure Reading's economic and cultural success

and to do this by:

- Putting Residents First
- Involving, Collaborating and Empowering Residents
- Being Proudly Ambitious for Reading

- 4.2 REDA supports this through its Mission to: "Boost Business and enhance the visitor experience in a way that improves the quality of life for all in the Reading region".
- 4.3 The work outlined in this report is now brought together to deliver the Council's objectives through the new REDA and RBC joint officer task group to deliver the new Reading Economic Development Framework. Key officers also part of the Social Inclusion Board and the Town Centre Working Group as well as the relevant Berkshire Prosperity Board work streams.

5 Environmental and Climate Implications

- 5.1 The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers). A new Reading Climate Emergency Strategy for 2025-30, produced by the Reading Climate Change Partnership with the Council's support has been approved.
- 5.2 REDA's Employment and Skills Plans align with the aims of the Climate Emergency Strategy particularly in their adoption of Green Skills as part of the emerging Future Skills agenda. Associated work to this ESP programme highlighted the key issue of sustainability in film, a key growing sector locally and provided a basis for further work. The delivery of a 'green' town centre and Business Improvement District from which the ESP programme will leverage further funding has been assisted by report commissioned by REDA looking at 'How Green is Reading Town Centre', with recommended actions including sustainability training for employees in town centre businesses. This further develops our understanding from the 2023 REDA report 'Towards a Green Jobs and Skills Roadmap for Reading 2023' which showed the likelihood of 5,600 Low Carbon and Renewable Energy Jobs in Reading by 2050. Key interventions could see this rise to 20,000 within the same period, including the opportunity to upskill the Council's Housing Services repairs and maintenance teams to undertake this work on its own housing stock as well as compete in the Reading market among private ownership households.

6. Community Engagement

- 6.1 Work in schools has been developed over several years and we have feedbacked each year from students, teachers and employers involved on the programme so we can improve delivery and ascertain demand to continue the programme.
- 6.2 Work over the last two years period was focused on new ways of work and was highly interactive and participatory in its nature. This included talking with individuals in community settings (including Battle, Caversham and Tilehurst Libraries, Whitley Community Hub, Weller Centre and Broad St Mall) providing advice and identifying needs that can be fed back to stakeholder and partner activities as well as our own. The friendly knowledgeable drop-in informal style of providing this programme has led to people getting immediate help with:
- thinking about being self-employed and knowing about a route to join a local advice and mentoring programme with the possibility of a startup grant;
 - answering questions that the people have not asked anyone else;
 - knowing the pros and cons of spending money in starting up a business;
 - thinking positively about the journey back to work after having had breaks eg for family or health reasons.
- 6.3 The programme has engaged with a wide cross section of Reading's communities. Ages ranged from early 20s to 50s with an approximate 60/40 split between female and male. The majority were white British, however, a significant number were of southeast Asian heritage and some of African and Caribbean heritage. There was also representation from East Europe, Hong Kong and South America.
- 6.4 This local engagement with over 200 resident conversations undertaken, together with collaboration with local community development staff, other key agencies and staff at the Whitley CDA and Café, has informed our approach and development of the programme going forward.

7 Equality Implications

- 7.1 Employment and Skills Plans provide the opportunity for targeted programmes reaching some of our harder to reach residents and those in priority settings, including priority schools, residents in south Reading and those facing barriers to employment. We will work with RBC and other key partners especially DWP, to ensure we reach out and engage with those facing most difficulties in accessing work.

8 Other Relevant Considerations

None

9 Legal Implications

- 9.1 Employment and Skills Plans are secured through the Section 106 process, which is now governed by the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 (as amended). The tests for Section 106 agreements are whether they are necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms, related to the development, and fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind.

Employment and skills plans are not part of the Community Infrastructure Levy regime and will continue to be sought on major sites, where they meet the above tests.

10 Financial Implications

- 10.1 The majority of ESPs referred to in this report are secured through Section 106 agreements and are either carried out by the developer in conjunction with REDA, or by sourcing third party funds, or funded by the developer directly.

Director of Finance Comments:

- 10.3 **VALUE FOR MONEY:** The SPD requires developers to prepare or fund ESP's that have a positive effect on employment, skills and training. This has a direct implication for economic development in the Borough, especially at this time of cost of living and austerity pressures. The needs and challenges of local people and businesses are addressed within the plan's responses to key sector skills shortages, and the idea of "future proofing" skills demand and upskilling and retraining local people to increase job opportunity, employment resilience and the dependence on financial support.
- 10.4 The Developer ESP's plans and programme of activity will be delivered and managed by the Council's Economic Development Partnership Company, REDA. This is costed in the proposals and at no cost to the council. The total costs of each activity and unit cost and investment in participating residents are identified in the report in Table 1. The delivery of many programmes is supported by private sector and third sector partners, all of which provides excellent value for money and opportunities to attract further external funding to expand the programme for example from government sources such as UKSPF.

RISK ASSESSMENT: There are no direct financial risks associated with this report.

11. Background Papers

- 11.1 There are none.

Appendices

- 1 Reading Economic Development Framework Priorities 2025-2035**
- 2 Case Studies related to delivery of programme in 2024-26.**

Appendix 1.

IMPLEMENTING THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

Priority Interventions and Actions

	2026 - 2027	2028 - 2030
GOVERNANCE	• Establishment of Strategic Project Board. • Agreement of project and monitoring protocols.	
INTERVENTION NO 1: A Levelled Up Skilled Workforce for Reading	• Sector focused workforce development plan. • Green economy skills plan. • Career destination planning partnership. • Formation of a business skills board & network. • Survey of the training needs of businesses. • 3-year skills and productivity action plan and pilots.	• Business cases for securing funds. • Implementation of main programme.
INTERVENTION NO 2: Coherent Mobilisation of the South Reading Voluntary and Community Sector	• Mapping of all local groups and providers. • Capacity building support programme. • Formal coordination and referral framework. • Targeted outreach campaigns to inform residents about available support services.	• Rolling evaluation, impact assessment and continuous improvement.
INTERVENTION NO 3: Boosted Investment in Reading's Key Sectors	• Bespoke marketing propositions. • Engagement with all potential referral agents. • Promotion of Reading place brand. • Set up of enquiry handling for DBT referrals.	• Collaboration with Berkshire, wide inward investment promotion.
INTERVENTION NO 4: Enhancing Reading as an Advanced Technology Economy	• Analysis of emerging growth industries, supply chains, workspace and support requirements. • AI zone of excellence development plan. • Business cases for securing funds. • Launch of high growth business support.	• Incubation and flexible workspace funding and development programme implementation.
INTERVENTION NO 5: Town centre Place Making Blueprint	• Town centre animation project plan. • Measures to safeguard office space from permitted development. • Policy and mechanisms for the recycling and renewal of outdated commercial buildings.	• Master planning to incorporate family size homes in or adjacent to Central Reading.
INTERVENTION NO 6: Animation of Town centre and South Reading	• Project plans for the animation of the town centre, and South Reading. • Plan and proposals for community cohesion initiatives conducive to enhanced interaction. • Define sources of business advice and support for community infrastructure providers. • Set up small grant regime. • Proposals for public realm improvements.	• Launch support and resources for local groups. • Proposals for rapid bus links from South Reading to employment hubs.
INTERVENTION NO.7: Accelerated Transport Infrastructure Funding	• Overarching case and updated project proposals for park-and-ride enhancements, rapid public transport solutions linking the town centre and peripheral business and residential areas.	• Public-private sector collaborative approaches to building the case for funding.
INTERVENTION NO.8: Integrated Devolution Plans and Proposals	• Overarching devolved framework and costed proposals.	• Design and implementation of funded projects.

Appendix 2. Case Studies

1. Community Business Outreach clinics (Theme 1)

The friendly knowledgeable drop-in informal style of providing this programme directly in various community locations across Reading has led to people getting immediate help with:

- thinking about being self-employed and knowing about a route to join a local advice and mentoring programme with the possibility of a startup grant
- answering questions that the people have not asked anyone else.
- knowing the pros and cons of spending money in starting up a business
- thinking positively about the journey back to work after having had breaks eg for family or health reasons.

Examples of key outcomes

- In Caversham Library we met with a man in his mid-30's. He had been running a gardening business for several years but was struggling. The session helped him think through his marketing clearly. He left a 30-minute conversation with a simple visual business plan diagram (he said he was dyslexic) of steps forward that were realistic and gave him a sense of direction. His feedback was that the session had been beyond his expectations. Practical, visual and confidence building. The session will help him get more business and be more sustainable in his self-employment.
- In Whitley CDA a man in his 40's came forward looking at the REDA pull up banner. The conversation with him was about the fact that he was out of work, keen to work but struggled with online applications and his own confidence in what to say (he said he could not read or write well, and neither could his wife). The conversation looked at other ways he could know about and apply for jobs. It also was about his confidence in customer skills and knowing how to show this confidence. He had got a job within two weeks of this conversation.
- In Southcote Library a woman in her 40's talked through her low confidence about returning to work after a career break. She also talked about her son who has ADHD and a Master's degree. Our conversation was around using Linked in (for her level of experience and for her son), how to build a profile and how to help her son have confidence that the Linked in platform is a safe place. Her feedback was that it had helped her know more about Linked in, know how to talk with her son about it and helped her realise she could use it to get ready to start looking for jobs. The session will have helped her know good actions to take to get her back to work and will help her son find the right job for him and see his ADHD as a positive characteristic.
- In Caversham Library a conversation developed with a Polish heritage solicitor who had residency in the UK. She was returning to work for when her children were in primary school. The conversation helped her navigate finding out how to turn her Polish qualifications into UK based work. The signposting and confidence boost about her language skills was a delight to her. The session will have helped her get to a job to really use her skills and aim higher than she might have thought.

2. Whitley Wood Community Centre Jobs and Skills Pilot Event (Theme 2)

Background and Purpose

Reading's Economy and Destination Agency (REDA) organised a pilot Jobs and Skills event at Whitley Wood Community Centre as part of its ongoing community outreach and commitment to the Whitley Place Based Pilot. The event aimed to:

- Reach residents unable or unwilling to travel to central venues.
- Identify and support unemployed people who may not be engaging with traditional services.
- Connect residents with employers and training providers.
- Provide advice and guidance in an informal, welcoming environment.

Event Planning and Delivery

The event took place on **17 November** in the community centre's small hall. While securing employer participation proved challenging despite two months' notice, the final exhibitor mix included:

- **Three employers:** Collards Environmental, Reading Borough Council Trade Services, and IHG Hotels (Holiday Inn South).
- **Two support providers:** New Directions and Idea Fishing Associates.

- **Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)** representatives offering employment, welfare and childcare advice.

Promotion was carried out through REDA networks and local South Reading Programme ambassadors.

Attendance and Outcomes

Approximately **30–40 local residents** attended and engaged with exhibitors throughout the two-hour event.

Attendees included:

- Young people seeking career changes from retail and hospitality roles.
- Individuals needing CV and job application support.
- Three skilled workers facing redundancy, who received advice and have since been offered additional support by DWP.

Exhibitors reported productive conversations, shared contacts with attendees, and established networking opportunities among themselves, leading to planned follow-up meetings.

Key Observations

- Six exhibitors were an appropriate number for the venue size.
- The small, informal setting encouraged personal engagement and effective signposting.
- Skills advisers and DWP staff added significant value by helping attendees understand training, childcare, benefits and employment options.
- Employers provided meaningful discussions about career opportunities and recruitment pathways.
- Most attendees were younger, lower-skilled residents from diverse backgrounds, with attendance driven largely by local word-of-mouth promotion.

Lessons Learned

- More prominent signage, particularly from nearby roads, would improve visibility.
- Employers require significantly longer lead times; future events should ideally be planned at least six months in advance.
- Maintaining an informal community-focused atmosphere should remain a priority, even if additional support from organisations such as DWP is utilised.

Overall Assessment

The pilot was successful in attracting residents, facilitating meaningful employer engagement, and providing accessible employment and skills support within the community. The event demonstrated demand for localised, informal jobs and skills provision and provided valuable insights for planning future community-based employment events.

3. Groundworks (Theme 3)

During 2025 the employment charity *Groundwork South* was contracted by REDA to provide training in Green Skills to long- and short-term unemployed residents in Reading. The programme was developed in partnership with Reading's own Parks Team with 3 separate cohorts of 6 weeks being supported over an 8-month period.

Referral partners from the Voluntary Sector and DWP JobCentre identified people that had an interest in working within the conservation and horticulture sector, but overall, the majority of trainees had no outdoor working experience. Once the trainees had been interviewed and confirmed Groundwork South and Reading's Park Supervisor identified sites that required tasks such as lopping, clearance and tree removal.

In numbers:

- 44 referrals
- 21 offered placements with 16 completing the full course.
- 13 of the trainees were over 40.
- 96% said the course had improved their mental health.
- 5 found work immediately after, 2 became self-employed, 1 has gone into horticultural training.

Over the 6-week 2 days onsite training, they all had the opportunity to learn the following:

- Health and Safety onsite
- Risk Assessments
- How to use hand tools safely in open green spaces
- How to use petrol driven tools
- How to maintain tools

Alongside practical sessions trainees completed employability workshops.

These sessions looked at:

- Behaviours in the workplace
- Strengths and weaknesses
- CV's
- Effective job searching
- Interview techniques
- Social media
- Networking
- Employer visit

Feedback:

Vincent was part of cohort one –

he has ADHD and Autism and mild learning difficulties. His mother contacted Groundworks to ask if he could join the training, he was interviewed as everyone else and after liaising with Vincent's mum, with appropriate risk assessments, Vincent was given the opportunity that he may not get with another organisation.

Feedback from **Vincent's mum** was positive -

'Thanks so much for the opportunity you have given Vincent. He absolutely loved the 6 weeks. He's gained useful skills, and I can see that he is more mature, independent and confident following his involvement with Groundworks'.

Rob was also in cohort one-

He was a key member of the team and supported Vincent throughout the 6 weeks. Rob said he has ADHD however he hasn't been professionally diagnosed. Rob was struggling with motivation, he was struggling with his mental health and wellbeing, after he spoke to his work coach he was put on the 6 weeks course. His work coach saw a huge improvement with Rob and said, 'this was the best thing he had done'. Rob also said – 'The amount I have learnt and the pointers I have received has really boosted my confidence, not to mention the reminder that getting out and about in the world of work will always reap benefits! I have started to go running again too, I haven't been running in years and having a routine again has helped me focus on my mental health and wellbeing'.

Rob has now become self-employed and is waiting for his certificate to take on landscaping jobs locally.

Working closely with the **Reading Council parks team**, the programme had excellent feedback from Liam Haines and Pedro Borralho:

'Thank you for your hard work and the volunteers help in keeping our parks tidy. Do keep up the great work!'

'Thank you for the update. The area looks fantastic from what I have seen so far. A credit to you, Jess, the volunteers, and everyone else involved.'

4. Education Business Partnership Schools Programme (Theme 4)

Education Business Partnership (EBP) delivered a full programme of **careers, employability and enterprise workshops** to Reading secondary schools between **April 2024 – July 2026**.

REDA's longstanding commitment to work with Education Business Partnership aims to address **local workforce shortages** by inspiring young people to explore career pathways. During the funding period students met **local, national and international employers**. All activities were very **inclusive**, supporting students of all backgrounds and covered both employment and soft skills giving students (for many) unique access to the world of work.

Workshops helped students build **employment skills**, raise **career aspirations**, understand **different sectors and roles** and connect with employers and discover new opportunities.

In numbers:

All planned workshops were completed including:

- **30 Employability Master Classes**
- **6 Mock Interview Days**
- **7 Spotlight on Careers events**
- **10 Site Visits / Guess My Job**
- **4 Champions of Enterprise workshops**

- A total of **9,063** students have been supported during the period at seven schools including;

The Wren, Reading Girls, Highdown, Blessed Hugh Faringdon, Hartland/JMA and Maiden Erlegh.

For all events and workshops, evaluation forms are taken for the students, teachers and business volunteers to complete. The feedback received from these workshops is vital to ensure the best content for the students.

Student Satisfaction

The following statistics show the percentage of students that found the workshops valuable. Across the board, students found all workshops extremely valuable with all workshops having a percentage over 90%

- Champions of Enterprise – 98%
- All About Me – 96%
- AI: The Big Debate – 93%
- Financial Untangle – 99%
- Growth Mindset – 97%
- People Like Me – 97%

For Guess My Job the question asked is whether they would like to take part in this workshop again. This shows how well received these workshops were by the students.

- Guess my Job – 96%

Teacher Satisfaction

92% of teachers gave a score of 8/10 or higher.

Feedback from Teachers

“This challenged students to think about their wider experiences and development outside of the usual curriculum; inspiring them to work hard “job roles”.

“What a fantastic experience for our future leaders of business”

“Excellent intro to AI from knowledgeable people - well planned and resourced and engaging”

“Engaging, well resourced, positive, well led, well organised, age appropriate”.

“It's always a pleasure I look forward to the event again, next year”.

“Fabulous team - managed to hold the attention of the students. They have thoroughly enjoyed the event”.