GROWING LUTON TOGETHER

Growing Luton Together:

The Final Report of the Luton Inclusive Growth Commission

Executive Summary

The Luton Inclusive Growth Commission

The Luton Inclusive Growth Commission was established in December 2018 as an independent body tasked with investigating how to develop an inclusive economy in Luton and overcome specific barriers to inclusive growth.

Based upon the definition given by the RSA commission in 2016, the Luton Inclusive Growth Commission has focussed its enquiry into how everyone in Luton can contribute to and benefit from ongoing growth, including more than £1.5 billion of inward investment being driven by the Luton Investment Framework (LIF).

The Commission was initially established by Luton Council, with Professor Sir Les Ebdon CBE DL appointed to the role of Chair. The Chair then undertook a recruitment process to appoint eight additional members of the commission, each with outstanding knowledge and expertise across various sectors in Luton.

The members of the Commission are:

- Professor Sir Les Ebdon CBE DL – Chair of the Commission
- Chris Curtis – Chief Executive of Youthscape
- Mick Dillon – Chief Executive of Citizens' Advice Luton
- Gwyneth Gibson – Head Teacher at Lea Manor High School
- Ali Hadawi CBE – Principal of Central Bedfordshire College
- Fozia Irfan – Chief Executive of Bedfordshire and Luton Community Foundation
- Dr Nick Lancaster – Director of Innovation and Enterprise at University of Bedfordshire
- Justin Richardson – Chief Executive of Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce
- Jennie Russell – Deputy Director of Nursing and Head of Quality at Luton CCG

The commission have carried out extensive engagement with residents and key stakeholders in Luton around six key lines of enquiry. This process has included several roundtable discussions with representatives from businesses, the voluntary sector, education and health providers and communities in Luton. Commissioners also received more than 460 responses from residents to their consultation and have held numerous conversations with residents in public locations such as the Mall and Luton and Dunstable Hospital.

The commission have been supported in their investigation by Luton Council, who have provided a detailed evidence base for the commission as well as arranging meetings and providing administrative support throughout the process. The commission has also engaged extensively with other local authorities and organisations including Leeds City Council, Preston City Council, SEMLEP, Centre for Cities and Luton CCG to further enhance their knowledge and evidence base.

Findings of the Commission

The commission focussed its investigation on the following six key lines of enquiry:

- Skills
- Productivity
- Economic Activity and Community Enterprise
- Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Equality of Opportunities and Equality of Outcomes
- Destination Luton

Luton faces some clear challenges around skills, including an attainment gap of 6% between Luton schools and those nationally at key stage 2 and more than one in eight working age people having no formal qualifications. The commission also found that despite overall high aspirations among young people, these aspirations did not match up with the opportunities existing in Luton, with around 36% of businesses having skills gaps in their workforces. Despite these challenges the commission recognised that Luton's young population and good digital infrastructure present clear opportunities in terms of digital skills and advanced manufacturing.

Luton also faces a clear productivity challenge, with gross value added per hour worked around 4.8% below the rest of the UK. The evidence has clearly demonstrated that attracting more high-value industries such as advanced manufacturing and financial services to Luton is crucial to improving productivity. In addition, the commission recognises that measures to improve health, increase flexibility for employees and raise earnings levels can all have a positive impact on productivity.

In terms of economic activity the commission identified three areas of most concern in Luton. These were long-term unemployment (5.6% of working age population), economic inactivity (25%) and insecure work. Among these groups the high proportion of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women who are out of work was a particular concern, with greater labour market flexibility seen as necessary to increase opportunities for those with family and caring responsibilities. In addition the commission recognised the value of more than 485 charities and voluntary organisations in Luton, as well as the need to build capacity and harness the potential of the voluntary and community sector.

Although Luton has good social mobility overall there remain clear inequalities among the population. This is demonstrated most clearly by the fact that 46% of children are now living in poverty, up from 33% in 2015, while 26% of working households in Luton are also now in poverty. In

addition the level of debt projected for Citizen's Advice Luton clients in 2019 is around £8.5 million. Growing levels of deprivation are linked to low wages and high costs of living, with rising private sector rents a clear factor. These inequalities also have a major impact on health and education outcomes, with a male life expectancy gap of around 8 years between some wards in Luton.

The commission recognised some significant health challenges in Luton, with mental health, obesity and long-term health conditions identified as the main concerns. With the likely impact these conditions will have upon health and social care budgets as well as employment and productivity, the commission recognised the need to address each of these challenges through a new health and wellbeing strategy, as well as a smart city approach and measures to address poverty as an underlying cause.

Finally, the commission gave consideration to the concept of 'destination Luton', consulting widely with residents and stakeholders upon what would make Luton a better place to live, work and study. A major issue identified throughout this process was the quality of the town centre, with the need for a more diverse mix of retail, leisure and culture often cited. In addition, perceptions of being unsafe in Luton as well as concerns around the cleanliness of the town centre were often mentioned.

To meet the challenges identified from the evidence and consultations, the commission have set out 12 ambitions for building an inclusive economy in Luton. These 12 ambitions are high level recommendations which reflect the things which the commission believes are necessary to deliver an inclusive economy in which everybody can benefit and play their part. Each of the ambitions are underpinned by a series of recommendations to suggest how they might be achieved.

The 12 ambitions are divided into three key themes, place, communities and people. The ambitions within each theme will ensure that Luton has the foundations required to build a productive economy, collaborative communities playing their part and real benefits being delivered for all in Luton to reach their full potential.

Four Ambitions for a Productive Place

Early in this process the commission recognised that ambitions around Luton as a place are vital to ensuring that we have the foundations in place for an inclusive economy. As the evidence and engagement in this process has demonstrated, a modern, productive economy, vibrant town centre offer and labour market flexibility for workers are all vital to supporting higher wages, business investment and a better quality of life for our communities.

Four Ambitions for Collaborative Communities that Play Their Part

The commission has been left in no doubt during this process that Luton's communities are among its greatest assets. This is true not just in terms of the geographic communities in Luton but also in terms of the fantastic voluntary sector organisations, hard-working businesses and committed anchor institutions. To ensure that our economy is truly inclusive though it is vital that we bring these communities together more often, to collaborate and act as influencers to address some of the biggest challenges in Luton today.

Four Ambitions for Happy, Healthy and Successful People

The commission recognises that alongside ambitions for our place and communities to deliver inclusive growth we need bold aspirations to ensure that all of the people of Luton benefit from this. These ambitions undoubtedly have to focus on addressing the challenges of poverty and inequality, which are having negative impacts upon education and health outcomes to prevent much of our population from reaching their potential. In addition these ambitions need to be focussed on our young people, ensuring that they have the skills and opportunities to match their aspirations.

Additional Recommendations and Next Steps

Achieving the 12 ambitions set out in this report will require actions from all parts of Luton, including businesses, voluntary organisations, education and health providers and communities. The Inclusive Growth Commission recognises the role of Luton Council as a place leader for Luton and therefore believes that the council should facilitate all parts of Luton in coming together to play their part in achieving the 12 ambitions for an inclusive economy.

As well as the 12 ambitions outlined in the report the commission has drawn upon the success of the equity roundtable approach used in Buffalo, USA as a means of monitoring inequalities and proposing specific actions to achieve equity. The commission believes that a similar roundtable approach should be used alongside an inclusive growth monitor to measure inclusive growth against the ambitions set out in this report.

12 Ambitions for an Inclusive Economy in Luton

1

A thriving town centre, designed around the needs of Luton's young population and vulnerable communities

- Luton Council should develop a new town centre masterplan, with the needs and values of young people and vulnerable communities at its heart.
- The masterplan should aim to diversify the Luton town centre economy, to include a better combination of office, retail, leisure and dining facilities and create a vibrant night-time economy.
- Key stakeholders should work together to campaign for investment from central government for the regeneration of the town centre station, to provide a catalyst for further transport improvements. These improvements will help to strengthen the image of Luton to visitors as well as easing fears of safety in the town centre.
- The masterplan should also seek to maximise new and existing assets, including the improving public arts offer, Luton's unique heritage and the Power Court development.
- Luton should establish a new arts and culture strategy as well as a hospitality forum to bring organisations together to promote events in the public arts space.

2

A smart city which supports healthy infrastructure from homes to workplaces

- Luton Council should work closely with partners including Luton CCG to establish a new health and wellbeing strategy with a clear focus on designing the right environment and infrastructure from homes to workplaces to support healthy and active lives.
- This strategy should include the design and maintenance of homes that support good health, including homes that provide supported living for people with disabilities and long term health conditions that reduce issues such as damp which can have adverse impacts on health.
- The strategy should also aim to encourage design of transport infrastructure and a town centre that encourages active travel as well as a commitment to preserve green spaces and support clean air.
- Luton should aim to develop a smart smart city approach to health, investing in new technology to help individuals, communities and employers to take greater responsibility for health and wellbeing.
- This smart city approach should draw upon lessons learned from places such as Leeds and Nottingham and build upon existing work in Luton around wearable technology. Technology and data analytics should be utilised to develop monitoring of healthy homes, smarter travel and accessible data to help individuals, GPs and employers monitor and manage health and activity levels.

3

An outstanding location to attract high-value industries such as electric vehicle manufacturing

- Luton should draw upon the success of Sheffield's Advanced Manufacturing Park to create the right environment for high-value, exporting businesses to operate and invest in Luton.
- Further and higher education providers should be at the centre of these efforts by ensuring good access to knowledge and highly skilled graduates in Luton.
- Luton should focus its efforts on electric vehicle manufacturing, drawing upon existing work by Vauxhall and Luton's history in motor manufacturing, to become a leading player in this high-value and high-growth industry.
- Luton should engage with regional partners such as SEMLEP and businesses in the electric vehicle industry to establish more opportunities for production in Luton.
- Build on the ongoing development of electric vehicles by Vauxhall in Luton to encourage more manufacturing and skills training around this industry.

4

A labour market recognised as one of the most flexible places to work in the UK

- Luton Council should draw upon the lessons of Manchester City Council and aim to become a Timewise Council.
- Luton Council should then aim to establish this same flexible working culture across Luton and should consider commissioning work from national experts in this area to support SMEs to adapt to suit the needs of employees.
- Businesses in Luton, particularly SMEs, should be supported to engage with people outside of the labour market to better understand the barriers to work and the types of flexible working policies that would most benefit them.
- Larger employers in Luton that offer the best range of flexible working policies should work closely with SMEs to develop their policies and working practices to improve work-life balance.