



County Durham
Inclusive Economic Strategy
Feedback Report for the Big Econ-versation

Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee
28 June 2022
Mike Allum



Why are we doing this?

- Developing the county's first inclusive economic strategy
- To respond to complexity of current environment with immediate and long term drivers of change
- Changing but uncertain governance and delivery structures in relation of Local Economic Partnerships and potential for a County Deal
- Expanded economic development role for the county, starting with with funding through Shared Prosperity Fund
- Opportunity of levelling up - Funding prioritised for areas like County Durham – a Tier 1 area for Levelling Up fund
- To build the delivery partnership - the council as convener and sets strategy

Where we are now

- The focus now and over the coming month is to **think about the priorities and actions for the Strategy.**
- We are developing a long-list of ideas – some of which we are already doing and some of which is new.
- We are looking to identify the gamechanger actions that will have biggest impact
- We need to prioritise what is realistic with current resources and capacity.



The Big Econ-versation



Summary of the Big Econ-versation



1,455
surveys completed



Over 1,500
people engaged through
the conversations



86 workshops &
events



Business, partnerships,
anchor institutions & partners,
community groups & residents
and DCC staff & members



Promoted via web,
social media, bus &
radio



Inclusive – diverse
representation and
online/offline reach

Main messages from the Big Econ-versation

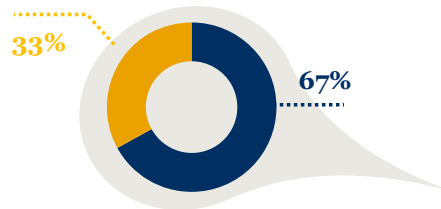
- County Durham needs **more good quality jobs**
- These need to be **accessible to local people**, through improved **transport**, especially in rural areas and inclusive **skills provision**
- More needs to be done to **market and promote the county**
- **Investment in places is needed county-wide**, particularly in smaller towns and villages
- Green economy and **climate change** is seen by business to be an opportunity for growth, but caution this needs to not increase costs

Resident Survey Summary

“Most people I know travel large distances to their place of work or study, often in other counties.”

“There are not enough well-paying, high skilled jobs so many people commute for work or leave.”

“There has been a historic lack of investment in the area compared to other parts of the country.”



1 in 3 respondents have faced barriers to good skills training, jobs & career progression

Approx. one quarter of respondents with a disability work full-time, compared to over half of non-disabled respondents



More good quality jobs

Is a major priority. Skilled people are leaving or commuting outside the county. Good quality jobs in the county are often inaccessible to local people.



Public transport

Is a major priority. The main barrier to economic opportunities especially for rural communities.

Access to education, training and jobs



When asked if they had experienced barriers to accessing learning, training or finding a job, a third said that they had.

Of those who reported experiencing barriers, the most common reasons included:

- **Poor transport connectivity** or insufficient transport options, especially in rural areas.
- **Lack of well paid, highly skilled, secure jobs and career opportunities** that offer progression in the county compared to other parts of the region and country.
- **A lack of investment in the county** and concentration of existing investment in Durham City and larger towns rather than smaller towns and rural areas – a concern this was driving people out of the county
- **Town centre decline**, linked to the reduction in local jobs.
- A lack of investment in **education and skills with limited provision**.
- **Limited retraining opportunities for older people**, as well as the **high cost** and **inflexible** nature of provision. The barriers for older people seeking employment opportunities was also raised.
- Some residents said they would like to see **more support for disabilities and residents with special educational needs**.

Future priorities

Residents were asked to rate their priorities for the future across a range of areas.

The following 3 areas came out as top priorities for the future, with over 90% of respondents rating them as either important or very important:

- Improving town centres
- Training the workforce
- Supporting an ageing population

Important or very important

Improving town centres	93%
Training the workforce	91%
Supporting an ageing population	90%
Improving public transport	86%
Retaining young people	85%
Attracting higher paying jobs	83%
Improving digital infrastructure/broadband	82%
Encouraging entrepreneurship	78%
Focusing on the green economy/Climate Change	76%
Increasing & improving tourism offer	70%
Recovering from COVID-19	69%
Building new homes	46%

Business Survey Summary

“My business is in County Durham because I am proud of where I live ”

- Small Education sector business

“We have a good network and infrastructure for supporting businesses here”

- Large services business

“County Durham has relatively low wages and a low cost of living”

- Small Public Administration business

Raising capital

Top challenge faced by start ups

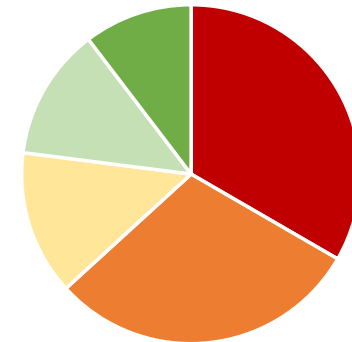
Skilled workforce

Top need to improve productivity

Skills, promotion of the county and town centres

Key to economic growth

One third of businesses say Covid-19 has had a major negative impact on the county



■ Major negative impact ■ Minor negative impact
■ Little or no impact ■ Minor positive impact
■ Major positive impact

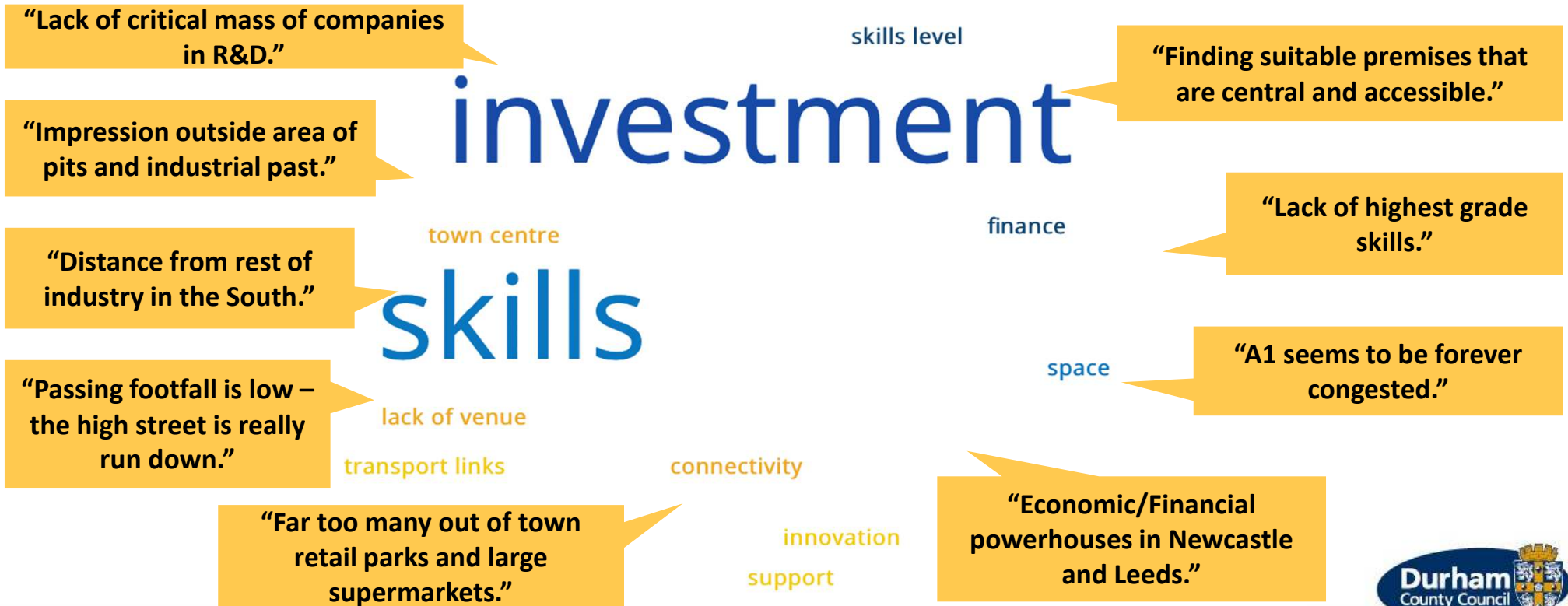
Advantages of being in County Durham

When asked about the advantages of being in the county, businesses highlighted local people, quality of life, good business support and networks, and the transport links and location.



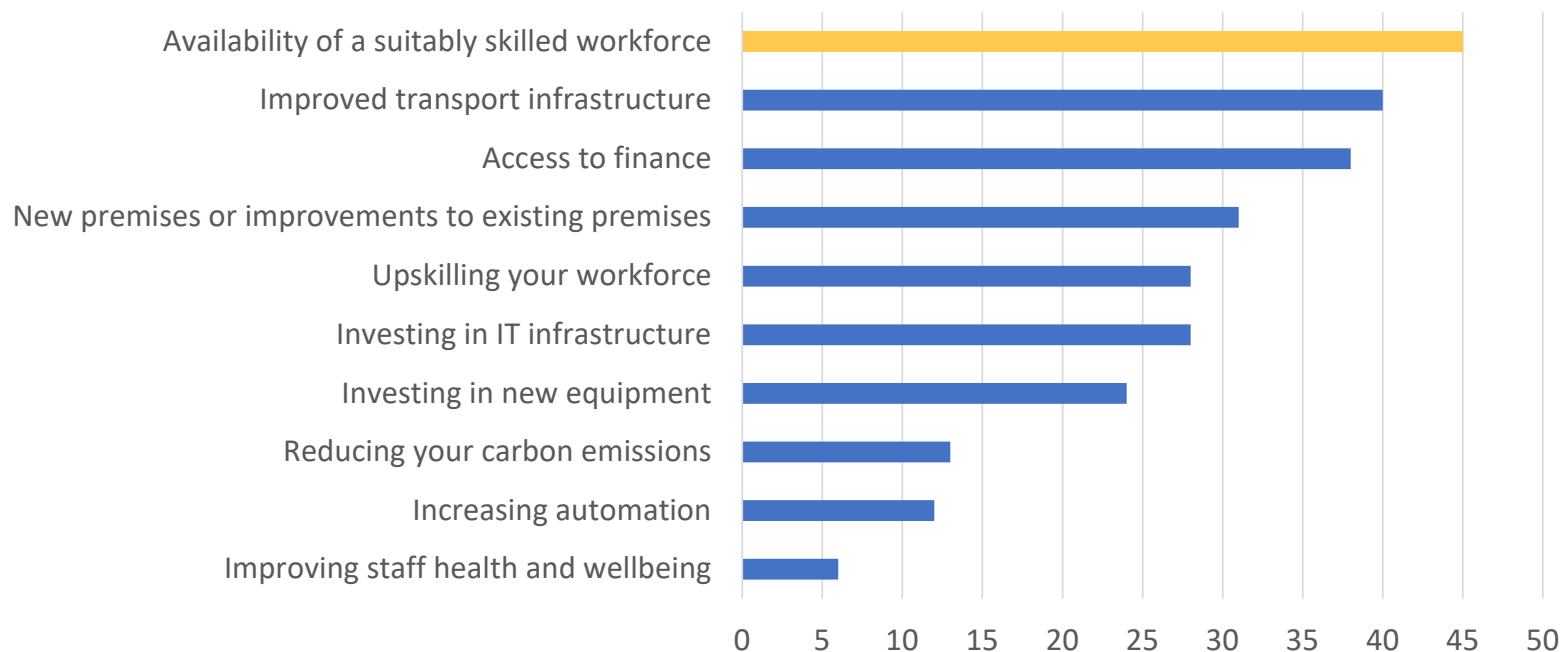
Challenges of being in County Durham

One of the main challenges identified by businesses was investment, particularly accessing growth finance and support for staff skills training. Other businesses mentioned skills shortages, employment space, perceptions of the county, low innovation, and deprivation and town centre decline.



Improving productivity

Businesses were asked what would improve the productivity of their workforce: 45% highlighted the availability of a suitably skilled workforce as a challenge, 40% identified transport and 38% chose access to finance. Of the 21% that selected 'other', some respondents referred to business support and networking, and access to employment sites and land.



Future growth sectors

Many businesses see manufacturing as a future growth sector for the economy, highlighting green, renewables and electric vehicles. Tourism also featured, as well as financial services and digital.

“Green engineering and manufacturing services”

- Large Financial Services Business

“There is substantial expertise in biotech and health in our universities”

- Small Technical and Scientific Business

“Health – this region has numerous examples of companies pulling together through the pandemic”

- Small Manufacturing business

production
battery e.v
green manufacturing
technology & space
aerospace & defence
digital tech
tourism financial services
visitors economy
energy
engineering renewables

Young People Survey Summary

"I'd like to go to a University outside of Durham as I would like to study something vocational & the University here is very academic."

"I don't know where I want to live; it will depend on work opportunities but I'd like to stay in Durham near my family and friends."

"Being happy and inspiring others are the most important things about work"

Go to university

The most common aspiration for young people post-school/six form

c. 57%

Of those who plan to go to a university, said they would go to one outside of the county

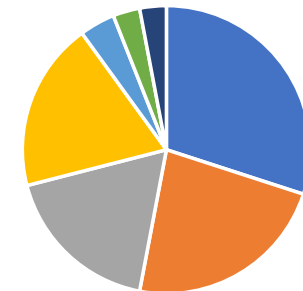
54%

Said they could not or are unsure they could pursue their chosen career or business idea in the county

67%

Said 'doing something interesting' mattered more than pay or location when choosing a career

What support young people would like to help them pursue their chosen career or business idea...



- More employment opportunities
- Wider choice of education/training courses
- More market leading employers
- More work experience/apprenticeship opportunities
- More equal opportunities
- Other
- Don't know

Next steps after full-time education

Young people were asked about their plans after leaving full-time education:

- Almost one third of young people surveyed wanted to go to university
- Almost a quarter thought they would do an apprenticeship
- About one in five thought they would go into full-time employment

Of those that ticked 'Other', many respondents said 'College', reflecting the younger age of some respondents with 37% aged 15-16 years and 36% aged 11-14.

	% of respondents
University	32%
Don't know	25%
Apprenticeship	23%
Full time employment	21%
Travel	10%
Other	6%

Future jobs and business ideas

Young people were asked about their future plans. They provided a wide range of jobs and business ideas, including teaching, working in public services, construction, law and the creative sector.

In response to what young people felt is needed in County Durham to help them get a job or start a business idea, suggestions included:



A **wider choice** of courses and opportunities to speak to entrepreneurs.



Better awareness around available opportunities in the county, work experience and apprenticeships through advertisements and job events.



More **support** for girls and LGBTQ+ people, particularly in the science industries.



Better connections to **large, international companies**, and attracting them to locate in the county.

Approach to the conversations

- As part of the Big Econ-versation, conversations were held with a diverse range of groups to ensure that the process was as inclusive as possible. This included business, partnerships, anchor institutions and partners, and community groups and residents
- The structure and format of conversations varied and included attendance at meetings and events, presentations with Q&A, and workshops.
- Most conversations covered the challenges facing the groups, but topics and questions varied according to the type of organisation taking part in the event:
 - **Businesses** – business support, employment plans & challenges, investment plans, and start ups and growth opportunities.
 - **Partnerships, anchor institutions & partners** – Levelling up priorities, housing, poverty, health, skills & education priorities.
 - **Community groups & residents** – safety, town centres and neighborhoods, voluntary & community sector, education & skills, housing, culture and leisure.

Conversations Summary

- **Tackle poverty and level up the county** – to address growing concerns about poverty and quality of life in light of the cost of living crisis.
- **Create better jobs** – with more opportunities, particularly to help retain young people.
- **Improve transport and digital connectivity** – to improve access to training and jobs, and support business growth.
- **Improve skills provision for all** – across the lifecycle from young people through to older workers.
- **Support businesses to thrive and grow** – through access to skills, employment sites, innovation and investment.
- **Revive town centres and neighbourhoods** – repurposing high streets with a mix of services.
- **Promote the county** – raising the profile of County Durham outside of the county and the North East.

Lessons for the Inclusive Economic Strategy

- Residents, businesses and stakeholders were proud of County Durham for its beautiful natural landscapes, culture, heritage, people, innovative businesses and sectors, and saw many opportunities for county, including net zero, manufacturing, knowledge intensive sectors, and tourism.
- But many spoke of inequalities in the county with higher levels of deprivation and crime, declining town centres, and a lack of opportunity in some areas. Many also voiced concerns over the availability of good jobs and the ability for local people to access these, whether due to poor public transport or not having the right skills and work experience.
- This indicates that potential areas of focus for the Inclusive Economic Strategy include:
 - Supporting business growth and job creation, particularly in opportunity sectors
 - Improving public transport and access to facilities
 - Developing a lifelong learning offer for residents
 - Improving the health of residents and workers
 - Promoting County Durham
 - Building on recent investments to regenerate and reimagine town centres
 - Transitioning to net zero through a just, flexible and innovative approach that creates new jobs and safeguards existing ones