

Presentation by Roger Tetstall, Chief Executive of Test Valley Borough Council.

Good morning everyone, as the programme says, my name is Roger Tetstall and I am the chief executive of Test Valley Borough Council.

Welcome to The Lights Theatre.

In a few months time, the Arena in which many of you have congregated this morning, will be full of Year 6 pupils throwing their mortar boards in the air after having taken part in the 8th annual Andover Junior Graduation.

And indeed, well over 3,000 11 year olds from Andover's 9 junior schools (and many more parents) will, by the time of this year's Summer Holidays, have gone through this remarkable ceremony and taken home the memento of a portrait photo with their Junior School head teacher.

And this is where we start investing in Andover.

These ceremonies are all about raising local aspirations – celebrating achievement at junior school, looking forward to secondary school and imagining what university might offer – with excellent support from our nearest university at Winchester. And special thanks to Ian Coombs at John Hanson Community School.

Not surprisingly, education, learning and training form part of the Council's core priorities, and we are delighted to be hosting this conference with a view to strengthening the understanding between local employers and local schools.

It is also fitting that Geoff is here from the Enterprise M3 Local Enterprise Partnership and Tim from Andover College as we struggle to contain our excitement at the prospect of the Andover Technology & Skills Centre – but I will let Tim say more about that later.

Several years ago the Council was forced to make a very stark choice when amidst enormous controversy, the planning application came forward to develop the former Andover Airfield into what is now Andover Business Park.

At that point, in the face of the most significant opposition, the Council make the choice to invest in the economic infrastructure of Andover and granted planning permission.

Immediately, as part of the legal agreement relating to Andover Business Park, the Council secured the sum of £500,000 which we put into an Andover Skills Training Fund, that has been made available to Andover residents employed by Andover businesses who want help with training – hopefully to help address local skills shortages.

I understand that to date, the Council has committed £250,000 to benefit some 350 Andover residents in 130 Andover companies. Which means that we still have £250,000 to invest in Andover's resident workforce!

More generally, the evidence of investment in Andover is there for all to see: new communities at Augusta Park, Picket Twenty, and Picket Piece, the delivery of long sought after facilities like The Lights and the Odeon Cinema, and leisure schemes being planned.

And with new jobs coming on stream at Andover Airfield, throughout the town and very soon 1200 new jobs courtesy of Ocado on Walworth Business Park.

And, for my part, when someone wants to invest in Andover, I will move heaven and earth to give them a same day or next day appointment – usually to their horror as they expected the Council to take a week or so.

These developments in Andover are paralleled by major changes in education and learning, and I imagine that we have all asked ourselves whether we are communicating with each other at an Andover level as much as we could be?

In particular, can the worlds of work and school make stronger connections?

Speaking as a parent, as well as on behalf of the Council, I worry that employment and education are pulling away from one another leaving parents, assorted individuals, and new forms of career guidance to try and bridge the gap. And this against a background of jobs becoming ever more sophisticated and education and learning changing rapidly with an emphasis on:

- Strengthening STEM subjects to compete globally
- Minimising people Not in Education Employment or Training (NEETS)
- Raising the school leaving age
- Ongoing change to:
 - University tuition fees;
 - Apprenticeships ;
 - Work placements.

So just when we need a clear and strong platform to connect employment and education:

- Government has made work experience at school optional;
- Careers guidance for students has been devolved to schools with a variety of providers; and
- the curriculum is becoming more academic leaving vocational learning to the margins.

Which raises the fear that all this investment in Andover might not bear as much fruit as it should. So my pragmatic plea is simply for us all to understand each other a little more and hopefully to forge new relationships so that students can understand what fantastic employers and businesses we have here in Andover and employers can help inspire pupils to consider future careers in their sectors.

Today is less about immediate recruitment than about creating longer term relationships between Andover schools and Andover employers and I pledge TVBC's full support in making this happen.