

MONDAY 12 JUNE 2023

**THE REPORT OF THE ADULT LEARNING AND SKILLS TASK GROUP**

**Purpose of report:** To provide the Select Committee with the findings and recommendations of the Adult Learning and Skills Task Group, tasked with considering what changes to adult learning and skills policy and provision would meet the economic and social needs of the community and deliver relevant environmental commitments.

**Introduction**

1. With the UK economy expected to continue to contract this year, chronic skills shortages must be addressed to encourage growth. The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) said businesses were still struggling to hire as the number of job vacancies remains at a historically high level. The businesses' representative has repeatedly asked the government to update the Shortage Occupations List<sup>1</sup>, suggesting that the skills required by employers are not in sufficient supply within Britain's borders.

2. At the same time as skilled positions lie unfilled, those in low wage work, which tends to be low skilled, are particularly helpless against the soaring costs of housing, energy, food and fuel, and the pool of available unskilled jobs is shrinking as a result of automation. Digital skills are a prerequisite for nearly all jobs now, yet in 2020, 15 per cent of those aged 15 and over in the South East were not able to do a basic set of digital tasks that include opening an internet browser.<sup>2</sup> An ageing workforce will, in addition, need to adapt to technological change after they trained in their sector, for example roofers needing to fit solar panels, while those who lost their jobs as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, for example in the hospitality, aviation or retail sector, could also benefit from retraining or upskilling.

3. It is clear there is a mismatch between skills supply and demand and thus an urgent need to upskill the adult population. The Adult Learning and Skills Task Group was set up against this backdrop of labour and skills shortages and the cost-of-living crisis, with the aim of identifying opportunities for adult learning in Surrey to better meet the needs

<sup>1</sup> Percival, 'CBI responds to latest labour market stats', (CBI, 2023) [CBI responds to latest labour market stats | CBI](#)

<sup>2</sup> Lloyds Bank, 'Lloyds Bank UK consumer digital index' (2020) [lb-consumer-digital-index-2020-report.pdf \(lloydsbank.com\)](#)

of employers and residents. It considers not just a desire for economic growth, but also the need to balance this with the impact on Surrey's people and the environment.

4. This report will explain how the Council's Surrey Adult Learning service fits into the current landscape and how it finds itself at odds with the agenda of the national government that funds it. It will demonstrate how a 'do-nothing' approach would be a risky business move and, although it would perhaps be favoured by a majority of current users of the service, would leave some residents of Surrey behind.

## Acknowledgements

5. Members would like to take this opportunity to thank all who have taken time to share their experiences with the Task Group which has helped to shape the findings of this review.

6. Any errors, factual inaccuracies or inconsistencies contained within the report are the responsibility of the Task Group alone and not of those who contributed their knowledge, insight and experiences to the formation of this report.

## Objectives

7. A Task Group was established by the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee in March 2022 following a recommendation by the Committee in March 2021 that Surrey Adult Learning:

*Work with partners, within and external to Surrey County Council and with the Surrey Economy and Growth Team to develop a coordinated plan for the future, to ensure that the Adult Learning Service remains responsive to changing health, social and economic needs; and*

*Continuously review the Service delivery model to ensure sustainability and that the Service meets the needs and aspirations of the local community.*

8. Membership of the Task Group was agreed as follows:

- Chris Townsend, Chairman
- Catherine Baart (ex officio)
- Jonathan Essex
- Jeremy Webster
- Fiona White

9. The Task Group's purpose was to answer the following: What reasonable and achievable changes to adult learning and skills policy and provision are desirable in Surrey in order to meet the economic and social needs of the community and deliver relevant environmental commitments?

10. Its agreed objectives were:

- a) Understand the benefits of adult learning and skills (to economy, society and community).
- b) Understand current policy and provision and anticipated changes.
- c) Review employment data and participation in adult learning and skills at population and local levels.
- d) Identify the groups who stand to benefit the most from participation in adult learning and skills and barriers to their participation.
- e) Ascertain the current and anticipated economic and social needs of Surrey's communities (in the context of adult learning and skills), including the skills required to deliver our environmental commitments.
- f) Identify good practice regarding adult learning and skills within and outside of the county.
- g) Make recommendations regarding how the Council could improve its adult learning and skills offer in order to:
  - i. increase participation by disengaged groups and groups who stand to benefit the most from adult learning and skills; and
  - ii. contribute to meeting the current and future economic and social needs of Surrey and deliver relevant environmental commitments.

11. Adult learning is that delivered to people aged 19 or over which excludes official tertiary education such as degrees. As such it is not, and cannot be, the only answer in the plan to improve skills, since some skills gaps can only be filled by graduates. Surrey generally has an above average proportion of higher-skilled employment. This is also seen within the construction sector and the jobs that will be created in low-emission infrastructure in a zero-carbon economy, for instance, will require civil engineers, who must be graduates. Similarly, there are persistent vacancies in health and social care and a degree is needed to fill the plethora of vacant nurse and social worker roles. Adult education then, clearly cannot be the sole answer to all employers' skills shortage problems. The Council's Surrey Skills Plan, launched at the end of 2022, has a broader remit that also encompasses compulsory education and universities, although by nature of envisioning an employer-led system it does focus on technical routes.

### **Evidence gathering**

12. All of the evidence that was received in the course of this enquiry with permission for publication can be found in the annexes of this report.

## Written evidence

13. The Task Group's first step was to request written evidence from the following: Surrey County Council's directorates of education and economy and growth, Surrey Adult Learning, family centres, Orbital South Colleges Group (East Surrey College, John Ruskin College and Reigate School of Art), Learning and Work Institute, Surrey Chambers of Commerce, Enterprise M3 and Coast to Capital Local Enterprise Partnerships, Surrey Skills Leadership Forum, Family Voice Surrey, Jobcentre Plus, Association of Employment and Learning Providers, Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities, Local Government Association, and University of Surrey School of Economics.
14. To understand the needs and views of those who would use an Adult Learning service, from 9 March 2022 to 18 April 2022, the Task Group ran a public call for evidence in the form of an online survey. The survey asked for free text views on the following four areas: benefits of adult learning and skills; barriers and/or facilitators of adult learning and skills; what groups stand to benefit most from it; feedback on current policy and provision<sup>3</sup>. Emerging themes were coded and counted.

*Table 1: Responses to public survey*

<b>Respondent type</b>	<b>Number received</b>
Individual who has participated in adult learning or skills training	42 (75.0%)
Individual who has considered/is considering participating in adult learning or skills training	8 (14.3%)
Employer	1 (1.8%)
Other	5 (8.9%)
Total	56

## Oral evidence

15. The Task Group met with the following people to discuss Adult Learning and Skills on the dates stated:
- 3 May 2022: Surrey County Council (Tim Oliver, Leader of the Council; Denise Turner-Stewart, then Cabinet Member for Education and Learning; Dawn

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<sup>3</sup> Responses available in Appendix 1

Redpath, Director for Economy and Growth; Jane Edwards, Assistant Director for Education; Francis Lawlor, Principal of Surrey Adult Learning).

- 14 December 2022: Orbital South Colleges Group (Lindsay Pamphilon, Group Principal and incoming Chief Executive Officer; Jayne Dickinson, Chief Executive Officer).
- 31 January 2023: Surrey Chambers of Commerce (Louise Punter, Chief Executive Officer; Rob Gibson, Local Skills Improvement Plan Project Manager).
- 6 February 2023: Surrey Adult Learning (Francis Lawlor, Principal).

## Limitations

16. Some organisations from which the Task Group requested written evidence were unable to support the inquiry. Similarly, the progress of this enquiry stalled for several months when the role of Scrutiny Officer became vacant.

## Benefits of adult learning and skills

17. The sense of belonging and achievement that acquiring new skills can bring is widely recognised to be beneficial to learners' mental health. It can also improve learners' employment prospects, which can in turn increase their earnings and foster a sense of identity, purpose and improved life satisfaction.
18. As well as the benefits to the individuals themselves, participation in adult education has benefits for the economy, as learners upskill to meet local employer needs, and for society, with the potential to lead to greater civic participation and reduce reoffending. Adults who engage in learning themselves are more likely to engage in their children's education.
19. There are two distinct aspects to adult education. Adult skills is defined as accredited learning that aims to provide a qualification from an awarding body, such as GCSE English or Maths. Community learning, meanwhile, is for non-accredited leisure and pleasure activities such as pottery, painting or pilates.
20. The Task Group's public survey illuminated that people who can feel isolated in the rural setting of Surrey are embracing leisure courses to profit from the social aspect of learning. Among the respondents asked to cite the benefits of adult learning, the acquisition of skills that did not lead to a formal qualification appeared more often (18) than formal qualifications (8), which may reflect Surrey Adult Learning's greater emphasis on community learning than adult skills. Although a significant number (13) stated getting a job or furthering a career as a benefit, this was surpassed by the number who cited social interaction (22) or mental wellbeing (21). As one contributor put it: *"The benefits are (I believe) as much to do with personal*

*well-being and social interaction as they are to do with learning a skill. This doesn't devalue the learning aspect, but it should nevertheless not be relegated to the status of a side issue."*

21. Seven of the 42 people (17 per cent) who had participated in adult learning or skills training said Surrey Adult Learning (SAL) had enabled them personally to make an income; this was due in equal measures to either formal qualifications or creative skills. It paled in comparison to the number of times that social benefits were raised.

### **Current policy and provision and anticipated changes**

22. Before 2010 the whole of Surrey was served by SAL which ran across about 18 locations. Sites in East Surrey were then leased to East Surrey College (ESC), which when leases ended chose to offer provision out of the college instead. SAL now has seven dedicated centres remaining in North and South West Surrey. Aside from family learning, which SAL delivers across the county, adult learning in the East continues to be delivered out of ESC in Redhill, now part of the Orbital South Colleges Group after merging with John Ruskin College in Croydon. Across Surrey, adult education is also offered by several further education providers: Guildford College, Farnham College and Merrist Wood College (all part of the Activate Learning group); North East Surrey College of Technology (Nescot) in Ewell; Strode College in Egham; and Brooklands College.
23. Nine of the Task Group's 56 survey respondents (16 per cent) complained about a lack of provision in Mole Valley. Provision of particularly community learning in Leatherhead and Dorking was surrendered by SAL in 2010 and lost when it was assumed ESC was taking over.
24. Three quarters of SAL's provision comprises community learning programmes, and adult skills leading to externally accredited qualifications makes up the remaining quarter. This split has evolved as a result of market demand and is an unusually high proportion of community learning relative to elsewhere, including East Surrey where the split is around two thirds accredited qualifications and one third community learning. The majority of SAL's learners are older, want to learn for pleasure, and have been made aware of provision through word of mouth or accessing the website. This is in stark contrast to places with higher unemployment where most learners are recruited through links with the job centre, communities and employers – a scenario more akin to the east of the county. Relative to SAL, ESC has a greater focus on entry into work and skills development than social engagement. It has well-established links with industries and its construction students, for example, have a guaranteed interview with Wilmott Dixon after a short period of training.

*Table 2: Different focuses on provision type, West v East Surrey*

	Accredited qualifications	Community learning
Surrey Adult Learning	25% (AEB)	75%
East Surrey College	65% (45% AEB, 20% Free Courses For Jobs)	35%

25. SAL feels under pressure to change its 75:25 ratio because of the Government's emphasis on skills for jobs in its post-16 technical education reforms. In April 2022, after the Task Group was established, the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill was enacted. This makes it a requirement for a designated Employer Representative Body (ERB) to draw up a Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP). These plans focus on creating a demand-led system, placing employers at the centre so that they can recruit people with the skills they need. Surrey Chambers of Commerce is the county's designated ERB and was due to submit the LSIP, of which adult education is just one aspect, to Government at the end of May 2023. SAL has regular meetings with the ERB. Along with all other providers of adult education, SAL will be monitored by Ofsted on how effectively they respond to this improvement plan. They will also be required to align their curriculums with the LSIP's priorities in order to receive funding from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and will need to set out targets for doing so in an accountability statement.
26. The ESFA's Adult Education Budget (AEB) fully funds adults aged 19 and over to do digital skills up to Level 1 and English and Maths GCSEs at grade 4 (C) or above. It also fully funds learners' first Level 2 qualification in any subject if aged 19-23, or aged 24 and over who are unemployed or earning below National Living Wage (£18,525). In addition, it pays for adults aged 19 and over to do English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) up to Level 2 when unemployed or earning below National Living Wage.
27. Under the Lifetime Skills Guarantee, enshrined in the 2021 Skills for Jobs White Paper, the Government also pays for bootcamps – fast-track courses of 12-16 weeks that develop in-demand skills and culminate in an interview with a local employer – and Free Courses for Jobs, where anyone aged 19 and over has their first Level 3 funded, or subsequent Level 3 if unemployed or earning below National Living Wage, for a prescribed list of courses where the UK has a skills shortage. These include digital, health and social care, teaching and construction. Having a curriculum that is responsive to industry need will be the paramount priority of the LSIP and it is likely colleges will utilise and expand skills bootcamps to offer shorter courses or modular options to businesses.
28. Employers' needs tend to extend beyond Level 2 and SAL does not deliver Level 3 provision under the Lifetime Skills Guarantee; going forward it may well be expected to offer more qualification-based courses to comply with the LSIP. This is

problematic for two reasons: firstly, the principal does not believe there to be sufficient demand in West Surrey to warrant more Level 3 provision; secondly, if the balance was flipped against community learning it would be detrimental to SAL's income, almost half of which (45 per cent) comes from community learning provision. Demand for Level 3 is considered to be supplied in full by other providers and it is not regarded as sensible to compete for what is a limited supply of competent tutors and funding, particularly when SAL does not necessarily have the expertise required to deliver at this level: *"If we have learners wanting to do a Level 3 we send them to FE colleges. I would move into it if I thought that there was a shortage and a demand, but I haven't found that; principals say they struggle to fill their Level 3 courses."*<sup>4</sup>

29. Paid-for community learning cross-subsidises both free parenting support classes and supported learning for about 50 adults with moderate to severe learning difficulties. Although SAL does receive AEB funding for community learning, it is not full cost recovery and the majority of learners pay a fee for the classes, topping up government funding significantly. It brings in about £2 million income, allowing the other 15 per cent to take part for free. SAL leadership fears the Government's emphasis on more economic-led outcomes will make it less inclined to contribute to community learning and therefore put these programmes, and with them the ability to facilitate provision generating friendships, under severe strain. As can be seen in in Table 3, community learning made up 78 per cent of SAL's Adult Education Budget grant in the last academic year. If fees must be increased to compensate for a grant reduction, this may exclude all but the very well-off. Not only would this contribute to social isolation, it would go against the Council's guiding principle of 'no one left behind'. SAL's principal commented: *"Scandinavia and Northern Europe do a lot of civic education and recognise its importance in the rounding of communities. I'm not sure our drive towards economics is for the best."*<sup>5</sup>

*Table 3: External Grants 2022/23*

<b>2022/23 (academic year)</b>	<b>(£) ESFA</b>	<b>(£) GLA</b>	<b>(£) Total</b>
Community Learning	2,151,028	91,080	2,242,108
Adult Skills	597,582	22,435	620,017
<b>AEB Total</b>	<b>2,748,610</b>	<b>113,515</b>	<b>2,862,125</b>
<b>Grant total</b>	<b>2,748,610</b>	<b>113,515</b>	<b>2,862,125</b>

**Conclusion:** There is a disparity between the types of provision offered in East and West Surrey, which leaves different parts of the population in each area dissatisfied. Mole Valley residents in particular feel under-served in community learning, while East

<sup>4</sup> Annex 11

<sup>5</sup> Annex 11



Surrey’s alignment to the Government’s Skills for Jobs drive leaves SAL vulnerable to having to move away from its traditional area of focus. Reduced income from community learning may put at risk subsidising parenting classes and supported learning for adults with learning disabilities.

**Employment data and participation in adult learning and skills**

High employment rate

30. “Rising headline employment and growing labour market non-participation means a tighter labour market,”<sup>6</sup> reports Enterprise M3 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), which covers West Surrey and most of Hampshire. It is generally difficult to fill vacancies, and more so in Surrey where fewer people are out of work than the Great Britain average. In the year to September 2022, employment among Surrey residents aged 16-64 was strong at 78.8 per cent, compared with 75.5 per cent across Great Britain<sup>7</sup>. With only 2.7 per cent in the county classed as unemployed, i.e. able to work and seeking a job (3.7 per cent in Great Britain), the pool of available workers is even smaller than elsewhere.
31. Even the highest unemployed claimant rate in West Surrey revealed by Enterprise M3 – 3.1 per cent in Spelthorne – compares favourably with the UK rate. However, the averages fail to reveal the outliers; although no borough in particular stands out overall, there are pockets within boroughs where the number of unemployment claimants far outstrips the country’s average. In the same year as the data in Table 4, 8.8 per cent of Goldsworth Park Woking residents were receiving unemployment benefit, 6.1 per cent in Walton South and 5.9 per cent in Stanwell North - just a few examples of many areas well in excess of the concurrent 3.8 per cent average for England<sup>8</sup>.

*Table 4: Unemployed claimant rate in West Surrey boroughs, November 2022*

<b>Borough / Region</b>	<b>Unemployed claimant rate</b>
Elmbridge	2.1%
Guildford	1.8%
Runnymede	2.3%
Spelthorne	3.1%

<sup>6</sup> Enterprise M3, ‘Enterprise M3 Economy, Labour Market and Skills Dashboard Jan/Feb 2023’ (2023) [Enterprise M3 Economy and Labour Market Dashboard](#)

<sup>7</sup> Office for National Statistics, ‘Labour Market Profile – Surrey’ (2023) [Labour Market Profile - Nomis - Official Census and Labour Market Statistics \(nomisweb.co.uk\)](#)

<sup>8</sup> Surrey County Council, ‘The behaviours of Surrey residents - a comparison of the identified areas (LSOAs) within the 21 key neighbourhoods’ (2022) [PDF-Dashboard-comparing-22-LSOAs-21-key-neighbourhoods-Oct-22.pdf \(datapress.cloud\)](#)

Surrey Heath	2.1%
Waverley	1.8%
Woking	2.4%
South East	2.9%
UK	3.6%

Source: Enterprise M3 Economy, Labour Market and Skills Dashboard Jan/Feb 2023

32. It is worth noting that a large number of vacancies competing for a small pool of applicants should not necessarily discourage people from improving their qualifications, because jobseekers may not have the qualifications required by the available roles. Over two thirds (67 per cent) of labour demand in the Enterprise M3 area in December 2022 was in high-skilled and upper intermediate-skilled roles. According to the Office for National Statistics, Surrey’s share of employees in professional occupations or managers/directors/senior officials is higher than average - 48.6 per cent compared with 36.5 per cent nationally.

#### Highly skilled population

33. Surrey residents in general are relatively highly qualified, nearly six in 10 people (58.9 per cent) to A Level or beyond (50.7 per cent in England and Wales) and four in 10 (42.4 per cent) have degrees or above (33.8 per cent in England)<sup>9</sup>. The number of highly educated perhaps makes it unsurprising that SAL leans more towards community learning than adult skills. At the same time, however, more than one in five of Surrey adults (21.3 per cent) have not achieved any Level 2 qualification, the equivalent of a GCSE grade 9 to 4 (A\*-C). Although this is a small proportion relative to the 27.8 per cent across the nation, it equates to more than 207,000 people. Furthermore, more than 125,000 of these people (12.9 per cent of Surrey adults) have no qualifications at all.
34. Following SAL’s 2022 inspection, Ofsted said: “*Leaders should ensure that they refocus their allocation of public funding to meet the needs of those who are disadvantaged, vulnerable and least likely to participate in education.*” Excluding pensioners gives a more accurate picture - 4.3 per cent of Surrey residents aged 16-64 do not have any qualifications and 17.7 per cent have not achieved at least a Level 2 qualification<sup>10</sup>; although these figures are still not fully informative as the state pension age is 66, they show there is a considerable proportion of residents who could benefit from upskilling.

<sup>9</sup> Office for National Statistics, ‘Education, England and Wales: Census 2021: Highest level of qualification’ (2023) [Education, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/educationandwork/articles/census2021/highest-level-of-qualification)

<sup>10</sup> Office for National Statistics, ‘Labour Market Profile – Surrey’ (2023) [Labour Market Profile - Nomis - Official Census and Labour Market Statistics \(nomisweb.co.uk\)](https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/lmp/surrey)

**Conclusion:** The proportion of unskilled residents in the county is relatively low. Nevertheless, there are more than 130,000 residents without a Level 2 qualification, and more than 30,000 of these have none. In order to fulfil its ethos of leaving no one behind, the Council must strive to reach them.

Shrinking government funding coincides with decreasing participation

35. The Learning and Work Institute's Participation in Learning Survey 2019 showed that participation in adult skills nationally was at its lowest rate for two decades. In the basic adult skills of English, Maths and ESOL it declined by 63 per cent, 62 per cent and 17 per cent respectively between 2012-2020<sup>11</sup>. In the same period, the Adult Education Budget reduced by 52 per cent in real terms.
36. Surrey Adult Learning suffered a loss of learners too, and now has only about one third of the 20,000 it had in 2010. Numbers had already fallen considerably to 11,785 pre-Covid and last year stood at 6,726. However, unlike the national picture, it is the community learning participants who have dropped off (47 per cent between 2018/19-2021/22); conversely, the take-up for adult skills has gone up 20 per cent in this time.
37. SAL had initially managed to compensate for the reduced AEB grant to an extent by creating new community learning courses to generate additional tuition fee income. In fact it experienced a growth in enrolments in the five years prior to Covid; however as demand then decreased, it became more difficult to use the £2.1million budget as efficiently: *"Pre-Covid 2018/19 we were one of the most efficient users, amongst the best in the country for cost per learner. Now we are about average, less efficient, because where we used to have eight or nine learners on a course, we now have five."*<sup>12</sup> This has a knock-on effect on customer satisfaction. Classes are mixed ability unless there is enough demand from those with same ability. However, while a solution if numbers enrolling are low, mixed ability classes were felt by some who responded to the Task Group's survey to result unavoidably in an unequal allocation of the tutor's time, which was felt to be unfair.
38. A SAL survey to find out why participants have not come back post-pandemic attracted 570 respondents but had not yet been analysed at the time of writing. The Principal of Surrey Adult Learning has not seen participation elsewhere in FE colleges increase and believes therefore rather that learners are making different life choices. His feeling is that post-lockdown people would rather spend their time travelling and seeing family, and this also applies to tutors making them in short supply. There are also some learners who, having seen the productivity brought about by remote learning, feel the classroom is not as productive, while others describe the face-to-face contact as a lifeline.

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<sup>11</sup> Learning and Work Institute, 'Getting the basics right. The case for action on adult basic skills' (2021) [Getting-the-basics-right-LW-report.pdf \(learningandwork.org.uk\)](#)

<sup>12</sup> Annex 11

**Conclusion:** Participation in SAL’s community learning programmes is decreasing, which is making them more expensive to run. This reduced income may result in learners having to pay higher course fees and risks making them unaffordable to some.

**Groups who stand to benefit most from participating and the barriers**

39. As discussed in the previous section, Surrey’s population is very well-educated overall, relative to other parts of the country. This does not mean, however, that there are no people locally who lack skills. Averages mask the complete picture; for example, almost two in five people (39.7 per cent) living in part of Stoke in Guildford are unqualified, which is 17.2 percentage points higher than the UK average. The areas in Table 5 are among 21 identified by the Council as ‘key neighbourhoods’, prioritised in its Health and Wellbeing Strategy as those with the poorest health outcomes.

*Table 5: Surrey wards with highest proportion of unqualified residents*

Lower layer Super Output Area (LSOA)	% with no qualifications
UK	22.5
Surrey	15.9
Guildford 007C (Stoke)	39.7
Mole Valley 011D (Holmwoods)	30.8
Spelthorne 001C (Stanwell North)	30.7
Surrey Heath 004C (Old Dean)	30.2
Woking 004F (Canalside)	30.1
Runnymede 006D (Chertsey St Ann’s)	30.0

Source: 2011 Census (Breakdown of 2021 data not yet available)

40. Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) rankings, a dataset widely used to measure the relative poverty of small areas, were cross-referenced with locations of SAL’s seven centres to gain insight into whether these are best situated to be accessed by residents in need. With the exception of Woking, all seven centres are situated in areas that rank low for deprivation. The majority of SAL’s learners live in the vicinity of their sites, which are in relatively affluent areas and as such well placed

to cater for the older middle-class residents who are their most prominent users. Indeed, the largest age group participating in SAL courses is 60-69, suggesting this is not for the purposes of gaining employment.

41. Runnymede does not have a Surrey Adult Learning centre, despite Englefield Green West being one of the Council's 21 key neighbourhoods. Guildford does have a SAL centre, but it is in an area of the town centre that ranks among the least deprived - 32,291 out of 32,844 for education, skills and training. By contrast the borough's most deprived area in Westborough ranks much nearer the top of this category at 1,069.
42. Similarly, Spelthorne's centre is located in Sunbury East with an IMD rank of 30,655, where only one Lower layer Super Output Area (LSOA) in the borough has a higher rank. If those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds are to be reached, it may be more appropriate to locate one where there is the greatest level of deprivation, in Stanwell North next to Heathrow Airport where most homes have the lowest council tax band of H, and which has an IMD rank of 6,666 out of 32,844 (where 1 is most deprived).
43. Unlike the dispersed way that SAL delivers its services, there is some public dissatisfaction with the centralised nature of ESC's Surrey provision, concentrated in Redhill. A dearth of provision of particularly community learning in Leatherhead and Dorking, both of which also have pockets of deprivation, was raised several times in responses to the Task Group's public survey.
44. Local skills gaps were identified by Ofsted in their visit to SAL in May 2022: "*While leaders have made progress in meeting the needs of many adult learners and apprentices, very few of these come from the most disadvantaged backgrounds or areas of deprivation.*" By contrast, Ofsted said of ACL Essex, which is commissioned by the county council there: "*Courses are clearly targeted to support those communities in greatest need, or groups for whom other forms of provision may not be suitable.*"
45. According to ACL Essex's inspection report, what managers are doing to identify need is working well with local charities and community groups. East Surrey College, which plans to target an area of deprivation by running Multiply courses at the Merstham Hub, commissions the adult education charity WEA and relies on its presence in local communities to build relationships. Partnerships are an important part of targeting need and can help to raise awareness in the right places. ESC highlighted a lack of awareness of the available provision: "*It's amazing how many people don't know that if you haven't got Maths and English Level 2 it's free.*" SAL has an important role to play in getting the word out about what is on offer.
46. It would be worthwhile connecting with Mole Valley Employment and Skills Hub who, using funding from the DWP's Back to Work budget, link residents with

training opportunities. It is delivered by the charity Surrey Lifelong Learning Partnership, who run a community learning centre in the disadvantaged area Park Barn. Within nine months of starting out it was working with 35 people, highlighting the level of need in the area. The people it works with are referred by its partners, a good example of partnership working which could be replicated in similar areas. There are multiple other charities in Surrey that could also help SAL to bridge the gap and reach vulnerable people in most need of its adult skills. These include: ETHOS Project, The Hope Hub, York Road Project, Guildford Action, Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum, Surrey Coalition of Disabled People, Scope, Mencap, Richmond Fellowship, Love Me Love My Mind, Catalyst and Oakleaf Enterprise.

**Conclusion:** Ofsted highlighted a need to encourage participation in deprived areas. There are pockets of deprivation across Surrey where the fundamentals of supporting people into training and learning need to be addressed before a vocational pathway can even be considered. SAL centres are not best situated to reach these people, who are the most in need of gaining adult skills.

**Recommendation 1:** Develop a stronger relationship with Jobcentre Plus to (a) connect with the adults most in need of upskilling and (b) ensure courses match demand in type and location.

**Recommendation 2:** Take the teaching of functional skills to where the data shows qualifications are most lacking and unemployment is greatest. There should be a greater focus on Spelthorne, for example, where the greatest proportion of Surrey's residents have fewer than five GCSE grades 9-4 (27.9 per cent). Ideally this will not necessitate the closure of any current centre but if the budget means all courses must be in the same building, then this may mean those who can afford to travel may have to go farther.

**Recommendation 3:** Venues should be accessible by public transport and co-located with other internal services like libraries to be more community based and share costs. Every library across Surrey should also operate as an adult learning facility delivering community learning.

**Recommendation 4:** Form or strengthen partnerships with the community and voluntary sector organisations suggested in the Task Group report to encourage participation in disadvantaged and deprived areas.

**Recommendation 5:** Continue to work with teams in community engagement, economic development, land and property and health and wellbeing to analyse other ways of targeting the Council's 21 key neighbourhoods.

## Barriers

47. A lack of skills up to Level 2 is a barrier to progressing to higher vocational learning, and, having left learning long ago, this could perhaps be accompanied by bad memories relating to compulsory education and a lack of self-belief. There are

also the constraints of the cost and availability of childcare and transport as well as finding the time amid work and caring responsibilities. The House of Commons Education Committee recommended developing qualifications that can be taken in *“bite-size modules rather than commit to full qualifications”*<sup>13</sup> to enable adults with busy lives to build up qualifications over time. Surrey Chambers, asking businesses in an ongoing survey how they want training delivered, are finding short modular courses akin to the bootcamp model have been a popular choice, selected by 23 per cent so far<sup>14</sup>.

48. Some of the practical impediments can also be mitigated by virtual learning, and a mix of remote and in person classes would cater for everyone’s needs if economically viable. It should be remembered, however, that the pandemic exacerbated some of the learning gaps for the most vulnerable groups as classes moved online, which the digitally excluded are unable to access. The Council has commissioned Citizens Online to research the extent of this exclusion. It is estimated that a lack of access to information and communications technologies is preventing 200,000 Surrey residents from fully participating in society.
49. At the same time, poor infrastructure in rural Surrey inhibits access to education in person. As well as the infrequency of public transport on some routes, cost is an issue. This is particularly a problem in the East of the county where provision is centralised. According to East Surrey College, travel is the biggest barrier to asylum seekers’ learning: *“Funding that would enable that travel would completely revolutionise what activities they can access. They would stop being people who just live in a hotel who don’t have any relationships and don’t feel part of this community.”* Whereas Ukrainians can legally work in the UK and so have ESOL fully funded, Afghans still seeking asylum status are only part funded. As a result, ESC were taking training to their hotels rather than using their bursary on buses, but this did not allow students to gain the life skills involved in travel.
50. When looking for accommodation near those most in need, therefore, the Council does need to consider if there is affordable public transport to get there. In 2020 the House of Commons Education Committee’s 2020 recommendations also included: *“A community learning centre in every town to ensure the first rung of the ladder is there for adults furthest from qualifications and employment”*. It was suggested among the Task Group survey responses that Surrey’s adult education should be given equal status to its libraries. Siting an adult learning facility within every library hub would allow it to become more community based. Co-location is the intention in the library transformation board’s plans to move Sunbury’s into the town centre. It has tried for two years to also co-locate in Camberley, but the principal of SAL says this has proven difficult.

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<sup>13</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, ‘A plan for an adult skills and lifelong learning revolution’ (2020) [A plan for an adult skills and lifelong learning revolution - Education Committee - House of Commons \(parliament.uk\)](#)

<sup>14</sup> Surrey Chambers of Commerce ‘Enterprise M3 + Rest of Surrey Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP): Key findings and draft priorities webinar’, webinar for colleges and Independent Training Providers (28 March 2023) [LSIP Breakfast event \(surrey-chambers.co.uk\)](#)

51. Another important barrier that SAL needs to break down is a negative perception of the value of, or need for, education. They explain it is a “hard sell” convincing those with low qualifications to participate because in spite of this they are finding relatively well-paid roles: *“When I ask the economic development team, have labourers on construction sites got a desire to improve their qualifications, I find not, because they’re relatively well-paid and so do not see the financial advantage of it.”*<sup>15</sup>
52. Aside from convincing people of the personal advantages of upskilling, barriers faced by the provider are recruiting enough staff and making courses affordable amidst the shrinking Adult Education Budget. Community learning is particularly important at a time when an increasing number of people are suffering problems with emotional wellbeing. However, educational enrichment through education can be seen as a luxury in a cost-of-living crisis, and not just by welfare claimants. Eighteen respondents to the Task Group’s survey mentioned cost or payment arrangements as an issue: *“I know several people who have stopped courses reluctantly because they no longer have sufficient money to sign up and these are people unlikely to be in receipt of benefits. Personal fulfilment opportunities should not only be available to those who can afford them easily.”*
53. SAL state that currently their predominant clientele is middle/upper-middle class 60 to 69-year-olds and: *“There are no barriers concerning cost, despite the cost-of-living crisis”*<sup>16</sup>. They do, however, consider participation would suffer if costs were now to be increased, whereas it is thought this would not have been the case five years ago. As already noted, this would perpetuate the problem by making it more difficult to run courses efficiently.
54. Both SAL and ESC should heed the danger of a single entity delivering the bulk of an area’s adult skills and community learning programme. West Sussex County Council commissioned the charity Aspire Sussex to deliver most of its adult learning for 10 years, but it ceased trading in November 2022 after Covid caused the number of learners to fall dramatically. The ensuing cost-of-living crisis meant many were unable to pay for their courses, Aspire’s Director of Development explained. West Sussex County Council has since decided to take a mixed economy approach<sup>17</sup>.

**Conclusion:** The closure of Aspire Sussex in 2022 after its learners were unable to pay course fees demonstrates the risks associated with having a single adult education provider in one area. Council Services beyond education need to do all they can to

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<sup>15</sup> Annex 11

<sup>16</sup> Annex 8

<sup>17</sup> West Sussex County Council, ‘Item 6 Commissioning of an Adult Community Education Service’ (2023) [\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee, 18/01/2023 10:30 \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)



improve access to SAL's courses in order for it to remain viable, including minimising digital exclusion and improving public transport.

**Recommendation 6:** Fund transport for asylum seekers to attend training provision, particularly where it is centralised. This could be using the neighbourhood portion of Community Infrastructure Levy receipts.

**Recommendation 7:** Where possible courses should be offered both in person, to allow access for those without a computer and to maximise the social aspect, and remotely, to make it easier for people without transport or limited spare time due to caring or work commitments. Liaise with Citizens Online, which has been commissioned by the Council to research digital exclusion in Surrey, and cooperate with its recommendations to minimise it.

**Recommendation 8:** Market research of the types of courses wanted and better promotion of what is available could help to avoid having to run courses mixed ability due to lack of interest.

**Recommendation 9:** Where mixed ability classes must be used for the sake of economics, train tutors how to differentiate effectively and incorporate peer and self-assessment to enable their time to be shared more equitably.

## Surrey's economic, social and environmental skills needs

### Economic

55. Like most economies the bulk of Surrey's employment is in retail, health and education. It also has high-knowledge industries such as aviation, digital, professional services, life sciences and advanced manufacturing. Job postings show the highest number of vacancies in Surrey in the last year were for care workers and home carers, nurses, programmers and software developers, administrative roles, and sales.
56. In the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) region that includes Surrey and most of Hampshire, there are 78 per cent more jobs in the IT sector than the national average and 34 per cent more in construction, and Surrey is not immune from the nationwide recruitment struggles in these areas in particular. The government paper 'Quantifying the UK skills gap' of May 2021 said 46 per cent of businesses were struggling to recruit for roles that require data skills. Construction companies are similarly finding it difficult to hire, exacerbated by losing workers to Brexit and the fact that over a fifth of workers in the sector are in their 50s,<sup>18</sup> at a time that the architecture, engineering, and construction industry is being transformed by 3D design and modelling software.

<sup>18</sup> Construction Management, 'Why upskilling is key in 2022' (2022) [Why upskilling is key in 2022 - Construction Management](#)

57. The Surrey Skills Plan approved by Cabinet in October 2022 recognises the need to “Develop and promote courses to keep pace with industry demand and support reskilling” but does not specify who should be responsible. In the current economic climate, businesses are said to be putting their own investment in training on the back burner, along with marketing, as two costs that make the difference in the slightly longer-term. More positively, the process of writing the LSIP has acted as a bridge between training providers and businesses, with Surrey Chambers building lines of communication between them so that businesses can influence the courses on offer. Indeed, Nescot started a Level 6 Laboratory Scientist Apprenticeship in January 2022 as a direct result of a need identified by employers.
58. Young people in the area tend to overlook apprenticeships as they are encouraged by parents to go to university. In the 2021 census, 4.2 per cent of Surrey residents aged 16 and over had an apprenticeship, compared with 5.3 per cent in England and Wales. In the Chambers of Commerce survey, 82 per cent of respondents either already take on apprentices or plan to utilise them in the future<sup>19</sup>. It is therefore not a case of needing to persuade employers to engage, but persuading the workforce this is a sensible option and making the apprenticeships easy to find.
59. Some gaps in provision exist in areas of skills shortages. For example, coding is only available at ESC as an apprenticeship, not an option for those who cannot afford to take an apprentice rate of £4.81 an hour for a year. A part-time offer would allow working people to retrain in software development. Similarly, HNC (level 4) Digital Technologies (software development and programming) at Guildford College is also out of reach for some in more ways than one, with fees over £6,000 and, although partly online, a location of Reading or Oxford. East Surrey College offers ‘taster’ days to introduce possible new practical careers in for example plumbing or electrical installation, which can encourage people to engage in longer courses, and these could be extended to include coding.
60. Strategic Development Funding (SDF) is being awarded to help reshape training provision to align it with the LSIP, and the Enterprise M3 LEP was awarded £2.69m in 2022/23. Surrey’s Nescot and Hampshire’s Sparsholt College worked together to lead their application process and the funding was awarded to providers advancing retrofit and carbon literacy. Among them was East Surrey College, but not SAL which did not apply.
61. The Council is supporting skills needs where it itself is the employer, for instance apprenticeships in social care. Using the Apprenticeship Levy, Surrey County Council has over 40 staff on adult social care programmes at Chichester University for the Social Work Degree and Canterbury (Christchurch) for the Occupational Therapy Degree.

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<sup>19</sup> Surrey Chambers of Commerce ‘Enterprise M3 + Rest of Surrey Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP): Key findings and draft priorities webinar’, webinar for colleges and Independent Training Providers (28 March 2023) [LSIP Breakfast event \(surrey-chambers.co.uk\)](https://www.surrey-chambers.co.uk)

62. Colleges are well-placed to provide a progression route into the care industry, and the curriculum delivered by East Surrey College has direct input from Surrey Care Association which supports social care providers. As an employer struggling to recruit enough social workers, the Council could enter a mutually beneficial partnership with ESC by helping to recruit onto its access to social work course and giving the students work placements. Following a Select Committee recommendation in April 2023 to work with ESC to provide placements for students on their Level 3 course in Access to Social Work, the Cabinet Member agreed the Children's Services Academy would approach social work teams to place their students wherever there was available capacity.
63. The Government's Lifetime Skills Guarantee, paid for by the National Skills Fund, allows any adult without an A Level or equivalent (or who do but are unemployed or earn less than the living wage), to access full funding to take their first Level 3 course. In Surrey, these are available in childcare and early years, health and social care, and construction, at East Surrey College, or Professional Training Solutions based in Farnham<sup>20</sup>. It is anticipated that those studying childcare free of charge on a Saturday at ESC will go on to do the foundation degree and work in the industry, another that desperately needs staff. They also run 'Pre-access to Nursing' for those who first need English and Maths GCSEs, a course which attracted an "enormous" number of applicants during Covid. In addition, there are discussions with a provider about them writing a course programme to enable ESOL learners to get the skills they need to apply for healthcare assistant jobs.
64. Many of the skills gaps require vocational qualifications at a higher level than SAL is currently delivering, arguing they are already sufficiently supplied by the further education colleges. Therefore, the Government's drive for a skills plan led by employer demand may conflict with SAL's lean towards community learning. As discussed, this is a problem because paid for non-accredited courses in the areas of foreign languages, arts and crafts and cookery are important not only to combat social isolation but also for SAL to supplement its income, especially when the Adult Education Budget has failed to increase in line with rampant inflation.

How can this tension be resolved?

65. A 'do nothing' option is risky because it needs to show in its accountability statement how it aligns with the LSIP. At the same time, providing more higher-level vocational courses would not play to its strengths and could be to the detriment of the community learning courses which are its area of expertise, and where the majority of its customer base lies due to market demand. It does not have the expertise to teach directly many subjects where skills shortages have

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<sup>20</sup> Department for Education, 'Free courses for jobs: list of providers' (2022) [Free courses for jobs: list of providers - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/free-courses-for-jobs-list-of-providers)

been identified. It also does not make good sense when existing providers are competing for skilled tutors, of which there is a shortage, as well as competing for a share of the same grant. Furthermore, it may not be sensible for the Council to pursue taking a greater share of the market itself in the current climate, when the collapse of Aspire Sussex has shown a single provider model to be risky. In West Sussex County Council's preferred new model, endorsed by its scrutiny committee in January 2023, the Council does not provide adult learning directly but instead allocates the AEB to multiple subcontracted providers. It is the Council's job to design the curriculum, manage the contracts, and give quality assurance, which spreads the risk and gives more scope for tailoring its offer according to location and learner needs. The Council is comparable to Surrey in that it has a 64:36 split in favour of community learning, almost the polar opposite to ESC.

66. There are already a number of FE and independent training providers serving the Surrey market, which may or may not be open to being commissioned by Surrey County Council. Even within the half of the county that SAL covers, other provision is already established and has the same right to apply to ESFA for funding. The fact that the local authority does not as yet have devolved powers at a level that would allow it to control the Adult Education Budget, makes it tricky to have the universal offer across Surrey that the Leader of the Council aspires to.
67. It makes sense for SAL to offer high level training in the Council's areas of expertise, i.e. education and social care. It already does this through apprenticeships, though skills bootcamps would make this more accessible to those who need to maintain a higher income while training. For training in areas outside of the Council's areas of expertise, on the other hand, it is perhaps not efficient for the Council to compete with other adult skills providers and dilute funding and tutors, both of which are in short supply. Providers should instead collaborate, allowing them to each play to their areas of expertise. SAL could play more of a strategic leadership role to ensure plans are co-ordinated and make the skills system easier to access for both learners and employers. There does not appear to be any readily accessible database of what training is available in the county, meaning potential learners may perceive barriers that are not there. For example, Access to Nursing HE at ESC and Guildford College is an excellent route to a nursing degree for those without Level 3, but it is not available part-time which would preclude someone who needs to earn a wage that year. It is, however, offered part-time at Nescot in Ewell, but someone unaware of this could be deterred from enrolling. SAL should keep track of what technical, higher level courses are available and signpost learners to them.
68. Within such an oversight role, the Council could take the lead on maintaining a single learning portal and guiding people to learning opportunities, something the Economy and Growth team has begun work on with private sector investment, since participating in the Task Group's evidence session. The Council does not necessarily have a strategic remit to influence but can aim to achieve this through relationship-building. Among the LSIP's draft priorities is embedding more of a "collective mentality" amongst providers, and enhancing relationships between

providers and businesses, with the latter being clear on the specialisms of each provider, and contributing to course design and delivery. With the work on building these networks already underway, it should be easier for the Council to engage with the collaborative approach. Historically, partnership working with Surrey's colleges has been impeded by a sense of competition, but relationships are said to be improving as three of the FE colleges have brought in new principals in the last year. The process of working on the LSIP appear to have helped in this regard. Surrey college principals are now meeting regularly, in line with the Surrey Skills Plan's suggestion of establishing a formal partnership of providers to coordinate activity and bid for funding, for action within one to three years.

69. Effective collaboration could possibly offer a resolution to the tension between catering for economic and social needs, particularly if SAL is able to demonstrate the value of its contribution to the Department for Education. Adult learning can be an important cog in the wheel, acting as a starting point to return to learning, by building confidence or basic literacy, numeracy and IT to a level where people can go on to formal post-secondary education, which will then increase their earning potential.
70. As well as supporting adults who did not originally continue their learning journey through to higher education, adult learning can upskill the older generation digitally and thus encourage early retirees to return to the job market. Ofsted said in 2022 that learners and apprentices did not routinely know what career opportunities were available to them or how to prepare for their next steps. Careers advice is not appreciated by many engaging in community learning, 60 per cent of whom are aged over 53, yet this is a target audience for the Government and SAL could turn its older clientele into an advantage by ensuring learners of all ages benefit from individualised careers guidance. SAL already provides a very good range of digital skills qualifications, which have increasing participation rates and are also promoted to those doing functional skills.
71. SAL also teaches refugees the native language through English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), which will enable them to utilise skills they already possess and join the workforce. If SAL were to reach more people who would benefit most from removing these initial barriers to vocational training, i.e. lack of language skills, adult skills and self-belief, it could be argued that providing this essential underpinning to progress to higher learning would play a significant part in the government's skills drive. In an ongoing online survey run by Surrey Chambers of Commerce to discover employers' skills gaps, four per cent of respondents at the time of writing said that when they were recruiting, they experienced problems attracting applicants with sufficient levels of English and Maths<sup>21</sup>, which further supports the case for continuing to deliver these courses. A significant proportion of learners achieving basic skills through adult education then

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<sup>21</sup> Surrey Chambers of Commerce 'Enterprise M3 + Rest of Surrey Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP): Key findings and draft priorities webinar', webinar for colleges and Independent Training Providers (28 March 2023) [LSIP Breakfast event \(surrey-chambers.co.uk\)](https://www.surrey-chambers.co.uk)

progress onto further courses, a DfE survey showed<sup>22</sup>. After doing a Level 2 Skills for Life course, 44 per cent of English learners and 39 per cent of Maths learners went on to do a Level 3 course the following year. Without this Level 2 starting point, they would be impeded from taking advantage of the government's Lifetime Skills Guarantee offers.

72. At the same time, SAL can help to make learners employable. In a Surrey Chambers of Commerce survey of employers asking what problems they experienced when recruiting, technical skills were said to be lacking by a significant proportion who responded – 29 per cent. However, a greater problem, highlighted by 36 per cent, was said to be a lack of employability skills. It would appear the main skills shortage stopping businesses from being able to recruit are those in presentation and communication. Surrey Chambers reported a number of 16 to 24-year-olds on a Kickstart scheme placement were unable to complete it due to a lack of confidence. Their sense is that due to everyone having to go virtual during lockdown periods, it has reduced the experience and exposure young people might normally have got at school, college, or at work and this is now being felt by employers who are citing it as a challenge. SAL runs a free 'Getting into work – refresh' course in building job search and interview skills; to reflect the communication skills deficit exacerbated by the pandemic, this course could be expanded to include such skills as using the telephone and emailing.

**Conclusion:** There may be a conflict between fulfilling Surrey's economic and social needs. SAL offers English, Maths, digital and ESOL but does not provide any level 3 vocational qualifications. Where work to fill the requisite skills gaps is being undertaken by colleges in the area, it would not be sensible to duplicate this, though Surrey County Council should keep this under review and ensure channels of communication should be in place so that the Council is made aware of any intention to withdraw provision elsewhere.

**Recommendation 10:** There should be parity in provision across Surrey. Both accredited and community aspects of learning should be accessible to both West and East without the existence of a postcode lottery. In its areas of expertise, i.e. education and social care, the Council should be offering Level 3 training; in addition to apprenticeships in these areas it should consider skills bootcamps, for which grants are available for local authorities. In other areas of learning, where it would not make good financial sense to provide these itself it should seek to commission providers to fill these gaps.

**Recommendation 11:** Working within a formal partnership of colleges and independent training providers, and the Employer Representative Body which is researching skills gaps in the county, launch an online database of available training by the end of the

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<sup>22</sup> Panayiotou et al. 'Quantitative programme of research for adult English and maths: Longitudinal survey of adult learners final research report' (Department for Education, 2018) [Quantitative programme of research for adult English and maths \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#) in [Getting-the-basics-right-LW-report.pdf \(learningandwork.org.uk\)](#)

2022/23 academic year. This overview of the offer in Surrey will allow SAL to see what training is missing and will better enable signposting to relevant courses when contacted by a learner or business.

**Recommendation 12:** The training database should be publicly accessible and well promoted by SAL to make the public aware of the local offer.

**Recommendation 13:** The database should be kept up-to-date with available apprenticeships throughout Surrey that SAL and careers hubs can signpost potential learners to. Should the Council take over responsibility for careers hubs as envisaged in the Pathways to Employment proposal to Cabinet of 28 March, it should promote apprenticeships and T-Levels as respectable alternative pathways to employment, in its careers advice in schools, as outlined in the Surrey Skills Plan.

**Recommendation 14:** To reflect the communication skills deficit exacerbated by the pandemic, SAL's Getting into work – refresh course should be expanded to include such skills as using the telephone and emailing.

**Conclusion:** With an ageing population a particular problem in the area, and the labour supply likely to peak in the near future, SAL could have a useful role to play in encouraging some older people to rejoin the workforce.

**Recommendation 15:** In order to evidence SAL's contribution to the Government's economic drive, encourage all learners of working age, including those in 60s, to take advantage of careers advice and digital skills, help to connect ESOL students with appropriate employers, and collect data on the work/study destinations of all learners.

## Environmental

73. The London School of Economics, which has estimated the proportion of employees in each sector that will be affected by the greening of employment to contribute to net zero, predicts the South East has 10.4 per cent of jobs that could require reskilling<sup>23</sup>. Surrey Chambers of Commerce commissioned research to understand green jobs within the LSIP area, which projected that the number would rise from 35,000 in 2022 to 57,000 in 2030 and 108,000 in 2050<sup>24</sup>.
74. Construction is being heavily impacted, with carbon benchmarking and feasibility advice becoming a core skill in the industry. Many construction companies have their headquarters based in Surrey and this sector represents 13 per cent of the county's green jobs, almost double the regional average. A paper in the journal Energy Economics states that 30 per cent of construction workers will need to learn

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<sup>23</sup> Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment, LSE [Microsoft Word - IJT UK Policy Report January 2019 FINAL NEW FOR PRINT 28Jan.docx \(lse.ac.uk\)](#)

<sup>24</sup> WPI Economics and Lightcast, 'Green skills demand in Surrey and North/Mid Hampshire' (2023) [Green-skills-demand-in-Surrey-and-north.mid-Hampshire-002.pdf \(surrey-chambers.co.uk\)](#)

new skills as part of the transition to a green economy<sup>25</sup>. The next largest sector, at 26 per cent, is transport and storage. Indeed the two most key changes that need to cut carbon emissions, laid out in the Greener Futures Climate Change Delivery Plan 2021-2025, are putting low carbon heating into 53,000 homes and taking 376,000 petrol and diesel cars off the roads.

75. Orbital South Colleges, Activate Learning, Brooklands College and Nescot have received money from the DfE's 2022/23 Strategic Development Fund (SDF) to respond to skills needs in the areas of green construction, professional services, agri-tech and electric and hybrid vehicles. East Surrey College, for example, is using its funding for electric vehicle technology, while its sister college John Ruskin has developed instruction in fitting solar panels, ground source heat pumps and wind turbines and is delivering retrofit as part of a domestic heating apprenticeship. It is widely accepted that most areas of the economy will develop a 'green' element to them, and Orbital South Colleges acknowledge this through their general "greening up" of provision. For instance, students on a hairdressing course will learn about the benefits of using products without palm oil and plastic packaging.
76. Surrey County Council's Surrey Skills Plan recognises that the need for green skills, particularly in technical roles, is an inhibitor of business growth and seeks to address this by, for example, developing a specific STEM careers strategy. Despite this, SAL does not currently offer any courses that embed green skills. Skills Bootcamp funding is available for green skills, and according to the government's website there is only one provider in the South East receiving funding to deliver a skills bootcamp in heat pumps, and that is near Southampton. Most bootcamps are delivered remotely but green skills is the exception. SAL says it does not have the facilities to offer bootcamps, but this could be resolved by the virtual learning offered by the Retrofit Academy based in Stafford, which is dedicated entirely to training retrofit coordinators. ACL Essex<sup>26</sup> use them to offer level 2 e-learning and a 10-week level 3 bootcamp. Since the Task Group's evidence sessions, in February 2023 the Council entered into a three-year partnership with The Retrofit Academy. In June it will take part in an online Retrofit Summit, bringing together training providers, installers and materials manufacturers to outline the scale of need and ambition for retrofit in Surrey.

**Conclusion:** There is government funding available to deliver green skills, which are in demand, particularly in the construction and transport sectors, and would help the Council's Greener Futures Climate Change Delivery Plan. A student who completed Level 3 retrofit in Essex said the Level 2 prepared them well.

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<sup>25</sup> Bowen, A., K. Kuralbayeva and E. L. Tipoe (2018) Characterising green employment: the impacts of 'greening' on workforce composition. *Energy Economics*, 72: 263-275

<sup>26</sup> ACL Essex, 'ACL Essex is offering fully funded retrofit training in partnership with The Retrofit Academy (2023) [NEWS RELEASE: ACL Essex is offering fully funded retrofit training in partnership with The Retrofit Academy - ACL Essex](#)



**Recommendation 16:** SAL uses available DfE and DWP funding to deliver retrofit courses in partnership with The Retrofit Academy by the end of 2023, including Level 2 (GCSE 4/C+) to entice learners in and prepare the groundwork for study.

77. Green skills are for consumers as well as for industry and living sustainably can help personal wellbeing and community cohesion. Adult learning could be used to impart an awareness of the carbon dioxide costs and impacts of everyday activities and why and how to reduce these. There could be workshops in grow your own and cooking with local seasonal ingredients, upcycling, using energy more efficiently in the home, cycle mechanics, and homemade environmentally friendly cleaning products. ACL Essex, for example, run free online courses to share what individuals can do to contribute to a more sustainable future through a circular economy. The Innovation South Virtual Campus, which involves Enterprise M3, has recently launched free online learning to employees in areas such as sustainable resource management.

**Conclusion:** While the Council's 2020 Climate Change Strategy aims to decarbonise the county by 2050, 95 per cent of the county's carbon emissions are generated by residents and businesses. It is therefore crucial that its adult learning provision delivers courses aimed at empowering individuals to reduce their emissions, which can contribute to better physical and mental health.

**Recommendation 17:** SAL introduces free courses for residents in carbon literacy and sustainable living.

## Social

78. In a survey across England, six per cent of people aged 16 and over reported often or always feeling lonely in the year ending March 2019, before any periods of lockdown began<sup>27</sup>. Studies have linked loneliness and social isolation to depression, coronary heart disease and stroke and even a 26 per cent increase in the likelihood of mortality<sup>28</sup>. In addition to the human cost, there is a significant economic cost. Due to the associated loss of productivity and sickness absence, caring responsibilities of employees, and staff turnover, it is estimated to cost UK employers £2.5 billion a year<sup>29</sup>. The public purse pays too, as lonely people are more likely to rely on health and social care services. According to Public Health England, £1 invested in tackling loneliness saves society £1.26.

79. The previous section discussed in detail pockets of social deprivation in Surrey, but poor health outcomes are linked not only to low income but also to loneliness. Surrey's Health and Wellbeing Strategy was refreshed in 2022 to include a focus on the areas experiencing the poorest health outcomes in Surrey, selected on the basis of the overall deprivation score established in the English deprivation indices

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<sup>27</sup> ONS, 'Measures of National Wellbeing Dashboard' (2019) [Measures of National Well-being Dashboard - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/measures-of-national-wellbeing)

<sup>28</sup> Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T.B., Baker, M., Harris, T. and Stephenson, D., 2015. Loneliness and social isolation as risk factors for mortality: a meta-analytic review. *Perspectives on psychological science*, 10(2), pp.227-237

<sup>29</sup> Co-op and New Economics Foundation, 'The cost of loneliness to UK employers' (2017) [cost-of-loneliness-2017.pdf \(campaigntoendloneliness.org\)](https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/cost-of-loneliness-2017.pdf)

2019<sup>30</sup>. As areas of deprivation, Hooley, Merstham and Netherne, Canalside, Westborough, Stoke and Stanwell North are the top five priority areas in the Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy<sup>31</sup>, in which 'creating communities and social environments that tackle isolation' comes under priority two: Supporting people's mental health and emotional well-being by preventing mental ill health and promoting emotional well-being. At the same time, the Surrey Skills Plan<sup>32</sup> approved by Cabinet in 2022 envisions a skills system that is led by the needs of businesses in order to power economic growth. Both of these ambitions are shared by Government - laid out in the Skills and Post 16 Education Act 2022 that followed the Skills for Jobs White Paper, and also in the Tackling Loneliness Network Action Plan that shows Ministers recognise the damage to health and wellbeing caused by an absence of social contact. At first sight the two aims appear to be mutually exclusive and pit the needs of individuals and employers against one another, but that may not necessarily be so. Community learning can give people the confidence and motivation to progress to formal qualifications, in a similar way that Skills for Life courses (level 2 in English, Maths and digital) can open doors to higher study. At the same time, accredited courses can also bring people together and help to gain employment which eases isolation.

**Conclusion:** The tangible personal and economic benefits make it important not to dismiss community learning amid the national government drive to improve adult skills. Covid recovery plans need to have mental health in mind as well as the economy. There needs to be a balance between helping to fill local employers' skills gaps and recognising the value of adult learning's contribution to counteracting a loneliness epidemic, both of which are ambitions of both the Government and the Council.

**Recommendation 18:** Ensure the drive for skills for jobs outlined in Surrey Skills Plan is not at the expense of community learning. Expand community learning into all areas of Surrey where it is lacking. Continue to work with Surrey Chambers of Commerce to prepare an accountability statement for the LSIP, while at the same time exploring ways of maintaining affordable community learning.

**Recommendation 19:** Consider setting up a skills swap service as a way of counteracting social isolation at no cost to the participants. For example, someone may be willing to teach functional skills and could trade the credit earned from this to join yoga classes.

**Recommendation 20:** Consider a community credit scheme, such as the one run by Volunteer Centre Dorset, whereby adults with learning disabilities volunteer in the community and learn new skills, aided by a mentor. Both earn credits which can be exchanged for goods or services from businesses signed up to the scheme. For example, volunteers referred by the Department for Work and Pensions, learning life skills at a furniture reuse charity in Redhill, could be incorporated into such a scheme.

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<sup>30</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 'English indices of deprivation' (2019) [English indices of deprivation 2019 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/424242/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> Surrey County Council, 'Surrey Health and Well-being Strategy' (2022) [Surrey Health and Well-being Strategy - update 2022 | Healthy Surrey](https://www.surrey.gov.uk/media/10222/surrey-health-and-well-being-strategy-update-2022.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> Surrey County Council, 'The Surrey Skills Plan' (2022) [Surrey-Skills-Plan-12.10.22.pdf \(investinsurrey.co.uk\)](https://www.surrey.gov.uk/media/10222/surrey-skills-plan-12.10.22.pdf)

Recruiting volunteers to mentor may give them the self-belief they lacked and motivate them to become a tutor with SAL or to go into teacher training.

### Good practice in and out of county

80. SAL was again rated Good by Ofsted in its most recent inspection in May 2022, as were 42 per cent of further education and skills providers. It has excellent achievement rates and learner feedback in its English and Maths programme. ESC's adult learning programmes were also rated Good in December 2022.
81. What constitutes good practice has been explored in detail throughout this report, but this section will be used specifically to look at what providers rated Outstanding by Ofsted are doing. A search of Ofsted's database found that only 5.5 per cent of further education and skills providers in England have an Outstanding grade, and just one of these is run by a local authority - Redbridge Institute of Adult Education.
82. The following features indicate some of the practices that have earned the provider its status:
- A wide range of high-quality and accessible venues within the community, 48 in total. These are in a wide variety of community settings, such as ESOL lessons at a local supermarket and free digital family learning based in local libraries.
  - "Highly effective regional partnerships and subcontracting arrangements" enable local priorities to be addressed in the curriculum. Managers maintain a strong network of partnerships including libraries, children's centres, Jobcentre Plus, Working in Mind Partnership and Redbridge Concern for Mental Health.
  - Less academic courses, such as willow weaving or an 'edible garden' project, encourage people from different backgrounds into education.
  - A programme run in partnership with local job centres is designed for learners from minority ethnic groups, over 50s unemployed for an extended period and people with poor mental health, and has supported a significant proportion of these learners into paid employment.
  - Job opportunities are identified by arranging for learners to access job fairs, work experience and volunteering.

**Conclusion:** Partnership working is clearly seen by Ofsted as playing a key role in engaging with hard-to-reach groups and meeting employer needs, as can be seen in its praise of, for example, Redbridge Institute of Adult Education and ACL Essex for working with the local enterprise partnership, job centres, charities and community groups.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### Consolidated list of conclusions:

**Conclusion:** There is a disparity between the types of provision offered in East and West Surrey, which leaves different parts of the population in each area dissatisfied. Mole Valley residents in particular feel under-served in community learning, while East Surrey's alignment to the Government's Skills for Jobs drive leaves SAL vulnerable to having to move away from its traditional area of focus. Reduced income from community learning may put at risk subsidising parenting classes and supported learning for adults with learning disabilities.

**Conclusion:** The proportion of unskilled residents in the county is relatively low. Nevertheless, there are more than 130,000 residents without a Level 2 qualification, and more than 30,000 of these have none. In order to fulfil its ethos of leaving no one behind, the Council must strive to reach them.

**Conclusion:** Participation in SAL's community learning programmes is decreasing, which is making them more expensive to run. This reduced income may result in learners having to pay higher course fees and risks making them unaffordable to some.

**Conclusion:** Ofsted highlighted a need to encourage participation in deprived areas. There are pockets of deprivation across Surrey where the fundamentals of supporting people into training and learning need to be addressed before a vocational pathway can even be considered. SAL centres are not best situated to reach these people, who are the most in need of gaining adult skills.

**Conclusion:** The closure of Aspire Sussex in 2022 after its learners were unable to pay course fees demonstrates the risks associated with having a single adult education provider in one area. Council Services beyond education need to do all they can to improve access to SAL's courses in order for it to remain viable, including minimising digital exclusion and improving public transport.

**Conclusion:** There may be a conflict between fulfilling Surrey's economic and social needs. SAL offers English, Maths, digital and ESOL but does not provide any level 3 vocational qualifications. Where work to fill the requisite skills gaps is being undertaken by colleges in the area, it would not be sensible to duplicate this, though Surrey County Council should keep this under review and ensure channels of communication should be in place so that the Council is made aware of any intention to withdraw provision elsewhere.

**Conclusion:** With an ageing population a particular problem in the area, and the labour supply likely to peak in the near future, SAL could have a useful role to play in encouraging some older people to rejoin the workforce.

**Conclusion:** There is government funding available to deliver green skills, which are in demand, particularly in the construction and transport sectors, and would help the Council's Greener Futures Climate Change Delivery Plan. A student who completed Level 3 retrofit in Essex said the Level 2 prepared them well.

**Conclusion:** While the Council's 2020 Climate Change Strategy aims to decarbonise the county by 2050, 95 per cent of the county's carbon emissions are generated by residents and businesses. It is therefore crucial that its adult learning provision delivers courses aimed at empowering individuals to reduce their emissions, which can contribute to better physical and mental health.

**Conclusion:** The tangible personal and economic benefits make it important not to dismiss community learning amid the national government drive to improve adult skills. Covid recovery plans need to have mental health in mind as well as the economy. There needs to be a balance between helping to fill local employers' skills gaps and recognising the value of adult learning's contribution to counteracting a loneliness epidemic, both of which are ambitions of both the Government and the Council.

**Conclusion:** Partnership working is clearly seen by Ofsted as playing a key role in engaging with hard-to-reach groups and meeting employer needs, as can be seen in its praise of, for example, Redbridge Institute of Adult Education and ACL Essex for working with the local enterprise partnership, job centres, charities and community groups.

#### **Consolidated list of recommendations:**

There are two areas of exclusion currently which differ between the east and west of Surrey: in the East, provision is centralised and those seeking community learning are disadvantaged; in the West, accredited learning is not reaching some of those most excluded from the labour market. For social and economic reasons of equal importance, both of these areas need to be addressed. The Adult Learning and Skills Task Group therefore recommends:

*To reach people most in need*

**Recommendation 1:** Develop a stronger relationship with Jobcentre Plus to (a) connect with the adults most in need of upskilling and (b) ensure courses match demand in type and location.

**Recommendation 2:** Take the teaching of functional skills to where the data shows qualifications are most lacking and unemployment is greatest. There should be a greater focus on Spelthorne, for example, where the greatest proportion of Surrey's residents have fewer than five GCSE grades 9-4 (27.9 per cent). Ideally this will not necessitate the closure of any current centre but if the budget means all courses must be in the same building, then this may mean those who can afford to travel may have to go farther.

**Recommendation 3:** Venues should be accessible by public transport and co-located with other internal services like libraries to be more community based and share costs. Every library across Surrey should also operate as an adult learning facility delivering community learning.

**Recommendation 4:** Form or strengthen partnerships with the community and voluntary sector organisations suggested in the Task Group report to encourage participation in disadvantaged and deprived areas.

**Recommendation 5:** Continue to work with teams in community engagement, economic development, land and property and health and wellbeing to analyse other ways of targeting the Council's 21 key neighbourhoods.

**Recommendation 6:** Fund transport for asylum seekers to attend training provision, particularly where it is centralised. This may use the neighbourhood portion of Community Infrastructure Levy receipts.

**Recommendation 7:** Where possible courses should be offered both in person, to allow access for those without a computer and to maximise the social aspect, and remotely, to make it easier for people without transport or limited spare time due to caring or work commitments. Liaise with Citizens Online, which has been commissioned by the Council to research digital exclusion in Surrey, and cooperate with its recommendations to minimise it.

*To support viability*

**Recommendation 8:** Market research of the types of courses wanted and better promotion of what is available could help to avoid having to run courses mixed ability due to lack of interest.

**Recommendation 9:** Where mixed ability classes must be used for the sake of economics, train tutors how to differentiate effectively and incorporate peer and self-assessment to enable their time to be shared more equitably.

*To aid economic growth*

**Recommendation 10:** There should be parity in provision across Surrey. Both accredited and community aspects of learning should be accessible to both West and East without the existence of a postcode lottery. In its areas of expertise, i.e. education and social care, the Council should be offering Level 3 training; in addition to apprenticeships in these areas it should consider skills bootcamps, for which grants are available for local authorities. In other areas of learning, where it would not make good financial sense to provide these itself it should seek to commission providers to fill these gaps.

**Recommendation 11:** Working within a formal partnership of colleges and independent training providers, and the Employer Representative Body which is researching skills gaps in the county, launch an online database of available training by the end of the 2022/23 academic year. This overview of the offer in Surrey will allow SAL to see what training is missing and will better enable signposting to relevant courses when contacted by a learner or business.

**Recommendation 12:** The training database should be publicly accessible and well promoted by SAL to make the public aware of the local offer.

**Recommendation 13:** The database should be kept up-to-date with available apprenticeships throughout Surrey that SAL and careers hubs can signpost potential learners to. Should the Council take over responsibility for careers hubs as envisaged in the Pathways to Employment proposal to Cabinet in March 2023, it should promote apprenticeships and T-Levels as respectable alternative pathways to employment, in its careers advice in schools, as outlined in the Surrey Skills Plan.

**Recommendation 14:** To reflect the communication skills deficit exacerbated by the pandemic, SAL's Getting into work – refresh course should be expanded to include such skills as using the telephone and emailing.

**Recommendation 15:** In order to evidence SAL's contribution to the Government's economic drive, encourage all learners of working age, including those in 60s, to take advantage of careers advice and digital skills, help to connect ESOL students with appropriate employers, and collect data on the work/study destinations of all learners.

*To meet environmental commitments*

**Recommendation 16:** SAL uses available DfE and DWP funding to deliver retrofit courses in partnership with The Retrofit Academy by the end of 2023, including Level 2 (GCSE 4/C+) to entice learners in and prepare the groundwork for study.

**Recommendation 17:** SAL introduces free courses for residents in carbon literacy and sustainable living.

*To help combat social isolation*

**Recommendation 18:** Ensure the drive for skills for jobs outlined in Surrey Skills Plan is not at the expense of community learning. Expand community learning into all areas of Surrey where it is lacking. Continue to work with Surrey Chambers of Commerce to prepare an accountability statement for the LSIP, while at the same time exploring ways of maintaining affordable community learning.

**Recommendation 19:** Consider setting up a skills swap service as a way of counteracting social isolation at no cost to the participants. For example, someone may be willing to teach functional skills and could trade the credit earned from this to join yoga classes.

**Recommendation 20:** Consider a community credit scheme, such as the one run by Volunteer Centre Dorset, whereby adults with learning disabilities volunteer in the community and learn new skills, aided by a mentor. Both earn credits which can be exchanged for goods or services from businesses signed up to the scheme. For example, volunteers referred by the Department for Work and Pensions, learning life skills at a furniture reuse charity in Redhill, could be incorporated into such a scheme. Recruiting volunteers to mentor may give them the self-belief they lacked and motivate them to become a tutor with SAL or to go into teacher training.

### Next steps

The Task Group's report will be considered by the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee on 12 June 2023, with recommendations submitted to Cabinet on 27 June 2023.

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Councillor Chris Townsend, Chairman of the Adult Learning and Skills Task Group

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## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Collated responses to the public survey conducted by the Adult Learning and Skills Task Group between 9 March 2022 and 18 April 2022

## **Annexes**

Annex 1 – Terms of Reference

Annex 2 – Written submission from Alex Stevenson, Head of Programme – Essential and Life Skills, Learning and Work Institute, dated 15 March 2022

Annex 3 – Written submission from Family Voice Surrey, dated 14 April 2022

Annex 4 – Written submission from Tim Oliver, Leader of the Council, and Denise Turner-Stewart, then Cabinet Member for Education and Learning, dated 20 April 2022

Annex 5 – Minutes of an oral evidence session with Tim Oliver, Leader of the Council; Denise Turner-Stewart, then Cabinet Member for Education and Learning; Dawn Redpath, Director for Economy and Growth; Jane Edwards, then Assistant Director for Education; Francis Lawlor, Principal of Surrey Adult Learning, on 3 May 2022

Annex 6 – Written submission from Jayne Dickinson, Chief Executive of Orbital South Colleges, dated 18 May 2022

Annex 7 – Written submission on family centres from Matt Ansell, SCC Director for Family Resilience and Safeguarding, dated 15 July 2022

Annex 8 – Written submission from Francis Lawlor, Principal of Surrey Adult Learning, and Matt Furniss, Cabinet Member for Transport, Infrastructure and Growth, dated 29 November 2022

Annex 9 – Minutes of an oral evidence session with Lindsay Pamphilon, Orbital South Colleges Group Principal, and Jayne Dickinson, Orbital South Colleges CEO, on 14 December 2022

Annex 10 – Minutes of an oral evidence session with Surrey Chambers of Commerce CEO Louise Punter and Local Skills Improvement Plan Project Manager Rob Gibson, on 31 January 2023

Annex 11 – Minutes of an oral evidence session with Francis Lawlor, Principal of Surrey Adult Learning, on 6 February 2023.