

**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**

**Adult Learning & Skills Task Group – Surrey County Council Oral Evidence Session 1**

1.30pm on Tuesday, 3 May 2022

**In Attendance:**

Chris Townsend (Task Group Lead)

Jonathan Essex

Fiona White

Catherine Baart

Jeremy Webster

**Witnesses:**

Tim Oliver, Leader of the Council

Denise Turner-Stewart, Cabinet Member for Education and Learning

Dawn Redpath, Director – Economy and Growth

Jane Winterbone, Assistant Director – Education

Francis Lawlor, Principal – Adult Learning

**Key points raised in the discussion:**

1. The Leader acknowledged that both the Council and the county more generally were facing issues around skills shortages. The Council was seeking to improve its offer to employees to access further learning and training, and to consequently improve retention of employees. This work would translate into an adult's academy, in conjunction with health partners. The Leader explained that the Council could work closely with the further education sector and local enterprise partnerships to identify skills gaps and the work to address such gaps. The Leader emphasised the importance of adult learning provision in the context of refugees, especially English language classes. Those who had taken early retirement and incentivising them to return to work was a resource worth using. The Leader explained that more work needed to be done to reach out to those with learning disabilities to utilise their skills in employment.
2. The Cabinet Member added that there was pressure on the Council to not only provide classes to aid wellbeing and to combat loneliness, but to also provide provision to help with training, education and skills to satisfy the demands of the labour market. The relationships were well developed with schools and the education

sector, but there were tensions with those relationships. New working styles had overcome some of the barriers that the county was facing, such as congestion. The Cabinet Member explained that the Council needed to be resourcing appropriately, without a reliance on the income generated by the provision.

3. The Principal explained that the Council had experienced three stages of generations in the space of two years. Prior to the pandemic, adult learning was a service led by demand rather than need. During the pandemic, there was a decrease of participation from 11,000 to approximately 5,000 and following the pandemic, this has increased to approximately 7,500. The Principal noted that 55% of the learners were over the age of 55. The Council offered provision for those who have no skills or limited skills whereby participants gain qualifications, and the average age of those participants was around 30 to 45. The Council also offered provision for those undertaking a hobby to maintain or improve their wellbeing and seek social interaction. The Principal noted that there was a difference between adult learning and adult skills. One third of provision was currently remote, with two thirds taking place face-to-face. It was noted that there was a tension between collaboration and competition between providers. The service was awaiting an Ofsted inspection.
4. The Assistant Director added that adult learning had to make a significant contribution to the Levelling Up agenda, such as identifying the groups of people that the service needed to be reaching. Some of the skills gaps in the county were not related to the adult learning service.
5. The Director explained that Surrey had a highly skilled population, with 53.4% of working age population trained to level 4 or above, compared to the national average of 43%. Surrey only had 4.4% of the population with no skills, compared to 6.4% nationally. It was important to consider how adult learning could provide an opportunity for those not engaged with the system, to get engaged with the system. A whole system approach was essential.
6. A Member asked about the geographic provision of adult learning across Surrey, the funding of the provision, and working with other partners. The Assistant Director clarified that the Council's adult learning was provided in certain geographical areas. The service had been reaching out to providers that could be viewed as 'competitors', as it was necessary to work together to provide a joined-up, strategic approach to meet the needs of the county's learners and provide the best offer. The Principal explained that in 2008 – 2010 half of the centres were closed down and seven remained open in the west and the north of the county. The Council gave £1 million of funding from the DfE to East Surrey College. The Council's adult learning service now operated in around half of the county and received £2.75 million from the DfE and the Education and Skills Funding Agency, and £120,000 from the Greater London Authority. Surrey adult learning provision generated an income of approximately £1.5 million, pre-pandemic this figure was approximately £2.1 million. The adult education budget was an amalgamation of 12 different budgets and the name was expected to be changed to the national skills fund. There was a drive from the DfE regarding the outcomes of the budget. Demand often came from immediate need, rather than perceived need for the future and it was important to ensure that the marketing can tackle that challenge. The Chair asked whether the lack of provision by Surrey adult learning to the whole of the county would be a concern to Ofsted. The officers confirmed that this would not be the case, as the Ofsted

framework covered the quality of the Council's provision. The framework had also changed to an education inspection framework, which was why it was important to focus on developing skills.

7. A Member asked about spreading the provision to areas with those residents who may be less likely to engage with adult learning and skills provision and asked about the provision regarding family skills. The Assistant Director explained that a key part of the work had been around making links with Job Centre Plus and with schools in order to create referrals. It was noted that it was important not to lose the focus on mental wellbeing and social interaction, however, some of the provision needed to be recalibrated and it was about getting a balance between both. The Leader added that there was a conversation with the Local Enterprise Partnerships about their future involvement with skills provision as part of the Surrey Enterprise Hub, which was being created. The funding for further education colleges was retrospective, so the Council could look into loaning the money to fund a course and then have this reimbursed afterwards.
8. A Member noted that the importance of speaking to East Surrey College as part of the inquiry and queried the courses that linked to the environmental agenda provided by the Council. The Principal clarified that the funding provision to East Surrey College could be used to fund provision for residents from other counties as well, if they used their services. The Director explained that if Surrey were successful in the county deal, then the Council would have control over adult education funding for Surrey residents to be able to target it in ways discussed. A Member enquired about East Surrey's sister college, John Ruskin College. The Chair asked which area the inquiry of the Task Group should focus on. The Leader responded that an ambition would be to have a universal offer across Surrey and explained that it could make sense to add an adult learning facility within library hubs, as suggested by the Chair. Without further funding, it would be difficult to extend the current offer. A Member suggested looking at where the need was and how those people can access provision, such as looking at public transport arrangements and enquired about bursaries for those on universal credit accessing provision. The Cabinet Member noted the importance of optimising the current model and understanding the potential flexibility of this arrangement. The Assistant Director added that the Council was looking at opportunities for co-location alongside other services to become more community based.
9. A Member sought assurance around future funding arrangements and queried the model of place-based provision. The Director explained that the district and borough councils had received £1 million each over three years from UK Shared Prosperity Fund and in year three they were encouraged to focus on the skills element of that funding. The Council was bringing together officers from the district and borough councils to talk to them about opportunities to work collaboratively. The Principal clarified that there was not any funding from the European Social Fund. There was funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to assist adults with a lack of numeracy skills called 'multiple' which the Council and further education colleges could access of around £4.7 million and distribute accordingly across Surrey throughout the next three years.
10. A Member asked whether there were any figures on the potential impact of training required for certain sectors in the future. The Director explained that this work was

currently underway to establish where the jobs growth was in the green economy and these skills were often embedded in other sectors. There was likely to be a disproportionate increase in the number of skilled jobs around the green automotive sector in Surrey. The provision currently offered would be mapped against the skills demands.

11. The Chair queried the model of mixed ability classes. The Principal explained that this was often an issue as a result of timetabling and the tutors' availability. If there were enough individuals of the same ability willing to do that class and the income was generated, then it would be possible to separate the abilities. The Principal noted that this highlighted a need for tutors to be trained to be able to adapt their teaching approach to different learning needs and abilities.
12. A Member asked about how barriers to participation were being addressed or could be addressed. The Director highlighted the importance of a whole system approach to ensure that referrals are being made for groups that would not usually access adult learning provision and making sure that the pathways were clear for individuals to see.
13. A Member enquired about the distinction between residential jobs and workplace jobs. The Director explained that the distinction in the data was between where you live or where you work, and it highlighted that Surrey migrates a lot of its skilled workforce into London and outside of Surrey.
14. The Chair asked about the relationships with local businesses. The Director explained that the Surrey Growth Board regularly received updates from businesses around recruitment challenges that they are facing, and it was at the centre of the government's skills white paper. The Principal added that traditionally the Council had accessed participants of adult learning from one source which was the residents themselves, however, the Council was in the top 10-15% for participation in adult learning local authority provision. The Council would like to increase participation from employers, the community and Job Centre Plus. A Member asked about the lead times for delivery of new programmes and about attracting individuals for public sector jobs. The Assistant Director explained that it was about 'buying into Surrey' and its journey. The recent Ofsted judgement would also help to recruit individuals to children's social care positions. The Director that within every sector in Surrey, employers were struggling to recruit. The Surrey Skills Leadership Forum was working on a skills improvement plan which should highlight the gaps which need to be addressed, partially in response to the government's white paper. Work had been undertaken to look at both immediate skills needs and future skills needs. A Member brought attention to the responsibility of managers and businesses' role in this work.
15. The Assistant Director shared that 17% of the population aged 19 did not have a level two qualification, which was similar to the national average. This figure had been fairly constant for the last five years. The work around this was linked to the work with the NEET cohort and SEND cohort. This included inviting individuals in who required a level two qualification as part of their apprenticeship.
16. A Member asked whether there was demographic data of the participants of Surrey adult learning and noted the context of the cost of living crisis. The Principal explained that this data was available for everything except income.