

**CHILDREN, FAMILIES, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE SELECT COMMITTEE**

Item under consideration: REPORT OF THE ADULT LEARNING AND SKILLS TASK GROUP

Date Considered: 12 June 2023

1. A Task Group established by the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee was 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. Details of the Task Group's methodology and findings may be found in full in its [report](#).
2. The Task Group's report contains 20 recommendations (listed below). In the main these are for Surrey Adult Learning (SAL), but #10-13 should also be considered by the Cabinet Member for Transport, Infrastructure and Growth whose remit includes Skills and Apprenticeships, and #3 also pertains to Libraries which are the responsibility of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Community Protection.
3. Recommendations are informed by written submissions and oral evidence from Council officers in the Directorates of both Economy and Growth and Education and Learning, including SAL, as well as Surrey Chambers of Commerce and Orbital South Colleges Group which runs East Surrey College.
4. In addition, the Task Group undertook considerable independent research. This included: an online public survey to gather learners' views, an exploration of what other local authorities are doing with regard to adult learning and skills, and the cross-referencing of locations of Surrey's adult learning centres with neighbourhoods with the highest levels of deprivation and unqualified residents.
5. The report identifies unskilled and economically inactive communities in Surrey who are not being reached, and highlights an imbalance between types of provision in the East and West of Surrey. There are two areas of exclusion currently which differ between these two regions: in the West, accredited learning is not reaching some of those most excluded from the labour market; in the East, provision is centralised and those seeking community learning are disadvantaged. For social and economic reasons considered by the Task Group to be of equal importance, both of these areas need to be addressed.
6. Recommendations seek to enhance residents' wellbeing as well as aid economic growth, and urge that community learning and work-related skills are equally valued and not subject to a postcode lottery. The most important

first stage in resolving this issue is to have a centralised and publicly accessible database in order to demonstrate where gaps need to be filled.

7. The report of the Task Group was presented to the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee on 12 June 2023. The Committee endorsed all recommendations in the report, while noting the recommendation on using libraries may be very challenging in some smaller libraries.

## **Recommendations**

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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
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.

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

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

**Fiona Davidson, Chairman - Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee**

### **Background papers**

[Report of the Adult Learning and Skills Task Group](#)

[Annexes of the Report of the Adult Learning and Skills Task Group](#)

[Item 8, Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee, 12 June 2023.](#)