

CABINET RESPONSE TO THE REPORT OF THE ADULT LEARNING AND SKILLS TASK GROUP

This report provides a summary of the recommendations from the Adult Learning and Skills Task Group (reporting to the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee) and responses to these which are subject to detailed planning and alignment with the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, together with planning which is underway for 2024/25 onwards and investments required to deliver the response to each recommendation.

In addition to welcoming the recommendations made by the Task and Finish group there are further identified opportunities for specific groups within our communities, including care leavers, as a part of our Corporate Parenting responsibilities, those adults with additional needs, learning difficulties and disabilities, and opportunities to strengthen apprenticeships internal to the Council and in wider public service organisations in Surrey or through the social value within contracts. The service will continue to take this forward.

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.

Response: In July 2022, SCC signed a Partnership Agreement with DWP, setting out the principles and commitments that are agreed to deliver sustainable employment outcomes for Surrey residents. Both parties have shared objectives which are focused on driving the recovery of the Surrey economy, establishing clear pathways to high quality, sustainable work and thereby reducing unemployment and underemployment. This Agreement has already led to closer cooperation between Jobcentre Plus and Surrey Adult Learning (SAL) to help deliver ESOL courses for Ukrainian residents and the action plan for 2023/24 includes better sharing of data to help ensure courses match demand in type and location. SAL has set up a digital dippers course for the over 50s in partnership with the local DWP as a result of the partnership agreement.

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.

Response – There is a stronger emphasis on national, regional and local adult learning priorities to target adults with no or low qualifications and to reskill or upskill adults who are disadvantaged or vulnerable and live in more deprived areas such as Spelthorne, Canalside and Old Dean. It means a more targeted marketing

and communication approach to attract learners with specific needs. Historically, adult learning has relied upon the word of mouth from existing learners which in general means we have tended to attract the same type of learner. As such, Surrey Adult Learning is planning to take the learning to the learners with the most need, ensure that vulnerable learners receive support so that they can access remote learning via the internet and through a digital device. It will in effect mean we widen our participation which will meet an area of improvement set out in our last inspection in May 2023.

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.

Response: With 52 branches across the county, Surrey Library Service is situated in every major community and the offer is accessible to all. Libraries are informal centres of learning where all ages can build skills and knowledge contributing to well-being, building personal networks, and supporting career and earning potential. Surrey Libraries support and deliver the national Libraries Connected Universal Information and Digital Offer, which aims to ensure local communities have access to quality information and digital services, to learn new skills and to feel safe online. Through the information and digital offer, libraries provide quality information and digital support. Libraries enable individuals and communities to develop learning skills to find answers and to inform life choices. The offer helps children and adults to engage and feel safe online, it ensures resources and opportunities are accessible, and it embraces creative and innovative technology.

All Surrey libraries offer access to [Good Things Foundation Learn My Way](#) courses via public network terminals for free. There are also a range of resources that are freely available via the internet such as [Access to Research](#) and [Massive Open Online Courses \(MOOCs\)](#) provided by University of Surrey.

The Library Service actively works to signpost to services that meet the needs of residents and that includes supporting Adult Learning and Skills and promoting their service offer.

The Library Service is actively working with Adult Learning to co-locate services where possible, for example, in the new Sunbury Hub that is being planned. We also plan to expand the Adult Learning offer in libraries by providing taster sessions for longer courses and providing spaces where Adult Learning can hold classes to support the development of independent skills in areas of need.

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.

Response – Surrey Adult Learning is working with all staff in the service to improve their community presence and to do it in a structured planned way. We have been on the ABCD course delivered internally by Customers and Communities to work with internal and external partners to enhance our presence

and to do it in a way that is right for Surrey and holistic across all our County Council services. The aim is to deliver a person-centred approach that will include education as well as health and other strategic priorities. We have worked recently with the DWP and Jobcentre plus to develop a digital dippers course for ove-50s in deprived wards and it has been a major success.

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.

Response - There is a drive for all to target the 21 key neighbourhoods and for adult learning to play a part in revitalising the lives of many in our most deprived neighbourhoods. Surrey Adult Learning has many communications with internal County Council departments and attends meetings with the economic development directorate on the skills plan and the local skills improvement plan to provide a foundation for learning often through improvements in literacy, numeracy and digital skills to deliver outcomes for learners that improve their employability and progresses them further in their education or training.

We are working with land and property to develop a shared service site with libraries in Sunbury and Farnham and any potential sites or accommodation in the North of the county especially around Staines.

SAL is part of the Health and Wellbeing Board and is working on an implementation plan to highlight the importance of learning and education for improving health and wellbeing. SAL has a Passport to Wellbeing department with a plethora of active courses including Tai Chi and yoga and there is a strong presence of learners from the 21 key neighbourhoods although we could do more and will continue to focus on this area for development.

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.

Response – SAL is already doing this. SAL provides transport assistance to many asylum seekers via a minibus. For others, SAL reimburses their public transport costs. SAL is aware that without it there would be no provision for many asylum seekers. We will explore the use of the Community Infrastructure Levy.

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.

Response – SAL had 100% face to face provision in our seven sites in 2018/19 and that shifted to 100% remote learning during the Covid pandemic. In the last year 75% of our courses were face to face and 25% remote learning and we expect that equilibrium to be the same in the next academic year. Learners and

tutors are determining the mix that is right for them and many have unexpectedly taken to remote learning when initially there was a trepidation about its value. The quality of teaching and rapport between the learners can be maintained remotely with good, modified and appropriate teaching and learning. We will liaise with Citizens Online.

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.

Response – SAL has a learner survey at the end of the academic year with over 600 responses setting out their opinions on the strengths and areas for improvement on the course and the level of learner support. We provide a chart of “You Said and We Did” at all our seven sites and on our website. In addition, we asked the corporate research team to ask why previous learners and potential new learners have not accessed our provision. In summary, habits have changed since Covid and many potential learners do not appreciate the full benefits of further learning. As a consequence, we are marketing our provision in a more targeted way to the 21 key neighbourhoods and highlighting the benefits of learning for economic, social and community purposes.

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.

Response – SAL was recognised in its latest OFSTED inspection to have good quality teaching and learning at the core of its activity for the benefit of learners. SAL observes all our tutors and we use outside quality leaders to review our self-assessment reports of our curriculum areas, from modern foreign languages to arts and crafts and onto GCSEs in English and maths. It is a vital component for all tutors and we do it well to differentiate their teaching for each member of the class. We ask fellow learners to support other learners and it helps to generate a collective spirit and a learning community.

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.

Response (bootcamps): Surrey County Council has recently bid for £1.4m of Bootcamp funding, in partnership with Hampshire County Council. This prioritises digital (including cyber) and green skills, particularly retrofit (see also response to recommendation 16). If the bid is successful, Hampshire County Council will lead procurement of suitable training providers to deliver training, and Surrey Adult Learning is encouraged to apply.

There is a strategic discussion to be undertaken with East Surrey College on the Adult Education Budget across the east and west of the county. From 2010, Surrey County Council gave the provision and the funding in the south and the east to East Surrey College. The adult learning strategic needs in the west and the east are different which meant the provision provided was different and the level and balance of community learning and adult skills (or qualification-based literacy and numeracy courses) was different too. It has led to learners in the east wanting local community learning provision when the funding in the east is spent on literacy, numeracy and digital skills. In order to provide more community learning in the east it would need more funding from the DfE which is not forthcoming.

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.

Response to 11, 12 and 13: As outlined in both the Surrey Skills Plan and the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), a priority for action is the development of a Surrey Skills portal. This portal would be the online database of training delivered from across Surrey by HE, FE and independent training providers, including SAL, providing residents with a clear view as to what skills training opportunities exist and how they relate into career pathways. The ambition of the portal is also to showcase a live-time view of available apprenticeships and promote a range of pathways available to both young learners and older workers. The portal is currently in development and is hoped to be available for the Autumn term of 2023/24.

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.

Response – Working with the DWP, SAL has developed courses to improve basic digital skills and the national initiative Multiply is targeting local adults with limited numeracy and digital skills. Communication skills, and softer skills more specifically, is a priority area earmarked in the Local Skills Improvement Plan

(LSIP) for Surrey and North Hampshire May 2023. SAL is including telephoning 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.

Response – SAL has an information, advice and guidance or IAG team who liaise and meet with all our adult skills learners and the vast majority of our community learners. We have a matrix kitemark for IAG which we have to gain every February from the DfE and we have accessed it every year since its implementation. The destination of our learners after the completion of a course and the impact of that destination on our economic and social outcomes such as a new job, a pay increase or more self-confidence to reduce loneliness and improve social interaction is a primary purpose of our provision. Collecting data on destination is admittedly an ongoing concern. We use an outside body to help record it.

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.

Response: Surrey County Council (Economy and Growth team) currently has an Infrastructure Partnership with The Retrofit Academy. As part of this, SCC are currently (July 2023) seeking training providers to deliver retrofit training from Levels 2 to 5. Surrey Adult Learning could form a key element in ensuring retrofit training is made available to a wide range of Surrey residents. Retrofit training is a key element of the Bootcamp funding applied for (see Recommendation 10).

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

Response: New, free short courses are available on the Innovation South Virtual Campus (<https://em3.isvc.co.uk/>), developed as part of the Strategic Development Fund (DfE) in 2022-23. These cover Carbon Literacy, Climate Change, Sustainable Resource Management, Retrofit, Tree Planting and Water Conservation. Surrey Adult Learning will support learners to access these courses.

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.

Response – In order to expand community learning beyond the north and the west, it will require more funding from the DfE through the Adult Education Budget which has not increased in value for over ten years, or it would need to be at the expense of other activity including adult skills which is a priority for meeting the

local skills needs and therefore unlikely - or hard to achieve. It is a constant dilemma across Surrey that requires a more strategic discussion with East Surrey College. SAL meets regularly with the East Surrey College Principal and is collaborating on how we can transform our provision to make it more equitable. The Accountability Framework was prepared in association with the Chamber of Commerce who prepared the LSIP. The balance between adult skills with a stronger economic outcome and community learning is constantly analysed.

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.

Response – this recommendation is accepted and welcomed; SAL is exploring this for Ukrainians to teach English at a foundation level to new learners. Recruitment of high-level tutors in all areas of our provision is a constant strain. We are working with the County Council recruitment team to expand our advertising for potential recruits and improve our diversity. We have had a discussion with East Surrey College to share tutors and improve training of existing tutors to consider other curriculum areas.

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.

Response – SAL will explore the community credit scheme and analyse in more depth the Volunteer Scheme in Dorset. SAL has approximately 15 volunteers who help mainly to support learners and the outcomes are excellent in terms of the progress learners achieve with their assistance and the joy of learning is clear for all to see.

Clare Curran
Cabinet Member for Education and Learning
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