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SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL ACCOUNTABILITY STATEMENT

2025-2026

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‘I’m starting university on Monday thanks to the course, Realise Futures were really amazing and helped me get into university. I was disappointed before I started Realise Futures, and I started the course late, but they helped me catch up and they adapted to what I needed exactly. The small group gave me the chance to listen and talk about work for the future. Lots of communication from the team, they really care, talk to you the way you like and treat you nicely.’

‘I feel a part of my community. I’ve met new people and made friends.’

‘I loved this course it’s the only course I have enjoyed and ever completed’ ‘I wish school had been like this and I would have achieved so much more.’

Our Purpose

Suffolk's Adult Learning Service (The Service) holds an annual contract with the Department for Education (DfE) to provide Adult Learning Programmes across Suffolk. The Service supports residents to improve their lives and outcomes, enabling them to engage in their local communities and contribute to the economy of the county.

Suffolk County Council leads The Service and provides the central management, including the strategic direction, commissioning, safeguarding, management information, and quality assurance. All learning is subcontracted and delivered through a network of local organisations that form a group of adult learning providers. This hub and spoke model enables a very flexible and accessible offer to meet the needs of residents and communities across Suffolk.

The Service Strategy 2025-2028 sets the vision and direction, with associated priorities, outcomes, and actions to be delivered across the 3-year strategy period. This Accountability Statement provides additional annual targets that are aligned. It demonstrates that The Service is taking clear and considered steps to achieve our strategic priorities.

The strategy sets out the following vision, strategic intent, priorities, and outcomes:

The Vision of The Service is for Suffolk to be a place where lifelong learning is highly valued and empowers our residents to have more fulfilling lives, take a greater part in society and develop the skills they need to secure sustainable and productive employment.

The Strategic intent of The Service is to provide high quality learning opportunities for those adults in Suffolk who face the greatest barriers to securing employment or playing a full part in society, so that they can make progress in securing a better future for themselves, their families and communities.

The Service is targeted to deliver 4,000 learning aims each year and through its subcontractors delivers a broad and balanced programme of accredited and non-accredited learning opportunities across the County. It has been recognised by OFSTED in 2024 as being a “good” service and has ambitions to be outstanding.

Courses are planned to deliver the following three curriculum priorities.

1. **Prioritise** the breaking down of barriers to health, life and work for individuals and families
2. **Improve** essential skills for individuals and families
3. **Develop** employability, vocational skills, and work readiness.

All planned learning is at Level 2 and below and 80% is at Level 1 and below. At least 60% of learners are either unemployed and/or inactive, at least 25% of learners declare a learning need and at least 35% live in priority uplift areas.

The Service has an important role to play in improving the lives of people living in Suffolk and for some it has become an essential lifeline. The acquisition of knowledge and skills is a key component of strategies to; reduce barriers to health, life, and work, connect families and communities, address inequality and increase economic prosperity.

The Service is important for residents, communities and the local economy with The Service strategy targeting the following outcomes:

1. **Residents** who are engaged with the benefits of learning, resulting in them having the skills and confidence needed to meet life's challenges.
2. **Communities** who are supported to better address challenges and see a reduction in certain inequalities.
3. **A Local Economy** that benefits from a reduction in inactive residents and a pathway to further learning, leading to a more suitably qualified workforce.



Suffolk's Context & Place

The county of Suffolk offers an attractive place for people to live, work and visit. It is home to a population of 772,966 people with a working-age population of 444,650.

With plenty of places attracting tourists and a varied cultural offer, large areas of farmland, areas of outstanding natural beauty, and a variety of urban spaces, historic market towns and smaller communities, Suffolk can provide a high quality of life.

The county encompasses the four local authority districts of Babergh, East Suffolk, Mid Suffolk and West Suffolk, and the borough of Ipswich. It includes the coastal towns of Lowestoft, Southwold, and Felixstowe; market towns such as Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill, Newmarket, and Stowmarket; many villages and rural communities; as well as the county town of Ipswich.

Suffolk has a strong identity based on its agricultural heritage and a proud, long-standing history as a key gateway to the world for the country, through operating several key ports. However, it can also boast a strong and diverse business base,

spanning several key growth and employment sectors, with both major national and international businesses and a strong local supply chain of well-established and successful SMEs offering a range of career and employment opportunities.

Suffolk's diverse mix of rural, coastal, and urban communities also presents varying social and economic challenges. While some of our coastal communities have some of the poorest health outcomes in England, often alongside particularly high levels of deprivation, people in our rural areas often have limited transport options making access to key services more difficult and potentially limiting social mobility.



Over 80,000 people live in the 11% of Suffolk's Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) that are within the 20% most deprived in England. Pockets of greater relative deprivation can be found in more built-up areas, such as Beccles, Bury St Edmunds, Felixstowe, Ipswich, Lowestoft, and Stowmarket. 33% of Ipswich's and 14% of East Suffolk's LSOAs are within the 20% most deprived in England. Part of the Kirkley & Pakefield ward in Lowestoft in East Suffolk, is the 25th most deprived LSOA in England. In addition, all areas of Suffolk - apart from Mid-Suffolk - contain social mobility cold spots that are in the lowest 20% nationally for social mobility.

Suffolk has relatively high employment levels, with a 77.2% employment rate for those 16-64 compared to the national average of 76%. In 2023, Suffolk's unemployment rate was 3.7%, just lower than both the East of England and England average (3.8%).

The county has a comparably higher proportion of economically inactive people due to early retirement (19% versus 13%). Suffolk also has a higher proportion of economically inactive people due to, looking after family/home, temporary sick, and long-term sick.

Over the last 20 years, the proportion of individuals who are disabled in England has decreased whereas, on a local level, it has increased (2001: England 17.9%: Suffolk 17.1% to 2021: England 17.3%: Suffolk 18.3%).



Over the last 10 years, Suffolk's economic inactivity rate has also been consistently lower than the national average and this remains the case. In 2023 (Jan-Dec) it was 19.8%, compared to a national average of 21%. In December 2022, 24,740 people (7% of those aged 16-64 who are employed) claimed Universal Credit in Suffolk despite being in work. In-work claimant numbers have increased by 4.6% over the past 12 months, compared to 4.4% for unemployed claimants. So too has the proportion of Universal Credit claimants that are in-work – an increase from an average of 38% in Financial Year 2019/20 to 44% in Financial Year 2022/23.

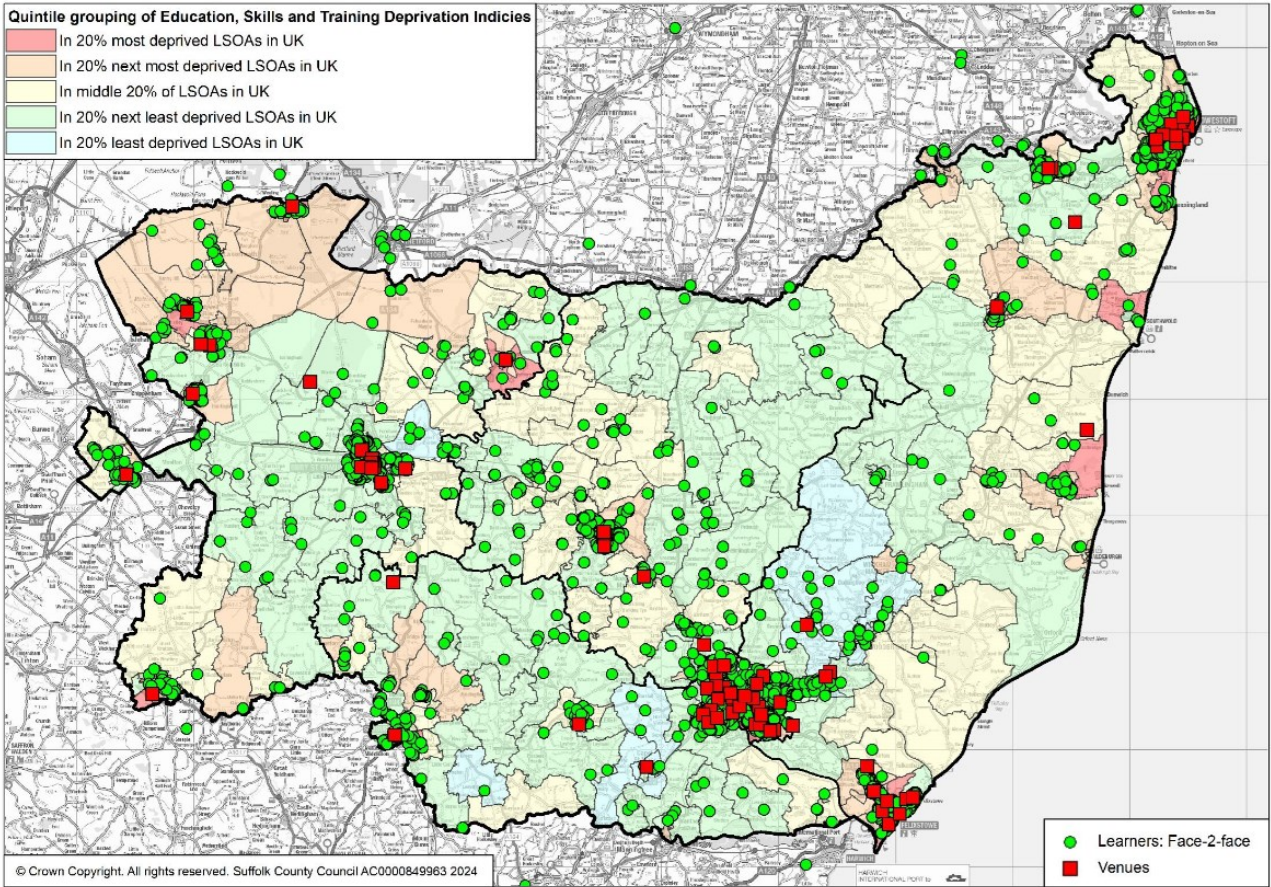
Suffolk's ageing population, relatively low unemployment rates, and high proportion of economically inactive people who do not want a job, all limit the availability of local people for the workforce and can create skills shortages.

Suffolk has lower levels of people living in relative poverty (17.8%) than the UK average (22%). However, the COVID-19 pandemic and the current cost of living crisis have increased both the number of Suffolk residents experiencing poverty, as well as the depth of poverty. More Suffolk residents are now experiencing fuel and food poverty and struggling with low incomes and high housing costs. The 2020 Hidden Needs Report indicates Suffolk is becoming less advantaged and more deprived. In 2007, Suffolk was ranked the 115th most deprived upper-tier local authority, by 2019 it was ranked the 99th most deprived.

The Service is targeted to deliver learning across the County. The Service has over 70 locations including both fixed and partner locations, which results in most learners travelling up to five miles to attend their course. To support the rurality of Suffolk further The Service is currently gaging the need for more virtual courses particularly to support the essential skills priority area.



Map 1: This map shows the spread of locations vs learners across the County.



Source: 2023-24 Self-Assessment Report data

Our Approach to the Annual Accountability Statement



The Service considers both national policies and local priorities alongside the current adult skills and employment landscape when developing the Accountability Statement. This includes, where appropriate, supporting priority sectors.

The current national skills and learning policy in the UK emphasises lifelong learning and aligning education with employer needs. Key initiatives include the Lifetime Skills Guarantee, local skills improvement plans, and funding reforms to make high-level technical training more accessible. The government aims to boost productivity, support growth industries, and provide individuals with greater opportunities for career progression. The following National Skills Priority Sectors have been agreed across Government. These sectors are:

- *Construction • Manufacturing • Digital and Technology*
- *Health and Social Care • Haulage and Logistics Engineering*
- *Science and Mathematics*

Adult Learning and Skills is also linked with the "Get Britain Working" initiative which is targeted to increase the

employment rate to 80%, by addressing the challenges of economic inactivity and ensuring more people can participate and progress in the workforce. This involves reforming employment support, integrating skills and health, and generating quality jobs through industrial strategy and local growth plans.

The Service is a part of a county wide skills system, which responds to the national priorities locally and regionally. This landscape supports Suffolk and enjoys strong relationships with a range of stakeholders whose actions and activity shape and impact the offer The Service delivers. This aligns with economic opportunities and future skills through representation and adherence to national policy, the Local Skills Improvement Plan, Local Employer Partnerships, National, Regional and Local Priorities, as well as the Council's strategic vision.

The Service will continue to develop its focus on building accessible learning pathways that raise aspiration and enable the acquisition of life changing skills, qualifications, and/or wider benefits such as improved health and wellbeing to effectively support the national and local priorities and policy.

The following has informed The Service's approach to this annual accountability statement.

- [The Suffolk Adult Learning Service Strategy 2025-2028](#) sets out the vision and strategic intent for The Service over the next three years.
 - [The Suffolk Adult Learning Service Self-Assessment Report 2023-2024](#) used to evaluate the performance and effectiveness of The Service. It is a reflective process to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement, which can then inform the future development.
 - [The Suffolk Adult Learning Service OFSTED report March 2024.](#)
 - [The Suffolk County Council Corporate Strategy for 2022-2026](#) focuses on achieving four key ambitions: looking after health and wellbeing, strengthening the local economy, protecting and enhancing the environment, and providing value for money for residents.
 - [The Norfolk and Suffolk Local Skills Improvement Plan \(LSIP\)](#) refers to the Norfolk and Suffolk Local Skills Improvement Plan, a plan developed by the Norfolk and Suffolk Chambers of Commerce to address local skills needs and shortages. Phase 2 of the plan was completed in 2024.
 - [The Suffolk Economic Strategy](#). The Suffolk Economic Strategy is a comprehensive plan developed by the Suffolk Business Board in collaboration with various stakeholders to position Suffolk as a national leader in sustainable growth and innovation. This strategy was agreed in December 2024.
 - [Devolved Adult Skills Fund \(ASF\) in Suffolk](#). A new strategic skills plan for Suffolk was developed to drive the direction of the ASF in Suffolk, with delivery due to start in academic year 2025-2026, however this was postponed. Consideration is now placed on a wider devolution deal under a Suffolk and Norfolk Combined Authority.
- Further Links and Partnerships have also informed the approach to this accountability statement, including:
- The Local Priorities Document (SCC Skills Team)
 - Learner Voice and Stakeholder feedback
 - Community organisations and venues
 - Voluntary sector organisations
 - National Careers Service
 - Other Council departments
 - Higher and Further Education
 - Private Training Providers
 - Employer Networks
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Our contribution to national, regional, and local priorities

The Service has identified the following additional objectives for academic year 2025-2026 to support national, regional, and local priorities. Each objective relates to 1 of the 3 Strategic Curriculum Priorities set out in The Suffolk Adult Learning Service Strategy 2025-2028. Each objective is also aligned with at least 1 of the 3 strategic outcomes.

The Suffolk Adult Learning Service Strategic Curriculum Priority 1: (Suffolk Adult Learning Service Strategy 2025-2028) Prioritise the breaking down of barriers to health, life and work for individuals and families.

Impact and/or contribution towards national or regional priorities for learning and skills	Impact and / or contribution towards local priorities for learning and skills	Suffolk's Adult Learning Service identified additional objectives for 2025-26 to further support national, regional, and local priorities.
<p>Lifelong Learning and Skills Development: The government recognises the importance of lifelong learning and wants to encourage adults to continuously develop their skills throughout their career. This includes supporting inactive and unemployed individuals to acquire new skills.</p> <p>Get Britain Working: Support Inclusive Labour Market: The aim is to create an inclusive labour market where everyone can participate and progress in their careers, regardless of background or circumstances.</p>	<p>The Suffolk Economic Strategy aims to improve workforce skills and participation and boost productivity through workforce health and wellbeing initiatives, support those out of work into sustained employment and leverage the skills of our ageing population to create an inclusive talent pipeline and unlock untapped talent.</p> <p>Suffolk County Council's Corporate Strategy targets working with our partners to create communities and environments that promote and enable healthier, active lives and tackle issues such as isolation, loneliness, and obesity.</p>	<p>The Service will fund and embed a 12-month pilot project called Suffolk Bright Futures, which will support the breaking down of barriers to employment and health through a 1-2-1 coaching and learning model.</p> <p>This supports both national, local and The Service priority to break down barriers to employment including health and wellbeing concerns and to drive participation rates for inactive and unemployed residents.</p>
<p>Get Britain Working: Tackle Economic Inactivity: The initiative targets rising economic inactivity including those who lack basic skills.</p>	<p>The LSIP is focused on addressing gaps: It aims to address skills shortages by providing opportunities for adult learners and those seeking to start or advance their career.</p>	<p>The Service will align and work in collaboration with the new Connect to Work Programme. A new Adult Skills and Employment Team will manage both contracts to allow for a seamless connection which will be targeted to reduce inactivity levels.</p>

The Suffolk Adult Learning Service Strategic Curriculum Priority 2: (Suffolk Adult Learning Service Strategy 2025-2028) Improve essential skills for individuals and families.

Impact and/or contribution towards national or regional priorities for learning and skills	Impact and / or contribution towards local priorities for learning and skills	Suffolk's Adult Learning Service identified additional objectives for 2025-26 to further support national, regional, and local priorities.
<p>Focusing on Core Skills: The government recognises the importance of core skills, such as literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy, in enabling individuals to thrive in the workplace and in their personal lives. Efforts are being made to support individuals in developing these core skills through various learning programs.</p>	<p>The LSIP is focused on addressing gaps in skills employers want including essential skills: It aims to address skills shortages by providing opportunities for adult learners and those seeking to advance their careers.</p>	<p>The Service will focus on increasing The Service digital skills offer by maximising participation particularly in related qualifications such as Skills for the Office. The Service will also procure a new virtual English and Maths functional skills offer at Level 1 and 2 to support the increased demand in this area.</p>
<p>Promoting Access to Level 3 and Above Qualifications: The government is focused on supporting adults, particularly those aged 24 and over, in achieving their first full level 3 qualification through fully funded courses. This initiative aims to help individuals gain new skills and access better job opportunities.</p>	<p>Suffolk County Council's Corporate Strategy highlights promoting economic growth that strengthens communities, reduces inequalities, and encourages residents to fulfil their potential.</p> <p>The LSIP aims to "future-proof" the regional economy by equipping people with the skills needed for a changing job market</p>	<p>The Service will prioritise ongoing collaboration and alignment with the main FE colleges operating in Suffolk to support Service learners' entry to higher-level FE provision. This includes ensuring that learners are equipped with the right level of essential skills qualifications to progress.</p> <p>Although The Service prioritises learning at level 2 and below it also targets a clearer pathway towards higher levels of learning.</p>

The Suffolk Adult Learning Service Strategic Curriculum Priority 3: (Suffolk Adult Learning Service Strategy 2025-2028) Develop employability, vocational skills, and work readiness.

Impact and/or contribution towards national or regional priorities for learning and skills	Impact and / or contribution towards local priorities for learning and skills	Suffolk's Adult Learning Service identified additional objectives for 2025-26 to further support national, regional, and local priorities.
<p>Addressing Skills Gaps: The government aims to address skills gaps in specific industries and regions by investing in training and development programs that target those areas. This may include supporting apprenticeships, vocational training, and other forms of skills development that can help fill critical skill gaps.</p> <p>Get Britain Working Improve Job Quality and Security: The "Plan to Make Work Pay" aims to enhance the quality and security of jobs, including by promoting local growth plans and a modern industrial strategy.</p>	<p>The LSIP confirms the key skills needed across various sectors in the region and provides a strategic roadmap to address skill shortages.</p> <p>The Suffolk Economy Strategy targets the implementation of initiatives that accelerate upskilling and reskilling of the workforce, launch targeted campaigns to attract and retain essential talent, and pursue devolved skills funding to better align training with business needs.</p>	<p>The Service will prioritise the alignment of its vocational offer with other adult learning programmes such as Skills Bootcamps and the FE Colleges Level 3 offer.</p> <p>The Service will procure the additional adult skills funding received from DFE to expand and develop the vocational qualification offer to reflect national priority areas such as construction, logistics, mathematics, and digital skills.</p>
<p>Relevance and Alignment with Employer Needs: Efforts are being made to ensure that adult learning programs are relevant to the needs of employers and align with the skills demanded by the current job market.</p> <p>Get Britain Working Increase Employment Rate: The government aims to raise the overall employment rate to 80% by the end of the current parliamentary term.</p>	<p>The LSIP highlights the need for a more cohesive and effective skills system, benefiting local businesses and communities.</p> <p>Suffolk County Council's Corporate Strategy maximising growth through our decisions and actions to support more people and businesses in Suffolk to do well.</p>	<p>The Service will trial a new CEIAG pilot, focused and aligned with the needs of employers, to support learners' progression opportunities, knowledge and understanding of the labour market. This also reflects an improvement suggested by Ofsted during the inspection in March 2024.</p>

Approval of our Accountability Statement

It is hereby confirmed that the 2025-26 Accountability Statement, as set out in this document, was approved by the Adult Learning Service Governing Board on 13th May 2025. The 2025-26 Accountability Statement will be published on the Adult Learning Service website [Learnsuffolk.org](https://learnsuffolk.org) on the About Us page within 3 months of the start of the 2025 to 2026 academic year.



SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

[2025-28-Adult-Learning-Service-Strategy](#)

[2023-24-SCC-Adult-Learning-Service-Self-Assessment-Report](#)

Ofsted Report 2024: [Ofsted Report](#)

[SCC-corp-strategy-report-2022-26](#)

[SCC-Economy-Strategy-24.pdf](#)

[Norfolk and Suffolk Local Skills Improvement Plan – May 2023](#)

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