



Suffolk's Adult Learning Service

Accountability Statement 2026-27

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Summary Statement

Suffolk's Adult Learning Service (SALS) will deliver a high-quality, evidence-led programme of adult education in 2026–27 that supports approximately 4,000 learning aims, primarily at Level 2 and below, delivered through a countywide hub-and-spoke model across 70+ community locations and virtual platforms. The planned curriculum is shaped by Suffolk's diverse geography, high levels of deprivation in coastal and urban areas, growing economic inactivity, and the essential skills gaps identified in the Norfolk & Suffolk Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP). It focuses on three strategic priorities: removing barriers to health, life and work; improving essential skills in English, maths, ESOL and digital; and developing employer-aligned vocational pathways.

Informed by the Local Needs Duty review and multiple evidence sources—including LSIP employer consultations, the Get Suffolk Working Plan, SALS' Self-Assessment Report, Ofsted feedback, learner voice and community intelligence—the 2026–27 offer responds directly to national Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) priorities in maths, digital capability, construction, logistics, and health and social care. SALS will strengthen employer engagement, expand digital and rural access routes, intensify delivery in high-need communities, and deepen partnerships with Further Education (FE) colleges, employment services, the Integrated Care System and Connect to Work. These actions ensure alignment with Suffolk County Council's ambitions for health, inclusion and economic growth.

Success will be measured through improved participation among priority groups, progression into employment or further learning, increased digital engagement, enhanced employer satisfaction, stronger alignment to LSIP priorities, and richer qualitative impact data captured through the Impact & Destination Pilot.

To provide the necessary context for how this planned activity will be delivered, the following sections set out the statutory purpose of the Adult Learning Service, the local context shaping demand, and the strategic framework that underpins SALS' priorities for 2026–27. Together, these establish the foundation on which the planned curriculum, partnership approach and success measures are built.

1. Introduction and Purpose

Suffolk's Adult Learning Service (SALS) delivers high-quality adult education on behalf of the DWP, supporting adults to acquire essential skills, improve their wellbeing, and progress into employment, further learning, or meaningful participation in their communities. The Service is strategically led by Suffolk County Council, which provides commissioning, MIS management, safeguarding, quality assurance and performance oversight, while learning is delivered through a hub-and-spoke model of subcontracted local providers. This model ensures a flexible, place-based offer that meets the diverse needs of Suffolk's rural, coastal, and urban communities.

This Accountability Statement for 2026–27 meets the statutory requirement under the Local Needs Duty (Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022) and responds to expectations set out in the Norfolk and Suffolk LSIP, the DWP 2026 Accountability Statement Guidance, and Suffolk County Council's wider strategic ambitions for skills, health, and economic growth.

Building on the foundations set in 2025–26, this Statement articulates how SALS will deliver a coherent, evidence-led programme that supports Suffolk’s residents and communities while contributing to the county’s wider strategic direction. Its purpose is to show how SALS is taking considered steps to achieve the outcomes laid out in the 2025–2028 Service Strategy, ensuring that sufficiency, quality, and progression routes remain central to the offer.

2. Suffolk’s Context & Place

Suffolk is home to 786,231 residents¹, including a working-age population of 442,100², living across a county characterised by a mix of coastal towns, rural villages, and urban centres. This diversity brings both opportunity and complexity: residents experience differing levels of access to services, employment, and transport.

The county benefits from a strong business base, a rich cultural offer, and a variety of thriving market towns and enterprise areas. At the same time, Suffolk faces persistent and deep-seated inequalities. Over 80,000³, residents live in Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) within the 20% most deprived nationally, and several coastal communities continue to experience some of the poorest health outcomes in England.

Economic inactivity remains a pressing issue, driven by illness, caring responsibilities, and early retirement. Suffolk has a higher proportion of disabled adults than the national average, and the number of residents experiencing fuel and food poverty continues to increase.

The Service already delivers learning across more than 70 locations, with most learners travelling up to five miles—a strength in a predominantly rural county where access is shaped by geography and transport connectivity. SALS is supplementing this infrastructure with virtual learning pathways to mitigate transport barriers and widen access.

Taken together, these contextual factors reinforce why an inclusive, place-responsive adult learning service is essential. SALS plays a central role in:

- addressing skills inequality,
- supporting resident health and wellbeing,
- reducing barriers to work and life, and
- strengthening community resilience.

This context shapes the Service’s strategic intent, curriculum, and engagement approach, ensuring that its offer responds directly to the lived experience of Suffolk residents.

3. Our Strategic Intent (2025–2028 Strategy)

SALS’ long-term vision is that Suffolk becomes a county where lifelong learning is highly valued, enabling adults to lead fulfilling lives, participate more confidently in society, and progress into sustainable, productive employment.

¹ Population Estimates, Office of National Statistics

² Annual Population Survey, NOMIS

³ English Indices of Deprivation 2019, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

The strategic intent is clear: *to provide high-quality learning opportunities for adults who face the greatest barriers to securing work or participating fully in society*, helping them build a better future for themselves, their families, and their communities.

The Service Strategy 2025–2028 sets out three curriculum priorities, which collectively form the golden thread that runs through this Accountability Statement:

Priority 1: Removing Barriers to Health, Life and Work

SALS supports residents to build confidence, resilience, and foundational life skills. This remains aligned with last year’s priority for reducing inequalities, supporting inactive residents, and improving community wellbeing.

Priority 2: Improving Essential Skills

SALS continues its commitment to delivering high-quality English, maths, ESOL, and digital learning—providing the core capabilities residents need for modern life. This aligns directly with regional LSIP priorities and last year’s focus on digital expansion, “Skills for the Office,” and accessible pathways for rural learners.

Priority 3: Developing Employability & Vocational Pathways

SALS ensures its learning offer remains connected to Suffolk’s labour market through strong partnerships with employers, FE providers, and employment support programmes. Last year’s commitments—including alignment with Skills Bootcamps and the promotion of progression into Level 3 —continue to drive development in 2026–27.

Together, these priorities shape a service that intends to deliver 4,000+ learning aims annually, primarily at Level 2 and below, with the ambition to extend pathways into higher-level learning through strong provider partnerships.

4. Alignment to National, Regional & Local Priorities

SALS operates within a complex national and regional skills landscape shaped by DWP policy direction, employer-driven LSIPs, and Suffolk County Council’s strategic priorities. Building on last year’s strengthened approach to the Annual Accountability Statement – which emphasised alignment to national initiatives such as *Get Britain Working*, the Lifetime Skills Guarantee, and the national priority sectors (construction, manufacturing, digital, health and social care, logistics, and STEM) – SALS continues to refine how its planning and delivery model responds to this wider framework.

The Service remains a core component of Suffolk’s wider skills system, working with FE providers, employer networks, community organisations, the voluntary sector, and the county’s Integrated Care System. This collaborative approach ensures that SALS’ learning offer is informed by multiple evidence sources, including SALS Self-Assessment Report, Ofsted feedback (2024), the Local Priorities Document, the Get Suffolk Working Plan, learner voice, community intelligence, and LSIP employer consultations. SALS also maintains a clear strategic link with the Suffolk Business Board, ensuring that curriculum planning and employer engagement are aligned with local economic priorities and labour market need.

These partnerships and data sources directly inform curriculum design, provider commissioning, and the continuous quality improvement cycle. The result is a service that is not only aligned with policy expectations but is also firmly anchored in the realities of Suffolk's learners, labour markets, and communities.

4.1 National Priority Alignment

DWP national priorities highlight significant needs across construction, manufacturing, digital, health and social care, logistics, and STEM disciplines. SALS' planned activity for 2026–27 continues last year's shift towards stronger evidence-based planning and clearer employer alignment, particularly in sectors identified as national priorities.

In 2026–27, SALS will:

Embed the Impact and Destination Capture Pilot

This pilot, initiated in 2025–26, strengthens SALS' evidence base by collecting rich, qualitative insight into learner outcomes, wellbeing change, and progression. This aligns with DWP expectations and supports SALS' ambition to demonstrate impact beyond qualification achievement.

Strengthen alignment with the Connect to Work Programme

Building on last year's planned integration between the Adult Skills contract and the new Connect to Work provision, SALS will operationalise a more seamless pathway for inactive residents seeking to re-enter the labour market, supporting the local 'Get Suffolk Working' plan.

Expand vocational and essential skills pathways linked to national priority sectors

Reflecting the DWP's increased emphasis on mathematics, digital capability, construction, logistics and foundational skills, SALS will scale its essential skills offer and use its subcontracted model to respond more flexibly to local employer demand.

These actions ensure continued compliance with national policy and strengthen the Service's contribution to economic participation and mobility.

4.2 Regional Priority Alignment (LSIP)

The Norfolk & Suffolk LSIP identifies several challenges across the region, including persistent essential skills gaps, insufficient progression into Level 3 technical pathways, and the need for more coherent skills transitions. SALS plays a key role in addressing these issues.

Building on last year's priorities – such as expansion of digital learning, improved access to functional skills, and strengthened FE alignment – SALS will:

Increase digital participation and access

SALS will expand its "Skills for the Office" courses and its virtual English & maths pathways, mirroring the demand identified in LSIP Phase 2 and meeting the needs of rural, working and digitally excluded residents.

Strengthen collaboration with FE colleges

Following commitments made in 2025–26 to improve progression routes into higher-level vocational learning, SALS will continue working with Suffolk's FE colleges to ensure clear entry

routes to Level 3. This includes aligning achievement of Level 1 and 2 qualifications with FE entry requirements.

Enhance employer-informed Careers, Education, Information, Advice & Guidance (CEIAG)

Responding to both LSIP and Ofsted recommendations, SALS will expand employer-engaged careers guidance, ensuring that learners develop strong labour-market orientation and understand the pathways available to them.

4.3 Local Priority Alignment

Suffolk County Council's strategic priorities emphasise health, wellbeing, inclusion, and economic growth. Last year's Accountability Statement highlighted the role of the Adult Learning Service in improving life chances, tackling health inequalities, strengthening communities, and supporting residents into sustainable work. SALS will continue to make strong contributions by:

Expanding rural and virtual learning infrastructure

As noted in last year's analysis of place-based need and rurality barriers, SALS will continue to scale its virtual delivery model to widen access and reduce transport-related disadvantage.

Targeting high-need communities

Building on the mapped provision and outreach activity from 2025–26, SALS will intensify delivery and engagement efforts in Ipswich, East Suffolk and Lowestoft, where deprivation, health inequalities and economic inactivity are most pronounced.

Strengthening health & wellbeing pathways

SALS will further develop programmes supporting confidence, wellbeing, connection and resilience, consistent with the Council's corporate ambitions for healthier, active communities.

Supporting sector-based workforce development

By aligning vocational pathways with employer demand and the Suffolk Economic Strategy, SALS will help strengthen the local workforce pipeline and support inclusive economic growth.

5. Best Practice Enhancements

SALS maintains a continuous commitment to improvement, actively seeking out and adopting best practice from high-performing adult learning services nationwide. Building on this ongoing approach, SALS will introduce the following enhancements for 2026–27:

Clearer Vision & Whole-Place Framing

SALS will strengthen the articulation of its role within Suffolk's broader ecosystem of health, prosperity, and community resilience. This development mirrors last year's emphasis on demonstrating how the Service contributes to county-wide ambitions for wellbeing, inclusion, and economic participation.

Stronger Employer Engagement Framework

SALS will enhance and extend its collaboration with employers, refining its engagement model to support more consistent, effective and insight-driven contributions to curriculum planning. This work directly responds to LSIP expectations, and Ofsted feedback on the need for stronger CEIAG and employer alignment.

Integration with Health & Wellbeing Strategies

Recognising rising need linked to disability, economic inactivity, and poor health outcomes, SALS will deepen partnerships with the Integrated Care System, social prescribing networks, and mental health services. This builds on last year's foundations around place-based wellbeing delivery.

6. Our Planned Provision for 2026–27

The 2026–27 curriculum is anchored in the three strategic pillars and is shaped directly by contextual needs, employer intelligence, community feedback, and national/regional policy alignment. Much of the infrastructure established in 2025–26 – including improved mapping of provision, strengthened digital pathways, and early vocational pilots – continues into this year's planning.

Priority 1: Removing Barriers to Health, Life and Work

- Wellbeing, resilience, and confidence-building programmes
- Supported learning pathways for residents with additional needs
- Community-based provision in high-need wards, aligned to local health partnerships

Priority 2: Improving Essential Skills

- English, maths and ESOL (virtual and face-to-face), aligned to LSIP demand
- Digital Essentials and “Skills for the Office”, expanding last year's digital growth
- Family Learning with intergenerational impact and improved targeting based on SAR data

Priority 3: Developing Employability & Vocational Pathways

- Sector-based vocational pathways aligned with local labour-market demand
- Progression routes complementing Skills Bootcamps and FE Level 3 pathways
- Employer-led CEIAG pilots, building on Ofsted's 2024 recommendations
- SWAP-linked provision to support rapid labour-market entry

7. Stakeholder Engagement

In line with DWP expectations for early and ongoing engagement, SALS will adopt a whole-ecosystem approach to partnership working. This builds on last year's structured engagement with LSIP bodies, FE providers, community partners, and employers.

In 2026–27, SALS will:

- Work continuously with LSIP Employer Representative Bodies
- Convene quarterly subcontractor forums for shared intelligence, Continuing Professional Development (CPD), and service improvement
- Maintain structured dialogue with FE colleges to refine progression pathways
- Gather insight through surveys of learners, staff, employers, and wider stakeholders

- Deliver the new Impact and Destination Capture Pilot, enhancing evidence for improvement
- Work closely with Connect to Work and local employability partners to support inactive residents

8. Measuring Success

SALS will measure success using a strengthened outcomes framework influenced by last year's SAR findings, Ofsted recommendations, the Get Suffolk Working Plan, learner voice, and LSIP evidence. Key measures include:

- Participation rates among priority learner groups (inactive, unemployed, SEND, deprived wards)
- Progression into employment, FE/HE, or personal development pathways
- Improved employer satisfaction and stronger evidence of employer-aligned curriculum planning
- Increased digital participation and virtual learning uptake
- Enhanced access to rural provision through virtual and hybrid delivery
- Implementation and monitoring of Ofsted improvement recommendations
- Richer qualitative evidence captured through the Impact & Destination Pilot
- Improved transitions into Level 3 through strengthened FE alignment

9. Governance & Approval

It is hereby confirmed that the 2026-27 Accountability Statement, as set out in this document, was approved by the Adult Skills and Employment Programme Governing Board on 23rd April 2026. As required by the DWP, it will be published on the Learn Suffolk website within three months of the start of the academic year.

Supporting Documentation

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

[2024-25 Self Assessment Report](#)

Ofsted Report 2024: [Ofsted Report](#)

[get-suffolk-working-local-plan](#)

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

[The Suffolk Economic Strategy](#)

[Norfolk-and-Suffolk-LSIP-2.0.pdf](#)

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