

Annual Accountability Statement 2025/26

Learning Services Worcestershire

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Executive Summary

Scope

Worcestershire County Council's Education Programmes for 2025/26 encompass 16-19 Education, Adult Skills Fund and Advanced Learner Loans, managed by the Learning Services team. Additionally, they oversee projects including Apprenticeships, Skills Bootcamps, and community initiatives.

Purpose of Learning Services Worcestershire

Learning Services aims to empower communities to help individuals lead independent, prosperous lives. By providing accessible education alternatives, the Service addresses barriers to learning, focusing on wellbeing and employment opportunities, thus contributing to economic development and community welfare. Notably, around 69% of the Council's net budget supports adult and children's social care, which highlights the importance of education in enhancing social mobility in the county.

Context and Place

Worcestershire, largely rural, faces disparities in population density and deprivation. Learning Services adapt to demographic shifts, utilising libraries and community centres as primary venues. It focuses on deprived areas while ensuring accessibility across the county, serving learners from various socio-economic backgrounds.

Approach to Developing Annual Accountability Statement

Learning Services collaborates extensively with relevant departments across the council and with external stakeholders to align priorities and initiatives. Strategic decisions prioritise efficient resource allocation, considering budget constraints and broader council objectives. With a relatively modest budget, decisions are made carefully to meet the diverse needs of the community.

Contribution to National, Regional and Local Priorities

The service aligns with local priorities by focusing on developing common skills and workplace behaviours. It caters to vulnerable learners, supporting personal growth, community engagement, and employment opportunities, contributing to regional development agendas. Notably, Ofsted rated the service "good" across all areas in November 2023, highlighting its effectiveness in meeting quality standards.

Service Development Priorities for 2025/26

Key objectives include expanding educational services, enhancing facilities, and improving service quality. Efforts focus on addressing specific community needs, maximising resource utilisation, and ensuring alignment with regulatory standards. For instance, plans to expand the Young Adult Learning service in Redditch aim to address high rates of youth unemployment and disengagement from education, training, or employment.

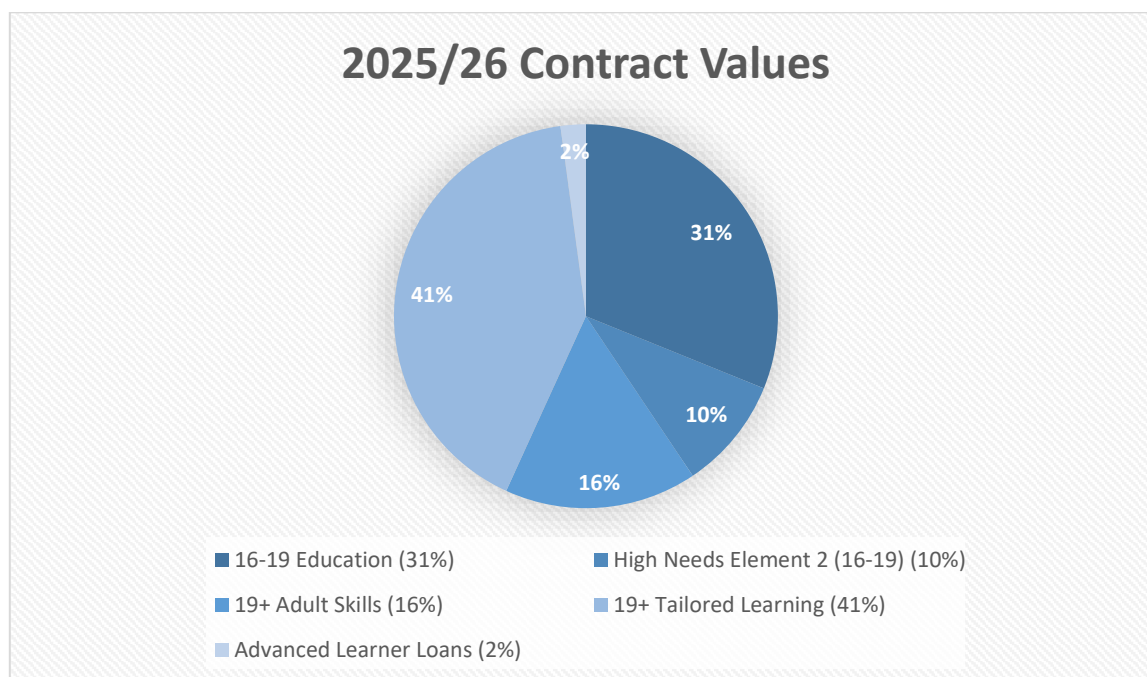
Conclusion

Learning Services Worcestershire plays a vital role in empowering communities through accessible education and skill development. By addressing local needs and aligning with broader strategic objectives, it contributes to individual prosperity and regional growth, impacting the lives of thousands of learners annually.

1.1 Scope

The education programmes offered by Worcestershire County Council, funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency and in-scope for this Accountability Statement in 2025/26 are:

- 16-19 Education Programmes for Young People
- 19+ Adult Skills Fund, including Tailored Learning
- Advanced Learner Loans



This work is conducted by the Council's Learning Services team and sits within a wider context of directly-delivered and commissioned skills projects which may also be directly or indirectly referenced in this statement, including:

- Apprenticeships
- Skills Bootcamps
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund
- Internally-funded local initiatives

1.2 Purpose of Learning Services Worcestershire

Worcestershire County Council supports some of the most vulnerable people in society and around 69% of its net budget goes towards providing adult and children's social care¹.

To ensure the Council can focus its limited resources on those that need its help most, it seeks to empower communities to live prosperous, independent lives. The Council sees its role as an "enabling authority" and therefore education has an important role to play in supporting the council to achieve its aims.

¹ Worcestershire County Council Corporate Plan: [Shaping Worcestershire's Future - Our Plan for Worcestershire](#)

Operating under the sub-brands Adult Learning Worcestershire and Young Adult Learning Worcestershire, Learning Services offers first-rung qualifications and other learning opportunities to residents who want to enhance their skills in local and accessible settings which are an alternative to mainstream college environments. In doing so, the services proactively address the barriers to learning and achievement experienced by some of the most vulnerable in Worcestershire's communities, enabling residents to access learning focused on wellbeing, personal development and employability, and to progress to further opportunities within their lives and employment.

Learning Services recognise that all learners have the potential to make a great contribution to the economic development of Worcestershire's future and is therefore committed to supporting them to achieve their full potential. Wherever possible, the Service also seeks to support learners to remain in the county to make their contribution to society, therefore improving the economic future of Worcestershire as a whole. By ensuring that appropriate, first-rung learning opportunities are available locally it is hoped that all residents can explore their futures and are enabled to make educational progress within the county.

As a flexible and dynamic service that works in partnership with organisations to meet arising learning needs across Worcestershire's communities, Learning Services uses its curricular statements of intent to steer decisions within its work, to avoid mission drift and to help partners and stakeholders understand the purpose and priorities of the Service:

Intention 1: Experiencing Success

To facilitate positive experiences of learning which foster a can-do attitude and build self-belief based on exposure to success in a range of forms.

Intention 2: Transforming Destinies

To inspire engagement with new opportunities and raise awareness of future possibilities that may not previously have been considered.

Intention 3: Building Stronger Communities

To motivate learners to become self-sufficient, connected, pro-active citizens and encourage them to make positive contributions to their communities.

1.3 Context and Place

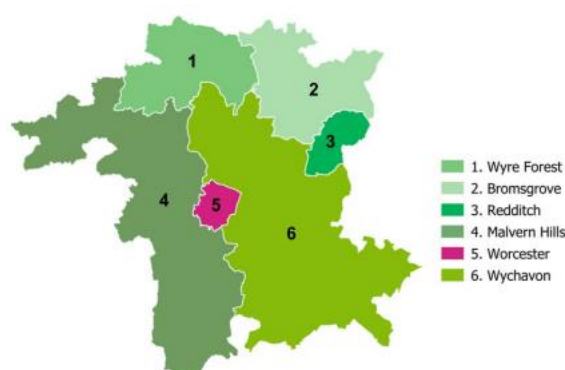
Worcestershire is a county in the West Midlands which is largely rural, has an area of 1,741 km² and a population of approximately 600,000. It is bordered to the south, west and east by the other shire counties of Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Gloucestershire and Herefordshire. To the north, Worcestershire shares borders with urban areas which are members of the devolved West Midlands Combined Authority.

Worcestershire currently has a two-tier local government structure. The County Council, which covers the whole of Worcestershire, and then district, borough and city councils. The county's skills and post-16 learning agenda is overseen by the County Council, sits within the Worcestershire Local Enterprise

Partnership area and is guided by the Local Skills Improvement Plan for Worcestershire, which was compiled by the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce.

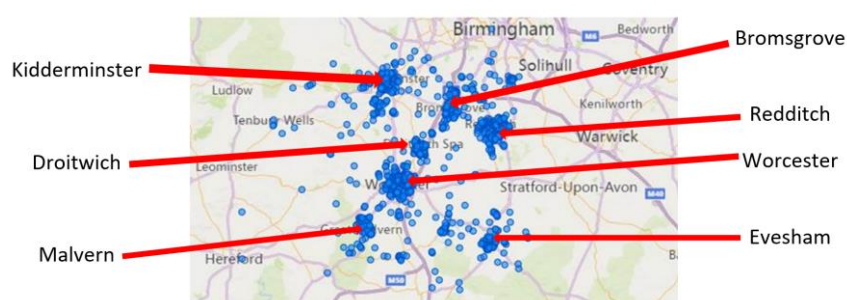
Learning Services Worcestershire is overseen by the Head of Service for Skills and Employability. The postholder of this role is also the Director of Skills for the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership, therefore straddling the various political tiers and other entities which have a vested interest in the work of the Service.

District Councils Encompassed within Worcestershire County Council Area



Whilst the county is largely rural, there is greater population density to the north. The largest town/city is Worcester, followed by Redditch then Kidderminster (in Wyre Forest district) and finally Malvern (towards the south of the Malvern Hills district). In some of the smaller border towns (for example Tenbury Wells on the western tip of the Malvern Hills district) there is easier access to cross-border opportunities (for example, Ludlow College) than to similar education settings in Worcestershire itself. The Learning Services resources are therefore focussed on areas of greatest population density and deprivation and supplemented with a live-online learning offer to broaden accessibility to these more rural areas.

Learner Distribution by Home Postcode (2022/23)



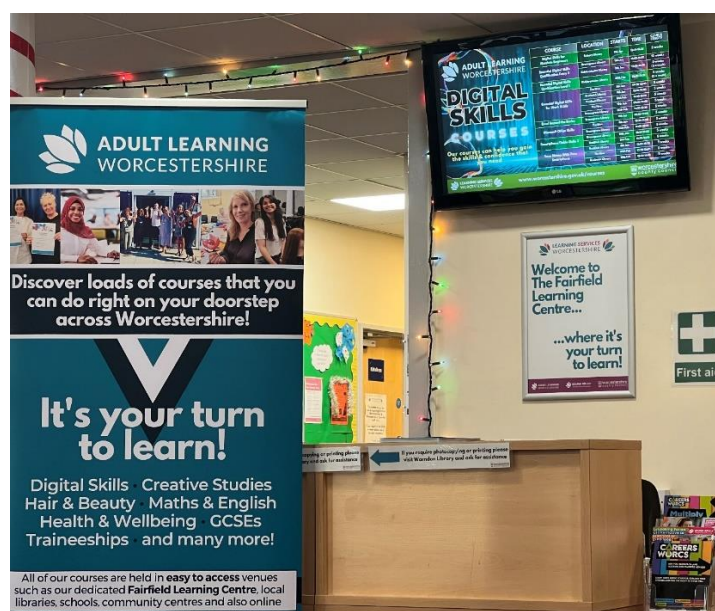
Provision planning is a responsive and fluid process and requests for learning activities are considered on an individual basis. Worcestershire is a relatively affluent county, albeit with pockets of deprivation and needs generated for other reasons. For example, in recent years provision planning has been adjusted to reflect the sudden influx of ESOL needs in some of our most rural and affluent areas as residents responded to the call for help under the Homes for Ukraine initiative. Circumstances such as this have skewed the usual demographic data (such as matching learner postcode to deprived ward data), making local knowledge and intelligence more important than ever in influencing decision making. However, despite this commitment to consider a range of requests for provision, the Service retains a key focus on building a consistent presence in some of our most deprived wards.

Learning Services is designated as an Adult and Community Learning provider. As such, the vast majority of the work is undertaken from non-specialist settings. These include:

- Worcestershire's network of 21 libraries
- Schools and early years settings
- Community centres and voluntary sector premises

Worcestershire's libraries provide well-equipped, cost-effective, safe, accessible accommodation and are well known venues within communities. The Service therefore operates a library-first approach to provision planning and these venues underpin the Tailored Learning and qualifications offer. Where the nearest library is not sufficiently accessible from the target neighbourhood, partner venues and community centres will be considered as alternatives.

In addition, the Service manages and operates from one designated centre – the Fairfield Centre in Warndon, Worcester. This centre acts as a key base for the service and plays host to a substantial proportion of the 16-19 Education offer and administers exams for learners studying across the county.



1.4 Approach to Developing Annual Accountability Statement

The work of Learning Services is knitted into almost every directorate of the County Council with activity that supports a very wide range of priorities and initiatives. These include, but are not limited to:

- Digital inclusion
- Public Health, including wellbeing and preventative care
- Children's social care
- Children's education
- Community cohesion
- Adult social care

This breadth is represented in the teams, officers and politicians that feed into deciding the direction for Learning Services through the governance structure. Beyond the decision-making structure, further breadth in stakeholders can be seen in the Service's connection to boards and forum across both the council, wider FE sector and voluntary and community organisations. Example groups include:

- Virtual School and Looked After Children teams
- 0-25 All Age Disability Teams
- Library Services
- Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce
- Herefordshire and Worcestershire Training Providers Association
- Herefordshire and Worcestershire Wellbeing and Recovery College

Leaders, managers and governors have a clear strategic vision for the learning and skills provision in Worcestershire. Leaders and managers work well with the local enterprise partnership and schools to ensure that their curriculums are meeting the needs of the locality and region ... Governors are well informed about the council's skills strategy and the quality of education. They receive appropriate performance reports. They offer appropriate scrutiny and challenge to managers which improves the provision. Ofsted, November 2023

The budget available to Learning Services is relatively modest and the contributions of these various personnel are therefore considered carefully to help determine which arising needs can be most efficiently and effectively met by the Service, and to leverage support from other learning organisations for supporting needs which the Service is unable to meet. Typically, potential initiatives to meet the needs and gaps identified would exceed the available budget hence the need to determine best-fit priorities.

1.5 Contribution to National, Regional and Local Priorities



Of the five LSIP priorities for Worcestershire, Learning Services focuses on Priority Two – Developing Common Skills and Workplace Behaviours. As a first-rung provider of learning activity, the focus for the Service is on engaging, or re-engaging, those who are least likely to participate in other forms of

formal learning. Most activity is therefore provided at Level 2 or below, with just a small proportion at Level 3 as a progression route from some specific programmes. The Service provides stepping stones into other opportunities, for example English and maths qualifications to enable access to university or apprenticeships and wellbeing programmes to support a return to employment after illness or other absence from the workplace.

For adult and younger learners, [Service Leaders] rightly prioritise engagement with vulnerable learners from the most disadvantaged communities. They provide them with access to courses that develop the knowledge and skills that learners need to improve their personal lives, contribute to their communities and increase their chances of gaining employment. Ofsted, November 2023

1.6 16-19 Education Programmes for Young People

Delivered under the brand of Young Adult Learning, the Council's 16-19 Education Programmes for Young People are valued as an integral tool to the wider work of the council, offering learning opportunities for residents which connect to the national agenda of Raising the Participation Age and the corporate priorities of *Open for Business* and *Supporting Children and Families*. A needs-led curriculum is influenced by intelligence gathered from frontline services and corporate partners, such as the council's education participation teams (including home schooled support), SENDIASS, Local Enterprise Partnership colleagues and specialist services such as the Care Leavers service, all-age disability and Social Care department. Information on arising need is then considered in conjunction with the sector network knowledge that partners can provide, based on understanding of gaps in provision or accessibility. A key objective for this work is to reduce the number of young people in the county who are not in education, training or employment (NEET).

Whilst any resident may self-refer to Young Adult Learning, most participants are already engaged with other council services and the programme is recommended to them if it is identified as a good match for their needs.

The Young Adult Learning curriculum focuses on building the common skills and workplace behaviours which will open up doors for further vocational training and/or employment. The vast majority of learners undertake English, maths and digital skills qualifications to fill gaps that remain following their pre-16 education. A comprehensive programme of Careers Information, Advice and Guidance also introduces them to the local labour market and supports them to understand the potential career pathways that they could progress to, usually via additional training.

1.7 Adult Skills Fund, Including Tailored Learning

The Council's Adult and Community Learning programme offers a variety of opportunities for residents which connect to the corporate priorities of *Open for Business*, *Supporting Children and Families*, and *Promoting Health and Wellbeing*.

The curriculum is influenced by intelligence which is gathered from our frontline services and corporate partners, such as the council's Library Service, Early Help and Stronger Families, our Wellbeing and Recovery College partnership and our Public Health department.

The curriculum is delivered via two departments, each with its own specialisms. The Skills and Qualifications department focuses on subjects such as English, Maths and Essential Digital Skills, with opportunities aligned to the government focus on providing transferable skills which underpin progression into a variety of careers. The department also provides a selection of vocational pathways which are aligned to careers that are well-suited to people who are seeking employment that balances well with raising a family. These include pathways into education (including programmes for Teaching Assistants) and hair and beauty programmes.

Whilst the Tailored Learning programme is more varied and designed to meet a wider range of priorities, including those linked to ageing well, there is a similar focus on empowering people to engage with work through a focus on keeping mentally well.

1.8 Advanced Learner Loans

The Service has a very modest Advanced Learner Loans allocation (just 2% of the total budget). Usage of this fluctuates as it is primarily utilised to enable progression for Hair and Beauty learners who seek to develop their skills with us beyond Level 2. In 2025/26, there will be a limited number of Level 3 places, ringfenced for our progressing cohort.

1.9 Service Development Priorities for 2025/26

| Aim | Context | Action(s) |
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| <p>16-19 Education High Needs Expansion</p> <p>To provide high-quality, relevant and financially-sustainable education for young people with High Needs who may otherwise receive no education, ineffective education or education at an unnecessarily high cost</p> | <p>2024/25 saw Young Adult Learning's first intake of young people with Education, Health and Care Plans, some of whom joined a new Supported Internship programme.</p> <p>This has been a year of developing the programme and the associated relationship with SEND.</p> <p>With High Needs Support funding now agreed, the programme needs to be further refined and expanded.</p> <p>The existing partnership with Worcestershire Acute Hospitals Trust will be retained, to deliver a Supported Internship programme which facilitates inclusive employment within the NHS and other health and care organisations.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market Young Adult Learning as a destination of choice for post-16 learning, particularly designed to create an inclusive environment for learners with social, emotional and mental health challenges • Retain a focus on full-time programmes, to meet the needs of young people whilst lobbying for provision which would fill remaining gaps in the sector • Utilise the High Needs Funding agreed in 24/25 to refine a programme offer which is financially sustainable, meets identified learner needs and supports council objectives to secure good value for money • Implement the quality and audit expectations for High Needs provision, with particular regard to the incoming Ofsted framework revisions • Develop the Supported Internship offer to broaden opportunities for young people • Introduce a Level 2 Health and Care pathway, to provide progression opportunities from the existing Level 1 programme, and a step into Supported Internships and/or apprenticeships <p>KPI: 20 young people with EHCPs educated by Young Adult Learning during 25/26, including 10 places assigned to Supported Internships within the NHS. This is an increase from 5 learners on NHS Supported Internships in 24/25.</p> |
| <p>Integration with SENDIASS</p> <p>To increase awareness of avenues of support for those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, and</p> | <p>Learning Services now has an integrated offer with the SENDIASS team. This has been a mixture of Family Learning activity and shorter workshops. Participation has been varied and 25/26 will focus on obtaining value for money by reviewing the offer</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with SENDIASS to provide training about Special Educational Needs and Disabilities • Consult with stakeholders to understand gaps in training and develop a curriculum which responds to these • Market the offer to parents via schools as part of the Family Learning programme |

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| those who care for them, by broadening access to relevant training | whilst retaining the spirit of the requirements laid out in the SEND Code of Practice. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to collaborate with Herefordshire as part of the shared relationship with the combined NHS Trust <p>KPI: 250 individuals provided with training regarding special educational needs</p> |
| <p>19+ Adult Skills Sustainment</p> <p>To maintain the existing Adult Skills Fund offer in the face of potential cuts by accessing any available Adult Skills Fund growth or alternative sources of funding</p> | At present, the Adult Skills Fund for Worcestershire County Council experiences significant disparity compared to the budget of peer authorities. Opportunities for automatic growth are not anticipated in the coming year, so the focus will be on ensuring that value for money is maximised and alternative funding sources are considered and used to complement the main Adult Skills offer. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manage the budget with a view to maximising any advertised growth window for Adult Skills Fund, in order to qualify in the event of growth being available Meet the council priorities for upskilling in the Playwork sector by developing an offer funded by Bootcamps Aim to sustain participation rates in priority subjects of English and maths, which already account for approximately 50% of the 19+ Adult Skills cohort <p>KPI: The existing Adult Skills offer will be complemented by 20 places on Playwork qualifications, funded by Bootcamps</p> |
| <p>Fairfield Centre Regeneration</p> <p>To expand and enhance the education programme at the Service's Warndon base</p> | The Fairfield Centre in Warndon serves as the base for Learning Services Worcestershire. Whilst it provides excellent facilities at present, it has received little major investment in recent years. A Towns Fund grant has therefore been awarded to expand the site, enabling an increase in the number of students that can be supported and improvements to some key facilities, such as those for Beauty Studies. The new premises should be available from January 2026 and the focus will turn to utilising the additional capacity. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate a broader 19+ Adult Learning offer at Fairfield by developing an enhanced evening programme Confirm plans for the division of space across the Fairfield site <p>Outcome: 19+ Adult Learning opportunities will be available at Fairfield on at least one evening per week and will include English, maths and digital skills opportunities to broaden access to these subjects</p> |
| <p>16-19 Education Redditch Expansion</p> <p>To become a well-known provider of choice for 16-19 education in the Redditch</p> | After Worcester, Redditch has the second-highest rates of youth unemployment and young people Not in Education, Employment or Training. During 2023/24, YAL began a direct delivery offer from a pop-up base at Willow Trees Community Centre in | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build the number of participants for Young Adult Learning in the Redditch area Refine the curriculum offer to focus more specifically on soft skills required for progression into employment Include a Supported Internship offer into the Redditch area, in partnership with the NHS |

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| area and reduce the volume of young people Not in Education, Training or Employment | Church Hill. 24/25 saw further expansion and 25/26 will focus on refining the offer. | KPI: 20 young people educated at a Redditch base in 25/26 |
| Quality Assurance To deliver a high-quality programme which is to at least Grade 2 Ofsted standards | The Service was inspected by Ofsted in October 2023 and secured a “good” rating across all areas. Improvements have been made following this inspection and refinements continue. The focus for 25/26 will be quality assurance with a specific focus on the inclusion agenda, particularly in respect of programmes for learners with High Needs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue with planned improvements to service quality, including appropriate response to November 2023 Ofsted Inspection findings • Collaborate with the Careers Worcs team to provide all learners with the careers education, information, advice and guidance they need to understand the range of opportunities available to them on completion of their courses • Provide learners with knowledge of local risks of extremism so that they can better protect themselves • Conduct quality assurance activities which are specifically designed to evaluate inclusive practices Outcome: Service meets the grade descriptors of good or better across all aspects of the service and learners benefit from the prospects these standards offer to them |
| Wellbeing and Employability Offer To ensure that the 19+ Adult Learning offer retains a focus on long-term pathways to gaining or retaining work | Whilst the Tailored Learning offer has a wide remit and responds to a wide range of priorities, it underpins a core focus of helping people to maintain positive wellbeing and therefore a greater likelihood of retaining or gaining work. As the Connect To Work programme establishes in Worcestershire, it will be important for Tailored Learning to build connections to these opportunities and complement the existing pathways into accredited qualifications. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on the English, Maths, ESOL and Digital Skills offer to ensure it retains a focus on supporting transition to new or improved employment • Build on strategic partnerships, such as those with Public Health, the Recovery College, Veterans group and the Careers Worcestershire teams • Continue to expand and diversify activity in target wards KPI: 300 learners participate in courses which are specifically designed to improve employment prospects |

Corporation Statement

This document was reviewed and approved in principle by the Worcestershire County Council Adults and Communities Directorate Leadership Team on 9th March 2025. It was subsequently amended to reflect the 2025/26 allocation statement issued in April 2025 and finalised by the Assistant Director for Communities on 9th June, 2025.

Hyperlink

[Learning Services Worcestershire \(LSW\) Policies | Worcestershire County Council](#)

Supporting Documentation

- Worcestershire County Council Ofsted Report (November 2023)
[50232692 \(ofsted.gov.uk\)](#)
- Worcestershire's Local Skills Improvement Plan
[Local Skills Improvement Plans | Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce \(hwchamber.co.uk\)](#)
- Worcestershire's Local Skills Report
[WLEP-A4-Landscape-Local-Skills-Report-update-2022-FINAL-Version.pdf](#)
- Worcestershire County Council's Corporate Plan
- [Shaping Worcestershire's Future - Our Plan for Worcestershire](#)