

FE Accountability Agreement:

Cheshire West and Chester Council's Adult Education Service

31 May 2023

Purpose

Cheshire West and Chester Council's Adult Education Service aims to support local residents that face a range of barriers to enable them to achieve their life goals.

The Service offer's pathways of support and skills development which allows these adults to enter employment and/or progress in work.

Our Intent is to support targeted residents and their families to:

'Progress in Life and Work'

We aim to be recognised within the Council, its wider partners and stakeholders as leaders and influencers in the field of employment skills, learning and employment support, with specific focus on reducing long-term unemployment in the borough.

To achieve this, we use economic data available to inform the provision required to support adults to find good, sustained employment, working in partnership with key stakeholders such as West Cheshire and North Wales Chamber.

We are planning to incorporate the findings of the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) for Cheshire and Warrington into our service's strategic plan when it is reviewed and renewed in 2024.

Context and Place



We are an Adult Education Service which is embedded within the Cheshire West and Chester (CW&C) Local Authority.

We deliver a wide range of programmes through our four geographically based work zones and commissioned partners. Our work zones are in Chester, Ellesmere Port, Northwich and Winsford. As part of this offer, we have created Learning and Skills

Hubs, which are currently based in ten local primary school settings. In addition to these school settings, the Hubs also provide support in community centres, plus venues where demand has been recognised and requested e.g., Dale Barracks. The Hubs offer a range of Family Learning and Work Zone adult learning opportunities that support the schools' parents, carers, and local residents to learn new skills, progress to further learning, find employment or improve career prospects. The Hubs also facilitate regular information drop-in sessions from Citizens Advice and the Council's Housing department.

Our programme of delivery is aimed at supporting adults to develop their confidence and basic skills, all the way through to delivering vocational programmes in line with local employment needs at Level 2.

We also work closely with partners such as local Further Education Colleges and independent training providers, to ensure no duplication of provision and to encourage progression routes for our learners into further study where relevant.

Recently we have also become responsible for the delivery of Multiply, aimed at supporting those adults without a Level 2 in maths, working closely with a range of partners including those in the voluntary and community sector.

In addition to our Adult Education provision, we support an annual cohort of approximately 20 Supported Internship Learners, providing them with employability and basic skills and facilitating high quality relevant work experience through our extensive link to local employers.

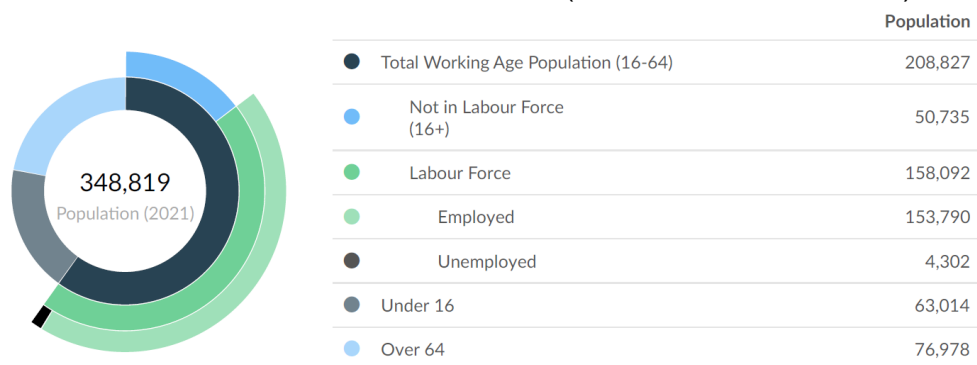
Our provision is contained within the Cheshire West and Chester footprint, serving a population of approximately 350,000 people.

The Services uses a broad range of intelligence to inform our provision which includes national data sets, such as the DWP Stat Xplore and the EMSI data supplied by the

Cheshire and Warrington LEP, along with feedback from learners and employers that we engage with.

Table 1 shows the labour force breakdown in CW&C in 2022. This table shows that there is a working age population (16-64) of 208,827, with 4,302 people currently classed as unemployed.

Table 1: 2021 Labour force breakdown (EMSI Q2 2022 Dataset)



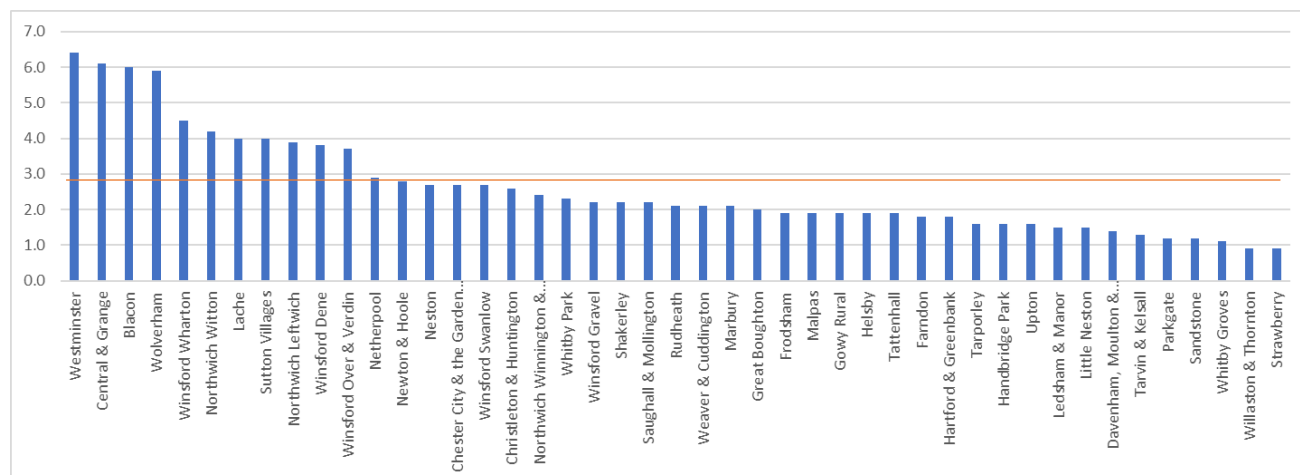
Claimant count figures for the borough have dropped from 2.8% in March 2022 to 2.6% February 2023 (see Table 2 below for more details).

Table 2: Claimant Count rate between Feb 2021 and Jan 2022 (ONS Feb 2023)

Date	Cheshire East	Cheshire West and Chester	Warrington	England
March 2022	2.5	2.8	3.2	6.5
April 2022	2.4	2.6	3.0	6.5
May 2022	2.4	2.6	2.9	6.4
June 2022	2.4	2.6	2.8	6.0
July 2022	2.3	2.5	2.7	5.6
August 2022	2.3	2.6	2.7	5.4
September 2022	2.3	2.6	2.6	5.2
October 2022	2.3	2.6	2.5	5.0
November 2022	2.3	2.6	2.5	4.8
December 2022	2.3	2.6	2.5	4.6
January 2023	2.3	2.6	2.4	4.4
February 2023	2.3	2.6	2.5	4.4

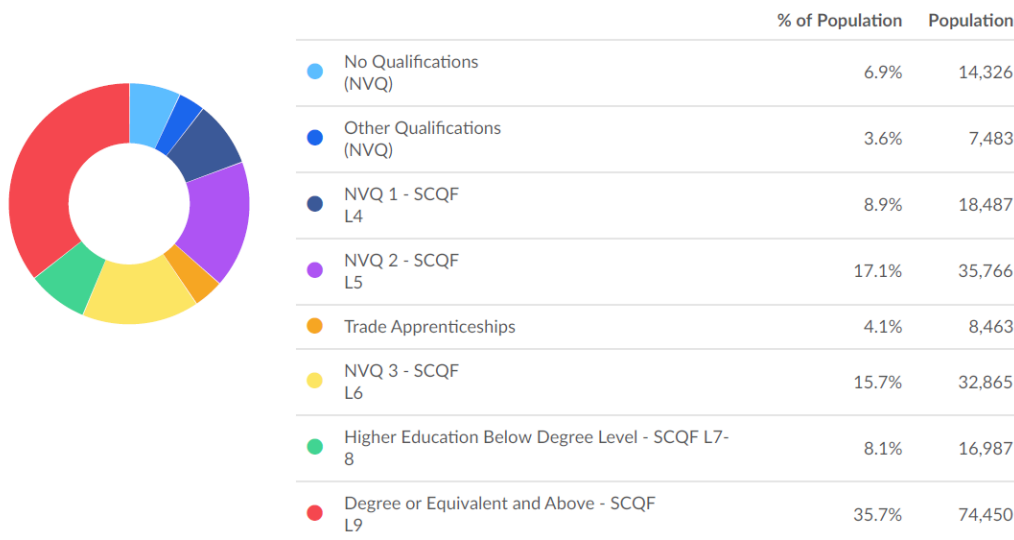
Claimant Count statistics show although low for the borough overall, there is a variation by geography. Table 3 highlights that many areas have significantly higher claimant counts, with these concentrated in the most deprived areas. Out of the 45 wards in CW&C, 15 have rates above the borough average with Westminster, Central & Grange, Blacon, and Wolverham, all with a higher level of claimant counts. This is where we aim to increase our engagement and delivery activities over the coming months.

Table 3: Claimant Count by Ward Jan 2023 (ONS Feb 2023)



Data shows that 35.7% of CW&C residents possess a degree or equivalent (grade 6) or above, 3.3% above the national average. 8.1% hold a HE qualification below a degree level (level 4 or 5), 0.1% below the national average (see Table 4). There are however still a significant number of residents with either no qualifications or qualifications below level 2 that we would be looking to target to access our provision.

Table 4: Qualification level by % and number of people in CW&C (EMSI Q2 2021)



Approach to Developing the Annual Accountability Statement

CW&C Adult Education Service produce an evidence base document each year, informed by local data which helps to shape the curriculum that we deliver and commission through partners. This data involves working with our internal data team, along with DWP, Cheshire and Warrington LEP, NHS partners and feedback from local employers (including any employer bodies) and learners. We will use our extensive evidence base document to inform this accountability statement.

We have also shared this accountability statement with our Adult Education Budget Governance Board. This Board includes representatives from: DWP, Groundwork (representing our local employer-led Business Improvement Districts) and the West Cheshire and North Wales Chamber. We will ensure that this accountability statement is reviewed every six months to monitor progress.

This year we have also worked closely with South Cheshire Chamber who are responsible for developing the Cheshire and Warrington Local Skills Improvement Plan to ensure that where relevant, we are looking to identify ways in which we can support the local priorities identified. We will be also looking to work with other local providers to better develop co-ordinated pathways of provision to response to the gaps identified.

Contribution to national, regional, local sector skills priorities

National sector skills priorities include construction, manufacturing, digital and technology, health and social care, haulage and logistics, engineering, science and maths

In response to national priorities, the CW&C Adult Education Service offer a variety of programmes including offering the CSCS card and training to support those looking for employment within the construction sector. Our sub-contractor also works closely with Procure Plus who deliver the local on-site experience skills programme on behalf of CITB.

We offer a range of digital programmes especially at an introductory level in Microsoft Office packages and work closely with partners to support digital inclusion across the borough.

We have supported several local social care employers and Skills for Care, delivering an introduction to the sector course to help with local recruitment through a sector-based work academy programme (SWAP). We are also in dialogue with the LEP and other local providers about developing a care skills bootcamp/s and are exploring how we could support the establishment of a health and social care academy in Winsford, working in partnership with Warrington and Vale Royal College.

We are not in the position to offer driving qualifications through our service; however we do work with two sub-contractors who provide forklift truck programmes to learners in Ellesmere Port and Winsford, in close proximity to local employer need. These skills would support the logistics sector, along with other sectors such as retail and manufacturing.

Engineering, Manufacturing, and science programmes do not lend themselves well to pre-level 2 provision, so generally the Service would refer to local FE provision, who we believe are better placed to deliver. We are however considering what “access to” programmes we could look to develop such as: Introduction to manufacturing/lean or business improvement techniques. These programmes could align with and help progression to L2/L3 apprenticeships and other vocation courses.

We do offer a range of maths programmes through our adult education programme, and we are responsible for co-ordinating the local Multiply offer, working in partnership with five sub-contractor providers and a broad range of voluntary and community sector organisations. The provision currently on offer ranges from light touch engagement sessions through to full functional skills qualifications. We are currently in the process of shaping and agreeing our year 2 programme for Multiply.

Regional priorities include manufacturing, health and social care and life sciences, along with cross-cutting themes of digital and low carbon/net zero

Both manufacturing, health and social care and digital are listed above in the national priorities. Our earlier paragraph outlined our response and offer as a provider.

The Life Science sector overall requires individuals with Level 3 skills and above and therefore not our cohort of learner. In addition to this, many of the employment opportunities also sit in East Cheshire, rather than West Cheshire and would require an individual to have access to their own transport. Should we however receive an enquiry into provision that would facilitate employment in this sector, we would refer to a better placed FE provider.

Low carbon/net zero sector is something we are looking at as a Service especially considering the emerging specialist centres in Ellesmere Port (Origin, Protos and HyNet). We are keen to work with partners including employers, the University of Chester, FE providers and DWP to develop progression pathways that would enable residents to benefit from these highly skilled and paid jobs. This is an emerging area because most provision required has not been developed and therefore not funded through traditional routes. We are currently exploring how skills bootcamps could help this sector or whether a training solution be developed through UKSPF. We are also supporting employers who are looking to engage with local residents as part of their agreed social value commitments.

We are aware that many local employers in a range of sectors are facing recruitment challenges and we are working closely with our business growth team to provide them with solutions – for example suggesting alternative recruitment processes and pathways which would benefit residents currently engaged on local employment support programmes, including offering work experience placements. As a service we offer a broad range of employment support programmes funded through the NHS and DWP. This service complements our AEB offer.

We also provide a wide range of key employability skills training, identified by employers from all sectors and we would look to formalise our links to employers to ensure the most appropriate content is developed and delivered now and in the future.

Local sector priorities include manufacturing, health and social care, low carbon, visitor economy and finance

The first three sectors have already been covered in this document.

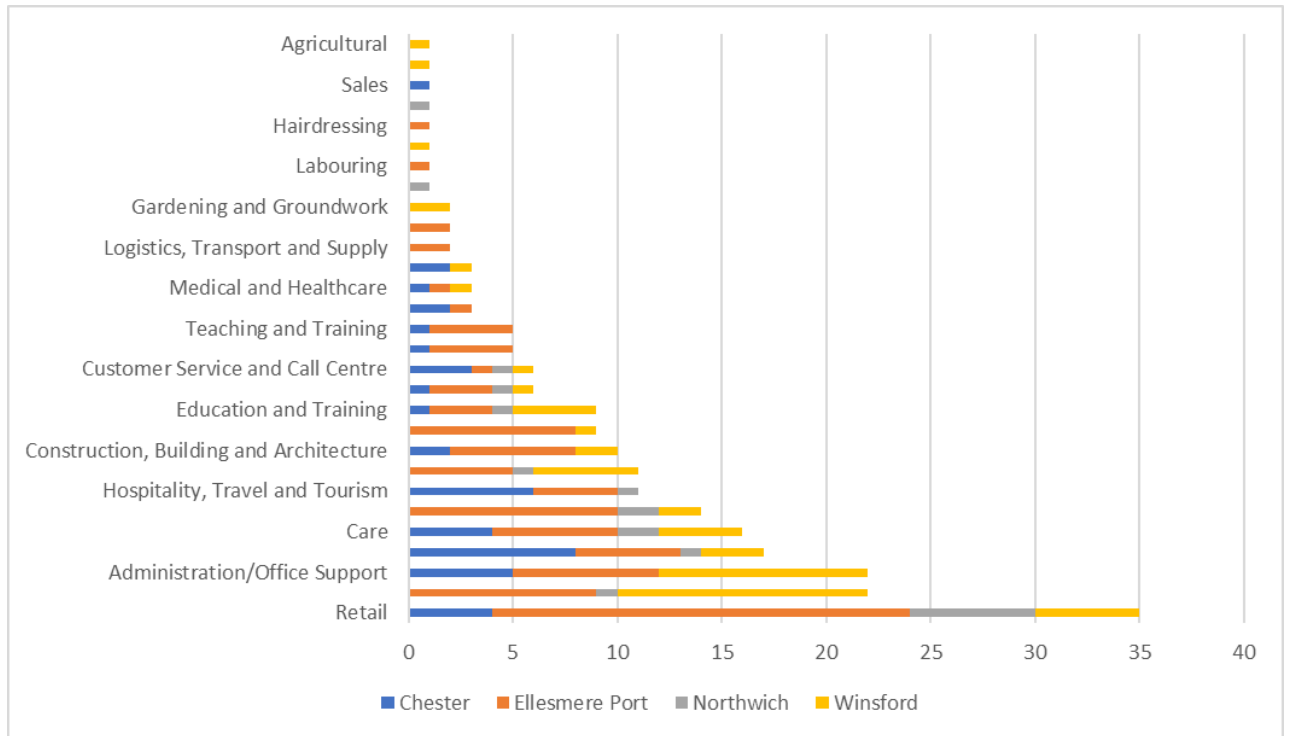
In response to the visitor economy sector, we have worked with several hospitality and retail companies offering sector-based work academy programmes (SWAPs), building on a customer service programme. This has worked particularly well with the new employers taking up residency in the Northgate site in Chester. We will be looking to ensure our offer is available to the planned improvements to the town centres in both Ellesmere Port and Winsford. We know that retail alone provides 33,000 jobs in CW&C

With regards to supporting the finance we have offered introduction to accounting programmes through our Service but would like to do more to ensure that this sectoral specialism is maintained and that residents able are to access work in this area. This sector currently accounts for 10,000 jobs, double the national average. We are also aware that many financial employers have difficulty in filling their vacancies and therefore we would like the find ways to support them through SWAPs or work placements.

Table 5 below shows which sectors provided job outcomes last year at which Work Zones. These were:

- Chester work zone: job outcomes were in Cleaning, Hospitality, and Administration.
- Ellesmere Port work zone: job outcomes were in Warehousing, Retail, and Food
- Northwich work zone: job outcomes were in Retail, Care, and Food
- Winsford work zone: job outcomes were in Warehousing, Administration, and Retail

Table 5: Work zone data showing job outcomes (by sector) by local Work Zone (March 2023)



Our Strategic Plan

Cheshire West and Chester Council Adult Education Service produced its Strategic Plan in December 2020. The document identified four aims. They were to:

- enhance the skills and competencies of local people to help them to gain and progress in productive employment, progress onto further learning and become and stay independent
- develop resident resilience to enable them to thrive and progress in life
- support residents so that they can develop the skills and values that will enable local businesses to compete and grow
- support a borough culture of inclusivity, responsibility, and good employment, underpinned by healthy and resilient workplaces

The plan identified 15 actions, although some of these were in direct response to the COVID pandemic and therefore no longer relevant. The key priority areas that remain are:

1. To develop a flexible and agile commissioning model that can respond to the emerging skills and employment demands, including online content
2. To support targeted individuals/geographies facing significant barriers to progressing into work through our employment support projects and participating in any further place-based approaches in the borough
3. To develop our marketing strategy to engage with those residents on low incomes and explore how we can reach and support these potential learners/beneficiaries
4. To support DWP campaigns aimed at supporting those over 50, those individuals with a disability seeking work and in work progression.
5. To inform the Council approach to Social Value and provide brokerage support which will enable local residents to benefit from regeneration projects.
6. To monitor the Anchor Institution initiative, offering support and advice to officers wishing to establish best practice.
7. To monitor employer demand for skills to inform our evidence base and as a result our curriculum planning.

In addition to our Strategic Plan, we also carry out a self-assessment, identifying key performance priorities and areas for improvement. These currently are:

- To ensure provision available is aligned to meet local employer needs
- To improve progression outcomes for learners, ensuring they fully understand the expected outcomes of the programme they enrol onto and for the team to be able to monitor any impact from learning
- To ensure we are embedded into a cohesive and co-ordinated provision offer made available to residents, dependent on need and aspiration
- To review current accommodation used to deliver provision, including expanding community-based provision such as the school hubs.

Aims and Target Outcomes for 2023-24

The following are a set of SMART objectives that we will work towards in response to the Cheshire and Warrington LSIP.

Objective	By When
1. To review the Services Strategic Plan to fully reflect the priorities of the LSIP, especially those pertinent to Cheshire West	By December 2023
2. Ensure CW&C AEB and Supported Internship provision is considered as part of the Cheshire West and Cheshire and Warrington training offer, supporting recruitment and referral of learners and meeting employer skills needs up to and including Level 2.	On-going
3. Continue to monitor employer skills needs locally and use evidence base available to inform provision and commissioning of provision	By April 2024
4. Explore pathway programmes to support both the manufacturing and finance sectors	By April 2024
5. Ensure CW&C Adult Education Service are involved in the skills conversations taking place in Ellesmere Port with regards to low carbon/green jobs in order to identify whether we can provide provision to support this growing sector.	On-going
6. Develop progression outcome pathways for provision which supports priority sectors, either into employment or further learning	By October 2023

Corporation statement

This accountability agreement was approved by the chair of the CW&C AEB Governance Board on 30 May 2023.

Supporting documentation

Ofsted Inspection reports:

[Cheshire West and Chester Council - Open - Find an Inspection Report - Ofsted](#)

Cheshire and Warrington Local Skills Improvement Plan:

[Cheshire & warrington Local Skills Improvement Plan Emerging Priorities \(sccci.co.uk\)](#)