

**FE Accountability Agreement:**

# **Cheshire West and Chester Council's Adult Education Service**

**30 June 2024**

# Purpose

Cheshire West and Chester Council's Adult Education Service (Skills and Employment) aims to support residents' who face a range of barriers and 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, it's wider partners and stakeholders as leaders and influencers in the field of 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 by adults to find good, sustained employment, working in partnership with key stakeholders such as the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Cheshire West Voluntary Action (CWVA), local further education colleges and the 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 Autumn 2024.

# Context and Place



We are an Adult Education Service which is embedded within Cheshire West and Chester (CW&C) Local Authority, serving a population of approximately 350,000 people.

This area shares borders with Cheshire East, Warrington, Wirral, Shropshire and North Wales.

The Skills and Employment team deliver a wide range of programmes through our four geographically based Work Zones and 14 commissioned partners. Our Work Zones are in Chester, Ellesmere Port, Northwich and Winsford.

In addition to the Work Zones, we have created Learning and Skills Hubs embedded within our local communities which aim to respond to local needs, offering the chance to learn new skills, progress onto further learning, find employment or improve career prospects. Hubs also work alongside local schools to help support parents and carers to develop new skills.

The team are constantly reviewing how successful our Work Zones and Hubs are in engaging with our more vulnerable or disadvantaged residents.

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 receive around £1.2m of Adult Skills Fund (ASF) (plus an additional £50,000 for our Supported Internship Programme) and support over 1,500 learners each year. Our last Ofsted report gave the service a “good” grade. We have recently been inspected and the full report will be available shortly.

We provide information, advice and guidance (IAG) to all our learners. At a recent external review, we were awarded a glowing Matrix report. The report stated that the team offered “a very high level of service... supporting them (residents) into employment and skills training through rigorous and impartial information, advice and guidance” and “although there are targets within the process, it was clear that the emphasis was on delivering high quality service to the residents, which in turn has led to a learner centred culture.” The service was also praised for its strong networking and collaboration with referral partners, subcontractors, and local area partnerships.

We work closely with partners such as local Further Education Colleges and independent training providers, to ensure there is no duplication of provision and to encourage progression routes for our learners into further study where relevant. We are active members of the Cheshire and Warrington provider network.

As a local authority, we are responsible for the local 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 ASF provision, we support an annual cohort of Supported Internship Learners, providing them with employability and basic skills and facilitating high quality relevant work experience through our extensive link to local employers. We are also involved in a pilot which delivers a Supported Internship programme to learners who do not have an EHCP<sup>1</sup>, but who have barriers to engagement. The aim is to support approx. 25 learners through each of these programmes in 2024-25.

The Service uses a broad range of intelligence to inform our provision. This includes national data sets, such as the DWP Stat Xplore and the EMSI data supplied by Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington<sup>2</sup>, along with feedback from learners and employers that we engage with. The team also links with our regeneration and business support services at the Council, to ensure we are fully briefed on planned inward investment opportunities and the potential training needs and employment opportunities that they could support.

Table 1 below shows a breakdown of the CW&C workforce in 2024. Over 50% of our population is aged between 35 and 74 years old, with 35% of our residents aged over 55. This is higher than the England average of 31%.

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<sup>1</sup> EHCP – Education, Health Care Plan

<sup>2</sup> Formally Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)

Table 1: Summary of the resident population by age (ONS, Feb 2024)

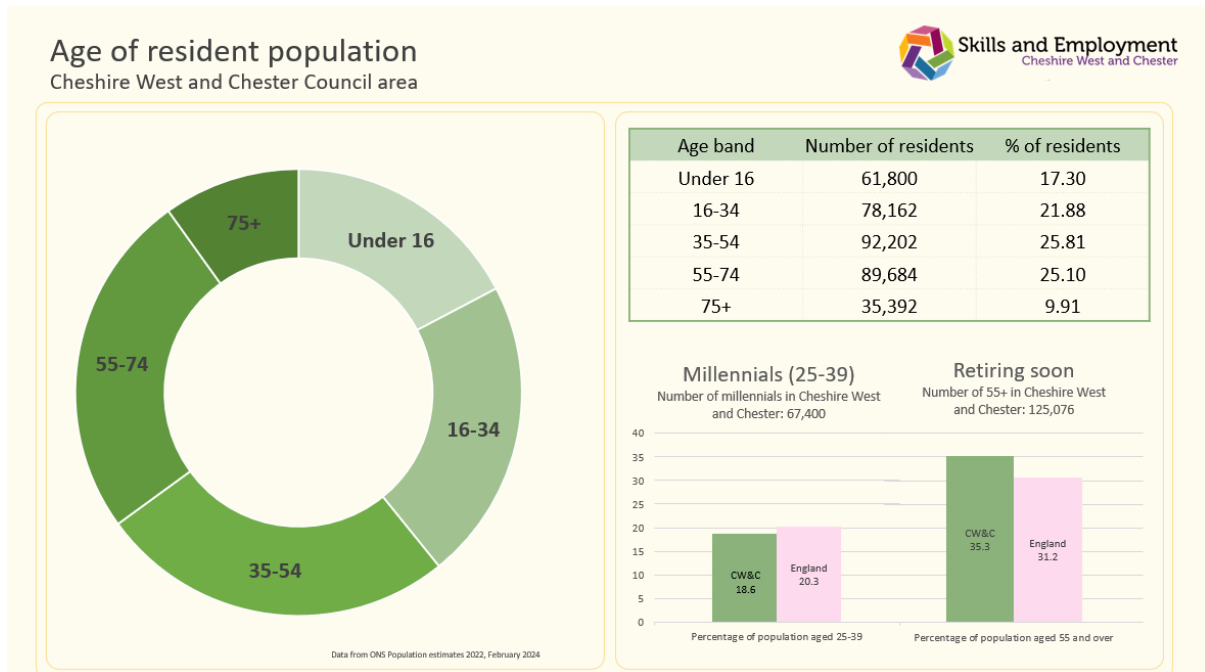
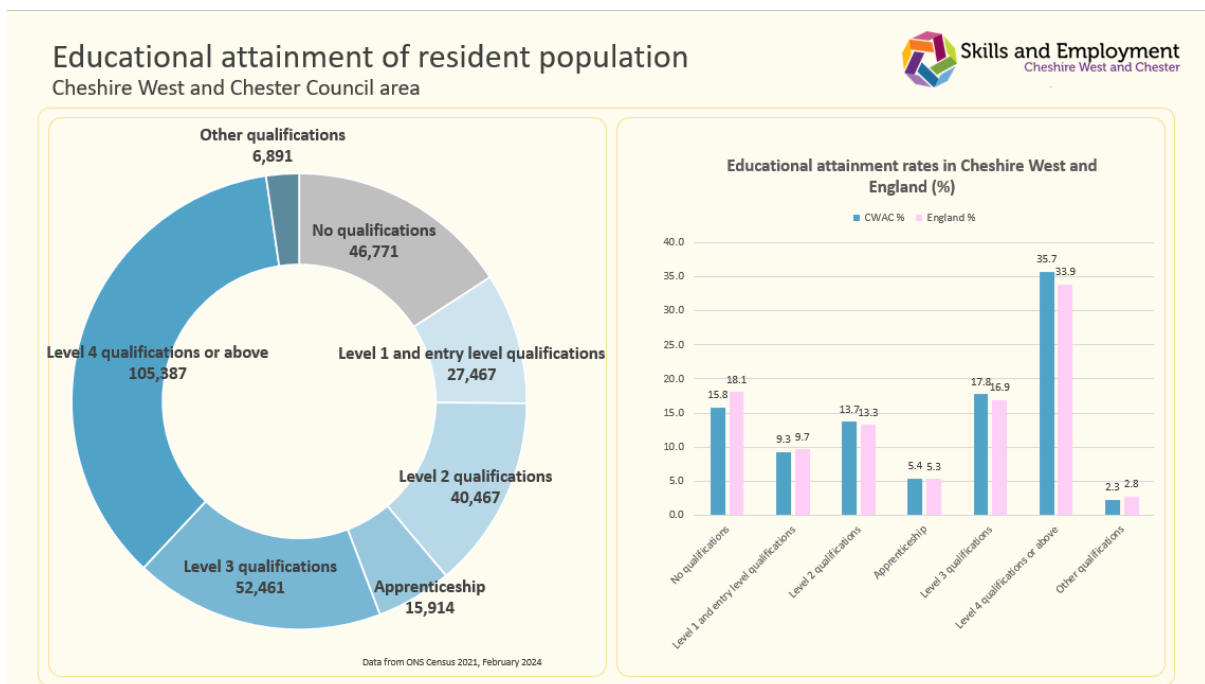


Table 2 shows the education attainment of residents in CW&C. There are over 105,000 people who have qualifications at Level 4 or above. This equates to 35.7% of the population, higher than the England average of 33.9%. However, there are still 74,238 people who either have an Entry or Level 1 qualification, or no qualifications. These are the target audience for the CW&C Skills and Employment provision.

Table 2: Educational attainment of resident population (ONS, Feb 2024)



The 2011 census showed that the non-white population in CW&C had increased from 2.7% to 4.7%, however this far below the national average of 19%.

Table 3 provides a summary of the labour force for CW&C. Out of a working age population of 208,827, 153,092 were employed and 4,302 unemployed.

Table 3: Summary of the labour force (Lightcast, 2023)

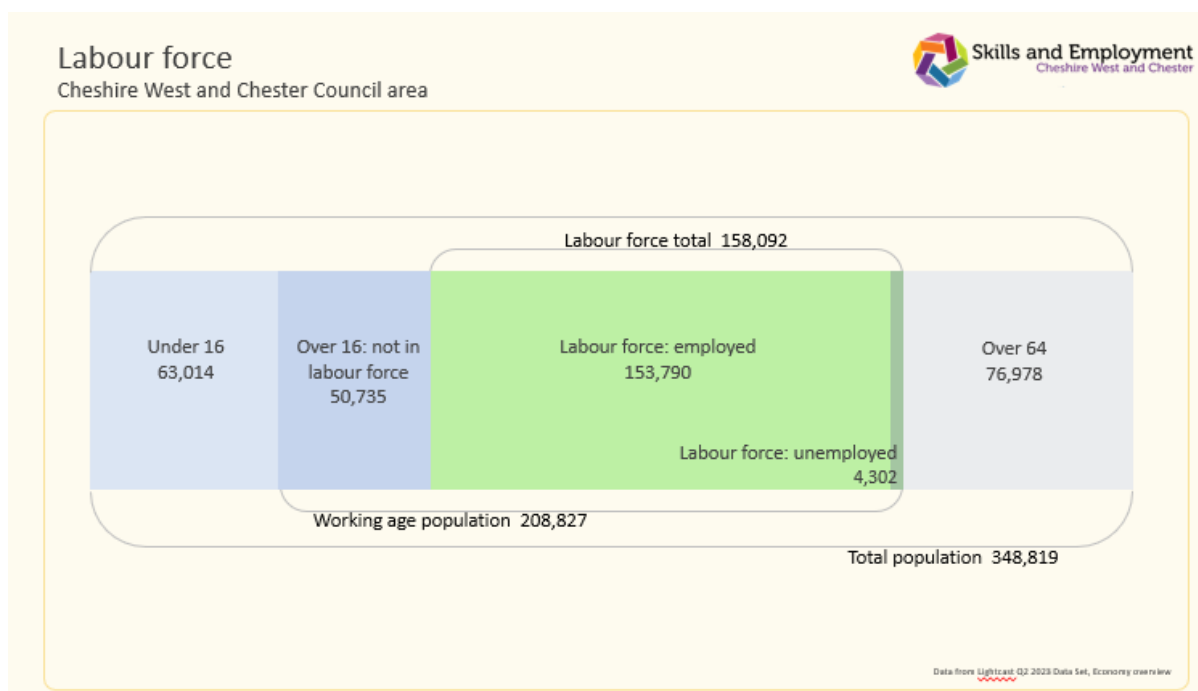


Table 4 shows the current unemployment rate in CW&C in comparison with our neighbours in Cheshire East and Warrington, along with the average rate for England. Our unemployment rate is currently 3%, which is below the England figure of 3.8% but higher than the rates for Cheshire East and Warrington. This however is still a drop from 3.7% which was the figure for 2018.

Table 4: Unemployment rates: Cheshire East, CW&C, Warrington and England (model-based estimates, March 2024)

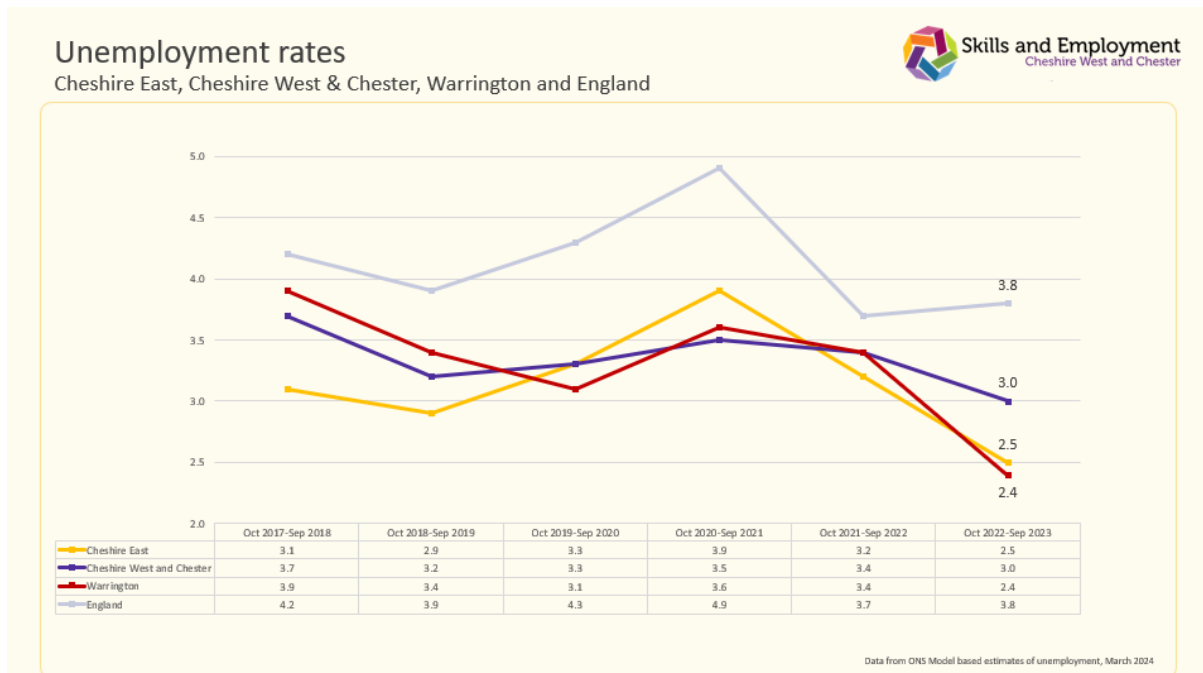


Table 5: Wards in CW&C with the highest claimant count (NOMIS 2024)

### Claimant count by ward

Wards with the highest proportion of residents aged 16-64 claiming benefits

Ward	February 2023	February 2024	% change
Westminster	6.5	6.8	0.3
Central & Grange	6.1	5.9	-0.2
Wolverham	6.4	5.3	-1.1
Blacon	6.0	4.9	-1.1
Northwich Leftwich	3.9	4.2	0.3
Northwich Witton	4.3	4.2	-0.1
Winsford Dene	3.7	4.0	0.3
Sutton Villages	3.9	4.0	0.1
Winsford Over & Verdin	4.1	3.9	-0.2
Winsford Wharton	4.8	3.6	-1.2
Lache	4.3	3.5	-0.8
Chester City & the Garden Quarter	2.9	3.1	0.2
Winsford Swanlow	3.1	2.9	-0.2
Winsford Gravel	2.5	2.8	0.3
Neston	3.1	2.8	-0.3
Whitby Park	2.7	2.7	0.0
Netherpool	2.8	2.7	-0.1
Newton & Hoole	2.8	2.7	-0.1
Northwich Winnington & Castle	2.9	2.7	-0.2
Rudheath	1.9	2.6	0.7
Shakerley	2.4	2.6	0.2
Upton	1.8	2.1	0.3
Great Boughton	2.1	2.1	0.0
Marbury	2.1	2.1	0.0

Pink formatting shows wards where the number of claimants has increased from February 2023 to February 2024. Green formatting shows wards where the number has decreased within the same period.

All data from nomisweb.co.uk, Claimant count by age and sex February 2024

Table 5 above provides an overview of those wards in the borough with the highest claimant count. It also highlights those areas which have seen an increase in the number claiming since February 2023. These are the areas that the Skills and Employment Service will be looking to target throughout the next 12 months. Many of these wards are also where there is the highest level of deprivation. In CW&C, we



know there are deprived wards a short distance away from affluent neighbourhoods. Addressing this inequality in the borough is a prime focus of the council's Borough Plan<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> [Home | CWC Borough Plan](#)

# **Approach to Developing the Annual Accountability Statement**

CW&C Skills and Employment Service produce an evidence base document each year, informed by local data which helps to shape the curriculum that we deliver and commission through our partners. This data involves working with our internal data and employer engagement team, along with DWP, Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington, NHS partners and feedback from local employers (including employer bodies) and our learners.

We have also used our extensive evidence base document to inform this accountability statement.

We have shared this accountability statement with our Adult Education 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.

We work closely with South Cheshire Chamber who are responsible for developing the Cheshire and Warrington Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) to ensure that where relevant, we are looking to identify ways in which we can play our part in supporting the local priorities identified. We will be also looking to work with other local providers to better develop co-ordinated pathways of provision in 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 Skills and Employment Service offer a variety of programmes that support the sectors above.

**Construction:** The Skills and Employment service work closely with a sub-contracted provider to offer CSCS<sup>4</sup> cards and training support for those adults looking for employment in this sector. Our training partner also works closely with Procure Plus who deliver the local on-site experience skills programme on behalf of CITB. This ensures that progression onto other training that could further increase a learners' employability can take place. Our provider has established links with many national and local construction firms and proactively engages with them to seek out employment opportunities of our learners.



**Digital and technology:** The Skills and Employment service offer a range of digital programmes especially at an introductory level. Many of these introduce learners to common Microsoft Office packages. The team also works closely with partners to support digital inclusion across the borough. Recently we have delivered digital skills alongside maths provision as part of our local Multiply offer.

As a service we are also looking to see how we can better use technology in the delivery of our learning programmes.

**Health and Social Care:** The Skills and Employment service have supported local social care employers, including delivery of sector work-based academy programmes (SWAP). We also monitor the local Skills Bootcamp provision, which includes an offer for this sector as this could become a useful progression route for our learners. The team are in regular contact with Warrington and Vale Royal College to understand how we can support them to develop and refer into their planned health and social care academy in Winsford.



We have recently supported the Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust in developing “Thriving Together: A partnership for health, care and employment in Cheshire West”. This clearly shows the role the Work Zones plays in supporting

<sup>4</sup> Construction Skills Certification Scheme

this sector recruit and retain staff, and that it is recognised by key stakeholders (see diagram below).

**Building a Caring Community: SWAPs, Skills Bootcamps, and the Path to a Rewarding Career in Cheshire West Health and Social Care**



**Responsibilities**

Employer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The employer is to offer voluntary positions or work experience in an area with capacity to do so following the completion of the Skills Bootcamp with CCSW</li> <li>To offer guaranteed interview at the end of the course, whether this is community, inpatient, outpatient, therapies, nursing, etc. that is relevant to the training completed (although employer cannot guarantee an interview in participants preferred area (i.e. maternity, A&amp;E, etc.), or guarantee position (usual interview process will apply))</li> </ul>
JCP and Workzone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To oversee the process of the EOJ and application from participants</li> <li>To ensure all applicants are at a level of Maths and English (although not required to have formal qualification) that will support them to complete both courses</li> <li>To facilitate the 4-day training (level 1 – course TBC) in Ellesmere Port</li> <li>To promote and advertise the opportunity to attract as much interest as possible.</li> </ul>
The Pledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To provide funding for the Skills Bootcamp (SB) to be facilitated by local training provider (potentially CCSW in Ellesmere Port, meeting scheduled with Helen Meakin, Karen Roberts and April Profit).</li> </ul>
CCSW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To facilitate the training required by the SB, offering a qualification following 60 hours of guided study (in-house at the Ellesmere Port Campus). This is to be completed over 2 weeks (30 hours per week to fit JCP requirements).</li> <li>To ensure full communication with the Cheshire West POC (Gemma Clemson (until 01.03.2024), following Andy Morris (from 01.03.2024))</li> <li>To provide full curriculum in advance of the SK starting, this is to be shared with JCP, Workzone, Employers, The Pledge and potentially with participants</li> </ul>
Participant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To be committed to complete the course with the opportunity to secure a guaranteed interview in Health and Social Care based roles, including Nursing Assistant / Healthcare Assistant / Therapies Assistant / Clinical Support Worker etc. All roles will be discussed on day 1 of the Workzone course.</li> <li>To attend and register at each of the sessions being facilitated by Workzone, CCSW, and during voluntary/work experience phase to be eligible for guarantee interview at the final phase.</li> </ul>



**Haulage and Logistics:** As a service, we are not in the position to offer driving qualifications, however we do work with two sub-contractors in the borough who provide forklift truck training programmes to learners in Ellesmere Port and Winsford. Both sites are located close to local logistics employers. This training would support the haulage and logistics sector, along with

other sectors such as retail and manufacturing.

**Engineering, Manufacturing, and Science:** These sectors do not lend themselves well to pre-level 2 provision, therefore we would look to refer to other local FE providers. 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 vocational courses.

**Maths:** We do offer a range of maths course through our ASF programme, and we are responsible for co-ordinating the local Multiply offer, working in partnership with seven sub-contracted 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 have recently launched our year 3 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 paragraphs outlined our response and offer as a provider. Please see below our response to those additional sectors highlighted as part of our Cheshire and Warrington Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)<sup>5</sup>.

**Life Sciences:** This sector generally requires individuals to have Level 3 skills and above, and therefore not our cohort. However, should we receive an enquiry for provision in this sector, we would look to refer to better placed FE or HE provider.



**Low carbon/net zero:** Although this sector does generally require skills of Level 3 and higher, we are keen to work with other partners to develop a pathway into these new types of jobs. This is particularly important in Ellesmere Port as there are a number of inward investment sites under development – targeted at low-carbon employers.

Government and the Council's social value policy is keen to ensure that these new jobs are made as inclusive as possible and not over-reliant on labour/ expertise from overseas.

Our Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) also identifies the need to be inclusive as a priority. As a team, the Skills and Employment Service work with a range of local employers, representing a variety of sectors who are facing recruitment and retention challenges. We aim to ensure our employment support provision is supported by our Adult Skills curriculum offer to enable progression into local vacancies.

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<sup>5</sup> [Home - Cheshire & Warrington Local Skills Improvement Plan \(cheshireandwarringtonlsip.co.uk\)](https://www.cheshireandwarringtonlsip.co.uk)

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. Please see below how our service responds to the needs of the visitor economy and finance sectors.

**Visitor Economy (including hospitality, leisure, and retail):**

The Skills and Employment service have worked closely with our Business Improvement District (BID) groups supporting retail and hospitality businesses, particularly in Chester and Northwich. We offer vocational courses in line with their skills needs, largely based around customer service skills. This has included



the new inward investment opportunities in Chester (continuing Northgate project), Ellesmere Port (Levelling Up Fund (LUF) scheme to re-develop the town centre including its market) and Winsford (the re-development of the town centre).

We have also responded to those individuals who have been impacted by redundancies, working in partnership with DWP and the National Careers Service.

Over the next 12 months, we are looking to see how we could offer catering courses, either ourselves or through a sub-contracted provider.



**Finance:** The Skills and Employment Service has begun to offer an introduction to accountancy as part of its curriculum in response to the demand for finance related skills. This is a sector which is more prevalent in Cheshire West than in other local authority areas nationally. We want to continue to monitor how successful these programmes have been in securing good quality work for our residents.

Table 6 below provides details of the job outcomes that have been achieved through learners engaging with the Work Zones across the borough. The majority have been into retail, warehouse, administration, cleaning and food related jobs.

Table 6: Job outcomes by Work Zone (March 2024)

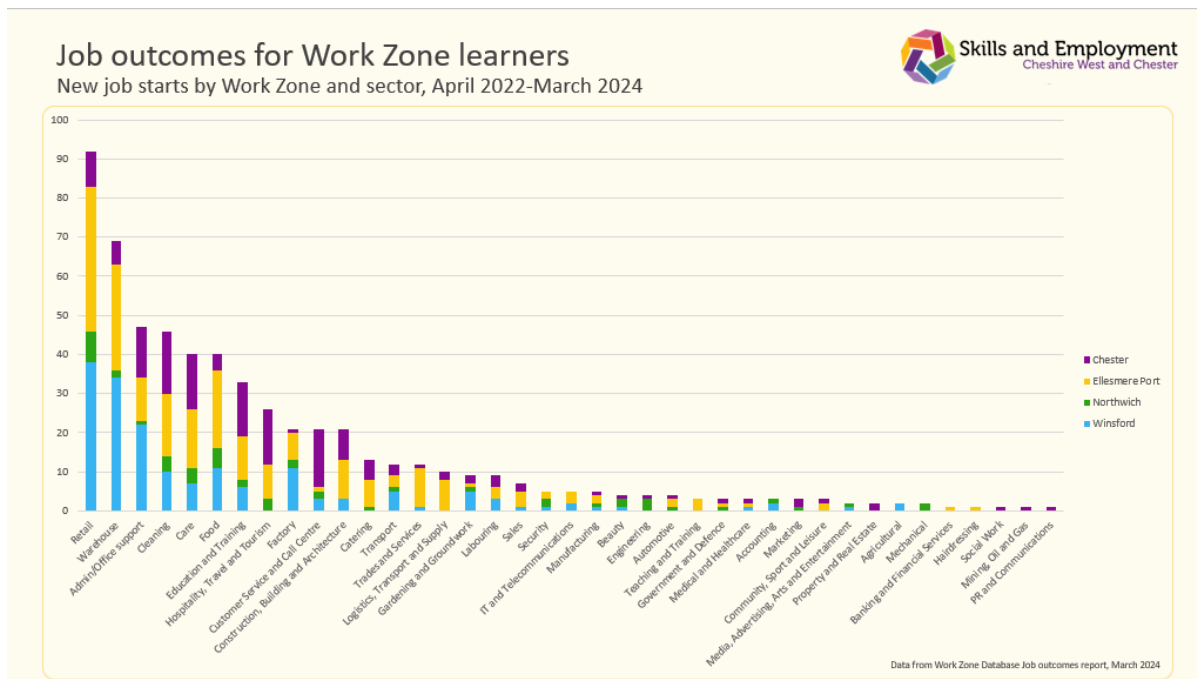


Table 7 provides an overview of the National, Regional and Local Skills priorities and how they differ and align. Table 8 demonstrates how the provision available through the Skills and Employment Service meets these sectors skills needs.

Table 7: Overview of national, regional and local skills priorities

Sector Area	National	Regional	Local
Construction	★		
Manufacturing	★	★	★
Digital and Technology	★	★	
Health and Social Care	★	★	★
Haulage and Logistics	★		
Engineering	★		
Science	★		
Maths	★		
Low Carbon		★	★
Visitor Economy			★
Finance			★

Table 8: Cheshire West and Chester Council’s Adult Skills Fund (ASF) contribution towards the national, regional and local skills priorities

Sector Area	ASF available now	ASF under development	ASF looking to commission
Construction	★		
Manufacturing			★
Digital and Technology	★		
Health and Social Care	★		
Haulage and Logistics	★		
Engineering			★
Science			
Maths	★		
Low Carbon			★
Visitor Economy	★	★	
Finance		★	



# Our Strategic Plan

Cheshire West and Chester Council Skills and Employment 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, progress in life and adapt to change.
- 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.

Moving forwards, we will also be looking to see how we can support our residents to adapt to change, upskilling and retraining where appropriate so that they are able to access job opportunities in emerging sectors and ensure they remain employable in an ever-changing jobs market – “jobs for life” becoming a thing of the past.

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<sup>6</sup>, 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.

This strategic plan is due for review and a new plan will be produced by September 2024.

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 learning and skills hubs.

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<sup>6</sup> [West Cheshire Anchor Network | Cheshire West and Chester Council](#)

## Aims and Target Outcomes for 2024-25

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

Objective	By When	Impact on skills priorities
1. To review the Skills and Employment Services Strategic Plan to fully reflect the priorities of the LSIP, especially those pertinent to Cheshire West	By December 2024	Ensure we play an active role in supporting the key sector strengths of the borough.
2. Ensure the CW&C ASF 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	Ensure partners and stakeholders understand the role we can play in supporting learners access employment (especially those sectors offering entry level/level 1 roles).
3. Develop sector pathways with stakeholders (similar to the one produced for health and social care) for other important sectors, clearly identifying our role in the journey.  This will also help up to improve progression outcomes to other skills provision.	By March 2025.	See above

<p>4. Continue to monitor employer skills needs locally and use the evidence base available to inform provision and commissioning of provision in 2024-25.</p>	<p>Evidence base produced by May 2024.</p> <p>Commissioning round for 2024-25 completed by August 2024.</p>	<p>Ensure our provision is reflective and responds to local employer needs.</p>
<p>5. Ensure CW&amp;C Skills and Employment 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.</p>	<p>On-going engagement with Hynet<sup>7</sup>, Origin<sup>8</sup>, Protos<sup>9</sup> and other inward investment schemes.</p> <p>Origin mapping to be completed by March 2025.</p>	<p>Ensure more local residents are able to benefit from the new low carbon jobs being generated in the area.</p>

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<sup>7</sup> [HyNet North West](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Origin | Climate solutions on an industrial scale \(origin-ep.co.uk\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Protos - The Destination for Energy, Innovation and Industry](#)

# Corporation statement

This accountability agreement was approved by the chair of the CW&C Adult Skills Fund (Formally Adult Education Budget) Governance Board on \*\*\*\*\*.

## Hyperlink

Insert link to document on the CW&C website when approved.

## Supporting documentation

Ofsted Inspection reports:

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

[Add the new one when available](#)

Cheshire and Warrington Local Skills Improvement Plan:

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