

Meeting:	Executive
Meeting date:	3 rd June 2025
Report of:	Pauline Stuchfield, Director Housing & Communities
Portfolio of:	Councillor Peter Kilbane Executive Member for Economy and Culture

Decision Report: York Learning Accountability Statement 2025-26

Subject of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to gain approval to submit the accountability statement, relating to the Adult Skills Fund (ASF) grant received by York Learning on an annual basis. All providers in receipt of £1m or more of funding for post-16 provision have a statutory responsibility to produce and publish an annual accountability statement that reflects the needs of the local environment as determined by the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) in particular but should also detail how funding is most effectively used in a local context.
2. This document will form part 2 of the funding agreement provided by the Education Skills Funding Agency and failure to agree this document by June 30th 2025 may impact on York Learning's ability to draw down grant funding in a timely manner.
3. The action plan provided within the accountability statement will form the Strategic Plan for York Learning for 2025-26 and approval is sought for these key actions.

Benefits and Challenges

4. The final accountability statement must be published on the York Learning website, as such it provides a key public facing document.

The production of this public facing document allows us to clearly demonstrate how:

- a) we aim to align the service with the key aspirations of the council through reflection of the council plan.
 - b) we aim to support residents to live healthier and more economical impactful lives.
 - c) we can support our local businesses to develop a pipeline of talent and to upskill and reskill their existing workforce in line with the aims of the LSIP.
 - d) we are shaping our curriculum to also meet the aims, needs and aspirations of the Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) economic framework, skills strategy and plans for Adult Skills Fund (ASF) devolution, (previously known as Adult Education Budget AEB).
5. The key challenges we face as a service are driven by decreasing national and regional participation rates in adult learning and increasing challenges on core council budgets. The accountability statement seeks to detail how we will align our curriculum to this preventative approach and to maximise the added social value of learning. We believe this to be in line with the plans of the MCA and will hope to be able to utilise the actions seen here to demonstrate the value provided by funding the local authority through the ASF.

Policy Basis for Decision

6. York Learning is currently part of the Housing and Communities Directorate of City of York Council. The service will move to the Children and Education Directorate in June 2025 to see closer alignment with wider education and skills provision. We define our purpose as providing the gateway to opportunity for the city's adults, (and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) enabling them to reach their full potential. Whether that be greater integration into society or to move into more-fulfilling employment roles we are keen to support individuals to thrive, improving their physical and emotional health and recognising the opportunities available to them.
7. From August 1st 2025, York Learning as part of City of York Council will provide largely York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority (MCA) funded adult and tailored learning provision, with additional income from dedicated project work, apprenticeships and the

support for those learners aged 19-25 with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP).

8. Our service, and its partnership with North Yorkshire's Adult Learning and Skills Service (ALSS), has a major role in enabling residents across the region to achieve the best they possibly can and benefit from our thriving economy.
9. Our passion for adult learning continues to drive us to deliver effective programmes of learning to a range of adults with a particular focus on those from disadvantaged and marginalised communities. We want to offer inclusive services with high quality learning provision and support, which works well across the spectrum of need, whilst meeting the needs of our local economy fully in line with 'One City, for all' we aim to deliver in a way that sets strong ambitions to increase opportunities for everyone living in York to live healthy and fulfilling lives.
10. The plan for the city sets four aligned core commitments as Equalities, Affordability, Climate Change and Health. These align to the city's 10-year plans and are reflected in the city's 10-year skills strategy.
11. We are ambitious within York Learning to be able to stress the significant impact that adult learning can have to meet these commitments. Using creativity, innovation and our community roots we can utilise our Adult Skills funding to:
 - Increase opportunities for people to manage through the cost of living crisis – through understanding waste, energy bills, practical hints and tips with embedded core numeracy, literacy and digital skills.
 - Increase the levels of independence in adults with disabilities to take personal responsibility for health and wellbeing.
 - Encourage families to work, learn and play together – delivering green ambitions, use of the city and cementing the connection with arts and heritage.
 - Support the training of the Voluntary and Community Sectors and for community champions to want to do more, equipping them with the skills to do so.
 - Support combined pride in and understanding of our wide and welcoming common heritage.
 - Work in spaces in communities to help them be more useful and vibrant.

12. Through all of this we will demonstrate clear pathways that:
- Improve essential skills.
 - support people to overcome digital poverty.
 - allow people to take up better jobs that are better suited to their skills, ambitions and aspirations and progress into the wider economic infrastructure.

Financial Strategy Implications

13. The accountability statement shapes the high-level ways that we will utilise our funding. This document basically details how we will aim to spend the funds that we are provided (as a grant) by the Combined Authority for adult provision and the Department for Education for young people aged 16-25 subject to Education, Health and Care Plans. These funds being around £1.2m to be received directly for Adults and a proportion of the £1.3m the council receives for learners aged 16+ who we deliver through our Routes programme and through High Needs subcontracting.
14. The service operates within the funding guidance issued by the Combined Authority and the Department for Education and supplements income through fees paid for accessing a large proportion of our provision.
15. Whilst no savings or significant surplus can be generated from our grant funding, more effective use of the opportunities offered by engagement in learning by our residents (including our staff) can improve health outcomes, can overcome barriers that are preventing individuals meeting their potential and can support families (and in turn their children) to be able to cope and become resilient to challenges such as the cost of living crisis. This in turn then potentially reduces the number of individuals who seek support from the wider statutory services of the council.

Recommendation and Reasons

16. Executive Members are asked to approve the Accountability Statement and Action Plan at the Annex to this report ahead of publication at the end of June 2025.

Reason: For the service to receive funding to deliver against this statement we must gain agreement on contents. This agreement

provides a framework for accountability whilst enabling us to receive the necessary funds to deliver the service. The document will also serve as the basis for wider internal conversations that will maximise the potential of learning for our residents.

Background

17. *Skills for jobs: lifelong learning for opportunity and growth* published in January 2021 laid out key reforms to post-16 technical education and training that aims to support people to develop the skills needed to get good jobs and improve national productivity. This paper and its subsequent legislation stipulated a clear plan to place employers at the heart of the skills system through the production of an LSIP.
18. The LSIP was written and published in July 2023 by an approved Employer Representative Body (ERB), for York and North Yorkshire; the West and North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce being the designated ERB.
19. The York and North Yorkshire LSIP report is a strategic document identifying clear priorities for skills in the local area. It includes the necessary key changes needed (or indeed what should be retained) to make post-16 technical education and training more responsive to the skills needs of employers in the area. The LSIP covers a fixed period of 3 years.
20. *The Skills for Jobs* whitepaper detailed how providers would need to publish an annual accountability statement, that would form part of their annual funding agreement, that would indicate how funding received is to be used in line with local and national skills priorities as detailed by the LSIP.
21. The Department for Education (DfE) describe the Accountability Agreements, introduced for the first time in the 2023 to 2024 academic year, as setting the overall expectations of providers (including local authorities delivering more than £1 million of post - 16 provision) in return for funding. The agreement focusses on what colleges, designated institutions and local authorities deliver in the year ahead and how they intend to support local, regional, and national needs. These annual Statements should in all cases be

informed by providers' longer term strategic plans and ambitions. The DfE stipulate that documents produced by local authority providers must be signed off by your governing body or equivalent prior to submission.

Consultation Analysis

22. The Shared Head for Adult Learning and Skills (York and North Yorkshire) set out and consulted on a clear strategic vision for the adult learning provision provided by North Yorkshire and City of York Councils in December 2021. This strategy and direction identified the need to support adults to access the training and support that can be provided by engagement in education. This common strategy is important to support the wider economic requirements of the region and aims to enable strong lobbying support for the services once the adult education budget is devolved under a combined mayoral authority which is expected in the 2025/2026 academic year.
23. This strategic document was consulted on in July 2022 and published in September 2022 and was produced utilising the extensively consulted research base of the York and North Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (YNYLEP). This is one of many documents that were used to formulate the York and North Yorkshire LSIP which additionally cites a strong research and policy base. The Shared Head has worked closely with the combined authority team to shape the MCA skills and ASF strategies and these opportunities have been integral to the creation of a strong collaborative platform for the creation of this plan.

Options Analysis and Evidential Basis

24. Whilst the paper presented is a key step in receiving funding it does not hold us directly to account on how this funding is utilised. This is set out in the Adult Skills Fund (ASF) funding guidance and in turn in the York Learning Fees Policy document for 2025-26. These rules are the boundaries on what we can and cannot use funding received through ASF for. This document details the key strategic approaches that we wish to take and are the mechanism by which this funding is received.

25. As such it is hoped the approach meets the aims of council and demonstrates an effective way of utilising this ring-fenced funding to assist in achievement of the council plan.
26. Agreement to approve does not prevent further discussion on how we may utilise our 2025-26 budget but failure to do so may impact the receipt of vital funds. There are therefore no other options recommended for approval in this report.

Organisational Impact and Implications

27. **Financial** – The Chief Finance officer has stated that there are no financial implications to this report.
28. **Human Resources (HR)** - The office of the Chief Officer HR & Support Services report no HR (or ICT) implications contained within this report should approval to submit the accountability statement be given and funding secured
29. **Legal** – The Senior Solicitor, Court Business Partner and Deputy Monitoring Officer states that York Learning's strategy reflects a comprehensive approach to identifying priorities and outcomes, engaging with key stakeholders and collaborating with local providers to meet community needs and align with local skills and economic strategies. It is in compliance with Section 52B of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, as amended by the Skills and Post 16 Education Act 2022. The service also aligns with the Public Sector Equality Duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 by promoting inclusivity, advancing equality and fostering good relations. By targeting disadvantaged communities and providing tailored learning opportunities, the initiatives meet the legal obligations of the Equality Act.
30. **Procurement** - The Head of Procurement has stated that there are there are no direct procurement implications arising from this report.
31. **Health and Wellbeing** – Learning and skills development make a positive contribution to health and wellbeing both directly, through improving aspects of physical and mental health, and indirectly, for

example by improving better job opportunities and financial stability. In addition, the learning funded through this agreement prioritises groups whose health and wellbeing outcomes often fall short of those enjoyed by others in the city. Public Health approve the accountability statement.

32. **Environment and Climate action** – The Head of Carbon Reduction describes the statement as ensuring York has the right skills and capacity is crucial to meeting demand and supporting a just transition to net zero. The objectives of York Learning align with this requirement, providing delivery that meets local, regional and national needs.
33. **Affordability**, - The Director of Housing and Communities states the skills and learning driven and funded through this agreement directly contribute to improving life chances and job skills. Where there are low cost and free courses such as those for digital skills the impact on those struggling during the cost-of-living crisis is likely to be positive where online support and services become accessible as a result.
34. **Equalities and Human Rights** The Assistant Director Customer, Communities and Inclusion states the first Accountability Statement produced in July 2023 was assessed and it has not changed since that time. This will be revisited each year. The assessment can be found as Annex 2 with a continued positive impact on those protected by the Equalities and Human Rights Acts.
35. **Data Protection and Privacy**
The data protection impact assessment (DPIAs) screening questions were completed for the recommendations and options in this report and as there is no personal, special categories or criminal offence data being processed to set these out, there is no requirement to complete a DPIA at this time. However, this will be reviewed following the approved recommendations and options from this report and a DPIA completed if required
36. **Communications** - The York Learning Accountability Statement 2025–26 presents a clear opportunity to reinforce the council’s commitment to inclusive growth, skills development, and social mobility, while demonstrating alignment with both national and regional priorities, including devolution and the Adult Skills Fund. York Learning should be positioned as a proactive, community-

embedded service helping residents overcome barriers, improve wellbeing, and access employment opportunities, especially in underrepresented groups. Given its statutory nature and visibility as a public document, communications will highlight York Learning's impact on city priorities (Equalities, Affordability, Climate, Health), the inclusive engagement strategy, and the strategic use of funding to widen participation, thus making the case not only for public accountability but also for civic pride in York's educational leadership.

37. **Economy**-The Chief Strategy officer states that as set out in the report, the work of York Learning contributes to positive economic outcomes & benefits and supports the delivery of the York Economic Strategy.

Risks and Mitigations

38. There are no known risks associated with the agreement of this document, but significant risk should we not gain agreement as funding for the service would be removed.
39. Future risks exist should we not be able to demonstrate full use of the grant, as performance can be directly monitored by the MCA.

Wards Impacted

40. The decision will impact all wards.

Contact details

For further information please contact the authors of this Decision Report.

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Date:	07/05/2025
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Background papers

[Approval of York Learning Accountability Statement 2024/25: Decision Session - Executive item 7– 14th June 2024](#)

[Skills for jobs: lifelong learning for opportunity and growth](#)

[York and North Yorkshire Local Skills Improvement Plan](#)

[Meeting skills needs: Guidance on annual Accountability Agreements 2024/25 and the Local Needs Duty](#)

[York and North Yorkshire Adult Learning and Skills Engagement Strategy 2021-2025](#)

[Skills for Employment York's 10-year Strategy](#)

Annexes

Annex:

1 City of York Council -- Draft York Learning Accountability Statement 2024/25

2 Equality Impact Assessment

Abbreviations:

ASF – Adult Skills Fund

LSIP – Local Skills Improvement Plan

AEB – Adult Education Budget

MCA – Mayoral Combined Authority

CA – Combined Authority

ESFA – Education Skills Funding Agency

EHCP – Education, Health and Care Plan

ALSS – North Yorkshire Adult Learning and Skills Service

ERB – Employer Responsive Body

DfE – Department for Education
YNLEP – York and North Yorkshire Local Enterprise
Partnership
EIA – Equalities Impact Assessment