

Learning for Life

Community Learning and
Skills Strategy 2022 - 25



Community Learning Mission:

To inspire and support the people of West Berkshire to improve their lives through lifelong learning

Community Learning Vision:

A West Berkshire where all adults have access to the learning they need to thrive and reach their potential



Introduction and Context

The Council has a clear ambition to improve the lives of adults in West Berkshire. The Community Learning service plays an important part in this aim by inspiring and supporting the improvement of lives through lifelong learning with particular focus on:

- Developing employment skills and opportunities
- Improving maths, English and digital skills
- Supporting families to help children to learn and develop
- Improving health and wellbeing
- Developing stronger communities

The service attracts around 1800 adult learners each year on a wide programme of accredited and non-accredited learning opportunities. It was recognised in the 2015 OFSTED inspection as being a good service, and has ambitions to be outstanding.

Funded primarily by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) the Community Learning service supports local learning providers and council services to deliver a wide range of courses to adults aged 19 or over across the district. Throughout the community learning planning, commissioning and delivery process there is a strong emphasis on partnership working to address local need, ensure best value for money, avoid duplication and strengthen the Council's drive to improve outcomes for residents.

'Partnership working is outstanding. Leaders and managers place a strong emphasis on ensuring all learners can access learning by increasingly working with a more diverse range of organisations...'
(Ofsted, November 2015)



Local Post 19 Sector

There are three ESFA funded providers based in West Berkshire that deliver post 19 education and training:

- Newbury College (General Further and Higher Education College)
- West Berkshire Training Consortium (Independent Learning Provider)
- West Berkshire Council Community Learning service

West Berkshire Council's Community Learning service specifically focuses on supporting short courses that encourage adults to experience the benefits of learning. The service works in partnership with other providers to develop clear pathways for learners to address their needs and progress on to further learning opportunities.

1. Our Intent: Key Design Principles

Learner Centred

The Community Learning service puts the learner at the centre of every aspect of the planning and delivery process from commissioning providers to the targeting of learners and the design and delivery of courses:

- Providers: skilled and quality specialist providers and tutors are used to support the learner through their learning experience.
- Outcomes led: that we contribute to the outcomes for communities as proposed in the West Berkshire Council's strategic plan 'Building on our Strengths' (2019-2023).
- Strong Partnerships: that we continue to identify and work with partners to address local need, determine relevant and targeted programmes and ensure that the needs of the learner are always put first.
- Targeted programmes: that we prioritise our work towards those in society where learning activities will have the most impact and design programmes to provide accessible learning pathways.
- Flexible: that the service is responsive to a fast changing environment and is able to adapt to changing priorities and learner needs.
- Local: that learning programmes are delivered locally by local providers in places that are accessible to the learner.
- Quality provision: that programmes are of the highest quality to provide all learners with the best possible support to enable them to fulfil their full potential.

- Equality of access: that we will remove barriers to learning and widen participation through a fair and simple fees policy, free access to those in need, flexible delivery and effective targeted promotion.
- Innovation: that programmes truly align with demand and provide more flexible models of delivery covering both remote and non-remote provision.

Strategic Approach

West Berkshire Council's community learning service is informed by the strategies and priorities of national, regional and local partners and stakeholders.

We are an active member of HOLEX, the professional membership body for the Local Authority Adult Community Education (ACE) sector, which represents a network of 140+ adult and community learning service providers.

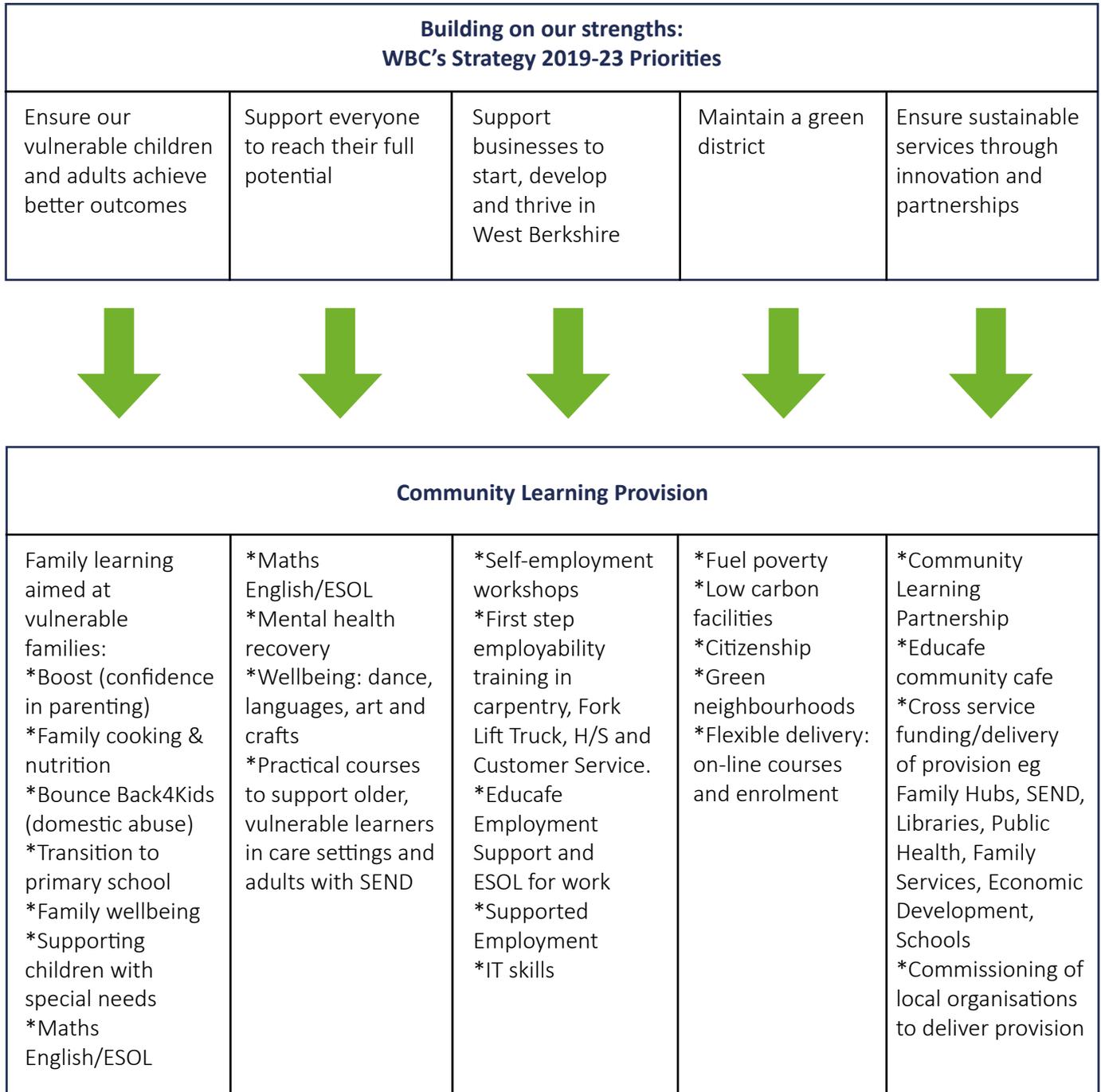
Our priorities reflect those outlined in [Council](#) and national government strategies:

- [West Berkshire Vision 2036](#)
- [WBC Strategy 'Building on our Strengths' 2019-23](#)
- [WBC Economic Development Strategy 2019-36](#)
- [Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership Berkshire Prospectus 2022](#)
- [New Challenges, New Chances Further Education and Skills Reform Plan 2011](#)
- [UK Industrial Strategy](#)
- [WBC Digital Strategy](#)
- [Berkshire West Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021-2030](#)

Addressing Local Priorities

West Berkshire Council’s Community Learning service addresses the strategic priorities of West Berkshire Council in the way it targets learners, addresses need, designs the curriculum and commissions providers to deliver a range of courses.

The service specifically contributes to the delivery of five of the six strategic priorities outlined in West Berkshire Council’s strategy ‘[Building on our Strengths](#)’ (2019-2023).



2. Implementation: How we plan to achieve our mission and priorities

Curriculum Design and Development

The community learning curriculum is constantly developing in response to national and local priorities and changes in funding and qualification eligibility. At its core is strong partnership working which informs, designs and develops a varied curriculum. Partners includes:

- Learners who feedback on their needs and experiences.
- Local community who are regularly consulted.
- Commissioned providers who have specialist knowledge and expertise of key target groups.
- The Community Learning Partnership that contributes to the shaping of a broad curriculum by highlighting need, identifying gaps, sharing resources and expertise.
- Internal Council services which identify shared priorities and funding opportunities.

All partners recognise that the curriculum is wider than the content of what is delivered with a strong emphasis on personal development, such as confidence, resilience, independence and physical and mental wellbeing.

Curriculum Themes

- **Develop employment skills and opportunities**
Supporting learners to take initial steps on their pathway towards employment by gaining new knowledge and skills, gaining confidence and social skills and a sense of self-improvement.
- **Improve maths, English and digital skills**
Supporting learners to develop functional maths, English and digital skills to get on in modern Britain.
- **Support families to help children to learn and develop**
Supporting learners to develop their parenting skills, confidence and self-belief, in turn improving their children's learning and development throughout childhood and adolescence.
- **Improve health and wellbeing**
Supporting learners to develop their health and wellbeing by engaging in a new activity, learning new skills and knowledge and boost self-confidence and self-esteem, help build a sense of purpose and foster connection with others.
- **Develop stronger communities**
Supporting learners to be involved in their communities so that they can share, shape and create a strong, vibrant, healthy and inclusive sense of community, place and belonging.



Curriculum Delivery

The majority of our curriculum delivery is subcontracted to locally based providers for reasons of working in partnership to reach in to our communities and providing a more accessible curriculum to all residents. We also support other internal Council services, such as Family Hubs, Early Years, Public Health and Libraries.

Subcontracting allows us to respond to new and emerging local needs, using specialist provider resources and expertise to target and deliver effective learning programmes across the district.

All provision is part-time, mainly targeted at specific learner groups and flexible in terms of content, format (accredited or in-formal) and delivery (remote, classroom or blended).

Curriculum and Professional Development

A flexible commissioning process, robust quality assurance and strong contract management by the community learning team enables providers and tutors to continually develop the range and quality of courses available.

We support, encourage and facilitate the professional development and involvement of tutors and providers through professional qualifications, specific training (Safeguarding, Mental Health, Prevent) and a dedicated annual Tutor Forum.

We know our areas of strength, and that of our local providers, and we work hard to address opportunities together.

Sources of reference: [WBC strategy](#), [CL LLL Study \(May 2021\)](#), [Community Education Fund bid form](#)



3. Moving Forward

Building on our Strengths

As we move through the next three years, we will continue to adjust to changing and emerging needs, building on areas of strength and focusing on areas for improvement. Our ambition of learning for life is reflected in our ambition for learning – for new knowledge and skills to be gained to enable residents to improve their lives regardless of age or background.

- **Engagement:** We will focus on increasing the number of people engaged in lifelong learning. West Berkshire Council has a unique connection with local residents and we will capitalise on this by working with internal partners and locally based providers to widen the lifelong learning offer through the continual development of a needs driven curriculum.
- **Delivery of a High Quality Courses:** We aim is to provide our learners with a life enhancing experience through inspirational teaching and learning. We will continue to support providers and tutors to develop their professional teaching skills and knowledge with an ambition of becoming an ‘Outstanding’ service.
- **Partnerships:** We will work with partners who have the knowledge, skills and ability to connect with key groups across the district. Our approach will focus on developing a more integrated lifelong learning offer across West Berkshire. This will require strong collaboration particularly with internal services, schools and colleges to support people at different stages of their learner journey. This approach will provide a more consistent and easily accessible learning offer across the district.

- **Funding:** We will explore new funding opportunities to secure the long term sustainability of the community learning service. The service is heavily reliant on funding from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), and the delivery of high quality targeted, community based provision to support disadvantaged groups is both expensive and essential. Our priority remains equality of access however to deliver this we must also explore new funding opportunities both within the council and across the local and national region.
- **Governance:** We will work with the Community Learning Scrutiny Group to develop our governance arrangements and ensure it fulfils its role in enabling lifelong learning across the district.

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4. Impact: Making a Difference

Case study 1: Returning to Work

Learner A had been unable to work for 3 years due to mental illness. She knew she needed to prepare herself to get back into employment and decided to enrol on GRAFT's challenging seven week Survival Guide employability course. GRAFT provides a range of training opportunities and support to encourage vulnerable adults to return to the workplace.

Despite many difficulties and setbacks, learner A overcame all the barriers by actively engaging in the learning process, which in turn developed her confidence, and she soon became a leading member of the group. Her success has enabled her to take small steps towards mainstream learning and employment. Like many illnesses the return to good mental health is a walk not a sprint.

Learner A comments *"I have just started paid employment at a few hours a week and it is going really well. It's a new direction for me so I am absorbing and learning all that I can"*.

Case study 2: ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages)

Learner B arrived in the UK in 2017 after escaping the Syrian civil war aged 19 with her husband and two young children. As soon as she settled in West Berkshire she enrolled on a community based ESOL course with the Berkshire School of English and has continued to develop her ESOL skills both on and off-line ever since.

She was an excellent student and is now able to effectively communicate with various local services to support her family's integration in to the local community.

Throughout her time in the UK she has embraced life and feels lucky to have had the opportunity to give her children a safe and secure future. Once her English skills are developed she plans to go on to higher education with a view to developing her own career.

Case study 3: Self Employment

After a chaotic early life that included a bad school experience, drugs and a spell in prison learner C found it difficult to find employment. He decided his best option was to develop his own business in wood turning, a skill he developed in prison, and enrolled on a self-employment course with The Real Business Club.

Learning was a struggle mainly because he lacked basic skills and the effect his previous experiences had on his cognitive ability. However he was determined to succeed and worked hard to develop his knowledge and skills in money management, marketing and customer relations.

His course gave him the confidence to start his own business and he now has a workshop and is selling products in many local shops and markets – including through the prison shop where he often returns to inspire others with his story.





5. Community Learning Providers

To address local needs and priorities the Community Learning service worked with a range of learning providers in the 2021/22 academic year.

[Berkshire School of English](#)

[Connecting Communities in Berkshire](#)

[Corn Exchange](#)

[Creative Communities](#)

[Educafe](#)

[GRAFT](#)

[Link Up- West Berkshire Mencap](#)

[Newbury College](#)

[Newbury Community Resource Centre](#)

[PACT- Parents And Children Together](#)

[Parenting Special Children](#)

[Recovery In Mind](#)

[The Real Business Club](#)

[West Berkshire Family Hubs including](#)

[Hungerford and Area Family Centre](#)

[West Berkshire Early Years' Service](#)

[West Berkshire Training Consortium](#)



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