



**CAMBRIDGESHIRE
& PETERBOROUGH**
COMBINED AUTHORITY

Agenda Item No: 5.1

Adult Education Budget Commissioning Approach and Statement for 2022/23 onwards

To: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Board

Meeting Date: 24 November 2021

Public report: Yes

Lead Member: Councillor L Nethsingha, Lead Member for Skills

From: John T Hill, Director of Business and Skills

Key decision: Yes

Forward Plan ref: KD2021/053

Recommendations: The Combined Authority Board is recommended to:

- a) Approve the proposed commissioning approach for the devolved Adult Education Budget from 2022-23 academic year onwards, to procure Independent Training Providers under contracts for services for up to £3m per year, subject to Department for Education (DfE) awarding the funding.
- b) Approve the implementation of three-year Plan-Led Funding, for the commissioning of Further Education Colleges and Local Authorities, operating under grant funding, from 2022-23 academic year onwards, subject to DfE funding awards.
- c) Delegate authority to the Director of Business and Skills in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer, to enter into multi-year grant funding agreements with providers on behalf of the Combined Authority, following approval of three-year Plans

- d) Delegate authority to the Director of Business and Skills in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer, to enter into contracts for services with Independent Training Providers on behalf of the Combined Authority, following conclusion of the commissioning process outlined in this report.

Voting arrangements: A simple majority of all Members present and voting

Any vote in favour must include the vote of the Mayor, or the Deputy Mayor acting in place of the Mayor, to be carried.

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The Board's approval is sought for the proposed commissioning approach, to undertake an open and competitive tendering process to procure Independent Training Providers (ITPs) for delivery of training courses. Funding of up to £3m of devolved Adult Education Budget (AEB) and National Skills Fund (NSF) will be awarded under Contracts for Services with providers, for a five-year period from 1 August 2022 to 31 July 2027.
- 1.2 The Board's approval is also sought to implement a three-year, Plan-Led Funding process for grant funded providers. This includes Further Education Colleges, Sixth-Form Colleges and local authority providers of adult education.
- 1.3 The Board is invited to delegate authority to the Director of Business and Skills to enter into grant agreements and contracts for the Adult Education Budget and/or National Skills Fund for a five-year period from 1 August 2022 to 31 July 2027.
- 1.4 These proposals were considered by the Skills Committee on 10 November 2021. Following discussion, the Committee resolved unanimously to recommend the proposals to the Combined Authority Board for approval.
- 1.5 The report and appendices presented to the Skills Committee can be viewed via the link below:

[AEB Commissioning Statement and Approach 2022-23](#)

2. Considerations

- 2.1 There was a question from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which asked about the linkages between the AEB Commissioning approach and the Loneliness Strategy. A verbal response was provided by the Chair at the meeting as follows:

Loneliness is a universal public health issue that significantly impacts health and wellbeing and generates demand for social care and health services. It is indeed recognised that Adult Education does play a role to support individuals and communities to make social connections, and for individuals to build their social and communication skills, confidence, and self-belief. Colleges and Adult Learning Centres also play a vital role as civic institutions, providing a neutral and trusted space for citizens from diverse backgrounds to meet in the pursuit of learning.

The Department for Media, Culture and Sport, published the Loneliness Strategy under Theresa May's government and to note that this is, in fact not referenced in the report. However, the wider outcomes of adult education in improving the quality of life for individuals and the community are well-documented in academic research and national best-practice. Therefore, the AEB Commissioning Statement will reference the wider outcomes of both formal and informal learning, in helping to address wider societal issues. These include:

- tackling loneliness
- improving community connection and cohesion
- enhancing civic engagement through volunteering
- environmental sustainability awareness

- boosting mental health and wellbeing
- creating 'cultural' buzz' in communities through increasing foot-fall
- raising aspirations by connecting citizens to opportunities.

Employment is also a lifeline for social contact. The role of good jobs in addressing loneliness and supporting good mental health is also well documented in research literature and AEB commissioning will continue to fund skills support for the unemployed through both grant-funded colleges and adult and community institutes and commissioned training providers.

- 2.2 In response to the report, members asked several questions about the approach to Community Learning. Officers explained that AEB funding is planned based on an 80:20 split - 80 per cent Adult Skills qualifications and 20 per cent Community Learning. Local Authority providers – City College Peterborough and Cambridgeshire Skills are commissioned to deliver Community Learning, both accredited and informal learning across the sub-region. Officers will co-produce with the two local authorities, a clearer definition of the four different categories of Community Learning to better align with the Employment and Skills Strategy, which are:
- Personal and Community Development Learning (PCDL)
 - Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities (NLDC)
 - Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy (FLLN)
 - Wider Family Learning (WFL)
- 2.3 A question about Community Learning in Village Colleges was raised and officers advised, these are funded via a sub-contract via Cambridgeshire County Council and would be considered as part of the AEB Evaluation and upcoming review of subcontracting. It was noted that a shift to three-year Plan-Led Funding would also help provide greater certainty to colleges and providers, including Village Colleges, to enable greater investment in curriculum and infrastructure.
- 2.4 There were several questions from Members about how businesses and employers have input into the Commissioning approach. Officers advised that business input is an ongoing process and has been provided through the Employment and Skills Board in it's advisory capacity and also the conversations with business as part of the Employment and Skills Strategy consultation.
- 2.5 A question was asked about SMEs in Fenland and other rural areas, who may not be accessing skills training to grow. Officers mentioned that a 'cold-spot' analysis is underway, looking at gaps in provision and this would inform future commissioning. Skills brokerage is provided by Growth Works for Skills, which continues to support SMEs with skills needs. There is also a need to build capacity to create new provision, such as the new training centre in Chatteris, where an investment from Local Growth Fund in a new building will open further skills support in Fenland. There is also work underway to look at gaps in Ely and St Neots. In addition, discussions with Fenland District Council to look at a Levelling Up Fund submission for enhancing FE capacity in Wisbech.
- 2.6 A member raised a question about the importance of volunteering in building strong communities and ensuring there are progression opportunities for the low skilled. Officers

advised that work to promote and enable volunteering, in partnership with the Council of Voluntary Service (CVS) is underway and officers will be able to report to a future Skills Committee. The wider outcomes of Adult Education, including volunteering will be considered as part of the second-year's evaluation of AEB. Members were assured that the wider outcomes of learning, including volunteering, community connection and health and wellbeing are also considered. Officers confirmed that there is sufficient funding in place for opportunities for the low-skilled.

- 2.7 There were various questions about the importance of ensuring there is flexibility in the funding agreements with providers to ensure responsiveness and adaptation to the changes in the economy and wider funding system.
- 2.8 It was proposed that at the Skills Committee meeting in March, further information about the provision offer will be agreed with grant funded providers and will be shared, alongside the final funding allocations for 2022/23.

3. Appendices

- 3.1 Appendices to the report to the Skills Committee on 15 March 2021 can be viewed via the link below:

[Item 2.1 - Appendix 1 - AEB Allocations 2021-22](#)

4. Background Papers

- 4.1 [AEB Commissioning Strategy 2020-2025](#)