



City of **Stoke-on-Trent**

Stoke-on-Trent City Council

Adult Learning

Accountability Statement 2025/26

Purpose

Statement of purpose

Stoke-on-Trent City Council's Adult and Community Learning (ACL) service provides inclusive learning opportunities that improve lives, foster independence, and support economic and social prosperity across the city.

Our provision is designed to:

- Empower residents to engage actively in their communities and local economy
- Provide accessible first-step learning that builds confidence and motivation
- Support progression into further education, training, and employment
- Address skills gaps and improve life chances, particularly for disadvantaged groups

By creating a welcoming, learner-centred environment, the service reintroduces adults to learning, removes barriers to participation, and supports Stoke-on-Trent's wider ambitions for inclusive growth, health, and wellbeing.

Service Vision 2025/26

Our vision is to improve the lives of Stoke-on-Trent residents and support the city's inclusive economic growth by developing skills, confidence, and opportunities for all.

We aim to raise aspirations and remove barriers to learning by offering high-quality, accessible education that meets the diverse needs of individuals and communities.

To deliver on this vision, our plan is structured around five distinct but interconnected curriculum areas:

Family Learning – Supporting parents and carers to engage in their children's education and build their own confidence and skills.

Tailored Learning – Engaging adults in informal learning that fosters wellbeing, social connection, and community participation.

Adult Learning – Providing accredited and non-accredited courses that support progression into employment, further study, or increased independence.

Study Programmes – Supporting young people aged 16–19 to gain qualifications, develop employability skills, and prepare for adult life.

Stoke-by-Numbers (funded by UKSPF) – Delivering practical, confidence-building maths courses that help adults manage everyday tasks, progress at work, or access further learning.

Together, these strands ensure we respond to local priorities, national policy, and individual learner journeys.

Strategic Aims and Objectives

Stoke-on-Trent City Council's corporate strategy for 2024–2028, *Our City, Our Wellbeing*, sets out a clear vision for a fairer, healthier, and more prosperous city. The strategy is structured around seven key priorities:

- **Healthier:** Creating a healthier standard of living for all our citizens
- **Wealthier:** Reducing hardship and enabling greater shared prosperity
- **Safer:** Building empowered communities, safe from the threat of harm

- **Greener:** Conserving our environment and living more sustainably
- **Cleaner:** Working together to clean up our city and our communities
- **Fairer:** Tackling inequality and improving life chances for everyone
- **Skilled:** Providing opportunities for people to improve their skills and education

Stoke-on-Trent City Council's Adult and Community Learning (ACL) service plays a vital role in delivering the Skilled agenda by providing accessible, high-quality education that enables residents to gain new skills, progress into employment or further learning, and improve their life chances.

However, the impact of adult learning extends across all seven priorities. Our provision:

- Promotes health and wellbeing through courses that build confidence, reduce isolation, and support mental health
- Contributes to a wealthier city by supporting residents into better employment and reducing dependency
- Builds safer and stronger communities through inclusive, community-based learning
- Champions a fairer society by ensuring access to learning for disadvantaged and underrepresented groups

By embedding learning into community life, the ACL service is helping deliver a more skilled, connected, and resilient Stoke-on-Trent.

Context

Stoke-on-Trent City Council's post 16 learning service serves the whole of the Stoke-on-Trent area, reaching around 1,300 adult residents (just under 1,800 enrolments) in each academic year.

Commonly referred to as 'the Potteries', the city has been the heart of the UK ceramics industry for over two hundred years. Stoke-on-Trent is an amalgamation of six towns: the county borough of Hanley, the municipal boroughs of Burslem, Longton, and Stoke, and the urban districts of Tunstall and Fenton.

In Stoke-on-Trent, the population size has increased by 3.8%, from around 249,000 in 2011 to 258,400 in 2021. This is lower than the overall increase for England (6.6%) (*Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2021*)

The city is the 13th most deprived district in England. (*The English Indices of Deprivation 2019 (IoD) 2019*).

Of Stoke-on-Trent's estimated population, around 83,500 people (32%) live in areas ranked among the 10% most deprived in England, while more than half the population. Approximately 136,200 people (53%) — live in areas within the 20% most deprived nationally (*The English Indices of Deprivation 2019 (IoD) 2019*).

The city has an ageing population, with 17.1% of residents aged 65 and over, and 4.4% aged 80 and over (Census 2021).

Around 115,700 residents aged 16–64 were in employment in 2022, representing 74% of the working-age population—slightly below the national average of 76% (Director of Public Health Annual Report, Stoke-on-Trent, 2023).

Gross Disposable Household Income per head in Stoke-on-Trent was £15,470 in 2021, ranking it 5th lowest out of 179 ITL3 areas, and roughly 28.6% below the UK average of £21,679. (ONS 2021) Provisional data for 2022 shows Stoke's GDHI per head rose modestly but remained low. (Midlands Engine Observatory, 2023)

However, Stoke-on-Trent is currently in the bottom ten for average Gross Disposable Household Income (GDHI) with £15,470 per capita (2021) this is 28% below the national average of £21,679 and ranks 304th of 309 English districts. (*Regional gross disposable household income, UK: 1997 to 2021 Provisional*).

There are around 32,100 workless households (9.7%) in the city, compared to 13.9% nationally (Nomis, 2025). There are an estimated 47,800 people living in income-deprived households (*IoD2019*).

We are among the fastest local economies to rebound from the last recession, with £56 million levelling up investment in Stoke-on-Trent to shape our future. 2nd for job creation in the UK, with 1,975 jobs created through inward investment since 2020. Our GVA per capita has risen by 8.9% in the last year to £24,175 (*Levelling Up Update March 2023*). No newer Levelling Up Review has been released; however, Stoke did receive another £20 million from the Levelling Up Partnership in May 2024

The most significant growth sector in Stoke-on-Trent, according to the latest local economic planning, is advanced manufacturing, closely followed by digital technology and green energy.

Stoke-on-Trent is at the heart of the UK's largest advanced manufacturing cluster, particularly strong in ceramics, materials, and metals. With around 2,350 people employed across 115 businesses, this

sector is a cornerstone of the city's post-industrial resurgence. Both the Economic Development Strategy (2024–28) and the Investment Prospectus (2025–26) emphasise digital creativity, innovation, and technology as burgeoning drivers of economic expansion. Emerging sectors—especially those linked to green energy, smart infrastructure, and decarbonisation—are spotlighted as future growth engines that can support job creation and urban renewal (Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Economic Development Strategy 2024-28).

The most significant growth sectors in Stoke on Trent, in employment terms are hospitality, administration, care, logistics and domestic services. (Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Economic Bulletin no.58, 2025)

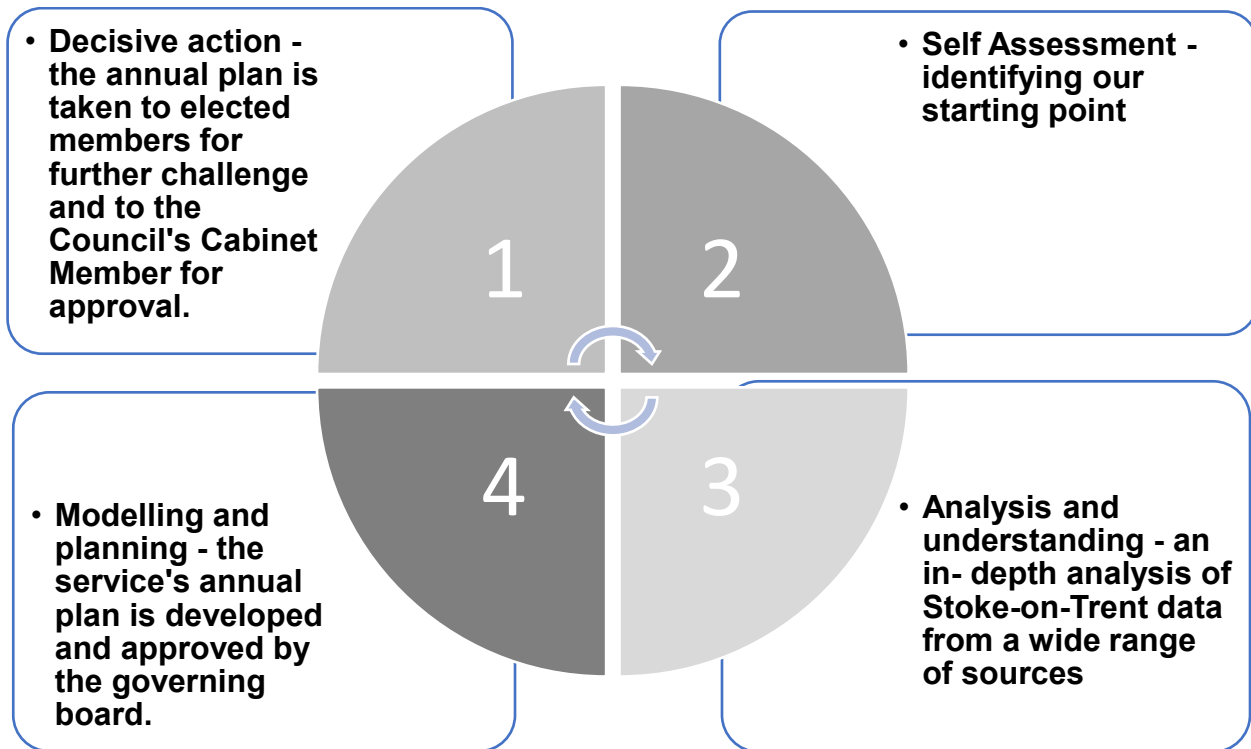
We know there are skills gaps locally (*Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2022 Update*)

- 7.7% of working age adults have no formal qualifications (compared to 6.2% in England)
- Just over one quarter (29%) of local people are qualified to NVQ Level 4 (43.1% in England)
- 6.9% of local employers have staff that are not fully proficient due to skills gaps (5.5% in England)
- 35.6% of local people are in managerial and professional jobs (50.2% in England)

In total only 4,000 households (3.7%) do not have English as a main language compared with 4.4% nationally. 24.94% (29,925) of the workforce do not hold a recognised qualification at level 2 or above of which 13.7% do not have any qualifications (16,645) (*Census 2021*).

The Planning Approach

ACL's annual planning cycle commences in April and usually continues throughout the academic year. The service undertakes a comprehensive analysis of national, regional, and local priorities. This includes consideration of Government policy direction and local need and strategic intent, as identified through Stoke-on-Trent City Council's Our City, Our Wellbeing plan (2024–2028) and the Economic Development Strategy 2024–2028.



Stoke-on-Trent City Council's Adult and Community Learning service has a robust curriculum plan that outlines the following strategic intent:

The curriculum is developed to meet both national and local priorities. It is designed to engage and empower learners from diverse backgrounds, supporting them to develop the skills, knowledge, and behaviours needed to lead independent and fulfilling lives. Through this, learners are enabled to reach their full potential and contribute to society both economically and socially.

Our curriculum will:

- ✓ Create opportunities for learners to learn how to be successful, and to gain and hone transferable skills, supported by relevant subject knowledge
- ✓ Empower learners to progress personally and into Further and Higher Education, apprenticeships or work
- ✓ Promote and embed a range of key themes which include maths, English, digital skills, Prevent, British Values, wellbeing and health

Through our curriculum, our learners:

- ✓ are challenged and stretched to achieve high standards and make significant progress relative to their starting point;

- ✓ are encouraged and supported to develop high quality personal, learning and thinking skills and become an independent learner;
- ✓ enjoy and commit to learning, and have high aspirations for their own futures;
- ✓ are resilient, healthy and safe.

We have met the intentions of our curriculum plan to a good level.

Governance, together with local engagement with external stakeholders are two things that are intrinsically linked within Adult Learning. We know that the closer the links with stakeholders, the better the insight into local wants and needs, which is crucial to ensuring we provide relevant and purposeful skills, knowledge, and experience to the residents of Stoke-on-Trent.

We have an Adult and Community Learning Governing Body which oversees our strategic direction, quality of provision, learner outcomes, financial performance, and compliance with funding and regulatory requirements. Following the last inspection, we strengthened the terms of reference, membership and access to data of the Governing Body and in 2024/25 this board has been further embedded.

The Governing Body is part of a much wider partnership governance structure designed to strategically improve outcomes for residents in the city and champion learning and skills

We have revamped our management structure to support more effective and collaborative working. The structure now includes a Head of Delivery and a Head of Support Services, both reporting to the overall Adult and Community Learning Manager, who leads on strategic priorities and continuous improvement across Adult and Community Learning.

Planning for success

In order for the plan to be approved, it must be grounded in good research and strong relationships with other teams in the council, including council leaders, and with other local and partner organisations including employers, the Chambers of Commerce and learners themselves.

Curriculum Intent and Priorities

Our curriculum is designed to:

- Support the development of skills, knowledge, and behaviors that are valued by employers and enable individuals to become active members of their communities.
- Prepare learners to make informed, appropriate decisions at the end of their programme, supporting progression into further or higher education, training, or employment.
- Enable learners to fulfil their potential and lead active, independent, and fulfilling lives.

Curriculum Priority Groups

In response to changes in Learner Legal Entitlements within the Adult Education Budget (AEB) Funding and Performance Rules, our curriculum priority groups have evolved significantly. We now focus our offer on the following priority groups:

- Young people aged 16 – 19 or 24 with learning difficulties or disabilities
- Adults who do not have a Level 2 qualification in English and/or maths
- Recently unemployed and needing re and/or up-skilling
- Unemployed – on out of work benefits, more chaotic vulnerable long term, building up hours of work
- Employed learners in the workplace who are entitled under the Learner Legal Entitlement to but have not yet achieved their first full level 3. (eligibility criteria is applicable)
- Low to moderate mental health needs
- Learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- Homeless
- Domestic abuse victims
- Vulnerable families in children's centres, schools and other community settings
- Learners in later life
- Substance misusers

- Offenders/ex-offenders
- Ethnic minority groups
- Employee Well-being

Curriculum Planning and Delivery

Our curriculum planning process is regularly reviewed to ensure it remains responsive to the evolving skills needs of Stoke-on-Trent. We are committed to using the most effective delivery methods for each area of our provision, which now includes face-to-face, online, blended, and remote learning.

As a small provider with a limited in-house curriculum offer, we have strategically sub-contracted a small proportion of our Adult Skills and 16-19 funding to an external provider. This has enabled us to deliver provision in areas and to cohorts that our own mainstream service cannot reach or impact. This partnership has been highly successful, and, as a result, we will continue to sub-contract a small amount of Adult Skills and 16-19 Funding for the 2025/26 academic year.

Family Learning remains a key strand of our adult learning offer. It supports intergenerational learning by encouraging family members to learn together. Many of these activities are designed to help parents and carers develop the confidence and skills needed to support their children's education effectively.

Parents benefit from family learning through:

1. **Improved educational skills** – Strengthening literacy, language, and numeracy skills.
2. **Strengthened family relationships** – Encouraging quality learning time and improved communication.
3. **Enhanced parenting skills** – Developing positive parenting techniques and understanding child development.
4. **Increased confidence and self-esteem** – Gaining belief in their ability to learn and support others.
5. **Better employment opportunities** – Developing transferable skills for the workplace.
6. **Positive role modelling** – Demonstrating the value of lifelong learning to children.
7. **Support networks** – Building relationships with other parents and professionals.

In Stoke-on-Trent, Family Learning plays a particularly important role due to:

1. **Economic challenges** – Supporting families facing financial hardship to develop skills that improve life chances
2. **Educational attainment gaps** – Helping to raise aspirations and close attainment gaps for both adults and children.

3. **Community development** – Building stronger, more resilient communities through shared learning experiences.

Family Learning in Stoke-on-Trent supports not only educational outcomes but also broader social inclusion, family cohesion, and community resilience.

Stoke-by-Numbers Programme

The Multiply Skills for Life programme concluded in March 2025, having delivered significant impact across Stoke-on-Trent. Over 3,000 adults participated in the programme, with delivery by six local partners and led by Stoke-on-Trent City Council. The initiative was met with high levels of engagement and demand, and feedback consistently highlighted the programme's practical benefits and accessibility. Many learners and partners expressed disappointment at its closure.

Due to the demonstrable success and ongoing need, we submitted a continuation bid through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). This continuation offer retains the Stoke-by-Numbers theme and is now being delivered by four delivery partners, maintaining the collaborative and community-focused approach.

Stoke-by-Numbers successfully embeds within our ACL offer through three delivery strands:

- Bridging Courses – Supporting learners to progress from Level 1 to Level 2 maths, addressing the substantial gap between the levels.
- Engagement Workshops – Two-hour sessions aimed at parents and carers to build initial confidence and spark interest in maths learning.
- Life Skills and Well-being Courses – Six-hour courses focused on budgeting and mental health, with maths integrated throughout.
- Functional Skills Maths for 16–19-year-olds (and up to 25 with additional needs) – A full Maths FS programme to enable young people to gain a Maths qualification to further their prospects

The majority of courses were designed to support progression into Functional Skills qualifications, while also improving learners' confidence with numbers in everyday life. The programme has contributed to improvements in personal finance management, employability, self-esteem, and overall well-being, helping learners to support their families and contribute more fully to their communities.

Study Programme and Strategic Partnerships

Building on the success of subcontracted Adult Skills provision, we will also be subcontracting a small proportion of Study Programme funding for the 2024/25 academic year. The curriculum was delivered through three distinct strands:

1. Full-Time Employability Route

This in-house programme focuses on customer service and business administration, offering learners a substantial Level 1 qualification, alongside English, maths, employability skills, and a tailored two-week work placement. The placement is designed to align with learners' career aspirations and local job opportunities, with the aim of leading to sustained employment.

2. Work-Ready Programme

A shorter, targeted programme for learners who are closest to the labour market. It focuses on providing high-quality work experience placements to build confidence, develop practical skills, and support progression into employment or apprenticeships.

3. Specialist Partner Delivery

This strand will be delivered by an external partner in a specialist curriculum area that we do not currently offer internally. Procurement for this provision is currently underway.

Strategic Collaboration for Skills Development

We take a proactive approach to partnership working, aligning our offer with the city's strategic priorities for skills development. This includes active collaboration through the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) and with key stakeholders such as the Chamber of Commerce, local education providers, training organisations, and employers.

We continue to strengthen our leadership role in ensuring the quality and sufficiency of education, skills, and training for young people. Our engagement in the Young People's Learning and Skills Strategy demonstrates our commitment to raising aspirations and outcomes across the city.

We are ambitious for Stoke-on-Trent's economic future and are focused on ensuring that residents have access to the skills and opportunities needed to drive and share in the city's growth.

Widening Participation and Inclusion

We champion access to education, training, and employment for disadvantaged and underrepresented groups in the city. This includes:

- Learners with learning disabilities and/or SEND
- Care leavers
- ESOL learners
- Individuals who are economically inactive due to ill health

Our provision is designed to remove barriers, promote inclusion, and support all residents to achieve their potential and contribute meaningfully to the economic and social life of Stoke-on-Trent.

Our contribution to national, regional and local priorities

Stoke-on-Trent City Council's Adult and Community Learning (ACL) service is closely aligned with the priorities outlined in the Our City, Our Wellbeing Corporate Strategy (2024–2028). Our provision supports the Council's vision to create a city where everyone can thrive—economically, socially, and personally—through the following key contributions:

City Council Strategic Objective	Service target(s)	Impact and/or contribution to national, regional and local priorities
A Healthier City	Deliver learning programmes that support personal development, resilience, and confidence particularly through family learning, digital inclusion, and financial wellbeing.	- Improves adult mental health and wellbeing through community-based learning. - Multiply, budgeting, and well-being-themed courses help reduce social isolation and support preventative health outcomes. - Aligns with the local JSNA and health inequality reduction priorities.
An Educated and Skilled City	- Provide inclusive learning opportunities that enable adults to gain the skills, knowledge, and behaviours needed to thrive in work and life. - Support at least 300 learners annually through adult skills and employability provision.	- Directly supports national and regional ambitions for adult upskilling and reskilling. - Enables progression into further learning, volunteering, or employment. - Supports the Department for Education's priorities around lifelong learning and core transferable skills.
A City of Opportunity for Everyone	Target delivery to those most in need, including adults without Level 2 qualifications, care leavers, people with SEND, ESOL learners, and those economically inactive due to ill health.	- Reduces inequality by removing barriers to participation and progression. - Aligns with UKSPF and Adult Education Budget (AEB) funding priorities for disadvantaged learners. - Promotes inclusive growth and improved life chances for all Stoke-on-Trent residents.
A Thriving Economy	- Align curriculum offer with key growth sectors such as digital, logistics, manufacturing, and green energy. - Work in partnership with employers and local networks to ensure curriculum relevance.	- Supports Stoke-on-Trent's economic development goals by building a skilled local workforce. - Informs local skills planning through collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce and LSIP. - Contributes to levelling up and economic resilience through tailored adult learning.

City Council Strategic Objective	Service target(s)	Impact and/or contribution to national, regional and local priorities
A Collaborative and Responsive Council	• Act as both a provider and commissioner of learning— brokering high-quality delivery through strategic partnerships and subcontracting. • Sustain a robust quality assurance model ensuring learners receive a good or outstanding education.	• Promotes innovation and service agility through market engagement and responsiveness to learner needs. • Enhances system leadership in the adult learning and skills ecosystem. • Aligns with the Council's ambition to modernise services and maximise impact through collaboration.

Corporation Statement

On behalf of Stoke on Trent City Council, it is hereby confirmed that the plan as set out above reflects an agreed statement of purpose, aims and objectives

The plan will be published on the Council's website within 2 months of the start of the new academic year and can be accessed from the following link:

[Adult education | Stoke-on-Trent](#)

Supporting Documents

[Corporate Strategy 2024-2028 - Our City, Our Wellbeing](#)

[Latest Ofsted Report](#)

[Population and household estimates, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](#)

[Regional gross disposable household income, UK - Office for National Statistics](#)

[The English Indices of Deprivation 2019](#)

[Census 2021](#)

[Our City Our Wellbeing Corporate Strategy FINAL .pdf](#)

[Nomis - Official Census and Labour Market Statistics](#)

[Economic Development Strategy \(3\).pdf](#)

[Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Economic Bulletin](#)