

FE Accountability Agreement:

Cheshire West and Chester Council's Adult Education Service

30 June 2025



Purpose

Cheshire West and Chester Council's Skills and Employment Service aims to support residents who face a range of barriers and enable them to achieve their life goals.

The Service offers pathways of support and skills development which allows these adults to enter employment or progress in work.

Our intent is to support targeted residents and their families.

Cheshire West and Chester Council's Skills and Employment Service provides all the support residents need to find and keep a job

We aim to be recognised within the Council, its 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. We have recently developed a Service Prospectus to outline the range of provision and support available to residents of Cheshire West and Chester.

To ensure our provision meets local needs, we utilise the economic data available and work collaboratively with key stakeholders such as the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Cheshire West Voluntary Action (CWVA), local further education colleges, schools and the West Cheshire and North Wales Chamber (WCNW Chamber).



Context and Place



We are an Adult Education Service which is embedded within Cheshire West and Chester (CWCC) Local Authority, serving a population of approximately 357,000 people.

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

The Skills and Employment Service deliver a wide range of programmes through our four geographically based Skills and Employment Hubs and around 11 commissioned partners. Our Hubs are located in Chester, Ellesmere Port, Northwich and Winsford.

In addition to the Hubs, we offer Skills and Employment Outreach provision based in local primary schools and other community venues. These are as welcoming spaces for adults to develop their skills, gain qualifications and give opportunities for residents to learn alongside their children, or indeed grandchildren.

The team are constantly reviewing how successful our Hubs and Outreach provision is 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 £1.18m of Adult Skills Fund (ASF) (plus an additional £50,000- £90,000 for our Supported Internship Programme) and support over 1,500 learners each year.

The Service was inspected by Ofsted on 22 and 23 May 2024. The [full report](#) was very positive with an overall outcome that the provision continued to be “Good”.

The Service provides 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 [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, sub-contractors, and local area partnerships.

The team work closely with partners such as local schools and 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. This collaborative activity has increased over the last 12 months, with our Skills and Employment Hubs providing work experience placements, along with delivering employability skills such as CV writing, interview techniques and job applications, giving learners practical hands-on experience in the 'real world'. We will expect this collaboration to continue and develop further following devolution in the sub-region (expected to be May 2026).

We are also active members of the Cheshire and Warrington provider network.

In addition to our ASF provision, we support an annual cohort of supported internship participants, 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 (SI) programme to learners who do not have an EHCP¹, but who do have complex needs and similar barriers to engagement. The aim is to support approx. 20 learners through our EHCP SI provision and up to 50 students through the non-EHCP pilot each in 2025-26.

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 Warrington², 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.

¹ EHCP – Education, Health Care Plan

² Formally Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)



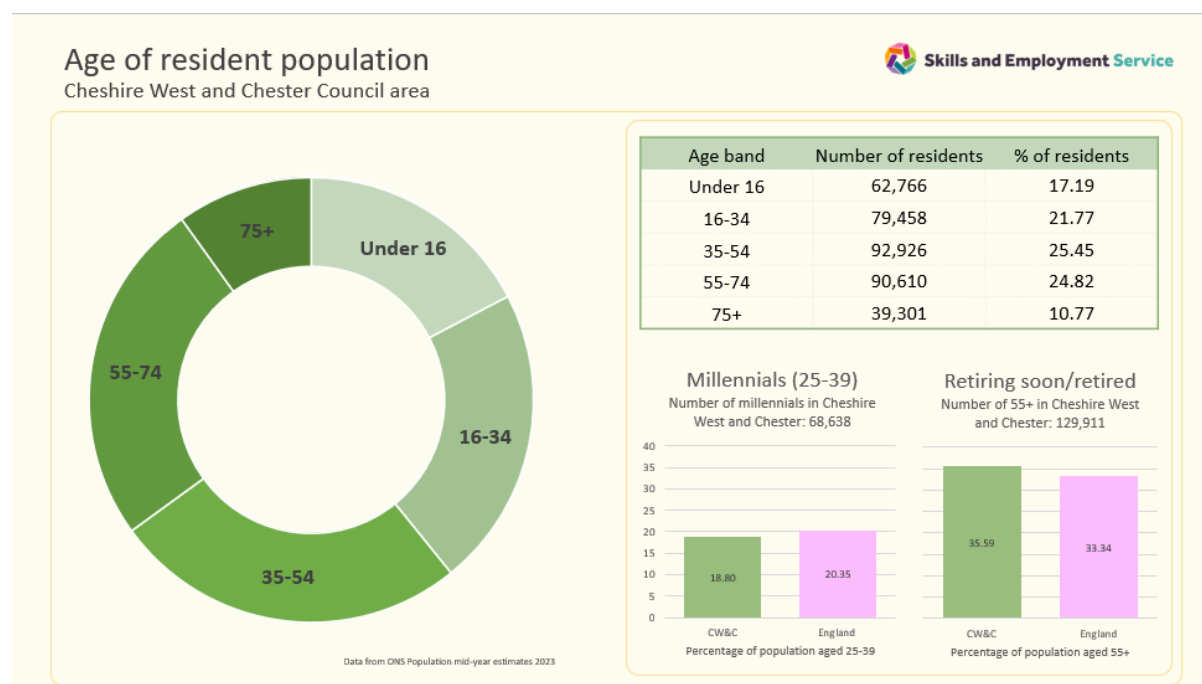
Population – age

Figure 1 shows a breakdown of the CWCC population in 2023. The population of CWCC is older than the average for England. The data show that the largest proportion of Cheshire West residents is made up of those aged 35-54. The graphs comparing CWCC and England data show the marked difference in age groups; while the proportion of millennials (25–39 year-olds) is below the national average, the 55+ age group makes up a much greater proportion of the CWCC population.

Our provision will need to support not only the younger cohorts, but also meet the needs of older residents, including those who may be looking to reskill to find work in a new sector.

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%.

Figure 1: Summary of the resident population by age (ONS, Feb 2023)

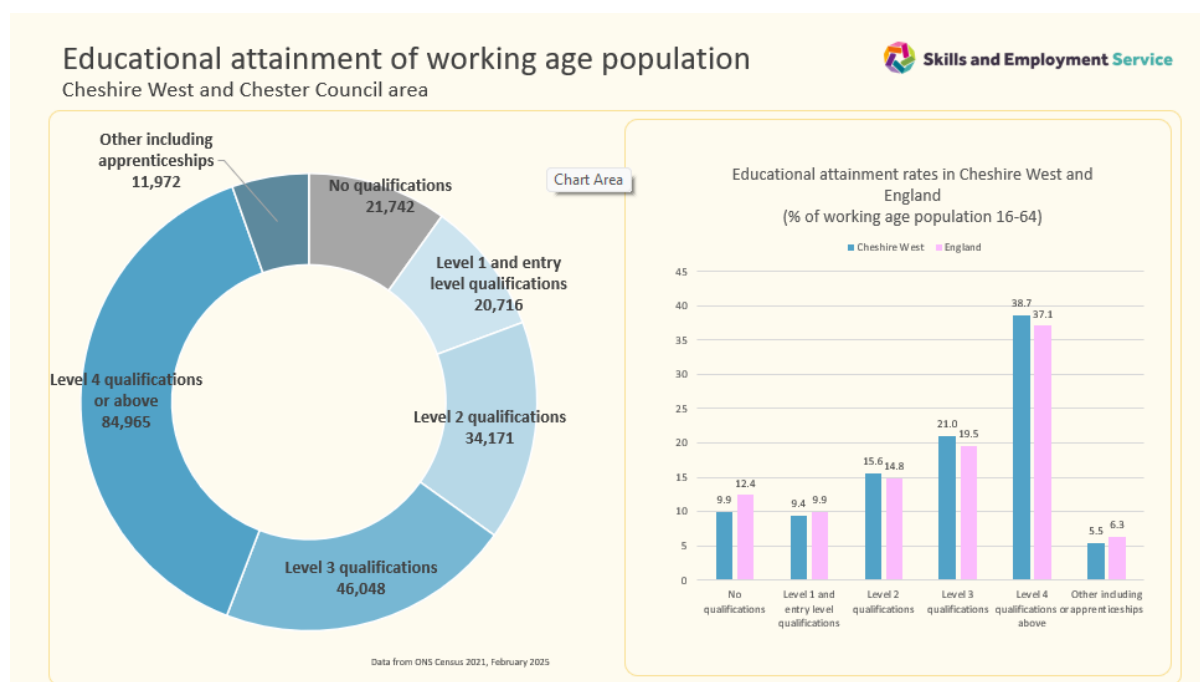




Population – educational attainment

Figure 2 shows the education attainment of residents in CWCC. Of working age residents (aged 16-64) Cheshire West outperforms national averages in attainment of qualifications above Level 2. The number of those with no qualifications is significantly lower than the national average. However, at Entry/Level 1 (and with other qualifications including apprenticeships) Cheshire West is below the national average showing that there is further development to be done at this level.

Figure 2: Educational attainment of resident population (ONS, Feb 2025)





Population – ethnicity

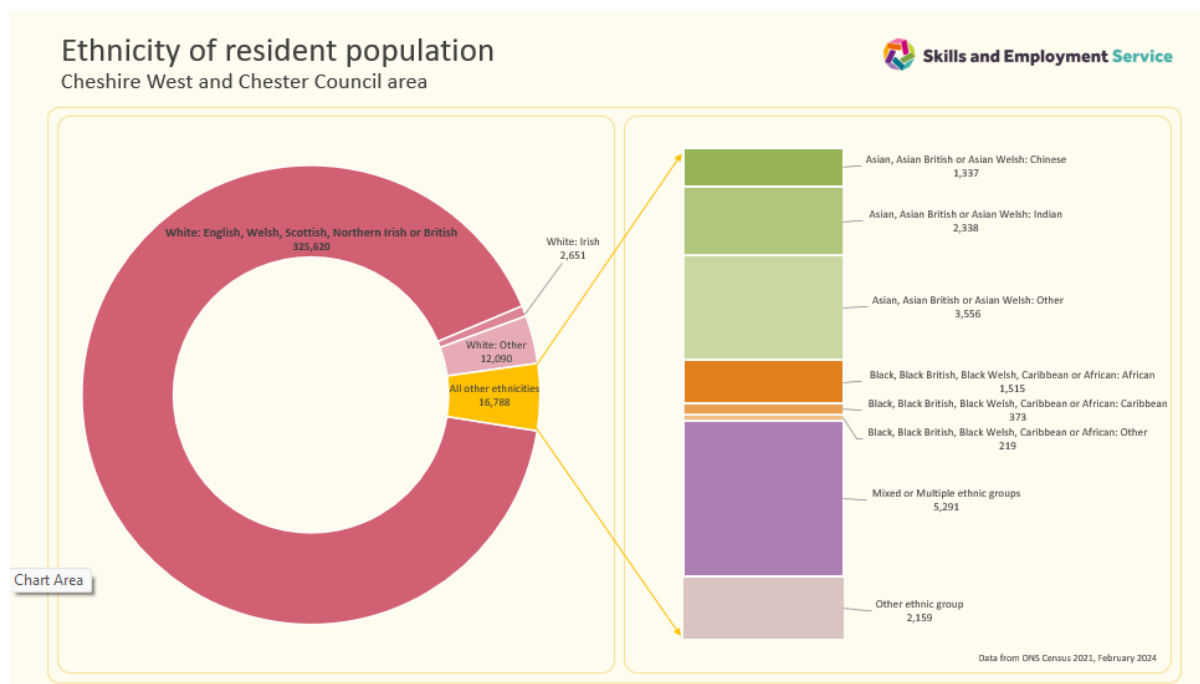
The 2021 census showed that the vast majority of CWCC residents are white British, with a proportion of white Irish and other white nationalities. Black/black British make up a much smaller percentage of the resident population (0.6%) than the national average (4.2%). The largest single ethnic groups are Indian/British Indian and Chinese/British Chinese.

The borough is gradually becoming more ethnically diverse. Since the 2011 census, the proportion of non-white ethnicities has increased from 2.7% to 4.7%, however this is still below the national average of 19%.

The Skills and Employment Service is working with partners and providers to ensure there is effective ESOL provision available to those who need it across the borough.

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

Figure 3 Ethnicity overview (ONS census data 2021)

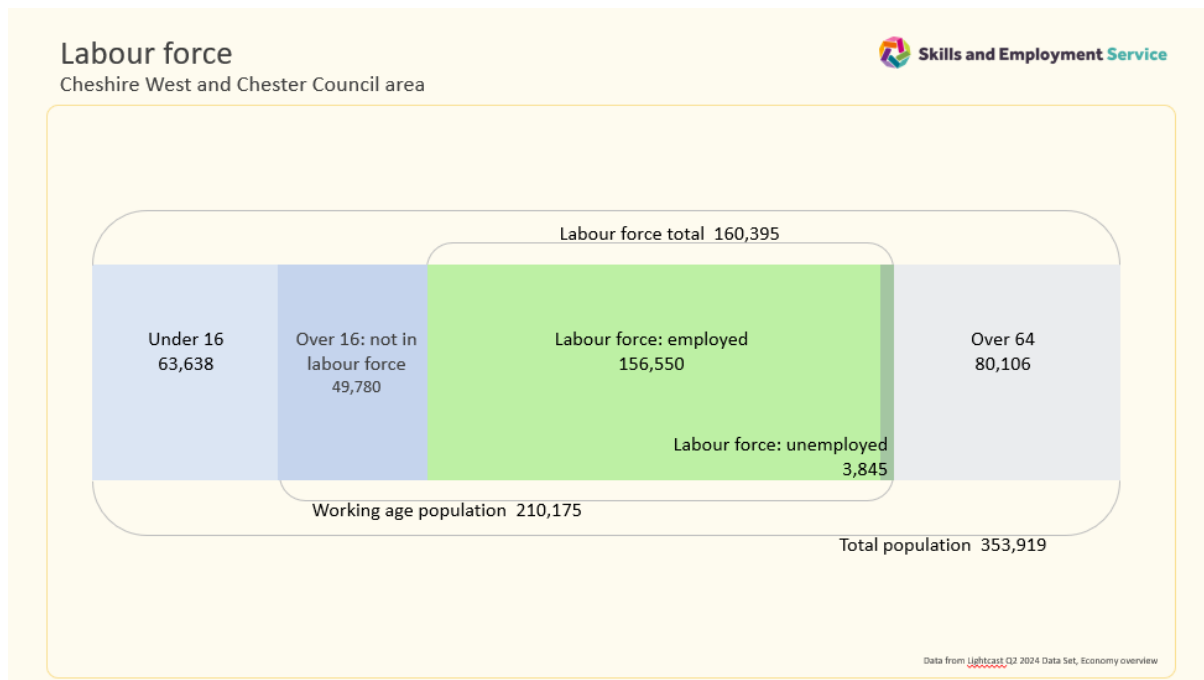




Population – labour force

The borough has a total or 156,550 employed residents an increase of over 6,000 since the equivalent period last year and a working age population of 210,175. The breakdown of this workforce can be found in figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Summary of the labour force (Lightcast, 2024)



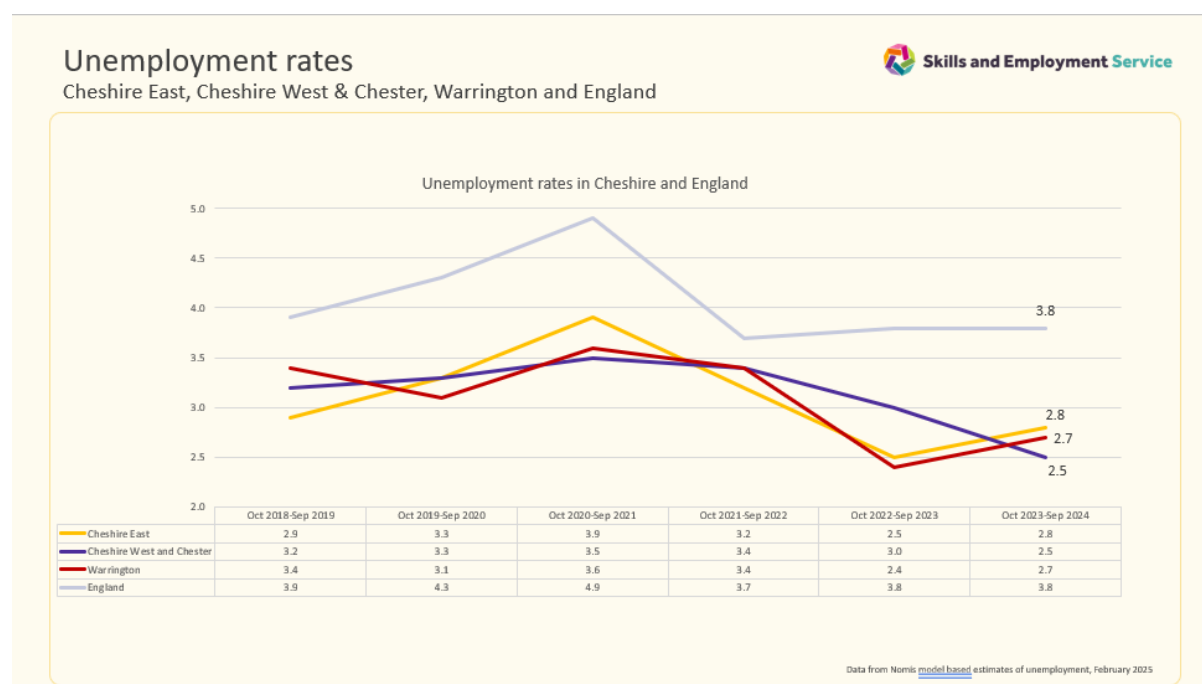


Population – unemployment

Figure 5 shows the current unemployment rate in CWCC in comparison with our neighbours in Cheshire East and Warrington, along with the average rate for England.

All areas experienced an increase in unemployment during the pandemic. Cheshire East and Warrington's unemployment rates have started to increase since 2023 while CWCC's rate is gradually decreasing.

Figure 5 Unemployment rates: Cheshire East, CW&C, Warrington and England (model-based estimates, February 2025)



**Population – benefit claimants by ward**

Figure 6: Wards in CWCC with the highest claimant count (NOMIS 2025)

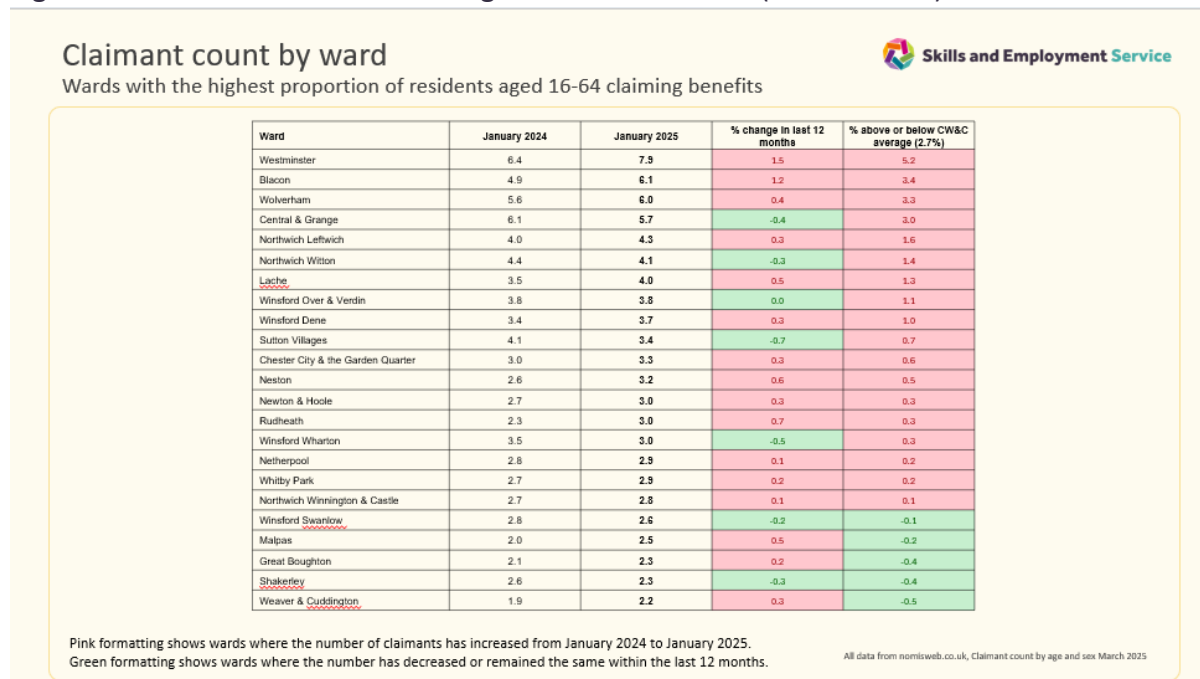


Figure 6 above shows the wards in CWCC with the highest rate of working age benefit claimants. The columns show the figures for each ward in January 2024 and January 2025. Where the number for 2025 is greater than 2024 – an increase in claims – the growth is shown in red. Decreases are shown in green.

- Three of the five highest claimant rates are in Ellesmere Port wards: Westminster, Wolverham and Central & Grange, however the latter has decreased over the last year.
- Chester's highest claimant rate is in Blacon. Of all the city's wards only Saughall and Mollington has seen a reduction in claimant rates.
- Leftwich and Witton in Northwich both have high claimant rates but the latter has reduced slightly over the last two years.
- All wards in Winsford appear in the top half of the table. Over & Verdin has the highest claimant rate, but this has stayed steady over the last 12 months.

The Skills and Employment Service will review provision availability in each ward to ensure those with the highest claimant rates can be addressed potentially using Skills and Employment Outreach locations at local primary schools.



Approach to Developing the Annual Accountability Statement

The CWCC 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 and NHS partners, and includes feedback from local employers (including employer bodies) and our learners.

We have 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 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 find ways in which we can play our part in supporting the indicated local priorities. 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: advanced manufacturing, creative industries, defence, digital and technologies, financial services, life sciences, professional and business services, clean energy industries, construction and health

In response to national priorities, the CWCC Skills and Employment Service offer a variety of programmes that support some of the sectors above (not all of the sectors would be relevant as we only deliver provision up to a Level 2).



Digital and technologies:

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, but we also offer a Level 2 in Digital Marketing and Social Media course. The team works closely with partners to support digital inclusion across the borough.

As a service we are exploring how we can better use technology in the delivery of our learning programmes.

Financial Services: As there are a number of employment opportunities locally linked to this sector, especially in Chester and Northwich, we have provided training to support adults to start of a career path to financial roles. This has included business admin and Excel courses.



Professional and Business Services: The Skills and Employment Service offer a range of courses that can support learners to access employment in this sector. This includes a Pathways to Business Administration course at Level 1 and a Teaching Assistant course at Level 2.



Construction: The Skills and Employment Service work closely with a sub-contracted provider to offer CSCS³ cards and training support for those adults looking for employment in this growing sector.

Our training partner also works closely with Procure Plus who deliver the local on-site experience skills programme on behalf of CITB⁴. 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.

We have also supported young people into construction through Supported Internships and Fresh Start (a UKSPF funded programme aimed at providing employability support to young people aged 16-19).

Health and Social Care: The Skills and Employment Service have supported local health and social care employers. This has included the delivery of sector work-based academy programmes (SWAP). We have recently worked alongside Skills for Care and Cheshire College South and West to develop a pathways programme which included a SWAP, followed by a Skills Bootcamp and work experience.

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.



Due to the Skills and Employment Service delivering courses at Level 2 and below, and having limited access to specialist equipment, it is not positioned to support some of the national skills priorities. Instead, interested parties are referred to provision that is already offered in our FE Colleges and Independent Training Providers. This includes training aligned with key sectors such as Advanced Manufacturing, Creative Industries, Defence, Life Sciences and Clean Energy.

We do however offer a range of English, maths and digital programmes, available for all our learners. Over the last 12 months we have been utilising the experiences of delivering Multiply to inform how best to market, engage and progress learners on these programmes.

³ Construction Skills Certification Scheme

⁴ Construction Industry Training Board



Regional priorities include Advanced Manufacturing, Health and Social Care and Life Sciences, along with cross-cutting themes of digital and low carbon/net zero

Advanced Manufacturing, Health and Social Care, Life Sciences 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)⁵. The LSIP is currently being reviewed and may provide a focus on different sectors moving forward.



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 many inward investment sites under development – targeted at low-carbon employers, including Hynet. This part of the Regional Skills Pilot programme due for delivery in

2025-26.

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

⁵ Home - Cheshire & Warrington Local Skills Improvement Plan (cheshireandwarringtonlsip.co.uk)



Local sector priorities include Advanced Manufacturing, Health and Social Care, Low Carbon, Finance, Logistics and the Visitor Economy

The first four sectors have already been covered in this document. Please see below how our service responds to the needs of the Logistics and Visitor Economy sectors.



Logistics: The Skills and Employment Service are developing a course to support the local logistics sector, with tutors visiting a local warehouse and using learning from our experience of working with B&M to support their recruitment needs in Ellesmere Port. This provision will complement the forklift truck training that we already provide via our two experienced sub-contracted providers.

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 have been able to offer vocational courses in line with local employer needs skills needs and have enabled us to offer SWAPs for employers occupying new properties as a result of local regeneration initiatives. The team work closely with the Council Business Growth, Regeneration and Property teams to ensure we are able to support new businesses to recruit and retain staff.

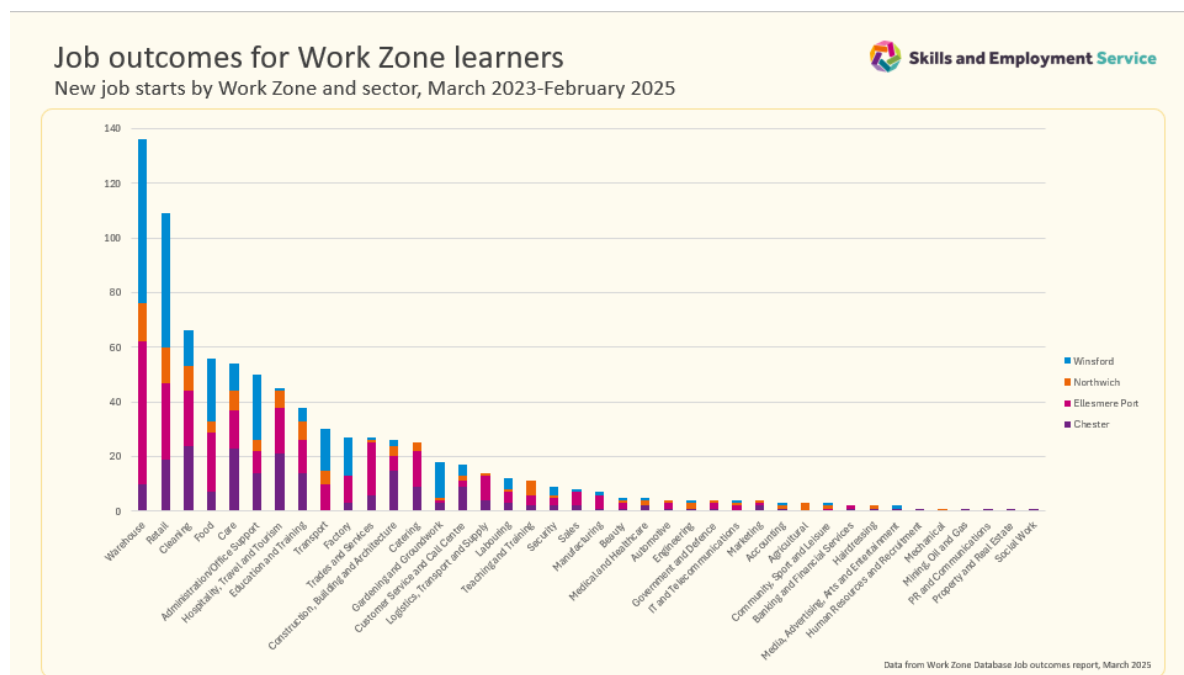
We have also responded to those individuals who have been impacted by redundancies, working in partnership with DWP and the National Careers Service.

Over the next 12 months, we are looking to see how we could offer catering courses, building on the food hygiene course that we already deliver.



Figure 7 below provides details of the job outcomes that have been achieved through learners engaging with the Skills and Employment Hubs (formerly called Work Zones) across the borough. The majority have been into warehousing, retail, cleaning, food and care related jobs.

Figure 7: Job outcomes by Work Zone (March 2025)



The ASF provision underpins many of the employment support programmes delivered by the Skills and Employment Service. As a result of this dual offer, we were able to support a further 3,000 starts on employment support programmes, leading to 1,600 job starts/returns.



Table 8 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 8: Overview of national, regional and local skills priorities

Sector Area	National	Regional	Local
Advanced Manufacturing	★	★	★
Creative Industries	★		
Defence	★		
Digital and Technologies	★	★	
Financial Services	★		★
Life Sciences	★	★	
Professional and Business Services	★		
Clean Energy Industries	★	★	★
Construction	★		
Health and Social Care	★	★	★
Visitor Economy			★

Table 8: CWCC'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	Not appropriate to ASF delivery
Advanced Manufacturing				★
Creative Industries				★
Defence				★
Digital and Technologies	★			
Financial Services	★			
Life Sciences				★
Professional and Business Services	★			
Clean Energy Industries			★	
Construction	★			
Health and Social Care	★			
Visitor Economy	★			



Our Strategic Plan

Cheshire West and Chester Council's Skills and Employment Service is dedicated to being the primary catalyst for transformation in our residents' lives by offering them a second chance.

We recognize that many people face significant challenges, including recovery from poor mental health, redundancy, relationship breakdowns, reintegration after incarceration, and issues related to substance abuse, homelessness, and domestic violence.

Our mission is to empower these individuals to overcome barriers and thrive in their personal and professional lives with the following key outcomes:

- Enhancing skills and competencies: we aim to equip local residents with the necessary skills and competencies that will not only help them secure productive employment but also encourage ongoing personal and professional development, fostering lifelong independence
- Fostering resilience: our program is designed to build resilience among residents, empowering them to adapt to life's challenges and seize opportunities for growth and advancement
- Support for local businesses: we are committed to helping residents cultivate the skills and values essential for driving local business success, thereby contributing to the economic vitality of our community
- Cultivating an inclusive workforce culture: we strive to instil a culture of inclusivity, accountability, and high-quality employment opportunities while promoting healthy and resilient workplace environments

The Service offers participants a comprehensive support system that goes beyond mere skill acquisition and job placement. We recognise the unique circumstances of each individual and adopt a holistic approach to overcoming barriers, anchored by Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This approach ensures that foundational aspects of life, such as stable housing and daily self-care skills, are prioritized and secured before individuals can realize their full employment potential.

We provide transformative opportunities through a combination of courses, workshops, and individualized employment support, creating a supportive community that builds confidence and personal resilience—qualities that are highly valued by employers.



Strategic Actions for Achieving Our Goals

To creating equitable employment opportunities, the Skills and Employment Service will undertake the following strategic actions:

1. Establishing Skills and Employment Hubs: create inviting, accessible physical spaces where individuals seeking a second chance can receive guidance, support, and resources. Our community-based efforts will enhance the reach and responsiveness of our central hubs, ensuring we meet diverse resident needs, regardless of geography.
2. Tailoring the in-house curriculum: design a flexible curriculum that accommodates residents at various stages of their journey, allowing for personalized progression based on individual needs and circumstances and informed by local labour-market intelligence.
3. Agile commissioning model: implement a dynamic commissioning model to quickly adapt to emerging skills and employment needs, particularly in vocational areas that are not part of our existing curriculum
4. Targeted support initiatives: focus resources on specific individuals and communities facing substantial barriers to employment. This includes participation in place-based approaches aimed at enhancing local job opportunities and linking where possible into inward investment initiatives
5. Enhanced marketing strategy: develop a marketing strategy that effectively engages and supports low-income residents, ensuring they are aware of the resources available to them
6. Support for DWP campaigns: collaborate with Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) initiatives aimed at assisting underserved groups, such as individuals over 50, those with disabilities, and those seeking career advancement
7. Contributing to social value: Inform the Council's approach to social value by providing brokerage support for local residents to access opportunities arising from regeneration projects
8. Monitoring best practice: track the Anchor Institution initiative while offering advice and support to promote best practices among Council staff
9. Aligning skills with employer demand: continuously monitor and assess the skills employers require, using this data to refine our evidence base and curriculum planning



Continuous Improvement Commitment

As part of our ongoing commitment to excellence, we will implement a robust self-assessment framework focused on identifying key performance priorities and areas for improvement. Current areas of focus include:

- Aligning our provision with the evolving needs of local employers to ensure relevance and effectiveness
- Enhancing progression outcomes for learners by clarifying anticipated achievements associated with their selected programs and tracking the impact of learning experiences
- Embedding our services within a comprehensive and coordinated program offering that meets the diverse needs and aspirations of our community members
- Reviewing and expanding community-based educational provisions, including the enhancement of learning and skills hubs, to better serve our residents

Through these strategic initiatives, we aim to redefine the trajectory of our residents' lives and contribute to a thriving, skilled, and resilient community in Cheshire West and Chester.

Progress against aims and target outcomes set for 2024-25

The following is an update against the SMART objectives that were set as part of the 2024-25 Accountability Agreement document.

Objective	By When	Impact on skills priorities	Update on progress
1. 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).	This is on-going. The Service has recently launched a Prospectus document which outlines the provision available to residents and employers. This information will also be reflected in the Get Cheshire and Warrington Working Plan which will be published in September 2025.
2. 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	Unfortunately, this was not achieved in 2024-25, however this objective is still supported. Measuring progression is likely to be a priority for devolution and the Get Cheshire and Warrington Working Plan.
3. Continue to monitor employer skills needs locally and use the evidence base available to inform provision and commissioning of provision in 2024-25.	Evidence base produced by May 2024. Commissioning round for 2024-25 completed by August 2024.	Ensure our provision is reflective and responds to local employer needs.	This was achieved. The evidence base document was produced and used to inform curriculum planning for in-house delivery and our commissioning plan which we used to engage with other delivery partners.

4. Ensure CW&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>On-going engagement with Hynet⁶, Origin⁷, Protos⁸ and other inward investment schemes.</p> <p>Origin mapping to be completed by March 2025.</p>	Ensure more local residents are able to benefit from the new low carbon jobs being generated in the area.	<p>The origin mapping work has been completed and overtaken by a Regional Skills Pilot funded by OCEJ. Further skills intelligence has been commissioned, and pilot activity will take place in 2025-26.</p> <p>The Skills and Employment Service has been part of this project activity.</p>
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⁶ [HyNet North West](#)

⁷ [Origin | Climate solutions on an industrial scale \(origin-ep.co.uk\)](#)

⁸ [Protos - The Destination for Energy, Innovation and Industry](#)

Aims and Target Outcomes for 2025-26

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 2025	This will ensure our provision supports the skills and employment vision and strategic aims for Cheshire and Warrington.
2. To ensure we play an active role in devolution discussions associated with ASF and the Get Cheshire and Warrington Working Local Plan. We want to ensure that there is a “people first” culture adopted, built on encouragement and understanding.	On-going	Ensure we are able to benefit from any additional funding and flexibilities that will allow us to be more responsive to local skills needs
3. Develop sector pathways with stakeholders (similar to the one produced for health and social care) for the visitor economy sectors, clearly identifying our role in the journey.	By March 2026	To ensure we play an active role in getting residents employment in important local sectors, and for employers to be able to fill their vacancies. This will also ensure Cheshire West and Chester remains a vibrant place to live, work and stay.
4. Ensure CWCC 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.	By March 2026.	The team are already involved in the Regional Skills Pilot to ensure that where relevant and appropriate the Service are able to provide training to support progression into these low carbon/green roles.

Corporation statement

This accountability agreement was approved by the chair of the CW&C Adult Skills Fund (formally Adult Education Budget) Governance Board on Wednesday 25 June 2025.

This Accountability Agreement is available online on the [Skills and Employment Overview](#) page.

Supporting documentation

Ofsted Inspection report [50252485](#)

[Cheshire and Warrington Local Skills Improvement Plan](#)