

Report to Cabinet

11 September 2024

Subject:	Deed of Extension and Variation - Funding Agreement for Adult Education Budget and Free Courses for Jobs
Cabinet Member:	Cabinet Member for Children and Education, Cllr Jalal Uddin
Director:	Director of Children and Education Services, Sally Giles Executive Director - Finance and Transformation Alex Thompson
Key Decision:	Yes An executive decision which is likely to result in the Council incurring expenditure, the making of savings or the generation of income amounting to more than £1m
Contact Officer:	Interim Assistant Director Commissioning, Partnerships and Improvement, Mandip S. Chahal Mandip1_chahal@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Cabinet Member for Children and Education and the Director of Children and Education in conjunction with the Executive Director - Finance and Transformation be authorised to accept grants from West Midlands Combined Authority under the Terms and Conditions contained in the Grant Agreements for the provision of adult education.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The West Midlands Combined Authority's (WMCA) first devolution deal was formally agreed by the Combined Authority Shadow Board on 17 November 2015. The agreement included the transfer of adult skills funding (Adult Education Budget - AEB) to the WMCA and the subsequent Order establishing the Combined Authority contained details of a number of Adult Education powers although it did not deal with the devolution of funding.
- 2.2 The devolution of the Adult Education Budget was completed in 2018 with the WMCA having the duty and responsibility to deliver the government's commitment to statutory entitlements for fully funded qualifications at Levels 2 and 3, English and Maths and the future digital entitlements for learners, free of charge.
- 2.3 The WMCA have offered Sandwell £1.33m for 2024/25 for the provision of adult education. Approval is required to enter into grant agreements with the WMCA to accept this funding and future funding for the provision of adult education.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Council Plan?

Living in Sandwell	Giving residents the opportunity to access education can improve the opportunities available to them and positively impact on their health and wellbeing.
Thriving Economy in Sandwell	The provision of high-quality adult education will support Sandwell residents to access further education and employment opportunities that may not otherwise be available to them.
One Council One Team	The provision of adult education supports the Council's aspirations in respect of improving skills and education and positively impacts on regeneration by upskilling residents to fill skills and recruitment gaps.

4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The duty to provide adult education was devolved to the West Midlands Combined Authority from the Department for Education in 2018. This included:
- Duty to provide appropriate 19+ Further Education (not to include apprenticeships, prisoner education or traineeships)
 - Duty to provide appropriate FE to 19+ learners who do not have certain specified qualifications
 - Duty to ensure that provision is free for relevant learners who do not have certain specified qualifications
- 4.2 Sandwell Adult Family Learning (SAFL) currently deliver the adult education offer that is funded by the West Midlands Combined Authority. The funding received from WMCA pays for the whole of the SAFL service.
- 4.3 Around 1,500 learners choose to learn with Sandwell Adult Family Learning each year and take part in a wide range of courses in English, Maths and ICT. English and Maths are offered up to Functional Skills Level 2, which is recognised as equivalent to a GCSE for employment purposes; Level 2 in Digital Skills is also offered.
- 4.4 Funding from WMCA is confirmed annually, with the allocation for 24/25 being set at £1.33m. While funding for future years has not been confirmed approval is being sought to accept funding when it is offered/confirmed.

5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 The Council could choose not to accept the funding offered by West Midlands Combined Authority however given that if fully funds the SAFL service the Council would need to close this service, this would create a budget pressure for the Council. There would be significant impact on residents as they would no longer be able to access the courses provided by SAFL.

6 Implications

Resources:	The grant funding from WMCA will fully fund the Sandwell Adult Family Learning Service
Legal and Governance:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The delegations described in this report are in accordance with paragraph 1.3 of Part 4 (Executive Procedure Rules) of the Constitution.• The deed of extension and variation which WMCA has invited the Council to execute to confirm the extension and variations described in this report complies with the formalities in clause 44 of the main funding agreement which covers contract variations.
Risk:	The main risk in respect of the report is if the funding is not accepted. The Council would then need to either close the SAFL service or fund it from existing budgets. This would create a significant budget pressure.
Equality:	There are no equality implications arising from the recommendations contained in this report.
Health and Wellbeing:	There are no health and wellbeing implications arising from the recommendations contained in this report.
Social Value:	There are no social value implications arising from the recommendations contained in this report.
Climate Change:	There are no climate change implications arising from the recommendations contained in this report.
Corporate Parenting:	There are no implications for Corporate Parenting responsibilities arising from the recommendations contained in this report.

7. Appendices

None

8. Background Papers

None