

Report to CABINET

Acceptance of Adult Skills Funding Allocations 2026-2027 for Oldham Lifelong Learning Service and Get Oldham Working

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2nd /7th September 2026

Reason For Decision

To accept the funding allocation for the academic year 2026 -2027 for the Lifelong Learning Service.

Executive Summary

The report details funding offer received from the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) in respect of the Adult Skills Fund grant for the 2026-2027 Academic Year and highlights how this funding will be used to meet GMCA's and the Council's key priorities.

Recommendations

To accept the Adult Skills Fund grant offer from GMCA for the academic year 2026-2027

Acceptance of Adult Skills Funding Allocations 2026-2027 for Oldham Lifelong Learning Service and Get Oldham Working

1 Background

- 1.1 Following devolution of the Adult Skills Fund Budget, the Council's Lifelong Learning Service is now funded by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (prior to devolution this was directly awarded by the Education & Skills Funding Agency).
- 1.2 The Service is designed to meet the GMCA "Together We Are GM" Strategy and the Council's ambition and key objectives as set out in the "Ready for the Future" Corporate Plan. The Service works with the 5 district partnerships with a focus upon the Council's 'Get Oldham Working' campaign and the Co-operative Agenda. The funding will support the Service to specifically assist the Council to deliver outcomes against the following priorities:
 - Healthier, Happier Lives
 - A great place to live
 - Green and Growing
- 1.3 The Adult Skills Fund helps the service to specifically deliver against the Healthier, Happier Lives priority, by providing the resources to engage with c. 2,500 residents a year to engage in lifelong learning activities. The Lifelong Learning service also offers a range of employability programmes in liaison with the Employment and Skills team (GOW), Job Centre Plus, Welfare to Work Providers and the 5 districts. The Service also works closely with the Voluntary, Community, Faith and social enterprise sector (VCFSE) via Action Together. Partnerships with Family Hubs, Schools, Public Health, Adult and Children Social Care and others to enable the Service to deliver targeted work which develops self-reliance, confidence, independence, health and progression to further learning, training and employment.
- 1.4 The Lifelong Learning Service embeds the Co-operative Council's values and priorities in its delivery of learning opportunities across the Borough. The Service engages learners in decision making and regularly seeks views and input when developing the curriculum. The Service is committed to working with local communities, families and individuals with a particular focus on active citizenship and getting people into employment as part of the 'Get Oldham Working' campaign.
- 1.5 In addition to the Adult Skills Fund outlined above, the Council is asked to accept an additional £150,000 for 2026-2027 as part of the GMCA Local Agreement funding.

2 Current Position – Adult Skills Fund

- 2.1 For the academic year 2026 – 2027, the Lifelong Learning Service has been awarded an increased grant. Adult Education Budget will continue to be split based on the initial 2019/20 geographical delivery with an allocation of GMCA Devolved Adult Skills Fund (ASF) budget.
- 2.2 The allocation is payable by GMCA to the Council for the Lifelong Learning Service for the academic year from 1 August 2026 to 31 July 2027 **£3,301,621** (Three Million, Three Hundred and One Thousand, Six Hundred and Twenty One Pounds Sterling). This total allocation is the total sum of the core Adult Skills and Level 3 Adult Skills funding, Learner Support and where applicable, tailored learning.

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- 2.3 All funds are to be used to support Oldham Lifelong Learning Service's Strategic Plan, Self-Assessment Report (SAR), Quality Improvement Plan (QIP), the Oldham Community Learning Plan and Lifelong Learning Service's Business Plan and the Council Corporate Plan. The funding will also support the GM Strategy and GM Local Industrial Strategy and in negotiation with GMCA it will maintain the position of prioritising Adult Skills funded provision.
- 2.4 The Adult Skills Fund block grant aims to engage adults and provide skills and learning they need to equip them for work, an apprenticeship or other learning. It enables more flexible tailored programmes of learning to be made available, which may not require a qualification. This will help those furthest from learning or the workplace.
- 2.5 The ASF allocation for 2026-2027 includes Adult Skills, Tailored Learning, (formerly Community Learning) and Discretionary Learner Support as a combined sum. The Adult Skills element is used to fund the accredited programmes offered by the Service. Tailored Learning will be used to fund the non-vocational programme offered by the Service. Discretionary Learner Support is used specifically for childcare provision and to provide financial support towards the cost of fees, books, travel costs and equipment for learners who otherwise would be unable to attend classes.
- 2.6 GMCA has removed the tolerance for under allocation; to manage flex and growth in year. GMCA is also committed to having a positive conversation with individual and groups of grant providers to manage underspends for the benefit of 'place' first and then opened up to other GM providers. It is expected that the Lifelong Learning service will not underspend and will meet all the given allocation. The service has always delivered above the allocation level. The service has planned for 100% delivery but has set a stretch target to achieve 103% allocation which will see an £99,049, uplift to £3.4m.

2.7 Current Position – Local Authority Grants Programme

- 2.8 In addition to the Grant award for adult skills provision delivered by Oldham Council, GMCA has also awarded the Council £150,000 under the Local Authority Grants Programme (see Appendix 2). which supports 3 projects:
- ESOL Advisory Service – ensures ESOL provision is efficient, reducing waiting times hosted by Lifelong Learning service.
 - Digital Skills funding – Get Oldham Working supporting residents with digital skills barriers
 - Removing Barriers – Get Oldham Working supporting residents to engage and move into skills or employment.
- 2.9 Cabinet is requested to note the two grant allocations and accept the funding and delegate authorisation to officers to enter into the Grant Funding Agreements with GMCA.

3 Options/Alternatives

- 3.1 To accept the funding and to enter into suitable funding agreements.
- 3.2 To decline the funding.

4 Preferred Option

- 4.1 To accept the funding and to enter into suitable funding agreements.

5 Consultation

- 5.1 The Service undertakes extensive and regular consultation with learners, other users, employers and public and Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise partners. This includes self assessment and curriculum planning.

6 Financial Implications

- 6.1 The initial funding allocation for Oldham Lifelong Learning Service is **£3,301,621**. The funding will be utilised to fund the Service's delivery programme, which is developed to meet GMCA and the Council's priorities and targets.
- 6.2 The budget is for the 2026/2027 academic year and covers the delivery of the Service's programme for the same period, income therefore falls into the 2026/2027 and 2027/2028 financial years. As the grant funding runs across two financial years, any unspent funding at the end of the financial year 2026/2027 will be carried forward as a receipt in advance to be spent in 2027/2028 financial year.
- 6.3 As per previous years, GMCA will continue with no minimum tolerance level and any spend lower than 100% will be reconciled at the close of the year end and in theory it could be reclaimed, however the Service always plan to over deliver and have never had any monies claimed back.
- 6.4 Conversely, GMCA continues to honour over delivery payable which is funded up to a maximum of 3% above the approved core adult skills allocation of **£3,301,621**. For the academic year 2025/2026 this was factored into the financial year budget. Any overachievement for Academic year 2026/2027 will be factored into the relevant financial year budget. The Service is currently planning an overachievement of 103%. The table below summarises the notified and expected funding, if all targets are met the likelihood is that funding of £3,400,670 will be received.

	2026/27	2027/28	Total
2026/2027 GMCA ASF Allocation	£2,201,081	£1,100,540	£3,301,621
103% overachievement (planned)	£66,032	£33,016	£99,049
Total (within financial year)	£2,267,113	£1,133,556	£3,400,670
Total Academic Year (August 26 – July 27)	£3,400,670		

- 6.5 As in previous years, the Service may receive additional one-off grant allocations from the GMCA and other funding bodies and will seek approval to accept these as and when they arise. This funding will be linked to specific delivery programmes and targets from varying sources. They may fall into the academic year or financial year.
- 6.6 The ASF grant is fully ring-fenced to the Lifelong Learning Service and is subject to a detailed annual grant return and detailed monthly data returns and an annual audit. The monthly data returns, namely the Individual Learner Record (ILR), record the amount of funding drawn down by individual learners and calculate the overall amount of funding earned each month. The Service is paid on a monthly profile. GMCA provide Red/Amber/Green (RAG) rate for each audit, and the service is pleased to have maintained a "green" award for each audit with no additional conditions attached.

- 6.7 Should performance issues arise then the Service delivery programme will be revised to reflect any reduced budget allocation.
- 6.8 Oldham Council has also been awarded £150,000 under the Local Authority Grants Programme within the Get Oldham Working Service. This is also for the Academic Year (August 2026 to July 2027). The table below shows how the funding will be utilised.

Get Oldham Working Service			
	2026/27	2027/28	Total
ESOL Advisory Service – ensures ESOL provision is efficient, reducing waiting times	£33,333	£16,667	£50,000
Digital Skills funding – Get Oldham Working supporting residents with digital skills barriers	£33,333	£16,667	£50,000
Removing Barriers – Get Oldham Working supporting residents to engage and move into skills or employment.	£33,333	£16,667	£50,000
Total (within financial year)	£100,000	£50,000	£150,000
Total Academic Year (Aug 25 – Jul 26)	£150,000		

- 6.9 All schemes will be closely monitored to ensure compliance with the grant conditions and that all expenditure is maintained within the grant allocation.
John Edisbury - Accountant

7 Legal Implications

- 7.1 The Report seeks approval to accept the GMCA Adult Skill Fund (ASF) and Local Authority grant allocation for 2026–2027. The Service will be responsible for ensuring compliance with all conditions contained within the GFA, including any monitoring, data submission and delivery obligations set by GMCA. Any risks arising from non-compliance will need to be managed by the Service and Legal Services should be consulted if any issues are identified. Provided the Council is in a position to meet the requirements of the grant funding agreement there are no known legal implications in respect of the proposed recommendation.

Sukie Kaur - Solicitor

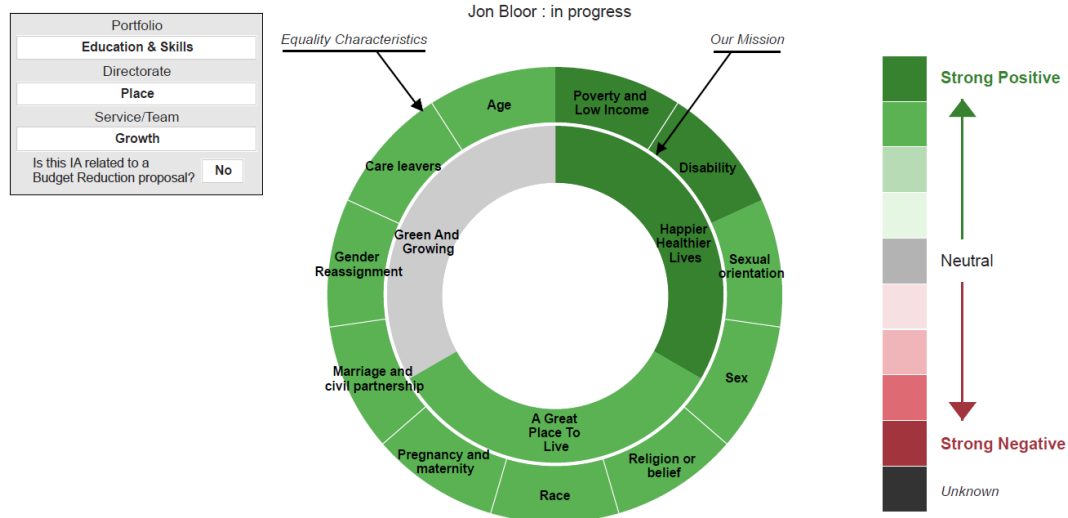
8. Procurement Implications

- 8.1 There are no immediate procurement implications contained in this report. If procurement implications do arise in the future with regards to spending the funds, Procurement will provide guidance and support as necessary.

Tom Pyne – Assistant Director; Procurement, Contract Management and Social Value

9 Equality Impact, including implications for Children and Young People

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10 Key Decision

10.1 Yes

11 Key Decision Reference

11.1 EE-01-26

12 Background Papers

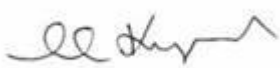
12.1 None

13 Appendices

Appendix 1 - Oldham Council – Allocation letter 26-27 -  Appendix 1 - LA and Grants Allocatio

Appendix 2 - LA Grants Allocation Letter 26-27 -  Appendix 2 - Oldham LA ASF inter

Appendix 3 -GMCA ASF Funding and Performance Management Rules 25-26 -  Appendix 3 - GMCA ASF Funding and Pe

Approved by the Chief Executive following consultation with the political group leaders. Decision made under the authorisation contained in Section 9C – Delegations to Specific Officers of Part 3 (Responsibility for Functions) of the Council Constitution for the Chief Executive to take any emergency decisions in respect of the Council's executive functions.	
Signed:  Shelley Kipling, Chief Executive	Dated: 8th September 2026
Date of Group Leaders meeting	7th September 2026