**Report to the Chief Executive**

# Live Well Journey to Employment Future Delivery Proposal for a 15 – 24 Education, Employment and Training (EET) Support Service

**Officer Contact:** Deputy Chief Executive, Place – Emma Barton and Executive Director Children and Young People – Julie Daniels

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**30th November 2026**

## Reason for Decision

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) is currently working with each of the ten local authorities (LA's) to determine how devolved funding will operate across employment and skills. This activity is taking place with teams across the Council and has implications for various services and choices that the Council will want to make. This is part of the latest devolution deal and includes an integrated settlement that allows GMCA to prioritise areas of activity to deliver the GM Strategy and constituent policies, including Get GM Working, Live Well and Local Growth Plans.

This report specifically relates to the Education, Work and Skills (EWS) portion of the Integrated Settlement (IS) funding that is being allocated via GMCA.

A report was brought to Cabinet in March 2026 outlining Year 1 plans for the funding for the Live Well Journey to Employment. This report outlined the funding confirmed to Oldham from GMCA at that stage for extensions to 3 projects currently being funded in the Oldham area and covered the financial year 2026/2027.

We are now in receipt of an indicative budget for EWS Integrated Settlement funding for 2027/2028 and 2028/2029. This report aims to advise on one element of the proposed future delivery plan. Further reports on the future delivery plan will update Leaders when information is clear.
This report will cover the new service we will create, that will provide an offer of education, employment and training (EET) support specifically aimed at 15 – 24 year olds, who are at risk of, or who have become NEET (not in education, employment or training).

## Recommendations

Chief Executive to agree the proposals for the new service and agree for officers to continue to work with Procurement timescales to achieve a 1st April 2027 delivery start date. This requires the LA to go out to tender for a new service without a GFA in place with GMCA.

**Pre-Decision Scrutiny** **19th November 2026**
**Leaders' Consultative Session** **30th November 2026**

**Live Well Journey to Employment Future Delivery Proposal for a 15 – 24 EET Support Service**

## 1 Background

1.1 England is undergoing a significant programme of devolution, with the Government's *English Devolution White Paper: Power and Partnership - Foundations for Growth*[1] setting out a long-term ambition to "rewire the state" by transferring powers and funding from Whitehall to local and mayoral strategic authorities. The aim is to reduce central control, strengthen local decision-making and enable places to drive economic growth, public service reform and improved outcomes for residents.

1.2 A key element of this agenda is the devolution of employment, skills and economic development functions. The Government has positioned skills as a central lever for growth, with increasing responsibility for adult skills funding, workforce development, labour market planning and employer engagement being devolved to combined and mayoral authorities.

1.3 This aligns with wider reforms to create more integrated local systems that bring together employment support, skills provision and economic priorities, enabling local areas to better respond to employer demand and address workforce shortages.

1.4 For areas such as Greater Manchester and Oldham, devolution provides greater flexibility to shape education, employment and skills provision around local needs. The direction of travel is towards locally led, place-based approaches that support inclusive growth, increase participation in learning and work, and ensure residents can access opportunities created through economic development and investment.

1.5 The employment, skills and economic development functions and funding are devolved via the Integrated Settlement (IS) and last year replaced the system of separate funding pots from different government departments into the Greater Manchester economy.

1.6 An outcomes framework has been established to measure the impact of the funding on local residents and services.

1.7 2025/2026 was the first year of the new system. GMCA's expectations of localities was that the funding would support the delivery of existing programmes of work during the transitional year. The Oldham model primary function was to secure existing staff working in the wider Oldham partnership of work and skills. This allowed us to continue to deliver services at no detriment to Oldham residents and retain the expertise developed in Oldham.

1.8 This model included the previous funding received from GMCA for 15 – 19 NEET support. Historically, Oldham made the decision to attach this fund to the TSSS Contract currently delivered by Positive Steps to ensure value for money and streamlining of services. Due to procurement legislation around levels of funding and the material change in the service, this is no longer an option Officers can consider, requiring us to go out to competitive tender for this service.

[1] Rewiring the State – Cabinet Statement (HTML) - GOV.UK

1.9 Whilst the wider integrated settlement covers a variety of funding pots across Local Growth and Place, Local Transport and Housing regeneration and retrofit. This report deals only with the funding relating to IS allocations for education, work and skills.

1.10 Oldham's future delivery plan is currently under development and further reports incorporating the full future delivery plan will be provided in due course, due to legal requirements around procurement timescales, a decision regarding the 15 – 24 EET Support Service is required earlier.

## 2 Current Position

2.1 From various funding sources, including European Social Funding (ESF) and UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF), GMCA have been able to provide funding for NEET support to the ten Local Authorities (LA) across Greater Manchester.

2.2 The fund was always intended to support young people aged 15 – 19 (up to 21 if care leavers and 25 if in receipt of an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan).

2.3 For the financial year 2026/27, GMCA have not yet been able to secure NEET funding for localities and a business case is being developed. Decisions on this will not be made until February/March 2027. Therefore, to address this gap in funding, as this work is deemed a priority, LA's were asked to secure provision via the newly established Integrated Settlement. In Oldham, we were able to secure most of the previous allocation level, which was £480,000. For 2026/27, we secured £460,000 for NEET support.

2.4 Officers have been working closely with stakeholders across the employment and skills eco-system in Oldham and GMCA to develop the future delivery for the remaining 2 years of allocated funding.

2.5 In May 2026, Alan Milburn produced his interim report, Young People and Work[2]. This is a diagnostic report and concludes that the growing number of young people who are NEET is a national social and economic crisis driven by interconnected challenges in health, education, the labour market and public services, requiring a more joined-up system focused on participation, prevention and opportunity. The recommendations report is due in late October/early November 2026.

2.6 The report makes a shift in the age range for NEET as is defined by LA statutory duties. Currently, LA's have duties in relation to supporting those who are NEET but these duties only cover ages 16 – 19 (up to 25 if in receipt of an EHC plan).[3] The Young People and Work report covers an age range of 16 – 24 year olds.

2.7 Anticipating the Young People and Work recommendations report, and acknowledging the gap we have in Oldham between our 16 – 19 NEET rate (3.7% in June 2026) and our 18 – 24 Youth Unemployment rate (9.9% in June 2026), Oldham made the decision to design a service that covers this age range and align to the current government thinking around young people and work.

2.8 This shift constitutes a material change to the existing service currently delivered by Positive Steps. In addition, due to the wider age range and wider service offer, we have increased the funding envelope for this service. We have allocated an envelope of approximately £539,000 per financial year, which is 23% of the Work and Skills portion of the Integrated Settlement allocated to Oldham. This requires us to go out to competitive tender.

[2] Young people and work: interim report - GOV.UK
[3] Participation of young people in education, employment or training

2.9 The associated targets set against the Integrated Settlement Outcomes Framework (ISOF) have been split across the full suite of employment support projects developed based on the percentage level of funding each project has been allocated. This service will be required to achieve the following;

| | **Starts** | **Positive Outcomes** | **Job outcome** | **Job sustainment** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| EET Support (15 – 24) | 318 | 135 | 81 | 0 |
| Total for IS annual delivery | 1379 | 610 | 269 | 184 |

2.10 GMCA have sought approval via their governance for the plans submitted. A joint portfolio meeting took place at GMCA on 9 October 2026 which sought approval of the plans for the GM Live Well Journey to Employment across the region. Following this meeting, GMCA Treasurer will approve letters of comfort to each LA confirming approval of the delivery plans and actual funding level.

2.11 This process also delays the issue of the grant funding agreement (GFA) to Local Authorities. At the time of writing, GMCA cannot give us an indication of when the GFA will be available to LA's.

2.12 To ensure our newly procured service is in place and ready to deliver from 1st April 2027 and we do not have any gaps I service delivery for our residents, we will be required to go out to tender at risk, without having a GFA signed and sealed by our Legal team.

## 3 Options/Alternatives

3.1 Delivery of the commissioned service

3.2 Option 1:
Continue to work with Procurement timescales to achieve a 1st April 2027 delivery start date. This requires the LA to go out to tender for a new service without a GFA in place with GMCA.

3.2.1 This option ensures the LA doesn't experience a gap in critical services for young people who are vulnerable to experiencing a period of NEET which we know to be scarring for future potential career development and progression.

3.3 Option 2:
Cease all activity on the tender and service delivery schedules until the GFA is signed and in place.

3.3.1 Whilst this option reduces risk from a LA funding perspective as funding will not be allocated until the GFA and associated paperwork is in place, it heightens risk for residents who require the service and puts young people at risk who are at risk of or who are experiencing NEET and require support. The gap in service delivery could be six months.

## 4 Preferred Option

4.1 Option 1 is the preferred option.

4.2 The risk of the GFA not being signed and sealed and Oldham not receiving the funding is minimal. The greater risk is to residents not accessing an essential service whilst we procure one.

## 5 Consultation

5.1 No consultation is required or has been undertaken. There are no declared interests.

## 6 Financial Implications

6.1 This report is seeking approval to complete a competitive procurement tender exercise.

6.2 The proposal commits £539,000 per annum from the expected but yet to be confirmed Education, Work and Skills element of the Greater Manchester Integrated Settlement towards the commissioning of a new 15-24 Education, Employment and Training (EET) Support Service. This allocation represents approximately 23% of Oldham's Work and Skills settlement funding. The estimated contract value is £1.078m over the initial two-year term from April 2027 to March 2029, with potential extension options subject to future funding availability and performance requirements.

6.3 The service will be externally procured through a competitive tender exercise. To achieve mobilisation by 1 April 2027, procurement activity will need to commence before a formal Grant Funding Agreement (GFA) has been issued by GMCA. As outlined in section 2.10 above the GMCA Treasurer will be issuing letters of comfort to each LA confirming approval of the delivery plans and actual funding level, so whilst officers consider the risk of funding not being confirmed to be low, there remains a financial risk should GMCA alter allocations or funding conditions prior to grant agreement execution.

6.4 Funding for the service is expected to be met entirely from Integrated Settlement allocations and therefore does not create a direct additional pressure on Council budgets. However, funding levels remain indicative pending final confirmation from GMCA and may be subject to future review.

Catherine Dunkerley – Accountant

## 7 Legal Implications

7.1 The proposal is lawful and complies with the Council's constitution. Section 1 of the Localism Act 2021 give Local Authorities a general power of competence to do anything which an individual may do for the benefit of the authority, its area or persons resident or present in their area

7.2 The Council must be satisfied it can meet the objectives and terms and conditions and milestones of the funding imposed by the funding authority including any obligation to provide match funding and to monitor, keep any necessary records and file any necessary returns. Officers must also check the terms do not conflict with other funding conditions for the scheme/s or project/property already in place and ensure compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty and obtain any necessary Environmental Assessments.

7.3 Any works, services and goods procured by or on behalf of the Council must be procured in compliance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and all other relevant regulations including, where applicable, the Financial Procedure Rules and Land and Property Protocol. Officers must work with legal colleagues to approve and formalise the terms of any grant agreement or MOU in conjunction with Finance and Audit colleagues.

7.4 The terms of any proposed MOU/Grant Agreement must be reviewed and agreed by the SRO along with legal and finance colleagues. Provisions of note and/or provisions with associated risk should be highlighted to officers for consideration.

7.5 If any grant funds are to be spent on supplies, works or services, the Council must undertake any commissioning activity in accordance with Contract Procedure Rules, incorporating relevant national procurement legislation

Bryan Bose - Solicitor

8. **Procurement Implications**

8.1 The funding risk is acknowledged in the report. Please can you confirm the proposed arrangement should the GFA not be signed and sealed, or the anticipated funding not be received, including whether the Council would be able to withdraw from the procurement or avoid entering the contractual commitment before funding is confirmed. Please could you confirm the proposed contract duration and the total estimated contract value, including any extensions, so we can apply the relevant thresholds and procurement route.

Samantha Lee – Senior Category Manager 16.10.2026

8.2 The funding risk has been considered. The service area has confirmed that the risk of the Grant Funding Agreement (GFA) not being signed is minimal. However, should the anticipated funding not be received, the Council would be unable to proceed with contract and would withdraw from the procurement process. No contracts will be entered into until the GFA is in place.

8.3 The estimated contract value has been confirmed as £539,000 per annum. The service area is to ensure that the proposed contract duration, including any extension options, is reflected in the total estimated contract value to enable the appropriate procurement thresholds and route to be determined.

8.4 Procurement is satisfied that the above points have been addressed and supports the proposal, subject to the GFA being in place before any contractual commitment is entered into.

Samantha Lee – Senior Category Manager 19.10.2026

9 **Equality Impact, including implications for Children and Young People**

9.1 Yes/No [delete as appropriate] Ctrl and click to follow link to complete https://app.powerbi.com/home?experience=power-bi

**Please do not embed the assessment here. Attach it separately as an appendix.**

10 **Key Decision**

10.1 Yes

11 **Key Decision Reference**

11.1 KDD-26-48

12 **Appendices & Background Papers**

12.1 Cabinet Report accepting Year 1 EWS IS funding.

12.2 Service Specification for 15 – 24 EET Support Service.

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| Approved by the Chief Executive following consultation with the political group leaders who were in attendance as follows:-<br>Councillors:<br><br>Decision made under the authorisation contained in Section 9C (5) Delegations of Specific Officers of Part 3 (Responsibility for Functions) and Section 3.6 of Part 4 (Executive Procedure Rules) of the Council Constitution for the Chief Executive to take emergency decisions in respect of the Council's executive functions. |
| Signed:<br><br>Shelley Kipling, Chief Executive<br>Dated: |
| Date of Leaders' Consultative meeting: |
| Summary of feedback from the political group leaders |