

Progress Report – Annex B

June 2025

Supporting Documentaton for the LSIP Annual Report

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• Strategic & Economic Context

Economic Profile of Norfolk and Suffolk

Norfolk and Suffolk demonstrate leadership and innovation in clean energy, with both onshore and offshore renewables, and in Suffolk with new nuclear. Both have a strong Agri-food/Agri-tech sectors and advanced manufacturing and engineering capabilities.

In Norfolk, there is a world-leading life-science cluster and a growing digital tech sector, as well as a well-established financial services sector encompassing insurance and financial technology (Fintech), and a significant visitor economy. Suffolk boasts a substantial agri-food and drink sector, and its strategic location hosts vital ports and logistics facilities, most notably, the largest container port in the UK at Felixstowe. Furthermore, Suffolk has a strong digital technology sector, anchored by Adastral Park in Martlesham and an emerging presence in life sciences and biotech, as well as the visitor economy.

With no reliance on any single sector or industry, stability for the region comes from the diversity of Norfolk and Suffolk's range of sectors. With a focus on key national priorities, both counties are favourably positioned for attracting investment and making significant contributions to the broader UK economy. Collectively Norfolk and Suffolk contribute approximately £41 billion to UK plc.

The two counties have a goal to boost productivity in the region, which has the capability to add an additional £4 billion to our region's economic output each year. Norfolk and Suffolk are home to nearly 71,000 businesses (Norfolk 39,760 and Suffolk 30,945) and both have a strong, sustainable business base growth rate over the last 10 years.

Here are links to both recent Growth Plans:

[Norfolk Local Growth Plan 2024 – 2029](#)

[Suffolk Economic Strategy & Growth Plan – December 2024](#)

EMPLOYER BASE	NORFOLK <i>Based on latest data available</i>	SUFFOLK <i>Based on latest data available</i>
GVA	£20 billion	£21 billion
Key Industries	Clean Energy Finance & Insurance Digital Cluster Advance Manufacturing & Engineering Life Science, Agri Food & Biotech Cluster Visitor Economy	Clean Energy Agri-food & Drink Port & Logistics ICT Digital/Creative Life Science & Biotech Visitor Economy
Business Count	39,760	30,945
Population	931,900	776,000
Employment Levels	365,000	350,000
Productivity Per Hour	£32.90	£30.96

Labour Market Information

Despite the strong employment figures across both counties, there is evidence of challenges with filling job vacancies. Reports about not having enough people to fill current vacancies suggests potential labour shortages within specific sectors. This situation, where high employment coexists with unfilled positions, points towards a potential mismatch between the skills possessed by the available workforce and the requirements of the jobs being offered. It could also indicate a limited supply of labour in certain specialised roles. Both counties have below average wage levels, Norfolk, £32,634 and Suffolk, £31,000 against a UK average of £35,100.

Economic Activity and Inactivity Overview

Data at the end of 2024 showed that Norfolk's overall economic inactivity stood at 20.5% and Suffolk's at 19%. With the Suffolk economic inactivity rate continuing to rise quicker than the national average. Whilst there are a range of local programmes designed to address these labour market challenges, moving individuals towards employment can only be successful in the long-term if they are paired with a strong understanding of the skills that local employers actually require. Thus enabling individuals to become job-ready, as well as work-ready. It is therefore vital that the work of the LSIP continues to be at the forefront of local skills and employment discussions.

Skills Landscape and Challenges

Norfolk and Suffolk has several skills-related challenges that impact on their overall economic potential: lower than average wages, compared to the East of England and national levels; lower proportions of the population attaining degree-level qualifications; and a higher number of young people classified as Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET). Specific skills shortages have been identified in STEM fields and the construction industry faces difficulties in recruiting skilled workers. This combination of factors suggests that there is a broad skills challenge across the region affecting those entering the workforce and those seeking higher-skilled employment, which has an overall impact economic growth and productivity.

Analysis of job postings in our region in recent years has revealed that the most in-demand roles were in Health and Social Care, sales-related occupations, and teaching professions. Skills gaps exist at a significant scale in areas such as digital literacy, soft skills, and green skills across varying sectors. These factors indicate that our skills challenges are closely linked to our economic structure, with a higher concentration of jobs in lower-skilled sectors and a pressing need to upskill and reskill the workforce to meet the demands of higher-value industries.

Both Norfolk and Suffolk face some daunting statistics regarding the proportion of their working-age populations holding high-level qualifications. In Norfolk only 33.1% of individuals aged 16-64 have qualifications at Level 4 or higher and in Suffolk 39.2%. These figures are notably lower than the average for the UK at 43.2%. This indicates a consistent pattern of lower higher-level educational attainment across both counties, compared to regional and national standards.

The work of the LSIP is driven by the needs of local employers and aims to identify and address skills gaps within the region. The data on lower qualification levels in Norfolk and Suffolk provides strong evidence for the LSIP to prioritise initiatives that boost higher-level skills and educational

attainment within the local population which better aligns to the actual roles available. By understanding these specific gaps, the LSIP can focus on developing targeted training programmes and fostering stronger links between education providers and businesses.

By working collaboratively with all of these stakeholders, we can increase the proportion of highly qualified individuals in both counties, improving productivity, wages, and the overall attractiveness of the region to businesses and inward investors. This evidence has been used to develop regional skills bootcamps to address the needs of employers and to upskill potential candidates.

Government and Local Economic Initiatives

Norfolk and Suffolk benefit from a range of government and local initiatives designed to foster economic growth and address specific challenges. This region has been allocated government funding to deliver the “Connect to Work” programme, a key component of the national “Get Britain Working” strategy, aimed at reducing ‘hidden unemployment’ by linking health and employment services.

In Norfolk, the latest Rural Economic Strategy (2021-24) to support rural areas and funding programs like the Business Growth Fund and the Made Smarter Adoption programme offer grants to stimulate growth in key sectors. These initiatives demonstrate a concerted effort to strategically plan for and invest in Norfolk's economic future, leveraging both local resources and national funding opportunities. In Suffolk, they are actively involved in national initiatives such as Freeport East and the Space to Innovate Enterprise Zone, which offer benefits such as business rate discounts and simplified planning procedures to attract investment and drive job creation.

These strategic engagements and targeted funding programs highlight Suffolk's commitment to fostering a dynamic and innovative economy, particularly within high-growth sectors. Norfolk and Suffolk have also received a £4 million boost in skills funding to support the continuation and expansion of its successful Skills Bootcamps programme.

Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation

The government's English Devolution White Paper was published in December 2024 and outlined plans to shift power from Westminster to local communities. Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council's both submitted expressions of interest in being fast-tracked for a joint devolution deal for Norfolk and Suffolk, through a Mayoral County Combined Authority. These have been accepted by government and the first mayoral election could potentially take place in May 2026, as Norfolk and Suffolk are on the Devolution Priority Place list.

Devolution seeks to secure devolved funding for the region, particularly in areas like housing, regeneration, local growth, adult skills (excluding apprenticeships), and local transport. A critical aspect of this devolution agenda is the need for a close relationship between the work of the LSIP and the MCCA.

The LSIP is driven by employer needs and identifies key skills gaps within Norfolk and Suffolk. Devolution can provide the region with greater control over skills funding and the ability to implement targeted training programmes that directly address these gaps. By aligning devolved powers with the priorities of the LSIP we can ensure that skills development initiatives are tailored to the specific needs articulated by businesses - ultimately boosting productivity, attracting businesses, and improving the overall economic well-being of Norfolk and Suffolk.

It should also be noted that Norfolk and Suffolk are currently developing proposals for Local Government Reorganisation which will see the current councils across Norfolk and Suffolk (at both a county and borough/district level) replaced with a smaller number of unitary councils. The aim is for the new unitaries to be up and running by 2028.

Impact of the LSIP on Provider Landscape

As a result of the changes in the political landscape, such as Devolution and Local Government Reform and the need to navigate changes in skills funding, the provider landscape in Norfolk and Suffolk is under significant pressure to adjust. The LSIP's role is to ensure that the education and training provision is as responsive as possible to employers' needs. To achieve this, we will continue to foster greater collaboration between providers, including:

1. Further Education (FE) colleges
2. Higher Education (HE) institutions
3. Independent Training Providers (ITP)
4. Other stakeholders

Norfolk and Suffolk benefits from a vast array of independent training providers who can deliver a wide range of funded and non-funded training across the region. They have a level of flexibility and agility that may help to deliver at pace, alongside the HE/FE providers, in order to meet the changing requirements of business and employers. With five FE colleges in the region, there is a wide breadth of provision available and all work closely with the LSIP. In the last LSIP delivery period, four of the colleges have been supported by the LSIP with their Ofsted inspections. Three received a 'Good' Ofsted rating and one, West Suffolk College, part of the Eastern Education Group, was awarded an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating.

Laraine Moody – Group Principal University & Professional Development from Eastern Education Group said: *“West Suffolk College, recognised as an Outstanding provider by Ofsted, has played a leading role in aligning technical education with regional economic priorities through its active collaboration with the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP). As the Suffolk FE representative on the Norfolk and Suffolk LSIP Governance Board and sub-groups, the College has worked closely with employers, local authorities, and regional partners to ensure its curriculum directly reflects the skills needs identified in the LSIP.*

“This collaboration has supported curriculum innovation and responsiveness across key sectors, including digital, health, construction, and engineering. Notably, West Suffolk College has embedded LSIP priorities into its strategic planning—enhancing its offer in areas such as advanced digital skills, Net Zero technologies, and soft skills development—ensuring learners are equipped to meet employer demand both locally and nationally.

“Through sustained engagement with over 2,000 businesses and the delivery of over 750 new apprenticeships and 3,000 student work placements last year alone, the College serves as a regional anchor institution, driving workforce development and economic resilience. This symbiotic partnership between the College and the LSIP exemplifies how place-based, employer-led strategies can strengthen local provision, boost productivity, and provide learners with meaningful progression into employment and higher education.”

Key aspects of this changing landscape across Norfolk and Suffolk include:

- **Increased Employer Engagement:** The LSIP emphasises the need for providers to work closely with employers to design and deliver training that meets specific industry demands.
- **Focus on Priority Skills:** Providers are adapting their offerings to address the skills gaps highlighted in the LSIP, particularly in areas such as digital skills, soft skills and green skills.
- **Collaboration and Specialisation:** There is a push for greater collaboration among providers to avoid duplication of effort, achieve economies of scale, and develop centres of excellence in specific sectors.
- **Investment in Facilities and Resources:** Funding has been directed towards improving training facilities and equipment to support the delivery of industry-relevant training. The £4.75m Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) has been a catalyst to support a consortium of colleges in Norfolk and Suffolk to invest in equipment, events, teaching, and new facilities.

The LSIP is always striving to foster significant changes in the provider landscape, encouraging a more responsive, collaborative, and employer-led approach to skills development in Norfolk and Suffolk. Skills England is a new body established by the government to address skills shortages and support economic growth. It aims to simplify the skills landscape and ensure the workforce has the necessary skills to drive economic growth.

Skills England's priorities include:

- Identifying skills gaps at the national level and creating strategies to address them.
- Unifying the skills landscape across England, in collaboration with local government, businesses, training providers, and unions.
- Shaping technical education to meet skills needs.
- Advising on the highly trained workforce needed for the future economy.
- Prioritising 10 key sectors:
 - Advanced manufacturing
 - Clean energy industries
 - Creative industries
 - Defence
 - Digital and technologies
 - Financial services
 - Life sciences
 - Professional and business services
 - Construction
 - Health and social care

It should be noted that the above 10 Key Sectors do not include Agri-food, which is still a key sector for Norfolk and Suffolk.

- **Norfolk & Suffolk Skills Landscape**

For an illustration of the complexity of the current skills landscape across Norfolk and Suffolk and how the LSIP is connected and embedded across this landscape see the below link:

- [Skills Landscape](#)

- **Employer Engagement**
Survey work conducted with employers during the 2025/2025 period produced a set of results that highlighted the challenges employers are facing, the results report can be found using the below link:
 - [LSIP 24/25 - Survey Results](#)

- **LSIF Case Studies**
Case studies from the work of the Local Skills Improvement Fund can be viewed below:
 - [East Norfolk Employer Zone](#)
 - [City College Norwich - LSIF](#)
 - [East Coast College - LSIF](#)
 - [College of West Anglia - LSIF](#)
 - [Suffolk New College - LSIF](#)
 - [West Suffolk College - LSIF](#)

- **Norfolk Economic Strategy**
 - <https://www.norfolkbusinessboard.co.uk/article/61526/Norfolks-Local-Growth-Plan>

- **Suffolk Economic Strategy**
 - <https://suffolkeconomy.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/SCC-Economy-Strategy-24.pdf>

- **LSIP Employers Case Studies**
Below are just a few of the case studies from LSIP Employers outlining the benefit and activities of working with the LSIP:

Karl Pull from Armultra Ltd - Norfolk

“At Armultra we have always been invested in skills within the manufacturing sector, and with a more challenging landscape for businesses, it is vital that we continue to do so. As part of this, we contribute to the delivery and outputs of the Skills Bootcamps and Apprenticeships, utilising the local college. As an active supporter of the work of the LSIP, it is important that we continue to flag concerns and challenges around recruitment, skills, and retention of staff. We are always keen to learn more about how our business can access training and funding and the LSIP provides a function for us to understand the complex world of skills in our region.”

Isaac Cooper from GETECH Ltd - Suffolk

“Sara Hinchliffe from the Suffolk Chamber of Commerce, as part of the Local Skills Improvement Plan, has been instrumental in helping us at Getech connect with the local community in a meaningful way. Her understanding of the local landscape and her proactive introductions have allowed us to showcase the exciting possibilities within STEM to the next generation. LEGO Education, championed by Sara, has been a fantastic tool to make these complex ideas tangible and fun for young minds.

“By connecting Getech with local STEM industries and promoting the use of LEGO Education, Sara has played a crucial role in fostering early engagement and inspiring future STEM professionals within Suffolk. This collaborative effort is laying the groundwork for a skilled workforce that will contribute to the region’s technological advancement for years to come.”

Nadine Tapp from Flagship Group – Norfolk & Suffolk

“As Chair of the Building Growth Sector Group, I’ve seen first-hand the difference a strong, responsive skills system can make. Working with the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) has given me clearer insight into the skills landscape – and a platform to voice the real challenges employers like Flagship face. At Flagship, we’ve always taken a hands-on approach to training and growing new talent. But partnering with the LSIP has helped sharpen that focus. It’s allowed us to raise concerns, highlight gaps, and work closer with local providers.

“A great example is our collaboration with one of our local colleges – a relationship that grew through this work and helped us win the LSIP-Sponsored Large Employer Award at the Norfolk Apprenticeships Awards. I’m also proud to contribute as a Keystone Employer for the LSIP, where I can bring a housing and construction perspective to the table and help shape a skills agenda that’s built around the needs of our sector and our places.”

Andy Heffer-Lamond from H.F. Bond & Co Ltd - Suffolk

“With the ever-present and undeniable skills gap in engineering and manufacturing, H.F. Bond, as a business, took the decision to look at the options available for taking on learners. I was keen to learn as much as I could around the skills landscape in engineering and manufacturing. I got in touch with local organisations that I thought could help me navigate this rocky road! I reached out and found a plethora of information and people with wide ranging knowledge in an area that was very new to me.

“We have since become members of the Suffolk Chambers of Commerce (the LSIP being particularly useful for closing the skills gap), and New Anglia Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering along with New Anglia Growth Hub and New Anglia Careers Hub. All of which guided me to FE institutions such as Suffolk New College and the Eastern Education Group. This then led me to become an Industry Partner to the college, and an Enterprise Adviser with New Anglia Careers Hub. Following on from this, I am now a member of the Enginuity SME Advisory Group. Needless to say, I have become a bit passionate about closing the skills gap!”