



# Northumberland County Council

Cabinet

TUESDAY, 10 OCTOBER 2023

## **Building our Data Capability - Data Academy Pilot**

**Report of Councillor Richard Wearmouth, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services**

**Responsible Officers: Audrey Kingham, Executive Director for Children, Young People & Education, Jan Willis, Executive Director for Resources & Transformation (S151)**

### **1. Link to Key Priorities of the Corporate Plan**

1.1 This report is relevant to the “Achieving Value for Money” priority within the NCC Corporate Plan by working better, and more efficiently.

### **2. Purpose of report**

2.1 The purpose of this report is to outline the need to develop our data skills and capabilities and seek approval for the proposed establishment of a ‘Data Academy’ and associated use of unallocated Apprenticeship Levy to fund.

### **3. Recommendations**

Cabinet is recommended to:

3.1 Approve the awarding of a pilot programme in data skill apprenticeships to the apprenticeship provider ‘Multiverse’ with a Government Levy spend of £0.6m (excluding VAT).

### **4. Key Issues**

4.1 As set out in our corporate plan, we have committed to:

***“Redesign the way our customers access our services to provide a coordinated, consistent and equitable offer of services that makes better use of the data we gather, delivers more pro-active services and makes the best use of digital services” and “Improve how we use data and performance monitoring to inform and plan our services, deliver improved outcomes and ensure continuous improvement.”***

4.2 We recently conducted an organisation-wide skills survey to assess our data literacy and maturity. The 504 employee responses illustrated that we don't have the skills to fully use and benefit from the data we hold. The lack of fundamental and advanced skills in working with data means we may be missing opportunities to make better, evidence-based decisions.

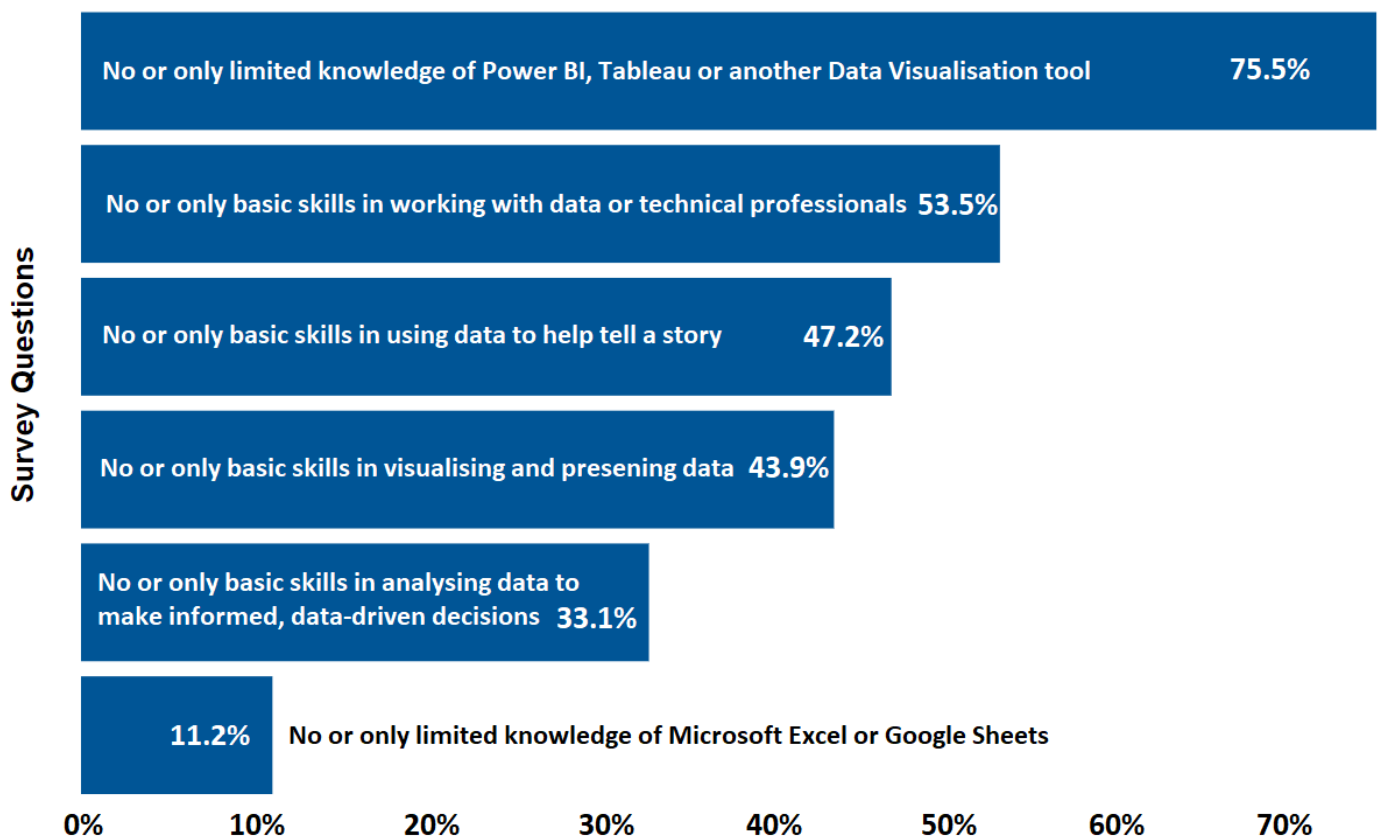
Of the 504 respondents, 269 are in data critical roles, and of these 269 employees:

4.2.1 **144 (53.5 %)** stated they had no or only basic skills in working with data or technical professionals.

4.2.2 **118 (43.9 %)** stated they had no or only basic skills in visualising and presenting data.

4.2.3 **127 (47.2 %)** stated they had no or only basic skills in using data to help tell a story (e.g. designing presentations with a narrative using data or linking patterns in data to real-life events, Etc.).

**OF THE 269 IDENTIFIED DATA CRITICAL ROLES: % OF RESPONDENTS (EMPLOYEES) IN A DATA CRITICAL ROLE**



**Figure 1.** Shows some key indicators on responses relating to employees in 'data critical' roles (269 employees in data critical roles of 504 employee overall responses).

4.3 Data is essential to service delivery and decision making. By harnessing data, we gain insights into community needs, identify emerging trends, and track progress towards goals. Data-driven approaches enhance transparency, accountability, and engagement, as information is readily accessible to residents and stakeholders.

4.4 Through BEST we have developed a draft Data and BI Strategy that sets out 6 key actions. Action 5 is “**Upskilling all levels of staff across the Council in data use and analysis**”

4.5 Through this proposal, we want to ensure that officers have the skills to be able to use data and business intelligence to make evidence-based decisions.

#### **4.6 Where are we now?**

4.6.1 Inconsistent data literacy across the Council

4.6.2 Data quality gaps across the Council, impacting downstream data analysis and performance reporting

4.6.3 Council data skills are largely analysis and modelling rather than infrastructure and governance

#### **4.7 Where do we want to be?**

4.7.1 Basic data skills and self-service dashboards enable everyone to use data in their jobs.

4.7.2 Move away from repetitive, low-skilled data work

4.7.3 Upskill all staff to use data for better decision-making

4.7.4 professionals are skilled, strategic, able to influence decision making and flex to organisational need

4.7.5 Advanced data skills (data science, data engineering) are available to teams that need them

4.7.6 We resource and organise data skills fluidly, efficiently, across the council.

4.7.7 Time is allocated for continuous learning and improvement

## **5. Background**

### **5.1 Understanding our needs**

After an in-depth consultation with Multiverse which entailed a data maturity assessment completed by over 500 members of staff and over 40 interviews with senior stakeholders across all directorates, Multiverse reported their findings to the BEST Working Board on 5th May 2023. The recommended proposal following this work was a £3.07m three-year investment, funded by our Government Levy, into the training and development of 240 employees across the Council through data focused apprenticeships. This proposal would utilise a large proportion of our apprenticeship levy, making it unavailable to fulfil other service needs beyond data maturity. It is therefore recommended that we first conduct a pilot to understand the benefits of a ‘Data Academy’. Our ambition to provide best value for money will require this pilot to determine the true benefits (both financial and non-financial) to validate NCC’s future decision making when investing in data related skills.

### **5.2 Potential Benefits**

5.2.1 Cost and time savings as a result of improved data literacy (& maturity) through understanding more about data and best practice.

5.2.2 Upskilling of workforce in data to make better decisions

5.2.3 Mature the council’s management, use and visualisation of data

5.2.4 Retaining talent through provision of career development

### **5.3 Proposed pilot**

Through the proposed pilot, we will engage with Multiverse to deliver training to 50 employees on a level three programme through one cohort. We will use the pilot to

determine the viability of potentially establishing a larger scale 'Data Academy' in the future.

5.4 The table below shows an indicative timeline of the pilot.

<b>Pilot Activity</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
Select & Onboard Employees for Level 3 Data Literacy Course	OCTOBER 2023
Pilot Cohort Start	NOVEMBER 2023
Third Month Review of NCC Cohort	FEBRUARY 2024
Assessment of pilot outcomes and viability of 'Data Academy' ambition	MARCH 2024

5.5 The pilot will consist of one cohort of 50 employees from Northumberland County Council. The duration will be determined by a three-month review where the cohort will be partially through the thirteen-month long programme.

### **5.6 Candidate Selection**

Candidates will be selected based upon those deemed suitable from the skills survey.

Candidates will also need to satisfy additional criteria, including:

5.6.1 Government eligibility criteria;

5.6.1.1 Currently NOT studying

5.6.1.2 UK Resident (3 years)

5.6.2 Management approval for commitment to 20% off the job training.

5.6.3 Maths and English GCSE (or equivalent) at grade 4/C (or equivalent) or above

### **5.7 Pilot Success Criteria**

To help assess the success of the pilot, we will measure and assess the following:

5.7.1 Feedback from pilot cohort – has the training helped them perform their role better

5.7.2 Feedback from Management (of staff who are enrolled in cohort)

5.7.3 Cohort performance

5.7.4 Cohort attendance

### **5.8 Apprenticeship Levy**

The apprenticeship levy is a UK government policy introduced in April 2017 that requires large employers with an annual payroll exceeding £3 million to invest in apprenticeship training. These employers are required to contribute a percentage of their payroll costs to a dedicated fund, which they can then use to fund apprenticeship programs within their organizations. The goal of the levy is to encourage businesses to create more apprenticeship opportunities and develop a skilled workforce, thereby boosting economic growth and addressing skills gaps in various industries.

5.9 Northumberland County Council contributes to the levy each year, in the past 12 months a contribution of £1,244,998.41 has been made (August 2022 to July 2023). Of this, amount £912,001.32 has been spent in the last 12 months.

### 5.10 Data and Business Intelligence (BI) Strategy

In February 2023 a 'Data and Business Intelligence' strategy was formulated via paid services to TPXIMPACT which produced a single document draft for the council's approach to data. This was created through a series of workshops, interviews, and other engagement activities across Northumberland County Council. The document highlights a number of organisational challenges and detailed insights that will positively impact Northumberland County Council (NCC). One of these insights detailed the requirement to focus on data upskilling across the council for those who use data in their day-to-day roles. This includes the opportunity to positively impact the council's overall data maturity and addressing insight raised through actioning the strategy.

### 5.11 Multiverse

Multiverse is an Ofsted 'outstanding' rated apprenticeship provider. They have extensive experience delivering data apprenticeships to other councils and have worked with Hackney Council, Waltham Forest Council, City of Westminster Council, Barnet Council, Haringey Council, Liverpool Council, Oldham Council, and Norfolk Council. In addition, Multiverse work with other government departments including Northumbria Healthcare Service (NHS) England, Ministry of Defence (MoD), Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), and the Metropolitan Police.

5.12 Given the existing support and relationship with Multiverse and their accreditation, this will contribute to allowing us to progress the proposed pilot at pace and allow employees to access learning quicker.

## 6. Implications

<b>Policy</b>	
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	This proposal outlines the use of otherwise unused apprenticeship levy. the pilot programme alone estimated at £1.3m ROI from an initial £0.6m investment. The pilot specifically provides an opportunity to build on our existing data & digital capabilities that empower our employees to ultimately improve how we process and understand data and technology and seek out efficiencies. This is expected to have a positive impact on new and existing processes that link to services that our residents and businesses utilise whilst also investing in our staff and organisation transformation.
<b>Legal</b>	Master Service Agreement signature required (Legal Officers have reviewed and agreed this can be signed)
<b>Procurement</b>	Procurement have been consulted throughout the engagement with Multiverse.  Direct award from Framework - YORKSHIRE PURCHASING ORGANISATION - YPO  Apprenticeships and Associated Training - 1086  YPO has developed a new iteration of the successful long-standing apprenticeships and associated training framework

	<p>that has been running since 2018. This has been developed and improvements made to support the needs of the public sector when procuring apprenticeship standards, end point assessment and associated training in a variety of ways.</p> <p>Contracting authorities can carry out a direct award or further competition through the framework.</p> <p>Benefits of using this framework include:</p> <p>Access to an established marketplace Simplified procurement process and reduced costs Compliance Contract Stability Access to expertise and support from Framework provider</p> <p>Direct award is available as a compliant call off from this framework. It will allow us to build upon the work and relationship that has already developed with Multiverse. It will contribute to an expedited procurement process, allowing cohorts of employees to access learning quicker.</p>
<b>Human Resources</b>	The proposal would have a positive affect on staff, creating development opportunities
<b>Property</b>	n/a
<b>Equalities</b>	Impact Assessment Attached Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	n/a
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder</b>	Improved skills and capability in the use of data may allow us to better understand crime and disorder, helping us to make better decisions to tackle crime and disorder.
<b>Customer Consideration</b>	Improved skills and capability in the use of data may allow us to better understand our customers, helping us to design better services and make better decisions based on data
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	Improved skills and capability in the use of data may allow us to better understand how we can further impact change to help achieve our goal of net zero
<b>Health and Wellbeing</b>	Better use of data may help us to make better decisions and have a greater impact on the health and wellbeing of our residents and staff.
<b>Wards</b>	ALL

## 7. Author and Contact Details

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