

## **Committee: Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel**

**Date: 15 March 2017**

Wards: All

### **Subject: Merton Adult Learning Commissioning Progress Report**

Lead officer: Anthony Hopkins – Head of Library, Heritage and Adult Education Service

Lead member: Councillor Nick Draper – Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

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#### **Recommendations:**

- A. That the Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel note progress made with the establishment of the new commissioning model for adult learning and discuss progress made over this and the last academic year.
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## **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1. The London Borough of Merton is committed to providing high quality and sustainable adult learning in order to improve the social, economic, health and wellbeing of our residents. This report outlines the work that has been undertaken following the Cabinet decision of 16 February 2016 to move forward with a commissioning approach to delivering adult learning in the borough and the strategic aims that were agreed on 19 September 2016.
- 1.2. The report also provides the Scrutiny Panel with a review of the performance of the last year of the service as a direct provider and term one performance with the new commissioning model. It also provides a summary of the last Ofsted inspection and work being undertaken in order to improve outcomes.

## **2 DETAILS**

### **Adult Learning Strategy**

- 2.1. The London Borough of Merton is committed to providing high quality and sustainable adult learning in order to improve the social, economic, health and wellbeing of our residents. We will deliver this through a strategic investment approach: commissioning provision to the best providers in the field and by developing sophisticated evidence based approaches to what we deliver.
- 2.2. We aim to reduce inequalities across the borough by focussing a significant proportion of our investment on those most socially and / or economically disadvantaged whilst providing a broad range of learning opportunities to develop all of our resident's skills.
- 2.3. Underpinning this strategy is the commitment to adult learning in Merton as set out in Cabinet's commissioning principles, along with the requirements of our funders and regulators such as the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and Ofsted, and the understanding of current and future needs of residents.

2.4. Adult learning in Merton will:

- Embed an evidence based approach to strategic commissioning to ensure the fullest return on investment to meet our social, economic and health objectives.
- Continue to provide popular courses whilst expanding provision and providing courses for families.
- Increase the proportion of learners attending accredited and / or vocational courses.
- Increase the quality and number of courses in employability, maths and English and ensure that a thread of employability and life skills is weaved into all courses where appropriate.
- Provide targeted courses for adults to improve literacy and / or numeracy skills to enable learners to participate more fully socially and / or economically.
- Improve the range of courses for learners with learning difficulties and / or disabilities to enable them to live as independently as possible.
- Tailor the learning journey for all learners from beginning to end so that they progress onto new opportunities.
- Develop a new apprenticeship programme that increases the number of adults into employment.

2.5. Underpinning our strategic aims are the following key principles for adult learning:

- Provide a broad range of accredited and non-credited courses to meet market demand and based on evidence and intelligence of future needs.
- An increased focus on Customer Relationship Management (CRM) to understand, target and track the delivery of our services to different parts of the population to ensure the widest reach of adult education.
- Ensure all courses (apart from some apprenticeship opportunities) are delivered in the borough.
- Be delivered in an inclusive and welcoming environment in high quality venues that are easy for people to access.
- Ensure the safeguarding of all our learners.
- Embed appropriate assessment and selection processes to ensure that participants meet course criteria and progress appropriately following course completion.
- Learn from, and contribute to, best practice around the country in the field of adult learning and actively seek to embrace new approaches.

- Improve the quality of teaching provision and develop enhanced systems to manage quality and improve feedback from our learners.
- Learner outcomes will be tracked to monitor the effectiveness of courses against our strategic objectives with ILP's (independent learning plans) and / or RARPA (recognising and recording progress and achievement) embedded amongst all learners.
- Clear pathways will be established, recorded and monitored to enable progression of learners onto new courses, employment opportunities and / or improved health and wellbeing as appropriate.
- Market our services to the community through a variety of different methods and ensure a strong thread of localism is embedded into our course offer.

### **Lot 1 – Main Services**

- 2.6. Lot 1 accounts for approximately 80% of the adult learning provision in Merton and focusses on accredited and functional skills development with a particular focus on core skills such as English and Maths. This lot also includes the vast proportion of community learning and vocational courses.
- 2.7. The provision is delivered by South Thames College with the vast proportion of their courses delivered at their Merton Campus. 350 courses are planned to be delivered and term one performance is summarised under section 3.
- 2.8. The Merton Campus has excellent facilities and has enabled the provision to develop a new course offer including more vocational options, such as hairdressing, barbering, counselling, community interpreting and more literacy and numeracy options. This continues to be reviewed and South Thames College have recently undertaken a marketing campaign to increase enrolment numbers.

### **Lots 2 and 5 – Employability and Family Learning**

- 2.9. Both of these lots have been awarded to Groundwork London who are delivering a range of courses in community venues predominantly in the east of the borough. Courses planned include employability courses with partner organisations, drugs awareness, keeping up with the kids, paediatric first aid and getting ready for nursery.
- 2.10. Numbers have not quite achieved targets set so far and Groundwork London has plans in place in order to significantly increase numbers in the next few months.

### **Lot 3 – Learners with Learning Difficulties and / or Disabilities (LLDD)**

- 2.11. The provider who was due to manage the provision withdrew in July 2016. As a result the provision is being delivered in house at community venues such as Pollards Hill Library and at the Merton Vision Guardian Centre. These arrangements remain under review. Significant work was undertaken to ensure that there was no disruption to the provision with a better variety of courses developed and courses starting as usual.

- 2.12. Ofsted highlighted concerns about this provision in their last inspection and in particular around learner progression and the level of engagement in classes. Significant work has been undertaken in order to improve the provision including developing a new curriculum; improving partnership work with key agencies; more appropriate placement of learners on courses; better objective setting and progression tracking for learners.
- 2.13. On top of the published provision a short term contract is in place with the Baked Bean Company to deliver new and additional LLDD courses in this academic year.

#### **Lot 4 - Apprenticeships**

- 2.14. The Merton Adult Learning team is working with the London Borough of Wandsworth to develop a new apprenticeship offer for Merton residents and employers. It is currently engaging with key stakeholders to develop opportunities and to ensure that the provision complements the current offer.

### **3 PERFORMANCE**

- 3.1. Robust contract and performance recording mechanisms have been established with performance measures embedded into quality management processes and contracts.
- 3.2. The new key performance indicators (KPI's) and a summary of performance for this academic year and the previous year is summarised below. Where figures are not available it is either because the figures are not recorded until the end of the academic year or they were not recorded prior to the commissioning model being established. Year to date (YTD) figures are for term one (September to December).

#### **1. Number of unique learners per annum (i.e. regardless of number of courses / modules)**

	<b>General Provision (STC)</b>	<b>Employ (GWL)</b>	<b>Family Learning (GWL)</b>	<b>LLDD</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>2016/17 (YTD)</b>	777	5	31	84	<b>887</b>
<b>2015/16 (YTD)</b>	1162	0	75	156	<b>1368</b>
<b>2015/16 (Full Year)</b>	1711	0	151	157	<b>1983</b>

#### **2. Number of new learners per annum (not registered as learner in previous year)**

	<b>General Provision (STC)</b>	<b>Employ (GWL)</b>	<b>Family Learning (GWL)</b>	<b>LLDD</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>2016/17 (YTD)</b>	450	5	23	9	<b>487</b>
<b>2015/16 (YTD)</b>	541	0	55	43	<b>624</b>
<b>2015/16 (Full Year)</b>	1032	0	117	44	<b>1172</b>

### 3. Number of completers (% retention rate per annum)

	General Provision (STC)	Employ (GWL)	Family Learning (GWL)	LLDD	TOTAL
2016/17 (YTD)					Results at year end
2015/16 (YTD)					Results at year end
2015/16 (Full Year)	97.58%	0	100%	99.57%	97.84%

### 4. % overall success rate of accredited courses per annum

	General Provision (STC)	Employ (GWL)	Family Learning (GWL)	LLDD	TOTAL
2016/17 (YTD)					Results at year end
2015/16 (YTD)					Results at year end
2015/16 (Full Year)	82.63%	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	82.63%

### 5. % of end of course evaluations where teaching and learning is rated as good or above

	General Provision (STC)	Employ (GWL)	Family Learning (GWL)	LLDD	TOTAL
2016/17 (YTD)	99%	Pending	Pending	98%	99%
2015/16 (YTD)	Not available	Not applicable	Not available	Not available	Not available
2015/16 (Full Year)	Not available	Not applicable	Not available	Not available	98%

### 6. % of learners from deprived wards

	General Provision (STC)	Employ (GWL)	Family Learning (GWL)	LLDD	TOTAL
2016/17 (YTD)	21.88%	100.00%	83.87%	29.76%	25.48%
2015/16 (YTD)	23.67%	Not applicable	69.33%	33.33%	26.61%
2015/16 (Full Year)	24.25%	Not applicable	66.89%	33.76%	27.58%

### 7. Value for money: average cost per learner

	General Provision (STC)	Employ (GWL)	Family Learning (GWL)	LLDD	TOTAL
2016/17 (YTD)					Results at year end

<b>2015/16 (YTD)</b>					<b>Results at year end</b>
<b>2015/16 (Full Year)</b>	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	<b>£381.46</b>

3.3. The KPI's show that generally YTD performance is slightly below the previous year but is expected to improve. A considerable amount of work was undertaken by the Commissioning Team and the providers to establish the new systems and many of the teething issues have now been resolved. For all parts of the provision an increased offer in terms two and three is in place and should ensure that performance either meets or exceeds the last academic year.

3.4. **Evidence Base**

3.5. Traditionally adult learning provision has been based on the feedback and knowledge of our tutors and curriculum heads to develop next year's curriculum on a cyclical basis. Whilst this input will still remain crucial, we will take a longer term strategic approach to course planning to identify future trends and underpin this by making better use of community information and data.

3.6. The evidence that we will use to inform our strategic thinking includes:

- (i) Community profile information including socio-economic data.
- (ii) Information on the current provision including attendance numbers, achievement and future demand.
- (iii) Government direction and the steer of our funders and inspectors.

3.7. **Ofsted**

3.8. Merton Adult Education was subject to an Ofsted inspection in November 2015. Each area of assessment including the overall assessment was rated as "requires improvement" although some areas of good practice were noted.

3.9. The report highlighted as a strength the Council's approach to commissioning and the consultation processes in particular. Many of the issues identified by the inspectors have been picked up and are reflected in the strategic aims and service planning. This includes the need for improved progression for LLDD students and the need to rebalance the accredited and non-accredited provision.

3.10. Other areas for development include better setting of learning targets/outcomes, better evaluation of learning and teaching and higher levels of achievement. New quality monitoring processes are in place with an increased number of teaching observations and learning walks.

3.11. A monitoring visit by an Ofsted officer in December 2016 noted progress made with the provision since their last visit and key areas for development before the next inspection are:

- Continue to work with staff and subcontracted partners to ensure that the progress and achievement of learners on non-accredited courses is consistently recorded to a high standard.

- Continue to develop the curriculum so that it builds the employability skills that learners need.
- Develop a more proactive approach to preventing extremism, radicalisation and promoting British values to learners.

### 3.12. **Self Assessment Report (SAR)**

3.13. The annual SAR for the service was published in January 2017 and provides a summary of performance for the last academic year. Termly SAR's are also completed and the first term summary for the new commissioning model covers the following items:

- Effective collaborative working between the providers and the Council has resulted in a strong provision in the first term at South Thames College, but a slow start with Groundwork London.
- Significant work has been undertaken to improve the LLDD provision, including improving attendance and progress tracking, embedding employability and literacy and numeracy and providing additional CPD and support for staff.
- The Council has provided strong leadership in contract management to ensure that the courses fit the needs of Merton and its strategy to improve the skills and wellbeing of its adult learners.
- Data is used effectively to monitor the provision, along with contract meetings, quality visits and a shared observation framework.
- There are an insufficient number of courses held away from the main South Thames College campus in community venues, which would attract hard to reach learners. Outreach actions are in place and progress is expected in term two. All Groundwork London and LLDD courses are in venues in the east of the borough.
- Accommodation at South Thames College is of a very high quality and community venues used are fit for purpose and have been used effectively.
- Learners enjoy their lessons and attend regularly. Evaluations shows that learners rate highly the level of teaching on their courses and would recommend Merton adult learning to family and friends. Feedback on LLDD courses has been positive.
- Providers are successfully attracting more learners from BAME groups at 55% (STC) and 84% (GWL) than in previous years, when the figure was 53%, against the overall resident population figure for Merton of 35%.

## 4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

### 4.1. Advisory Panel

4.2. An Advisory Panel has been established to ensure that there is input from key stake holders and an independent assessment of the effectiveness of the service is undertaken with new opportunities identified. The Advisory Panel comprises of the Cabinet member and senior Council officers, representatives from the business and voluntary sectors and adult learning providers.

### 4.3. Learner Feedback

4.4. An annual Learner Survey is conducted between February and April to seek input from learners on all aspects of the courses they attend. Results of this academic year's survey are expected in the summer.

4.5. Feedback is collected for all courses and learners are requested to complete an end of course evaluation. Of end of course evaluations completed so far the feedback shows that satisfaction levels are high:

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No answer</b>
I felt safe when I carried out activities for this course	<b>97%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>3%</b>
I feel more confident	<b>95%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>3%</b>
My health and/or wellbeing has improved	<b>82%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>9%</b>
I feel I have more social interaction with people	<b>84%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>8%</b>
I have improved my skills for work or volunteering	<b>75%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>13%</b>
I would recommend Merton adult learning to a friend / family	<b>92%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>6%</b>

4.6. Examples of learner comments recorded from term one are:

- *“I have really enjoyed my first term and surprised myself with what I have achieved.”*
- *“I look forward to my course every week. I am always learning and gaining inspiration.”*
- *“I really liked this course because it helped me to improve my skills and be more confident to relate with others. At the beginning I set some goals with my tutor and achieved all of them.”*
- *“Great course to help my career and to understand what my skills are to help match that with potential career opportunities.”*
- *“This course has taught me personal growth and development.”*

4.7. Feedback is also sought through learning walks and teaching observations. Only 5 complaints have been received regarding the new provision and mainly focused on issues with the enrolment process and initial marketing



with South Thames College. These matters have been addressed with the provider and improvements have been put in place.

## **5 TIMETABLE**

- 5.1. The Adult Learning Service Plan 2017/18 outlines all key projects to be delivered and was presented to the Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel on 12 January 2017.

## **6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1. Merton's adult learning service relies on funding from the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), which is awarded on an annual basis. As a result of government cuts to the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) adult education budgets in Merton have reduced over the last 5 years and future reductions are likely. By 2019 the SFA will be abolished with funding allocated and dispersed by London's LEAP (Local Enterprise Partnership). Local Area Reviews (LAR's) have been completed for adult and community education have provided recommendations on how funding should be dispersed for London.
- 6.2. The adult education budget (which is made up of non-apprenticeship adult skills, community learning and discretionary learner support funding) is allocated as a block grant for the 2016 to 2017 academic year. The adult education budget is issued in two parts:
  - (i) Adult education block grant - £1,345,317
  - (ii) Adult apprenticeships - £28,486
- 6.3. In the last year as a full in house provider (2015/16) the service reported an overspend of £249,191. In 2016/17 the old model is forecasting to overspend by £549,106. The overspend costs are split over two financial years to reflect that adult learning budgets are assigned by the SFA to academic years. With the new contracts and working arrangements in place future spend is expected to be cost neutral and updates will continue to be provided through financial monitoring reports.
- 6.4. The Council's management fee (i.e. commissioning costs) is set at 20% and will be reduced to 15% for the following year's allocation. The 20% figure for the first year is based on any residual expenditure linked to the transfer to the new commissioned model.
- 6.5. The adult education provision at Whatley Avenue closed at the end of July and work is underway to refurbish the site ready for use as a temporary secondary school site. All of the provision previously delivered at the Whatley Avenue site has been transferred to other venues in Merton and as detailed elsewhere in this report.

## **7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1. The main statutory basis for the adult education service is section 15B of the Education Act 1996. This section empowers local authorities to secure the

provision for their area of full-time or part-time education suitable to the requirements of persons who have attained the age of 19, including provision for persons from other areas. It includes power to secure the provision of training, including vocational, social, physical and recreational training, and of organised leisure time occupation which is provided in connection with the provision of education or training. The authority may do anything which appears to them to be necessary or expedient for the purposes of or in connection with the exercise of their functions under this section. In exercising their functions, the authority must in particular have regard to the needs of persons with learning difficulties or disabilities.

- 7.2. The authority does not therefore have a statutory duty to maintain an adult education service but must in considering whether to provide a service and what service to provide take account in particular of the needs of people with learning difficulties or disabilities.
- 7.3. Statutory guidance is in place for participation of young people in education, employment or training to ensure secure, sufficient and suitable education and training provision for those aged up to age 25 with a learning difficulty assessment (LDA) or Education, Health and Care (ECH) plan in their area. This guidance is applicable to a small number of adult education learners.

## **8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1. The strategic aims of the adult learning service include improving community cohesion and in particular to support those in highest need to improve their life chances. Courses are increasingly focussed on improving employability and the health and wellbeing of our residents.

## **9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1. None identified.

## **10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1. No specific issues identified in this report. A risk register is maintained for projects detailed in the Merton Adult Learning Service Plan.

## **11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT**

None included.