

Committee: Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel

Date: 30 April 2019

Wards: All

Subject: Merton Adult Learning Annual Report 2017/18 (academic year)

Lead officer: Anthony Hopkins; Head of Library, Heritage & Adult Education Service

Lead member: Councillor Nick Draper; Cabinet Member for Community & Culture

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Recommendations:

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1. That the Scrutiny Panel note the progress made following the transition to a commissioning model for the delivery of adult learning in the borough.
 2. That the Scrutiny Panel note and discuss the feedback from Ofsted following the last inspection and the services preparedness for its next inspection.
 3. That the Scrutiny Panel note the proposed changes to funding for adult learning following the devolution of funds from the Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) to the Mayor of London's office.
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1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. Following the Cabinet decision of 16 February 2015 Merton launched its new commissioning model for adult learning in September 2016. The strategic rationale for moving to a commissioning model was to ensure that the grant received from the ESFA maximised its investment in Merton residents, supporting them to develop new skills and improve their life chances. The change also ensured that the service could be managed within the funding allocation received to ensure the sustainability of adult learning in the borough.
- 1.2. The strategic objectives for the service were agreed by Cabinet on 19 September 2016:
- 1.3. *"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.*
- 1.4. *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."*

- 1.5. Commissioning of services was originally in 5 lots, which have been streamlined to better suit the strategic objectives of the Council, and to reflect the provider market. Contracts are currently in place with the following providers:
- a) South Thames College Group – Main adult learning contract. Accounts for approximately 80% of the ESFA allocation for Merton.
 - b) GSS (Global Solution Services) – A new contract awarded for the provision of community based accredited learning courses.
 - c) RHACC (Richmond and Hillcroft Adult and Community College) – Contract for the provision of courses for learners with learning difficulties and/or learning disabilities (LLDD).
 - d) A range of smaller providers are also commissioned on an annual basis to deliver community based family learning and employability programmes.
- 1.6. The commissioned model of service was inspected by Ofsted in November 2017, a year into the new model. It followed a previous inspection, when the borough was a provider of adult learning, where the service was judged to 'Require Improvement'. 2017's inspection judged the service to still 'Require Improvement' but noted progress made. The Ofsted inspectors commented that, *“Leaders and managers have taken bold and effective steps to restructure the service through subcontracting arrangements. In doing so leaders and managers have secured the long-term future of adult education for local residents.”*
- 1.7. The details of this report have been summarised under the headings used by Ofsted inspectors to provide the Scrutiny Panel with insight into progress made since the last inspection and to highlight areas of further work. A more detailed analysis of performance is undertaken each year by the adult learning service as part of the SAR (Self-Assessment Report) process. The statements in this report have been externally moderated by a peer group of adult and community learning providers and the ESFA Intervention Team. Ofsted have also reviewed the SAR.

2 DETAILS

2.1. Overall Effectiveness

2.2. Since the last inspection leaders have been driving the pace of improvement in the service particularly around performance management and quality improvement. This has resulted in greater collaboration with providers and a better understanding of priorities. The establishment of a new quality framework has resulted in improvements in teaching, learning and assessment.

2.3. Learners make good progress on courses through the support provided by tutors in meeting individual learning needs, resulting in high pass rates across the provision.

- 2.4. The LLDD provision has been further developed and provides a broader curriculum for learners to learn and develop skills including employability skills and to live safely and more independently. New provision has been developed in collaboration with Adult Social Care such as tailored courses at the Gables supported living centre. Commissioning of LLDD services is now fully complete and for the first year since being a commissioning service no direct delivery will be undertaken by the Adult Learning team. This enables the team to focus further on improvement actions highlighted.
- 2.5. Community based learning has been further developed to improve the learning opportunities in priority areas and to better meet borough priorities around skills development. In priority wards more learners are enrolling on courses and achievement has increased.
- 2.6. Better collaboration with providers has resulted in the removal of duplication and increasing the focus on evaluation and impact of processes.
- 2.7. There has been excellent feedback from learners who confirm they enjoy their learning and feel safe.
- 2.8. **Leadership and Management**
- 2.9. Governance structures have been further strengthened to provide greater support and challenge. This includes the embedding of an Adult Learning Advisory Panel that consists of members and officers along with representatives from the business, voluntary and community sectors of the borough. Annual progress reports are circulated to Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel, CMT and DMT.
- 2.10. Working with providers a more evaluative approach is taken that focuses on impact, progress, action planning and target setting.
- 2.11. There is a focus on activities to make learners aware of keeping themselves safe from radicalisation and extremism including new guidance and training around items such as county lines.
- 2.12. The new commissioning model has enabled the service to develop the curriculum to better meet the needs of Merton residents including better embedding of employability content in courses and the development of new provision.
- 2.13. New performance management tools implemented by providers have seen a significant improvement in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- 2.14. **Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment**
- 2.15. Since the last Ofsted inspection officers have been working closely with its providers to improve the quality of teaching and learning. As the majority of the provision is with South Thames College Group (STC) the responsibility has mainly been with them and officers have worked collaboratively with STC's management team to drive performance up. This has resulted in significant improvements in tutor performance.
- 2.16. In community learning in particular (which accounts for approx. 70% of the provision) there are experienced teachers with excellent subject knowledge, meaning that learners develop good and sometimes excellent technical skills. In accredited provision significant support has been put into ESOL and

Functional Skills and these two areas have the most significant increases in learner achievement.

- 2.17. Family Learning provision has been further developed and innovative programmes have been delivered in priority areas such as healthy eating, living more independently and school readiness. New programmes have been developed working collaboratively with Council services such as Adult Social Care, Early Years and Public Health.
- 2.18. Tutors have high expectations of learners and set challenging work.
- 2.19. **Personal Development, Behaviour and Welfare**
- 2.20. Learners enjoy their learning, attend well and are willing to learn. As a result, most progress and achieve well.
- 2.21. Learners gain skills that help them progress onto further learning or other career opportunities. They gain confidence and improve their wellbeing.
- 2.22. Learners complete high standards of work on community learning courses. Maths, English and employability are well embedded into courses.
- 2.23. Learners make progress to support their children with the curriculum and to improve their health and wellbeing.
- 2.24. Learners on LLDD courses have a good understanding of living in modern Britain and understand how to keep themselves safe. This can be seen in learners' work in classes and lesson plans.
- 2.25. **Outcomes for Learners**
- 2.26. The table below summarises end of academic year performance:

Measure	Total Academic Year 2016/17	Target	Total Academic Year 2017/18	Trend
Number of unique learners funded by the ESFA	1,850	1,983	2,032	▲
Number of enrolments funded by the ESFA	3,504	3,691	3,598	▲
Overall achievement on accredited courses	74%	85%	74%	▶
% of new learners per annum	73%	50%	71%	▼
% of learners from deprived wards	29%	27%	29%	▶
% retention rate per annum	96%	93%	91%	▼
% of end of course evaluations where teaching and learning is rated as good and above	99%	95%	99%	▶
Average cost per learner	£285	£241	£374	▼

- 2.27. Learner numbers have increased and are now above figures previously achieved when the service was a direct provider.
- 2.28. Achievement rates have increased in priority accredited provision such as ESOL and Functional Skills. Retention issues, particularly on GCSE

- courses, have had an impact on overall achievement and improvement plans are in place with STC to address this.
- 2.29. Community Learning outcomes are excellent with achievement at 91.5% and retention at 95.2%
- 2.30. New learner numbers were expected to decline but are still above target. This reflects where providers are progressing learners onto new courses within their provision.
- 2.31. Progression pathways have been developed to complement the commissioned provision and to maximise the wider offer provided by providers and other training providers in the borough.
- 2.32. The average cost per learner has increased this year due to one off commissioning undertaken to develop the provider market and to commission more specialist provision. LLDD costs have also increased to more accurately reflect what the market can manage. One off costs have been incurred for the procurement of a new management information system (MIS) to improve data quality and better forecast achievement levels. Some additional staffing costs to support with Ofsted readiness and maternity cover have all been managed within the ESFA grant. A refinement of marketing plans and new guidance for providers is expected to see learner numbers continue to grow.
- 2.33. Intervention and support that enabled learners to stay on programmes was good and is reflected in a 3-year high in Pass rates in qualifications (i.e. those who complete their courses are likely to achieve good grades in their exams). The majority of learners who successfully complete their qualifications continue to study at a higher level.
- 2.34. A good programme for visually impaired learners was commissioned to assist with gaining confidence, reducing isolation and developing skills for employment.
- 2.35. **Feedback from Monitoring Visit**
- 2.36. A 'Support and Challenge' visit by Ofsted took place on 8 November 2018. Termly visits made by the ESFA Intervention Team also monitor the services progress made from the last inspection.
- 2.37. Areas for further development in this academic year include:
- a) Ensure that observations of teaching, learning and assessment concentrate on the progress that learners are making.
 - b) Consider what managers need to record from their observations of teaching, learning and assessment.
 - c) Implement the new management information system to improve the timeliness of data returns and to assist with better forecasting of retention and achievement.
 - d) Improve initial assessment processes so that learners are more appropriately placed on accredited learning courses.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1. The London Borough of Merton undertook an extensive consultation process before deciding upon its commissioning model. All options of delivery were considered and the new model has achieved financial sustainability and a more developed curriculum to better meet the needs of Merton residents.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. Feedback and evaluation is gathered from all learners. Learner feedback is very high with 99% of learners rating teaching and learning as good or above.
- 4.2. A tutor survey was undertaken across providers to identify tutor support needs and to gather their views. Actions from this survey are incorporated into the service and provider's Quality Improvement Plans (QIP).
- 4.3. Ofsted have published proposals to replace the current Common Inspection Framework (CIF) with the Education Inspection Framework (EIF). The new framework is likely to be used for the next inspection of the adult learning service.

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1. The Adult Learning Service Plan was reviewed at the Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel on 9 January 2019 and details key project and timelines.

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. Merton Adult Learning relies solely on its grant received from the ESFA and any other external funds it can draw on. The full ESFA allocation of ££1,253.550 was spent in 2017/18.
- 6.2. From the 2019/20 academic year onwards funds will be devolved from the ESFA to the Mayor of London and new commissioning principles are being established. There are unlikely to be substantial changes in grant arrangements to begin with. The Mayor of London has produced his 'Skills for Londoners Strategy' that sets out his plans for the development of adult and community learning along with wider thinking around the further education sector.
- 6.3. All adult learning provision is delivered in the borough at community venues and arranged by providers.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. The main statutory basis for the adult learning 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.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. A significant proportion of Adult Learning's investment is on those most socially and / or economically disadvantaged whilst providing a broad range of learning opportunities to develop all resident's skills. Focussed programmes are developed that identify priority needs and use a wide range of sources to inform commissioning principles.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. No implications identified for the purpose of this report.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. No implications identified for the purpose of this report.

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

- None included

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