

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

**Date: 17 March 2020**

Wards: All

## **Subject: Merton Adult Learning Annual Report 2018/19 (academic year)**

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

Lead member: Councillor Eleanor Stringer; Cabinet Member for Schools and Adult Education

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

### **Recommendations:**

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1. That the Scrutiny Panel review and discuss the progress over the last year of the Adult Learning provision in the borough.
  2. That the Scrutiny Panel review the good outcomes from the Ofsted inspection of the service in October 2019.
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## **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1. Since August 2016 Merton's Adult Learning Service has been operating in a commissioning model. The strategic rationale for moving to a commissioning model was to ensure that education grants received maximised 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. A refreshed set of strategic objectives for the service were agreed by Cabinet on 27 January 2020:
- 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. In October 2019 Merton Adult Learning Service was subject to a full inspection by Ofsted under the new Education Inspection Framework (EIF) and were the first borough in London to be inspected under the new framework. The inspectors noted the good progress made since the previous inspection and awarded the service 'Good' in all six judgment areas. The Ofsted inspectors noted that, "Leaders and managers ensure

that learners benefit from high quality courses. They pay close attention to planning a curriculum that meets the social, economic and health priorities of the borough.”

## **2 DETAILS**

### **2.1. Adult Learning Strategy**

2.2. Earlier this year Cabinet agreed the refreshed strategic objectives for the Adult Learning Service. The objectives are to:

- Use an evidence based approach to commissioning to ensure the fullest return on investment.
- Embrace technological developments and support residents through the delivery of courses that improve learners’ economic and digital opportunities.
- Deliver courses to improve the health and wellbeing of our residents and reduce social isolation.
- Continue to provide popular courses whilst expanding provision for families to encourage intergenerational learning.
- Increase the quality and number of courses in employability and ensure that a thread of employability and life skills is weaved into all courses.
- Provide targeted courses for adults to improve literacy and / or numeracy skills to enable learners to participate more fully socially and / or economically.
- Further develop the range of courses for learners with learning difficulties and / or disabilities to enable them to live as independently as possible to improve their wellbeing and life chances.
- Tailor the learning journey for all learners from beginning to end so that they progress onto new opportunities.
- Deliver excellent teaching and learning across providers and work collaboratively with them to ensure that best practice is shared and embedded in course provision.

### **2.3. Providers**

2.1. Merton Adult Learning Service commissions a range of providers in the borough to deliver services on its behalf. Contracts are currently in place with the following providers:

- a) South Thames College Group – Main adult learning contract. Accounts for approximately 80% of the grant allocation for Merton.
- b) GSS (Global Solution Services) – Contract 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. Current providers being used include City Lit, MiComputSolutions, The Assessment and Training Centre (TATC) and Adult Training Network (ATN).

## 2.2. **Ofsted Inspection**

2.3. Merton Adult Learning was inspected by Ofsted under the new Education Inspection Framework between 8 and 11 October 2019. Ofsted noted that good progress has been made across all of the provision. They said:

- 2.1. *“Learners gain a range of benefits from their courses. They enjoy the subjects they study. Those facing social isolation build their self-confidence and form new friendships while they study. Learners are taught valuable skills that help increase their self-esteem and play a more active role in the community. Learners who are not confident with English improve their speaking and comprehension.*
- 2.2. *Tutors create a positive work-ethic among learners. It helps learners to develop the behaviours they need to go on to study at a higher level or increase their prospects of employment.*
- 2.3. *Learners receive a range of advice and guidance that enable them to make the right career and study choices. Specialist careers advisors know what learners who have been out of work for some time need to help them seek employment. Tutors help learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their families find the right next step for them.*
- 2.4. *Learners appreciate the high-quality accommodation at the community venues in which lessons take place. They make productive use of the resources at the various community settings. Learners feel safe and know whom to approach should they have any concerns.*
- 2.5. *Tutors are experienced, knowledgeable and well qualified in their subjects. They have high expectations for their learners.*
- 2.6. *Leaders and managers ensure that learners benefit from high-quality courses. They pay close attention to planning a curriculum that meets the social, economic and health priorities of the borough. For example, learners with LDD benefit from courses such as cookery, information and communication technologies and gardening.*
- 2.7. *Leaders and managers work well with local partners to shape and deliver the curriculum offer. They work with subcontractors who offer courses that meet their curricular ambitions.*
- 2.8. *Effective governance has resulted in leaders working well together to improve the quality of the curriculum.*
- 2.9. *Leaders and managers place a suitable priority on safeguarding. Leaders are thorough in checking the safeguarding arrangements at subcontractors before working with them. Staff are appropriately trained in safeguarding and the ‘Prevent’ duty. When they need to act to safeguard learners and promote their welfare they do so promptly and effectively.”*

2.10. Improvement actions have been incorporated into this year's Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) and formulate part of the continuous improvement of the service.

2.11. **Performance**

2.12. The table below summarises end of academic year performance:

Measure	Total Academic Year 2017/18	Target	Total Academic Year 2018/19	Trend
Number of unique learners funded by the ESFA	2,032	1,983	1,841	▼
Number of enrolments funded by the ESFA	3,598	3,691	3,697	▲
Overall achievement on accredited courses	74%	85%	87%	▲
% of new learners per annum	71%	50%	Pending	▼
% of learners from deprived wards	29%	27%	30%	▲
% retention rate per annum	91%	93%	97%	▲
% of end of course evaluations where teaching and learning is rated as good and above	99%	95%	99%	▶
Average cost per learner	£374	£241	£375	▲

2.13. Learner numbers decreased slightly in 2018/19 although enrolment numbers are up. To improve learner numbers for 2019/20 Merton Adult Learning have commissioned a number of new providers to deliver community based courses in priority areas of the borough. These new providers should improve performance of unique learners, enrolments, new learners and learners from deprived wards.

2.14. The percentage of learners from deprived wards has increased in line with the strategic objectives of the service and further courses will be delivered in these wards in 2019/20 onwards.

2.15. Achievement rates have significantly increased across the provision in the vast majority of areas and are well above national average. Performance reflects the high level of support and improvement in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and was validated in the recent Ofsted inspection.

2.16. 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.

2.17. Progression pathways have been developed to complement the commissioned provision and to maximise the wider offer provided by other training providers in the borough.

2.18. The average cost per learner has increased this year due to learner number targets not being met and price increases for some courses commissioned.

2.19. 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.

### **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. The service is working to improve the information it records to track learners progression onto new courses or onto new employment opportunities. A new performance measure will be included in next year's reports to measure progress in this area.

### **5 TIMETABLE**

- 5.1. The Adult Learning Service Plan was reviewed at the Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel on 6 February 2020 and details key project and timelines.

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

- 6.1. Merton Adult Learning relies solely on external grants to provide its provision. From the 2019/20 academic year the majority of the grants are now administered by the GLA and their allocation for Merton this year is £1,360,577. A smaller grant for out of London learners is administered by the ESFA of £36,710.

### **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**

- Ofsted Inspection of Merton Adult Learning 8 – 11 October 2019