

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 19 September 2016

Wards: All

Subject: Adult Learning Commissioning Progress Report

Lead officer: Simon Williams

Lead member: Councillor Nick Draper

Contact officer: Anthony Hopkins

Recommendations:

- A. That Cabinet agree the 3-year strategic aims for the service.
- B. That Cabinet note the progress made with the commissioning of adult education services and the new arrangements.

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report outlines the 3-year strategic aims for adult learning in the London Borough of Merton. These aims are underpinned by the commissioning principles established by Cabinet.
- 1.2. 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. Following the Cabinet decision on 16 February 2015 to move to a commissioning model for adult education, officers have been working to implement this decision and this report provides an update on progress made.
- 1.3. From 1 August 2016 the majority of adult learning services are now delivered by South Thames College with the majority of the provision delivered out of their Merton campus. The award was made under the procurement of Lot 1 – Main Services. Lot 2 - Employability and Lot 5 – Family Learning are now being delivered by Groundwork London.
- 1.4. A new apprenticeship scheme (Lot 4) will be established and launched by the end of the calendar year. The learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LLDD) provision (Lot 3) will continue at this time to be delivered in house at community venues.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1. **3-year Adult Learning Strategy**
- 2.2. 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.

- 2.3. 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.
- 2.4. 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.
- 2.5. 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.
- 2.6. 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.

2.7. Robust contract and performance recording mechanisms have been established. Performance measures are embedded into our quality management processes and contracts. The new key performance indicators (KPI's) are:

1. Number of unique learners per annum (i.e. regardless of number of courses / modules)
2. Number of new learners per annum (not registered as learner in previous year)
3. Number of completers (% retention rate per annum)
4. % overall success rate of accredited courses per annum
5. % of end of course evaluations where teaching and learning is rated as good or above
6. % of learners from deprived wards
7. Value for money: average cost per learner

2.8. 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.

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

- Community profile information including socio-economic data.

- Information on the current provision including attendance numbers, achievement and future demand.
- Government direction and the steer of our funders and inspectors.

2.10. **Commissioning Update**

2.11. **Lot 1 – Main Services**

2.12. South Thames College officially started as the new provider for the main adult skills contract from 1 August 2016 and on the same day all staff within scope transferred to the new provider.

2.13. South Thames are preparing themselves for the start of the new course programme which begins in September. The new course curriculum was published online in June 2016 and enrolments have been steadily increasing since then. Ongoing marketing campaigns and engagement continues to raise awareness of the new provision including student open days.

2.14. **Lots 2 and 5 – Employability and Family Learning**

2.15. Groundwork London has published their course curriculum and their provision will be delivered in a variety of community venues. A series of outreach and engagement activities are in place to encourage participation.

2.16. **Lot 4 – Apprenticeships**

2.17. Officers are currently engaging with a wide range of providers and partners in order to gain a better understanding of the specific needs for the borough. A new apprenticeship scheme that complements the wider Merton offer will be established by the end of the calendar year.

2.18. **Lot 3 – Learners with Learning Difficulties and / or Disabilities**

2.19. A suitable supplier could not be identified during the procurement stages and the provision will remain directly delivered in community venues for the 2016/17 academic year. These arrangements will remain under review.

How this meets the Cabinet’s commissioning principles

2.20. Cabinet agreed a set of commissioning principles on 16 February 2016. The information below sets out how the commissioning principles are being met:

- That commissioning should look to continue the same breadth of courses currently provided. This does not mean that the courses must be the exact same year to year as needs change but that the breadth and variety should be maintained.

The full breadth of courses has been retained and in some areas (e.g. LLDD, maths and English) the provision has been expanded. The only exceptions are where demand has reduced and courses are no longer viable to run.

- That courses should continue to be delivered within the borough.

All of the provision apart from some selected apprenticeship opportunities will be delivered in the borough at a range of community

venues. Extra emphasis has been placed on providing additional provision in the east of the borough to increase resident take up.

- That the economic development and skills agendas of the council should be prevalent through the commissioning process.

This is integral to the delivery of the 3-year development strategy and will also reflect the Skills Funding Agency priorities and the emphasis on skills and employability objectives highlighted by Ofsted.

- That TUPE regulations will be followed and every effort made to retain the highly valued tutors.

TUPE applies as a matter of law to all employees and has been adhered to in all transfer matters. The vast majority of tutors have been retained and those not retained is due to business as usual reorganisations where demand for courses has significantly reduced and is being managed through.

- That the environment and support of each provider should be assessed as part of the commissioning process.

Engagement with learners is a key part of the new delivery model to ensure that they are well supported and appropriately placed on courses. Each community learning venue has a detailed risk assessment completed for it and all the venues adhere to the council's safeguarding policies. Particular emphasis is also being made to provide additional support for LLDD learners including working with key partner agencies. Assessment of venues is a key part of ongoing contract management arrangements.

- That adults with disabilities and their carers should be involved in the commissioning process for courses specifically tailored for them.

We have engaged with learners and carers throughout the process through a variety of formal and informal channels. Communication is ongoing including regular dialogue with organisations such as MENCAP, Merton Centre for Independent Living, Merton Carers and with our own key in house teams such as Adult Social Care and Transport.

- That discussion about the provision of facilities for art and craft courses should involve user representatives from those courses.

The new course curriculum ensures the continuation of specialist arts such as stained glass, pottery and upholstery through asset transfer. This position has been communicated to learners and staff through various channels including noticeboards, website, presentations and newsletters. The tutors who are responsible for the delivery of the courses have also been integral to the establishment of the new systems and have used various channels to keep learners involved and informed.

- That a focus on wellbeing and aging well and on helping learners to gain employment should be key elements of the commissioning process to go alongside any focus on qualifications and learning.

The future curriculum will have a balance of vocational and non-vocational, accredited and non-accredited learning with an increased focus on outcomes.

- That hobbies, crafts and non-vocational skills courses should still be commissioned in line with SFA funding.

These courses continue to form part of the course offer whilst identifying the need to rebalance in line with local and national priorities to improve employability skills within the provision. The future establishment of clubs as opposed to courses should also assist with the ongoing sustainability of this provision.

- That fees should be set by the Council as part of the commissioning process and controlled accordingly.

All course fees are frozen for the new academic year and the new providers are continuing to honour the previous concessionary pricing structure. The Council will continue to monitor providers' fee structures closely.

- That effort should be made to ensure provision is spread around the borough and not just located at one site, although quality and cost will remain key considerations.

The new course provision will be delivered in a range of community venues and the focus is on areas where there is the greatest need. The main bulk of the provision will be delivered at South Thames College's Merton Campus where there are excellent learning facilities and specialist equipment to support with some of the courses.

- That, where possible, services should be commissioned with not-for-profit organisations.

All three lots awarded are being delivered by not-for-profit organisations whilst the LLDD provision continues to be delivered in house.

- That the outcomes for learners should be closely monitored to ensure that job prospects, well-being, support for vulnerable learners and safeguarding aspects are all considered as part of the commissioning cycle.

This is all incorporated into the development strategy and contract arrangements with particular emphasis on ensuring that learner progression is better tracked.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1. The Council has previously considered and explored a range of different options for future delivery before deciding upon a commissioning approach. The award to the new providers of adult learning services has been completed under a competitive procurement exercise and awards were based on quality and value for money.

- 3.2. A new apprenticeship program will be in place by Christmas whilst the provision for learners with learning difficulties and / or disabilities will continue to be delivered in house through community venues. The LLDD provision will be delivered across three main sites – MertonVision, Pollards Hill Library and High Path Day Centre. All three sites are in closer vicinity to learners than the previous provision and further work is scheduled for September to engage and induct learners into using the new venues.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. Consultation took place with the public before the Cabinet decision to move towards a commissioning model. Further consultation and engagement has taken place with stakeholders (learners, staff, interest groups) throughout the commissioning process. This has included a number of invited focus group meetings and open presentations. Feedback from these engagements has fed in to the final service specification.
- 4.2. Formal consultation with staff has taken place as part of the TUPE process.
- 4.3. The Council has retained a small Commissioning Team to ensure that contracts are monitored and delivered to a satisfactory standard and that the provision is meeting the council’s strategic needs. The team will ensure that the 3-year development strategy is implemented. It will also be responsible for future Ofsted inspections and will manage Merton’s investment in learning including completing returns and audits to funding bodies.
- 4.4. With the completion of the new arrangements the Council is seeking to enhance the feedback it gets from learners and will be establishing new systems to improve this.

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1. Our Self-Assessment Report, Ofsted Improvement Action Plans and contracts with our commissioned providers will provide further detail around improvement plans and the 3-year high level development plan will consist of:

Year One (2016/17)	Year Two (2017/18)	Year Three (2018/19)
Embedding of employability, maths and English strands in courses where applicable	Overhaul course provision to rely more on evidence base	Outstanding Ofsted status
Retention of popular current course programme whilst developing new provision	Expanded course provision and a clear definition between courses and clubs	Detailed evidence of progression for all learners onto new opportunities
Launch of new apprenticeship scheme	Development of new online learning offer to complement class based activities	
Good Ofsted status	Launch new progression planning tool	
Expand provision in deprived areas of the borough and /or amongst deprived communities	Bring in other sources of funding and develop new partnerships	

Develop evidence based approach to commissioning	Respond to the Local Area Reviews and implement recommendations	
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- 5.2. Merton Adult Education was subject to an Ofsted inspection in November 2015 in what was the last year of full in house course delivery. Each area of assessment and the overall assessment was rated as “requires improvement” with some areas of good practice identified.
- 5.3. The report highlighted as a strength the Council’s approach to commissioning and the consultation processes in particular. Issues identified by the inspectors have been picked up and reflected in the 3-year development strategy with a particular focus on improving quality, progression and achievement rates.

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. As a result of government cuts to the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) adult education budgets in Merton have been significantly reduced over the last 5 years and future reductions are likely as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review. By 2019 the SFA will be abolished with funding allocated and dispersed by London’s LEP (Local Enterprise Partnership).
- 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 indicative adult education budget for the spending review period is cash flat at a national level and there is no overall reduction to this year’s allocation, which is issued in two parts:
- Adult education block grant - £1,345,317
 - Adult apprenticeships - £28,486
- 6.3. The adult education budget is made up of Skills Funding Agency funding and some other smaller external grants. Budgets are allocated to an academic year and in the last year as a full in house provider (2015/16) the service is reporting an underspend of £184,800. 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 adult education budget is made up of Skills Funding Agency funding and some other smaller external grants. Budgets are allocated to an academic year and in the last year as a full in house provider (2015/16) the service is reporting an underspend of £184,800. 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.
- 6.5. 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.
- 6.6. The indicative contract values, subject to future funding allocations, are:

- Lot 1 Main Services (South Thames College): indicative value £800,000
- Lot 2 Employability Services (Groundwork London): indicative value £18,000
- Lot 5 Family Learning (Groundwork London): indicative value £45,000

6.7. 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. A detailed Equalities Analysis was included as part of the Cabinet report on 16 February 2015. This analysis continues to be reviewed and actions implemented. The Analysis has also contributed to the establishment of the new 3-year development strategy.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. Not applicable.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. A risk register has been maintained for the commissioning project. Now that the new arrangements have been established any remaining risks will migrate into corporate and divisional risk registers.

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

- None included

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 12.1. 16 February 2015 Cabinet Report – Adult Education in Merton - evidence and options for achieving a value for money service
- 12.2. 15 February 2016 Cabinet Report – Merton Adult Education Commissioning