

Committee: Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 16 January 2018

Wards: All

Subject: Adult Learning Annual Report – 2016/17 Academic Year

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:

1. That the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel note progress made with the commissioning of adult learning services.
 2. That the panel reviews the performance of the first full academic year of the model.
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1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report outlines progress made with the new commissioning model for adult learning following the first full year of delivery. Following the Cabinet decision of 16 February 2015 to move to a commissioning model officers have been working to embed the new arrangements with the new services going live in September 2016.
- 1.2. Merton Adult Learning commissioned its provision in five lots. The lots and the contracts were initially awarded to the following providers:
 - Main services (incorporates approximately 80% of the provision) – South Thames College
 - Family Learning – Groundwork London
 - Employability – Groundwork London
 - Apprenticeships – London Borough of Wandsworth
 - Learners with learning difficulties and / or difficulties (LLDD) – In house
- 1.3. Following an initial period of settling into the new structure performance has strengthened across most of the provision and where underperformance has been identified this is being addressed through contract management processes. Initial figures for the 2017/18 academic year indicate that

performance is expected to improve upon 2016/17 figures and this is being monitored closely.

- 1.4. Of the key performance indicators (KPIs) established for the service one has been exceeded, three met, one partially met and three did not achieve the targets set in the first academic year.
- 1.5. In the final year as a college Merton Adult Education was inspected by Ofsted and was found to 'Require Improvement'. The new service was inspected from the 13th to 16th November 2017 and the service still 'Requires Improvement' but with some 'Good' elements. The inspectors acknowledged the hard work of officers and the political commitment of members to ensuring a sustainable adult learning model for the London Borough of Merton. The report demonstrates an upward trajectory in performance since the previous inspection whilst identifying areas that require improvement.

2 DETAILS

2.1. Adult Learning Strategy

2.2. The new strategic aims for the service were agreed at Cabinet on 19 September 2016.

2.3. 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.

2.4. 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.

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. **Main services contract – South Thames College**

2.7. South Thames College published their agreed course provision in July 2016 for the upcoming academic year. Following initial challenges around internal processes and marketing, enrolments improved in terms 2 and 3 and are expected to improve in this academic year.

2.8. Part of the strategic aims of the service is to recalibrate the course provision with a greater proportion of courses now being spent on improving people's social, health and economic status. The new provision has a focus on maths, English and employability skills being embedded into all of the course provision, where applicable. Demand has reduced for some of the more traditional community learning courses and are no longer provided. These courses have been replaced by new courses that incorporate an evidence based approach to commissioning, utilising the latest health, social and economic data to inform commissioning decisions.

2.9. The quality of the course provision is improving but further work is still required. This is notable in areas where concerns were highlighted previously such as GCSE Maths where there was a 6% increase in achievement against a backdrop of falling results nationally. Teaching assessment and quality are particular areas for further development and are being addressed through contract management processes.

2.10. Following the merger of South Thames College with Kingston and Carshalton Colleges the Merton Campus site has reverted back to being called Merton College from October 2017.

2.11. **Family learning and employability contracts – Groundwork London**

2.12. Whilst relatively small in value both contracts have underperformed and measures have been undertaken by the Adult Learning team to address these. Despite giving ongoing support to the contractor a failure to meet the requirements of the contract has led to no further work being commissioned.

2.13. In the interim some of the provision is being delivered by South Thames College and some smaller providers. The Merton Adult Learning team has awarded contracts to bring in new providers for term 2 of this academic year.

2.14. **Apprenticeships contract – London Borough of Wandsworth**

2.15. Whilst only a fraction of overall spend this contract has the highest potential for growth. Apprentices have been assigned to employers in the borough. Feedback so far on the quality of the learning and support has been good and contract performance is good.

2.16. **Learners with learning difficulties and / or difficulties (LLDD) – In house**

2.17. The contractor who was due to manage the LLDD service pulled out shortly before the new provision was to go live. Whilst this caused challenges the team has managed to not only maintain the service but make several improvements to the course provision with a greater focus on progression.

2.18. During the last academic year smaller contracts were awarded to other providers to complement the core provision and were used as a way of warming the market up for future procurement. For 2017/18 approximately 50% of the provision will be delivered in house with the remainder being delivered under contract to Richmond Adult and Community College (RACC).

2.19. The LLDD provision whilst regarded as a weakness in the previous Ofsted inspection was identified as an area of strength in the recent inspection.

2.20. **Self-Assessment Report**

2.21. Adult and community learning providers are required to complete a self-assessment of their performance for each academic year. The 2016/17 self-assessment rates the overall performance of the service as ‘Good’. A summary of the self-assessment strengths and weaknesses is:

Strengths	Areas for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong strategy to ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of Merton • Robust contract management and quality processes which are improving the provision’s quality • Strong focus on improving teaching and learning • Improved governance arrangements • High levels of learners enjoy their courses and progress well • High achievement levels on vocational and GCSE courses • Good range of employability and careers support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of teaching in some areas still needs improving • Information on the impact of careers/employability courses and progression • Increase the number of courses within community venues by main provider.

2.22. **Ofsted**

2.23. The recent Ofsted inspection determined that the service still ‘Requires Improvement’. The Ofsted inspection covers a two-year period. The new service has been operating for one year and the report shows an upward trajectory since the last Ofsted inspection whilst acknowledging that more work needs to be done.

2.24. The grading for each area is:

- **Leadership and Management:** Requires Improvement

- **Outcomes for Learners:** Requires Improvement
- **Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment:** Requires Improvement
- **Personal Development, Behaviour & Welfare:** Good

2.25. Strengths identified from the inspection are:

- Leaders and managers have taken effective steps to restructure the service to secure the long-term future of adult education for local residents.
- Provision for learners with learning difficulties and / or disabilities (LLDD) has been identified as a strength by the inspectors. Inspectors in the previous inspection had raised concerns about this provision.
- Leaders and managers have successfully changed the subjects offered to meet the needs of local residents. In doing so, more learners access courses in order to gain employment.
- Achievement in GCSE's for English and mathematics qualifications has improved and is high despite a national decline in these subject areas.
- The quality of community learning courses is high and learners produce work to a high standard.

2.26. Areas for improvement are:

- On some courses leading to qualifications, the proportion of learners who successfully complete their studies is low and declining.
- Teaching, learning and assessment needs improvement and tutors do not use the assessment of learners' skills well enough to teach lessons to meet the needs of all learners.
- Managers do not ensure that their evaluation of the quality of the provision is matched closely enough to the evaluation by managers at their main subcontractor.
- Staff do not provide learners with enough information about how to keep themselves safe and the risks posed by extremism and radicalisation.

2.27. The Adult Learning Service acknowledges that further work is required in order to improve the quality of the provision and plans are well underway to improve. It identifies that all areas of the provision can be further improved but is in the process of challenging some of the findings for outcomes for learners along with leadership and management with Ofsted.

2.28. **Local Area Review (LAR)**

2.29. Merton Adult Learning has been actively contributing to the adult and community learning (ACL) LAR review. From 2019/20 funding for ACL will

be devolved to the Mayor's office who are completing a review of how they will commission funding across London. A range of options are being considered with announcements on future funding arrangements expected in February 2018.

3 PERFORMANCE

3.1. A summary of performance against the newly developed KPI's for the first full academic year of the service are:

Measure/Indicator Details	Total Academic Year 2015/16	Total Academic Year 2016/17	Target 2016/17	Status
Number of Unique Learners Funded by the ESFA	1983	1850	1983	Unmet
Number of Enrols Funded by the ESFA	3691	3504	3691	Partially Met
Overall Success Rate Accredited Courses % (Annual)	83%	74%	85%	Unmet
% of New Learners per Annum	59%	73%	50%	Exceeded
% of Learners from Deprived Wards	28%	29%	27%	Met
% Retention Rate per Annum (Number of Completers)	98%	96%	93%	Met
% of end of course evaluations where teaching and learning is rated as good or above	98%	99%	95%	Met
Value for money (average cost per learner) (Annual)	£381	£285	£241	Unmet

3.2. 1,850 learners enrolled on 392 courses in 14 venues in Merton in 2016/17. 62% of learners identified themselves as being from a black or minority ethnic (BAME) group, which was a significant increase from the previous year. 29% of learners came from the 8 most deprived wards in Merton

3.3. There was an increase in enrolment by younger learners than in previous years:

- 31% of learners were in the age range 18-34
- 43% of learners were in the age range 35-54
- 26% of learners were over the age of 55
- 12% of learners identified themselves as having a learning difficulty or disability

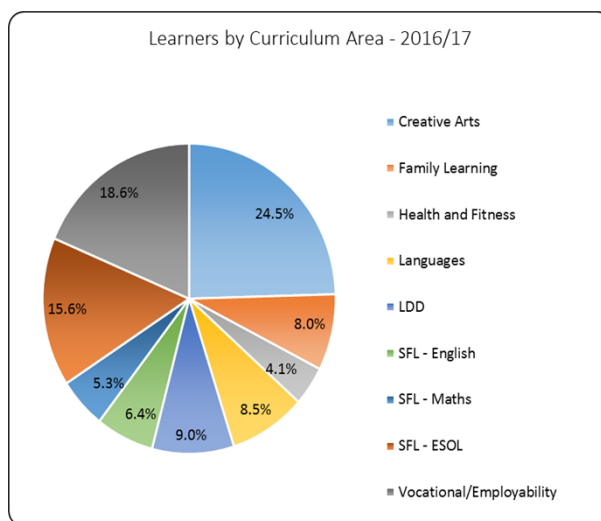
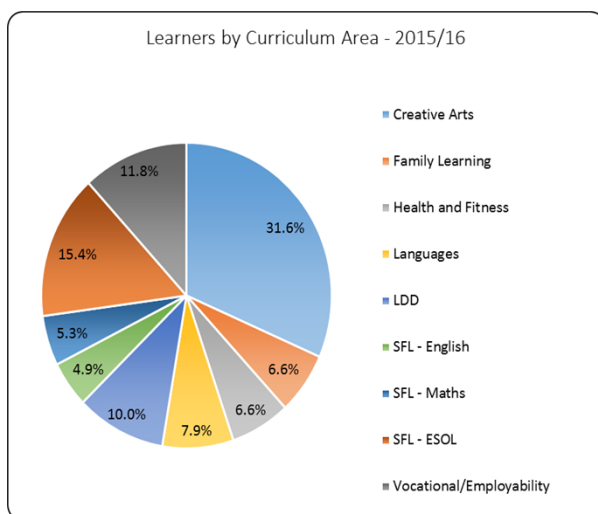
3.4. Where performance around learner numbers and enrolments did not meet targets this is mainly attributable to underperformance within the Groundwork London contracts and where we no longer commission as much

community learning for subjects such as art (e.g. there were 225 less enrolments on upholstery courses in 2016/17 as opposed to 2015/16).

- 3.5. Merton Adult Learning has strategies in place to improve performance for the 2017/18 academic year including commissioning to a wider breadth of providers and managing existing providers marketing and communications more closely. Enrolments are already 30% up on last year (*YTD 31 October 2017*).
- 3.6. Success rates on accredited courses are generally good and above national rates. Areas for improvement are in some parts of the ESOL provision (mainly reading and writing) and functional skills.
- 3.7. The change in the breadth of courses provided is demonstrable through these tables:

- 3.8.
- 3.9.
- 3.10.
- 3.11.

4



CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. Merton Adult Learning runs an annual learner voice consultation. There was an increase in responses in 2016/17 and the results showed that:
 - 99% of learners rated the teaching as good to excellent.
 - 98% of learners rated the support received with their learning as good to excellent.
 - 98% of learners reported an increase in confidence as a result of attending a course.
 - 85% reported improved health and / or wellbeing.
 - 88% improved skills for work or volunteering.
- 4.2. The Ofsted Learner View survey, which was collated as part of the 2017 inspection, also showed high levels of satisfaction:
 - 100% felt the course/programme met their needs.
 - 98% received the support they needed to help them progress.
 - 100% were treated fairly.
 - 98% of lessons/training sessions are well taught.

- 93% said their course/programme is preparing them for their chosen next steps (e.g. employment, another course, university and so on).
 - 98% would recommended Merton Adult Learning to a friend.
- 4.3. Further work is being undertaken by Merton Adult Learning to improve feedback from learners including further development of the new learner forum. Apart from the annual surveys and end of course evaluation feedback is also sought by Adult Learning staff through classroom observations and lesson walk throughs.
- 4.4. An Advisory Panel has been established to seek independent input and scrutiny of the service and to ensure that it is achieving its strategic aims. The Advisory panel includes representatives from the business community, the voluntary sector, council officers and members along with the commissioned providers. The Advisory Panel meets on a termly basis.

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1. The Merton Adult Learning Service Plan outlines key dates and milestones.
- 5.2. For the main provider contract with South Thames College the contract is now into the second year of a 3+1+1 contract. A review of performance is currently underway and recommendations for future procurement will be finalised in early 2018.

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. As part of the commissioning of the adult learning service the college at Whatley Avenue was closed in July 2016 and handed to Children's, Schools and Families for use as a temporary school.
- 6.2. Courses are predominantly delivered at Merton College although an increasing proportion of courses is delivered in the east of the borough in venues such as libraries, day centres and community centres.
- 6.3. The ESFA grant for Adult Learning in 2016/17 was £1,345,317. For 2017/18 the budget remains flat with expected changes in the next few years when adult and community learning budgets for London are devolved to the GLA.
- 6.4. Last year's allocation was not fully spent, which is mainly attributable to lower than expected transition costs and underperformance of contractors in some areas. Figures would suggest that this underspend is not expected to reoccur in 2017/18 with enrolment numbers already up. Also, costs for LLDD provision have increased and are expected to utilise the budget more fully along with new provision being delivered at venues such as the Gables.
- 6.5. The October budgetary return reported an underspend of £6,000. This underspend is attributable to the fees collected for in house provision for LLDD.

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.
- 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 learning learners.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. Part of the Adult Learning Strategy for the borough is to focus resources for those most in need of improving their social, health or economic status. In keeping with 'Bridging the Gap' significant resources are focussed on provision for residents in the east of the borough. Commissioning has enabled more courses to be delivered for these groups.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. None identified.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. None identified.

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. Commissioning Progress Report – Cabinet, 16 September 2016

12.2. Commissioning Progress Report – Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel, 15 March 2017