

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 16 January 2023

Wards: All

Subject: Merton Adult Learning Strategy 2023 - 2026

Lead officer: John Morgan; Interim Director of Community & Housing Department

Lead member: Councillor Sally Kenny; Cabinet Member for Education & Lifelong Learning

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

Recommendations:

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1. That the Merton Adult Learning Strategy 2023 – 2026 is reviewed and adopted by Merton Council
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1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report outlines the strategic objectives and priorities of Merton's Adult Learning Service for the next four years. A delivery plan of the activity to meet the strategic objectives has been included in Appendix 1.
- 1.2. The new Adult Learning Strategy plays an important role in delivering the Council's priorities of:
 1. Civic Pride;
 2. Building a sustainable future;
 3. Borough of sport.
- 1.3. As part of the refresh of the Cabinet priorities the following activities have been identified where Adult Learning will play a key role:
 1. Achieving good or outstanding education for all.
 2. Develop a green skills course offer.
 3. Increase the number of residents from low pay into good well-paid jobs.
- 1.4. The London Borough of Merton is committed to providing high quality and sustainable adult learning to improve the social, economic, health and wellbeing outcomes 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.
- 1.5. 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.
- 1.6. A refreshed set of strategic objectives for the service were previously agreed by Cabinet on 27 January 2020 and the new strategy developed has more emphasis on progression opportunities into better paid employment along

with developing new curriculum areas such as green skills. There is also a renewed focus on improving residents key skills in areas such as English, Maths and digital skills.

2 DETAILS

2.1. Background

2.2. 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.

2.3. 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."*

2.4. Since the last strategy the Adult Learning Service has continued to move forward with evolving its curriculum offer. It responded well to the challenges of moving a significant proportion of its delivery online during the pandemic and developing new methods to engage with learners to help them achieve and progress.

2.5. In the last complete academic year (2021/22) 1,836 learners enrolled on 362 courses.

2.6. Established partnerships have helped the service to overhaul its curriculum offer. The flexibility in the model has meant that the service has been able to quickly adapt to changing resident demands for training and skills. It has also been successful in applying to the Greater London Authority (GLA) for additional funds and unlike some other authorities it has continued to see its core grant increase. This investment has been used to commission additional courses in priority subjects and develop new provision.

2.7. As a commissioning service the model has evolved since the last strategy and 11 providers are currently engaged in delivering adult learning in the borough. Within this provision there is a particular emphasis on delivery in the east of the borough and engaging with those furthest from learning.

2.8. Mayor's Academies Quality Mark

2.9. The Mayor of London has recently launched an accreditation scheme to recognise high quality training provision across London. Merton Adult

Learning have been successful in achieving the Mayor's Academies Quality Mark for their Digital Skills provision.

2.10. The Quality Mark identifies and celebrates high-quality skills provision and is part of a London-wide programme to help cement the economic recovery across the capital. Merton Adult Learning are one of the first adult learning providers to receive this recognition. The service had to show that their training provision was industry relevant, was closely aligned with employers' needs and promoted and supported the creation of good work opportunities.

2.11. **Skills for Londoners Strategy**

2.12. Merton Adult Learning is fully funded via a grant from the Greater London Authority (GLA) along with a smaller grant funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) for learners who do not live in a London borough. The GLA have been administering the main part of the grant since 2019 as part of the government's plans around devolution.

2.13. Since administering the grant the GLA have established a strategy for how the funding should be used, which fall under 3 key priority areas:

1. Empower all Londoners to access the education and skills to participate in society and progress in education and work;
2. Meet the needs of London's economy and employers now and in the future;
3. Deliver a strategic city-wide technical skills and adult education offer.

2.14. **Merton Adult Learning Strategy 2023 - 2026**

2.15. The London Borough of Merton is committed to providing high quality and sustainable adult learning to improve the social, economic, health and wellbeing outcomes 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.

2.16. 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.

2.17. To deliver our strategy, the following objectives have been developed:

1. Further develop our evidence-based approach to commissioning to ensure the fullest return on investment.
2. Further develop collaboration and partnerships across the employment, voluntary and health sectors to embed the work of adult learning in the community.
3. Deliver a significant proportion of our courses in priority areas in the borough to address inequalities.

4. Increase the range and quality of courses in employability and ensure that a thread of employability and life skills is weaved into all courses.
 5. Adapt courses to address employer's future workforce needs and progress more residents into good work including skills for the green economy.
 6. Embrace technological developments and support residents through the delivery of courses that increase digital opportunities and enable residents to get online safely and confidently.
 7. Deliver courses to improve the health and wellbeing of our residents and reduce social isolation.
 8. Provide popular courses and continue to develop our curriculum to fit the skills needs of residents.
 9. Deliver provision for families to encourage intergenerational learning.
 10. Provide targeted courses for adults to improve literacy and / or numeracy skills to enable learners to participate more fully socially and / or economically.
 11. 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.
 12. Tailor the learning journey for all learners from beginning to end so that they progress onto new opportunities.
 13. Deliver excellent teaching and learning that is learner focussed and enables residents to progress.
 14. Work collaboratively with providers to ensure that best practice is shared and embedded in course provision.
- 2.18. Underpinning our objectives are the following core values for delivering adult learning:
1. Provide a broad range of accredited and non-credited courses to meet market demand and based on evidence and intelligence of future needs.
 2. Make full use of national, regional and local data to understand, target and track the delivery of our services to different parts of the resident population to ensure the widest reach of adult learning.
 3. Ensure all courses are delivered in the borough.
 4. Courses are delivered in an inclusive and welcoming environment in high quality venues that are easy for people to access whilst ensuring the safeguarding of all our learners.
 5. Embed appropriate assessment and selection processes to ensure that course criteria matches learner needs and they progress appropriately following course completion.

6. Learn from, and contribute to, best practice around the country in the field of adult learning and actively seek to embrace new approaches.
 7. Continue to improve the quality of education and develop enhanced systems to manage quality and improve feedback from our learners.
 8. Clear pathways are established, recorded, and monitored to enable progression of learners onto new courses, employment opportunities and / or improved health and wellbeing as appropriate.
 9. 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.
- 2.19. Areas for development in the new Adult Learning Strategy focus on an increase in the delivery of key work skills courses including English, Maths, digital skills and ESOL. The curriculum also includes new subjects such as green skills to provide training to equip residents for careers in the green economy, an area of employment that is expected to significantly increase over the next ten years. The action plan in Appendix 1 outlines the core work programme for the next four years.
- 2.20. The London Borough of Merton pays all its employees above the London Living Wage. It has recently pledged its commitment to becoming an accredited London Living Wage employer. As part of the accreditation process it is working with its contracted providers to achieve London Living Wage for all their employees.
- 2.21. This is an important commitment for the borough and shows an example of the Council leading in terms of identifying and championing good work opportunities. This commitment sits well with the new Adult Learning Strategy as the service increases its work with employers and will work with residents who are currently in low skilled and / or low paid roles to support them into pathways to good work.
- 2.22. Strengthening partnerships with other training providers and educational facilities, including further and higher education, is also a priority so that a more joined up approach is taken to improving resident's skills for employment and personal development. The Adult Learning Service will support the council to better utilise its apprenticeship levy.

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. The model has also seen the quality of the provision significantly increase with all areas of provision judged as 'Good' in the last Ofsted inspection and with the service continuing to strive for 'Outstanding' in all areas.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. Feedback and evaluation is gathered from all learners. Learner feedback is very high with 96% 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 and more details regarding activity are included in the delivery plan.

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1. The attached Adult Learning Strategy Delivery Plan (Appendix 1) outlines the key projects to be undertaken to achieve the strategic aims with dates and milestones. Key actions from the Strategy will be incorporated into the annual service planning exercise and will be published in the Merton Council Business Plan.

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 most of the grants are now administered by the GLA and their allocation for Merton for 2022/23 is £1,515,718. An additional grant has also been received under the Multiply initiative to increase basic maths provision and the allocation for 2022/23 is £73,752. A smaller grant for out of London learners is administered by the ESFA of £38,221.

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 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 of the needs of people with learning difficulties or disabilities.
- 7.3. Whilst there are no specific legal issues or risks arising from the changes outlined in this report in relation to commissioning, Merton must continue to have regard to our overall responsibilities at paragraph 7.2 when deciding on the content of provision being commissioned.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. A significant proportion of Adult Learning’s investment is for 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.
- 8.2. All providers have targets around attracting learners from priority areas of the borough and detailed marketing plans have been developed to address this.
- 8.3. Equalities data shows that women and people from black and ethnic minority backgrounds are most likely to participate in adult learning courses.

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

- Appendix 1 – Merton Adult Learning Strategy Delivery Plan

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