

Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee

24 September 2012



Adult Learning Strategy: 'Learning for Skills, Learning for Life 2011 – 2013'

Joint Report of Lorraine O'Donnell, Assistant Chief Executive and Rachael Shimmin, Corporate Director Children and Adult Services

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee with background information on the development of the Adult Learning Strategy within County Durham prior to an overview presentation.

Background

- 2 Members will recall that as part of the 'Increasing young people's employment opportunities 18-24' Scrutiny Review written evidence was provided in relation to the key messages, priorities and the delivery of the Adult Learning Strategy within County Durham.
- 3 In addition, at the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 29 March 2012 a refresh of the work programme for 2012 – 2014 was considered within the context of the 'Altogether Wealthier' priority theme of the Council Plan 2012 – 2016. As a result of this refresh, it was agreed by members that an overview of the development of the Adult Learning Strategy within County Durham would be included within the Committee's current work programme for 2012-2014.
- 4 In 2010 a review of the Council's Adult Learning Service was undertaken by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE). It identified a number of strengths of the Adult Learning Service (ALS), in particular the provision of an excellent skills for life and family learning programme and a number of weaknesses, such as its management arrangements and the absence of clear priorities and strategic direction for adult learning.

Adult Learning Strategy

- 5 As a result of the findings of the review the Adult Learning Strategy has been developed to shape the new Adult Learning and Skills Service (ALSS), its priorities, delivery mechanisms and strategic direction. The Strategy also aims to give some strategic direction to and gain support from the Service's learning partners both within the Authority as well as Further Education and third sector providers across County Durham.

- 6 The Strategy for Adult Learning is to deliver and commission learning and skills for adults over 19 for County Durham in line with the priorities identified in paragraph 9. Whilst it considers the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) funded delivery, there is a need for clear linkages with Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and other funding sources. It is a Strategy for Durham County Council, but the intention is that it will be the starting point for a wider County wide strategy, adopted by partners and potential providers. The Strategy will bring about a restructure of the service to ensure it is focused on the identified priorities, with a modern curriculum and a leaner, flexible staffing structure.
- 7 The Strategy will have as its focus the implementation of the SFA funded activity, through the Adult Learning Service in Children and Adult Services and in Regeneration and Economic Development and through other providers working on the Council's behalf with some Adult Learning delivered by colleges, the third sector and by social enterprises.
- 8 The County Durham Economic Assessment has identified the County's priority areas of learning, which in the main reflect the national priorities. Therefore in Durham we have developed a programme of Adult Learning which reflects these priorities, whilst also delivering a locally sensitive curriculum focusing on specific local needs for example in literacy and numeracy.
- 9 The Adult Learning service's strategic priorities are:
 - Literacy and numeracy training.
 - First full Level 2 qualifications and a first full level 3 for 19-25 year olds.
 - Training for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities.
 - Training support for the unemployed.
 - Informal adult learning to engage the low-skilled learner.
 - Level 4 qualifications.
 - Progression of learners.
- 10 It is important that the Strategy is seen in the context of the wider skills agenda in the local economy which is led by the County Durham Economic Partnership (CDEP) through the Employment and Skills Executive Group. The Strategy has been presented to this group and the implementation of the Strategy and its corresponding action plans will support the delivery of the County's Economic Assessment People Implementation Plan.

Current position

- 11 The Adult Learning Service strategic policy laid out 11 key actions to complete during the time of the strategy, of which 10 have been implemented. Currently, 8 of those which were implemented are now being evaluated and reviewed, as part of a quality continual improvement process. The action to develop an Adult Learning Commissioning and Franchising framework for learning is nearly complete. It has been developed and is now awaiting approval before implementation.

- 12 The ALSS has worked effectively with external organisations to develop the delivery of its programme. External organisations such as Matrix, OfSTED and the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) have reviewed the service and provision and have given good feedback on progress made.
- 13 The academic year from 1 August 2011 to 31 July 2012 has seen the service undergo major restructure and change yet it has still continued to engage into learning over 11,000 residents of County Durham. The majority of these learners were on courses linked to employability skills and apprenticeships.
- 14 One of the major achievements undertaken by the service in this academic year is the opening of the funding envelope for 16-18 Apprenticeship for the authority's Skills Funding Agency (SFA) contract. Following the production of a robust business case this part of the SFA grant now stands at £75,000, work has been undertaken with the Improving Progression Partnership in order to begin to maximise and grow this contract.
- 15 During early 2012 the service reviewed its current structure and has entered into another restructure to ensure the service can maintain its delivery and commitment to external funding organisations, whilst contributing a saving to the medium term financial plan. This was completed by the end of August 2012 and the service reformed as one team moving to Crook Civic Centre in early September.

Recommendation

- 16 That the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the information provided in the presentation and receive a further update on the development of the Strategy at a future meeting.

Background Papers

Cabinet Report – 2 March 2011 – Adult learning Review - Strategy.
Economy and Enterprise OSC – 29 March 2012 – Refresh of the Work Programme 2012 - 2014.

Contact:	Feisal Jassat	
Tel:	0191 383 3506	E-mail: feisal.jassat@durham.gov.uk
Author:	Diane Close	
Tel:	0191 383 6506	E-mail: diane.close@durham.gov.uk

Appendix 1: Implications

Finance – Funding is reduced and this will impact upon the level of provision possible.

Staffing – There have been staffing implications as the service has undertaken a restructure.

Risk – There are risks around the level of provision possible given the levels of funding available.

Equality and Diversity – An impact assessment has been undertaken as part of the MTFP.

Accommodation – Premises for adult learning are being reviewed.

Crime and Disorder – None

Human Rights – None

Consultation – Consultation on changes to staffing structures have been undertaken.

Procurement – Commissioning arrangements have been made for the services that will not be directly provided by the Adult Learning and Skills Service.

Disability Discrimination Act – None

Legal Implications – None