

**FURTHER EDUCATION
COMMISSIONER ASSESSMENT
SUMMARY**

Warrington Borough Council

FEBRUARY 2015

Assessment

Background

1) Warrington Borough Council's Community Employment Learning and Skills Service provides Apprenticeships and Community Learning within the borough. The service provides Intermediate and Advanced Apprenticeships, the majority of which is delivered to its own staff. There is no sub-contracting of Apprenticeship delivery. It provides non-accredited programmes for adult learners in Community Learning, which is delivered, in its entirety, through a network of local sub-contractors.

2) Following the Skill's Funding Agency's notification that Warrington Borough Council Community Employment Learning and Skills had been graded as inadequate by Ofsted at its most recent inspection, the Minister for Skills decided that the FE Commissioner should assess the position of the college in line with the government's intervention policy set out in '*Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills*'.

3) The FE Commissioner's report is intended to advise the Minister and the Chief Executive of the Funding Agencies on;

a) The capacity and capability of Warrington Borough Council's Community Employment Learning and Skills leadership and governance to deliver quality improvement within an agreed timeframe;

b) Any action that should be taken by the Minister and/or the Chief Executive of the funding agencies to ensure the delivery of quality improvement (considering the suite of interventions set out in '*Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills*'); and

c) How progress should be monitored and reviewed, taking into account the Agency's regular monitoring arrangements and Ofsted's monitoring visits.

Assessment Methodology

4) The FE Commissioner requested that two FE Advisers visit the Warrington Borough Council's Community Employment Learning and Skills over the period 2nd February – 6th February 2015. They received briefing information in advance from the Skills and Education Funding Agencies and met with those with overall responsibility for the service, managers and staff. They also met with subcontracting providers, an external consultant and examined the documentation on the service that was available.

Governance arrangements

5) Governance arrangements currently are poor. Although lead Councillors and senior managers have a clear commitment to apprenticeships and to the role played by community learning in addressing inequalities in the Borough this has not translated into a clear strategy for the service. There has been a lack of effective arrangements to monitor the service and its impact.

6) The Post inspection Action Plan correctly identifies the need for senior leaders to have an expanded understanding of the effectiveness and impact of the service through monthly reports to the directorate management team; the reports are to include performance, achievement and progressions data. The PIAP identifies, as an action, regular briefings to portfolio holders and the Chief Executive. This process should seek to be 'tightened' regarding timing of the briefings, should be in report form and address a scrutiny panel comprising the Chief Executive and relevant members.

7) There is no overall strategy for the delivery of Adult and Community Learning. There has been little, if any, monitoring and analysis of year on year performance by providers and the quarterly partnership meetings have not, to date, been structured. Data management has been an issue although steps have been taken to provide data support from elsewhere in the council. Meetings are now monthly, are agenda driven with minutes, and providers have identified with a new feeling of drive and urgency.

8) Senior staff and Council members recognise that significant improvements need to be made in the management of the service. The Council is currently undertaking an externally led review of its provision and the management and delivery of apprenticeships and community learning moving forward. In both cases it was recognised that there were other significant local providers. There is an understanding that, whilst the Council seeks to maintain its function as a 'champion' of apprenticeships and adult and community learning, it can continue to do so without managing the service. It is keen to manage the process of quality improvement alongside a review with the agency and providers to investigate ways in which the overall service can be better delivered including a refocusing of resources. In the discussions held with senior staff and members including the relevant portfolio holder it became clear that the priority was to establish a provision which matched the needs of its community and which was managed and delivered in the most efficient and effective way.

Leadership and Management

9) The Community Employment Learning and Skills Service of Warrington Borough Council is part of the Human Resources Department and is headed by the Assistant Director of Human Resources who reports to the Deputy Chief Executive. The Service Manager for Employment Learning and Skills, who reports to the Assistant Director of Human Resources, manages a Community Learning Manager and an Apprenticeship Manager. There is an elected member who oversees the service.

10) There have been considerable changes in the leadership and staffing of the service over recent years and these have continued since the inspection in October 2014, with some key roles being filled on an interim or secondment basis, and others not being replaced. The Community Learning Service has not had a permanent Data Officer since November 2013. During this period, the service has lost focus and previously effective quality assurance procedures have been allowed to lapse. At the same time there has been no clear strategy for the Community Learning Service and accountability for performance has not been carried out. As a result, it is recognised that the service has become 'provider led' rather than planned on the basis of the needs of learners. Apart from unstructured quarterly partnership meetings there has been no strategic oversight of the provision and monitoring of provision has been officer led.

11) Operational management is improving. The Service Manager, working with the Community Learning and Apprenticeship managers, has brought some stability, and there are early signs of greater rigour being brought to the management of the service. There was agreement that previous managers often lacked the skills set required to manage sub-contracted provision. Partnership meetings which were previously quarterly and unstructured have now been increased to formal monthly meetings. However, the speed of recovery required would suggest that, in the period leading up to re – inspection, these should be weekly with a forensic focus on the improvement actions identified in the PIAP.

12) An external consultant, with experience of adult and community learning, has been commissioned to undertake a strategic options review of the community learning and apprenticeship provision. The council has subsequently extended their brief to support the implementation of the post inspection action plan (PIAP).

13) Although the Council is using additional internal expertise to augment the Community Learning and Apprenticeship service, it is questionable whether the existing staffing resource is sufficient to provide the range of contract management and quality assurance skills necessary to make the rapid improvements required. The absence of a dedicated resource to manage the data necessary to monitor the performance of the sub-contractors, and to support the self-assessment process, is a concern.

The Quality of Provision

14) The Ofsted Inspection which took place from 14th to 17th October 2014 made the following judgements;

Overall effectiveness – Inadequate

Outcomes for learners –Inadequate

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment – Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management - Inadequate

15) The Self - Assessment Report for 2012/2013 was not sufficiently rigorous. The overall Provider Grade 2 did not equate with the findings of the Ofsted inspection. Sub-contracted providers carried out their own self - assessment which was fed in to the final report. There was no external validation. There is no self -assessment report for 2013/14.

16) A draft post-inspection action plan (PIAP) has been developed and it addresses the key issues identified by Ofsted and the actions required. Leads are identified against each actioned outcome but it needs to ensure that the actions and milestones are 'owned' by providers at the point of delivery. An external adviser has helped to facilitate the drafting of the PIAP and it is now considerably more robust than earlier drafts.

17) Data recovery and management has been poor. Monitoring student performance has been unsatisfactory and progression is not well tracked. Managers and staff have been hampered by systems which make it difficult to produce appropriate reports. IT systems and software should be reviewed to ensure functional timeliness and effectiveness.

Teaching and Learning

18) There is a policy and procedures for the observation of teaching and learning but these do not appear to be aligned with competency procedures. The 2012/13 Self - Assessment

Report graded teaching and learning as 2 (Good) with 3 providers assessing themselves as Grade1 (Outstanding). This was wholly inconsistent with the Ofsted report which reported that too little teaching was good or better. The service would benefit from a fundamental review of its Observation of Teaching and Learning Procedures and should seek external validation of their graded observations including paired lesson observations. This should be identified as a specific focus in the PIAP.

19) The PIAP identifies actions required to improve outcomes for students through the assessment of individual learning needs and the embedding of high standards of English and Maths teaching, the tracking and reporting of learners' progress and monitoring the impact of achievement and progression on to further learning. These actions, as with many of the actions identified in the PIAP require robust data systems to ensure their integrity and credibility.

Conclusions

20) Warrington Borough Council's Community Employment Learning and Skills Service has undergone a period of management change over the last few years during which there has been a loss of focus and a consequent loss of quality. It has seen a year on reduction in funding which has resulted in a need to subsidise the provision.

21) Arrangements have been put in place to strengthen and manage the service until such time as the Council has re-examined the scope and purpose of what it is offering. These arrangements are beginning to have a positive impact but there are concerns over its capacity to deliver the required speed of improvement.

22) Apprenticeships and adult and community learning are seen as an important part of the council's strategy to develop local communities but it is felt that the delivery of qualifications and skills could be better provided by the colleges and other providers in the area. At least one provider already has a direct ACL allocation from the agency.

23) The current situation offers an opportunity to strategically review the provision across the borough for the benefit of learners and it would be helpful for the Council to take the leading role in this. Discussions should be held with the providers and the SFA to take these ideas forward in an appropriate way. This would allow the Council to concentrate on remaining a strategic 'champion for apprenticeships and adult and community learning whilst allowing the resource and delivery to be more efficiently and effectively delivered.

Recommendations from Further Education Commissioner

1. The Council should stop the delivery of apprenticeship training following completion of the current cohort of learners, working with the SFA to ensure a smooth transfer of the provision to alternative high quality providers.
2. The Council should stop the delivery of Adult and Community Learning, working with the SFA to ensure a smooth transfer of the provision to alternative, high quality providers by August 2015.
3. In the interim, the Council should strengthen its leadership and management of the provision in order to implement and monitor an effective Post Inspection Action Plan and drive improvement.
4. The Council should lead a strategic review of Adult and Community Learning and develop a focussed strategic plan for taking the provision forward.
5. The FE Commissioner should undertake a monitoring visit at the end of the spring term to review progress.

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