

Meeting	Cabinet
Meeting date	15th October 2015
Title of report:	Adult and community learning plan 2015-2018
Report by:	Senior adviser post 16 learning and skills

Classification

Open

Key Decision

This is a key decision because it is likely to be significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising one or more wards in the county.

NOTICE has been served in accordance with Part 3, Section 9 (Publicity in Connection with Key Decisions) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012

Wards Affected

Countywide

Purpose

To approve the adult and community learning plan 2015/18

Recommendation(s)

THAT:

- (a) the Adult and Community Learning Service's (ACLS) delivery and outcomes for 2013/2014 be noted;**
- (b) the Adult and Community Plan for 2015/2018 (at appendix a) be approved;**
- (c) the expenditure of the grant allocation for the academic year 2015/16 from the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) against priorities identified be approved; and**
- (b) the Fees Policy for 2015/2016 academic year (at appendix b) be approved.**

Alternative options

- 1 Herefordshire Council contracts out the delivery of Adult and Community Learning. All delivery of learning is done through subcontracts with the council retaining funding for its management of the provision. Alternative delivery options are as follows:
- 2 Direct Delivery – all delivery is done in house by council staff. The council would have to recruit tutoring staff to deliver the learning programmes. The council would be better able to shape and change the provision and direction of the service in order to respond to changing priorities and identified needs. It is also widely acknowledged that Local Authorities know their communities very well, and are better able to link together the identification of gaps and needs with provision and services that can respond.
- 3 The main disadvantage to direct-delivery is the potential redundancy costs if external funding is reduced or withdrawn. Additionally there can be niche areas which require specialist skills and knowledge in order to create provision to meet this need, if the organisation does not have those skills within its team it would be difficult to meet the need. In this instance it would be better to contract with an organisation that already had those niche skills.
- 4 Hybrid – a mixture of both direct delivery and subcontracting. This can vary greatly in the % split between direct and subcontracted provision. The hybrid model can have both the advantages and disadvantages of both direct delivery and sub-contracted models. The extent to which they manifest is largely determined by the percentage of split between direct delivery and subcontracting.
- 5 Herefordshire Council could decide not to deliver adult and community learning and give notice to the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and hand back the contract. There is no guarantee that this funding would be reallocated to another provider in Herefordshire and could result in a loss of £509k to invest in funding education and training provision in our most deprived wards and disadvantaged residents. It would also mean a loss of funding to sub-contractors the majority of whom are local voluntary and community organisations which in turn would lead to job losses. Furthermore in addition there would be redundancy costs to Herefordshire Council.

Reasons for recommendations

- 6 The recommendations are made to ensure effective spend of the SFA grant against relevant government and Herefordshire Council priorities and to set a fair fees policy.

Key considerations

Background

- 7 The community learning funding allocation which includes family learning programmes is historical and goes back to the time when Herefordshire and Worcestershire local authority split. Herefordshire Council was a new unitary authority and an allocation was made nationally. This allocation following a business case was increased in 2004. The amount allocated each academic year of £340k has not changed for 10 years. The Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS)

has invested £210m in community learning nationally every year since 2005. Therefore in real terms it has been eaten away by inflation.

- 8 The adult skills budget (ASB) allocation is based on the previous academic year's performance, national priorities and national funding settlement. 2013/2014 academic year was the first year of ASB delivery for the adult and community learning (ACL) service and the allocation was based on the Formal First Steps allocation from the previous year. Formal first Steps funding became part of the ASB single funding stream in 2013/2014.
- 9 The adult and community learning plan sets out the plans for the delivery of adult and community learning by Herefordshire Council in Herefordshire for the period 2015/2018. The adult and community learning service are funded by the SFA. In 2014/2015 academic year a grant allocation of £540,723 of which £340,972 was for community learning and £199,751 adult skills budget was available to plan, manage and deliver learning. For 2015/2016 the grant allocation is £509k. National government policy has seen the adult skills element of the funding allocation cut by 24% for the academic year 2015/2016.
- 10 For 2013/2014 academic year we engaged 1058 learners on community learning courses with a success rate of 99.5% above benchmark of 91.4%. For the ASB 190 learners were supported with a success rate of 80.45% above the SFA minimum level of performance. 2014/2015 verified data is not yet available.
- 11 There are five recognisable key benefits from participating in adult learning: greater likelihood of finding a job or staying in a job, improvements in health, more likely to volunteer, social value and improving family life chances. Encouragingly unemployment in Herefordshire is falling but we are continuing to work with job seekers to help them to develop their skills and employment opportunities impacting on Herefordshire economy. We target provision at adults with low level skills to support them to increase their Maths, English and ICT skills which have been highlighted as key priorities by local employers. The ICT training supports people to be able to access on-line services essential to Government and Herefordshire Council's digital agenda. Family learning provision is aimed at supporting parents to develop their basic and parenting skills resulting in improving family life chances.
- 12 We work with communities such as Gypsy Roma Travellers, care leavers, adults with low level skills, adults with learning difficulties and or disabilities and others who could without adult and community learning provision be at risk of social exclusion.
- 13 The impact of adult and community learning is irregular and very personal. There is no comparator data as yet. Our challenge is how we document this impact in a clear systematic way. For 2013/2014 we contacted 893 learners to see how they had used the skills that they had gained since leaving their course. 275 (30.9%) responded of which 47.6% progressed onto a further course, 55.6% improved physical/mental health, 38.9% more active in local community, 18% found paid work, 16.3% became a volunteer.
- 14 The skills funding letter (or statement) is published annually by the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) and sets out the government's funding priorities for the adult skills system. It includes information for the Skills Funding Agency to set provider allocations.

- 15 The 2015 to 2016 letter reflects the reforms in 'Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills', published in April 2013, and focuses on delivering the skills that employers and individuals need.
- 16 The government is funding high quality provision that delivers good value for money, and concentrates on young adults aged 19+, the low skilled and those who are unemployed.
- 17 Funding is focussed on qualifications that are part of a regulated framework approved by the Skills Funding Agency. Providers must operate within the terms and conditions of the funding agreement, the funding rules, the performance management rules and the individual learner specification. The funding rules form part of the terms and conditions of funding. The rules set out the requirements that providers must comply with to make sure public funding is protected.
- 18 Herefordshire's adult and community learning service (ACLS) will focus adult skills funding to provide accredited learning, targeted primarily at learners who require up-skilling to improve their employment opportunities.
- 19 Where possible, the delivery of the service will target the localities of Herefordshire to ensure fair access to all learners who have been identified by the engagement process of the contract, or would like to access accredited learning, to improve their chances of employment, or further the opportunities of employed learners subject to eligibility.
- 20 The council does not intend to fund provision above Level 3 or duplicate provision already available from institutions delivering further or higher education within Herefordshire unless a need is clearly identified.
- 21 The overall purpose and objectives for community learning are set by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) in the White Paper 'New Challenges, New Chances'. The SFA requires the community learning allocation of £340,972 to be used to:
- Maximise access to community learning for adults, bringing new opportunities and improving lives, whatever people's circumstances
 - Promote social renewal by bringing local communities together to experience the joy of learning and pride that comes with achievement
 - Maximise the impact of community learning on the social and economic well-being of individuals, families and communities.
- 22 The aim of the Herefordshire ACL Plan is to deploy the SFA funding to ensure that local people have access to a range of appropriate learning opportunities that will contribute to their personal, social, educational and economic development. The strategic aims, objectives and key priorities for 2015-2018 can be found on pages 3 to 7 of the Adult and Community Learning Plan attached at appendix a.
- 23 The services described herein will be delivered using the council's existing multiple supplier framework for adult and community learning. This framework contract was awarded in 2013 in accordance with council contract procedure rules. For further information on how the service is delivered, please refer to pages 11-14 of the ACL plan.

- 24 **Fees Policy** - The community learning curriculum area provides a 'universal offer' (as part of SFA requirements) for community learning. These courses are open to everyone with the exception of courses within the skills for Independent Living (SfIL) contract. In line with SFA and Herefordshire council priorities, learners who can afford to pay should be charged a fee which contributes to the Pound Plus elements of the Community Learning Plan, with the exception of courses within the SfIL contract. Pound plus is a new term that describes how learning providers can show how they are maximising the value of public investment. Pound plus refers to additional income (and savings) generated by providers over and above core income from Government's Community learning funding. This includes income generated through course fees, financial sponsorship, access to accommodation made available at no or reduced cost, the use of volunteer workers, donations of equipment or consumable items, and access to other funding sources or grants. It is up to the individual provider (in this case Herefordshire Council) to set an appropriate fee for these community learning courses. Herefordshire Council's Adult and Community Learning Plan sets out its priorities and its target groups. Emerging from this plan it has established the fees policy for learners on community learning courses at £4.50 per hour. See appendix b for more details of the fees policy.

Community impact

- 25 The ACLS aim is to engage with local people who are least likely to participate in learning and enable them to access a range of high quality learning opportunities, so that they can lead more independent lives, support their families, gain a qualification, get a job, volunteer and become less socially isolated.
- 26 The ACLS works with local partners to deliver a programme of high quality learning, which clearly contributes to the priorities of:
- Herefordshire Council's Corporate Plan (to create and maintain a successful economy; enable residents to be independent and lead fulfilling lives, keep children and young people safe and give them a great start in life, enable residents to live safe, healthy and independent lives);
 - the Health and Wellbeing Strategy vision 'Herefordshire residents are resilient, lead fulfilling lives, are emotionally and physically healthy and feel safe and secure'; and
 - the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership Skills Plan, European Investment Strategy and Strategic Economic Plan.
- 27 In particular the Family Learning programmes support the priorities of the Children and Young People's Partnership by:
- Targeting resources and supporting vulnerable families into learning
 - Improving the emotional and mental health and wellbeing of parents and carers
 - Helping families, parents and carers to help themselves
 - Promoting health and wellbeing e.g. cookery, Nordic walking, coppice crafts
 - Achieving success in life, learning and future employment e.g. English and Maths provision
 - For further information please see pages, 6, 7 and 8 of the ACL plan for links to key national Government and local drivers.
 - Fees Policy - Generating additional income and revenue is central to the objective of driving up participation in community learning within a very

constrained public funding environment. Learners who can afford to pay are charged a fee for community learning of £4.50 per hour with the exception of SfiL courses where 'A consistent Fees Policy is required to ensure that adults within Herefordshire are treated equitably by each delivery partner within the Herefordshire Council's Adult and Community Learning Provider Network. The fees policy for 2015/16 is attached at appendix b and remains unchanged from 2014/2015.

Equality duty

- 28 This report pays due regard to the Human Rights Act, Equality Act 2010 including section 149, the 'General Duty' on public authorities.
- 29 The ACLS seeks to provide high quality learning opportunities that are inclusive and free from discrimination. The service aims to make learning opportunities available across the county particularly focusing on recruiting learners from the most deprived areas of Herefordshire and from key target groups as listed in the adult and community learning plan 2015-2018.
- 30 Equality of opportunity is an important aspect of raising aspirations, self-esteem and achievement. The ACLS aims to provide learning that is safe, accessible and welcoming. Discriminatory behaviour or harassment will not be tolerated.
- 31 As a contracted-out service we require all our providers to comply with the Equality Act 2010 and actively promote equality and diversity in the delivery of ACLS provision, as outlined in the Common Inspection Framework.
- 32 Staff and providers and tutors are supported and developed through equality and diversity mandatory training and through the tutor handbook. Equality and diversity is also embedded within the Observation of Teaching and Learning process.
- 33 Equality and diversity provider performance is monitored against targets, policies and procedures and act on any inequalities highlighted.
- 34 An equalities impact assessment has been carried out and is attached at appendix c.

Financial implications

- 35 The SFA grant for the academic year 2015/2016 is £509,945 and it is expected that this will be fully utilised delivering the services set out in the adult and community learning plan 2015/2018. The adult and community learning service team is fully funded by the SFA grant.
- 36 A consistent fees policy is required to ensure that adults within Herefordshire are treated equitably by each delivery partner within the ACLS provider network. The proposed Fee Policy is attached at appendix b.
- 37 It is proposed that the Fees Policy remains unchanged from the 2014/2015 policy.

Legal implications

- 38 The council is required to comply with all relevant legislation and any statutory guidance issued.

Risk management

- 39 The ACLS manages risk through a risk assessment process. Risks identified for 2015/2018 are:
- Provider underperformance or failure – mitigated by robust contract management process and procedures
 - Poor Ofsted inspection result – mitigated through the high focus on quality improvement within the service.

Consultees

- 40 The adult and community learning plan has been informed by the network of sub-contracted learning providers, the Herefordshire Community Learning Partnership, learner feedback, performance data, government and local priorities.

Appendices

Appendix A Adult and Community Learning plan 2015 -2018

Appendix B Fees Policy 2015-2016

Appendix C Equality Impact Assessment

Background papers

- None identified.