

LIFELONG LEARNING DEVELOPMENT UNIT

PROGRAMME AREA RESPONSIBILITY: COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

CABINET

9TH OCTOBER, 2003

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To support working with the Local Government Association and the local Learning and Skills Council to address the constraints on a small rural-based Adult and Community Learning service in ensuring an equitable access to provision.

Key Decision

This is not a Key Decision.

Recommendations

THAT the work with the Local Government Association to ensure equitable access to provision within a small, rural-based service be supported.

Reasons

A report was presented to Social and Economic Development Scrutiny Committee on 4th September, 2003 on the Adult Learning Inspectorate's inspection of the Council's Adult and Community Learning (ACL) provision, and the proposed actions of the Lifelong Learning Development Unit (LLDU) to address issues arising from the inspection report.

Following the meeting it was proposed that a report be presented to Cabinet, giving an overview of the activities of the Unit, the current funding available and proposals to secure a level of funding appropriate to the service.

Considerations

1. The Council's Lifelong Learning Development Unit was formed following the appointment of the Lifelong Learning Development Officer in April 1999. Since then the unit has developed and its activities broadly fall within three service areas.
 - Provision of adult and community learning courses
 - Supporting the development of organisations within the county to become Adult and Community Learning providers
 - Facilitating and supporting the Herefordshire Learning Partnership and its operational groups (recently merged with the Herefordshire Partnership's Ambition Group)

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Pete Ding, Principal Learning and Recreation Officer on (01432) 260637

2. The scope of the LLDU has recently been a part of a wide-ranging consultation with partner providers and stakeholders. Working with partners to provide a coherent approach to the provision of learning opportunities, the Council's provision is targeted at disadvantaged groups and does not aim to provide a broad based Adult and Community Learning service. It is felt appropriate that the unit does not directly provide courses, but that it should contract through other provider organisations.
3. There is support for the Unit's work in developing and supporting emerging ACL provision. Recent initiatives have seen the Unit supporting the Herefordshire Literacy Project in accessing £99,998 ESF LSC co-financed funding, successfully bidding for £759,800 of LSC Capital funds for the development of the WRVS Community Learning Centre, giving advice and support to a wide range of voluntary organisations, managing a number of delegated grants for learner support, and offering an accreditation route through the Open College Network.
4. A staff restructuring process is currently underway to further underpin the ability to effectively achieve the Unit's objectives. The LSC has been advised, and is supportive of the proposals.
5. Herefordshire Council receives funding (£221,941 August 2003 – July 2004) from the Learning and Skills Council to provide adult and community learning courses (post 16) and for Family Learning. The level of funding received by Herefordshire Council to support adult learning is significantly lower than the National average. This results from current grant allocation levels being based on the previous uptake of available funding by the Herefordshire and Worcestershire LEA.
6. The current LSC regime allocates funds based on the previous year's uptake. The Learning and Skills Council is proposing to move to a formula based funding regime which will directly tie the amount of funding received to the number of students who participate in courses.
7. To augment these funds the LLDU has in the past accessed other funding streams (ESF, GOWM Partnership Funds, LSC LIF). It is currently working in partnership with the LSC and the Herefordshire Partnership in identifying needs and supporting a submission to Advantage West Midlands for funding under the Adult and Community Learning flagship. Should the submission be successful the LLDU will be bidding for funding to increase the number of courses available within its programme.
8. The local LSC is able to make a discretionary payment of up to £61,245 (2003/04) for the support and development of the Herefordshire Learning Partnership. This is currently negotiated on an annual basis, although there is an indication that in future years this may be negotiable for a three-year term.
9. A sum of £38,520 is made available to the LLDU from the Policy and Community budget for the employment of the Principal Learning Officer. The budget for 2003/04 is £271,461. This is funded by: -

LSC - £221,941;	Herefordshire Council - £38,520	Other - £11,000
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51.1% (£138,750) will be spent on course provision, of which £78,000 is ring fenced for Family Learning
10. Officers of the Council recently met with the local LSC and the National LSC to voice concerns that the current level of funding is not effective in meeting need and that movement to formula funding could threaten the level of grant received by the authority, undermining further its ability to deliver an appropriate service. The

identified issues were: -

- The lack of any weighting factor within the formula to accommodate the increased costs of provision to a rural county.
 - The disproportionate level of fixed costs required by a small provider as a proportion of total costs.
 - The disproportionate costs associated with developing a curriculum within a local environment of low delivery capacity.
 - The increased costs associated with providing to the LLDU's particular target groups and the limited opportunity to receive fees income.
 - The costs associated with accessing further funding streams.
 - The threat of significant loss to the capacity building support that the LLDU gives to emerging ACL providers within the County.
 - The effect that low level, short term funding has on the development of human resources within the LLDU.
11. Following on from this meeting, the local LSC will be requesting of the National LSC that the funding regime acknowledges the particular issues that apply to Herefordshire Council's ACL service, and will be proposing that a minimum threshold allocation of £250,000 is granted. This will enable the LLDU to develop both its internal capacity to provide and support quality ACL provision, but also to continue and enhance the ability of the unit to develop and support the capacity of other organisations to offer learning opportunities.
12. It is further proposed that the issues raised within this report are brought to the attention of the Local Government Association for consideration.

Risk Management

No major risks identified.

Consultees

Local Learning and Skills Council.

Background Papers

None identified.