

ADULT LEARNING INSPECTORATE RE-INSPECTION

Report By: Director of Policy and Community

Wards Affected

County-wide.

Purpose

1. To inform the Committee of the progress towards the Adult Learning Inspectorates reinspection of the Council's Learning and Skills Council's (LSC) funded Adult and Community Learning (ACL) provision in 2004.

Financial Implications

2. None.

Considerations

3. A report was submitted to the Social and Economic Development Scrutiny Committee in February 2004 outlining the anticipated processes required to meet the proposed Adult Learning Inspectorates (ALI) re-inspection of the Herefordshire Council Adult and Community Learning provision.
4. The report identified the likely re-inspection period to be between September and December 2004 and that the nominated ALI lead inspector would visit on a quarterly basis to review progress of the Council's Post Inspection Action Plan addressing weaknesses identified within the report published by the Adult Learning Inspectorate in its inspection of January 2003.
5. The report further proposed that issues arising from the Lifelong Learning Development Unit's (LLDU) annual stakeholder meeting, together with the current situation regarding funding be included in a report to a future meeting of the Social and Economic Development Scrutiny Committee.
6. The ALI's lead inspector carried out his first official monitoring visit on 29th March 2004. In reviewing the Post Inspection Action Plan and the supporting evidence the view of the inspector was that in most of the identified areas of weakness some or good progress had been made. It was recognised that staffing appointments following the restructuring of the LLDU would enable further progress against two areas in which it was felt there had been limited progress.
7. A key identified weakness of the 2003 inspection was the insufficient resources for expansion of provision. The inspector recognised the work that had been carried out by the LLDU to address this, albeit that further funding had not as yet been secured. The current position is discussed later on in this report.
8. The indications are that the re-inspection is likely to be in late November or December 2004.

9. The LLDU held its annual Stakeholder meeting on 24th February at which a range of organisations to whom the Unit contracts its provision along with a number of representatives from relevant community organisations and other council services were present. The meeting affirmed the aims and objectives of the Council's Adult Community Learning Provision and in addition raised issues around Equality of Access and Funding. Providers were invited to participate in a further session at the end of the main meeting to provide them with information on the ALI re-inspection process.
10. With respect to the funding situation there have been a number of activities which impact on the resources available to the service.
11. The LSC recently proposed that funding available to Local Authorities in support of their adult and community learning provision would change to a formula-funding model for 2004/05, similar to that in place in the further education sector. Officers of the Council have made representation along with local LSC officers to highlight both the particular situation that Herefordshire Council has with respect to the low level of ACL funding, and of its concerns of the potential negative impact that changes in this regime may have on future funding levels. In addition it was stressed that there needs to be a recognition of the need of a core, minimum level of funding for a service to operate effectively.
12. The LSC response to this and representation from other Authorities has been to delay the implementation of formula funding subject to further consultation. Officers of the LLDU are responding to a request to provide information by June 30th 2004 identifying and quantifying elements of its activities within adult and community learning which do not fit within a formula-funding model.
13. In recognition of the facilitation and support of the Herefordshire Learning Partnership by the LLDU and of key work of the unit in developing the LSC's objectives in widening participation, the local LSC financially supports some core staffing of the LLDU from its Local Initiative Development fund. This is currently negotiated on an annual basis, and is given subject to performance against the Learning Partnerships Development Plan. There is an indication that in future years this may be negotiable for a three-year term.
14. Funding of £50,000 each year for two years has been accessed by the local LSC under the Widening Participation Access fund and has been made available to the LLDU to develop activity to support widening participation in rural areas of the county. It is one of four authorities to benefit from this fund in the West Midlands area. Initial discussions have focussed on developing activity in the golden Valley area with a view to engaging new learners at basic introductory level and to move them into mainstream adult and community learning.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the progress of the Council's post inspection action plan be noted.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Post Inspection Action Plan