

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET 24 JUNE 2010

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

LEAD ACCOUNTABLE BODY FOR INFORMAL ADULT LEARNING

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines the role of the Local Authority as Lead Accountable Body for Informal Adult Learning.

1. Background

- 1.1 Informal Adult Learning was funded by the Learning Skills Council, (LSC). In April 2010 the LSC was dissolved and adult learning will now be managed by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA). Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service (WL&FLS) received funding from Learning and Skills Council for Adult Safeguarded Learning split into categories of personal and community development learning, neighbourhood learning for deprived communities and family learning, approximately £876k per year. Wirral Metropolitan College also receives funding for personal and community development learning, approximately £206k per year. All Adult Learning funding comes via the SFA, from April 2010.
- 1.2 In March 2009 a White Paper, *the Learning Revolution* was published. This provides a new vision for Informal Adult Learning, which uses as a catalyst the £210 million (national) Learning and Skills Council funds called Adult Safeguarded Learning with the intention to join with other existing national and local lifelong learning budgets, for example, health, culture.
- 1.3 Local Authorities are invited to take responsibility for the local agenda for this type of learning by becoming a Lead Accountable Body (LAB). This puts them in a key position to be advocates for and facilitators of a local strategic vision for this non-skills learning and build it more effectively into local priorities. The wider benefits of learning are well documented: the new agenda gives us an opportunity to look at informal adult learning and link it to well-being for all. This includes developing a culture of learning in families, responding to demographic changes in the community such as helping older people to keep mentally and physically active and fit, supporting communities through the after-effects of the recession, targeting activities to engage people in local democratic processes, engaging people in new digital technologies, learning for a green future. Informal Adult Learning can often be a stepping stone to gaining new skills and qualifications and complements vocational learning. It is part of a broader learning and skills continuum that can enable citizens to keep learning throughout their lives.
- 1.4 Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service was inspected by OFSTED in January 2010. The overall judgement was "Good", with "Outstanding" for Equality and Diversity. Inspectors commented that "WL&FLS is committed to providing high quality provision for the local community and to widening participation within the borough. The service provides a wide choice of courses in a variety of locations, many in areas of deprivation and are good at meeting the range of interests and needs in the community. The service is very effective at supporting innovative projects that engage

hard to reach learners. Learners are making a very positive contribution to community cohesion. They develop good skills to improve their contribution to family life and employability and skills that benefit the community. Many gain a qualification, often for the first time. Learners praise the impact of their learning and describe warmly the difference it has made to their lives. The learning programmes play a crucial part in enhancing the life experiences and chances of learners. WL&FLS has effective partnerships, particularly with community groups, support organisations and other learning providers.” This demonstrates the wider impact that adult learning has in the local area and shows the value of working in partnership.

- 1.5 A lead accountable body (LAB) will pull together all the partners in the area and develop a local plan for all types of informal adult learning. The key is that the learning meets local needs and supports a range of social and economic priorities of elected bodies. Lead Accountable Body will provide vision and leadership to innovate, by promoting a culture of learning through life. They will lead a strong local partnership ensuring participation actors a wide range of organisations to meet local needs and ensure the local plan secures value for money and levers in additional resources from fees and other sources. The Skills Funding Agency will agree the headline targets in the annual delivery plan, with the LAB.
- 1.6 The LAB will manage all the funds for Informal Adult Learning going into the area. This currently does not happen as some of the budget is paid directly to Wirral Metropolitan College. There is a commitment from the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) to deregulate this area. This means increased flexibility in how the funding can be used, non-accredited learning will be looked at differently by Ofsted and there are discussions about the type of qualifications needed for those facilitating the informal learning activities. The LAB will have to show how it is leveraging in extra funds in addition to those from the Skills Funding Agency, either in kind, such as through opening up new spaces, or through other means. It will also need to show both targeted activity for those with the most needs and an increase in overall learner numbers. Any increase in provision will have to pay for itself eg through course fees.
- 1.7 In Spring 2010 local authorities were invited to become Lead Accountable Bodies and Wirral has provisionally accepted the role. From 2011-12 funding for Informal Adult Learning will go through the LABs. Throughout 2010-11 the LAB will work with other partners in an area, including those currently receiving this funding, to develop a plan. Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service Steering Group would be best placed to take on the strategic role of the Lead Accountable Body. The Steering Group, which is chaired by Head of Branch Learning and Achievement, currently has strategic oversight of the Lifelong and Family Learning Service and is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the work of the service. The Steering Group would agree the local plan for delivering Informal Adult Learning, evaluate the effectiveness of the IAL plan and ensure that IAL fits into Wirral's longer term strategy. The Steering Group would act as commissioners of IAL if required. The plan will be presented to the Children's Trust for approval.
- 1.8 To support the development of a coherent plan for IAL there needs to be partnership working. Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service already works closely with a diverse range of local partners and leads an established partnership that works well together to identify and meet the needs of adult community learning in Wirral. The Personal and Community Development Learning (PCDL) Partnership has a wide range of members and is chaired by the Principal Manager for Lifelong Learning, who manages Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service. The partnership links into the Wirral Economic Development and Skills Group (WEDS). Members include Lifelong and Family Learning, Colleges, WEA, voluntary and community groups, PCT,

libraries, extended schools, Link Forum, Older People's Parliament and community centres. Partners have successfully bid together for Learning Revolution Transformation Funds for the Cascade engagement project which was very successful and for Community Learning Champions. The partnership aims to include all existing and newly funded providers and key stakeholders of informal adult learning in Wirral.

- 1.9 The PCDL Partnership could inform the planning of Informal Adult Learning at an operational level, by identifying local needs and what the partners already provide. The members of the PCDL Partnership are well placed to identify gaps and how best to work together locally to plan the delivery of Informal Adult Learning. This will contribute to the wider planning of learning and support for communities in Wirral. Some joint planning has taken place between colleges and the Lifelong and Family Learning Service eg discussion around curriculum and priorities. It would help the area to share planning processes and work in partnership to ensure the best use of available funds covering engagement activity and progression routes. A networking event in Adult Learners Week May 2010 will enable partnership working to be further developed.
- 1.10 The Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Steering Group and the PCDL Partnership would have distinct and complementary roles in the planning of Informal Adult Learning
 - The PCDL Partnership would propose priorities for an Informal Adult Learning plan based on the needs of the local area.
 - The Wirral Lifelong and Family Steering Group as the Lead Accountable Body will agree the strategy for Informal Adult Learning, commission provision and ensure provision is delivered, monitored and evaluated.
 - The Steering Group will present a report to the Children's Trust recommending the IAL plan and outcomes of commissioning.

2. Financial implications

- 2.1 The Lifelong Learning Service is funded by grant from the Skills Funding Agency.

Funding Aug 2010- July 2011	£
Adult and Community Learning	382,762
Family Learning	314,315
Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities	179,181
Total Adult Safeguarded Learning	876,258

- 2.2 From April 2010 funding for Adult Learning will come from the Skills Funding Agency (SFA). They will continue to fund existing contracts for their duration. The Lifelong and Family Learning Service is fully funded from the LSC/ SFA grant.
- 2.3 The service works closely with schools, children's centres and other local providers to identify economies that can be made through shared use of premises and shared delivery to meet common goals and has been able to continue to provide adult learning to more learners in targeted areas. Additional funding for the service has been sought from project funding and tenders, although these are more tightly focussed on employment outcomes than the general adult learning provision. The Learning Revolution guidance expects both targeted use of public funds for informal adult learning and an increase in numbers of adult learners across the area. Any increase in provision will have to pay for itself through course fees. Course fees may need to be increased to ensure they cover costs of delivery.

3. Staffing implications

Any additional workload will have to be accommodated from within the existing staff team.

4. Equal Opportunities Implications/Health Impact Assessment

Adult learning play a valuable contribution to improving the skills of Wirral residents. Much of the provision is located in disadvantaged communities and encourages people back into learning and employment. The OFSTED inspection of Wirral Lifelong and Family Learning Service judged the service to be outstanding for equality and diversity, with particularly effective initiatives to support people from diverse backgrounds. A diverse range of adult learning opportunities will be maintained to meet local needs. Involvement in learning has a positive effect on health and is particularly beneficial to the well being and good mental health.

5. Community safety implications

No implications.

6. Local Agenda 21 implications

Adult learning plays a valuable role in the well-being of the community through developing the skills and confidence of adults to become involved in their communities.

7. Planning implications

No implications.

8. Anti-poverty implications

Much of the provision is located in disadvantaged communities and encourages people back into learning and employment. Adult learning has a major impact on child poverty and there are clear links between areas of deprivation and those with low levels of adult qualifications.

9. Social inclusion implications

Adult learning contributes to social inclusion and community cohesion in Wirral as reported by OFSTED.

10. Local Member Support implications

Lifelong learning can benefit adults in all wards.

11. Background Papers

“The Learning Revolution” White paper DBIS March 2009

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that

1. Wirral Council acts as the lead Accountable Body and commissioning body for Informal Adult Learning (IAL) in Wirral.
2. The PCDL Partnership supports the planning of Informal Adult Learning in Wirral.
3. A plan for Informal Adult Learning is drawn up, linked into wider planning and local priorities.
4. The final plan is presented back to Cabinet.

Howard Cooper
Director of Children's Services