

REPORT FOR DECISION



DECISION OF:	CABINET
DATE:	10 JUNE 2015
SUBJECT:	ADULT EDUCATION STRATEGY 2015-18
REPORT FROM:	CABINET MEMBER COMMUNITES
CONTACT OFFICER:	Julie Kenrick, Head of Service
TYPE OF DECISION:	CABINET (KEY DECISION)
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION/STATUS:	This paper is within the public domain.
SUMMARY:	<p>The strategy sets a direction of travel for the Council's adult learning service that is more closely aligned to Team Bury priorities and the Council's ambitions. There is a strong focus on actions that increase basic skill levels and reduce other barriers to employment. The role of learning in promoting community cohesion and reducing inequalities is also recognised.</p> <p>The document will form part of the evidence considered by Ofsted when the service is inspected (anticipated later this year) and will support future bids to the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and other funding sources.</p>
OPTIONS & RECOMMENDED OPTION	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To approve the strategy. This is the recommended option as it provides direction to the service going forward. 2. To not approve the strategy.
IMPLICATIONS:	
Corporate Aims/Policy Framework:	Do the proposals accord with the Policy Framework? Yes
Statement by the S151 Officer: Financial Implications and Risk Considerations:	<p>The proposed strategy sets out a platform for the future development of the service; recognising potential funding reductions (estimated to be £150,000 in 2015/16).</p> <p>Alternative funding sources will be examined, and fee levels will be reviewed to address this.</p>
Health and Safety	There are no health and safety issues arising directly from this strategy. Any changes in services or operating practice will be subject to risk assessments and implemented in line

SK

	with existing policy.	
Statement by Executive Director of Resources:	The service plays a key role in developing individuals and employers to further the Council's "Stronger Economy" priority.	SK
Equality/Diversity implications:	The Equality Analysis indicates that the proposals support community cohesion and encourage participation in learning by disadvantaged groups. The extent to which this can be delivered will be affected by Government funding decisions.	
Considered by Monitoring Officer:	Yes	JH
Wards Affected:	All	
Scrutiny Interest:		

TRACKING/PROCESS

DIRECTOR: Executive Director of Adult Care Services

Chief Executive/ Strategic Leadership Team	Executive Member/Chair	Ward Members	Partners
18/5/15	22/5/15		
Scrutiny Committee	Committee	Council	

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Adult Learning Service (ALS) in Bury delivers a range of learning opportunities for local people. From formal qualifications and skill based courses to family and community sessions, a broad curriculum is offered – enabling individuals to return to learning at different points according to their needs and aspirations.
- 1.2 4,000 people were attracted to the service last year (amounting to almost 6000 enrolments) and they were supported by 92 tutors at a cost of £2 million. 80% of the budget is funded by the Government with course fees contributing another 10%. Lottery grants and commissioned services provide the balance. The service operates at no cost to the Council.
- 1.3 Government funding through the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) has been squeezed over many years, mitigated by prudent management and a track record of delivery. However, further spending cuts in the coming year will increase pressure on the range, depth and location of provision. It is therefore timely to review the focus of the service – to keep the alignment with local priorities and satisfy our contractual obligations – without resorting to Council funding or placing an undue financial burden on course participants.
- 1.4 Bury ALS is also due an OFSTED inspection in the next year. An up to date strategy will be a key document when judgements are made on leadership and governance.

2. WHERE ARE WE NOW?

- 2.1 Bury has a high level of qualified residents compared to neighbouring Boroughs but there are still some 23% (equivalent to 42,000 people) who have no qualifications at all. Compared to the 2001 Census (when 29% of residents had no qualifications) this is an improvement but inequalities remain particularly in Bury East, Radcliffe and Besses where deprivation is more prevalent and economic inactivity is higher than the Borough average. By increasing skill levels, people are brought closer to the job market, improving their life chances and employability.
- 2.2 The Council's Adult Education Service performs well in this respect. Success rates for the 4,000 learners are outstanding in both non-accredited provision (95.30%) and accredited provision (90.6%). Retention on courses at over 95% is also excellent. The quality of the service is a major contributing factor to success with 97% of teaching and learning observations graded good or better.
- 2.3 In recent years, greater emphasis has been given to attracting individuals from more deprived areas. In the 2013/14 academic year, 58.13% of learners in Adult Skills provision came from these priority wards. Whilst this rate of participation is welcomed, there is still work to be done to increase numbers further and improve the success rate for BME learners (24% of learners in Adult Skills provision) which, at 84%, is below the overall success rate of 90.6%.
- 2.4 Another area for development is employer engagement. With a large proportion of small and medium sized firms in the Borough, the service has found it difficult to engage with some sectors. Closer links would enable co-production of the skills curriculum (to match outputs to employer requirements), increase work experience and placements for learners as well as improving intelligence on learner progression. Taken together these activities would help to measure the effectiveness of the skills provision.

3. PROPOSALS

- 3.1 To address the factors influencing the future development of the service, the strategy is based on five priorities:
 - **Improving outcomes for learners.** Reducing the number of residents without functional skills (including maths, English and IT) is a key priority. For some this will be about gaining qualifications; for others Bury ALS will be a gateway – a way of building confidence through less formal education to help them cope better with modern life, reduce social isolation or enable them to participate more fully in society.
 - **Improving outcomes for employers.** In supporting Bury's 'stronger economy' priority, the service will work with employers to identify and teach the skills needed so that Bury residents can take advantage of any upturn in the economy. Better skilled people are more likely to qualify for jobs paying higher wages – as long as those skills match the requirements of employers.
 - **High quality.** High achievement and retention rates are dependent on effective, quality teaching. Maintaining standards across the service will enhance our reputation with employers and prospective learners.

- **Strong leadership and management.** There are challenges ahead which will require the balancing of quality, cost and diversity in order to maintain provision which is valued and fully utilised by local people.
- **Sustainable communities.** Learning provides individuals with the skills needed to become more self reliant and confident. These are essential components for reducing demand on services and inequalities in the Borough. Increasing participation from disadvantaged communities will be a key target for the service in the coming years as we set out to raise aspirations and empower more individuals to take control over their own lives.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The strategy has no direct financial implications on the service but provides guidance to managers in respect of prioritising the use of resources.
- 4.2 It is known that Government funding will fall in the coming year. The Skills Funding Agency has signalled a reduction in Bury Council's grant for the 2015/16 academic year which could amount to around £150,000. Options for dealing with this scenario are being evaluated including alternative funding sources, revising fee levels and reducing certain types of provision. The priorities outlined in the strategy will be protected and this means that course fees must remain affordable.
- 4.3 Although adult learning is a discretionary function, it is in the interests of the Council to maintain an in-house service. As well as providing employment for 100 people from tutors and curriculum leaders to support staff, the service operates at no cost to the Council. In fact in 2014/15, the Council benefitted from the service to the tune of over £250,000.

5. RISKS

- 5.1 The primary risk to the service relates to funding and in particular the future of central grants. Whilst funding cuts are unwelcome, it is the uncertainty caused by annual determination of grant levels that makes forward planning difficult. This risk is being mitigated by investigating alternative funding sources, cost reduction measures and targeting activity (as outlined in the strategy priorities) to maximise the return investment.
- 5.2 Continued success depends on maintaining, and preferably, increasing participation levels and participation is known to be influenced by the type and range of courses, quality of teaching and cost. The strategy has focused on these components to minimise any learner resistance to changes that may be needed going forward.
- 5.3 Developing the skills route into employment requires better engagement with local firms. Aligning courses and activities with the needs of local firms is essential to avoid time, effort and resources being wasted. Better tracking of learners will provide further reassurance on the quality and value of this provision.
- 5.4 Not implementing the strategy also carries major risks. Without a focus, the service risks being driven by funding decisions rather than policy – an approach that will lead the service into decline at a time when it needs to be identifying ways to improve the resilience and life chances of individuals as a means of reducing inequalities.

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 6.1 By maintaining the focus on skills development, the overall impact of the strategy on disadvantaged individuals and communities is positive.
- 6.2 The unknown aspect at this stage is the detailed implications of funding cuts. Government may, through the SFA, seek to target resources at specific provision to influence the type of learning provided. Analysis of grant conditions and assessment of the options is required before the impact on local provision can be calculated.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 The adult learning service is making a difference to people's lives. Through quality provision, individuals are achieving high success rates. This in turn is producing a more skilled workforce and fewer residents with no qualifications. However it is not just about employability. The service is well aware of its responsibilities to reduce disadvantage and this has led to emphasis being given to encouraging individuals from priority wards to participate in learning.
- 7.2 The future strategy builds on this by reinforcing areas of strength, aligning activity more closely to Council priorities and supporting the aspirations of local people. These are expressed through five key priorities:
- Improving outcomes for learners
 - Improving outcomes for employers
 - High quality
 - Strong leadership and management
 - An approach that support sustainable communities
- 7.3 It is recommended that:
- (a) The strategy is approved;
 - (b) Options are developed, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Communities, to address potential funding shortfalls in the budget and ensure the financial sustainability of the in-house service

List of Background Papers:-

Adult Learning Strategy 2015-18
Self Assessment summary 2013-14
Equality Analysis

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