



**FUTURE STRATEGY FOR ADULT AND COMMUNITY
LEARNING**

SCC LOCAL COMMITTEE IN ELMBRIDGE

26 MARCH 2007

KEY ISSUE:

This report informs the Local Committee about changes to the strategy for the delivery of adult and community learning in Elmbridge from 1 August 2007.

SUMMARY:

The County Council agreed with the Surrey Learning and Skills Council (which funds the service) to develop a new strategy for Adult and Community Learning based on externalisations. Although proposals were received from potential providers in response to an invitation to tender issued by the Learning and Skills Council, the bids received will not enable the objective of externalisation to be fully met. The Learning and Skills Council requires the County Council to continue to provide learning in North Surrey, including Elmbridge, but changes to the funding and a continuing decline in interest in leisure learning mean that changes are required to the way that learning is delivered in the Borough.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Committee is asked to:

- (i) Note the proposals agreed by the Executive for the delivery of Adult and Community Learning in Elmbridge from August 2007
- (ii) Advise officers of any local issues or concerns that should be

taken into account in planning adult and community learning in Elmbridge.

INTRODUCTION and BACKGROUND

1. Since 2001, Adult and Community Learning has been funded by grant from the Surrey Learning and Skills Council; half the service's budget is generated from fees and other income, and the remainder is funded from the grant. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has a duty to ensure there is provision of leisure learning and the County Council has the power to make provision. Since 1999, the service has provided leisure-based learning (19,000 learners in 2005/6), as well as courses for 700 learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, 1700 learners on Family Programmes, and over 300 disadvantaged learners annually. The service in Tandridge and Reigate and Banstead was externalised to East Surrey College in 1999.
2. LSC has invested over £2m in improving ACL buildings, especially access, but the main revenue grant has reduced in each of the last three years (by £225000 for 2006/7) and no inflation has been added. To ensure a balanced budget, savings of £506000 were implemented for 2006/7, including a fee increase from £3.00 per hour to minimum £4.00 per hour as well as closure of three enrolment Centres and two Centres used by East Surrey College.
3. In response to concerns about the sustainability of the service, on 14 February 2006 the County Council's Executive agreed with proposals by the Surrey Learning and Skills Council on a new strategy for Adult and Community Learning, based on a partnership model.
4. The key issues identified last year which led to the decision to externalise were:
 - LSC priorities for funding for post 16 learning, which focus on vocational skills
 - Suitability of buildings and teaching resources
 - Reducing interest meaning fewer learners and less income

Outcome of externalisation

5. The Learning and Skills Council offered contracts for the provision of adult and community learning in Surrey as three lots; the contract for North Surrey included Elmbridge, Runnymede, Spelthorne and Surrey Heath. The requirements for each lot were a programme of leisure learning, learning for disadvantaged adults including learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, learners with mental health issues and learners in communities of disadvantage. There is a new requirement for learning to support volunteers in the community. Negotiations with a bidder for North Surrey continued up to 30 January 07, when the bidder withdrew; this is understood to be because of

the costs and implications of TUPE, in the context of uncertain grant funding after 2008. The Learning and Skills Council has asked the County Council to continue to provide learning in North Surrey.

Next steps

6. There is no "status quo" option as available funding and potential income is insufficient to sustain the present service; a re-organisation of the service is essential to reduce potential financial risk to the County Council. A key aspect of the LSC's approach to externalisation was to address unequal access to learning. For historical reasons, there are four Centres in Elmbridge and two in Spelthorne, so that 47%, a disproportionate amount, of the service's current budget is expended in North Surrey.

7. The LSC intends to address the unequal access by allocating grant funding to the three contract areas on the basis of population, which will reduce funding available to support learning in North Surrey including Elmbridge. Because of this reduction in grant funding together with declining take-up and falling fee income, it is essential to reduce the costs of the service through a reduction of management and support staff costs, rationalisation of the use of property and maximising of income. In line with national and regional policy, fees will need to be increased for most learners, with discounts retained for disadvantaged learners.

Changes proposed in Elmbridge

8. There is more access to learning in Elmbridge when compared to the rest of Surrey. Four of the current 14 Centres are in Elmbridge. Because of the fall in interest, use of all Centres for SCC courses is significantly below capacity.

Use of Centres for SCC Courses 2005/6

	Cobham	Esher Green	Molesey	Weybridge	Total
Space used	25.92%	20.16%	25.35%	19%	22.66%
Learners	584	969	947	908	3408
Courses	116	144	186	180	626

Note: all Centres have some further use by Brooklands College under a partnership agreement but this use has declined significantly in 2006/7.

9. At the Weybridge Centre, for example, although it is an attractive and well-located building, teaching space is used for less than 20% of the available sessions, and enrolments declined by 27% in Autumn 2006 compared to Autumn 2005. 908 learners used the Centre in 2005/6 attending 180 courses; of these learners, only 258 live in Weybridge and 90.51% of all learners lived within six miles of the Centre. 358 learners are aged 55 and over and many of them are not local to the Centre. We know that 80% of learners travel to their class by car.

10. In the context of the significant reduction in funding for North Surrey and the under-use of capacity, continued operation of the current network of Centres does not represent the best use of the available funding. Better use of the buildings and substantial savings can be achieved by retaining Esher Green and Molesey; learning activities currently offered at Cobham and Weybridge would transfer to these Centres or to community locations, including other SCC buildings.
11. The majority of learners at all Centres live within 6 linear miles of the Centre they attend, and detailed post code analysis indicates that reducing the network of Centres will not significantly disadvantage many learners.
12. It is difficult to make a case to support the retention of local Centres for use by local people as our analysis of home addresses for our learners in Autumn Term 2006 shows that the majority of learners do not come from the local community. At Cobham Centre, for example, 26.74% of learners live in Cobham. 30.8% of learners at Cobham have addresses elsewhere in Elmbridge and 38% live in other parts of Surrey.

ACL IN ELMBRIDGE - LEARNERS BY PLACE OF RESIDENCE % - Autumn Term 2006

	Cobham	Esher Green	Molesey	Weybridge
Place of residence				
Cobham	26.74	7.58	7.05	2.53
Esher/Claygate	8.31	25.75	10.51	1.99
Molesey	2.02	9.47	20.61	3.17
Thames Ditton	0.90	5.86	4.52	1.18
Walton-on-Thames	8.09	14.47	22.07	13.39
Weybridge	11.46	9.13	11.30	23.35
Surrey - other Boroughs	37.98	21.88	17.95	49.95
Greater London	2.47	5.51	5.45	2.99
Elsewhere	2.02	0.34	0.53	1.45
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Figures in **bold** are residents in town where Centre is located

13. It is important to distinguish between the building and the learning offer. It is our intention to continue to offer all of the successful courses from Weybridge and Cobham at other locations, including Centres in Esher, Molesey and Addlestone as well as community venues, which may include Weybridge Library. We already locate some of our courses at Brooklands College,

Burview Hall, Fernleigh Day Centre and Whiteley Village and will continue to do so if the courses are viable. We intend to transfer specialist facilities, such as Weybridge's equipment for jewellery making, to new locations.

14. LSC and SCC invested £880000 in 2004 on a major refurbishment of Molesey Centre as part of the Chandlers Field School redevelopment. The building is now in good condition with full access for disabled people. Molesey Centre is also in an area of relative social need and is therefore an adult learning priority area for LSC. There has already been a range of successful family learning projects at Chandlers Field School on the same site.
15. Esher Green has 8 teaching rooms, including art and pottery studios. Cobham (4 rooms) and Weybridge (7 rooms) have no specialist facilities, although art and craft courses take place at these locations. Cobham also has a recurring long-term building problem with subsidence. Molesey has a dedicated cookery room that was refurbished in 2003 using £60000 from the Henrietta Parker Trust. It has art and dance studios and a computer suite, also updated using the Trust Fund; income from this source can continue to be used to refurbish the Centre or provide new resources in future.
16. Analysis of courses and learners is being undertaken to identify courses which might be better located in community venues, although the overall strategy is to ensure the remaining Centres' capacity is better used and expenditure on hire of local venues minimised.
17. We plan to offer open days and taster sessions for Cobham and Weybridge learners at Esher and Molesey, and to engage our tutors to promote the changes positively.

ANALYSIS and COMMENTARY

18. Residents of Elmbridge have many learning opportunities available to them in addition to Adult and Community Learning. Besides the many part-time adult courses offered by Brooklands College, a wide range of courses (from fly-tying to interior design) is offered by Esher College, the WEA offers an interesting range of humanities courses in local communities and there is also a thriving Elmbridge branch of the University of the Third Age. One of the reasons that fewer people are learning yoga, keep fit and sport with ACL is the increasing range of health clubs and gyms, which have become more affordable, and also privately-run classes in village halls.
19. We intend to make changes to the provision of Adult and Community Learning in Elmbridge which are financially sustainable while still offering a wide range of good quality learning. The service was inspected by the Adult Learning Inspectorate in January 2007 and has been judged satisfactory with sufficient capacity to make improvements.

CONSULTATION

20. The development of the externalisation strategy and service priorities was based on a stakeholder engagement project carried out on behalf of the LSC and County Council by the Office of Public Management; the work included consultation with learners and staff as well as key partners.

21. In presenting these changes to learners and the wider community, it is not possible to offer extended consultation because of the limited time to plan for next academic year following the failure of the externalisation process, and the timetable to be followed to develop the programme for September 2007, which is due to be printed on 12 June 07. Consultation can only be meaningful when genuine choices can be presented and the financial position of the service provides little scope for other options.

EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

22. Learning is provided in the Elmbridge Centres for about 140 learners with learning disabilities and difficulties, with some additional provision for these learners made by Brooklands College. Every effort will be made to accommodate these learners' future learning needs.

CONCLUSION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

23. Members of the Local Committee for Elmbridge are aware that the Learning and Skills Council has had responsibility for the funding and planning of adult learning since 2001. The County Council has worked with the LSC to secure the future of personal and community development learning in the context of the Government's priorities for post – 16 learning and the declining interest in traditional "adult education". The Local Committee is asked to note the outcome of the externalisation process and progress to date on an alternative strategy for the service, and to advise on any local issues or concerns that the Learning and Skills Council should take into account in further development of their strategy, or issues that officers should consider in planning a programme of adult learning for 2007/8.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: Report to the Executive, 30 January 2007