



FUTURE STRATEGY FOR ADULT AND COMMUNITY LEARNING

SCC LOCAL COMMITTEE IN EPSOM & EWELL 19 March 2007

KEY ISSUE:

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

SUMMARY:

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. The Learning and Skills Council has offered a contract for the provision of learning in South East Surrey, including the Borough of Epsom and Ewell, to a new provider. Negotiations are not yet concluded, but this report outlines some potential changes and improvements to the learning offer for local residents.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Committee is asked to agree

- (i) to note the proposals made by the Learning and Skills Council for the delivery of adult and Community Learning in Epsom and Ewell from August 2007.
- (ii) to advise officers of any local issues or concerns that the Learning and Skills Council should take into account in planning adult and community learning in Epsom and Ewell.

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 process

5. The Learning and Skills Council offered contracts for the provision of adult and community learning in Surrey as three lots; the contract for South East Surrey included Epsom and Ewell, Mole Valley, Reigate and Banstead and Tandridge. 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. Providers were offered the opportunity to lease current Adult Learning Centres but this was not a requirement. With diminishing public funding, more learning will be provided if more use is made of community facilities for learning and costs of maintaining premises for sole use are reduced.
6. A bid for this lot was received from a partner organisation. After an evaluation process and further clarification of outstanding issues, the Surrey Learning and Skills

Council wrote on 16 January 2007 to offer this organisation a contract for SE Surrey, subject to negotiation.

7. The contract for this provision will be between the provider and the Learning and Skills Council; the County Council will not have a client role although, through the Strategic Commissioning Board, the County Council will continue to be involved with planning and reviewing the service. The Learning and Skills Council is negotiating with the provider on the terms and conditions of a written contract in connection with the provision of the service.
8. Discussions between the County Council and the provider have been initiated about the transfer of staff to the College under the Transfer of Undertakings – Protection of Employment Regulations (2006).
9. Although the provider has explained its overall strategy for future provision and provided some detailed information, at this stage, a detailed programme for 2007/8, including locations to be used, has not yet been planned. In line with Government policy, fees charged to learners by all learning providers are likely to increase.
10. The provider intends that there will be a broad spread of provision across the day as well as evenings. The provision will be in line with the SCC identified key areas of Art, Craft, Exercise, Sport, Fitness, Foreign Languages, General Studies, Health, Beauty and Personal Development. It is also the intention over the life of the contract to develop opportunities for on-line learning communities to increase access to provision. The programme and enrolment facilities will be available online.
11. The provider intends to research suitable venues, engage with other providers in Epsom and Ewell and to ensure that there is an accessible spread of provision.
12. Clearly, until a contract has been signed between the provider and the LSC, the possibility remains that the partner organisation might withdraw. Contingency plans are being made to deliver a programme of learning in Epsom and Ewell in September 2007 in case negotiations fail, and the LSC has been urged to set an early deadline for the conclusion of these negotiations.

ANALYSIS and COMMENTARY

13. There is a significant change as the County Council will no longer commission or provide adult leisure learning in Epsom and Ewell. The Surrey Learning and Skills Council will contract directly with the incoming provider. The future role of Local Committees in scrutinising the planning and quality of adult learning, and more specifically leisure learning, is being discussed by the joint LSC/SCC Strategic Commissioning Board. The views of the Local Committee for Epsom and Ewell are welcome.
14. The reducing demand for adult learning has been a significant factor influencing the County Council and Surrey Learning and Skills Council in the development of this strategy. At the Epsom Adult Learning Centre, 30.5% of the courses planned and advertised for Autumn Term 2006 were cancelled, mainly due to lack of enrolments. The classrooms were used for 17% of the available sessions. Overall, enrolments on Surrey's adult and community learning courses for Autumn Term 2006 fell by over 20% compared to 2005.
15. Research carried out in 2005 with learners who no longer enrolled indicated that the most significant factor was lifestyle, with less time for learning and a wider range of

opportunities for leisure time. There are many more opportunities for leisure learning provided by voluntary organisations, such as the University of the Third Age, and by the private sector, particularly in sport, dance and keep fit, so that there is less demand for the service historically provided by the County Council.

CONSULTATION

16. The externalisation strategy and priorities within the specification were developed following a stakeholder engagement project undertaken on behalf of the County Council and Learning and Skills Council by the Office of Public Management. The specification also drew on the work of Surrey Lifelong Learning Partnership on identifying learning need.
17. There is a requirement for the incoming provider to consult effectively with learners and the wider community on local learning needs and the development of a programme, although it is likely that this consultation process will have more impact in future years than on the programme for Autumn 2007. Nationally, the LSC is developing partnerships at Area level for the planning of personal and community development learning, aiming to engage providers of learning activities from all sectors.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

18. 85% of current learners live within 6 miles of the Adult Learning Centre in Epsom. If the provider offers learning in local venues in the community, there is some potential to reduce travelling by learners.

EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

19. The specification includes targets for additional learning for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, and for learners with mental health needs. There is a new target to work with voluntary organisations to provide learning for 200 people across the contract area, and to ensure that learning is offered to disadvantaged people in Court/Ruxley. The provider will also need to take into account the profile of learners on mainstream programmes - 52% of current learners are aged over 55, and about 75% of learners are female – and to make provision for people who need additional support to participate, for example, providing a signer for a learner with hearing disabilities.
20. The Learning and Skills Council requires that all providers receiving LSC funding meet the standards and targets of the LSC's Equality and Diversity Strategy, as well as, of course, legal requirements. An assessment of Equality of Opportunity forms part of external inspections of adult learning, which will be the responsibility of Ofsted from 1 April 07.

CONCLUSION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

21. Members of the Local Committee for Epsom and Ewell 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, and to advise on any local issues or concerns that the Learning and Skills Council should take into account.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: Officer Report to the Executive, 30 January 2007