



FUTURE STRATEGY FOR ADULT AND COMMUNITY LEARNING

**SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL
LOCAL COMMITTEE (WAVERLEY)
8 June 2007**

KEY ISSUE:

This report informs the Local Committee about the impact that changes in strategy for the delivery of adult and community learning will have in Waverley from August 2007.

SUMMARY:

The County Council's Executive has agreed with proposals by the Surrey Learning and Skills Council on a new strategy for Adult and Community Learning (ACL), based on a partnership model. Following an externalisation process, no tenders were received for the delivery of ACL in South-West Surrey. The County Council has, therefore, been requested to continue to provide a service in the area.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Local Committee (Waverley) should:

1. Note the developments that have taken place in the delivery of Adult and Community Learning in Waverley.
2. Advise officers of any local issues or concerns that officers from Adult and Community Learning and the Learning and Skills Council should take into account in planning adult and community learning in Waverley.

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

INTRODUCTION and BACKGROUND

1. Since 2001 Adult and Community Learning has been funded by grant from the Surrey Learning and Skills Council; half of 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 £225,000 for 2006/7) and no inflation has been added. To ensure a balanced budget, savings of £506,000 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 the enrolment Centres in Godalming and Haslemere Libraries and at the Runnymede Centre 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. LSC offered contracts for the provision of adult and community learning in Surrey as three lots; the contract for South West Surrey included Guildford, Waverley and Woking. 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. 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. No bids were received for South-West Surrey, although one organisation was expressing an interest until three days before the closing date. As a result, LSC has asked the County Council to continue to provide adult and community learning in the area for 2007/8.

PROVISION IN WAVERLEY – 2007/8 AND BEYOND

7. The continuation of the service provided by the County Council in South-West Surrey does not mean that the service will be unchanged. With a new contract for the service in East Surrey, a reduced grant from LSC and the number of learners still declining, operating costs are having to be reduced by a staff re-organisation, the withdrawal of a few low-interest subjects and a further significant increase in fees. The basic hourly rate for a course was increased from £3.00 in 2005/6 to £4.00 in 2006/7 and will become £5.00 for 2007/8.
8. The impact of these changes from September 2007 will be less in Waverley than in other areas of Surrey where Adult Learning Centres will be closing. A similar programme will be offered in much of Waverley as in 2007/8 as in 2006/7. As mentioned in paragraph 2, enrolment centres in Godalming and Haslemere were closed in July 2006. Enrolments are now managed through the Farnham Centre. Although courses have continued in and around Godalming and Haslemere in schools and community halls, the loss of local management has meant a higher decline in enrolments than the county average. The number of learners has fallen by 38% in Godalming and 71% in Haslemere compared to 23% countywide. Nationally, there is a 30% decline in enrolments, comparing Autumn Term 2006 with 2004.
9. With reduced resources, it is unlikely that sufficient input can be made in Godalming and Haslemere to reverse this trend. In the uncertain financial future, alternative approaches are being considered to protect the delivery of adult learning that may not necessarily involve the County Council. In Haslemere discussions are taking place with Wispers School, where a positive partnership has been in place since 1999 to enable adult learning courses to be provided during the day as well as in the evening. The school has expressed interest in offering a complementary adult learning programme in future independent of LSC.
10. With Government policy prioritising adults with poor vocational skills or no level 2 (5 GCSE A-C grades) qualifications, the future of the LSC grant for leisure learning is very uncertain. For 2007/8, the grant is nationally protected, although there will be no increase for inflation. For 2008/9, the national safeguard for funding for leisure learning will be removed. It is possible that the grant for mainstream courses will be reduced to allow most of the resources to be directed to the needs of disadvantaged learners. The impact of this change for mainstream courses will be a further increase in fees, likely decline in use and loss of more subject areas.
11. ACL has for some years provided learning opportunities with partners in disadvantaged communities in Waverley such as Sandy Hill and Ockford Ridge/Aarons Hill. Now that these local communities are more organised, LSC has asked ACL to direct its attention to Farncombe and Binscombe, where similar initiatives are now beginning to be organized. Funding will be allocated to this initiative in 2007/8.
12. Family learning opportunities have been provided at 12 schools in Waverley so far in 2006/7 as well as at Bramley Library and Tilford Rural Life Centre. These courses allow parents and guardians to study with their children on literacy and numeracy skills and other shared learning opportunities. These courses are funded by a separate grant from LSC.

CONSULTATION

13. The externalisation strategy and the 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.
14. There is a requirement for the LSC service providers including Surrey County Council 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

15. 85% of current learners live within 6 miles of their course location. If learning is offered in local venues in the community, there is some potential to reduce travelling by learners.

EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

16. The LSC continues to require the County Council to achieve targets for additional learning for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, and for learners with mental health needs. There is a new target for 2007/8 to work with voluntary organisations to provide learning for 250 people across Waverley, Guildford and Woking, and to ensure that learning is offered to disadvantaged people in Farncombe and Binscombe. As with other providers, the County Council 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, by providing a signer for a learner with hearing disabilities.
17. LSC requires that all providers receiving its 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 has been the responsibility of Ofsted from 1 April 2007.

CONCLUSION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

21. Members of the Local Committee (Waverley) 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.