

# Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

12 April 2023

## Warwickshire's Adult and Community Learning Progress and Performance Report 2021/22

### Recommendation

That the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers and comments upon the performance of Warwickshire County Council's Adult and Community Learning Service and seeks clarification on any areas of concern.

### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an overview of the performance of Warwickshire County Council's Adult and Community Learning Service in the academic year 2021/22, the outcomes achieved for residents and to highlight future priorities, opportunities and challenges.
- 1.2 This report forms part of wider reporting and monitoring arrangements for the service and feedback on the report from the Committee will help to inform the direction and purpose of the Service.
- 1.3 A report will be presented to the Committee annually to update on Service performance for the previous academic year.
- 1.4 The Service was inspected by Ofsted in October 2022 and their report<sup>1</sup> shows that the Service maintained its 'Good' judgement.
- 1.5 This report shows that performance has improved in the last year.

### Background

- 1.6 Warwickshire County Council (WCC) provides Adult and Community Learning through [Warwickshire's Adult and Community Learning Service \(WACL\)](#). The Service is part of Education Services.

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<sup>1</sup> Warwickshire Adult & Community Learning Ofsted report  
<https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50198591>

- 1.7 The Service provides formal and informal learning programmes to adults aged 19+ across the County in over 30 inclusive learning environments in a wide range of community venues, many of which are within the County's areas of highest need. Courses offered include English, Maths, ESOL (English as a second language), IT, Languages, arts and crafts, and courses for adults with learning difficulties. Family Learning activities are also provided for parents and their children, with most of these activities organised through primary schools, targeting schools with the highest levels of need.
- 1.8 The Service is predominantly funded through the Adult Education Budget (AEB) provided by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). Over the last ten years this has been fixed at around £1.61m per year. The funding is split between funding for qualifications and Skills (£468k) and for Community Learning (£1.141million), which tends to be non-qualification based. In addition, the Service generates income from learner fees and occasionally through external grants. The Service is therefore dependent on the successful delivery of its provision.
- 1.9 The Service supports and develops individuals and groups within Warwickshire for whom formal learning may have been a barrier in the past and works to build confidence and realise potential. This might mean learning new skills, building up personal confidence, meeting new people or finding a new job. Like all public services, it needs to respond to fast changing circumstances. This presents financial challenges but also changing priorities in how people want to learn, the types of skills that employers wish to develop, and the priorities of other sectors such as within the integrated health care system.
- 1.10 The Service uses key demographic and local labour market trends and data to inform the planning and delivery of the offer to Warwickshire residents. Any plans developed are set within the context of the Council Plan but also respond to a number of sub-regional, regional and national policy objectives.
- 1.11 The governance, monitoring and support for the strategic direction of the Service is provided by the Service's Advisory Board, which was formed in April 2022 and meets three times a year. Members of the board are drawn from a variety of backgrounds and skills sets. The Board is Chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Education.
- 1.12 The Service was inspected by Ofsted in October 2022 and their report<sup>2</sup> shows that the Service maintained its 'Good' judgement. The Ofsted report sets out the many strengths of the Service and also identifies two areas for further development that leaders are now addressing:
- 1.12.1 ensuring all learners benefit from impartial high quality careers advice

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<sup>2</sup> Warwickshire Adult & Community Learning Ofsted report  
<https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50198591>

1.12.2 improving the timeliness of the collection of progression and destination data to support leaders' understanding of the effectiveness of the curriculum.

- 1.13 The Service has a robust quality cycle that drives continuous improvement. The annual self-assessment report (SAR) is produced by the WACL Management Team using service data and is ratified by WCC's Education Service's Senior Leadership Team and validated by the ACL Advisory Board.
- 1.14 The self-assessment process involves identifying areas of good practice and areas for improvement using qualitative analysis of data to arrive at judgements of the provision against Ofsted's Education Inspection Framework.
- 1.15 The tables below provide a summary of the self-assessment grades over the last three years. Note, grading is in line with Ofsted's grading: 1 is Outstanding; 2 is Good, 3 is Requires Improvement, 4 is Inadequate.

**Whole service grades:**

	2019/20		2020/21		2021/22	
Overall effectiveness	2	Good	2	Good	2	Good
Quality of education	2	Good	2	Good	2	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	2	Good	2	Good	2	Good
Personal development	2	Good	2	Good	2	Good
Leadership and management	2	Good	2	Good	2	Good

**Curriculum grades:**

Description	Grade 2019/20	Grade 2020/21	Grade 2021/22
English	2	2	2
ESOL	2	2	1
Family Learning	1	1	1
IT	2	2	2
LLDD	2	2	2
Maths	2	2	2
PCDL (Community Learning)	2	2	2

- 1.16 The Service successfully retained its Matrix Accreditation in March 2021 and standards were confirmed at the one-year review in March 2022. Matrix is a national quality framework that measures how well the Service provides information, advice and guidance to learners and how well the Service promotes this provision. The Matrix accreditation has to be renewed every three years.
- 1.17 The Service developed a Statement of Intent in Summer 2022, which provides an overview of the Service, a summary of national and local drivers, the key priorities and aims of the Service for the next three years and actions to be taken to ensure the Service continues to be sustainable (financial and quality), into the future. The Statement of Intent will be reviewed in July 2023.
- 1.18 The COVID pandemic has had a significant negative impact on the Service over three academic years. In the summer of 2020, tutors adapted to online delivery and supported learners who didn't have digital access via phone and post. Online delivery continued in 2020/21 with low levels of learner recruitment, mostly due to the challenge of recruiting new learners. During 2021/22, many courses returned to face-to-face delivery and learner numbers slowly increased, with the proportion of new learners almost returning to pre-pandemic levels.
- 1.19 The Service has implemented a number of initiatives in order to attract and recruit learners. The Service is having to increase its marketing, publicity and social media presence and redesign curriculum for new markets in order to reach new learners. Increased competition from other providers, particularly those offering on-line courses, is also a challenge.

### **Participation and Outcomes for learners**

- 1.20 In 2021/22, the Service recruited 2038 learners, with 2661 enrolments on courses (some learners access more than one course). The number of enrolments was significantly higher than the previous year's figure of 2193 enrolments, but below the pre-Covid figure of around 4400.
- 1.21 Women represent 79.7% of learners and men 20.3%. This is below the national picture for gender enrolment in the sector, which is 25% male. The percentage of males has risen significantly in the last year in four of the seven curriculum areas: Family Learning, ICT, courses for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities (LLDD), and maths. Work is underway to amend courses and promotional materials to make the offer more appealing to men. The impact of this has been most noticeable in ICT, where the percentage of men has risen from 29.4% to 37.5%, and LLDD courses where the percentage of men has risen from 56.8% to 62.1%.

- 1.22 All ages of learner are well represented, with the highest rates among learners aged 30-39; participation by the youngest and oldest age bands declined slightly during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 1.23 Ethnic minorities and people living in Warwickshire's most deprived communities have above average representation in the Service's provision. In Skills-funded provision, those living in the 30% most deprived neighbourhoods nationally comprise 14.2% of Warwickshire's population but make up 23.6% of learners.
- 1.24 Achievement rates in 2021/22 for learners with a disability or learning difficulties have increased and the achievement gap, when compared with those with no disability or learning difficulty, has narrowed.
- 1.25 The overall achievement rate in Skills-funded provision in 2021/22 was 79.5%, slightly below the previous year's figure of 81.1%. Note, Skills-funded provision includes maths, English, English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL), some ICT and provision for learners with learning difficulties or disabilities. There is no overall national achievement rate for skills programmes, each subject area has its own national rate for comparison.
- 1.26 The overall achievement rate in 2021/22 in Community Learning funded provision increased from 93.5% to 95.5%. Community Learning courses tend to be shorter, with less formal assessments compared with the skills-funded courses.
- 1.27 Attendance in 2021/22 continued to increase to 84.3%, compared to the previous year's figure of 82.4%. The service key performance indicator for the overall attendance rate for learners is a minimum of 90% and work continues to drive up attendance levels across all courses.
- 1.28 Learner destinations are collected at the end of each course. Many learners report that their learning has helped them develop work-related skills and/or gain employment, and a high proportion intend to go on to another ACL course, or further or higher education. Overall, in 2021/22, 59% of learners were new to the service, an increase of 10% over the previous year. However, collection of learner destinations is variable and work is underway to improve the methods of collecting and reporting this information.

## **2. Financial Implications**

- 2.1 Although learner recruitment increased in 2021/22, the service only achieved 92.6% of its ESFA funding allocation for the year. In the previous two years, the ESFA allowed providers to retain a proportion of funding due to the ongoing impact of COVID, however, this tolerance was removed in 2021/22, resulting in £118k clawback for that academic year. Expenditure within the service has been reduced where possible to minimise the impact of the funding clawback.

- 2.2 Course fees have been kept as low as possible to support learners as the cost-of-living rises.
- 2.3 A significant reduction or clawback in the grant funding would lead to the Council having to decide on the future of the service and review how any reduction in the service offer would impact on Warwickshire residents with the highest needs.
- 2.4 In July 2022, the Department for Education (DfE) launched a consultation on proposed changes to the Adult Education Budget from Summer 2023. The DfE proposed that ring fenced Community Learning funding was combined with Skills funding and all funding was focused on qualifications and employment outcomes, with provision retained for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities. The Council submitted a response to the consultation citing the impact the removal of Community Learning opportunities for adults with highest needs could have on Warwickshire residents. The DfE has not yet published a formal response to the consultation, but there are indications that the proposed changes will be implemented from 2024 rather than September 2023 as originally stated in the consultation. The Service is monitoring these developments and planning mitigations, as needed.
- 2.5 The Service has successfully bid for a portion of the Council's new DfE Multiply funding, which supports numeracy and financial literacy learning. The fund is over three financial years with the Service allocated £32k for the financial year ending March 2023, £128k for the following financial year and £140k for the year after. Delivery has already started, with innovative Family Learning provision and support for individual learners with specific needs.

### **3. Environmental Implications**

- 3.1 None arising directly from this report.

### **4. Supporting Information**

- 4.1 None.

### **Background Papers**

- 1. Cabinet Report 8/10/2020, Adult and Community Learning Proposed Advisory Board
- 2. Communities Overview and Scrutiny Report, 22/6/2022, Warwickshire Adult and Community Learning Progress and Performance Report

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The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication:

Local Member(s): not applicable – county wide service

Other members: Chair and Party Spokespersons of Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee