

Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

22 June 2022

Warwickshire Adult and Community Learning Progress and Performance Report

Recommendation(s)

That the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

1. Considers and comments upon the performance of Warwickshire County Council's Adult and Community Learning Service and seeks clarification on any areas of concern, and
2. Provides its comments on the Adult and Community Learning Service draft Statement of Intent 2022-2025 at Appendix 1.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the performance of Warwickshire County Council's Adult Community and Learning Service in the academic year 2020/21 and 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 Overview and Scrutiny Committee will help to inform the direction and purpose of the Service.
- 1.3 A further report will be presented to this committee before the end of 2022 to provide the Service performance for the academic year 2021/22.

Background

- 1.4 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.
- 1.5 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.

- 1.6 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 £1.66m per year. The funding is split between funding for qualifications and Skills (£467k) and for Community Learning (£1.2million), 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.
- 1.7 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 is not just 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.
- 1.8 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.
- 1.9 In October 2020, Cabinet agreed to strengthen the governance and scrutiny arrangements in respect of Warwickshire's Adult and Community Learning Service by establishing an Advisory Board.
- 1.10 The Advisory Board held its first meeting on 26 April 2022 (having been delayed due to the dealing with the challenges of COVID) and will continue to meet three times per year (in July, November and March). Members of the board are drawn from a variety of backgrounds and skills sets. The Board was Chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Education and Children's Services until May 2022. From May 2022 onwards the Board will be chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Education.
- 1.11 The Service was last inspected by Ofsted in 2016 and received a 'Good' judgement. Another Ofsted inspection is expected imminently.
- 1.12 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 data from the service and is ratified by WCC's Education Service's Senior Leadership Team. From 2021/22 onwards this will also be validated by the ACL Advisory Board.

- 1.13 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 Inspection Framework.
- 1.14 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:

	2018/19		2019/20		2020/21	
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 2018/19	Grade 2019/20	Grade 2020/21
English	2	2	2
ESOL	2	2	2
Family Learning	1	1	1
IT	2	2	2
LLDD	2	2	2
Maths	2	2	2
PCDL (Community Learning)	2	2	2

- 1.15 The Service is pleased to report that it was successful in retaining its Matrix Accreditation in March 2021. 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 these services. This accreditation has to be renewed every three years.

- 1.16 The Service has recently developed a Statement of Intent (Appendix 1), 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.

Delivering through COVID

- 1.17 The COVID pandemic highlighted that the Service has resilient and highly committed management and tutor teams. Tutors willingly engaged with new on-line teaching technologies such as Zoom, Teams and Google Classroom. Courses were quickly transferred to remote learning, combined where needed with telephone support and resources emailed or posted to learners.
- 1.18 For some courses and learners, the challenges of delivering on-line were significant. To support learners who were struggling to access provision on-line due to lack equipment or access to the internet, the service purchased a small number of laptops to be loaned to learners, a loan scheme was quickly developed, and learners prioritised and given access to equipment where needed.
- 1.19 Frequent contact was maintained with learners during the lockdowns, helping with continued engagement and especially with the most vulnerable learners. Support was also provided to residents and learners throughout lockdown with activities and new one-off events that were developed to help combat loneliness, stress and the sense of isolation that residents were feeling at that time.
- 1.20 For courses targeted at adults with learning difficulties and or disabilities, many learners were unable to access on-line sessions unless there was good support from their carers. These courses have now returned to face-to-face delivery.
- 1.21 Whilst overall learner numbers have dropped as online learning has not suited everyone, there have still been many new learners recruited. This is mainly within Family Learning and English, which is encouraging and shows the potential of growth for an ongoing online offer.
- 1.22 Despite the impact of COVID, the services ESFA funding out-turn position for 2019/20 was just over 90% of the allocation against a national target threshold of 68% to receive full funding. However, in 2020/21 the impact of COVID did adversely affect the funding out-turn position which dropped to 87% against a threshold target of 90% to receive full funding, therefore the Service was subjected to a small financial clawback.

Participation and Outcomes for learners

- 1.23 Enrolments and provision were severely impacted by Covid-19 throughout the whole of 2020/21 academic year. There were only 2631 total enrolments, with

1304 adults accessing learning through the Service (some learners enrol on more than one course). Pre-Covid, enrolments were 4356 (2788 learners).

- 1.24 Total enrolled numbers for the academic year 2021/22 represent 76% of enrolments and just 56% of learners compared with the previous year, which had itself been significantly impacted by the pandemic. The fall in participation in Community Learning of 36% was slightly smaller than the national average of 40.5% (<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/further-education-and-skills/2020-21>)
- 1.25 80% (980) of learners were women and 20% (226) were men. This is below the national picture for gender enrolment in the sector, which is 25% male. All ages of learner are well represented, with the highest rates among learners aged 30-39; participation by the youngest and oldest age bands has declined slightly during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 1.26 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.
- 1.27 Achievement rates in 2020/21 for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities are in line with the previous year but slightly down on pre-Covid rates. These courses have now returned to face-to-face delivery and this approach is providing the additional support that these learners need to succeed.
- 1.28 The overall achievement rate in skills-funded provision in 2020/21 was 81.1% (slightly higher than the achievement rate of 78.6% in 2019/20) but still below the pre-Covid rate of 87.2% in 2018/19. Note, skills-funded provision includes maths, English, English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL) and provision for learners with learning difficulties or disabilities.
- 1.29 The overall achievement rate in 2020/21 in community learning funded provision has remained strong at 93.5%. Community learning courses tend to be shorter, with less formal assessments compared with the skills-funded courses.
- 1.30 Attendance fell during Covid lockdowns (76.6% in 2019/20) but started to increase in 2020/21 (82.4%), compared with the pre-Covid level of 86.5% in 2018/19. Work continues to drive up attendance levels across all courses.
- 1.31 Learner destinations are collected at the end of each course. 59% of Skills-funded learners said their learning has helped them develop work-related skills and/or gain employment, and 88% plan to go on to another ACL course, further or higher education. Overall, 51% of learners in 2020/21 had previously undertaken a course with ACL. 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 In 2020/21, the ESFA set a threshold of 90% for earnings against the allocation, with clawback of any unearned funding below 90%. The Service delivered 87%, so was subject to a 3% clawback. Note, the ESFA provided an opportunity for services that did not meet the 90% threshold to submit a business case to request retaining 100% of the funding allocation. Warwickshire ACL Service submitted a business case setting out the impact of COVID on the service. However, the service had generated additional fee income during 2020/21 which offset the underspend and therefore the business case was rejected.
- 2.2 In 2021/22, the ESFA Adult Education Budget threshold to receive full funding has returned to the pre-Covid level of 97%. Therefore, there is again a risk of financial clawback.
- 2.3 The service has implemented a number of initiatives in order to attract and recruit learners. However, against a backdrop of COVID, increases in the cost of living and an increase in competition with other providers now offering on-line courses, the number of learners has not returned to pre-Covid levels.
- 2.4 The service also needs to maintain the 'Good' grade 2 rating at the next Ofsted inspection to avoid the risk of losing some or all of the ESFA Adult Education budget.
- 2.5 If there was a significant reduction/clawback in the grant funding, the Council would need 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.
- 2.6 Additionally, the ESFA is considering making significant changes to the funding methodology in 2023/24 which could impact on the service. The Service is monitoring these developments and planning mitigations, as needed.

3. Environmental Implications

- 3.1 None

4. Supporting Information

- 4.1 None.

5. Timescales associated with the decision and next steps

- 5.1 Feedback on the Service draft Statement of Intent 2022-2025 will be received during the meeting and the document will then be finalised and taken to the Service's Advisory Board in July 2022.

Appendices

1. Appendix 1 - Warwickshire's ACL Service draft Statement of Intent 2022-2025

Background Papers

1. Cabinet Report, 8th October 2020, Adult and Community Learning Proposed Advisory Board.

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

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Other members: Chair and Spokes of Communities OSC