

**Further Education Commissioner
assessment summary**

**The Wiltshire Council
(Learning in Wiltshire)**

February 2017

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Assessment

Background

The Wiltshire Council is the unitary authority for most of the County of Wiltshire, providing all significant local government services to Wiltshire residents. It is the biggest employer in Wiltshire and is based in Trowbridge. Wiltshire is a predominantly rural county, with Salisbury having the highest population density. There is a strong military presence throughout the County, but particularly concentrated around the Salisbury Plain.

Job creation, education and skills is one of the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) priorities, with a need for more, higher level skills in high value Manufacturing, Advanced Engineering, Financial and Professional Services, Digital/ICT and Land based industries.

The Wiltshire Education, Employment and Skills Strategy 2014-2020 reveals:

- There are no universities in Wiltshire. 37.4% of residents are educated to degree level - almost 12% below the national average.
- Wiltshire's performance at narrowing the achievement gap is behind national, regional and statistical neighbours.
- There is a need to raise the quality of further education (FE) to reach a consistent high standard across all campuses and to improve the condition of the FE estate.

The Council's 2016/17 contract with the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) encompasses adult Apprenticeships, 16–18 Apprenticeships and adult education.

Through a branded service called '*Learning in Wiltshire*' (LiW), Wiltshire Council delivers a range of accredited and non-accredited courses across Wiltshire and beyond. LiW currently offers family learning, work-based learning, classroom learning and Apprenticeships.

Following an inadequate Ofsted inspection in October 2016, the Council initially determined to withdraw from all provision. Following much debate over the options available, including a declared need to maintain provision for vulnerable families, it was decided that, although there were alternative options for the Apprenticeship provision, the community learning provision should remain within Council control. Senior Directors have confirmed that, in the pursuit of sustainable quality improvement, the provision may require 'underwriting'.

The Council has informed the SFA in a letter dated 11 January 2017 that, following its Ofsted inspection outcome, it will hand back all Apprenticeship funding and terminate this part of the contract on 31 March 2017. The Council is working with the SFA to ensure that all apprentices who will still be in learning on 1 April 2017 will have been transferred to other suitable providers.

Following the SFA notification that Wiltshire Council, Learning in Wiltshire (Community Employment Learning and Skills) had been graded as inadequate by Ofsted at its most recent inspection, the Minister for Skills decided that the FE Commissioner should assess the position of the service in line with the Government's intervention policy set out in '*Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills*'.

The FE Commissioner's report is intended to advise the Minister and the Chief Executive of the Funding Agencies on:

- The capacity and capability of Wiltshire Council's Community Employment Learning and Skills leadership and governance to deliver quality improvement within an agreed timeframe;

- Any action that should be taken by the Minister and/or the Chief Executive of the Funding Agencies to ensure the delivery of quality improvement (considering the suite of interventions set out in '*Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills*'); and
- How progress should be monitored and reviewed, taking into account the SFA regular monitoring arrangements and Ofsted monitoring visits.

Assessment Methodology

The FE Commissioner requested that two advisers visit the Wiltshire Council's Community Employment Learning and Skills over the period 21 - 23 February 2017. They received briefing information in advance from the SFA and met with those with overall responsibility for the service and spoke with managers, tutors and learners.

Governance Arrangements

Governance has been poor. Although there has been a commitment to Apprenticeships and to the role played by community learning in addressing inequalities in Wiltshire, this has not translated into a clear strategy for the service. There has been a lack of effective arrangements to monitor the service and its impact.

A new governing body is being created and will meet, for the first time, in March 2017. It will include two senior managers of the Children's Centres, a primary head teacher, the Assistant Director Commissioning, Performance and School Effectiveness, the holder of the portfolio for Children's Services and a learner. It will report to the Children's Trust. It will be necessary to address the means of enabling effective scrutiny through regular data based reports from the new leadership team.

Leaders acknowledge that, although firmly committed to family learning in the traditional sense, the service was somewhat piecemeal and slow in focussing on the acquisition of skills and progression into employment. This is recognised in the Post Inspection Action Plan, albeit it has yet to be incorporated into an overall strategic plan.

Leadership and Management

The service is currently part of the Human Resources provision of the Department of People and Business. The Learning Partnership Manager who reports to the Head of Human Resources, manages a small team which, until recently has had a number of unfilled vacancies. There has been considerable 'churn' in the leadership and staffing of the service over recent years and these, coupled with unfilled vacancies, have contributed to a general loss of direction.

Senior leaders have acted decisively. The provision is being moved to the oversight of the Head of School Effectiveness, transition being completed by 1 April 2017. A new Head of Family Learning has been appointed and erstwhile frozen vacancies are now being filled.

There is evidence of a real desire to refocus, with greater rigour on the management of the service and placing learners in a clear, formally evidenced progression pathway. Managers and tutors understand that evidence of progression must be empirical, rather than anecdotal alone, as the service moves forward.

The Quality of Provision

Wiltshire Council was inspected by Ofsted in late October 2016. Inspectors judged the following to be inadequate: overall effectiveness; the effectiveness of leadership and management; outcomes for learners; quality of teaching, learning and assessment; adult learning programmes; and apprenticeships. Personal development, behaviour and welfare was judged to require improvement. The '*effective work with schools and children's centres across Wiltshire which enable adult learners to take their first steps back into learning*' and '*the provision of family learning in locations with the greatest proportion of disadvantaged or deprived learners*' were both seen as a strength.

By the time of the first Ofsted re-inspection monitoring visit to Wiltshire Council on 12-13 January 2017, the Council had announced its decision to withdraw from delivering Apprenticeships. It had also just concluded its considerations about the future of its adult education (community learning) provision and decided to retain it. Responsibility for the provision is being moved from the Directorate of People and Business back to the Directorate of Commissioning, Performance and School Effectiveness, thus aligning it with the School Improvement Team, where there is the knowledge and skills necessary to raise standards and share good practice. This decision has the full support of the staff involved.

In January 2017, Ofsted highlighted the priorities for quality improvement as follows:

- *As a matter of urgency, produce a post-inspection action plan (PIAP) which includes dates for completion of actions, clear measures for evaluating the impact of actions taken and actions to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.*
- *Ensure that the PIAP aligns to the revised strategy for adult learning courses.*
- *Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that teachers know how to plan lessons and courses that develop learners' skills and knowledge and, where appropriate, prepare them for employment.*

Conclusions

Council leaders have carried out a thorough review of the future options for Apprenticeship provision. They considered a range of options and decided to end the contract with the SFA to deliver Apprenticeships on 31 March 2017.

Managers and staff now have a clear understanding of what apprentices need to do in order to complete their Apprenticeship and which apprentices are able to complete before the end of March 2017.

Council leaders are working closely and productively with the SFA to examine future procurement options for apprentices who will not complete their apprenticeship by 31 March 2017.

Council leaders have also considered carefully the options for adult provision/family learning. They have decided to retain the adult education budget (AEB) contract. They believe that, by moving the provision into the Directorate for Commissioning, Performance and School Effectiveness, they will be able to use the support for educational provision which already exists in the Directorate to contribute towards improving the quality of the courses and aligning it better to skills agenda and employability objectives.

A new vision and strategy is being developed for the family learning provision that better supports national, regional and Council objectives of creating stronger and more resilient communities; supporting adults back into learning and progressing them towards gaining skills, qualifications and ultimately work and helping parents/carers to support their children's learning and life chances.

There is evidence of a real desire to refocus, with greater rigour on the management of the service and placing learners in clear, evidenced progression pathways. Managers and tutors also understand that evidence of progression must be empirical, rather than anecdotal, as the service moves forward.

Managers are in the early stages of developing a post inspection action plan (PIAP), to tackle the weaknesses identified by inspectors in teaching, learning and assessment.

Recommendations

1. Continue to implement new transfer arrangements for governance and leadership into the Directorate for Commissioning, Performance and School Effectiveness, thus better utilising existing wider quality assurance arrangements and strengthening leadership.
2. Ensure the new Governing Body comprises a suitable balance of internal and external stakeholders and partners; it should make sure that it has appropriate reporting arrangements in order to hold managers and staff to account for the performance of the service, as well as supporting and advising them.
3. Ensure that the Post Inspection Action Plan (PIAP) has congruence with the emerging strategic plan i.e. skills acquisition and progression to employment.
4. Continue to develop the PIAP to ensure concise objectives and timelines, linked to quality improvement.
5. Ensure that new quality improvement policies and procedures are speedily translated into appropriate staff development/performance management arrangements for classroom teachers and for observers judging the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
6. Continue to work with the SFA to ensure the smooth transfer of Apprenticeship provision to alternative high quality providers.
7. An FE Commission Adviser to attend case conferences prior to undertaking a monitoring visit during the summer term to review progress.

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