



Department
for Education

FE Commissioner Intervention Assessment Report: North Lincolnshire Council

October 2019

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FE Commissioner Intervention Assessment Report

North Lincolnshire Council

Name and address of council	North Lincolnshire Council Church Square House 30-40 High Street Scunthorpe DN15 6NL
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Chair of the council	Councillor Rob Waltham MBE – Leader of council Councillor David Rose – Cabinet member for children, families and culture
Chief executive of the council	Denise Hyde – CEO Peter Thorpe – Director: learning, skills and culture Sandra Simmons – Head of participation and achievement
Date of assessment	8 to 9 October 2019

Background to FE Commissioner Intervention Assessment

North Lincolnshire Council was referred for FE Commissioner (FEC) intervention following notification that the council had received an Inadequate grading after a recent Ofsted inspection.

Two FE advisers visited the council in October 2019 to carry out the intervention. Briefing information was provided in advance by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and the council. The FEC Team spoke with elected members, governors, senior leaders, managers, stakeholders, tutors and learners (see Annex A and B) during the two-day visit.

The FEC report is intended to advise the Minister and the Chief Executive of the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) on:

- The capacity and capability of North Lincolnshire Council or institution 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 ESFA to ensure the delivery of quality improvement; and
- How and when progress should be monitored and reviewed taking into account the ESFA's regular monitoring arrangements and Ofsted monitoring visits.

Overview of the council

North Lincolnshire council area comprises 338 square miles and has a rising population of 171k. It is home to the busiest port complex in the UK and good road, rail and air networks link businesses to key markets in the UK, Europe and global trade routes. Relatively low house prices (44% below the national average) and commercial rental costs (lower than regional and national averages by 43% and 16%) make it attractive to some 5,555 manufacturing, metal and engineering, process industries, logistics and green economy businesses. Tourism is also an increasingly important part of the economy. Key employers include British Steel which has a major site in the area, Total Fina Elf, Conoco Phillips, Wren kitchens and various hotel and restaurant, education, public administration and health sector employers.

Some areas in North Lincolnshire are within the top fifth most deprived in England (2015 data); the most deprived being clustered in the Scunthorpe urban area, with pockets of deprivation in Winterton and Barton. Much of North Lincolnshire's workforce also earns below the average annual wage.

Scunthorpe is one of the council's main locations for new housing and employment development, along with the market towns of Brigg and Barton. The council's adult education and community learning service (AECL) is committed to its work with those who are harder to engage in education and training and focuses its AECL funding on people who are disadvantaged and least likely to participate in learning.

The AECL service is part of a portfolio within the local authority that includes schools, libraries and learning. It delivers adult and family learning in hub centres, community venues and children's centres. All of its £1.25 million provision is funded by the ESFA. Adult education provision overall was judged as Inadequate by Ofsted at inspection in June 2019. Family learning, inclusivity and partnerships were praised in the text.

Leadership and Governance

North Lincolnshire council is divided into seventeen electoral wards represented by 43 councillors. Following May 2019 local elections, the conservative party holds the majority, with 27 seats on the council. The council operates a leader and cabinet system; the latter is made up of the leader and eight councillors. Labour opposition councillors also attend cabinet meetings.

The cabinet member for children, families and culture has strategic responsibility for AECL. During our conversation with the cabinet member, he explained that prior to a few months before the Ofsted inspection, governance and accountability arrangements were insufficiently thorough. In short, elected members and leaders were not effective enough in monitoring the performance of the service and in holding leaders and managers to account.

The recent changes to the strategic oversight of the AECL service have strengthened the arrangements for governance. The cabinet member is an ex-secondary school headteacher and has in-depth experience of all phases of education, including school improvement and inspection. He is chair of both the children and young peoples' partnership and corporate parenting boards and a member of the schools' forum and the education and special educational needs and disability (SEND) standards boards. He is also a member of the governance board which is now overseeing AECL provision. Reporting mechanisms are now following good practice models elsewhere in the council.

The new governing board is chaired by the well-qualified head of access and inclusion at the council. He has strategic and operational responsibility for functions such as SEND, educational psychology, specialist teaching support, disability services and access to education arrangements. We spoke to him and to most of the new governors. They have a wide and rich skill set and significant relevant experience. Although new (the board has only met once so far), its meeting minutes are detailed. Key performance indicators (KPIs) and risk measures are being introduced that show members are dedicated to

overseeing a curriculum that serves community and local employment priorities well and will challenge leaders to ensure that this happens.

The governing board is showing promise of better assurance. Until it is fully functioning however, a progress board, led by an independent chair from another part of the council (head of standards and effectiveness), has been effectively holding managers to account. The board investigates leaders' and managers' knowledge, understanding and rigour, triangulating this with quantitative and qualitative evidence.

Leadership and Senior Management team

We met with senior leaders at director level and throughout the service. There is commitment and involvement at the highest level within the council to improve the AECL service. The council first carried out a review in late 2017, after which AECL provision was moved to the portfolio that includes schools, libraries and learning to be aligned to schools and school improvement. Under the head of participation and achievement, an experienced senior leader and ex-primary headteacher, a revised management structure was introduced. A new service manager was appointed in autumn 2018. She quickly recognised that the quality of teaching was a concern and that the provision was no longer good. An external review procured by the local authority confirmed this. It also highlighted that previous managers were not challenging underperformance sufficiently.

In response to these findings, senior leaders then made significant changes to the structure of the service. These included introducing new roles, such as lead tutors with core responsibilities e.g. for teaching and assessment, data, mathematics and English. Consultation was in progress at the time of the inspection. Some internal staff have now been reappointed to the new roles; many were not re-appointed and have left the council. Further, in response to criticisms of the curriculum, leaders and managers have acted swiftly to align the provision more closely with local needs.

The recent restructure has been managed effectively. Along with the restructure, shrewd staffing appointments at managerial, tutor and support levels are giving much needed clarity around roles and responsibilities and are leading to greater accountability. It is important that these new and enthusiastic staff receive sufficient mentoring support to help them grow into their managerial roles.

Data is also being used more effectively to analyse performance and identify issues. Managers improved analysis and interpretation also appears to be leading to swifter action to identify students who are at risk of underachieving. Tracking and monitoring of all learners needs to become routine and embedded across the service.

Leaders are driving improvements and are clear about the need for change. As a result, people across the service whom the FEC Team met, have a renewed sense of purpose and passion for the work that they do. This is also balanced by a realistic understanding of how this needs to translate into high quality provision.

Curriculum and Quality Improvement

Curriculum and provision overview

Current provision at North Lincolnshire Council comprises courses in English, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), mathematics, information and communication technology, business administration, photography and customer services. People who want to begin work in schools can follow courses for teaching assistants. Courses are offered at pre-entry level for functional skills and ESOL, and at entry, level 1, 2 and 3 for other qualifications. The council provides a family learning programme, linked very closely to local needs. The programme is designed to help parents understand how children learn and how they can best support them. Around two fifths of the council's provision is non-accredited community learning and around a quarter is family learning.

The council's delivery partners include the Department for Work and Pensions, voluntary and community organisations, schools, children's centres and libraries. Links with partners are strong and purposeful and help to identify adults who would otherwise not be in education.

Curriculum planning and development

Shortly before the Ofsted inspection in June 2019, leaders and managers became aware that the council's adult community learning curriculum was insufficiently focused on local needs. The Ofsted report served to reinforce this issue, identifying that too many council courses were for recreational purposes only. Subsequently, all provision was completely overhauled. Stakeholders, including local schools and health visitors, employers, such as British Steel, managers, teachers and other staff were consulted and involved in the design of the current course offer. The council now makes much better use of labour market information and data in general to continually review curriculum offer. The result is a programme of adult community provision that aligns closely with the council's 'safe, well, prosperous, connected' outcomes. Courses are now wholly organised around the needs of the local residents, especially those living in the most deprived areas and who would otherwise not be in education. All staff are focused on helping local residents on council courses to get into work, training, or progress onto other courses.

Hobby and leisure programmes have been removed from the council publicly funded offer. Support in the form of accommodation is still provided by the council for those who want to continue such courses on a self-funded basis.

Pathways to work have also been better developed in family learning provision, starting with non-accredited programmes to help under confident parents enabling progression onto work-related qualifications.

Quality improvement and self-assessment

North Lincolnshire Council had a full Ofsted inspection in June 2019. Grades in all areas were Inadequate apart from the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, which was judged to as Requires Improvement. Safeguarding was judged as effective.

Self-assessment

The latest self-assessment report (SAR) is comprehensive, but overly optimistic in judgements about performance. For example, it is too positive about the most recent achievement data, which, although improved by 4.5 percentage points from 2017/18 to 2018/19, is still well below national achievement rate levels. Processes to raise attendance are in place, and it appears that these are having a positive impact on students. However, it is too early in the academic year to be able to judge the true effectiveness of the much-tightened procedures for improving attendance.

Managers have increased the rigour of lesson observation, but too many assumptions are made about future outcomes to assess accurately that teaching, learning and assessment are of consistently high quality. The quality improvement plan/post inspection action plan (QIP/PIAP) is wide ranging and addresses all the areas for improvement identified by Ofsted. Like the SAR, the plan is insufficiently self-critical. Further, it does not make full and effective use of data to measure, analyse and evaluate performance, and then to use this to inform future actions.

Despite issues with self-assessment and the QIP, the progress being made is very encouraging, especially in community learning provision as a result of the many actions taken by staff. No time has been wasted in seeking improvements in all aspects of provision. We found that staff at all levels were fully committed to ensuring that needs of local residents, especially those who were most vulnerable, are met.

We agree with staff about the improved quality of the continuing professional development (CPD) programme. Nevertheless, there needs to be more access to mentoring and coaching programmes, especially for recently appointed managers so that they can develop strategic skills. Senior leaders should also plan for succession management.

Student views

Students whom the FEC team met were highly appreciative of the provision and offered good examples of how they had made progress onto the next level of course.

Staff views

Staff say they feel more involved, listened to and supported. They value the changes made in the recent restructure and feel that it has brought clarity and a greater sense of

purpose to their work. Staff welcome the more rigorous approach to performance management and understand its purpose in helping to develop provision that is outstanding. They particularly appreciate the well-considered programme of CPD.

Effectiveness of the council to manage and improve quality

A good deal of progress has been made since the council first became aware earlier in 2019 that community provision was poor. Actions had already begun to improve provision but when Ofsted judged provision as Inadequate in June 2019, it served to reinvigorate the council's resolve and to redouble their efforts to ensure that adult and community learning was at least good.

Council staff have the capacity to manage and improve quality. Senior leaders and council members are clear about what needs to happen. They have overseen several moves to ensure that staff involved in adult and community provision can learn from best practice found elsewhere in North Lincolnshire council and beyond. Actions to date are encouraging; this includes a restructure and a more robust approach to quality assurance as these are beginning to have an impact. For example, headline results for 2019, although still below national rates, have improved by just under 5 percentage points.

Staff at all levels are working at pace to secure improvements in adult and community provision. They need to ensure now that they do not lose the momentum and enthusiasm for change. Leaders can help in this by providing good support especially to recently appointed managers, and to ensure sound succession planning.

Conclusions

The FEC Team visit to North Lincolnshire Council AECL service has shown that there are clear examples of good practice, especially in family learning provision and in cross agency working.

Senior leaders from director level throughout the council are driving improvements and are clear about the need for change. As a result, and due to the recent restructure, people across the service have a renewed sense of purpose. This is balanced by a realistic understanding of how this needs to translate into high-quality provision.

The governing board is fledgling, having only met once so far, however the progress board is providing robust challenge to the governing board in its development stages.

Local stakeholders' employers and staff have been involved in developing the revised curriculum offer which is now wholly organised around the needs of the local residents, especially those living in the most deprived areas. Data is being used more effectively however tracking and monitoring of all learners needs to become routine and embedded.

The SAR produced in September 2019, and the QIP are comprehensive, but both are insufficiently self-critical. The QIP in particular needs to include more numerical targets. The SAR should be based on the new inspection framework. Both documents need to be more evaluative.

The council has the capacity to improve. Actions taken to date are encouraging and the impact is beginning to show.

Recommendations

1. The council must ensure new staff receive sufficient support to help them grow into their managerial roles through a tailored approach to coaching and mentoring. This should be introduced by September 2020.
2. There needs to be an improvement in the evaluation of the quality of provision by ensuring that leaders and managers accurately identify key weaknesses and refer to them in the SAR and streamlined PIAP. The next SAR is due in November 2020 and the FEC team will review this at the next visit.
3. Tracking and monitoring of all learners must become routine and embedded by November 2020. The FEC Team will review this at the next visit.
4. The council needs to maintain the momentum and the enthusiasm for change, but make sure that the increased pace does not compromise the approach to quality assurance. Staff need to place more emphasis on evaluating, in a more self-critical way, the impact of actions taken. This will be reviewed in FEC stocktake November 2020.

The FEC Team will liaise with the ESFA following the agency's regular case conferences with the council, where the service will report on its progress, especially in relation to the PIAP and the above recommendations. A FEC stocktake visit will be undertaken (usually after the Ofsted monitoring visit) to review progress.

Annex A - Information reviewed

Structure charts

Governing body membership and pen pics of governors

Skills audit - governing board

Minutes of governing board meetings

Ofsted inspection report – June 2019

Details of curriculum offer

Locations of delivery venues

Details of quality assurance cycle - 2019/20

AECL position paper (September 2019)

AECL QIP and post inspection action plan (September 2019)

3 years trend and provisional QAR data 2018/19

Teaching, learning and assessment policy and OTLA procedures

Tracking by programmes - summary

Performance Management Framework

Safeguarding policy and Prevent action plan

Annex B - Interviewees

Cabinet member children, families and culture

Governance group members x 6

Director of learning, skills and culture

Head of participation and achievement

Head of access and inclusion (chair of governance board)

Head of standards and effectiveness team (chair of progress board)

AECL manager

Senior officer performance management improvement

Senior officer community and family learning

Data/MIS officer

Lead tutor IQA/RAPRA

Safeguarding and support officer

IAG and customer service supervisor

Lead tutor English and ESOL

Lead tutor employability and skills

Lead tutor mathematics and IT

Supporting teaching and learning tutor

Teaching assistant tutor

Development officer and tutor, community and family learning

Action station manager

Skills adviser Jobcentre Plus

Tutor/learner support assistant

Community and family learning outreach officer

Learners x 5



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