

## **BUSINESS SUPPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**3 APRIL 2013**

### **MEMBER'S ITEM: MEDWAY ADULT LEARNING OFSTED REPORT**

Report from: Tricia Palmer, Assistant Director, Organisational Services

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#### **Summary**

This report sets out a response to a matter raised by Councillor Maple on the recent OFSTED report on Medway Adult Learning. This report outlines the outcomes from the recent OFSTED inspection of Medway Adult Learning and proposes the way forward in addressing the issues raised by the inspection.

#### **1. Budget and Policy Framework**

1.1 Under Medway Constitution Overview and Scrutiny rules (Chapter 4, Part 5, Paragraph 9.1) Councillor Maple has requested that an item on this matter is included on the agenda for this meeting.

#### **2. Background**

2.1 The Medway Adult Learning Service (MALS) was inspected by OFSTED week commencing 4 March 2013, and the report was published on 15 March 2013. The outcome of the inspection was Level 4 (inadequate). A copy of this report can be found on the OFSTED website at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/provider/ELS/53295>

2.2 The report contains many positive comments about elements of the service, and the outcomes for learners and the quality of teaching and learning remained at level 3. However the service was rated at level 4 due to lack of progress in improving the service overall. It should also be noted that not all the service provision was inspected, but the courses funded by grant money from the Skills Funding Agency were closely scrutinised. The level 4 scoring related to some concerns around the management of the service, and in particular the level and breadth of information provided to senior leaders to enable them to challenge and scrutinise performance. This had led to variability in the quality of teaching and learning with some areas performing very well (Employability Training), whilst others (Foundation English and Mathematics) were found to need improvement.

- 2.3 The inspection was carried out under a new OFSTED regime, which places greater emphasis on leadership and management. This area of the inspection includes having an ambitious vision and high expectations of learners, together with a requirement to meet the needs and interests of learners, employers and the community alike. This a tougher test than the previous inspections and a level 4 in the leadership and management section can only lead to an inadequate outcome, regardless of the scores achieved in other elements of the inspection. Therefore whilst MALS had continued to improve since the last inspection (4.5% increase in successful outcomes and around the national average for outcomes) it had failed to sufficiently keep up with the national trends, and demonstrate the level of ambition needed to make the required improvements. The inspection noted that self-assessment was not used effectively and consequently improvement planning was not cohesive. This is clearly very disappointing and could have serious implications for funding if the service does not demonstrate an ability to improve within the next 6 months. However these are areas in which it is possible to make clear and demonstrable change within that time period. There will be a re-inspection in a year's time, where the service must demonstrate clear improvements and cannot continue to be inadequate.
- 2.4 It should however be noted that of the 64 observations made by OFSTED, 40 of them were positive and reflected well on the service, these included the following strengths:
- The range of programmes on offer meets the needs of the communities and reflects the Council's priorities well
  - Partnership working was noted as strong and effectively broadens the curriculum for learners
  - Learners are well motivated and often attain personal learning goals. They develop their skills well and often apply them in their every day lives. It should also be noted here that in an independent survey 87% of learners enjoy their courses (compared with 79% in comparative providers).
  - Learners on the employability programmes and those undertaking apprenticeship qualifications achieve well. This is particularly satisfying as it is a key strand in supporting individuals back into work.
  - In addition the inspections reported no concerns in relation to safeguarding or equality and diversity and the financial health of the service continues to be robust.

### **3. Next Steps**

- 3.1 The service is required to provide a very clear improvement plan to the Skills Funding Agency within 6 weeks of the inspection and we have agreed to provide this by the end of May. The following actions have already been instigated to move this forward quickly and ensure that improvements are made quickly to enable them to be embedded in time for the monitoring visit from OFSTED in 6- 8 months:
- The current service manager has left, and a very experienced interim manager has been appointed to move the service forward and manage the improvement plan
  - An improvement board has been set up, chaired by the portfolio holder and attended by the AD, Organisational services and MALS senior management team. This board will monitor progress on the improvement plan and review statistical data to ensure that retention and performance on outcomes improves and is bench-marked against national and local trends

- An improvement plan has been drafted and will be reviewed by an external professional to ensure that it is robust
- Additional resources have been transferred from the Council's learning and development team to support the improvement plan
- External support will be provided from the Learning and Skills Improvement Services
- Self-assessment panels have been reinstated with the curriculum managers and will be collated into an overall self assessment for the service. This in turn will feed into a cohesive approach to improvement planning
- Regular monitoring meetings have been agreed with the Skills funding Agency to update on progress
- Immediate training for Curriculum Managers to ensure that they are aware of the need for a robust approach to lesson observation, use of technology and individual learner plans
- Review of the senior management structure to ensure that there is sufficient capacity to meet the improvement agenda with a view to adding resource (from within the current budget) to quality improvement support

These are the initial actions we have taken to respond quickly to the OFSTED outcome. However as the self-assessments are carried out and reviewed new actions may feed into the improvement plan.

## 5. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk
Failure to make sufficient progress on improvements	Progress in the quality of teaching and learning is too slow	Robust management of tutors by the curriculum managers and thorough lesson observations Immediate training for curriculum managers
Poor PR as a result of inspection	Funding from the Skills funding Agency at risk  Interest from the media, learner concerns, loss of confidence	Ensure that improvement plan is thorough and effective.  Explore other avenues of funding  Publicise good messages, profile learner successes, ensure that robust data tells the complete story
Reduced employee morale	Employees de-motivated, performance dips	Strong visible leadership backed by an improvement plan which individuals can understand and support. Good communications, training and face-to-face discussions

## **6. Financial and legal implications**

- 6.1 In accordance with Rule 9.1 of the Constitution, any member of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee or Sub Committee shall be entitled to request that an item relevant to the functions of the Committee or Sub Committee be included on the agenda for the next available meeting.
- 6.2 There are no immediate financial implications as the SFA funding follows the academic year. However it is clear that the service will not receive any growth in funding and should it fail to improve the financial implications are severe and could affect the viability of the service. The running costs of the service are some £2.7m, funded by grant (£2.1m) and other income (£0.6m).

## **7. Recommendations**

- 7.1 The committee is asked to note this report and support the actions so far in improving the service. A further report on progress against the improvement plan will be brought back to this committee in September 2013.

### **Lead officer contact**

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### **Background papers**

OFSTED Report – Medway Adult learning <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/provider/ELS/53295>