

CABINET

14 DECEMBER 2021

MEDWAY ADULT EDUCATION (MAE) BUSINESS PLAN

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Howard Doe, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services

Report from: Richard Hicks, Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive

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Summary

The Business Plan sets out a short-term and medium-term framework for Medway Adult Education, focusing on work outside of business as usual. It considers challenges and opportunities, both from a commercial and holistic perspective. It lays out the priorities and an action plan to deliver against.

The report was considered by the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 25 November 2021 and its comments are set out in section 4 of the report.

1. Budget and policy framework

1.1 Approval of the MAE Business Plan is a matter for Cabinet. The Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee has considered the report and provided comments for consideration by Cabinet in determining this matter.

1.2 The MAE Business Plan is consistent with the Council Plan, notably the strand 'Residents with Jobs & Skills' whilst interacting with others such as 'Healthy and Active Communities'.

2. Background

2.1 Medway Adult Education has been on a significant journey of improvement, in 2013 it was given an Inadequate rating by Ofsted. A lot of work began to improve this, which culminated in a Good rating in 2015 and a further Good rating in 2018. Now that MAE is established as a Good provider, the time is right to launch a new business plan, to explore future business opportunities and ensure long term sustainability.

- 2.2 Drafting of the business plan commenced in March 2019, however, this was paused while the impact of COVID-19 was assessed. Delivery against the core aims of the draft however didn't pause and so elements of the business plan have been delivered, including a small structure redesign to enable MAE to respond to new ways of working in the pandemic.
- 2.3 The business plan has also been aligned with the Skills & Employability Plan for Medway 2035 and adopts 3 of the 4 priorities currently within the skills plan. This strengthens both plans and Medway Council's ambitions to provide residents with the right skills and jobs.
- 2.4 The business plan is focused on delivering new areas of work for MAE and as such will need to be delivered alongside business as usual activities. It must not compromise the delivery of our core Education Skills Funding Agency contract and our Ofsted performance. The pace of delivery will be affected by those factors as well as the level of investment that can be raised.

3. Advice and analysis

- 3.1 The Business Plan is important for driving MAE forward, to ensure it remains a key part of the community, enabling residents to reach their potential, whether supporting them to enhance their work skills, or supporting creativity. Concurrently it also provides the framework for increased commercial activity, seeking to generate new income streams to ensure continued sustainability for the service.
- 3.2 The plan identifies some key opportunity areas, notably working in with businesses in alignment with our skills agenda. We have much to offer businesses, including tailored courses, support for wellbeing and apprenticeships. Other opportunities include enhancing our digital offer through the new, exciting facility at Britton Farm Mall and embracing online delivery.
- 3.3 The plan sets out four priorities, each priority promotes growth for all and expands the reach of MAE. Behind each priority is a suite of objectives and actions, bringing the priorities to fruition.

The priorities are:

- Matching Business Demand with Skills Supply
 - Developing Medway's Talent Pool
 - Establishing Routes to Employment
 - Developing Individuals Holistically
- 3.4 A Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA) has been completed and is attached to this report as Appendix 3. The Plan is for all residents and will help to advance equality in Medway.

4. Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee

4.1 The Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the report at its meeting on 25 November 2021 and its comments are set out below.

4.2 Discussion:

Members considered a report regarding the Medway Adult Education (MAE) Business Plan which set out a short-term and medium-term framework for MAE, focusing on work outside of business as usual. The Plan considered challenges and opportunities, both from a commercial and holistic perspective as well as an action plan to deliver against priorities.

4.3 The following issues were discussed:

Developing IT Skills – reference was made to a number of organisations which the Council worked with where people with an illness or disability who were unable to work full time and had improved their IT skills during the pandemic to a degree but now needed to improve further. Whether adult education could help them to develop the IT skills needed to start a small business was queried as it was felt what was currently offered was not suitable. Members were advised that digital skills were a key area for the adult education service and digital courses had recently been expanded, although more were needed. Planning for the next academic year was due to begin and officers would look at whether the point raised about IT skills could be addressed.

4.4 **Apprenticeships** – whether the support for apprenticeships referred to in the Plan included people over 24 years old was questioned. Members were assured apprenticeships were for all ages, with good representation in the 24 plus age range and no upper age limit.

4.5 **Accessibility of tablets and data** – with regard to the provision of 50 tablets and data to enable learners to access learning from home, the importance of learners having the resources to get the data needed to use the equipment was emphasised. Members were advised that data was critical and if a user who had a tablet but needed data then that would be looked at.

4.6 **Kick Start Programme** – how adult education could play a part in this programme was queried and Members were advised that the service had participated in this programme, which had worked well.

4.7 **Social prescribing** - noting that this may be one of the motivations for accessing adult education, a suggestion that this should be strengthened in the Plan was agreed.

4.8 **Decrease in foreign language courses** – noting the decrease in the availability of these courses, whether the service could work with the pool of interpreters that the Council had access to was suggested.

- 4.9 **Holistic education for adults** - the loss of academic qualifications was regretted, particularly routes to higher education, although it was acknowledged this was due to funding conditions. In response, Members were advised that the adult education service worked closely with Mid Kent College and universities to ensure there were progression routes and guidance was given on how to reach higher educational levels.
- 4.10 **Voluntary Sector** - how the sector would be engaged through the Plan was queried as well as what could be done to help those volunteers would had given up lots of time (e.g., in vaccination centres) to get into employment. Reference was also made to the contributions of people in community payback projects, and it was suggested that the adult education service could recognise their work in order to help them find employment. Members were advised that volunteers played a key role in the service, which also worked closely with the voluntary sector. There were also good links with community partners and officers would look at how the participants in community payback schemes could be accredited or recognised.
- 4.11 **Measuring of outcomes** - in terms of how outcomes were measured and what percentage progressed to employment or further education, Members were advised that work had started to try to capture this information, but this was challenging.
- 4.12 **Decision:** The Committee agreed to note the Medway Adult Education Business Plan and forward its comments to Cabinet, as set out above.

5. Risk management

5.1 Identified risks and proposed mitigation is as follows:

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Business as usual slows delivery	Delivery of existing services and contract is demanding with numerous peaks throughout the year. This will slow the pace of delivery of the plan.	Seek investment to grow the team to focus on delivery of new services. Ensure the structure has in built flexibility to meet demand.	C2
Lack of investment	Without additional investment the pace of delivery will remain slow.	Seek investment from a variety of sources, work with the External Investment Officer. Deliver change in a careful way to	C2

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
		allow for resource to match demand.	
National Policy	The Government is currently working on a policy change which will affect the funding of adult education services. The impact of this is not yet known. It could substantially alter the deliverability of this plan.	Keep a close eye on policy as it forms. Lobby as appropriate and maintain communication with the wider adult education network.	B2
Lack of business engagement	Businesses may not want to engage with MAE and its services, which would make certain elements of the plan undeliverable.	Align the offer with our skills work. Use multiple channels for engagement and work with other departments that work with businesses.	D2

6. Consultation

6.1 The basis of the plan was formed after a wide-ranging consultation took place, including internal stakeholders, training provision, further education and higher education. The bulk of the plan has been formed largely with internal stakeholders, under the guidance of the Medway Adult Education Oversight Board.

7. Climate change implications

7.1 The business plan takes into account the importance of the climate change agenda and seeks to support the education of residents around the importance of climate change. Work will also take place to explore opportunities within the work skills curriculum to enable residents to work in growing decarbonisation industries

8. Financial implications

8.1 There are no immediate financial implications, there is an investment section in the report which explains the areas where funding from external sources

will be sought. Pre-COVID Medway Adult Education had operated within the revenue that it generates.

9. Legal implications

9.1 The Business Plan is aligned with the contractual obligations of our Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) contract. It is in line with national strategies.

10. Recommendation

10.1 The Cabinet is asked to note the comments of the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as set out in section 4 of the report.

10.2 The Cabinet is recommended to approve the Medway Adult Education Business Plan, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

10.3 The Cabinet is recommended to delegate authority to the Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services to consider how coverage of social prescribing can be enhanced within the Plan, as suggested at paragraph 4.7 to the report and to make the relevant changes as required.

11. Suggested reasons for decision

11.1 Approving the MAE Business Plan will:

- Set the direction for the service towards greater sustainability
- Benefit residents through a wide variety of different opportunities through our curriculum
- Align MAE with our growing skills & employment agenda.

Lead officer contact

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Appendices

Appendix 1: MAE Business Plan

Appendix 2: MAE action plan

Appendix 3: Diversity Impact Assessment

Background Papers

None.