

## **Cabinet – 14 April 2010**

### **Walsall Adult Learning Plan and Lead Accountable Body Status**

**Portfolio:** Councillor Harris – Leisure and Culture

**Service:** Walsall Adult and Community College

**Wards:** All

**Key decision:** No

**Forward plan:** No

#### **1. Summary of report**

Following approval of the White Paper, The Learning Revolution, and the implementation of related changes in government responsibilities, each local authority is being encouraged to lead a new movement in informal adult learning and take a strategic lead on informal adult learning (IAL) at local level. This involves drawing up a local learning plan for each local authority area or cluster of areas, signing a Pledge for IAL and acting as local Lead Accountable Body (LAB) for IAL. This role will involve dispersing annual Skills Funding Agency (SFA) funds for informal adult learning delivery.

The benefits of acting as Lead Accountability are the ability to draw down SFA funding for informal adult learning, matched to the local Walsall needs assessment. If Walsall Council does not seek LAB status, it could be the case that a neighbouring authority will pick up this status and draw the SFA funding on behalf of Walsall.

The council's approach to lead accountable body will be entirely consistent with the Protocol for Walsall Council to act as the Accountable Body, agreed by cabinet on 17 March 2010.

#### **2. Recommendations**

2.1 That the Cabinet agrees that the Principal of Walsall Adult and Community College, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, prepares for the Council to become a LAB by commissioning the work necessary to draw up an Adult Learning Plan for Walsall.

2.2 That Cabinet agrees in principle to the vision and objectives for informal and adult learning set out in the report and to the Council expressing an interest in becoming lead accountable body, when invited to do so, and that a further report

setting out detailed implications, is brought back for approval before any firm commitments are entered into.

### **3. Background information**

- 3.1 The national landscape for planning and funding learning and skills is changing. The LSC, which was both a planning and funding body for learning and skills, will be dissolved in on 1 April 2010. New agencies will be established to take on the funding role. These new agencies are:
- The Young People's Funding Agency (YPLA - 14-19 learning and skills remit)
  - The Skills Funding Agency (SFA - adult learning and skills, Apprenticeships and Train to Gain remits).
- 3.2 The next phase of this change will involve adult learning and, in the first instance, Informal Adult Learning (IAL). This change will take place in time to inform planning for the September 2011 academic year and the establishment of a new Lead Accountable Body (LAB) remit for local authorities is currently in development.
- 3.3 Local authorities have been invited to prepare for this change and begin the process becoming a Lead Accountable Body (LAB) for Informal Adult Learning (IAL).
- 3.4 Currently this activity is supported through the LSC Adult Safeguarded Learning (ASL) fund and the LSC Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities fund. These funds are distributed to both local authorities and directly to colleges and other providers.
- 3.5 Nationally this fund has amounted to £210m per year and has been fixed at this level for three years. This safeguard will end in 2011 and it is unclear exactly what amount will be available for this purpose beyond 2011. However, a figure of £69m has been recorded as 'reserved for local authority LAB initiatives'.
- 3.6 There is an assumption that, under the new arrangements, participation in IAL will increase and that this will be achieved through greater co-ordination of funds across a wider range of public, private and third sectors.
- 3.7 In Walsall funds from LSC amount to around £1.5m, the majority of which is deployed through Walsall Adult and Community College and approximately £0.25m through Walsall Lifelong Learning Alliance – in effect the council already is the accountable body for these funds.
- 3.8 However, IAL is a much broader concept that includes all non-skills learning that happens in places and at times outside the traditional learning sector. When this activity is taken into account the funding and expenditure in local authorities is significantly higher but has not necessarily been co-ordinated or linked to national indicators.

3.9 The Learning Revolution white paper (March 2009) focuses on the learning, skills and community sustainability policies for adults. It articulates the concept of informal adult learning (IAL), the risk of failing to co-ordinate IAL services at local level, and the wider community sustainability benefits of a local authority /cross border IAL strategy. The paper describes IAL as a golden thread in several national indicators (NIs) including:

1. Health inequalities.
2. Support for active citizenship and participation in local democracy.
3. Financial and digital capability.
4. Family life and social cohesion.

3.10 The paper defines 21 NIs and 5 PSAs to which IAL makes a contribution.

In addition, the LAB will be encouraged to secure provision to support 'Green Living'.

3.11 A national IAL implementation group is now established and work is currently underway to identify the national indicator associated the scale and impact of IAL at local level. This work is being led by John Denham as Cabinet Champion for Informal Adult Learning.

3.12 The white paper invites local authorities to subscribe to the Informal Adult Learning Pledge and commit to leading a vision and strategy for IAL following five key principles:

1. Innovation (joining up public funding streams with private and third sector investment)
2. Universal Access (opportunity for informal learning regardless of age or prior qualifications)
3. Targeted Support (securing fee income and utilising this to extend services to most disadvantaged)
4. Collaboration (joining up and sign-posting providers services to promote learner progression from one type of learning to another)
5. Promotion (ensuring clear and up-to-date information is widely available)

The LAB framework is the agreed method to pull this agenda together under local authority leadership.

3.13 Local authorities are being invited to lead the 'new movement' in IAL through signing and leading the Informal Adult Learning Pledge and registering as Local Accountable Body to deliver the national vision for IAL described in the white paper:

“..The national vision for informal adult learning needs to be translated into local action that genuinely transforms peoples’ lives.. .....this needs strong, innovative partnerships in each locality to secure the broadest possible choice of learning opportunities. Building on the best current partnerships we will ask LAs to provide the leadership to create and support vibrant local networks of informal learning”.

(Learning Revolution Chapter 4)

- 3.14 The details of LAB are still being worked through by the LAB Implementation group which is jointly led by LSC and the Social Mobility Unit. Local authorities will be invited to express interest in becoming LAB in May 2010.

The objective of the LAB is to:

“ Increase the awareness, reach and stretch of IAL funding through the leadership of a Lead Accountable Body in each local authority or sub-regional grouping”.

- Reach by securing a broad, high quality IAL offer to residents in every LA area with public funding targeted to people who experience deprivation, disability or isolation that limit life chances and future opportunities.
- Stretch by adding value to SFA levels of funding through:
  - Fee collection from those who can afford to pay
  - Linking funding streams.
  - In kind services through volunteer teaching and support.
  - Increased availability of free or low cost learning spaces for self-organised learning groups, clubs and/or societies.

- 3.15 The LAB will be expected to develop a local IAL plan based on local needs and involving a range of partners. The LAB will respond to the SFA commission through the local plan which reflects local priorities, targets, cultures and planning arrangements and will set out the following:

1. Volumes of learners to be supported through the SFA safeguarded budget.
2. Estimates of self organised learner numbers.
3. The value for money and ‘stretch’ secured for the public investment.
4. The flexibilities achieved, for example by leveraging ‘in-kind’ resources or ‘growing the pound’ available for IAL.
5. Local capacity building activity and the linkages developed across relevant stakeholders including self-organised learning groups, third sector and private sector organisations.

- 3.16 The next stage is the commitment to the IAL Pledge and expression of interest, in May 2010, to become a LAB.

A briefing note entitled 'The Councillors Concise Guide to Informal Adult Learning and Lead Accountability Body Status' (attached) was issued by the LGA in February 2010 and encourages a readiness for LAB status 'health-check' approach using the following questions:

1. Have you chosen an elected member and a chief officer who are going to discharge the lead role?
2. What planning processes do you plan to have in place to take on the role of Lead Accountable Body?
3. What is your vision for adult learning and skills in your area and how does informal learning feature and contribute to your ambitions? Can you use it to shape your plans for engaging more people in democratic processes and community activity? Can you and partners benefit from opening up new spaces for learning in your buildings? How does it link to your wider long-term vision for adult learning in the area?
4. Are you confident that your plans include all the adult and family learning in departments and services across the local authority area, such as libraries, adult learning, museums, community centres, extended services, archives, health centres?
5. Who are your new partners? Do your plans make the most of the local voluntary organisations and groups who can introduce those most excluded to new learning opportunities as well as Further Education colleges? Are there any sensitive relationships with organisations whose funding will be channelled through the LAB in future?
6. Have you examined how the benefits of learning can save spending on other budgets, such as health and care? Do you have enough examples of what happens locally to make the case for the public value of learning? Are the agencies where the savings are made contributing to the local learning budget?
7. Is it clear to all that the local authority can both commission and deliver learning as appropriate to local needs and the decision on what constitutes the right mix rests with each local authority?

#### **4. Resource considerations**

##### **4.1 Financial:**

The current 09/10 adult safeguarded learning budget for WACC is £1.3m, and the Neighbourhood learning in deprived communities is £0.25m. No variance is expected within 09/10 financial year.

The budgeted adult safeguarded learning for 10/11 is £1.2m and £0.25m for neighbourhood learning in deprived communities. Any financial Implications are dependent on the arrangements reached with the SFA in line with an agreed local learning plan and will be met from within existing budgets

4.2 **Legal:** The Council will need to ensure that it has in place adequate resources, governance processes and accountability procedures in place to ensure proper financial management and probity for the funds that the council will be accountable for.

4.3 **Staffing:** Resources will need to be identified to undertake audits, mapping and research to draw up the informal learning plan.

## 5. **Citizen impact**

5.1 IAL plans supported through LAB status will support residents to access needs-based informal adult learning across the borough in line with the Sustainable Community Strategy and the worklessness assessment.

## 6. **Community safety**

None

## 7. **Environmental impact**

None

## 8. **Performance and risk management issues**

8.1 **Risk:**  
Should the Council decide not to go forward as LAB then there is a risk that this role will be taken by a neighbouring authority which would reduce the influence the Council has over any future funding.

Should the council decide to go forward with LAB then appropriate fund and risk management controls will need to be in place in accordance with new guidance once published.

However the Council, through Walsall Adult and Community College, has a good track record with the SFA predecessor organisation (LSC), in the effective management and risk control of public funds for Adult Learning.

8.2 **Performance management:**  
None.

## 9. **Equality implications**

Any local IAL plan will be subject to impact assessment.

## 10. Consultation

Should the decision be taken to prepare for LAB status through an Adult Learning Plan for Walsall, considerable local community and provider consultation will need to take place.

### Background papers

Learning Revolution White Paper  
Councillors' Briefing on LAB

### Author

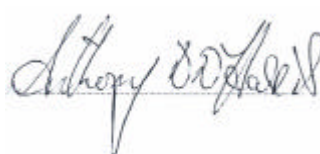
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29 March 2010

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