

People Panel (Cheshire East)
Position Paper 9.1.2009
Lifelong Learning and Employment Support

CONTEXT

- Service delivery comprises two main areas, Learning and Skills and Employment Support, both making an invaluable contribution to wellbeing, regeneration and social inclusion.
- It is a key role of Local Authorities to ensure the availability of all kinds of learning opportunities to contribute to the wellbeing of all of their residents.
- The service aims to take learning to where people can best access it and currently delivers at around 150 venues in Cheshire East. Annually there are approximately 5,500 learners.
- Support into work and training is especially important at a time of economic uncertainty and for those most disadvantaged. The Employment Support service works with individuals with learning difficulties and /or disabilities. Volumes are around 200 individuals supported annually.
- The base budget for the service currently stands at £250k. This levers in around £1m of external funding annually. Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funding of £970k annually is in place until 31.7.2009. Job Centre Plus (JC+) funding of £208k annually is in place until October 2009.
- The service is performing well. It achieved MATRIX (National Guidance quality standard) re-accreditation in December 2008. At the last OfSTED inspection Lifelong Learning achieved the second highest grade profile nationally of local authority adult education services. The Workstep provision is due for inspection in February 2009.
- Maintaining high standards is essential for people using the services but also as the continuation of external funding is dependant on this.

AREAS OF SERVICE DELIVERY

- **Adult and Community Learning** (non- accredited). This is delivered through commissioning and there are currently around 20 contracted providers operating in East Cheshire, including 3 Further Education Colleges, 1 independent Adult Learning provider and various Third Sector organisations.
- **Skills for life** delivery – the “Move On” team directly deliver national English and maths qualifications up to Level 2 (GCSE A*-C grade equivalent)
- **Parenting Support and Family Learning** are a key part of the “core” offer, contributing to Every Child Matters outcomes as part of the Narrowing the Gap and Think Family national policies. The team work in partnership with Schools and Children’s Centres providing an offer addressing the adults’ own learning needs, raising standards for children and supporting adults with their parenting needs.
- **Continuing Professional Development** is offered to all providers, including the Children’s workforce, in these specialist areas.
- **Workforce Development** is focussed on specific local authority delivery areas and supported through draw down of LSC Train to Gain funds. This

delivers NVQs to level 3, through the in-house assessment centre and some specialist contracts, alongside the Skills for Life qualifications through the Move On team.

- **Supported Employment** – works with Social Care users to support those who are able into work and maintain support to ensure job retention where this is needed.
- **Workstep Provision** – delivers a Job Centre + funded scheme for disabled people
- **Routefinders** - continuation of a successful Public Service agreement programme which enables people to progress into employment who may not otherwise be able to do so due to the complexities associated with their disability.

CURRENT POSITION

- The new authority offers some exciting opportunities to work differently. However it also throws up some challenges which will have to be met alongside a response to significant external change for these areas of work.
- The staffing in the East currently stands at 22 officers, with areas of specialism in Adult Learning, Skills for Life, Family learning and Parenting Support and vocational qualifications in a range of subject areas relevant to local authority delivery.
- There are gaps in experience and skills in post 19 education at senior management level within the service and development officer level, there are no IAG(Information Advice and Guidance) qualified staff, no experience of contract and finance management of externally funded provision and limited direct delivery capacity in Skills for Life and Family Learning. An agreement is in place to share the MIS function across the 2 new authorities until such time as resources can be made available for new systems.
- The recent DCFS / DIUS Raising Expectations (March 2008 - Machinery of Government) paper leaves post compulsory education (excluding HE) facing its most significant change in many years, with the creation of a new funding body and the transfer of 16-19 education planning to Local Authorities. There will be a need for all areas of the local authority affected by these changes to work closely together to ensure a robust response which will prevent our most vulnerable individuals and communities from facing further disadvantage.
- The new welfare reforms in the DWP recent white paper, "Raising Expectations and Increasing Support" (Dec 2008) will lead to integrated employment and skills delivery. The progress already made along these lines needs to be further developed in the new authority