

Adult Education – submission by scrutiny vice chair, Cllr the Right Reverend Emmanuel Oyewole

There seems to me to be some real crisis points now with Adult Education and its future in Southwark which have not been on the radar but should have been. I think that this Scrutiny would help in examining this situation and it should be sooner rather than later if possible. The issues are:

All of Adult Education has been funded by the Learning and Skills Council and now by the replacement agency the Skills Funding Agency which has an uncertain future. I think uncertainty is a good reason for looking at this service.

Provision has been contracting under the SFA and has two sections - skills and qualifications and Community Learning and Personal development.

What is happening locally is that community learning classes such as ceramics, art and keep fit interestingly, where different payment rules now seem to apply after Term 1 (Sept) are now closing in Southwark because the concession fees cease after one term - according to some contested rule. Not very surprisingly I have in the last few weeks received a stream of protests about this from users. (This is a brief summary - there are further issues about this)

Thomas Calton has been refurbished with money from the SFA and a small capital sum from Southwark. So this is a good facility but what is its future?

The Economic Strategy we recently agreed in Cabinet lists the main barriers to employment indentified in Southwark - one of which is "limited access to ESOL courses".

Does "Keep Fit" in Adult Education align with the wider health promotion agenda?

Adult Learning has never been the subject of a Scrutiny and yet it is vital component of our economic strategy because it is about language skills and literacy, keeping healthy programmes, support to vulnerable people within the community and about acquiring confidence, skills and new learning. Future funding is uncertain.

It would be good if the Scrutiny could:

- establish what the service is providing at the moment including the subject of charges and eligibility for concessions
- establish the current financial position and future of the Skills Funding Agency and seek to find out what direction this agency is going in
- hear from users about the present service
- Advise what direction for the future this service might take - especially in the light of the contexts above eg. regeneration, economic well being healthy living programmes etc