

Education and Children's Services Sub-committee 11th April 2011

Adult Learning Service update

Background

1. The March 14th meeting of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-committee received a report from officers on the Adult Learning Service.
2. The report focused primarily on issues relating to changes in the fee structure of the service during the last year.
3. As well as receiving an officer report, the Committee also received a deputation from Save Southwark Adult Learning.
4. Committee requested an update report from Officers for the 11th April meeting as well as that officers meet with representatives of Save Southwark Adult Learning in order to explain the calculation of fees in more detail. This meeting took place on March 29th.
5. Discussions centred on funding for Personal Community Development Learning (PCDL) and it was acknowledged that key areas such as literacy, numeracy, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and family learning are provided at no direct cost to the learner as required by Government.

Update

6. Since the last Committee meeting, officers have met with campaigners to respond to further queries about the service. One of the outcomes of the meeting was that officers are giving consideration to ways in which learners can be more involved in promoting the service.
7. In addition to this, key officers met with representatives of the campaign (as well as a meeting with Dr Brown on March 29th) to explain in more detail, the way in which fees are calculated.
8. The notes of the meeting with Dr Brown have only recently been received by officers who are looking at the numerous points he raises. Dr Brown has also, subsequently, asked for further information from officers in order to continue the debate on this issue. Officers are preparing this information for him.
9. There has not been sufficient time to prepare a full written commentary on the notes Dr Brown has submitted in time to meet the deadlines for Scrutiny Committee. One point from Dr Brown's notes does, however, need immediate clarification: The decision on fees and charges for the Adult Education Service was a Member decision taken by the Executive Member on 8th March 2010.

10. Officers will be available at Scrutiny Committee to discuss or clarify any further points arising from Dr Brown's notes
11. The Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport has asked that some additional visioning work be undertaken for the service. This will be undertaken in the coming months and a fuller report prepared and offered to Committee at a later date.

Report

12. The Committee meeting of March 14th raised a number of issues which are addressed in the report below.

Save Southwark Adult Learning contends that an adult learning class could be funded for a whole year with 14 unique learners and thus propose that learners are enrolled for a year.

13. Whilst it may be possible to run a course for a longer period of time with 14 learners, this would not increase the number of unique learners. Therefore, by increasing class length from 30 to 90 hours, the service risks not being able to meet the overall learner target, facing potential clawback of funds and/ or forcing the service into deficit that would then fall to the Council.
14. It is important to note that PCDL courses last a maximum of 30 hours and in the majority of cases this is delivered over 10 weeks. These are stand alone courses and not a third of a three term programme.

There is a lack of clarity or shared understanding over the cost per course or learner

15. The service's allocation from the Skills Funding Agency, for use for Adult Safeguarded Learning (which includes PCDL courses) is given as a set amount of funding for delivery of a set number of unique learners.
16. In 2010/11, £498,714 was allocated to the service for PCDL in return for delivering 1,330 unique learners. This equates to a payment of £375 per learner.
17. The funding is linked to learner targets in terms of recruiting "unique" learners. Each learner counts towards the target once only, no matter how many courses they attend each academic year. If a learner enrolls on a second course, no additional funding is received for them.
18. This has always been the case, however in the past the service has not limited the number of subsidised courses that a learner can enrol for. In previous years some learners have taken as many as 9 or 10 courses per year for which we are only paid for them to attend one. This has

meant that a small number of unique learners have been delivered and the service has failed to meet the learner targets set by the Skills Funding Agency and a deficit has resulted.

Guided learning hours and the impact on funding

19. The cost of delivering a course includes:

- tutor salary plus on-cost,
- materials and preparation for the course
- equipment costs relating to the course
- building costs, e.g. heating, lighting, cleaning
- management and administration costs
- venue hire costs for courses delivered outside of the Thomas Calton Centre

20. The service is entirely funded by the Skills Funding Agency and all costs must be met from within the annual settlement received from the funder. The cost of delivering the course for an individual learner limits the amount of guided learning hours that can be delivered.

21. For some provision, the SFA has a recommended number of guided learning hours within which courses should be delivered. In previous years these recommendations have not been strictly adhered to, leading to an over-delivery of learning hours, with no recompense from the SFA and contributing to the potential for overall deficit.

Save Southwark Adult Learning is concerned that 8 unique learners per course is an unrealistic marketing target that should be reconsidered.

22. If courses do not manage to recruit 8 new learners, then we do not have enough SFA funding to make the course viable.

23. Low enrolment sometimes occurs due to low levels of demand for particular programmes. This is not a new development and every year (and with all providers) there are courses that do not run due to lack of take-up.

24. Running courses with low enrolment also means that we risk not meeting our learner numbers for the year and so funding is directed into more popular areas.

The need for more unique learners could be addressed through improved marketing and any potential “crowding out” could be solved by a rule that unique learners take precedence.

25. Promotion and marketing of the service has been much improved in recent years with a number of new and innovative approaches to promotion being taken. Examples of this include:

- Brochure each term distributed to a mailing list of libraries, schools, children's centres, local venues in Peckham and vicinity, Morley College
- Updated course directory provider portal
- Hotcourses and floodlight listings
- Southwark web pages
- Family learning week brochure annually
- Course information sheets provided
- Articles in Southwark Life
- Articles in Southwark News
- Banners outside the building
- Telephone box ad campaign
- Morrison's receipt discount offer
- Banner opposite the Town Hall and on Elephant and Castle roundabout
- Adult Learners week brochure input
- Listings in various Southwark Council publications including Black History Month, Silver, etc.
- Articles in Communiversity – a publication from London South Bank University

26. The service operates a policy of new learners taking precedence over repeat learners as part of our strategy for meeting unique learner targets.

27. The Thomas Calton Centre has recently been refurbished with £1 million of capital funding from the Skills Funding Agency (£750,000) and from Southwark Council (£250,000). This funding has improved the learning environment as well as giving the service a more obvious and noticeable street presence. A series of opening events is planned to tie into other marketing campaigns for the service.

Save Southwark Adult Learning suggests that the services fees are pitched too high for the market and will result in classes discontinuing as courses will attract fewer learners and poorer students will be disadvantaged. Potential learners who are more mobile will travel to other providers.

28. Concessionary rates are still available for eligible learners. In addition to this, courses in literacy, numeracy, ESOL, family learning and childcare are available free of charge.

29. Fees are set annually in February as part of the overall setting of fees and charges within the Council. They are approved through a formal IDM process, approved by the appropriate Cabinet Member and are subject to the Scrutiny process.

30. A table of comparative costs for selected PCDL courses is set out below. The table shows that Southwark Adult Learning fees are indeed cheaper than those of other major providers within the area and in

many cases our cost recovery fee is cheaper than the standard rate of other providers.

Information downloaded 28/03/2011

Delivery partner	Course	Number sessions	Hours / session	Full fee	Conc fee	Cost-recovery fee
SALS	Ceramics beginners	10	3	£108 £3.60/hr	£46.50 £1.55/hr	£165 £5.50/hr
	Intro to water colour painting	10	3	£108 £3.60/hr	£46.50 £1.55/hr	£165 £5.50/hr
	Life drawing and painting	10	3	£108 £3.60/hr	£46.50 £1.55/hr	£165 £5.50/hr
Morley College	Ceramics beginners	7	3 hours	£167 £7.95/hr	£84 £4/hr	
	Ceramics intermediate	10	3 hours	£167 £5.50/hr	£84 £2.80/hr	
	Intro to watercolour	12	2.5 hours	£172 £5.70/hr	£86 £2.86/hr	
	Life drawing and painting	12	3 hours	£249 £6.91/hr	£198 £5.50/hr	
Dulwich Picture Gallery	Intro to watercolour	5	2 hrs	£75 £7.50/hr	£70 £7/hr	
	Oil Painting: Aspects of colour	4	2.5hrs	£60 £6/hr	£55 £5.50/hr	
Lewisham Community Education	Life drawing and painting	30	2hrs	£345 £5.75/hr	£225 £3.75/hr	
	Pottery all levels	20	2hrs	£210 £5.25/hr	£130 £3.25/hr	
City Lit	Intro to Ceramics	6	3hrs	£128 £7.11/hr	£74 £4.11/hr	
	Life drawing	10	3hrs	£176 £5.80/hr	£84 £2.8/hr	

Summary

- SALS now meets and exceeds its learner number targets as required by the Skills Funding Agency.
- Three times as many Southwark residents now benefit from Adult Learning as did three years ago.
- SALS will continue working on policy and vision to ensure its sustainability for local residents.
- SALS are happy to report back to Members at a future meeting, as and when required to do so.