

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Wednesday, 21st October, 2020

Present:- Councillors Kelly (Chair), A Cheema, Ajaib and Qaseem

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillor Strutton

Apologies for Absence:- Councillors Basra and A Sandhu

PART 1

11. Declarations of Interest

None were declared.

12. Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 July 2020

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2020 be approved as a correct record.

13. Member Questions

None were received.

14. Community Learning and Skills

The Community Learning and Skills Manager introduced a report that informed the Panel of the development that had taken place within the service and of the progress made during 2019/2020.

At the conclusion of a PowerPoint presentation, comments and questions were invited from the Panel.

During the discussion, the following points and questions were raised:

Referring to the Service Enrolments 2019/20 (cumulative) table, set out on paragraph 5.9 of the report, a member requested further breakdown of the age groups of the 3,000 enrolled learners. Details of how grant funding of the service was split between Slough Borough Council (SBC) and Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM). The Community and Skills Manager advised that details of the breakdown were required to be provided in a report to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA.). These would be provided to the Panel.

A member asked whether work was undertaken with community groups to establish local needs and whether established needs were being met. It was explained that approximately 18 months to 2 years prior, many students had been repeat students. However, since then, learners' wellbeing and employment and skills were being reviewed holistically. Clients were initially

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referred from Job Centre Plus and the service would initially establish the areas of interest and aspirations of the learners.

A member asked about the achievement rate. It was explained that the achievement rate was measured by the number of people on accredited provisions and whether the learners had successfully completed their course. This was measured by retention and pass rates. In terms of the providers, standard KPIs were used by Ofsted to assess the quality of providers, where an 80% KPI would be rated as 'good'. Eighteen months prior, the quality of providers had been rated as Grade 3 'requires improvement'. This rating was moved to 'good' during the last Ofsted inspection which included looking at the outcomes of annual self assessment, and key statistics.

In response to a question about the number of learners on a course, it was explained that the aim was to have a minimum of 12 with an optimum of 14 on a course, depending on where the course was being offered.

A member asked whether staff had been provided with training to run online courses as a result of the Covid- 19 pandemic. It was explained that tutors had been provided with intensive training via the Zoom and Bluejeans platforms. Tutors had also been trained on the flipped learning method, which they used to deliver some sessions. The outcome of a survey on online learning returned positive responses from both the experiences of tutors and learners.

A member questioned the likelihood of the Education Funding Agency (EFA) seeking a clawback of grant funding. It was explained that this was possible but EFA had not yet finalised how the process of clawback would work. Meanwhile, an analysis of last year's grant had been completed and calculated at £73,000 which would be mitigated in the Community Learning budget for the current year.

The Chair invited Cllr Strutton to address the Panel under Rule 30. Cllr Strutton referred to paragraph 5.9 and asked for further clarification on the following:

- Outline of the changes made in teaching structures. How tutors had been affected by the disruption of Covid -19 and how this had impacted on the level of reduction in learners.
- Requested a breakdown of figures by ward, to ascertain where priorities should be focused.
- A breakdown of the 3000 learners enrolled in 2019/20 that had been successful and unsuccessful in completing their courses.

The Assistant Director, Place Regulation advised that the information would be provided.

Members were advised that the previous Ofsted inspection which raised issues about the quality of teaching had now been addressed and had improved to 'good' rating. With regard to staffing, historically, many tutors

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worked on an as-and-when needed basis, which did not therefore allow time to provide quality teaching. The required standard of teaching had now been established and staff worked under contracted hours which had led to a significant improvement in the quality of teaching. However, learner numbers up to the end of March 2020 had been lower than planned for in a normal year. Repeat learners had not been progressing and moving on or achieving. Since then, a progress and progression form was introduced for tutors to complete each time, and where a learner had made no progress; they were encouraged to move on. Inevitably, this process resulted in the loss of learner numbers. A fresh start was subsequently made with a new flow of learners to ensure that priorities were being met. In addition, procurement commissioning was late and the provision of intensive courses resulted in less courses and inevitably, reduced learners.

It was explained that outcomes had improved as learners were moving into work. It had been planned for learner target to be met by 31 July 2020, however, due to Covid-19, many of the proposed work had to be reduced and moved online. Theory work for some courses had been completed but the practical part had yet to follow. This would be the information that would be submitted to the ESFA, should the service be found to be in breach, as would be the case with many other providers.

Cllr Strutton queried that the issue of repeat learners may have been due to poor teaching and asserted that there may be a high demand in learners wanting to do E-learning courses during Covid-19. Requested figures on the percentage of success rate of people moving into work.

It was explained that six new teachers of excellent standards had recently been recruited who would be useful in sharing good practice with the rest of the team. The recommendation of the ESFA had been to focus on current learners, particularly those going through accreditation. Additional courses including health and wellbeing were being offered with a hierarchy of accessibility. Support was being provided to many learners who were finding it difficult, via email and telephone. A pilot of intensive courses had commenced in September 2019 and commissioners would be undertaking a follow-up progression from Slough learners. Although these were early stages, the indication was that learners were moving into work and developing their career paths, whilst not that detailed due to Covid-19.

Resolved:

- i) That the report be noted.
- ii) That the Community, Learning and Skills Manager be requested to provide the following to the Panel and Cllr Strutton:
 - Further breakdown of the age groups of the 3,000 enrolled learners.
 - Details of how grant funding of the service was split between Slough Borough Council (SBC) and Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM).

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- iii) That further clarification as set out above be provided for Cllr Strutton and the Panel.

15. Training Provider- JGA Developing Futures

The Panel received a PowerPoint presentation from Richard Goodwin, JGA Group, which provided Apprenticeships and other vocational training across age groups locally and nationally.

Following the conclusion of the presentation, the Chair invited comments and questions from the Panel.

During the course of the discussion, the following points were raised:

A member queried that under the current climate the trend must show a lower uptake of apprenticeship in the last 12 months. It was explained that the actual number of apprenticeships on the programme would not have changed, as the programmes had been extended in the last three months but there had been a reduction in the number of starters, due to the impact of Covid -19. Demand for management development remained high, but hospitality had been adversely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and further compounded by the uncertainty of Brexit.

A member asked whether the reduction in apprenticeships for 16 -18 year olds was related just to Slough or the general trend. It was explained that this was the general trend but that specialist programmes would continue to expand.

Members were advised that further details about apprenticeships could be found on the Apprenticeship Website.

Resolved – That the 2020-21 JGA Developing Futures presentation be noted.

16. Report on Slough Apprenticeships

The Service Lead for economic and development introduced a report that provided an update of apprenticeships and other employment in Slough. The report also outlined economic generation opportunities that were available in the Borough.

During the course of the discussion, the following points and questions were raised:

A member asked whether the Berkshire Skills Portal that would enable job seekers to access all vacancies in Berkshire would be in operation in April/May 2021. This was confirmed.

A member asked whether there would be enough interest in the Slough Innovation Space project that would be operating from Observatory House. It

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was explained that there would be, as it would be supporting businesses in the digital technology sector. Businesses related to science and farming would not be accepted, as the project would not have the equipment to support the specialist technology and software.

A member asked whether the Phase 2 transformation process that the Council was going through would impact on this area, given the significant increase in unemployment in Slough since March 2020. It was explained that the Phase 2 transformation process had not yet been completed but there were various areas across the Council that would present learning opportunities but be dependent on the outcome.

A member asked about the growth strategy, building on strands and teaching in key areas where there were mismatched skills and questioned whether any steps had been taken to address this weakness. It was explained that there were challenges in the community and challenges regarding qualifications. Qualifications had been up to level two in the past and those with other qualifications at a higher level, had qualified from other countries but did not match to the demand in Slough. However, the qualifications could be developed to address the mismatch of employers. Some businesses may indicate that they did not have people with skills/qualifications required but yet have unemployed people that they were unaware of and therefore could be aligned through education and training to then match people in those jobs.

A member asked whether there was any mechanism to ascertain the skills that employers required. It was explained that there was, through on-going conversation in the borough acquired by Thames Valley Trade. Prior to Covid-19, relevant council staff were engaging with employers to establish trends and examples of what employers were saying they needed.

A member asked what the plans had been put in place to raise awareness to the people of Slough about the opportunity to upskill. It was explained that confirmation was pending from the funders and when received, there would be a press release. Both the Slough Innovation Space and Future Skills projects would be publicised via social media networks but each would also have its own marketing strategy. The Slough Innovation Space project would have a dedicated marketing person; for the Future Skills Hub, a combination of the Council and partner communication would be used to build a collective strategy.

A member asked whether young people who had participated in the Future Skills Hub project would be provided apprenticeships to work in the Council. It was explained that a percentage of apprentices would be employed by the Council and organisations that were in the Council's control. A growing

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percentage of schools and organisations in the community were also offering apprenticeships.

A member asked how long the Future Skills Hub and Slough Innovation Space projects would be in operation. It was explained the Slough Innovation Space project was funded for 3 years but further projects had been built in to enable it to run for longer. The Future Skills Hub was funded by capital funding on a 3 year revenue stream and would continue to be funded by other financial models to ensure sustainability.

A member asked about the number of school leavers that progressed into apprenticeships. It was explained that the number was low, as young people tended to choose to go onto traditional education. This issue would be included in the Slough Academy report.

The Chair invited Councillor (Cllr) Strutton to address the Panel under Rule 30.

Cllr Strutton advised that the Council had ring fenced apprenticeships for children leaving care (CLA) but this appeared to have been overlooked in the report. He expressed concern that farming had not been included in any of the proposed projects, particularly as there were agricultural areas in the borough and noted that neither had filming been included, given that there were media companies in Slough; nor had nursing and health care. Cllr Strutton questioned whether the Council was being proactive enough to encourage young people to get into employment in these areas.

Cllr Strutton stated that as corporate parents, the Council needed to be more robust in raising awareness of the reasons why apprenticeships were not being extensively provided for CLAs and for local young people. It was explained that Slough Academy was leading in the provision of apprenticeships. The film and creative industry had been highlighted as a growing sector in the strategy and this would be reviewed as the project progressed. It was noted that discussions were also taking place with the farming sector but stressed that qualification for this area was required at Level 4 and PHD in respect of the workers that were needed. In addition, people that were qualified at a higher level did not tend to stay in Slough.

The Assistant Director, Place Regulation clarified that it was never the case that apprenticeship was exclusively ring fenced for CLAs. Members were advised that the former apprenticeship scheme was available to 16 to 18 year olds which CLAs joined. Young people had also been encouraged to find work under that scheme. However, due to the development of Apprenticeship levy, Slough Academy came into place two years ago to create apprentice schemes to meet the needs of businesses. The Slough Academy remained open to CLAs, who were also supported by a joint team in the Council.

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The Panel recommended that a separate report on Slough Academy should be brought to the Panel at a future meeting.

The Assistant Director, Place Regulation advised that a response was being drafted for Cllr Carter, Chair of Corporate Parenting Panel in respect of questions that had been raised regarding this issue. Members were reassured that there was absolute support and commitment to providing apprenticeships and training for young people. In relation to the former scheme, completion of apprenticeships was an issue as many young people failed to complete their programme.

Resolved:

- i) That a report on the work of Slough Academy be reported to the next meeting.
- ii) The Assistant Director, Place Regulation would request Councillor Cater to share response to issues raised relating to apprenticeship with the Panel and Councillor Strutton.

17. Forward Work Programme

Members reviewed the Panel's work programme for the remainder of the 2020/21 municipal year.

Resolved - That a report on Slough Academy be included in the Forward Work Programme for 2020/2021.

18. Attendance Record

Resolved – That the details of the Members' Attendance Record be noted.

19. Date of Next Meeting - Thursday 3 December 2020

Resolved – That the date of the next meeting was confirmed as 3 December 2020.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.06 pm)