

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE		
DATE:	2 MARCH 2016	AGENDA ITEM:	11
TITLE:	NEW DIRECTIONS SERVICE UPDATE		
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SERVICE:	ECONOMIC & CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT	WARDS:	ALL
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## 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The report highlights the sustained improvement in outcomes and value for money that New Directions, the Council's adult learning and employment service, has delivered over recent years, including its rating of 'Good' by Ofsted following an inspection in December 2015.
- 1.2 It sets out plans in place for the service to further reduce costs over the next three years whilst maintaining the quality of service and positive outcomes for Reading residents.
- 1.3 The report outlines how the service is helping the Council to 'narrow the gap' for more disadvantaged residents and communities in line with the priorities of the Council as set out in the Corporate Plan.
- 1.4 The report highlights the significant added-value provided by New Directions, its partners and sub-contractors, including high quality volunteering opportunities, niche provision to meet the needs of vulnerable groups and helping to meet the skills needs of other Council services.
- 1.5 Appendices:
  - Appendix A: Narrowing the Gap
  - Appendix B: Academic Year 2014-15 Success Data

## 2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That Committee notes Ofsted continues to judge the New Directions service as 'Good'.
- 2.2 That Committee notes the significant contribution New Directions is making to help narrow the gap for residents.
- 2.3 That Committee endorses the strategies in place to reduce costs whilst safeguarding the delivery and quality of services to Reading's more deprived and vulnerable communities as set out in paragraph 4.2 of the report.

## 3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Council has directly provided an adult learning offer for many years. Historically this offer was delivered by Reading Adult and Community College (RACC) based at Wilson Road in West Reading. In 2006 RACC was merged with the Training and Employment Advice (TEA) Shop, a service that had been established using Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funding to support employability and employment for, primarily, low skilled adults struggling in the labour market. New Directions is the adult learning and employability service resulting from this merger. The new service then established a base in South Reading to better meet the needs of local communities in this area of greater need. Over subsequent years New Directions has become less of an institutionally based service and more of a peripatetic one targeting the needs of more vulnerable communities of interest and place across the Borough.
- 3.2 The service is grant funded (£1.4m per annum currently) by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) to deliver a range of adult education both regulated (leading to qualifications) and non-regulated (not leading to qualifications). The current national SFA priorities for funding that are delivered by New Directions are:

<b>English &amp; Maths</b>	The service offers a range of qualifications to around 500 learners per year; from small bite-sized awards through to Functional Skills and GCSE aims.
<b>Employability</b>	In partnership with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) the service offers a holistic course where learners address core skills such as basic IT, combating digital inclusion alongside specific employability topics to enable them to become more self-sufficient.
<b>Traineeships</b>	The service has commenced delivery to a pilot group. In the next academic year the service plans to offer 30 Traineeship places (prioritising those who are NEET) and including work placements with the Council. The service will also coordinate all work-experience placements with the Council.

<b>Community Learning</b>	Community Learning is a broad range of learning that brings together adults, often of different ages and backgrounds, to pursue an interest, address a need, acquire a new skill, become healthier or learn how to support their children.
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3.3 Nationally funding overall has reduced over recent years and provision which is not part of the above priorities has seen the biggest reductions over recent years. Fully-funded (free) learning options for learners aged 24+ are now limited to Maths and English, unless they're in receipt of Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) benefits. An increasing number of learners are expected to utilise learning loans to pay for their learning.

#### 4. THE PROPOSAL

##### 4.1 Current Position:

The service and its partners and sub-contractors provide a range of Information, Advice & Guidance (IAG) and learning opportunities across Reading and the service is responsible for the effective delivery and quality of all the provision it funds. Classes are delivered in five RBC owned centres (two designated learning centres in Caversham & Whitley and three shared premises: Central Library - 'Elevate Reading' hub, The Avenue & Hamilton Road) plus a wide range of neighbourhood venues such as Children's Centres, probation/bail hostels and schools across the Borough. This ensures high levels of accessibility across Reading's many and diverse communities. The service reaches around 5,500 individuals annually, the majority of whom are aged 19 plus. Typically learners attend classes between two and four hours per week and around 65% of learners are from the most deprived areas in Reading.

New Directions is unique because it works with those not catered for by mainstream educational provision (schools, colleges, Universities); the service doesn't turn someone away because it might mean academic results won't be the best. The learner as an individual is at the heart of everything the service delivers. Case studies of learners who have thrived with New Directions demonstrate that the sustained interventions offered deliver positive outcomes for many Reading residents, including employment and qualifications.

The service has around 90 highly skilled and qualified staff and also works with the voluntary and community sector to help increase capacity and reach learners who would not engage elsewhere. Reach exceeds local demographic profile across a range of characteristics, including ethnicity and disability. Experimental data published by BIS based on 2010-11 academic year learners cross referenced against HMRC and DWP data showed that 69% of learners had sustained positive destinations such as employment.

Overall success rates for the academic year 2014-15 improved by 0.9% to 79.9%. The majority of provision is in-line with or better than benchmarks with other providers. GCSE grade profiles have improved from the previous year, with more learners achieving grade C. Success rates are now above benchmarks. Learner satisfaction is excellent. Independently verified learner satisfaction rates for regulated provision have increased to 9.2 out of 10. The first year's independently

verified learner satisfaction rates for non-regulated provision in 2014-15 were 9.1 out of 10.

Approximately 69% of non-regulated learner numbers come from voluntary & community sector sub-contractors with a targeted offer or reach: WEA Reading Branch, Graft Thames Valley, Together Working for Wellbeing (Reading Your Way), Readipop, Reading Community Learning Centre (RCLC), Berkshire Autistic Society (BAS) and Pearl Education Ltd, Mapis Project CIC, Compass Opportunities. This has increased participation levels amongst a number of more vulnerable communities and client groups.

The service and its partners and sub-contractors generated at least £559K of 'poundplus' (added value). For example, Ofsted highlighted the service's extensive use of volunteers, and their robust training to provide effective classroom support and described this as 'Best Practice'.

New Directions was inspected by Ofsted in December 2015 and received a grade 2 or 'good' judgement (the full Ofsted Report can be accessed via the following <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/files/2539910/urn/54075.pdf>)

The service received a 'good' rating in all areas, including leadership and management, quality of teaching, personal development, learner outcomes and adult learning programmes. Key findings from Ofsted were that:

- Almost all learners completed their courses and achieved their learning aims; they grew in confidence and made good progress during their programmes and they developed good inter-personal and work-related skills.
- Leaders and managers have developed a good range of adult learning programmes that aligns closely with the council's strategic aims of 'narrowing the gaps' and matched local priorities and community needs well.
- The location of many learning centres in the most deprived areas of Reading was praised for ensuring the accessibility of courses. Thirty-one centres are located in children's centres and other community venues. The report went on to say: "The centres provide welcoming, safe environments where very diverse groups of learners can study and succeed."
- Leaders and managers have a particularly clear focus on supporting individuals to achieve their aspirations and in doing so, help learners to improve their own lives and of those in their local community.
- Learners take great pride in their work and recognise how their training improves their own and their families' lives by, for example, giving them the skills to help with a child's homework, pass a driving test or gain employment.
- Applicants receive very good, high-quality, impartial advice and guidance prior to and during enrolment.

- Learners also gain useful employment-related skills which helps prepare them well for volunteering and work placements.
- Those who speak English as a second language develop good English language skills and a very high proportion gain qualifications.
- A significant minority of learners progress from entry-level qualifications to higher levels and often become volunteers in the training centres and other community venues. Several have gone on to gain additional qualifications and been employed in children's centres.

Further external validation of the quality of the service has been the recent successful re-accreditation for the rigorous Matrix Standard in February 2016, ratifying the high standard of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) provided and critically that services are consistent across the Borough. The service was also awarded 'Silver status' Fair train standard for its work experience placements in April 2015.

## 4.2 Options Proposed

As demonstrated by the recent Ofsted assessment that the service is 'good' across all aspects of its provision, New Directions has over recent years demonstrably improved the targeting and consist quality of its offer whilst significantly reducing costs. Going forward the service will seek to maintain the quality of its offer and the outcomes for residents that it achieves whilst also:

- Diversifying its funding base to reduce vulnerability to Government reductions in or changes to skills funding;
- Further integration with other Council services and initiatives to add value and resources;
- Developing the service offer in-line with the Council's priorities and need to deliver improved outcomes for Reading's residents within financial constraints.

The service is planning to deliver more fee paying courses which will not be subject the SFA funding grant and therefore will not be in scope of Ofsted. This should result in increased fee income and a more efficient delivery model that is better and less bureaucratic for participants whilst also reducing delivery costs.

The service will increase volumes of non-direct delivery, for non-regulated learning, within the Council and voluntary and community sector building on existing relationships where quality standards have improved and there is on-going commitment to upskilling staff.

The service intends to extend a pilot research project with schools which supported children in receipt of free school meals whose attainment was lower than expected. The intervention saw parents and children learning together. The initial pilot concluded that children participating had made multiple months progress in a matter of weeks.

The service will continue to lead on the Council's 'Employability Pathway' strategy to increase opportunities for those most distant from the labour market such as

looked after Children transitioning into adulthood. As a part of this strategy the service is coordinating work experience placements across the whole Council for all age groups, as well as playing a pivotal role in the 'Elevate' Hub at Central Library.

The service will continue to offer targeted provision underpinned with Maths and English skills such as classes to support Universal Job-match, Universal Credit, Personal Budgeting and Digital Inclusion.

The service will continue to have a role in the quality improvement of Children's Centres to ensure that they provide a consistent and quality assured wider family learning programme. This will include the continued upskilling of staff leading learning activities.

To further evidence the local impact of Adult Learning a third party supplier is carrying out 'Outcomes and Destinations' tracking for all 2014-15 beneficiaries to capture more robust and detailed information and data.

#### **4.3 Other Options Considered**

Adult learning and employability services are non-statutory and the Council could decide to either withdraw from providing these services or contract out all provision. As outlined above the service is a niche provider delivering excellent outcomes for many of Reading's more vulnerable communities. It achieves this through a balance of direct delivery and sub-contracting to other voluntary sector providers to increase reach whilst securing appropriate quality standards across all of this provision. As a Council service it is also better placed to integrate with and help provide resources for other Council services and initiatives, for example Children's Centres, work experience, Elevate and 'Troubled Families'.

### **5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS**

#### **5.1 Providing the best life through education, early help and healthy living**

65% of the service's part-time learners come from the most deprived parts of the town. The service works with Children's Centres to co-fund their universal activities, fully-fund and deliver targeted learning opportunities such as English, Maths and Employability qualifications and by providing funding for childcare to help remove barriers to engagement. Example partnership projects include targeting parents whose children are not meeting expected attainment levels by working with them to support their children's learning.

#### **5.2 Safeguarding and protecting those that are most vulnerable**

The service offers a Universal programme which supports soft outcomes such as health and wellbeing, confidence and reduced isolation. Targeted support includes Adults with Learning Difficulties and or Disabilities, helping them to develop independent living skills. Birth preparation classes for expectant mums who do not speak English. Healthy eating classes focus on nutrition and budgeting. Project work includes working with families with multiple and complex needs, 50+ employment issues and careers advice. 100% of staff are safeguarding, prevent and equality & diversity trained.

### 5.3 Keeping the town clean, safe, green and active

The service provides classes at approved premises and probation. The service co-funds RSL delivered activities which promote active lifestyles and wellbeing. The service continues to maintain an active cohort of volunteers who support learning. The service supports digitalisation by providing free IT user training at a range of venues. Working with other teams such as housing and trading standards to develop and accredit schemes such as tenant participation and selling alcohol responsibly. Projects working with troubled families with multiple and complex needs have prevented numerous housing crises. Food4Families are co-located with the service in Whitley.

## 6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

6.1 The service relies on effective community engagement and information to attract learners. It produces extensive and targeted marketing for its offer and also delivers at a range of venues across the Borough to afford access to all of Reading's residents. In particular the service works with a range of community partners to extend reach through Reading Community Learning Network (RCLN). RCLN was first established in 2008 to begin addressing the governments vision New Challenges, New Chances. RCLN consists of 39 members each providing targeted or specialist provision: Chrysalis foundation, Reading College, Museum of English Rural Life, Reading Museum, Graft Thames Valley, Readipop, Thames Valley Dyslexia Centre, Berkshire Autistic Society, Thrive, Newbury College, WEA branch, WEA Region, Reading Your Way, Earley Crescent Centre, Bracknell & Wokingham College, Spark education Trust, Age UK, Language Training Development Ltd, Learndirect, PeoplePlus, Maximus, Reading Sport & Leisure, Reading libraries, Catalyst Housing, Real Business Club, Reading Voluntary Action, Children's Centres (x5 clusters), Probation, Scout Enterprises, Purley Park Trust, West Berkshire ACL, Jelly, Utulivu, Indian Community Centre, Abi College, Drug & Alcohol team, Youth Service, Compass, Link Up (Mencap) and Reading Community Learning Centre.

Since inception, key achievements include:

- Multiple provider Adult Learning Guide for Reading;
- Multiple provider ESOL provision leaflet with 6 language translation;
- Delivered Community Learning to over 2,700 learners each year;
- 57 staff achieved teaching/assessing qualifications;
- Worked with over 200 volunteers.

## 7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.1 The service has narrowed the achievement gap between Men and Women which was identified in 2014-15 and its reach exceeds local demographic profile across a range of characteristics, including ethnicity and disability.

7.2 An Equality Impact Assessment is not relevant to this paper.

## 8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The service is responsible for delivering the national entitlement of Maths and English qualifications to learners aged 19+ who have not yet achieved a GCSE grade C or above. The service has statutory responsibilities with regard to the Prevent duty.



## 9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 None arising directly from this report.
- 9.2 The three year budget forecast shows the managers view;
- 2016/17 - £45k
  - 2017-18 - £80k
  - 2018/19 - £100k
- 9.3 The service currently contributes £140K to other council service budgets; funding learning delivery in Children's Centres (Wider Family Learning e.g. Messy Play), Reading Sport and Leisure (Staying Active) and the Drug and Alcohol Team (DAAT), funding Childcare provision in Children's Centres, Avenue Centre Room hire, HR services, and Premises Costs. This is expected to increase to around £170K in 2016-17.
- 9.4 Over the last 7 years RBC's contribution to New Directions has reduced by around 65% alongside funding reductions of around 25% from the SFA contributions. The move within the Central Library into the 'Elevate Reading' hub has saved the service around £20k annually whilst still contributing an income stream to the Library service.
- 9.5 The service collects around £250k annually in course fees. The service also collects around £7k annually for room hire to community and not for profit groups.

## 10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Valuing the Impact of Adult Learning Report:

[http://shop.niace.org.uk/media/catalog/product/v/a/valuingimpact\\_web\\_1.pdf](http://shop.niace.org.uk/media/catalog/product/v/a/valuingimpact_web_1.pdf)

Community learning: government funding:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/community-learning-government-funding>

## Appendix A - Narrowing the Gap



New Directions vision is 'To support individuals to achieve their personal aims and aspirations whether they are to gain employment, improve their skills or to help them be part of their community'. Our mission is 'To provide best value, high quality adult and family learning, which meets the needs and aspirations of each individual in the local community'.

New Directions and its partners provide a range of Information, Advice & Guidance (IAG) and Learning opportunities across Reading in a variety of locations to raise skills, employability and to enrich the lives of adults, their families and their communities. All delivery is quality assured to the Common Inspection Framework (CIF) – Learning & Skills by Ofsted (for SFA funded learning) or MATRIX (for IAG activity).

New Directions has established a Community Learning Trust (Reading Community Learning Network – RCLN) which consists of 39 members each providing targeted or specialist provision:

Chrysalis foundation	WEA Region	Reading libraries	Abi College
Reading College	Reading Your Way	Catalyst Housing	Drug & Alcohol team
Museum of English Rural Life	Earley Crescent Centre	Real Business Club	Youth Service
Reading Museum	Bracknell & Wokingham College	Reading Voluntary Action	Compass
Graft Thames Valley	Spark education Trust	Children's Centres (x5 clusters)	Link Up (Mencap)
Readipop	Age UK	Probation	Reading Community Learning Centre.
Thames Valley Dyslexia Centre	Language Training Development Ltd	Scout Enterprises	
Berkshire Autistic Society	Learndirect	Purley Park Trust	
Thrive	A4E	West Berkshire ACL	
Newbury College	Maximus	Jelly	
WEA branch	Reading Sport & Leisure	Utulivu	
		Indian Community Centre	

### New Directions is narrowing the gap in Reading

Unlike other education providers New Directions is unique because we work with everyone; we never turn anyone away just because it might mean our academic results won't be the best. The learner is the heart of everything we do. Our case studies demonstrate that the sustained interventions we offer deliver real outcomes for the people of Reading. The service is helping adults and families to gain a range of outcomes including Employment and Qualifications. The service has around 100 highly skilled and qualified staff. The service is working with the voluntary and community sector to help increase capacity and reach learners who would not engage elsewhere. Reach exceeds local figures across a range of characteristics.

The service works with a range of targeted settings to bring education to the community; for example we are delivering Maths, English and I.T. classes at **Alana House** (helping women at risk of offending), the **Elizabeth Fry charity** (approved premises) and **Launchpad** (homeless charity).

Maths, English, I.T. and Vocational learning are also delivered in **Children's centres** across the borough to help support the most disadvantaged families.

Children's centres provide **childcare** for learners, funded by New Directions when individuals are studying towards qualifications.



69% of Learners sustained positive destinations



4500 Learners, 65% from the most deprived areas of Reading, 28% RMF reach.



Matrix Standard (Information, Advice & Guidance quality mark) re-awarded in February 2013



9.1 out of 10 learner satisfaction score (FE choices)



With Outstanding grades for Partnerships and Leadership



Over 1500 1:1 careers appointments delivered



£559,000 of Poundplus added value generated



Awarded fair train silver status for our work experience placements

Research published by the National Institute for Adults Continuing Education (NIACE) in 2012 'Valuing the Impact of Adult Learning An analysis of the effect of adult learning on different domains in life' key findings were:

- improvements in health, which has a value of £148 to the individual
- a greater likelihood of finding a job and/or staying in a job, which has a value of £231 to the individual
- better social relationships, which has a value of £658 to the individual
- a greater likelihood that people volunteer on a regular basis, which has a value of £130 to the individual

**Providing the best life through education, early help and healthy living**

65% of its part-time learners come from the most deprived parts of the town. The service works with Children's Centres to co-fund their universal activities, fully-fund and deliver targeted learning opportunities such as English, Maths and Employability qualifications and by providing funding for childcare to help remove barriers to engagement. Example partnership projects include targeting parents whose children are not meeting expected attainment levels by working with them to support their childrens learning. The service is now coordinating work experience placements across the Council to help a range of disadvantaged people



*"I had very good experience here I met multi-cultural people and we spoke about our cultures"*



**Safeguarding and protecting those that are most vulnerable**

The service offers a Universal programme which supports soft outcomes such as health and wellbeing, confidence and reduced isolation. Targeted support includes Adults with Learning Difficulties and or Disabilities, helping them to develop independent living skills. Birth preparation classes for those who do speak English. Healthy eating classes focus on nutrition and budgeting. Project work includes working with families with multiple and complex needs, 50+ employment issues and careers advice. 100% of staff are safeguarding and equality & diversity trained.

*"It has helped in my pursuit of a job giving me the ability to locate and most importantly apply for a job"*

**Keeping the town clean, safe, green and active**

The service provides classes at approved premises and probation. The service co-funds RSL delivered activities which promote active lifestyles and wellbeing. The service continues to maintain an active cohort of volunteers who support learning. The service supports digitalisation by providing IT user training at a range of venues such as YMCA for FREE. Working with other teams such as housing and trading standards to develop and accredit schemes such as tenant participation and selling alcohol responsibly. Projects working with troubled families with multiple and complex needs have prevented numerous housing crises. Food4Families are co-located with the service in Whitley.

*"This course has been an eye opener on all the issues you need to be aware of for the role of a volunteer support worker and has given me confidence to develop my support skills to possibly progress into a learning support worker"*

Funded by  
**Skills Funding Agency**



**Remaining financially sustainable to deliver these service priorities**

The service contributes a total of £140k to other council cost centres. The service benchmarks its return on investment against 38 other councils; cost per learner is at the median point. The service has generated almost as much added value (Poundplus) through its use of volunteers, free venues and course fees as it receives in community learning funding. Approximately £250K in course fees is collected annually; these help offset other costs and enables the service to work with the most vulnerable. The service continues to fund third sector organisations.



Appendix B - Academic Year 2014-15 Success Data

Learning Category	Number of 19+ learners	Success %	Provider Group Benchmark %
Award	303	80.8	86.4
Basic Skills Maths and English	411	80	72.4
Certificate	62	82.8	84.7
Diploma	37	71.4	82.8
ESOL	250	79.4	82.8
GCSE Maths and English	78	78.2	80.9

Only 31 learners (>3% of total) were in scope of minimum standards calculations.

*NB: The methodology for minimum standards calculations was changed for 2014-15 which means it is not possible to present a three year trend.*