

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

10 September 2012

Subject: The Role of Wiltshire Council in Informal Adult Education

Cabinet member: Councillor Lionel Grundy – Children’s Services

Key Decision: Yes

Executive Summary

This report presents the outcome of the consultation on adult education in Wiltshire which has been undertaken and invites the Cabinet to determine the future role of Wiltshire Council in respect of the provision of informal adult education.

Proposal

That Cabinet agree:

- i. that the Council adopt the role to facilitate the provision of informal adult education at a local level;
- ii. to approve the appointment of a 0.6 full-time equivalent part-time adult education officer to work with local community networks to develop a sustainable locally-based adult education provision including information on, and promotion of, opportunities;
- iii. to allocate budget of £32,000 from the revenue savings accrued from the closure of Urchfont Manor College to meet the costs associated with the appointment.

Reason for Proposal

The Council has been a direct provider of informal adult education through Urchfont Manor College until its closure on 3 September 2012. The Cabinet therefore needs to determine whether the Council should continue to be a direct provider or take another, or no, role in respect of informal adult education.

Stephanie Denovan
Service Director for Schools and Learning

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

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The Role of Wiltshire Council in Informal Adult Education

Purpose of Report

1. This report presents the outcome of the consultation on adult education in Wiltshire which has been undertaken and invites the Cabinet to determine the future role of Wiltshire Council in respect of the provision of informal adult education.
2. This report considers the provision of informal adult education as a universal service to the public. It is not intended to include, or review, adult education which the Council provides on a targeted basis, e.g. to the Council’s workforce, voluntary sector partners and Family Learning.

Background

3. At its meeting held on 17 January 2012 Cabinet received a report on the Proposed Creation of Central Devizes Customer Access Point and the Closure of Browfort, Urchfont Manor and Bradley Road Buildings. The Cabinet resolved:
 - i. To delegate to Dr Carlton Brand, Corporate Director, in consultation with Cllr Stuart Wheeler, Cabinet Member for Campus Development and Culture (including Leisure, Sport and Libraries) the authority to :-
 - i. undertake all necessary actions to secure, develop and deliver a new customer access site in central Devizes as well as providing hot desk facilities and an alternative Ceremony Room in the Devizes area;
 - ii. instruct officers within the Transformation Programme to commence the necessary consultation with key stakeholders and staff to enable the closure of Browfort offices during autumn 2012;
 - iii. complete the early closure of Bradley Road in autumn 2012, ensuring the relocation of the current customer access facility to the

- refurbished County Hall ensuring these complement the new Library and other customer facilities within the refurbished building;
- iv. undertake the required actions to secure the closure of Urchfont Manor by the end of September 2012. Recognising that future Adult Education Service provision including, where required, local flexible delivery in line with the Department for Business Innovation and Skills strategic proposals for Further Education and Skills, will be determined by Cabinet after consultation with service users, area boards, local communities and partners;
 - v. market and dispose of the Bradley Road offices and Urchfont Manor sites as part of the Transformation Programme;
 - vi. market and dispose of the Browfort offices site if officers cannot develop an appropriate, financially viable, alternative long term public service use for the site, such as use by another public body or Extra Care provision;
 - vii. ask the Chief Financial Officer to ensure that the overall savings generated by these proposals are identified and tracked within the Council's budget setting process and the costs of the alternative provision is properly reflected and funded in the Council's capital and revenue budgets;
- ii. That when disposing of Urchfont Manor, officers working with the community, take whatever steps are necessary to ensure continued community access and management of Oakfrith Wood, appropriate ongoing access by the school and community to the playing fields to the north of the Manor House and as far as is practicable, long term use of the existing cricket pitch by the Cricket Club. These arrangements are to be structured after negotiation with the successful purchaser in a manner that allows the Council to achieve the maximum capital receipt whilst ensuring ongoing community use and access with completion of these negotiations to be delegated to the Corporate Director (Dr Carlton Brand) following consultation with the Cabinet member for Waste, Property, Environment and Development Control Services.
4. The Cabinet confirmed its decisions at an extraordinary meeting held on 30 January 2012 following a request from the Organisation and Resources Select Committee that Cabinet reconsider the decision to close Urchfont Manor College in light of inadequate consultation, as defined within paragraphs 25 and 26 of the Cabinet procedure rules in Part 7 of the Constitution.'

The Consultation Process

5. The consultation with service users, area boards, local communities and partners has been undertaken by the Service Director for Schools and Learning in association with the Corporate Director of Public Health and Public Protection Services and comprised three parts:

- i. A questionnaire survey for completion by service users and members of the public to gather information on the demand for, and type of, adult education which could be provided. The questionnaire is reproduced at Appendix A.

The survey was publicised by local media and could be completed on-line or on paper with copies being available from public libraries and the Council's hub offices. Additionally, individual copies were sent to 6,688 students and tutors of Urchfont Manor College. A total of 1,741 completed questionnaires were returned, 286 on-line and 1,455 paper. Of these 719 were from respondents who could be identified as being Wiltshire residents.

- ii. A consultation paper on the role of the Council in respect of adult education was prepared for consideration by area boards and education providers. The report is reproduced at Appendix B.

The report was considered by and recommendations made by 12 of the 18 area boards.

- iii. A slightly amended version of the report was sent to all maintained secondary schools (including academies); eight independent schools, Wiltshire College and three other adult education providers. Two responses have been received which came from adult education providers.

Consultation Responses

6. A report on the responses to the questionnaire survey is attached as Appendix C. Copies of the additional comments received are available on-line from the Council's website. A total of 1,010 comments were received (397 from Wiltshire) of which 755 (260 from Wiltshire) objected to the closure of Urchfont Manor College.
7. The survey sought information on 14 topics. The summary responses from Wiltshire residents were as follows:

Figure No.	Question topic	Significant responses
1	Age Bracket	Over 80% are aged 55 or over
2	Participation	44% attended Urchfont Manor College in the past year. 29% have not participated in the past year
3	What matters most	Interest in topic (86%); Affordable price (77%); Within 5 miles of home (39%)
4	Price prepared to pay	£50 for full day (80%)
5	Price for residential accommodation	£50 (61%) Not interested in a residential course 24%
6	Prepared to travel	Up to 20 miles 76%

7	Residential accommodation	At the course venue 63% Would not like residential 30%
8	Duration of residential course	3 days 46%; 2 days 45%
9	Duration of non-residential course	Full day of 6 hours tuition 64%
10	Preferred subject/topic	Crafts (62%); Art and Design (59%)
11	Preferred source of information	Direct from providers 67% Internet 56%
12	Able to find all local activities in one place	Yes, on the internet 48%
13	Preferred venues	Schools and colleges (79%) Village and community halls (73%)
14	Refreshments	Basic refreshments only 42%

8. The summary responses from respondents who could not be identified as Wiltshire residents were as follows:

Figure No.	Question topic	Significant responses
1	Age Bracket	Over 80% are aged 55 or over
2	Participation	49% attended Urchfont Manor College in the past year. 25% have not participated in the past year
3	What matters most	Interest in topic (80%); Affordable price (69%); Staying at the venue to share experience (52%)
4	Price prepared to pay	£50 for full day (84%)
5	Price for residential accommodation	£50 (73%) Not interested in a residential course 13%
6	Prepared to travel	Over 20 miles 58%
7	Residential accommodation	At the course venue 76% Would not like residential 18%
8	Duration of residential course	3 days 47%; 2 days 56%
9	Duration of non-residential course	Full day of 6 hours tuition 76%
10	Preferred subject/topic	Crafts (60%); Art and Design (56%)
11	Preferred source of information	Direct from providers 73% Internet 52%
12	Able to find all local activities in one place	Yes, on the internet 48%
13	Preferred venues	Schools and colleges (71%) Village and community halls (59%)

14	Refreshments	Basic refreshments only (34%); Light refreshments (34%)
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9. The responses from Wiltshire residents and those from elsewhere are broadly similar apart from their views on the importance of residential education. 52% of respondents from outside Wiltshire consider this to be one of the three most important factors (Figure 3) as opposed to 34% of Wiltshire residents. 30% of Wiltshire respondents do not wish to attend a residential course whereas this applies to 18% of respondents from outside the county. (Figure 7). This difference is maintained in the related topics of paying for accommodation, travelling distance, course duration and the provision of refreshments (Figures 5, 7, 8, 9 and 14).
10. The recommendations from area boards are summarised as Appendix D.
11. Ten area boards support Option 3: *Wiltshire Council to facilitate the provision of informal adult education at a local level*. This would involve community networks and other groups identifying demand for adult education in each area and the Council working with education providers to meet the identified demand. This option is supported by the survey which indicates that 62% of Wiltshire residents do not wish to travel more than 20 miles and for 39% being within five miles is an important factor.
12. Four of the ten boards supporting Option 3 do so in combination with Option 4. One other supports Option 4 alone, i.e.: *Wiltshire Council to coordinate and promote informal adult learning opportunities offered across the county*. Activities being offered by different providers would be collated and indexed by community area. Small education providers would be able to promote their activities to a wide audience at low cost possibly encouraging new providers. The survey shows that 80% of respondents would like to be able to find information on all learning opportunities in their area in one place in printed form or on the internet.
13. The South West Wiltshire Area Board recommended that the Council assist local campuses to provide adult education. This approach may become more popular as campuses are developed in more areas.
14. Comments from the two education providers both favour Option 3 with some support for Option 4
15. The proportion of area boards and education providers who did not respond is significant and may indicate interest in the Council's role in adult education, and adult education more generally, to be a lower priority for them. However, implementation of options 3 and 4 would require the active participation of community networks and education providers.
16. On 26 July, the Children's Select Committee considered a report titled, 'The Role of Wiltshire Council in Informal Adult Education', presenting the outcomes of the consultation on adult education in Wiltshire. This was an earlier version of this report. The Committee was invited to consider the consultation results, which would be presented to Cabinet on 10 September,

and the options for future delivery of informal adult education. Following discussion, the Committee recommended that Cabinet adopt Options 2 and 3 as presented in the report (i.e. Options 3 and 4 of the consultation paper):

- i. to facilitate the provision of informal adult education at a local level;
- ii. to coordinate and promote informal adult learning opportunities offered across the county.

Main Considerations for the Council

17. Informal Adult Education is a non-statutory service for a local authority meaning that the Council is able to decide the extent of its involvement in the planning and provision of the service.
18. In comparison with many other areas, Wiltshire does not have a history of local authority involvement in the local provision of adult education as it has preferred to concentrate its provision from the fixed location of Urchfont Manor College. As such, it has no existing adult education service from which to build a new offer. The Council must now decide whether to continue to support the direct delivery of adult education or to adopt a different role.
19. The financial pressures upon the Council suggest that any new role should be largely self-financing although it may be necessary for financial support to be given initially.
20. Option 3 would support the Council's vision to create stronger and more resilient communities by facilitating provision on demand which has been identified at a local level. Some local communities already arrange adult education provision themselves.
21. The Department for Business Industry and Skills has selected a small number of adult education providers to pilot a variety of approaches aimed to focus the identification of need, and provision, at a community level, although the size of the pilot "communities" varies. However, it is expected that government funding for adult education will be available only to larger providers from 2013. Wiltshire will need to join together with partners if it is to be able to attract government funding in future.

Environmental Impact of the Proposal

22. The environmental impact of a change in the Council's support for adult education will primarily relate to travel. A locally-based service would reduce the length of journeys but this may be affected by an increase in the number of journeys relating to more frequent attendance. The take up of locally based opportunities in areas more accessible by public transport is also likely to reduce carbon dioxide emissions
23. The withdrawal of provision could lead to a reduction in travel if participants find no alternative or an increase if they have to travel further to access provision elsewhere.

24. The closure of Urchfont Manor will reduce the Council's carbon footprint by 142 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year (this is the emissions total from Urchfont Manor in 2011/12).

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

25. The equalities impact of a change in the Council's support for adult education will primarily increase access for more disadvantaged groups. A locally-based service would be more attuned to the needs of a community and the reduction in travel will make activities more accessible.

26. Although a comprehensive analysis of existing service users has not been undertaken, it can be seen from the responses to the consultation that the majority are aged over 55, many travel from outside Wiltshire and are prepared to pay to attend. Therefore, the withdrawal of the existing provision would impact most heavily on older people. It is believed that few disadvantaged individuals, or those from minority groups, access the current provision.

Risk Assessment

27. Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken:-
Withdrawal of the adult education service could present a risk to the well-being of existing service users. Such a risk is impossible to quantify.

28. Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks:

- i. Failing to attract sufficient income to meet the costs of the service on a self-financing basis. The financial model for such a service will need to be developed to assess and reduce the financial risk to the Council.
- ii. Lack of active participation and support from adult education providers. Officers will work to develop partnerships with a variety of providers to support the community-based provision.
- iii. Lack of active participation and support from community area networks. Officers will work to develop the range of opportunities offered and the benefits which will be realised.

Financial Implications

29. Option 1: if the service is withdrawn, there will be no financial implications to the Council.

30. Option 3: the estimated cost of employing a 0.6 f.t.e. part-time adult education officer to work with the Community Area service to work with community networks to identify specific demands for adult education and to liaise with education providers to meet that need is £32,000, in a full year, to meet the salary and related costs. This can be met from the direct revenue savings accruing from the closure of Urchfont Manor College.

31. Option 4: the development of an information system, including working with education providers, collating information, designing and implementing a web-based interactive information service is estimated at up to £40,000 for the initial development and a maintenance cost of £20,000 per year.
32. It may be possible for both these services to become self-financing over time.

Legal Implications

33. There are no legal implications which need to be taken into consideration at the present time.

Options Considered

34. Options considered are as set out in Appendix B.

Conclusions

35. The level of response to the public consultation indicates that the provision of adult education is of concern to many people in Wiltshire who wish to be able to access provision reasonably near to their homes (up to 20 miles) and for a reasonable price (up to £50 per day).
36. The response from outside Wiltshire principally relates to a desire for continued residential education, as provided by Urchfont Manor College.
37. Option 3 is consistent with the Council's vision to create more resilient communities. The lack of opportunity in some areas of the county could be enhanced by relatively small input from the Council by developing systems and partnerships which can be used by community networks to, in time, organise their own learning activities. This is supported by discussions with two community area partnerships which indicate considerable enthusiasm for developing adult education provision in their areas.
38. Implementation of Option 3 would require the appointment of an adult education officer (location to be agreed), to work with a few community areas at a time, to develop appropriate systems which will become sustainable. The officer's work could relate to the development of the community campuses if supported by the relevant area boards.
39. Successful implementation of Option 4 will require significant engagement with education providers and investment in a new technical solution. Given the response from providers to the consultation and the risks associated with developing a new IT solution, a more locally-based approach to collating the information would be more appropriate. This could be part of the work of the community network, with support from the adult education officer. Education providers could be encouraged to support the national index of adult education which is being provided by the National Careers Service.
40. Facilitation of local provision may lead to different levels of activity in different areas of the county, as now, although through prioritising the work of the adult

education officer this disparity could be addressed to some degree by concentrating their work upon areas which are poorly served by adult education providers at present.

41. Having considered the results of the consultations it is considered that the proposals represent an appropriate balance between the needs and aspirations of Wiltshire's communities.

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Background Papers

The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report:

None

Appendices

- A. Survey Questionnaire
- B. Report to Area Boards
- C. Report of Questionnaire Survey
- D. Recommendations from Area Boards