

# **Wiltshire Council**

## **Children's Services Select Committee**

**27 January 2011**

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### **Basic Skills Update**

#### **Purpose of Report**

1. Update to the Children's Services Select Committee on work underway to increase the level of Basic Skills attainment in Wiltshire, particularly the project enabled by the Performance Reward Grant that commenced in August 2010.

#### **Background**

2. This report builds on an earlier report to the committee in July 2010 which provided the picture (at that time) of Basic Skills attainment levels in Wiltshire accompanied by an outline on issues around Basic Skills in Wiltshire, partnership/governance arrangements, current initiatives and plans for the future.

#### **Main Considerations for the Council**

##### **3.1 A new Government Strategy for Skills**

In November 2011 the Business Secretary, Vince Cable, and Skills Minister, John Hayes, launched the Government's strategy for skills and reform of the further education (FE) and skills system – Skills for Sustainable Growth. This was accompanied by an investment strategy for further education and skills, Investing in Skills for Sustainable Growth. In brief, with relevance to Basic Skills the reform of the Skills System includes:

- Fully funding basic skills courses for individuals who leave school without basic reading, writing and mathematics;
- Protecting investment of £210 million in adult and community learning, to support personal development, inclusive communities and a route into formal learning for the disengaged;
- Fully funding training for young adults aged from 19 up to 24 undertaking their first full Level 2 (GCSE equivalent) or first level 3 qualification when they do not already have one. Entitlement to free training for a first full Level 2 qualification for those over 25 has gone. Until now there has been an entitlement to free training for a first full Level 2 qualification, regardless of age. Now this will have to be co-funded. And from 2013/14, those over the age of 24 will need to take out a loan in order to secure their first Level 3.
- The expansion of apprenticeships sits at the heart of the strategy. Expanding the numbers of adult apprenticeships available, so by

2014-15 there will be 75,000 more adults starting than under the previous Government's plans; 200,000 adults will be able to start an apprenticeship. Apprenticeships are to be reshaped so Level 3 becomes the level to which learners and employers aspire.

Furthermore, there is a commitment to provide clear routes from Apprenticeships to higher level training including, but not exclusively, Level 4 Apprenticeships.

- Replacing Train to Gain with an SME focused programme to help small employers train low-skilled staff. The October 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review saw the abolition of the Train to Gain funding programme, worth around £900m in 2009/10, Wiltshire Council's own Train to Gain contract for 2009/10 was worth £184,000. £200m was redirected out of Train to Gain nationally in the emergency budget for 2010/11; the cost-savings of abolishing the programme altogether have thus contributed significantly to the total spending cuts made by BIS. BIS will use a small amount of residual funding for work-based training to target SMEs.

In the context of the demise of the current network of business support agencies which will be dismantled over the next 12 months, most notably the abolition of the Regional Development Agencies, Local Enterprise Partnerships are to provide the strategic leadership in their areas and set out local economic priorities. The employment and skills agenda is expected to be an important focus for these emerging structures. In particular, Local Enterprise partnerships are expected to ensure alignment between the economic development priorities and the skills provision available locally.

### 3.2 Progress in Wiltshire around improving Basic Skills

Since our earlier report more up to date data relating to Basic Skills attainment levels in Wiltshire has been published. It is noteworthy that Wiltshire has increased its lead on both the regional and national averages as follows:

- In 2009 **74.5% (207,800) of Wiltshire's working age population was qualified to at least Level 2**. Wiltshire is now outperforming the regional average by 2.4 percentage points (72.1%) and the national average by 5.4 percentage points (69.1%). Notably, Wiltshire has the second highest performance in the South West, just behind Bath and NE Somerset (75.8%).
- In 2009 **25.5% (71,200) of Wiltshire's working age population did not hold at least a Level 2 qualification**, generally considered to be the minimum for employability. This has decreased from 27.0% in 2008 and now places Wiltshire as the best performing area in the South West and significantly better than the national average of 30.9%.
- In 2009 **7% (19,600) of Wiltshire's working age population held no qualifications**. This has reduced from 7.8% in 2008 and now places Wiltshire as the best performing area in the South West and significantly better than the national average of 12.1%.

- In 2008/09 **78% of people in Wiltshire achieved L2 by age 19**. This level has increased year on year since its introduction in 2003/04, and is in line with the regional average (77%) and just behind the national average (79%).
- In 2010 **55.6% of 15 year old pupils in Wiltshire achieved the equivalent of 5 GCSEs grade A\*-C including English and Maths**. This is higher than both the regional average (55.2%) and the national average (53%).

### 3.3 Availability of accurate and up to date data for Wiltshire

Our earlier report highlighted concern over data quality/availability in relation to the data submitted by the Skills Funding Agency to support performance management of the LAA/Local Agreement for Wiltshire resulting in the escalation of concerns to the Skills Funding Agency directly. This was compounded by a response from their National Strategic Team confirming that currently their focus is on the production of data at a regional level only, with the intention to supply data at a local level for those authorities who currently have section 4 powers. There is currently no capacity or budget to carry out a similar exercise for other authority areas. Since then, the Skills Funding Agency have agreed to provide information on funding for those providers with whom they manage contracts in the Wiltshire area. However, this will not provide the full picture as there will inevitably be national providers who may choose to deliver in this area as well as non-Skills Funding Agency funded provision, which is also taking place. A key development is that to support Local Enterprise Partnerships and Local Employment & Skills Board to understand what is being delivered and how well, the FE Data Service (located within the Skills Funding Agency) will publish regular information so that they and others can assess the extent to which skills delivered match their economic priorities.

Further to this, it has been confirmed that the Skills and Learning Intelligence Module (SLIM) of the South West Observatory will be able to provide continued support going forward with further developing the employment and skills evidence base at the sub regional (Wiltshire) level. In particular, the very useful Employment & Skills Analysis produced by SLIM in the Spring of 2010 will be refreshed in February 2011 as well as new measures to support performance monitoring of skills priorities. SLIM have also offered subject to capacity, to support any bespoke analysis/research required by sub regions.

### 3.4 Current Activity

Through its own Skills for Life contract with the Skills Funding Agency, Wiltshire Council has been actively raising the Basic Skills levels of its workforce. In 2008/09 139 staff were enrolled on programme with an achievement rate of 94.2%. In 2009/10 74 staff were enrolled on programme with an achievement rate of 97.3%. The lower number of learners is due to funding changes which excluded stand alone Skills for Life provision in 2009/10 so that the numbers are only for those enrolled on NVQ courses.

Through the Family Learning Skills for Life contract with the Skills Funding Agency, the Council has been actively raising the Basic Skills levels of its communities. In 2008/09 there were 138 on programme with an achievement rate of 93.5%. In 2009/10 there were 64 on programme with an achievement rate of 94%. Enrolment numbers were fewer in 2009/10 as a result of national policy changes which now embed Family Learning Skills for Life courses within longer Family Learning courses rather than deliver as additional 'bolt-on' courses. In the past learners on very short Family Learning programmes were able to join 6 hour 'move on' courses but the short delivery times only suited higher level learners who needed to brush up on their existing skills. This new, longer, integrated approach has worked well as learners working at lower levels have more time to prepare and feel less anxious about taking the test.

The Wiltshire Strategic Economic partnership Basic Skills Performance Reward Grant project being delivered by Wiltshire College commenced in August with a shortfall in enrolments in both Literacy and Numeracy as a result of the delivery centres in Corsham, Warminster and Devizes not opening in time for operational/staffing reasons and a subsequent delay in marketing and promotion to learners. Things are picking up though with the centres now open and a SLA in place with the Probation Service, referring prospective learners for both literacy and numeracy - from this it is envisaged there will be upwards of 10 referrals per month once momentum is gained (SLA commenced in November, referrals expected to reach anticipate levels by Jan/Feb). To date we have had 10 enrolments for Numeracy Level 3 and 12 enrolments for Literacy Level 1. The College is working with partners in the community to generate referral interest which is now starting to show promise though hindered by the severe weather conditions during November and December. The Council and College are in discussion about mechanisms for escalating referral activity so the project can claw back from the slow start and deliver in full by the end of the programme.

### 3.5 Planned Activity

The 'Action for Wiltshire' programme, established early in 2009 has achieved much in dealing with the impact on business and communities moving into recession. The impact of the downturn has created a number of particular issues for businesses, employees and job seekers that are both compounded by the reduction in public sector funding and more difficult to address without the availability of the normal business support tools. The current context for economic recovery and the role of economic development partners is changing. The Government is implementing a programme of work which will radically alter the policy context within which the public sector and its partners operate – one in which addressing the budget deficit will take precedence. It is in this context that a second phase of the Action for Wiltshire programme has been agreed. A key element of this will be an 'Employment Support Programme' aimed at addressing the hardening of unemployment, re-skilling a new workforce for Wiltshire, maximising opportunities for self employment and establishing a new business support model. Basic skills,

employability skills and informal skills development are expected to be feature strongly.

The Economy & Enterprise and HR & Organisational Development services of Wiltshire Council are in the process of developing an Apprenticeships Action Plan in the context of workforce planning and development including talent management and developing coherent career pathways. The Council is also working with Wiltshire College, the national Apprenticeship Service and other partners on a Wiltshire 100 in 100 Apprentices Campaign which launched earlier this month with the aims of achieving 100 new apprentices enrolling on an apprenticeship programme within 100 days.

During January & February Wiltshire Council will lead Wiltshire Works partners through a refresh of the Work & Skills Plan which sets out how Wiltshire Council, working with partners through Wiltshire Works (the worklessness sub-group of the Employment & Skills Board) will help deliver a reduction in worklessness and promote economic inclusion. The Council is also leading partners through the development of a wider Employment and Skills Strategy for Wiltshire with a first draft being prepared for the consideration of the Employment & Skills Board in February. In the work that is emerging, the importance of basic skills is clear.

#### **Environmental Impact of the Proposal**

4. There are no identified environmental impacts within this update/outline report.

#### **Equalities Impact of the Proposal**

5. The activity on Basic Skills outlined in this report has equalities considerations at its heart as it aims to provide opportunities for those most at need to develop their skills and learning.

#### **Risk Assessment**

6. There are no further identified risks within this update/outline report.

#### **Financial Implications**

9. There are no identified financial implications within this update/outline report.
10. N/A

#### **Legal Implications**

11. There are no identified legal implications within this update/outline report.

## **Options Considered**

13. No alternatives considered as the intention of this report is to provide an update to the Children's Services Select Committee on work underway to increase the level of Basic Skills attainment in Wiltshire, particularly the project enabled by the Performance Reward Grant that commenced in August 2010.

## **Conclusions**

14. According to the latest available data Wiltshire is demonstrating sustained improvement in Basic Skills attainment levels. The current and future activity highlighted in this report has been designed to build on this performance further. The support on offer from SLIM to further develop the sub regional employment and skills evidence base will support effective performance monitoring and measurement.

## **Proposal**

15. The Children's Services Select Committee is invited to note the progress made in improving the level of Basic Skills attainment in Wiltshire and the current and planned activity for maximising and sustaining this improvement. The Committee is also invited to note the improved outlook concerning the availability and quality of Basic Skills data for use by the sub region.

## **Reason for Proposal**

16. Update to the Children's Services Select Committee on work underway to increase the level of Basic Skills attainment in Wiltshire, particularly the project enabled by the Performance Reward Grant that commenced in August 2010.

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Date of report: 14 January 2010

## **Background Papers**

July 2010 Report to the Children's Services Select Committee on Basic Skills in Wiltshire.

## **Appendices**

N/a