

Wiltshire Council

Children's Select Committee

26 July 2012

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 Select Committee to make recommendations on the result of the consultation which will be presented to the cabinet in September 2012.

Background

2. 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.
3. 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

4. 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 two 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 1741 completed questionnaires were returned, 286 on-line and 1455 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 as a full agenda item and recommendations made by 11 of the 18 area boards.

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

5. 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.
6. The survey sought information on 14 topics. The summary responses from Wiltshire Residents were as follows:

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%

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

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%)

8. 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).
9. The recommendations from area boards are summarised as Appendix 4.
10. Nine 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.

11. Five of the nine boards supporting Option 3, plus one other, support Option 4: 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.
12. Comments from the two education providers both favour Option 3 with some support for Option 4
13. 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 low priority for them. However, implementation of options 3 or 4 would require the active participation of community networks and education providers.

Main Considerations for the Council

14. 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.
15. 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.
16. 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.
17. 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.
18. 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" vary. 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

19. 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.
20. 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.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

21. The equalities impact of a change in the council's support for adult education will primarily increase access for more deprived 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.
22. 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

23. Establishing a new service on a self-financing basis would introduce the risk of failing to attract sufficient income to meet the costs of the service. The financial model for such a service will need to be developed to assess and reduce the financial risk to the council.
24. Withdrawal of the service could present a risk to the well-being of existing service users. Such a risk is impossible to quantify.

Financial Implications

25. It is expected that any new service will have to be self-financing and therefore will not place any financial pressure upon the council.
26. If the service is withdrawn, there will be no financial implications.

Legal Implications

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

Options Considered

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

Conclusions

29. That Cabinet be invited to determine Wiltshire Council's future role in respect of informal adult education from the following options:

- i. to take no action and have no role in respect of informal adult education;
- ii. to facilitate the provision of informal adult education at a local level.
- iii. To coordinate and promote informal adult learning opportunities offered across the county.

Proposal

30. That the Children's Select Committee comment upon the findings of the consultation on adult education and the proposals to be presented to Cabinet.

Reason for Proposal

31. The proposal is made in the interests of transparent decision making.

**Stephanie Denovan
Service Director, Schools and Learning**

Report Author:

Simon Burke

Head of Business and Commercial Services

Tel. 01225 713840

E-Mail: simon.burke@wiltshire.gov.uk

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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