

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

21ST NOVEMBER 2019

**DEVELOPMENTS IN THE FUNDING AND DELIVERY OF ADULT
COMMUNITY LEARNING**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION AND
COMMUNITY SERVICES, IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR
PROSPERITY & WELL-BEING, COUNCILLOR JOY ROSSER**

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members with information in relation to the future of adult community learning.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Note the content of the report.
- 2.2 Consider whether further information is required.
- 2.3 Approve the initiation of discussions with Merthyr CBC and Bridgend CBC for the establishment of a Cwm Taf Morgannwg Adult Community Learning Partnership by September 2020.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 All current Adult Community Learning Partnerships are being encouraged to work across Local Authority areas and the vast majority now work on a regional basis.
- 3.2 It would make sense from a strategic perspective for Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr and Bridgend County Borough Councils to form one Adult Community Learning Partnership that would develop a collaborative curriculum for the Cwm Taf Morgannwg area aligned to regional priorities, thereby benefitting from economies of scale and maximising the offer to customers.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 A report was provided to Cabinet in March 2019 which outlined the changes proposed by Welsh Government to the future funding and delivery of adult community learning in Wales.
- 4.2 The outcome of the consultation on the proposed changes was announced on 12th July, 2019 by the Minister for Education. In brief, the decision is to adopt a two stage approach to the implementation of change.
- 4.3 Stage 1 will:
- Introduce a revised funding model based on population density economic and educational disadvantage (likely to be rolled out from April 2020 onwards).
 - Bring planning of provision in line with further education planning, with a focus on adult learning priorities of essential skills.
 - Re-structure of existing adult community learning partnerships to align with the Regional Skills Partnerships.
- 4.4 Stage 2 will focus on developing a National Strategic Body for community based adult learning in Wales including:
- Learning from current organisations to consider how a National Body would work.
 - Undertaking a feasibility study to assess whether an existing provider would be suitable for this role.
 - Work with the adult community learning sector to develop the remit for the National Body ensuring it supports existing provision, builds on good practice and develops a strategic overview that encourages and strengthens opportunities for learners across Wales.
- 4.5 It has been estimated that a National Strategic Body may not be fully established for up to five years.
- 4.6 In the meantime, all Adult Community Learning Partnerships are required to align their priorities with Regional Skills Partnerships; Welsh Government is supportive of Local Authorities expanding partnerships across Local Authority areas.

5. NEXT STEPS

- 5.1 The Welsh Government has previously highlighted its preference for Councils to work closely together wherever possible. There is potential to create a new regional Adult Community Learning partnership across Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil and Bridgend that could be of benefit to learners across the area. This would be consistent with several other regional strategic partnerships following the changes to the health board boundary. Adult

Community Learning partnerships include a wide variety of organisations, not just Council services and the strategic lead organisation in each area may differ. Consequently, there will need to be significant work to facilitate this development and partners across each area will need to agree to it.

5.2 There are a variety of organisational models that could be adopted in order to work across larger boundary areas. In other areas of Wales, partnerships have successfully aligned themselves in different ways including:

- FE institution led partnerships - i.e. The 5 Counties of the former Gwent have pooled all resources to a central pot and the partnership is administered by the local FE institution (Coleg Gwent).
- Local Authority led partnerships – Other areas have seen FE institutions and Local Authorities coming together with the Local Authority taking the lead in the facilitation of the partnership.

5.3 Depending on the approach adopted this could result in:

- A potential reduction in administrative costs and an increased investment in front-line delivery.
- More job security for tutors with opportunities to work across Local Authority boundaries.
- A common tutor rate for the Cwm Taf Morgannwg area.
- An enhanced curriculum offer for learners as each County has access to tutors with different skills and subject expertise.
- Sharing of good practice.
- Ability to plan strategically and implement learning programmes designed to address Cwm Taf Morgannwg well-being priorities.
- Less pressure on some organisations such as Adult Learning Wales who currently have to attend Adult Community Learning partnership meetings in three Counties.
- A consistent approach to quality and development in adult community learning across Cwm Taf Morgannwg.
- One Adult Community Learning Strategy and Action Plan for the whole Cwm Taf Morgannwg area.
- Estyn Inspections would be undertaken on the one Cwm Taf Morgannwg partnership as opposed to currently, three partnerships.

5.4 The potential risks associated with this approach could be:

- It will take time to restructure and there may be some costs associated with this.
- There may be a reduced need for some posts.
- Different partnerships use different software systems and it will take time to align systems in order to get the best information available to improve quality and monitoring.

- There may be some nervousness on the part of partners who may feel that their individual partnerships and relationships built over time could be threatened.
- There may be some concern from learners that planning for their local areas would become more centralised and less responsive to local needs.
- The outcomes of an Estyn Inspection might be adversely affected by an under-performance in one County thereby affecting the wider partnership (or, alternatively excellent performance in one partnership could result in a better outcome overall).

5.5 Until discussions take place between the different organisations across Cwm Taf Morgannwg and a greater understanding is gained of the specific models of delivery currently adopted in each area, it is impossible to recommend any particular model for future development.

5.6 It would be advisable therefore in the first instance for relevant Council colleagues in Merthyr County Borough Council and Bridgend County Borough Council to be contacted to assess their views on the potential of enhancing cross-boundary working and/or merging the partnerships across Cwm Taf.

This will provide an opportunity to:

- Identify a range of options that could be adopted subject to the agreement of each Adult Community Learning Partnership.
- Explore the benefits and challenges associated with these options.
- Assess the feasibility of achieving any change within a specific time-period;
- Produce a report that will identify an agreed preferred option for consideration by the relevant Governing Body and Council Cabinet in each area.

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not required in respect of the recommendations made in this report.

7. CONSULTATION/INVOLVEMENT

7.1 Consultation with the members of the Adult Community Learning Partnerships in each Local Authority area would be undertaken if the recommendations in this report are approved.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

8.1 There are no financial implications aligned to the recommendations in this report.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 9.1 There is no statutory requirement for Local Authorities to deliver adult community learning. However, S.22 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 requires Local Authorities to ensure there are sufficient facilities within their area for part-time adult learning provision.

10. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

- 10.1 Effective delivery of community based adult learning contributes to the following Corporate Plan priorities:

- Economy – Building a strong economy by providing access to the development of skills and qualifications that enhance employability and enable people to progress to employment.
- People – Promoting independence and positive lives for everyone by offering access to a broad range of learning that supports well-being and social interaction thereby reducing loneliness and social isolation.

Strategic planning across a wider area of delivery may also reduce costs while maximising the impact of resources.

- 10.2 The proposal potentially contributes to the wellbeing goals, particularly:

- A more prosperous Wales – improving access to learning and skills will reduce the level of poverty as people will be better able to gain employment.
- A more equal Wales - enhancing the learning offer and ensuring consistency of offer across a wider geographical area will ensure equality of access.
- A healthier Wales – having a Cwm Taf Morgannwg wide adult community learning partnership will potentially enable more strategic planning in line with the Cwm Taf Well-being priorities.
- A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language – the proposal offers opportunities to share tutors across a wider area thereby potentially enhancing the Welsh-medium offer and cultural learning offer available.

- 10.3 The proposal is consistent with the sustainable approach promoted by the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act through the five ways of working:

- Long-term – developing cross-boundary partnerships is a longer term approach to supporting the sustainability of adult community learning.
- Prevention – adopting a wider collaborative approach to delivery of adult learning will enable a better learning offer to be supported thereby

ensuring that learners are not prevented from engaging in some learning programmes because of where they live.

- Integrated – a more integrated adult learning offer across a wider geographical area could be the outcome of the discussions if approved.
- Collaboration – it is dependent on working collaboratively across organisations and partnerships for the benefit of learners.
- Involvement – discussions on the future partnership model will involve people from a wide range of organisations and also learners.

11. CONCLUSION

11.1 There will be significant changes to the funding and delivery of community based adult learning over the coming years. This affords an opportunity to review the current County specific partnership model in Rhondda Cynon Taf and to explore the potential of developing a wider Cwm Taf Morgannwg Adult Community Learning Partnership with colleagues in adjoining Counties.

11.2 Cross-boundary Adult Community Learning Partnerships are now the norm in Wales as they can offer significant advantages to learners and economies of scale to the organisations involved in delivery. However, it will be important to undertake significant work with partners in the County Boroughs of Merthyr Tydfil and Bridgend to assess their views on adopting a different approach and to ensure that there is a thorough understanding of the challenges before a recommendation can be provided to Cabinet on the best way ahead.

Other Information:-

Relevant Scrutiny Committee

Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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Background Papers

Cabinet Report – 19th March 2019

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