

Future provision of Adult Community Learning by the Department for Education and Children

1.0 Background to ACL Provision

1.1 The Welsh Government defines adult community learning (ACL) as flexible learning opportunities for adults, delivered in community venues to meet local needs. Adult community learning (ACL) funded by the Welsh Government covers a diverse range of provision. It embraces learning opportunities which are offered by further education (FE) and higher education (HE) institutions and local authorities. This sector caters mainly for adults aged 19+, with courses being offered in local community-based venues, as well as main college campuses. This includes both formal and informal/non-accredited learning opportunities.

1.2 The Welsh Government has set out six purposes for learning that adults undertake in the most recent strategy document for this sector, Delivering Community Learning for Wales (2010). These key purposes are:

- first steps learning;
- skills for life and embedded basic skills;
- skills for independent living;
- skills for work;
- personal development and well being;
- learning for active citizenship and/or community development.

These priorities link to related statistical evidence that shows that 12% of the Welsh population have not reached Level 1 of basic literacy skills. This issue is particularly acute in over 55s, where 15% of the population are below Level 1. Adult numeracy skills in Wales are also low, with 51% of the population at entry level, with 56% of 20-24 year olds and 54% in the 55-65 age bracket not reaching Level 1 competencies.

1.3 Historically, County Council provision of adult community learning in Wales has been funded by a combination of Welsh Government grants, revenue from learner fees and lettings and core council support from the Revenue Support Grant. In Carmarthenshire, the need for departmental budget savings from the ACL service budget over the past ten years has resulted in the incremental withdrawal of the £640k council core Revenue Support Grant subsidy. During this period the service has worked efficiently to be funded by grant and revenue income only. The funding withdrawn from the ACL service has been used to support other aspects of educational delivery within the department for Education and Children.

1.4 Officers have achieved this substantial saving to the departmental/County Council budget by an on-going and comprehensive programme of transformation, innovation and change that has included:

- two staff restructures;
- revision of administrative and caretaking procedures;
- not filling posts as they become vacant and the reallocation of duties across service staff;

- reducing the number buildings managed by service (including asset transfers to Town and Community Councils);
- converting “leisure learning” classes to clubs and;
- increasing the fees paid by learners.

1.5 However, despite the on-going work to reduce service costs, the service reported a budget shortfall of approx £45k in the 14-15 year. This reflected the requirement of the service to run five community education centres across the county and the reducing numbers of learners enrolling in classes. This trend reflects a similar pattern across Wales (see <http://gov.wales/docs/statistics/2015/150325-further-education-work-based-learning-community-learning-2013-14-en.pdf>.)

1.6 Officers have attended Education and Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee meetings regularly to update members regarding the financial challenges faced by the ACL service. In March 2015, members considered a service report advising of the extent of Welsh Government (WG) funding cuts to the ACL Service in the 2015-2016 financial year. Officers outlined how the local Authority’s responsibility to oversee the delivery of this provision could be carried out in 2015-2016 and beyond. Members had previously endorsed the proposal that responsibility, staffing and funding for adult community learning provision would be transferred from the County Council to Coleg Sir Gâr from September 2015.

1.7 However, managers at Coleg Sir Gâr were subsequently informed by the Welsh Government that the overall college budget would reduce by approximately 10% in the 2015-2016 year, with a 50% cut to the budget for learners aged 19 and over. Thus while the college was still committed in principle to the transfer of the service, it was unable to meet the original deadline of September 2015 as the level of staffing in the college was reducing due to the Welsh Government budget cut. While the college will provide the County Council with franchise funding for the 2015-2016 year, this is reduced significantly in line with the budget cut affecting funding for part-time courses. In addition to the cut to the CSG franchise budget, other Welsh Government grants have also been cut for the coming financial year. The nature of these central Welsh Government grant cuts mean that in 2015-2016:

- The Coleg Sir Gâr franchise for adult community learning courses will reduce from £394k (2014-2015) to £260k (2015-2016);
- The WG direct grant to the ACL service will reduce from £190k (2014/15) to £156k (2015/16);
- The Family Learning Grant (£106k in 2014/15) has been cut altogether for 2015/16;
- There is no probation service funding income (£15k in 2014/15) in 2015/16 and beyond.

1.8 The combination of these factors has resulted in a reduction in the income to the service of approximately £289k for the 2015-2016 year. Consequently, the budget situation facing the service is primarily a result of direct cuts made by the Welsh Government and not the 2015/2016 budgetary decisions made by the Department for Education and Children. As a result of the decision not to transfer provision to Coleg Sir Gâr in September 2015, officers planned to deliver a service for the 2015-2016 year based upon estimated income of £524k following the cuts to service revenue sources identified above.

- 1.9 In the absence of core funding from Departmental or other County Council budgets, planning to meet the identified budget shortfall in the coming year was focussed upon the following actions:
1. Reducing the number of courses delivered by the service;
 2. Increasing the fees paid by learners to take ACL service courses;
 3. Further reducing the number of buildings managed by the service;
 4. Reducing the overall level of staffing of the service.
- 1.10 All of these actions have been undertaken by officers over the past three months, further reducing the costs of running the service. This work includes the transfer of Glanamman Community Education Centre to Cwmaman Town Council, restructuring caretaking services at centres and not replacing three members of staff who have left the service
- 1.11 However, detailed budget monitoring in July 2015 has highlighted the full effect of the Welsh Government cuts on the service. This monitoring has identified a likely budget overspend of approximately £147k for the 2015-2016 year. While the final figure for the overspend is linked to the numbers of learners enrolling on courses offered by the service, the extent of the projected sum is such that any additional fee income generated will not impact significantly on the total overspend.
- 1.12 Budget monitoring has highlighted that the core costs for the service remain staffing and centre running costs. Other than reducing building related costs in this budget (by shutting community learning centres) and removing the RLP match-funding contribution, there is little scope to reduce this budget further other than by stopping service delivery altogether.

2.0 Service Update October 2015

- 2.1 Following a number of discussions with Coleg Sir Gâr managers during September 2015, a meeting was arranged involving Matt Morden (Lifelong Learning Networks Manager), Julie Stuart (CCC HR Officer), Mike Williams (CSG Assistant Principal) and Eirian Davies (CSG HR Officer) on Monday 28th September to look at the practicalities of the TUPE transfer of ABE and ESOL staff to the college during the 2015-2016.
- 2.2 Service staff had prepared a detailed staff breakdown showing the numbers of staff, teaching hours and roles, age profile and years of service, since the college were keen to have sight of this information before any transfer progressed. At the meeting, discussions focussed on these staff details and the liabilities that would fall upon the college should the transfer of these staff take place. During these discussions, Coleg Sir Gâr officers highlighted concerns that Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment (TUPE) liabilities would present too great a financial risk for the college. The consequent discussion identified a range of options for the future delivery of ACL courses.
- 2.3 Following the meeting, the College Executive Board considered these proposals on Friday 2nd October and subsequently confirmed that due to the financial risk to the College, they would not be able to progress with the TUPE transfer of CCC staff now or in the future. College management identified their wish to continue with the

existing franchise agreement arrangement for the 2016-2017 financial year. This decision created an urgent need to identify how and what ACL provision the Department for Education and Children will be able to offer in the future.

- 2.4 While there has been a reduction in County Council delivered community learning courses in recent years, there has been an increase in non-accredited community learning across Carmarthenshire delivered by community groups and individuals. In some cases, these courses are being taught by tutors who also work for the ACL service. Should County Council provision reduce further, it is possible that independent course delivery of this will increase to fill the gap left as Welsh Government funding for this work reduces. Given these developments, there is a role for the ACL service to play in highlighting the range of independent courses on offer across Carmarthenshire. This could be achieved by a regularly updated web page listing of these courses hosted on the Carmarthenshire County Council site.

3.0 Proposal for the Future Departmental Role in the Delivery of Adult Learning Provision

- 3.1 The combination of the current franchise income from Coleg Sir Gar (allocated on an academic year basis) and the direct grant from Welsh Government provides the service with WG grant income of approx £435k for the 2015-2016 year. Pending any further Welsh Government budget cuts, a similar budget for the service is projected for the 2016-2017 year.

- 3.2 While all WG budgets are subject to cuts, it is assumed that funding for adult essential skills (literacy and numeracy), digital literacy, ESOL, return to work and learn and Welsh for Adults will be prioritised due to the strong links with a range of poverty related policy initiatives. However, funding to support the “leisure” ACL classes is likely to be cut significantly, with the WG expectation being that where these classes are offered it is on a cost recovery basis only. Given this context and the need to plan service provision in line with the significantly reduced service budget available, it is proposed that the following actions be taken:

1. The ACL service budget available (approx £435k) be prioritised for adult basic education, literacy, numeracy, digital literacy courses, ESOL (including language support for refugees) and activities to target the hardest to reach and people experiencing the effects of poverty;
2. The Adult Basic Education element of the service is restructured to be able to deliver this provision in the most cost effective manner possible;
3. A review of the course fee policy takes place, with fees to be established for ESOL courses, though Basic Skills courses will remain free;
4. The provision of other adult community learning classes (e.g. in subjects including art, languages, computing, humanities) cease to be provided by the service after 31st March 2016) with the resulting reduction in the numbers of related staff employed;
5. The service formally relinquishes management and all related running costs of the Cennen Centre, Ammanford, Glanamman Community Education Centre and Felinfoel Community Education Centre as of 31st March 2016;
6. The service retains a presence in Carmarthen town, exploring options for the location of provision by assessing the viability of utilising space in Carmarthen library, or continuing to use the Carmarthen Community

Education Centre or other premises, and retains the use of rooms in Llanelli library;

7. The ACL service retains a role in collating information about courses offered by other organisations and individuals and promoting this information via website listings and a named contact officer;
8. Future expenditure on ACL services shall be contained within the level of grants or other external expenditure available from time to time.

3.3 The actions proposed above are such that they will require a political decision by elected members regarding the future of this service. The timeline for the required democratic process is as follows:

- E&C Scrutiny – 17th December
- Executive Board – 4th January 2016

3.4 Following discussions of the proposals at these meetings, a programme of consultation with staff affected by these changes will take place. Further consultation with learners and community education centre users affected by these changes will also be required. Should redundancies result from this process, the cost to the Department for Education and Children will be significant due to the length of time that many service staff have been employed.

3.5 An Equalities Impact Assessment EIA for these proposals has been completed and will need to proceed through the corporate change review process. There will also need to be consultation with staff and unions regarding restructuring, redeployment and likely redundancies and the relevant HR processes to be followed. Consultation will also be required with learners and centre users in locations where venues will close.

Appendix 1 – Current service delivery information

Current data (as of 2nd October 2015) shows that there are 502 learners enrolled in CCC ACL provision (including basic skills, ESOL and community learning but excluding Welsh for Adults classes) for the 2015-2016 year. Of these learners 73% are female and 27% are male. Learners over 40 make up the majority of service users, with 76.5% of those enrolled in courses in this category. The average age of female learners is 54 and 56 for male learners.

Non-employed learners make up 85% of those enrolled, with 15% in employment. 65% of learners categorise themselves as Welsh speakers. Learners with disabilities make up 44% of all students enrolled. The ethnicity of learners is predominately white British, with 95% of people in this category. Learners undertaking ESOL courses make up the majority of the further 5% in this category.

Appendix 2 – Current usage of community education centres

Community Education Centre	Number of sessions used per week				Total sessions
	Basic Skills classes	ESOL classes	Adult Learning classes	Lettings and private hire	
Felinfoel	0	7	12	6	25
Carmarthen	10	4	5	16	35
Glanaman	0	0	0	14	14
Return to Learn, Llanelli	9	3	0	0	12
Cennen Centre Ammanford	9	4	0	0	13