

THE ANNUAL ASSEMBLY

16 MAY 2007

REPORT OF ADULT EDUCATION 60+ SCRUTINY PANEL

Title: Adult Education 60+ Scrutiny Panel	For Decision
<p>Summary:</p> <p>This report details the Adult Education Scrutiny Panel's review of Adult Education for those residents aged 60+.</p> <p>The origin of the panel's review stems from the receipt of a number of letters of complaint to The Adult College of Barking & Dagenham arising as a result of the College's decision to remove the age-related fees concession for residents aged 60+, together with a letter received by the Chair of the Scrutiny Management Board.</p> <p>The report gives details from residents who have been affected by the removal of fees concessions; from the Adult College, their Governing Body, and from the Learning and Skills Council that provides funding for the courses offered at the college.</p> <p>The Panel also heard evidence from medical professionals of the significant wider additional health and general well-being benefits to be gained in participating in educational activities.</p> <p>The Panel were also informed by the voluntary sector organisation Age Concern of the services and activities they provide, and how they might help fill gaps for residents arising as a result of the college's fees increases.</p> <p>The Panel recognises that the Age Discrimination Act 2006 will prevent educational institutions such as The Adult College from offering concessions to fees for those residents not in receipt of benefits.</p> <p>The Panel was frustrated by the fact that no specific way forward could easily be identified to support those residents aged 60+ who could not afford to pay fees at the full cost.</p> <p>The Learning and Skills Council has made £20,000 available to East London boroughs to establish an Adult Education and Skills Forum, the purpose of which is to encourage greater partnership working in order to improve the qualifications held by residents and their job prospects. Given the particular concern of the Scrutiny Panel to encourage the continued participation of residents aged 60+ in learning, the Learning and Skills Council has agreed to set aside a sum of £5,000 to establish an Adult Education 60+ Task Group that will report to the LAA Adult Trust. Ongoing funding to support the work of the Group will be sought.</p> <p>Wards Affected: All</p>	

Implications:**Financial:**

In the first place £5,000 being provided by the Learning Skills Council, as part of £20,000 to set up an Adult Education and Skills Forum.

Legal:

None

Risk Management:

None

Social inclusion and Diversity:

Lifelong Learning is an important activity for all. Those residents aged 60+ who are no longer eligible for fees concessions for Adult Education courses must be catered for in order to prevent conditions such as dementia and social isolation from developing prematurely.

Crime and disorder:

Intergenerational learning opportunities between senior residents and young people often foster greater understanding and may have positive benefits on the subsequent behaviour of the younger members of the community.

Options Appraisals:

None

Recommendations:

The Panel is proposing the following actions. That:-

- (1) The Corporate Director of Regeneration establishes an Adult Education 60+ Task Group and invites the following parties to participate.
 - Executive Members for Regeneration, and Lifelong Learning
 - Lead Member – Adult 60+ Scrutiny Panel
 - Staff and student representation from The Adult College
 - Voluntary and community sector organisations providing adult education services to residents aged 60+.
- (2) The funding of £5,000 made available by the Learning and Skills Council (London East) enables the Task Group to be advised on the range of educational activities currently on offer in the borough for senior residents, and how these might be promoted to encourage greater participation in order to maximise the benefits to health and general well-being.
- (3) The Task Group considers ways to extend adult education opportunities through the development of Neighbourhood Management teams providing outreach facilities.

<p>(4) The work of the Task Group informs the priorities of the Adult Trust in order to potentially access funding through the LSP sub-group to encourage and support senior residents in educational activities.</p>		
<p>Reason: To agree and endorse the recommendations of the Scrutiny Panel, and accept any further recommendations.</p>		
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Introduction

- 1.1 Councillor Twomey, Chair of the Scrutiny Management Board received a letter in July 2006 from a resident living in Dagenham who informed her that there are no longer concessions at The Adult College for those aged 60+ who do not receive benefits.
 - 1.2 In response to their concerns the Scrutiny Management Board at their meeting on 5 July 2006 agreed to set up a scrutiny panel to look at Further and Adult Education, with set terms of reference, membership as set out below and a timeframe of 3 months.
- ## 2. Membership
- 2.1 The Membership of the Panel comprised of Councillor Mrs K J Flint (Lead Member), Councillor Mrs S J Baillie, Councillor N S S Gill, Mrs L A Reason, Councillor P T Waker and Councillor J R White.
 - 2.2 An external representative attended the first two meetings of the panel.
 - 2.3 Alan Lazell, Head of Skills, Learning, and Enterprise Division, was identified as the lead service officer, and Bruce Morris, Head of Adult Care Services, Adult and Community Services Department was the independent scrutiny support officer. Pauline Bonella, Democratic Services Officer provided support to the Panel.
 - 2.4 The Panel also invited Councillor P A Twomey, Chair of the Scrutiny Management Board to a number of meetings to provide expertise in her role as a user of Adult Education.
 - 2.5 Pat Cooney, Head of The Adult College was invited to most of the meetings to give the Panel first hand information regarding statistics of the participation rates of

residents aged 60+, and the current and future funding information as derived from the Learning Skills Council.

3. Terms of Reference

- 3.1 The Panel was originally going to scrutinise Further and Adult Education, across all age ranges, but at their meeting held on 31 October 2006, the Panel together with the Chair of the Scrutiny Management Board discussed their work programme and felt that the terms of reference were too wide to complete within the timescale and agreed to focus their scrutiny on the area for Adult Education for those aged 60 plus only, which was reported to the Scrutiny Management Board who concurred with the Panel.
- 3.2 A review to determine education and training needs of young people aged 14+ has been jointly commissioned by Rob Whiteman, the Chief Executive and Trevor Cook from the Learning Skills Council.
- 3.3 The age range for education not being covered by this Panel could be considered by the Scrutiny Management Board in due course.

4, Amended Terms of Reference

- 4.1 To investigate the provision of adult education facilities across the Borough and whether these offer residents aged 60+ adequate choice and access.
- 4.2 To examine costs and usage of facilities/resources for adult education aged 60+
- 4.3 To explore any opportunities for better value and participation, for example through granting of concessions and use of partnerships.
- 4.4 Like all scrutiny panels:
 - To consult/build appropriate links with other groups or partners particularly Age Concern, The Adult College's Governing Body and the Learning Skills Council.
 - To consider any related equalities and diversity issues, health implications, complaints in relation to the subject/service under scrutiny and efficiency gains.
 - To consider visiting other authorities for comparison purposes.
 - To report back with findings and recommendations. In this respect the Panel was given additional time to report their findings.

5. Background

- 5.1 Over 70 complaints were received by The Adult College when concessionary fees were abolished by the Governing Body for the College. The loss of concessionary fees, which resulted in an increase in fees was immediate, with no lead in time and gave the residents aged 60+ no time to prepare for this. This was due to the change of focus for providing funding to the College by the Learning and Skills Council.

- 5.2 The Governing Body for the Adult College had to make up the shortfall of the funding they received from the Learning Skills Council by learners having to pay more towards their fees, this trend to continue by 5% each year until learners pay at least 50% contribution. This will only apply to those who are not receiving benefits.
- 5.3 Some of the work undertaken by the Panel covered the spectrum for all age groups and the information received outside the new terms of reference has been discounted in this report.

6. Work Programme

- 6.1 At the inaugural meeting Alan Lazell, Lead Services Officer, provided the Panel with a scoping report which covered the topics shown below.
- The range and provision of further and adult education facilities across the Borough and whether these offer choice and availability
 - Vocational opportunities in schools, at Barking and Dagenham Training Services and in partnership with Further Education Colleges for young people
 - Examine costs and usage of facilities/resources for further adult education, including venues and teaching staff/lecturers
 - Explore opportunities for better value, for example, concessions
 - Consider any statutory requirements and or local strategies/initiatives for young people and adult education
- 6.2 To provide the Panel with an insight of the facilities the College offered they undertook a tour of the College and met the Management Team. They were impressed with the facilities but had concerns that should concessionary fees not continue classes would be closed due to lack of students. Pat Cooney, Head of the College and her team, provided the panel with a considerable amount of statistical information, including comparisons with other Boroughs, the number of adult learners aged 60-74; the number of learners aged 60+ who had paid the full fee and the fee income for those aged 60+ for the last three financial years. The Panel heard how the College continues to find ways to attract learners, with ideas such as buy one get one free, payment of fees by instalments, etc.
- 6.3 The Panel wanted to meet those residents, who had complained to the College about the rise in the cost of fees, due to the loss of concessionary rates. We met with these residents, who completed a questionnaire devised by the Panel. The results confirmed what the Panel expected in that many of the service users had incomes that were just above the benefit level and that due to this, many no longer attended classes, or reduced the number of classes they attended. A copy of the questionnaire and a breakdown of the results is attached as an Appendix.
- 6.4 The Panel felt it important to hear from the Learning Skills Council regarding the current and future funding arrangements for the College and invited Trevor Cook, Partnership Director of the Learning Skills Council for our Region. The Panel heard what the priorities of the LSC are and how the change to funding arrangements will affect those aged 60+ not claiming benefits. The ethos of the LSC was to

concentrate their funding on service users obtaining examinations and employment skills and less towards Community learning. Trevor Cook was invited back to update the Panel on the funding arrangements for 2007/08 but at the time of completing this report the information is not available.

- 6.5 The Panel invited members of the Governing Body from the College to clarify their decision to abolish concessionary fees to those who are not receiving benefits. The Panel heard from the Chair of Governors that the Learning Skills Council had reduced the college's funding, this was about £60,000 less for the financial year 2006/07 this meant that the Adult College would be expected to make up the shortfall by learners paying more towards their fees. The Panel were informed that this would increase at 5% each year until learners eventually paid a 50% contribution. Whilst the Governing Body understood the effects this may have on those aged 60+, they felt they had no choice but to abolish their concessionary rates and ask all service users not in receipt of benefits to contribute more to their fees.
- 6.6 The Panel also heard from the Student Co-ordinator for the College who provided details of the large number of learners who had approached her regarding the large increase in fees. She also confirmed that many of the learners age 60+ fell into the category just above the benefit level and therefore did not receive concessions.
- 6.7 The Panel felt that part of keeping healthy is to keep the mind stimulated and they invited Dr Bhat from the North East London Mental Health Trust. The Panel were provided with details of case studies that showed that when older people take up mental or physical activities it prevents the onset of dementia and promote general health and well-being. This was further confirmed by a presentation by Lindsay Royan, Consultant Clinical Psychologist, who identified that in 2006, the number of people aged 60+ nationally signing up for further education, had reduced by nearly 25% from the previous year and is thought to be to a combination of increased fees and reduction in courses for social and community purposes in favour of the greater focus on the skills agenda. She highlighted three government agencies who all supported lifelong learning for older people and on how the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) also supported this. The Panel were informed of the benefits of education in later life, particularly around reduced risk of depression, falls and dementia and providing social contact and a greater sense of well-being.
- 6.8 Claire Ramm, Director of Age Concern provided the Panel with information about activities and courses they provide for those aged 60+. Specifically she gave information to the Panel about a previous partnership working between the Adult College and UK On-Line Centres, and explained how at first the courses were slow to be taken up, but as they progressed they became more popular at which point the funding was withdrawn by the Learning Skills Council. We were also informed that Age Concern provided their services at a number of outreach venues.
- 6.9 Janet Thomas, a benefits adviser for Age Concern accompanied Claire Ramm and spoke about how the loss of concessionary fees had affected those aged 60+. She confirmed that she was aware that sometimes a difference of as little as 99p could mean that benefits could not be paid.

- 6.10 The Panel invited Matthew Cole, Director of Health Improvement for the Primary Care Trust. He is a joint appointment between the PCT and the Council and responsible for the Health Improvement agenda including issues affecting older people, which applies to the age range the Panel, are particularly looking at. He also interestingly told the Panel that the demographics of the Borough shows that within the next five years that there will be more people aged 65+ than those aged under 16.
- 6.11 In line with neighbouring boroughs the Learning Skills Council agreed to provide the Borough with £20,000 to establish an Adult Education and Skills Forum. Alan Lazell in discussions with the LSC secured agreement that £5,000 could be set aside to establish a Task Group to develop the recommendations arising from this Scrutiny Panel.
- 6.12 Alan Lazell provided an article from the Times Educational Supplement which highlighted the shift in funding to post 16 Education and Adult Skills for Life, combined with a loss of traditional sources from the European Social Fund and Single Regeneration Budget. This has led to Voluntary and Community organisations no longer being able to sustain projects.

7. Equalities and Diversity

- 7.1 The Council's agenda is clear around equalities and diversity, but the introduction of the Age Discrimination Act 2006, clearly identifies protection for those that are able to work, but does not take into account those who have now retired but still wish to be active in the Community, either by being able to participate in educational and community activities or having the opportunity to pass their experience and expertise onto others.
- 7.2 The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) have provided guidelines to Further Education Colleges or Higher Education Institutes, which clearly states that all Adult Learners should be treated equally, and that providers should not discriminate unfairly on any of the grounds covered by the Council for Equality and Human Rights. All Colleges of Further Education or Higher Education Institutes are complying with these guidelines to prevent any risk of a Tribunal might decide that the College must be covered the regulations. They go on to say that older people are not necessarily poorer than younger people, so the justification for a fee discount should be on the individual circumstances and not age.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1 In essence the Panel felt very frustrated that the formula used by the Learning Skills Council did not take into account the deprivation in this Borough. Whilst the Panel support education leading to examinations and skills for employment, they feel that this should not be the only route to be taken and it should take into account the health risk of those older people who still wish to continue being part of the community and engage in learning.
- 8.2 The Panel recognised that there is a significant number of residents aged 60+ whose income is only marginally above the threshold at which fee concessions apply. This prevents them from participating as fully as they might wish in educational activities.

8.3 The Panel were also made aware that many of the Borough's older residents subsequently would give up the opportunity to continue in education as they could no longer afford it. This in turn could lead to lack of social contact, depression, falls and dementia, and in the Panel's opinion lead to more pressure on other agencies.

9. Thank you

The Panel would like to thank all the outside organisations and in particular the residents of the Borough, who have contributed to the findings of the Panel's final report.

Consultation

Corporate Management Team
Finance Department

Background Papers

Minutes of meetings held on

26 September 2006

12 October 2006

31 October 2006

21 November 2006

11 December 2006

23 January 2007

12 February 2007

Questionnaire with Results Provided to Residents

- 1) How many courses have you enrolled in this year?
4 one course and 5 none
- 2) How many courses would you have liked to enrol in that you might have had the time to do?
6 one course, 3 two courses, 1 three courses
- 3) Did the cost of courses affect the **number** of courses you enrolled in?
9 Yes, 1 No
- 4) Did the cost of courses affect **which** course or courses you chose to enrol in and which you didn't?
6 Yes, 2 No
- 5) Does transport affect how many courses you attend?
10 No
 - Husband brought me in car
 - I have freedom pass I choose those within reasonable reach.
- 6) Are there courses that you might like to enrol on that are not provided? Please give examples.
5 No
 - The oil painting class which was cancelled.
 - Cannot think but variety is always an inventive to try.
 - Yes e.g. Ballroom or Latin Dancing
 - Woodwork
- 7) Please provide any further comments or information that you feel we should be aware of.
 - They tell old people to keep busy and take up hobbies in their retirement and then make it almost impossible to do so being raising the fees
 - It made it difficult to do any
 - As I genuinely have difficulty finding extra rent and charges levied by this Council extortionately.
 - I feel that the increase was very substantial, making the difference of being able to attend a course or not – in my case not!
 - Not all of us have two pensions. Not all of us qualify or want to apply for a free ride.
 - Yoga helped me after a serious R.T.A. cost me a job and left me impaired mobility. We are told to keep active and fit why make it impossible.
 - By depriving pensioners of attending classes due to increase of fees will have an adverse effect on health and well being so increasing stress on NHS. Pensions do not increase at the same rate as services – another pressure on Pensioners.
 - If we could have paid by term, it would have helped with the cost. I do a yoga class and helps me keep fit.
 - I think it was a big increase for people just on the boarder line.
 - Some classes have closed because of lack of students! A direct result of removal of concessions.