

**AGENDA ITEM**

**REPORT TO CABINET**

**17 DECEMBER 2020**

**REPORT OF CORPORATE  
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

**CABINET INFORMATION ITEM**

**Portfolio: Regeneration and Housing – Lead Cabinet Member – Cllr Nigel Cooke**

**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE GOVERNING BODY FOR THE LEARNING AND SKILLS SERVICE**

**SUMMARY**

This report provides an update on the work of the Learning and Skills Service in supporting residents, employers and community partners with learning opportunities and employment initiatives to meet social and economic priorities. The report highlights the challenges arising from the COVID pandemic and our success in developing our Virtual Learning Environment and ensuring our learners continued to reach achievement targets which are above the national benchmark rates.

**REASONS FOR PRODUCING THIS REPORT**

To demonstrate the ongoing success of the Learning and Skills Service and its Governing Body as an advisory committee empowered by Cabinet to provide challenge, support and strategic oversight.

This report is for information only. No decisions are required.

**DETAIL**

**Governance and management of the Service**

1. The Governing Body was established in October 2016 and since its inception has supported the Service through a period of transition and sustained improvement. The Governing Body provides challenge and insight from different sectors whilst ensuring the Service continues to meet the needs and priorities of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council.
2. The Service is fully funded by external grants allocated by funding bodies including Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) and the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). These grant allocations contribute to overall Council financial position and are regularly reviewed through close governance and performance monitoring.
3. The value of the contribution from the Governing Body along with the management arrangements for the Service have been validated by independent advisors, Ofsted inspectors, and external quality standard assessors.

4. Governors play an active role in quality assurance and improvement. In order to ensure that the Governing Body continues to remain strongly positioned, its membership has recently been reviewed.
5. It is proposed that membership will now incorporate an additional employer representative, specifically within the digital sector to help the Service meet skills demands within this local priority sector.
6. In addition, the current Learner Governor position became vacant in September 2020. Recruitment to this vacant position, alongside the development of a new employer representative position will provide fresh focus and strengthen the support to the Service.
7. The membership of the Governing Body for the 20/21 academic year is as follows:

<b>Position</b>	<b>Full name</b>	<b>Role</b>
Chair of Governors	Councillor Nigel Cooke	Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing (also Link Governor for Equality and Diversity)
Vice Chair of Governors	Frances Hoy	Personnel Manager for NIFCO UK Ltd Employer Representative for Industry and Commerce
Member	Councillor Jim Beall	Deputy Leader of the Council Cabinet Member for Health, Leisure and Culture (also link governor for safeguarding)
Member	Reuben Kench	Director of the Environment, Culture, Leisure and Events for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Member	Craig Taylor	Adult Learning and Skills Manager for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Staff Representative
Member	Chris Renahan	Inclusive Growth, Development and Planning Manager for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Member	VACANT	Learner Representative
Member	Karen Grundy	Community Programme Manager for Catalyst Voluntary and Community Sector Representative
Member	Jacqui Taylor	Education and Employer Representative
Member	VACANT	Employer Representative for Digital Sector

8. Within the 20/21 academic year, the Governing Body have agreed a Forward Plan with five key themes to continue to drive improvements. They are as follows:

Theme	Purpose	Deadline
Implementation of an Interest to Enrolment Conversion system	To ensure governors and leaders have greater clarity on how successful the service is when undertaking learner marketing and recruitment activities	March 2021
Information, Advice and Guidance Walkthrough and Observation	To identify good practice and areas for improvement specifically relating to information, advice and guidance as per the recommendations of the Matrix inspection	April 2021
Service Funding Performance	To review the funding and financial position of the Service and identify any future areas for income generation.	April 2021
Curriculum Planning and Development	To understand the analysis, rationale and planning involved to ensure Service provision is aligned to local needs and fulfils funding body requirements	July 2021
Annual Review of Strategic Plan and Quality Improvement Plan	To ensure progress / fulfilment of the objectives set within the Learning and Skills Strategic Plan and Quality Improvement Plan	July 2021

#### Impact of COVID-19 on Learning and Skills delivery

9. At the onset of the COVID-19 national lockdown restrictions in March 2020, the Service was quick to react and trigger contingency measures to ensure that the majority of existing learners were able to be retained on their learning programmes.
10. Whilst the Service was unable to deliver traditional face-to-face learning in a physical classroom setting, it transitioned its delivery to a predominantly online offer with courses being delivered via video and through the use of a Virtual Learning Environment. Physical paper based resource packs were also available where appropriate, such as for those learners who were unable to access ICT.
11. As a result the Service was still able to sustain high levels of learner achievement in the 19/20 academic year. For Adult Education Budget programmes, the overall achievement rate was 92.8%, of which, Adult Skills achievement rates were 88.2% and remained in line with the 18/19 national benchmark of 89.1%.
12. During this time, overall learner numbers have decreased compared to the levels achieved in 18/19. This was due to face-to-face activities being suspended and partner organisations such as Job Centre Plus remaining closed resulting in limited recruitment opportunities.
13. There was still demand for home based learning and enrolment numbers on Distance Learning courses rapidly increased. Due to this demand, Distance Learning has been further strengthened for the 20/21 academic year.

14. The Service also delivers a range of apprenticeship programmes to support employers across the Tees Valley. The number of new starts significantly reduced and several apprentices were also placed on furlough during this time.
15. Rapid measures were taken to ensure apprentices continued to be supported and were able to adapt to new working arrangements in their organisation. Alongside this, the off-the-job training element of the apprenticeship also converted to online delivery.

#### 20/21 Academic Year Delivery Adaptations

16. Extensive curriculum planning was undertaken in preparation for the 20/21 academic year to ensure that the Service continues to maximise the use of its Adult Education Budget and apprenticeship funding in response to the pandemic.
17. The Service faces significant challenges to maximise this funding when operating within the current restrictions for classroom based learning. Due to social distancing measures, classroom capacity has reduced to just 70% at Billingham Community Centre and as low as 45% within Stockton Business Centre.
18. In order to ensure that residents continue to have access to learning opportunities, additional classroom units have been acquired at Stockton Business Centre which has added financial pressure. There are also increased teaching costs as additional courses are required to generate the number of enrolments needed to meet TVCA contractual targets.
19. It is important that the Service continues to offer classroom based delivery to support those most disadvantaged, many of whom have limited access to ICT or have entry level skills and would therefore not be able to learn remotely. 67% of learners were identified as residing in a disadvantaged ward and 26% join the Service with no prior attainment/qualifications.
20. The Service continues to remain strongly positioned to support future economic recovery by utilising its expertise and funding resource. In addition, projects such as the Youth Employment Initiative and the Routes to Work programme will continue to provide specialist support to residents to help progress them into employment.

#### Routes to Work Programme

21. The Routes to Work programme is led by Tees Valley Combined Authority and delivered by each local authority. It aims to support up to 2500 people into employment, specifically targeting those aged 30 and over and facing the greatest difficulties to entering employment.
22. The Learning and Skills Service is the lead provider within Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council and is working in partnership with other service areas such as STEPs supported employment service.
23. Over the three year life of the project, there is a target to engage and actively support 625 Stockton-on-Tees residents with the aim of progressing 94 individuals into employment by the end of the project in March 2021.
24. As at 31<sup>st</sup> October 2020, the Service had already fully achieved its targets with 667 clients actively supported and 102 individuals successfully entering employment.
25. Due to the success of the project, Tees Valley Combined Authority have secured additional funding for a further financial year. As a result, an additional 675 Stockton-on-Tees residents will be supported on the project with a target to transition 93 people into employment.

26. The scope of the Routes to Work programme has also been further expanded to now include those aged 16 and older. This provides further opportunity for the Service to provide dedicated employment support to those in greatest need.
27. There is a potential duplication due to the number of other funding regimes already supporting those in the 16-19 age range. However, we are continuing to work with TVCA partners including DWP to ensure the original clarity and effectiveness of the Routes to Work programme is not lost and remains successful.

**Name of Contact Officer:** Craig Taylor  
**Post Title:** Adult Learning and Skills Manager  
**Telephone No:** 01642 528814  
**Email Address:** craig.taylor@stockton.gov.uk