

# CABINET INFORMATION ITEM ONLY

**AGENDA ITEM**

**REPORT TO CABINET**

**14 DECEMBER 2023**

**REPORT OF SENIOR  
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 during the 22/23 academic year. This report also highlights the outcome of the full Ofsted inspection which took place in June 2023. The report also demonstrates the ongoing success of the Governing Body as an advisory committee empowered by Cabinet to provide challenge, support and strategic oversight.

**Recommended that the report be noted.**

#### **DETAIL**

##### **Governance and management of the Service**

1. The Governing Body was first established in October 2016 and since that time has supported the Service by utilising its skillset, experience and knowledge across different sectors to provide challenge and insight to ensure 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 the 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 is regularly reviewed. The current membership of the Governing Body is as follows:

Position	Full name	Role
Chair of Governors	Councillor Nigel Cooke	Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Housing (Link Governor for Equality and Diversity)
Member	Chris Renahan	Assistant Director - Inclusive Growth and Development for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council SBC Senior Management Team Representative
Member	Craig Taylor	Adult Learning and Skills Manager for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Staff Representative
Member	Julie Marsden	Economic Development Manager for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Economic Growth and Regeneration Representative (Link governor for safeguarding)
Member	Kevin Cooper	Learner Representative
Member	Jon Carling	Chief Executive for Catalyst Voluntary and Community Sector Representative
Member	Lynsey Robinson	Director, Digital City, Teesside University Employer Representative for Digital Sector

### Ofsted Inspection Outcome

5. In June 2023, a full Ofsted inspection took place which confirmed the Service continued to be recognised as a 'Good' learning provider in line with the Ofsted Education Inspection Framework.
6. To achieve this rating, the Service must be able to evidence the high quality of education it provides, the positive impact it makes to the lives of learners and apprentices, and ensure that safeguarding measures are effective.
7. Ofsted were very positive about the clarity and purpose of governance arrangements. They stated "governors have a good understanding of the strengths and areas of development for the service" and that "members of the governance board effectively use their expertise and contacts with key stakeholders such as TVCA to help shape the strategic direction of the service and inform the content of its curriculum, particularly in response to the skills needed for economic growth in the region."
8. It was recognised that "leaders and managers have designed an ambitious curriculum that addresses two of the main strategic priorities of the local authority and TVCA. These are the need to develop the skills required for economic growth, particularly those sectors of the economy where there are labour shortages, and to provide residents with learning

opportunities to build their mental and physical resilience so they can return to work, counter social isolation and integrate into the community.”

9. It was evidenced that “teachers demonstrate a mastery of their craft” and that leaders “plan and design the curriculum effectively”. As a result “a high proportion of adult learners complete and achieve their qualifications” and “adult learners, and those apprentices who complete their programmes, secure positive destinations into employment and further education.”
10. However, during the inspection it was recognised that apprenticeship provision requires improvement. Inspectors noted that whilst “leaders and managers have identified and begun to implement actions that they need to take to improve apprenticeship provision...aspects of teaching and assessment are still not of a high enough quality.”
11. The Service, its leaders and governors now intend to fulfil the 23/24 Quality Improvement Plan which is tailored to address and exceed these recommendations made by Ofsted. The Service has already made great progress in improving apprenticeship performance with achievement rates for 22/23 increasing from 50% to 72.2%. This is now higher than the current national benchmark by 20.8%

#### Performance of the Learning and Skills Service

12. There were 3663 adult learning enrolments and 66 apprenticeships during the 22/23 academic year.
13. The achievement rate for Adult Learning programmes is 90.7%, of which, the Adult Skills achievement rate is 87.6%. This is above the national benchmark by 1.4%.
14. The Service is also keen to recognise not only the tangible achievements of learners such as those achieving recognised qualifications, but also the ‘softer skills’ which learners develop to support them in their wider lives. The feedback table below demonstrates that the vast majority of learners were able to improve their skills, increase their confidence, and have a greater understanding of their own health and well-being which ultimately help them to achieve or move closer to their aspirations.

Statement	Positive Responses
I feel more confident in my own ability	97%
I am more open to new ideas and experiences	97%
My well-being has improved	95%
I am more aware of my own strengths and area for development	96%
I have clearer goals and ambitions for the future	92%
I feel more able to take part in my own community	92%
I feel more confident to access services on-line	81%

15. The impact of the Service is also demonstrated with the positive destinations attained by learners and apprentices following completion of their programmes. 78.1% of adult learners progress to either higher level learning or an employment outcome. 86% of apprentices also enter a positive destination, with 84% of those achieving an employment outcome demonstrating that the knowledge, skills and behaviours they have developed has facilitated their retention in the workplace.
16. The Service continues to strategically target its funding to support those in greatest need and help tackle inequalities in the borough. As a result, 46.8% of learners engage from a disadvantaged area and 14.8% of learners are identified as having no prior attainment / qualifications.
17. However, it became apparent in the wake of the cost of living crisis that those in need of support were not necessarily from what has traditionally been recognised as a disadvantaged area. The increased cost of living has broadened those previous boundaries with the Service witnessing increased demand from residents at risk of hardship and poor wellbeing.

#### Supporting the Cost of Living Response

18. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council coordinated a response which included the Learning and Skills Service to help address the arising cost of living crisis.
19. The Service has worked closely with internal and external partners across Stockton-on-Tees to deliver a series of responsive and flexible programmes, often in recognised 'Warm Spaces' by utilising its specialist Learning for Inclusion funding, ringfenced to local authority adult learning providers.
20. These short, sharp, tailored programmes have often been co-designed with partners following engagement with various community partnership forums and have focussed on those specific community needs. These partners have included the SBC Fairer Stockton-on Tees team, Family Hubs, schools, social prescribers and VCSE organisations.
21. Programmes which have been delivered include 'Skills to Pay the Bills', designed to support people in managing their budgets in the light of rising food and energy costs. A 'Cook The Costs' course was implemented as a collaborative council effort which utilised wider corporate funding to provide family hub users with energy saving one-pot cookers whilst the Service taught individuals how to use this equipment to prepare cheap yet nutritious meals to support families on limited budgets.
22. It is anticipated that this demand will continue and the Service remains strongly positioned to utilise its Learning for Inclusion funding to support our communities in line with the "Powering Our Future" programme where we will continue to put communities at the heart of everything we do and utilise partnerships to support a place-based approach.

**Name of Contact Officer:** Marc Cole  
**Post Title:** Interim Director of Regeneration & Inclusive Growth  
**Telephone No:** 01642 527029  
**Email Address:** marc.cole@stockton.gov.uk