REVIEW INTO THE ADULT AND COMMUNITY LEARNING SERVICE - FIRST WITNESS SESSION

Committee name	Residents, Education and Environmental Services Policy Overview Committee

Officer reporting	Neil Fraser, Chief Executive's Office

Papers with report	None

Ward	All

HEADLINES

The Committee is conducting an in-depth review into Hillingdon's Adult and Community Learning Service. As part of the review, a number of witness sessions and other activities will be undertaken to gather relevant information and evidence for Members.

This first witness session is themed around officer and resident feedback and experiences, including challenges faced within the service.

Witnesses attending will include:

a. Thoria King - Curriculum Manager for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities team
b. Ginette Powis - Sessional tutor for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities
c. Ebbony Gonzalez - Learner who has completed ESOL and Maths courses during the lockdown period.

Debbie Scarborough – Service Manager, Adult and Community Learning, will also be attending to aid the Committee from a technical perspective.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **That the Committee considers the evidence provided by the witnesses in attendance and asks further exploratory questions to aid their review.**
2. **That the Committee suggest further topics and/or attendees for forthcoming witness sessions.**

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The witnesses have provided the following supporting information to aid the Committee:

a. **Thoria King, Programme Area Leader, Adults with Learning Difficulties & Disabilities, HACL**

What was the struggle?

In March 2020, with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, our ALDD curriculum ground to a halt. Until then, teachers had some teaching and learning activities online on Moodle, our virtual learning environment. However, the majority of learners were not accessing these Moodle pages. During the first lockdown the department developed our Moodle section on the Beat Corona Boredom page and although we contacted our learners, very few bothered to visit the site.

In May 2020, the staff were offered training to upskill digital teaching skills. The questions we asked ourselves were: how can we teach online, how can we facilitate learning online, how can ALDD learners learn best online? Learning more about the tools available in Moodle and using the Google G-Suite tools provided the tutors with far more confidence and alleviated some of the fears they had toward using technology in teaching and learning. However, many of the general tools were not suitable for ALDD learners with quite profound cognitive disabilities. They would need to be rigorously adapted and thought through carefully in order to be fully effective.

How did we overcome these issues?

The team worked very hard thinking about how to apply what we learned in the training to our subject areas, what could we adapt, what could we do differently, what was possible and what seemed impossible (at the time). In June 2020, we tested out our newfound skills in a 5-week online pilot project involving some of our high needs learners. Each session was taught by a pair of teachers who delivered a topic they wanted to experiment with. As the pilot went on, whatever we learned from previous sessions was shared forward and in this way each session improved week on week. Issues with logging in, figuring out the easiest way for learners to log in so that they didn't get put off, devising learning activities that were fun, engaging and effective: we learnt that it was not impossible, careful planning was key.

Since September (Term 1), teachers have placed all learning activities for their sessions on Moodle and use this in class so that the learners become more familiar with the platform. Teachers also had to move Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) online. This meant employing various ways of ensuring that this important tracking document was updated during each lesson. These ILPs were posted onto Moodle pages to encourage learners to visit when out of class. Learner work completed in class each week was also posted to encourage learners to want to go online and admire their work. This was great for learners who missed classes for whatever reason to be able to catch up with what was done. Then with increasing instances of shielding and covid-isolation, we tried to encourage learners and teachers to continue to attend remotely providing they were well enough to do so. This was challenging for learners who depend on their parent/carers without whom they are unable to connect.

What other issues do we now face?

With the January 2021 lockdown, ALDD took on the challenge of moving to an online provision. This highlighted many issues: many of our learners do not find online learning appealing and prefer traditional methods. Many do not have ICT equipment e.g. laptop, tablet, pc or even a smartphone therefore our Learn and Loan Scheme has now supported them to access a device with which to be able to join their classes online. Some have broadband/wi-fi issues especially those in care homes although these issues have seen improvement in recent weeks. A couple

of learners do not have someone with them to help and supervise them especially when their parents have to work. There is also a general lack of digital skills with parents and carers. Some parents say they don't have email addresses and are not interested in gaining digital skills or helping their charges to get online. Our team has been brilliant in providing hours of telephone support to assist learners and their parent/carers to join online, which is challenging when there is no face to face physical assistance.

What can help?

- General encouragement for people (parent/carers) to gain and improve digital skills.
- Physical technical assistance provided where needed?
- Assist Care homes to receive support to enable remote learning to take place (some have no time to take on this extra task, not enough technical knowledge, not enough staff)
- For those who can't connect, test if when the remote connection is made, they still do not want to participate i.e. if the difficult parts are done for them, then all they have to do is show up, but sometimes they just don't want to take part online.
- Encourage learners to enrol on a digital skills course to improve their ability to join in online. Encourage parents and carers to do the same.

b. Ginette Powis – Sessional Tutor and Established Learning Support Assistant, HACL

As a tutor, there have been many adjustments and adaptations that we have needed to make, given the pandemic situation that started March 2020. In the main, the outcome has been extremely positive, but it has presented many challenges along the way.

During the initial lockdown, we were in a position where learners could not access online classes and it became clear that this was an area that needed planning and developing. As an ICT tutor, I had practiced using the Moodle platform in the class, demonstrating and providing the printed instructions to take home, hopefully to encourage parental or carer support for this to be accessed in between classes. Unfortunately, this didn't happen and the number of learners that accessed this at home were very low. This is what initially made me aware that were many factors and obstacles to be overcome, mainly the lack of support and/or devices.

Therefore, during the first lockdown we, as tutors/LSA's, attended online CPD sessions to learn some new digital skills to assist moving our classes online in the future and develop our Moodle pages to be more interactive, informative and appealing. We had the opportunity to practice these newfound skills when we taught an online pilot session and even though the attending number of learners were limited, it helped us as tutors, to realise that this was possible and with some work it could be a reality if it was required in the future.

When we returned to courses in September, I focused on using Moodle every week in class, supporting learners to login to not only Moodle but also their HAE Google accounts and access their online ILPs. They fill their weekly diary entries in every session. We revised using the Google Meet links to help prepare for the possibility of online sessions. This stretched their digital skills and albeit confusing for them at times, it was great practice for doing this at home. They all had a list of their log in details to take home should they need them for the purpose of

online learning.

I gradually noticed that learners were becoming familiar with the process and the more able students were now doing this independently. The access to Moodle at home increased a little and they were participating in interactive quizzes, completing homework and accessing evidence of learning that I had uploaded from the session. However, there was still this gap where support, device access and internet connection were an issue.

My learners experienced the use of Google Meet in November 2020 when, because of my own Covid isolation, I taught the classes remotely from my home. They adapted well and their learning was not disrupted because of my absence.

When the January 2021 lockdown was announced, we found ourselves in a position to make online learning a reality. As a tutor, this involved many changes to lesson plans and adaptations to the course content and uncertainty of attendance.

As part of the established LSA team, I have contributed to supporting many learners, parents and carers to get online, login, access Moodle and Google Meet.
This has been challenging, time consuming and has identified issues that have needed to be addressed:

- Parent / carer lack of digital skills
- No support / Parents working
- No device / old device
- No internet connection / unable to share residential home Wi-Fi
- Learners finding online learning too daunting
- Learners disinterested / Parent disinterested
- Online attendance determined by level of support provided at home
- No response to calls, email etc
- Absent learners miss learning outcomes that are set
- Environment not always suitable

As many of our learners are in residential care or supported living, they sometimes rely on the staff to support them 1:1. This is not always possible due to staffing numbers and can determine if the learner can attend, as they are unable to do so without support. This situation is out of our control, but we have also been able to support other carers to connect and have demonstrated the functions of Google Meet, so they are able to encourage the learner to participate as fully as possible.

We have witnessed, in some online classes where learners are from a residential home, that although they are supported to connect this is not continued through the session and does not enable the learner to participate as fully as they could. Also, the environment in these situations is not always appropriate and conducive to learning. e.g. in residential homes, several learners may be in the same room which makes it noisy.

A 'Loan and Learn scheme' has now been introduced for learners that do not have devices,

which is positive, but they still require an internet connection, and this is not always possible. As a tutor, I am grateful for every learner that participates and I know that the team I am part of have worked so hard to make this happen. We are continuing to do this every week, checking on absent learners, offering support over the phone to encourage attendance and providing digital advice.

c. Ebbony Gonzalez, Learner who has completed ESOL and Maths courses during the lockdown period.

Born in the Dominican Republic, Ebbony spent her childhood travelling the world with her working mother, a model. Although she learned five languages along the way her formal education was frequently interrupted and when she settled in the UK in October 2015 with her husband and 2 children, she knew wanted to get some formal qualifications to fulfil her dreams of using her languages to build a career, either in teaching or interpreting.

By the time the Covid-19 pandemic hit and lockdown came, she was studying English and maths with Hillingdon Adult and Community Learning. By then, her 9-year-old and 15-year-old daughters had a 3-year-old sister but sadly her husband was suffering from Parkinsons and was increasingly depressed. During the lockdown, Ebbony struggled to balance her children's welfare with her role as her husband's carer. She tried hard to continue her studying. Her courses had transferred online and, with the family's laptop so often used by the children for their schoolwork, she found it difficult to attend regularly and keep up with homework. Somehow, she managed to pass her English exams but failed her maths qualification.

When her husband died in the summer, Ebbony returned to college to pick up her studies again. Following a conversation with the staff there, she decided to concentrate on just one of her subjects while she helps her children manage their grief, and with the help of a laptop borrowed from the service she is now studying English at Entry Level 3.   She has also struggled with her own grief and has felt isolated and exhausted much of the time. Despite this, she values her time at college and is determined to show her children that studying and working hard is the way to a better life.

Potential lines of Questioning:

The Committee may wish to consider the following lines of enquiry, along with any other questions Members may have for witnesses during the meeting:

- What further challenges are expected, if the Covid-19 pandemic continues?
- How has the delivery of virtual adult learning during the pandemic:
    - enabled the service to consider future opportunities for greater online education and learning delivery and thereby provide value for money and optimise resources?
    - given rise to ideas on how to reach out to <u>new</u> future residents/customers that would not usually consider or access more 'traditional' adult education services in person?
    - affected those learners or potential learners that find technology a barrier in participating virtually - and what can be done to overcome this going forward?
- What will be the impact if learner numbers decrease?
- Do the officers have ideas around sourcing alternative funding?

- What has the learner experience been? What helped keep learners going? What made the difference?
- What feedback on difficulties experienced can the officers share?
- What requests have been made by learners for additions or improvements to the service?
- What courses are requested but not currently provided?
- What provision does the service make for addressing mental health in learners?

Implications on related Council policies

The role of the Policy Overview Committees is to make recommendations on service changes and improvements to the Cabinet, who are responsible for the Council's policy and direction.

How this report benefits Hillingdon residents

Policy Overview Committees directly engage residents in shaping policy and recommendations to the decision-making Cabinet that seek to improve the way the Council provides local services.

Financial Implications

None at this stage.

Legal Implications

None at this stage.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL.