

Report of the Assistant Director Office of the Chief Executive to the meeting of Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be held on 22nd February 2022

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Subject:

Skills for Work Update

Summary statement:

This report provides an update on Skills for Work - the Council's delivery arm for Apprenticeships, and Adult, Family and Community learning - including details of achievements, the impact of Covid and future plans.

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY:

The intent of the strategic approach and delivery of Skills for Work's provision is to have a positive impact on residents across the whole of the district, address skills inequalities and to enhance each individual's equality of opportunity.

It also contributes to the Council's wider programme of work to ensure there are suitable local workforce opportunities to meet the diversity of people in the district who are, or will be seeking work, so as not to inadvertently exclude certain protected characteristic groups.

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Overview & Scrutiny Area:

Regeneration & Environment

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 Skills for Work (SfW) provision contributes to the Council's priorities to develop better skills, more good jobs and a growing economy, and to ensure a great start and good schools for all our children, as detailed in the Council Plan, and in alignment with the District Workforce Development Plan and District Economic Recovery Plan.
- 1.2 SfW is made up of two distinct teams delivering Apprenticeships, and Adult and Community Learning across the District. All funding is from external sources.
- 1.3 SfW operates as a fully traded service to meet the learning and employment needs of our most disadvantaged residents, offering opportunities for parents, families and unemployed adults. The model also supports the creation of apprenticeships across the District by providing training matched to local need facilitating a clear pathway into further learning and employment.
- 1.4 SfW is within scope of the Ofsted common inspection framework. The most recent Self-Assessment has determined that the provision is "Good", maintaining the "Good" judgement by Ofsted in December 2017.. The service also holds 'Matrix' accreditation, the recognised sector quality mark for provision of Information, Advice and Guidance.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council has an established track record of successfully delivering government funded employment & skills programmes. SfW works with local residents who have multiple barriers and are furthest from the workplace to develop skills and gain qualifications to secure progression into employment, further training or an Apprenticeship.
- 2.2 The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted education and training providers across the sector and the country, impacting established modes of delivery. Digital exclusion has been a critical issue and has adversely affected recruitment, retention and achievement, in particular for adult and family learning.
- 2.3 SfW initiated their Academy in 2021 to support young people accessing Kickstart placements at the Council both with preparation for the experience, and also delivering relevant training during their placement. Training has particularly focussed on literacy and numeracy needs.
- 2.4 SfW has its own Governing Body, the "Advisory Board", chaired by Lee Pryor (Director of Apprenticeships, Luminare FE group) to provide effective governance, and responding to an Ofsted recommendation at the last Inspection to set up a discrete Board. This paper is presented to Committee for additional scrutiny and insight, in line with local democratic processes and to further enhance links to the communities served by SfW. Appendix 1 sets out the Advisory Board membership and Terms of Reference.

- 2.5 This paper is specific to the SfW service which is one element of the Council's response to the underlying, and pandemic related, employment and skills challenges faced by the District. Whilst SfW is a key actor in the response to these challenges, it is one of many partners working to deliver the key targets and interventions identified in the District Workforce Development and Economic Recovery Plans.

3. REPORT ISSUES

3.1 *Overall effectiveness*

SfW was judged as Good at its last Ofsted inspection in December 2017. In the most recent self-assessment against the Ofsted framework, SfW leadership and its Board have determined that the "Good" judgement made by Ofsted would be sustained and, as below, have evaluated the headline inspection measures as all being "Good":

OVERALL ASSESSMENTS	GRADES 2019/20	GRADES 2020/21
Overall Effectiveness	GOOD	GOOD
Quality of Education	GOOD	GOOD
Behaviour and Attitudes	GOOD	GOOD
Personal Development	GOOD	GOOD
Leadership & Management	GOOD	GOOD

3.2 *Impact of Covid*

SfW has been a fully traded service since 2014, dependent on generating income to cover staffing and business costs. Income is from two main sources: West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) through the devolved Adult Education Budget; and the Apprenticeship Levy.

Unfortunately, SfW's income has been significantly impacted by the pandemic. Income is driven by learner participation, success and course type. Over 700 of SfW's learners were unable to continue in learning due to a combination of lockdown restrictions, illness, caring, anxiety, shielding and little or no access to IT hard- and software.

There was an immediate and significant impact from the start of the first lockdown on the recruitment and retention of learners. Typically, 60% of SfW's delivery is locality-based in a range of schools, libraries and other community venues. From March 2020 until July 2021, the community settings SfW use, as well as the city centre training rooms, were either closed entirely, or had severely restricted access limiting the numbers who could attend. Due to these factors, SfW had to discontinue face to face learning.

Lockdown restrictions and closure of venues also meant that the service could not hold or attend recruitment events. Provision has been robustly promoted via a variety of media and partners, but experience in typical years has proven that this more traditional approach to marketing is a less productive means of stimulating learner demand for community provision. Local events and word of mouth are by far

the more effective engagement and entry routes.

As such, there was significant impact on numbers, with a reduction in learners from almost 1,200 in 2018/19 to just over 300 in 2019/20. This has since slowly increased back up to 594 in December 2021. However, despite the easing of restrictions, the most vulnerable adults who comprise a significant part of our client group remain reluctant or unable to engage in provision due to illness, anxiety, shielding and/or caring.

SfW acted at pace to mitigate this impact where possible. Swift mobilisation by management and staff enabled on-line learning for over 300 adult learners and apprentices to continue with their programmes. IT hardware and software were updated, and additional software purchased to support this alongside intensive CPD for all staff. However, as the Committee will be aware, digital access and inclusion are significant challenges in the District, and this has been a consistent and substantial barrier to the success of these additional measures.

3.3 *SfW Academy*

As part of the wider employment and skills response to the pandemic, the Kickstart placement programme for 18-24 year olds has had impressive reach across the District. Over 600 young people have started on Kickstart placements coordinated by SkillsHouse, of which 319 have been within Bradford Council and 293 across the employer partnership which includes a range of employer types and sizes covering all sectors of the economy.

For the Council-based placements, SfW successfully launched the Academy in 2021 to deliver a Council workplace induction and preparation, as well as functional skills training in English, maths and ICT.

Following individual skills assessments, all Kickstart learners are allocated to a training programme, with cohorts taught in three distinct, bespoke groups:

- Accredited training to achieve a Level Two Functional Skills qualification in literacy, numeracy, and digital;
- Entry Level to Level One English, maths, digital skills, and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL); and
- “Upskilling” and refresher training in units of English, maths and ICT as appropriate.

In response to feedback from trainees and managers hosting placements, new, accredited training provision has been developed for delivery from November 2021 across a range of areas: Teaching Assistant; Enterprise; Volunteering; and Customer Service.

As part of the Council’s wider “Future Boost” campaign focussing on opportunities for 16-24 year olds young people in the Academy also have access to an online mentor from business via the Connectr platform.

3.4 Apprenticeships

SfW is the preferred training provider for Apprenticeships within Bradford Council, supporting learners to gain valuable skills and qualifications including maths and English through individual learning plans and with the support of dedicated assessment officers. Apprenticeships are offered from Level 2 to Level 5 in the following vocational areas:

- Management;
- Team Leadership;
- Business Administration;
- Customer Service; and
- Public Service Operational Delivery.

Since the peak of the pandemic SfW has been steadily increasing the number of Apprenticeship starts, mirroring regional and national trends. Currently SfW has 83 apprentices on programme. Growth has been supported by the extension of the Government's Apprenticeship incentives scheme, stimulating initial interest from employers that is now beginning to translate into new Apprenticeship opportunities.

Another focus of the work to generate Apprenticeship starts is the creation of progression pathways for young people on Kickstart placements, with the additional benefit of retaining young talent within the Council. Through maximising these growth channels, SfW's target is to have a minimum of 100 apprentices on programme in the 2022/23 contract year.

Whilst the lifting of restrictions mean it is anticipated that more people will be accessing their place of work, online delivery is being maintained to maximise access to provision, thus supporting high levels of retention and ultimately achievement.

SfW Apprenticeship success rates have been strong, and demonstrate steady and sustained improvement over an extended period of time, as seen below.

Apprenticeships overall success rates:

Academic Year	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
Skills for Work	70.7%	81.6%	87.1%
National Average	64.8%	N/A	TBC

SfW is projecting a minimum success rate of 85% for 2021/22, whilst this minimum figure would represent a slight decrease on 2020/21, it is still well above the anticipated national average.

Covid disruption has led to breaks in learning for some apprentices, most notably those in leadership and management roles. This may have an adverse impact on the 2021/2022 success rates should these learners not return to learning. Regular data monitoring and analysis is ongoing to track any impact, and to inform how we support learners to mitigate any disruption to their programme.

3.5 Adult and Community Learning

SfW delivers a range of accredited courses thorough Adult and Community Learning funding, including functional English and maths, ESOL, and ICT, in community based venues and schools across the district. Additionally, SfW offers a suite of qualifications covering a range of vocational areas and employability skills to support unemployed residents of the District with their search for work.

The impacts of the Covid pandemic have caused particular disruption to the delivery of Adult and Community Learning. This provision targets some of our hardest to reach residents, and its success in engaging and supporting learners to achieve is underpinned by the ability to deliver in localities that work for these residents.

The fact of these settings being closed, as well as inequality of digital access adversely impacting this client group, and further factors such as lack of confidence and resilience, and increased caring responsibilities, have all combined to significantly impact potential learners' desire and/or ability to engage. Consequently, there has been a significant impact on recruitment and achievement over the 2019/20 and 2020/21 contract years.

Planned learner events to support learners, mitigate loss and promote recruitment (indoor and outdoor) were also delayed or cancelled altogether due to different waves of the pandemic shifting the restrictions on these events, and our ability to hold them safely.

For many of the client group, their initial engagement with this programme is their first connection with learning since leaving formal education (often without qualifications). This is also often the first step of an extended journey to upskill, and address challenges in their lives, that ultimately leads to the workplace. Skills for Work is particularly successful at supporting individuals through a range of programmes on this long-term journey to work.

As such, it follows that reduced engagement in one year will have a ripple effect both from the perspective of the numbers SfW are working with, but also disrupting and putting at risk many individuals' longer-term personal development and journey to work.

The end of the academic year 2020/21 saw an increase of learners on programme to 401 in July 2021 with the uplift reflected across all areas of the offer. Progress has been sustained into 2021/22, with 594 learners having accessed the programme year to date, as below.

Adult and Community Learning participant numbers 2021/22

English	Maths	Digital Skills	ESOL	Childcare	Community Learning	Employability	Total
150	107	12	80	7	224	14	594

This is still, however, a reduction of 48% in comparison to numbers pre-pandemic from 2018/2019.

Achievement had increased year on year from 2017/18 - 2019/20, and observations

and quality reviews undertaken throughout the lockdowns have evaluated teaching and learning as “Good”. However, there was a sharp drop in achievement for 2020/21 to 51.4%. The action plan for recruitment, completion, and achievement, as well as to maximise funding has been refreshed and reviewed regularly with all staff, most recently in December 2021. Although 2021/22 continues to reflect the impacts of the pandemic, the predicted achievement rates indicate the plan has affected rapid improvement, with the achievement rate approaching the levels of 2017/18.

Qualification Achievement Rates (QAR):

Academic Year	SfW QAR	National QAR
2017/18	73.3%	88.7%
2018/19	77.6%	89.1%
2019/20	83.3%	Not Published
2020/21	52.6%	Not Published
2021/22 YTD	Predicted 70%	

4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

4.1 SfW is a fully traded service. No new issues arising from this report.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

5.1 Risk management processes are in place at programme level, and strategic risks are reviewed at meetings of SfW’s Governing Body. The wider employment and skills delivery that SfW contributes to is included in the Council’s corporate risk register, with appropriate mitigation in place for any identified issues.

6. LEGAL APPRAISAL

6.1 No new legal issues arising from this report.

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Learners have progression pathways, and upskilling/reskilling provision that supports their work and career aspirations and links to our clean growth city district ambition and future-proofing skills, attitudes and habits, contributing to a District workforce that is responsible, agile and resilient.

Council-based Apprentices will be contributing to our corporate goals around sustainability, and the programme serves to equip our workforce with relevant skills for sustainability.

7.2 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS

Staff objectives link closely to the Council Plan and Council corporate goals

including the Council's declaration of climate emergency, and as such SfW proactively considers the environmental effects of delivering the provision.

7.3 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

A key strategic intent of Adult and Community Learning provision, as set out nationally and in the West Yorkshire Combined Authority's "AEB Strategy" is to contribute to reducing isolation, promoting interaction and integration, bringing communities together, and making people happier and places smarter and more inclusive.

7.4 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

No issues arising from this report

7.5 TRADE UNION

No issues arising from this report

7.6 WARD IMPLICATIONS

There are no Ward or Area implications as SFW supports residents in all areas of the District.

7.7 AREA COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN IMPLICATIONS (for reports to Area Committees only)

N/a

7.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

There are no specific implications for corporate parenting.

As is set out above, SfW provision supports families and enables them to support their children's education contributing to the Council's priority of all children having a great start and good schools.

7.9 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT

No new issues arising from this report.

8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

N/a

9. OPTIONS

N/a

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that members:

- note the content of this report, the challenges posed by the pandemic to the service, and mitigating actions undertaken;
- welcome the continued success of SfW's Apprenticeships programme across the District, and the progress made in recovering Adult and Community Learning provision in 2021/22 to date;
- promote and support the Community and Family learning provision available in the localities to stimulate residents' engagement with the programme; and
- consider current delivery data (Appendix 2) and community settings (Appendix 4) and facilitate appropriate connections to additional venues and/or community groups that may increase the reach of the service within disadvantaged communities.

11. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Skills for Work Advisory Board membership and Terms of Reference

Appendix 2 – Participant demographic data

Appendix 3 - Service Testimonials and Case Studies

Appendix 4 – Skills for Work delivery venues

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

n/a