

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 3rd October 2023

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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 learner participation, achievements, and future plans.

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY:

Skills for Work's mission is to have a positive impact on residents across the whole of the district, address skills inequalities and to enhance everyone's equality of opportunity.

It also contributes to the Council's wider programme of work to ensure that 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 Plan 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. The offer also aligns 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 from our city centre location and in over twenty community settings.
- 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 service also supports the creation of apprenticeships across the district by providing training matched to local need therefore facilitating a clear pathway into further learning and employment.
- 1.4 SfW is within scope of the Ofsted education 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 successfully retained its ‘Matrix’ accreditation this year, this is 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 and skills programmes. SfW works with residents who have multiple barriers and are furthest from employment, supporting them to gain the skills that will secure progression into work, further training, or an Apprenticeship.
- 2.2 Covid-19 affected education and training providers across the sector and the country having a significant impact on the operations of SfW. SfW recruitment and performance data demonstrates strong recovery from the challenges posed by the pandemic.
- 2.3 SfW has its own Governing Body, the “Advisory Board”, chaired by Lee Pryor (Director of Apprenticeships, Luminate FE group) to provide effective governance, and responding to an Ofsted recommendation at the last Inspection to set up a discrete Board. Appendix 1 sets out the Advisory Board’s membership and Terms of Reference.
- 2.4 In presenting this paper to Committee for additional scrutiny and insight, SfW seeks to further enhance our existing links to the communities we serve and alignment with local democratic processes.
- 2.5 This paper is specific to the SfW service which is one element of the Council’s response to the local employment and skills agenda. Whilst SfW is a key actor in the response to these challenges, it is one of many partners working to deliver the targets and strategic interventions identified in the District Workforce Development Plan.

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. Furthermore, as below, leadership have evaluated all the headline inspection measures as all being “Good.”

Table 1: Ofsted Inspection Self-Assessed Grades

OVERALL JUDGEMENTS	GRADES 22/23	GRADES 21/22
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 and Legacy of Covid-19

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.

Income is driven by learner participation, success, and course type. Unfortunately, SfW’s operation was significantly impacted by the pandemic, through the series of national lockdowns and the disruption caused by the Omicron variant in 2022.

There was an immediate and significant impact from the start of the first lockdown on the recruitment and retention of learners. SfW’s ethos is a community-based approach to delivery of learning provision. Typically, 60% of delivery is locality-based in a range of schools, libraries, and other community venues. These were either closed entirely or had severely restricted access limiting the numbers who could attend. IT infrastructure was not in place to support swift move to any virtual learning in the first few weeks of the pandemic in 2020.

Due to these factors, SfW had to discontinue face to face learning, and could not hold or attend recruitment events. Experience in typical years has proven that local events and word of mouth are by far the most effective engagement and entry routes for community learning.

As such, there was a significant impact on numbers throughout the pandemic as can be seen in table 2.

Table 2: Learner Numbers 2018/19-2023/24

Year	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24 (planned)
Learners on adult programmes	790	1,006	281	791	1,278*	1,500
Learner enrolments on programmes (courses)	1,062	1,281	506	1424	1706	1,750
Number of Apprentices on programme	60	78	113	128	133	135
Total	850	1,084	394	919	1,411*	1,635

*Denotes part year figures

There was a reduction in learners from of almost 700, from 1,084 in 2019/20 to 394 in 2020/21. This impacted on initial recruitment as well as the reducing the number of learners that would normally have progressed to further learning in 2021, 2022 and 2023. Learner numbers have recovered in 2022/23 to 1,411 learners enrolled on 1,706 courses.

Table 3: Adult and Community Learning Qualification Achievement Rates (QAR)

Academic Year	SfW QAR	National QAR
2018/19	77.6%	89.1%
2019/20	83.3%	86.0%
2020/21	52.6%	85.5%
2021/22	70.0%	86.2%
2022/23	78% predicted	Not published until March 2024

As the numbers on programme reduced, this also affected the number of learners progressing to higher level courses for adult learning. Consequently, overall achievement which had been steadily increasing from 2017-2020 fell by 30.7% to 52.6% for 2020/21. There has been improvement to 70% in 2021/22, with the prediction of 78% overall achievement for 2022/23.

SfW mission is to support those learners in our most deprived areas facing multiple barriers to engaging and progressing in learning. This is reflected in our strategy to recruit increasing number of learners with no or few qualifications.

In 2018/19, 42% of our learners were assessed as being at entry level or below, this has risen to 62% of learners for 2022/23. Whilst this will have some effect on our achievement rates especially when compared to other providers' learner intakes, we are fully committed to working with this cohort and supporting them to realise their potential. This will in turn deliver significant positive impacts on our most deprived communities.

3.3 Apprenticeships

SfW is the preferred training provider for Apprenticeships within Bradford Council, supporting learners to gain valuable skills and qualifications including maths and English with the support of dedicated assessment officers. We also deliver provision for other local authorities and other employers. Apprenticeships are offered from Level 2 to Level 5 in the following vocational areas:

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

Since the peak of the pandemic SfW has been steadily increasing the number of Apprenticeship starts. Currently in academic year 2022/23 SfW has 133 apprentices more than doubling the number of Apprenticeships from 60 in 2018/19.

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.

Through maximising this, and other growth channels, SfW’s target is to have a minimum of 135 apprentices on programme in the 2023/24 contract year.

The calculation for the Apprenticeship achievement rate is based on planned end dates and as they are longer programmes, the impact on achievement rate was seen in 2021/22 rather than the immediate impact seen on adult learning achievement rates. For SfW this decreased to 64.4% from 81.7% in 2020/21, although this is still considerably better than the national rate of 53.7% (see Table 4 below).

Whilst the lifting of restrictions has meant more students are accessing their place of work, elements of online delivery have been maintained to maximise access to provision, thus supporting high levels of retention and ultimately achievement.

Table 4: Apprenticeships Overall Success Rates

Academic Year	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/23
Skills for Work	70.7%	81.6%	87.1%	64.4%	Predicted 86%
National Average	64.8%	57.5%	57.7%	53.7%	Published March 2024

SfW’s Apprenticeship success rates have been strong when compared to the national rate. There is a clear and sustained improvement over an extended period and even at the point the pandemic had most impact, SfW was more than ten percentage points better than national rate.

The recovery from the pandemic has been strong, and the underlying quality of the provision has been sustained through the challenges posed. SfW is projecting an achievement rate of 86% for 2022/23. Whilst this minimum figure would represent a

slight decrease on 2020/21, it still clearly represents a strong recovery and remains well above the anticipated national average. DfE expects all Apprenticeship providers to achieve a minimum achievement rate of 67% by 2025.

3.4 *Adult and Community Learning*

SfW delivers a range of accredited courses through Adult and Community Learning funding, including functional English and maths, ESOL, and ICT, in community based venues and schools across the district. This includes Family Learning events that are organised throughout the year, and provision that enables parents to support their children as they start their education.

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 offer has continued to successfully target those most in need of support, with low prior qualification levels and furthest from work. For many of our learners, this is their first experience with education 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.

The approach taken by SfW is a community based model with the aim to deliver in trusted venues in communities and with flexible engagement, recruitment and delivery patterns reflecting caring responsibilities and inequality of digital access. This approach was particularly disrupted by the pandemic and the legacy is still apparent, many residents still lack the confidence to engage in face to face settings, some are still in households that have ongoing increased caring responsibilities.

In addition, SfW has a progression curriculum to support learners on their long-term journey to work. Typically, SfW will support with a learner for several years on different and further learning programmes. In particular, the challenges from spring 2020 to winter 2022 significantly disrupted this internal progression of learners, and their longer-term personal development and journey to work.

Despite these continued challenges, recruitment data demonstrates success in increasing learner numbers and course enrolments, Overall adult education numbers on programme have increased from the low of 394 in 2021/22 to 1,278 year to date in 2022/23 (see table 2 above). In particular, SfW continues to support those most in need. In the current academic year to date on adult skills provision:

- 61.7% of learners meet the WYCA definition of disadvantaged;
- 62% of learners present at entry level (i.e. pre-Level 1, where Level 2 equates to GCSE) or below;
- 33% of learners have no prior qualifications; and
- 75% learners are not in paid employment (89% on community learning)

In addition to this SfW monitors certain protected characteristics to ensure we are delivering in line with our mission to “address skills inequalities and enhance everyone’s equality of opportunity.” There has been considerable success targeting ethnic minorities, reflecting groups that are under-represented in the labour market, and statistically have fewer and lower level qualifications. For the academic year to

date, 81% of participants identified as being from a non-White British background. 14% of learners declared a disability.

Achievement had increased year on year from 2017/18 - 2019/20, however as is set out in table 2, there was a sharp drop in achievement for 2020/21 to 51.4%. There has been a recovery in overall achievement to 70% in 2021/22, and this is predicted to increase to 78% in 2022/23. As part of our three year recovery plan, we are working to achieve the national average achievement rate of 85% by 2024/25.

Lesson observations and quality reviews undertaken throughout the pandemic and subsequently have noted that the quality of provision has been sustained at high levels with teaching and learning continues to be evaluated as “Good.” The action plan for recruitment, completion, and achievement is refreshed and reviewed regularly with all staff. This academic year there has been a marked improvement in overall recruitment, completion, and achievement.

Adult and Community learning is also part of the wider support offer for residents through the cost of living crisis. The SfW learner newsletter details additional help, advice and support available locally across the District including food, warm spaces, debt advice, housing, mental health, and well-being. All learners have also received a copy of the “Cost of Living Support Booklet.”

AEB and Community learning funding is utilised to provide additional support with travel and childcare costs where eligible. SfW also uses different funding streams to offer budgeting support, and planning and purchase of food for family meals that learners can cook together with their family at home.

3.5 *Other funding*

As has been noted above the majority of SfW income is through two funding streams. However, SfW actively explores new opportunities as they arise and assesses if they align with the SfW mission, expertise, and local strategic priorities, and if the new provision will enhance the local offer to residents and employers.

From January 2023, SfW commenced delivery of the national Multiply programme, which is part of the UK Shared Prosperity, to improve adult numeracy. In year 1 (to the end of March) SfW supported 330 people. For years 2 (the current financial year) and 3 (2024/25 financial year) SfW will have a mix of direct delivery and commissioned provision.

SfW is also exploring opportunities presented by the Skills Bootcamp provision that the WYCA has been successful in securing, and again is considering options for direct and commissioned delivery.

3.6 *Meeting local needs*

As part of the implementation of the Skills for Jobs White Paper, government now requires certain types of training provider to produce a new accountability agreement. This sets out how providers are contributing to priorities outlined in the new Local Skills Improvement Plans, collaborating with employers, providers, and local agencies.

Whilst SfW was not necessarily in scope for this process, the Board have recognised this a valuable, additional tool to ensure that the strategic intent of SfW is aligning with local need. Given the LSIP was also a new process (led by the Chamber of Commerce) and the need to be cognisant of the priorities identified by that, SfW determined it would be valuable to follow the Accountability Statement process. The final version as endorsed by the Board is at Appendix 2.

3.7 *Matrix accreditation*

The matrix Standard is the national accreditation (owned by the Department for Education) that ensures the delivery of high-quality information, advice and guidance (IAG) services. There is a rigorous accreditation process for providers to evidence that they are meeting the requires standard.

SfW has held the Standard for a number of years and was successful in retaining its accreditation in May 2023. The SfW Matrix assessment report identified these particular strengths in:

- The organisation has developed a strong model of partnership working that is enhancing their resources, reach and ability to adapt.
- There is a strong belief and commitment from the managers across the across the organisation to ensure the quality of IAG is in place.
- Skills for Work has in place a solid coaching capability across the teaching and learning team that was consistently reported by learners to be of a high professional integrity and focused on their individual needs and progression in life.

3.8 *Stakeholder satisfaction*

In addition to meeting local strategic priorities as set out in 3.6 above it is critical that SfW teams and the Board have a strong understanding of how effective learners and employers (of apprentices) believe SfW provision is at meeting their needs. As such SfW undertakes annual satisfaction surveys.

The overall average for employer satisfaction is 95.1%, an improvement of 1.6 percentage points on 2021/22. 97% of Apprentices felt their course met their needs and Adult learning participant similarly recorded a very high level of satisfaction, with an average of 97.3% an increase of 2.2 percentage points.

100% of learners across all funding streams indicated that they felt safe in their learning environment.

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.

SfW delivers family learning programmes that enable parents to support children with their education and reinforce the progress being made in school.

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 TACKLING THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY IMPLICATIONS

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.

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 the significant progress made with recovery;
- welcome the continued success of SfW's Apprenticeships programme across the District, and the progress made in recovering Adult and Community Learning provision in 2022/23 to date;
- promote and support the Community and Family learning provision available in localities to stimulate residents' engagement with the programme; and
- consider current delivery data 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 – Skills for Work Accountability Statement

Appendix 3 - Service Testimonials and Case Studies

Appendix 4 – Skills for Work delivery venues

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

n/a