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Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Sub-Committee

Adult and Community Learning in Harrow

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Adult and Community Learning in Harrow

Report of the Scrutiny Review Group

Review group

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1 Acknowledgements

- 1.1 The review group would like to thank all those who helped us in this review by giving up their time and sharing their experience and views with us.
- 1.2 Particular thanks go to Anita Luthra-Suri, Group Manager – Lifelong Learning, and Geoff Trodd, Service Manager – Adult Community and Family Learning for their valuable input and support throughout our review. We would also like to thank Yolanda Belle-Isle (Quality Officer), Karen Bhamra (ACL Programme Development Officer), and Barbara Martin (Team Leader – ACL).
- 1.3 We would also like to thank the learners and tutors we met during our visits to local adult and community learning centres for their willingness to talk to us and to share their thoughts on ACL in Harrow.
- 1.4 Thanks are due to Peter Pledger, Chief Executive of London West LSC and Kevin Oakhill, FE Account Manager for meeting with us.
- 1.5 This report has been compiled by those named on the cover of this report. The views expressed are solely theirs.

2 Executive Summary and Recommendations

Executive Summary

- 2.1 At its meeting on 19 April 2005, the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Sub-Committee agreed to undertake a review of adult and community learning in the borough and that this would be the main area of focus of the Sub-Committee for 2005-06.
- 2.2 The review is particularly timely. Nationally, adult and community learning has had a high profile in recent months as services face major future changes in the planning and funding of provision.
- 2.3 Our report explores ways in which the ACL service in its current form should respond to these challenges, around the areas of the setting of fees and concessions and communications.
- 2.4 We conclude that the service needs to consider its future direction in a more fundamental sense in order to ensure that it can best meet the needs of local people in the years to come. The key challenge relates to how to fund services that fall outside of the framework set by the Learning and Skills Council, but provide services that local people can benefit from in order to make Harrow a true learning community.

Recommendations

- 1 The review group recommends that the Council lobby at a national level for a more strategic footing for funding for personal and community development learning (PCDL) and a redistribution of funding that addresses historical anomalies.
- 2 The review group recommends that active consideration be given to whether the Council should (a) extend its direct delivery of adult and community learning (b) develop its co-ordinating role as a partnership 'hub'.
- 3 The review group recommends that the ACL service actively explores other means of supporting provision other than through the block grant so that funding for PCDL can be maximised. The review group accepts that the allocation of the block grant results from a contractual agreement with the LSC and that any changes to provision will need to be agreed by the LSC.
- 4 The review group acknowledges that fees for non-accredited ACL provision will need to increase. However, this increase must be at a sustainable and competitive rate. The review group recommends that fees be set at the minimum level which will enable the service's strategic priorities for ACL to be met.
- 5 The review group recommends that the ACL service consider ways in which priority areas such as literacy, language and numeracy can be embedded into learning so as to attract additional funding.

- 6 The review group recommends that the ACL service consider the conversion of some programmed provision to clubs or 'practice groups' in greater detail with a view to piloting such an approach.
- 7 The review group recommends that the branding for the ACL service be reviewed and that 'Learn in Harrow' be considered as a potential brand.
- 8 The review group recommends that the ACL service, in conjunction with the Communication Unit, places a higher profile link to www.learninharrow.org.uk from the Council's website.
- 9 The review group recommends that a communications plan be developed in order to ensure that changes to fees and concessions are properly explained to partners, staff and learners.
- 10 That the area of access to all Council services (of which adult and community learning is an important part) for adults with learning difficulties and their carers be considered by scrutiny as a potential area for a separate review.
- 11 That the Chief Executive, as the Council's representative on the West London Alliance, raise the issue of support to disabled learners with a view to developing solutions for the region, and giving consideration to the forthcoming pan-London round of ESF funding which totals £14m.
- 12 Given the costly nature of crèche provision, the review group recommends that the ACL service should consider further ways in which it can share such provision and support, for example through initiatives such as extended schools and the development of children's centres across the borough.

3 Introduction

- 3.1 Nationally, adult and community learning has had a high profile in recent months including a parliamentary debate in June 2005 (*Hansard*, 21 Jun 2005: Column 186-209WH). Services face major future changes in the planning and funding of provision. At the time of writing, unknown factors include the funding allocation for 2006/07, the potential for a national redistribution of funding, as well as the construction of a national framework for first step and personal development learning.
- 3.2 Our report has explored ways in which the service in its current form should respond to these challenges, around the areas of the setting of fees and concessions and communications. However, we conclude that the service needs to consider its future direction in a more fundamental sense in order to ensure that it can best meet the needs of local people in the years to come. The key challenge relates to how to fund services that fall outside of the framework set by the Learning and Skills Council, but provide services that local people can benefit from in order to make Harrow a true learning community.
- 3.3 During the course of our review we have been impressed with the range of provision on offer to local people, as well as the range of settings where people can participate in learning. We are also impressed with the professionalism and dedication of staff we have met and recognise that this is a key strength of Harrow's ACL service.
- 3.4 For the purpose of this review, adult and community learning has been defined as non-accredited learning, which can be divided into the three categories: personal and community development, first step/family learning and skills for independent living.
- 3.5 'Personal and community development learning' (PCDL) can be defined as learning for personal development, cultural enrichment, intellectual or creative stimulation and for enjoyment and for which there is no requirement that learners must progress to other learning. 'First step' is learning offered as an initial entry point into learning and from which learners are actively encouraged and supported to progress to other forms of learning. Family learning covers learning that involves more than one generation.
- 3.6 'Skills for Independent Living' is learning which develops the knowledge, skills and understanding of adults with learning difficulties for independent living in the community or which supports adults recovering from mental illness to re-engage in learning.

Methodology

- 3.7 The scope of our review is included in this report as Appendix 1.
- 3.8 We have gathered evidence from a wide range of sources which has included:

- Visits to the following local centres, which included discussions with learners and tutors:
 - Sangat Centre (ICT)
 - Kenton Learning Centre (Certificate in Pre-school practice/Skills for Life National Certificate in Literacy; Art)
 - SKSS (Digital camera; ICT)
 - Harrow College (Harrow Weald campus - variety of courses, including self-esteem and assertiveness, sign language and Braille)
- Evidence from a wide range of officers
- An evidence session with Mr Peter Pledger, Chief Executive, London West Learning and Skills Council
- A telephone survey of a number of other boroughs
- A desktop review of current policy
- A learner survey

3.9 During the course of the review we contributed to the development of a survey for learners and piloted this survey during our visits to local centres. At the time of writing full results of the survey were not available. The highlights we have seen suggest that this has been valuable exercise and we believe that the results will prove useful to the service in future.

Local context

3.10 Harrow Council secures Adult and Community Learning through partnership arrangements with a range of providers and through some direct delivery of first step & family learning. Partners include Harrow & Stanmore Colleges, MIND, Family Welfare Association, HAVS, and several community organisations.

3.11 Courses are delivered in over 40 venues across Harrow, including Harrow Mosque, the SKSS Temple, community centres and day centres. Other venues include the College sites and over 20 schools.

Budget

3.12 In 2005/06 the budget for ACL consists of the following elements:

LSC budget: £689k

Of which:

- ACL	£515k
- Family learning	£ 74k
- Family literacy, language and numeracy	£100k

Harrow Council budget: £128k

Service Manager, Finance Officer, Stepping Stones Manager and provision for those with a disability

People First contribution: £ 76k

3.13 The LSC budget is received as a block grant against target learner numbers, which are set in the 3 Year Development Plan agreed by the service and the LSC.

4 Key findings

National policy context – Central Government Policy

4.1 Government policy was initially set out in the Skills Strategy, which “seeks to ensure that, across the nation, employers have the right skills to support the success of their businesses and organisations, and individuals have the skills they need to be both employable and personally fulfilled” (DfES, 2003, p. 17-18). The strategy has a strong productivity and workforce development flavour. With reference to the individual the Government seeks to:

- Provide free learning to all adults studying for their first full level 2 qualification (equivalent to five GCSEs at grades A*-C)
- Provide support for higher-level skills in areas where there are sectoral and regional needs.
- Provide an adult learning grant of up to £30 a week for full time learners studying for their first full level 2 qualification, and young adults studying for their first full level 3 qualification.
- Improve information, advice and guidance services for adults so that people know what courses are on offer, and can get advice on which will best meet their needs.
- Strengthen the range of opportunities for adults returning to education by (i) ensuring there is a range of learning programmes which promote personal fulfilment, community development and active citizenship, with funding assigned to support them and (ii) offering opportunities in basic ICT skills, by developing the range of free introductory courses available (2003, p. 60).

4.2 Despite the heavy focus on skills development “there must continue to be a broad range of opportunities for those who get pleasure and personal fulfilment from learning. A civilised society should provide opportunities to enable everyone, including those who have retired, to learn for its own sake” (2003, p. 68).

4.3 The policy indicates that an overall indicative budget for the funds that should be used to support non-qualification-bearing programmes will be based on the proportion of LSC funds currently spent on these types of learning (to cover family learning, learning for older people, active citizenship, community development, learning through cultural activities, and work with libraries, museums and art galleries) (2003, p. 69).

4.4 The strategy acknowledges that older learners can benefit substantially from opportunities to learn – as it is an important social activity, benefiting both mental and physical health; pensioners should “benefit substantially” from the arrangements for safeguarding funding for leisure learning (2003, p. 70).

4.5 **The review group recommends (1) that the Council lobby at a national level for a more strategic footing for funding for PCDL and a redistribution of funding that addresses historical anomalies.**

Learning and Skills Council – Priorities for Success

4.6 The latest policy document from the LSC, *Priorities for Success* indicates that the settlement for the next two years will allow the continuation of free provision to

adult learners in entitlement groups and national fee remission categories, and a safeguarding of funding for personal and community development learning (PCDL) (2005, p. 2). Priorities for adults – as driven by the DfES – relate to learning for adults lacking basic skills for employability (Level 2); providing opportunities for progression; ensuring continuing availability of PCDL opportunities (2005, p. 3).

- 4.7 There is also a push towards rebalancing public and private contributions to the cost of education and training. Whilst the LSC stresses that personal and community development learning “potentially offers social and economic benefits for a wide range of people”, the policy document stresses that public investment in adult learning should focus on increasing participation and achievement in areas of highest economic and social priority rather than widening participation for its own sake (2005, p. 4).
- 4.8 The policy states that an increase in public funds directed towards learning has not been matched so far by increased contributions by the individual and by the employer. The policy argues for increasing awareness of the level of public subsidy and the true cost of provision, linked with increasing the contribution by the learners who can afford to pay. This is tied to a tighter focus on the key priorities – those set out by the DfES – and is linked with the delivery of more provision at full cost and a significant increase in fees (2005, p. 11, p. 15). The LSC argues that the national fee assumption should rise while protecting priority groups through fee remission (2005, p. 6). This aspect has significant consequences for ACL. We address communications-related issues later in our report.
- 4.9 The LSC seeks to reduce spending on activity that is internally certified or not certified through the National Qualifications framework (to be reduced by £73m from £550m in 2006/07). The LSC also stresses that there is a need to ensure that there are adequate progression routes (2005, p. 15).
- 4.10 The LSC consultation on First Step and Personal and Community Development Learning for Adults states that the LSC “does not believe that it is practical to develop a funding and planning system for adult learning on the basis of learners’ personal aims or motivations” (LSC, 2004, p. 10). We were interested to ask the London West LSC how this would be reconciled with the demand led model, which also appears in the same document. The response from the Chief Executive of the London West LSC was that the inconsistency should stand, for if a purely demand led model was adopted it would not be possible for the LSC to prioritise Level 2 qualifications, as this is not necessarily what learners look for. The argument given was that it is helpful to dispense with a pure model because the LSC aims to guide demand because there are certain skills that the Government believes everyone should have.
- 4.11 In the light of this challenge, it is for the ACL service to balance the competing needs of local residents and the funding body. We welcome the work undertaken by the service on the wider benefits of learning (including that by Bhamra (2004)). There is a need to balance the national priorities of the Government and the Learning and Skills Council with the local needs of Harrow People. Whilst we acknowledge and welcome opportunities to develop the qualifications base of the

local community that the national priorities represent, we are concerned that an over-emphasis on skills and a lack of emphasis on first step provision may mean that groups within Harrow's diverse community who may be most in need of qualifications may lack appropriate entry routes. We are aware that a 'leisure' programme may in fact act as a 'hook' which encourages a learner to undertake further learning or may eventually lead to the development of a business opportunity. We welcome the ACL service's input into the development of unique learner numbers, which we hope will provide useful information about learners' progression routes and achievements.

- 4.12 The review group notes that Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) found that Harrow strengths include clear strategic direction for the development of provision (Adult Learning Inspectorate, *Inspection Report – Harrow LEA*, 2003, p. 6) and was the first authority to receive grade 2 for the leadership and management element of the inspection regime. We are pleased to see the inclusion of information from Harrow's vitality profiles included in the service's three year development plan and we would like to see this heavily embedded into future plans. The linkages between first step provision and the demand/need identified in the borough need to be explicitly linked in future strategy.
- 4.13 In sum, the policy context highlights the future challenges faced by ACL. Although there is a commitment by the LSC to the continuation of personal and community development learning it is clear that this is in the context of the high emphasis placed on skills for employability and qualification-bearing activity. The challenge here is for the ACL service to set out its own priorities within that framework.

Learning brokerage

- 4.14 Research undertaken by the Learning and Skills Research Centre (2005), explores the benefits of learning brokerage, which it defines as "effective mediation between learners or potential learners and learning providers... [it] seeks to negotiate and inform change" (Thomas et al. (2005). p. vii). It joins up outreach, information, advice and guidance, new courses, learner support and pathways to further learning or employment. Though the report focuses on brokerage as a means for widening participation, its emphasis on non-traditional methods may be relevant to the ACL service as it explores models and partnership arrangements for the future. The model outlined for achieving brokerage has the following six steps:

- Understanding the current situation
- Gaining entry and building trust
- Raising interest in learning and making learning meaningful
- Identifying the right learning opportunity
- Promoting learning success
- Addressing organisational issues

A research project by the Learning and Skills Development Agency found that "...the two most promising strategies for widening participation involve:

- A substantial degree of flexibility in learning provision and support services, tailored to learners' needs

- Programmes tailored to the needs of employees and the workplace, including occupationally specific learning” (Macleod et al. (2005). p. 25).

4.15 In the context of the reports referred to above, it appears that the future shape of the ACL service has the potential to impact on its ability to access funds to widen participation and to develop skills. Thomas et al. explain that the full range of brokerage is likely to be undertaken by several organisations working in partnership, led by a ‘hub’ (2005, p. viii).

4.16 In the course of our meeting with the Chief Executive of the London West LSC it became apparent that there would be increasing opportunities for the Council to fulfil such a role; he referred to opportunities available for bids to support SMEs (small and medium sized enterprises) in offering learning. This should be explored in the wider context of Harrow’s economic and workforce development. With reference to SMEs, a perception that accessing funds involves excess bureaucracy needs to be countered. The Chief Executive stated that organisations with experience of bureaucracy such as local authorities are encouraged to act as intermediaries. He also stressed that match funding does not need to be found as the LSC will match bids. Organisations will be expected to deliver the contract but the LSC will handle audit. This year £4.7m from the pan-London ESF bid remains with the LSC as it has not been bid for; it is mostly for work with adults in SMEs. There is also a new pan-London round (£14m). **The review group recommends (2) that active consideration be given to whether the Council should (a) extend its direct delivery of adult and community learning (b) develop its co-ordinating role as a partnership ‘hub’.**

4.17 As part of developing a ‘hub’, consideration will need to be given to the fact that currently all costs – provision delivered through the colleges, direct delivery, provision for disabled adults, quality support, MIS system, and so on – come from the block ACL grant. Unless the ACL service receives enough of this funding to fund infrastructure costs it will be unable to access any other funding or offer any services. **The review group recommends (3) that the ACL service actively explores other means of supporting provision other than through the block grant so that funding for PCDL can be maximised. The review group accepts that the allocation of the block grant results from a contractual agreement with the LSC and that any changes to provision will need to be agreed by the LSC.** For example, support to learners with a disability could be funded through ESF or other sources. Though Harrow does not have a history of bidding for funding in this area, now that a dedicated officer is employed in this role the ACL service should act more proactively to source outside funding.

4.18 The ‘hub’ will need to consider income generation. For an ACL service to continue there will be a need to generate income. Under current arrangements fees go to providers and they will need to be part of that ‘hub’ and discussions around the future shape of ACL.

Quality

4.19 As part of our review we received evidence on the quality of education and training in Harrow. In 2003 the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) identified that there was poor monitoring and recording of learners and progress and weak monitoring and

evaluation of processes (Adult Learning Inspectorate, *Inspection Report – Harrow LEA*, 2003, p. 2). We are pleased to note that a recent quality monitoring visit by ALI noted that good progress has been made towards implementing national procedures for recognising and recording progress and achievement (RARPA). We are also pleased that all tutors and learners will be following this process from this September as nationally this does not come into force until September 2006.

Future fee levels

4.20 Currently there is a contract with the colleges and service level agreements (SLAs) with other providers. Fee income is kept by the provider as a contribution to the cost of delivery of the course. Most fee-paying courses are run by Harrow and Stanmore Colleges. The subsidy from the LSC budget to the Colleges is approximately £32 per course hour. When fee income is added this is raised to £65 per course hour. Actual costs may be higher as there is the potential for colleges to cross-subsidise provision. The service is currently engaged in a course costing exercise with the colleges to draw up costing models for different areas of the curriculum (for example is it more expensive to deliver ICT than Yoga?).

4.21 The Council sets the fees for non-accredited ACL in Harrow. In recent years increases have been kept in line with inflation. First step and family learning has a registration fee only. The basic rate is £2.20 per hour, with some specialist courses charging £2.65 per hour. The course provider chooses which rate to charge. There is a 75% concession for those on means tested benefits and a 50% concession for those aged over 60. Providers can add a registration charge and charge for additional materials. In total a ten-week course of 20 hours is likely to be charged at £50-60.

Table 1: ACL fees in London West 2005/6

Borough	Basic rate ph	Concessions	ACL budget (2004/5)
Brent	£2.20	66% concession for over 60's. Means-tested benefit free.	£1,648,103
Ealing	£3.00	50% concession for means-tested and over 60.	£620,527
Hammersmith & Fulham	£3.20	70% concession for means-tested and borough residents over 60.	£1,866,261
Harrow	£2.20	75% means-tested 50% over 60.	£735,406 (Reduced to £689,000 in 2005/6)
Hillingdon	Course fees vary depending on the length and type of course.	25% concession for over 60's.	£864,375
Hounslow	£2.20; £3.00 for languages and music.	50% concession for means-tested and over 60's.	£1,249,823

- 4.22 Benchmarking of fees can be a difficult exercise. Research carried out by the ACL service indicated that the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham is charging £3.20 per hour; some authorities such as Hounslow charge higher fees for modern languages and music (these are popular so the decision could be justified on the basis that there is high demand). There is a greater level of discrepancy regarding concessionary categories. The fee profile shows that the majority of providers grant concessions to over 60s. Some boroughs have increased the age at which concessions are granted on the basis of age from over 60 to over 65.
- 4.23 Advice from the Learning and Skills Council was stark: for learning for personal development the highest fee that the market can bear should be charged to enable this provision to be run. Funding for this type of learning will be withdrawn in favour of other provision. The Chief Executive advised that the LSC wanted to safeguard learning for personal development, but not necessarily the funding for it (its value will diminish in real terms), as it does not contribute to the LSC's targets.
- 4.24 **The review group acknowledges that fees for non-accredited ACL provision will need to increase. However, this increase must be at a sustainable and competitive rate. The review group recommends (4) that fees be set at the minimum level which will enable the service's strategic priorities for ACL to be met.** A too high increase would seriously risk damaging the viability of provision and may prevent courses from running. Decision-making should be driven by a full needs analysis linked to clear strategy. The reasons for any increases must be clearly articulated; we address communications later in our report.
- 4.25 The review group believes that there should be greater transparency about the differences between contracted out provision and directly delivered provision. Although we acknowledge the benefits of free first step provision it was not always obvious to us why some classes were categorised as first step provision and others fee-paying.
- 4.26 Differences in fee levels across the range of provision should not be driven by whether the provision is delivered through a contract or delivered directly but by the eventual outcome sought.

Managing concessions

- 4.27 *Fee income: a good practice guide* (DfES, 2005) stresses that concessionary fees should be costed and planned, as part of a wider strategy on engaging priority groups and meeting local need. Costing should help to ensure that income lost by granting concessions is delivering value for money in terms of the benefits gained.
- 4.28 Statements of concessionary policies should state the aims of the concessions and the associated outcomes e.g. raising participation from a particular group within the community, or from a particular geographic area. An assessment of cost effectiveness of offering concessions should be carried out – the cost of the concession should be compared with the success of the policy in reaching the targeted groups and broader strategy. The policy must be monitored, evaluated

and reviewed to ensure that it is having the desired impact on the ground (DfES, 2005, p. 51).

- 4.29 When considering concessions policy, managers and Cabinet Members should consider the potential benefits of granting concessions, which will depend on the wider priorities around who is to be reached (for example is it actually more cost effective to employ an outreach worker rather than offering a concession). The review group considered recommending that concessions for learners from outside borough (except for those with a disability) be dropped. However, the review group believes that any alteration to concessionary policy should be assessed in advance of its implementation for the likely impact and then assessed afterwards to determine its impact on take up by the groups at which the concession was targeted (DfES, 2005, p. 51-53).
- 4.30 The review group is pleased to learn that Harrow, as a borough which contracts out its provision, already discusses fee policies with its providers; this approach represents best practice. Fee income will be important in maintaining the breadth of provision following the introduction of the safeguarded budget for ACL.
- 4.31 Harrow's concessionary policy should have a clear purpose and rationale. This applies to both contracted out provision and courses run directly by Harrow that are provided free. Concessions should be part of an overall 'marketing mix' as fee concessions alone are unlikely to widen participation and other factors such as staff expertise and course design are also relevant (links to person-centred approach). The good practice guide indicates that ACL providers will be expected to share their fee and concessions policy with the LSC – the document provides a model policy that the review group suggests that the service considers making use of (DfES, 2005, p. 51).
- 4.32 As fee and concessionary policy is in Harrow's gift, it is even more important that the approach taken is driven strategically, well articulated and communicated effectively.

Curriculum

- 4.33 Currently, for first step and family learning programmes, a 'bidding' system is used with providers to deliver courses with agreed target groups or priority areas. For personal development programmes run through the Colleges, the courses have been largely put together by curriculum organisers in the colleges. For 2006/7 the ACL service is moving to a system of agreeing broad curriculum areas between providers and venue.
- 4.34 Both the policy review and our meeting with London West LSC highlighted a number of challenges relating to curriculum development for ACL in the future. It appears that there are other funding opportunities available besides LSC funds, but that in some cases there is a clear emphasis on accredited provision and skills provision (for example ESF). As a result there are implications for curriculum management. **The review group recommends (5) that the ACL service consider ways in which priority areas such as literacy, language and numeracy can be embedded into learning so as to attract funding.** Such an approach will need to be driven strategically, in the context of local priorities. The

ACL service may also need to consider whether current contract arrangements provide the Council with sufficient leverage over local provision.

4.35 Looking back at recent history we note that there has been an imbalance in funding in London West. The ACL service accepts that it suffers from under funding and that this is based on a historical model. When responsibility was transferred from the DTLR to the LSC following the Learning and Skills Act 2000, the department took from local authorities what it considered each ought to have spent on ACL and this sum was passed to the LSC. This was then returned to the local authorities with a 9% increase. Four boroughs in London West ran accredited ACL provision directly and funding was maintained for these through what were known as External Institutions (EIs). Harrow and Ealing were without External Institutions and funding for accredited courses went directly to the colleges. This history suggests to us that we cannot rely on there being future flexibility relating to the funding model. At the time of writing it is unclear what Harrow's allocation will be under the new model and although it appears that the London West LSC is prepared to rebalance targets, contracts and agreed outputs, we see this as another indication that the service should seek alternative sources of funding to protect local provision.

Clubs

4.36 Some ACL services have converted some leisure provision from programmed provision to clubs. The review group believes that there may be a number of positive benefits from such an approach, namely maintaining the social benefits, releasing pressure on classes, giving learners an opportunity to practice learning e.g. ICT as well as the benefits of maintaining a local and community based services. The potential negatives of such an approach are the potential for a club to be less inclusive, as well as the associated cost implications and infrastructure issues. The review group is of the view that the term 'practice group' might be a more appropriate term rather than clubs. One Member highlighted the benefits of a popular ICT drop-in facility that had run at Kenton Learning Centre. **The review group recommends (6) that the ACL service consider the conversion of some programmed provision to clubs or 'practice groups' in greater detail with a view to piloting such an approach.**

4.37 The implications of such an approach must be carefully considered and form part of overall strategy for developing Harrow as a true learning community; if clubs were to be encouraged to apply for grant funding, the Council's policy for awarding grant funding would have to reflect such a priority. Findings from the Hear/Say review of community engagement relating to grants and grant funding will be particularly relevant to these considerations.

Branding

4.38 The review group is concerned that the ACL service's current brand of REACH (Reaching Every Adult and Community in Harrow) does not clearly indicate what the service is. The review group is impressed with the ACL website, www.learninharrow.org.uk which brings together course information regardless of provider. **The review group recommends (7) that the branding for the ACL service be reviewed and that 'Learn in Harrow' be considered as a potential**

brand. It is already in use and seems to better communicate the nature of service being provided.

- 4.39 There are a number of means though which courses are currently publicised:
- The Harrow ACL website, www.learninharrow.org.uk, lists the courses of all major providers of adult education in Harrow
 - Harrow and Stanmore Colleges publish their own printed brochures, which are distributed door-to-door and via venues such as libraries
 - Direct delivery courses at local learning centres are publicised through leaflets and word of mouth
 - Family learning courses are publicised with leaflets via schools, parents and a range of venues
 - Taster sessions are run at different venues throughout the year where information and advice on longer courses is given to those attending.
 - Information is available throughout the year at publicity events such as Adult Learners Week, Family Learning Weekend and Community Advice sessions at schools.
- 4.40 **The review group recommends (8) that the ACL service, in conjunction with the Communication Unit, places a higher profile link to www.learninharrow.org.uk from the Council's website.** If this is not feasible all year round, the review group suggests that a high profile link be made available at 'peak' times when learners can register for course.
- 4.41 The review group also suggests that displays could be placed in the Civic Centre reception and libraries at registration times to raise the profile of adult and community learning. Consideration should also be given to the provision of drop-ins at venues such as libraries where potential learners could drop in to discuss the options available to them. All publicity should make it clear on what is on offer.
- 4.42 One of our co-optees expressed concern that there do not appear to be sufficient leaflets available at the learning centres. She was therefore unable to pass written information on to potential learners when it was requested; we are concerned that this represents a missed opportunity and recommend that more leaflets be made available.

Communicating fees and concessions

- 4.43 **The review group recommends (9) that a communications plan be developed in order to ensure that changes to fees and concessions are properly explained to partners, staff and learners.** Whilst the LSC should engage in this activity at a national level, the review group believes that local communications will play a key part in ensuring that the impact is fully appreciated and understood locally. Such activity should take into account the findings of the Hear/Say scrutiny review of community engagement and the Council's community engagement strategy.
- 4.44 A useful suggestion around communications is that brochures show the fee expected and make clear the level of subsidy (DfES, 2005, p. 53). The ACL service should give consideration to developing greater awareness of the cost of providing provision.

Widening participation

4.45 Local research has concluded that there is a wide range of evidence available about who unheard learners are and that attention should focus on meeting unmet need, such as “childcare facilities, flexible programmes, and a familiar location, with staff that learners can identify with” (London West Learning Partnership (2004), p. 2). The challenge relates to how this additional support can be provided where there are cost implications. The next two sections focus on learning disability and childcare.

Learners with a disability

4.46 Adaptive ICT equipment has been installed in several centres and there is a central pool of both hardware and software for use in other centres, in which tutors have been trained. Both Middlesex Association for the Blind and Harrow Association of Disabled People are partners in delivery and both face-to face and e-learning courses for disabled people, including sensory impaired people, have been developed. Learners on courses run through the Colleges have access to the range of learner support offered by the colleges. Learners on the Stepping Stones project have access to interpreting services funded through ACL. Over 20% of the current ACL budget is spent on provision for those with a learning difficulty or mental health issues, including provision run in 5 Day Centres, support for the Stepping Stones project run under MIND, funding of courses at the Family Welfare Association at Marlborough Hill and funding of the Choices 4 All project.

4.47 Locally, 22% of the ACL block grant is spent on provision for disabled people. This group of learners represent 6% of learners. The funding of provision for people with learning difficulties will remain problematic if there is no discrete funding. FE colleges are able to access separate funds for learner support, whereas ACL providers cannot. It was suggested to us in the course of our review that learners with a disability might be better supported in, and should be directed to, provision in FE colleges where support available is greater.

4.48 The white paper *Valuing People: A new strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century* (Cm 5086) stresses that people with learning difficulties “need to have the same access as other people to opportunities for education and lifelong learning”. The area of provision for adults with a learning disability represents a major challenge for the future. The LSC acknowledges the continuing increase in cost of specialist provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (2005, p. 9). When we met with the Chief Executive of the London West LSC it was apparent that this was also a regional and national pressure as much as it is a local one. He indicated that residential provision is not ideal and that the LSC wants learners to be able to access provision locally; there is a lack of provision in London and provision is being developed in London West. Provision for learners on the autistic spectrum is being developed at West Middlesex College and Ealing Hammersmith and West London College. Provision for learners with hearing or sight impairment is being developed at Uxbridge College. The aim is to develop a patchwork of day provision. It will be primarily focused on the young but other people will be able to access it. Adults with learning disabilities are supported through existing providers but the Chief Executive hoped that contestability would lead to the development of more specialist provision. He added that more

organisations needed to come forward and that there was no reason why an ACL provider could not position itself in this area.

4.49 The review group felt that as far as possible disabled learners should be integrated into mainstream provision but recognises the challenges this represents, particularly ensuring that tutors are sufficiently skilled in order to be able to adapt provision. Our review of research into reaching unreached learners suggests that a person-centred approach is most likely to ensure those who might not otherwise access learning are able to engage in learning.

4.50 **The review group recommends:**

- **(10) That the area of access to learning opportunity for people with learning difficulty (of which adult and community learning is an important part) be considered by scrutiny as a potential area for a separate review.**
- **(11) That the Chief Executive, as the Council's representative on the West London Alliance raise the issue of support to disabled learners with a view to developing solutions for the region, and giving consideration to the forthcoming pan-London round of ESF funding which totals £14m.**

Childcare

4.51 A crèche is available at Kenton Learning Centre for learners attending classes there and OfSTED registration is being sought to enable full-time opening. Lack of funding has prevented such facilities being developed elsewhere. The review group is aware that ACL provision does not attract additional funding for the provision for crèche facilities, unlike the FE sector.

4.52 During our visit to Kenton Learning Centre, it became clear that the situation was not straightforward. It came to our attention that although some parents were disappointed that the crèche could only manage to take twelve children for two hours at a time, others preferred to place their children with childminders or other provision to give the children the benefit of continuity, preferring provision that would not cease when they had completed their course. **Given the costly nature of crèche provision, the review group recommends (12) that the ACL service should consider further ways in which it can share such provision and support, for example through initiatives such as extended schools and the development of children's centres across the borough.** Such an approach is in the spirit of family learning and the widening participation agenda.

5 Conclusion

5.1 We have explored ways in which the Harrow's ACL service could respond to these difficult national challenges, particularly through fees and concessions policy and a proactive use of communications. However, we conclude that the service should take this valuable opportunity to look to the long term and explore future models and partnerships. This will ensure that ACL in Harrow can best meet the needs of local people in the years to come and help Harrow to become a true learning community.

6 Recommendations

- 1 The review group recommends that the Council lobby at a national level for a more strategic footing for funding for personal and community development learning (PCDL) and a redistribution of funding that addresses historical anomalies.
- 2 The review group recommends that active consideration be given to whether the Council should (a) extend its direct delivery of adult and community learning (b) develop its co-ordinating role as a partnership 'hub'.
- 3 The review group recommends that the ACL service actively explores other means of supporting provision other than through the block grant so that funding for PCDL can be maximised. The review group accepts that the allocation of the block grant results from a contractual agreement with the LSC and that any changes to provision will need to be agreed by the LSC.
- 4 The review group acknowledges that fees for non-accredited ACL provision will need to increase. However, this increase must be at a sustainable and competitive rate. The review group recommends that fees be set at the minimum level which will enable the service's strategic priorities for ACL to be met.
- 5 The review group recommends that the ACL service consider ways in which priority areas such as literacy, language and numeracy can be embedded into learning so as to attract additional funding.
- 6 The review group recommends that the ACL service consider the conversion of some programmed provision to clubs or 'practice groups' in greater detail with a view to piloting such an approach.
- 7 The review group recommends that the branding for the ACL service be reviewed and that 'Learn in Harrow' be considered as a potential brand.
- 8 The review group recommends that the ACL service, in conjunction with the Communication Unit, places a higher profile link to www.learninharrow.org.uk from the Council's website.
- 9 The review group recommends that a communications plan be developed in order to ensure that changes to fees and concessions are properly explained to partners, staff and learners.
- 10 That the area of access to all Council services (of which adult and community learning is an important part) for adults with learning difficulties and their carers be considered by scrutiny as a potential area for a separate review.
- 11 That the Chief Executive, as the Council's representative on the West London Alliance, raise the issue of support to disabled learners with a view to developing solutions for the region, and giving consideration to the forthcoming pan-London round of ESF funding which totals £14m.
- 12 Given the costly nature of crèche provision, the review group recommends that the ACL service should consider further ways in which it can share such provision and support, for example through initiatives such as extended schools and the development of children's centres across the borough.

7 **Glossary**

ACL	Adult and community learning
ALI	Adult Learning Inspectorate
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DTLR	Department of Transport Local Government and the Regions (predecessor of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister)
ESF	European Social Fund
FE	Further education
ICT	Information and communications technology
SMEs	Small and medium sized enterprises
LEA	Local education authority
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
OfSTED	Office for Standards in Education
PCDL	Personal and community development learning
RARPA	Recognising and recording progress and achievement

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Appendix 1 – Scope of the review

1	SUBJECT	Adult and Community Learning (ACL)
2	COMMITTEE	Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Sub-Committee
3	REVIEW GROUP	Councillors: Mitzi Green, Nana Asante, Brian Gate, Janet Mote, John Nickolay Co-opted members: Chris Greenhough, David House, Tony Plummer
4	AIMS/OBJECTIVES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To examine the current fees structure and concessions for personal development learning in the context of proposed changes to funding from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) 2. To identify community need to aid (a) future priority setting and (b) targeting of concessions by the service relating to personal development learning 3. To develop methods to ensure that programme delivery models and fee structures enables the delivery of a targeted and prioritised service. 4. To explore the effectiveness of the Council's role as a lifelong learning enabler, particularly in relation to working with partners and the voluntary sector. <p>For the purpose of the review, adult and community learning is defined as non-accredited learning, which can be divided into the three categories: personal development, first step/family learning and skills for independent living.</p>
5	MEASURES OF SUCCESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoption by the executive of scrutiny recommendations • Completion of the project on time to enable report to contribute to service development • Contribution to policy development through identification of good practice in other authorities • To input into the direction of the consultations to be undertaken by the service
6	SCOPE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is Harrow's diverse community looking for from adult and community learning? • Exploring the role of personal development as a 'hook' leading to skills based learning • Identifying best practice in relation to fees setting - how have other boroughs: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (a) identified needs; (b) handled changes to the fees structure or concessionary fees and associated communications with learners;

		(c) developed innovative models of funding (e.g. Sheffield)?
7	SERVICE PRIORITIES (Corporate/Dept)	Harrow Council secures ACL by partnership arrangements with a range of providers and through the direct delivery of a certain amount of first-step learning. The aim is to increase and widen participation in learning, to build up the skills and capacity from the voluntary and community sectors and to promote a coherent approach to lifelong learning.
8	REVIEW SPONSOR	Lynne McAdam, Service Manager – Scrutiny
9	ACCOUNTABLE MANAGER	Anita Luthra-Suri, Group Manager – Lifelong Learning Services Geoff Trodd, Service Manager – Adult Community and Family Learning
10	SUPPORT OFFICER	Heather Smith, Scrutiny Officer
11	ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT	Chris Thomas, Assistant Review Administrator
12	EXTERNAL INPUT	Students/users, stakeholders, partners, experts, business community (developing a skilled workforce)
13	METHODOLOGY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying current policies and gathering written evidence via desktop evidence gathering • Examining practice in other authorities (particularly relating to other funding models and funding flexibility in boroughs where services are contracted out) • Visiting a local centre • Inputting into consultation to be undertaken by the service • Views of stakeholders
14	EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS	The need to engage with minority and hard to reach groups will be integral to this review. Education and skills development are means through which exclusion can be reduced.
15	ASSUMPTIONS/ CONSTRAINTS	Any consultation activity will need to be closely married to activity planned by the service to avoid risk of duplication.
16	TIMESCALE	Report to be completed by January 2006.
17	RESOURCE COMMITMENTS	Resource commitment to be confirmed following project planning meeting scheduled for Monday 11 July. <u>Scrutiny Members</u> - Attend meetings and visits to gather evidence

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To encourage community participation in the development of policy options - Determine recommendations and main thrust of report <p><u>Scrutiny team</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop and manage the review - Carry out comparative research - Arrange/service member outreach and activity - Draft Reports <p><u>People First</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advise on work programme - Supply relevant evidence - Take part in evidence gathering - Comment on draft reports
18	REPORT AUTHOR	Review group supported by Scrutiny Officer

Appendix 2 – Telephone survey: Summarised survey returns

Question	Harrow	Windsor & Maidenhead	Enfield	Luton	Slough
1. Is your ACL service directly provided or contracted out?	Contracted out	Both	Mostly sub contracted, with small amount of direct provision	Directly funded	Both
2. (If contracted out) What proportion is contracted out?	In terms of volume of activity, currently about 80%	The majority	The majority – circa 80%	N/a	Around 30% contracted out for delivery
3. What are the aims and objectives of ACL in your borough?	<p>The priorities of Adult and Community Learning (ACL) fit within the wider strategic priorities of Harrow Council. They are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Widening participation in learning through targeting ACL to meet the needs of under-represented groups and individuals and by providing a means for learners who do not currently participate to gain access to the learning process • Enhancing the capacity of adult learners to progress into further learning or study, including Skills for Life qualifications • Developing local learning communities by enhancing the capacity of community and voluntary organisations to develop regeneration activities for their immediate communities • Developing learning for active citizenship and for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development capacity • Working partnerships • Extending provisions • Widening participation • Proving and improving quality 	<p>The mission statement at Enfield intends:</p> <p>“To promote learning opportunities for residents to learn throughout their lives.”</p>	<p>Access and achievement for all – vocational and non-vocational for all adults</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparing for the changes in the national models of funding for adult and community learning. • Delivering more provision ‘in house’ rather than contracting out • Enhancing quality assurance processes • Developing the Skills for Life agenda including Family Learning • Continuing to focus on delivery in areas of social deprivation • Engaging first rung learners especially those who are socially excluded • Strengthens links with Slough Borough Council in particular across Community and Cultural Services

Question	Harrow	Windsor & Maidenhead	Enfield	Luton	Slough and with Family and Children services
	<p>community cohesion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with the Harrow Corporate University initiative to provide accessible learning for the Council's workforce, employers and local residents and communities Strengthening the delivery of non-accredited learning to play a part in the agendas of widening participation, neighbourhood renewal and reducing health inequality Enhancing the professional status and ongoing professional development of those engaged in the delivery of ACL. Enhancing a partnership approach at local, regional and national levels and facilitating the sharing of good practice between partners. 				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a strategic approach to delivery in consultation with key stakeholders <p>Slough's lifelong learning service is concerned with "Creating Lifelong Learning Opportunities to empower the residents of Slough."</p>
4. What is the hourly rate charged for ACL?	Basic rate is £2.20ph	They don't charge – it's up to the provider	This is variable – it depends on the type of course.	ACL £2.66 without overhead/£2.90 with. FE £1.33 without overhead/£1.50 with.	Do not charge at present.
5. What proportion of ACL learners receive concessions?	Approximately 34%	Those on state benefits and the over 60s	A high number – most learn to work or for basic skills.	Over 60s pay 30%, 16-18 year olds not in work pay nothing. Those tested only	ACL provision free to learners. Small number with contracted provision pay fees but there is no concession

Question	Harrow	Windsor & Maidenhead	Enfield	Luton	Slough
6. What are the concessionary rates for ACL?	75% concession for means-tested benefit/50% for Over-60	50%	Unknown	Unknown	50% offered to learners on means tested benefit and over 60s
7. Who are concessions for ACL targeted at?	Over 60's, list of eligible means-tested criteria	Those on state benefits and the over 60s	People in areas of regeneration: the 3 most deprived areas.	The most disadvantaged – i.e. 16-18 not working and over 60s.	Those on means tested benefit and over 60s
8. How were groups for concessions identified?	Concessions are set by Harrow Council and have mainly been carried forward year on year	As Q7	On application. Because it is contracted out in the main, advertisers market their own course, mostly through newspapers.	Done a long time ago by Bedfordshire Luton before Luton became a unitary authority. They were agreed by elected members.	Identified at enrolment – include on form if they are entitled to concessions and then provide documents showing proof.
9. Who receives the fee income (provider or LA)?	Providers receive fee income	Income providers	It is funded by the LSC in its entirety – all of this goes straight out to providers.	Provider	Not yet decided – but authority's legal officer advising that income should come back to the authority.
10. If it is split what are the proportions?	N/a	N/a		N/a	N/a
11. Have you changed your charging policy recently?	£5 registration fee introduced for Family Learning in 2004/5. Otherwise there has been no change in charging policy	No	Yes – in 05/06 to be in line with changes to LSC funding.	Increased fees by 33%	No
12. Are you going to change your policy in the near future?	A look at changes in fee policy is part of the Scrutiny Panel remit. Changes in funding, particularly as regards Personal Development learning, are	No	This is dependant on higher up in the chain – the LSC will decide.	Will be up to the LSC to decide. This will be determined by whether targets are reached.	No

Question	Harrow	Windsor & Maidenhead	Enfield	Luton	Slough
	likely to require a rise in basic fees and a more flexible charging policy. The blanket concession for over 60's will also need to be looked at.				
13. Do you receive ACL and FE funding or just ACL?	Just ACL	Just ACL	Just ACL	Both	ACL and Family Learning only.
14. How many ACL enrolments/learners were there last year?	Approx 10000	ACL enrolments – 5232 / learners – 3172	ACL enrolments 2000, of which about 1690 stayed the duration.	Grand total of 6500, of which 3168 were FE.	Learners 2920, Enrolments 5159
15. How were these split between first step, personal development and skills for independent living?	Approximately: 67% Personal Development, 27% first step or family learning, 6% Skills for Independent Living	Not answered	Not known.	Not answered.	MIS adviser has not split across these areas so cannot advise.
16. (If contracted out) How many staff do you directly employ?	9	7 full time, 2 part-time, plus a range of hourly paid tutors	8	Are directly funded (205)	14 permanent staff and around 30 seasonal tutors employed directly by Lifelong learning.
17. What are their roles (teaching/admin/other)?	4 teaching staff, 1 admin/finance, 1 QA Officer, 1 Programme Development Officer, 2 Family Learning staff	Mainly administrative rather than directly teaching	A service manager with 1 full-time and 1 part-time administrator. Coordinators for ACL, family learning, study support & learning strategies development. 1 part-time family learning tutor. (They are looking to expand)	A mixture: teaching, admin, head of service, managers, curriculum coordinator etc	7 managers (head of service, 1 contract officer, 4 curriculum heads of which 3 also teach, 1 finance officer). 3 administration. The rest are tutors.
18. (If contracted out) Do you receive Council funding for ACL?	Yes – pays for Lifelong Learning Development Officer role and admin/finance role	Yes – for infrastructure costs mainly	No – just through LSC	Indirectly through lettings policy	Yes
19. Do you get other sources of funding (e.g. ESF)?	This depends on successful bids - currently receiving TrEACL funding and NLDC funding	Yes – for projects on ethnic and minority communities	Not really – considering small amounts, not worth noting.	SRB, IT funding, Learn Direct, UK Online. Not huge amounts of money, but lots of bids are made	Job Centre Plus contract.
20. What are your future plans?	Proposed plans are set out in	This depends on the	Currently writing Service	Restructuring to	• Shift emphasis

Question	plans for adult and community learning in your borough?	Harrow our 3-Year Plan. This includes intention to increase proportion of learners engaged in first step learning and in targeted direct delivery, to sustain a viable Personal Development programme and to develop partnership working with existing and new partners. However, direction of travel is partly dependent on what the LSC funding review of ACL will mean for local authority services.	Windsor & Maidenhead way in which LSC steers policy. It is an unclear policy direction but there is an underlying commitment to working with the community. Essentially, it is a continuation of the aims and objectives stipulated in Q3.	Enfield Plan. Looking to focus wider than just deprived areas: an increase in the general capacity for learning. Priorities for 2004-07 are: participation, basic skills, progression pathways, a link to the neighbourhood renewal strategy, to build in more pilot schemes through work with community organisations. Priority groups are: adults needing basic skills to return to work, learners with disabilities, refugees and asylum seekers, ethnic minority communities.	Luton ensure survival in light of LSC cuts.	Slough away from traditional leisure type courses delivered through external contracts. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Skills for Life programmes will remain a priority. The service will continue to build its capacity to contribute to building progression to Berkshire Learning and kills Council's Skills for Life targets. Family Learning in Slough continues to be a priority in line with national, regional and Berkshire strategies. The work with disabled and learners with learning difficulties will remain and strategies will be developed to increase this provision. A pricing policy will be developed over the period to reflect the new funding models that will begin to engage
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Question	Harrow	Windsor & Maidenhead	Enfield	Luton	Slough
					<p>new learners.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To review curriculum planning to include consideration of the healthy living agenda and facilitate tutors and staff across ACL within similar curriculum areas to exchange practice and to explore quality issues. • Further integration of work based learning (Job Centre Plus contract) within the service to respond to the economic development needs of Slough. • Continue to improve quality processes in order to raise the standards of teaching and learning. • To ensure on-going dialogue with key stakeholders to promote greater coordination and identification of progression routes.



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