

# Warrington Borough Council

## Follow up re-inspection monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 55268

**Name of lead inspector:** Steve Hailstone HMI

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**Type of provider:** Local authority

**Address:** St Werburgh's Development Centre  
Boswell Avenue  
Warrington  
WA4 6DQ

**Telephone number:** 01925 442600

## Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

### Context and focus of visit

This is the second re-inspection monitoring visit to Warrington Borough Council following publication of the most recent inspection report in December 2014, which found the provider to be inadequate overall. At the inspection, outcomes for learners and the effectiveness of leadership and management were judged inadequate. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment was judged to require improvement. Inspectors graded two subject areas; community learning was judged to require improvement and business administration and customer service was judged inadequate.

The first monitoring visit took place in January 2015. It found weaknesses in the post-inspection action plan and recommended that urgent action was needed on a number of issues. The findings of this visit are outlined below.

### Themes

#### **What progress have leaders and managers made in producing and implementing a clear action plan to address the areas for improvement identified at inspection?**

##### **Reasonable progress**

The revised post-inspection action plan provides a comprehensive and clear set of actions to tackle the weaknesses identified at the last inspection and at the previous monitoring visit. The plan includes timescales for achieving actions and clearly indicates the intended outcome from each action. Managers review progress against the actions each week and record progress on the plan. They risk-assess the likelihood of actions being achieved in the planned timescale and identify any additional actions to ensure that improvements are made quickly. The current version of the plan indicates that the council is making reasonable progress in addressing most of the weaknesses identified.

Managers provide monthly reports to senior officers in the council about the progress they are making in implementing the action plan. However, the reports focus only on what managers have done and do not summarise the impact of these actions in improving provision. Senior officers and elected members are not yet providing sufficient challenge to managers to improve the quality of provision. An improvement board made up of senior officers, elected members and service managers has been proposed, but put on hold until proposals about future funding arrangements have been finalised. The council is currently working closely with the Skills Funding Agency to consider possible changes to funding and contracts for community learning in Warrington in 2015/16.

## **What progress have leaders and managers made in improving the management of subcontractors?**

### **Reasonable progress**

Since the last monitoring visit, managers have met frequently with subcontractors and have communicated clearly the minimum standards of performance that they expect. Subcontractors are aware of the sanctions in place for underperformance including, where appropriate, termination of the contract. The council has ceased to work with one subcontractor as a result of poor performance. Observations of lessons carried out by inspectors during this monitoring visit confirmed that the council has raised its expectations of what it requires from subcontractors in relation to the quality of provision, and in almost all cases, subcontractors are complying with these expectations.

Managers now make frequent unannounced improvement visits to subcontractors to carry out observations, meet with staff and scrutinise documentation. They record the outcomes of these visits, including actions needed to improve the provision, on a subcontractor improvement plan, and monitor progress closely against the actions at subsequent visits. The visits focus closely on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, safeguarding and management of the provision. The increased rigour in managing the performance of subcontractors is beginning to have a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning.

Each subcontractor has now produced a self-assessment report. The most effective reports provide a thorough and appropriately detailed evaluation of the quality of the provision and identify accurately areas for improvement. However, too many of the reports are very brief and too descriptive and provide insufficient detail about what the subcontractor needs to do to improve quality. These self-assessment reports cite insufficient evidence to support the strengths claimed by the subcontractor, particularly where no lesson observations appear to have been carried out. With one exception, subcontractors have judged their overall effectiveness to be either good or outstanding; this is inconsistent with the findings from the last inspection and the previous monitoring visit. Managers should ensure that all subcontractors produce detailed and evaluative self-assessment reports. They should require subcontractors to provide regular updates on actions they are taking to tackle weaknesses identified through self-assessment.

Managers now receive all course timetables from each subcontractor, and have more accurate information about the times and venues of lessons. However, the records of recent quality visits carried out by managers show that some classes continue to be cancelled without managers being made aware of this in advance.

## **What improvements have been made to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment?**

### **Reasonable progress**

A new training and development plan includes events in the current term on relevant topics such as planning to meet individual needs, setting relevant and challenging targets for learners and improving assessment practice. Managers are also currently working with their college subcontracting partners to plan training on developing learners' English and mathematic skills and on promoting equality and diversity in lessons.

Managers are using the outcomes of lesson observations more effectively to manage the performance of tutors, particularly those whose teaching is not at the required standard. Following observations, managers take action quickly to improve performance. In observations carried out during this monitoring visit, inspectors saw evidence of the impact of actions taken to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, including good development of learners' English and mathematics skills. However, in some observed lessons, the range of ability of learners in the group was very wide, and tutors did not always use activities that ensured that all learners made good progress, including those with learning disabilities. Managers need to provide further training for tutors on how to meet the needs of individual learners in groups where the range of ability is broad.

The aims of most courses meet the requirement placed on providers in receipt of community learning funding to help adults to re-engage with learning, acquire new skills and prepare for progression. However, activities in lessons do not always enable learners to acquire skills that will be useful in their personal lives or at work, and not all learners progress on to further learning once they have completed their course. For example, some learners have been on the same computing course for many years, often carrying out activities that are not relevant to their individual needs. It is essential that, when the 2015/16 contractual and funding arrangements are agreed, managers plan the curriculum carefully to ensure that all courses and learning activities meet the objectives of community learning funding.

## **What improvements have managers made to the process for recording and evaluating learners' progress and achievement on community learning courses?**

### **Insufficient progress**

Managers now use lesson observations more effectively to evaluate how well tutors measure and record learners' progress and achievement. They include actions for improvement on observation records and on subcontractors' improvement plans, and monitor the progress that subcontractors make in improving tutors' assessment practice. However, managers have not yet introduced a moderation process to ensure that tutors' assessment of learners' progress and achievement is accurate. Initial assessment and target-setting are still not rigorous enough and, as a result,

too many learners are on courses at the wrong level and have learning targets that are not relevant to their personal needs, goals and aspirations.

Subcontractors now provide data to the council on attendance, retention and achievement. Managers have used this data to improve the service's efficiency by, for example, merging classes where the numbers of learners were low. However, too much of the information that subcontractors provide is inaccurate. Managers have collated the data to provide an analysis of learner success across the service but, because of the inaccuracy of the information received, this is unreliable. Managers have not carried out checks with subcontractors to ascertain the accuracy of the data. Managers have not used the data on attendance, retention and achievement to identify improvement actions for subcontractors at their quality visits.

### **What actions have been taken to remove the gaps in safeguarding arrangements?**

#### **Reasonable progress**

Managers have communicated clearly to all tutors and other staff working for subcontractors the importance of ensuring that safeguarding arrangements are robust. All staff have participated in appropriate training on safeguarding.

Managers now check venues more rigorously to ensure that they are safe and fit for the purpose of community learning. They take actions quickly to improve safety where they have concerns. Actions taken to improve safety, and their impact, are recorded in subcontractors' improvement plans. The council has ceased using centres where inspectors had concerns at the last monitoring visit about the poor learning environment.

Tutors and other staff now consistently check the identity of visitors entering premises or venues. Notices clearly inform visitors of the need to sign in as they enter the premises.

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