

Sunderland City Council

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 54666

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Inspection date(s): 22–23 January 2019

Type of provider: Local authority

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the third and final re-inspection monitoring visit to Sunderland City Council following publication of the inspection report on 19 February 2018 which found the provider to be inadequate overall. The effectiveness of leadership and management, and personal development, behaviour and welfare were also judged to be inadequate. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment and outcomes for learners required improvement. Of the provision types inspected, apprenticeships were found to be inadequate and adult learning required improvement.

The Tyne and Wear Care Alliance, the Family, Adult and Community Learning Service, and Connexions have been merged into a single organisation called Sunderland City Council's Learning and Skills Service.

At the time of the monitoring visit, there were 154 apprentices, the great majority of whom were on health and social care programmes. Thirty-seven apprentices were on programmes delivered by two subcontractors and 117 apprentices were on programmes delivered by the council's assessment centre. There were 40 learners on community learning courses and 17 learners on adult-skills funded programmes.

Following the previous inspection, the council has not recruited any new apprentices onto programmes and is winding down its apprenticeship contract. Since the previous monitoring visit, the service has recommissioned all of its adult learning provision. There are now 19 subcontractors, five of which are new and have not yet recruited learners.

Themes

Have managers undertaken a service-specific 'Prevent' duty risk assessment and have they started to implement effectively the actions arising from the risk assessment? Are learners and apprentices more aware of how to keep themselves safe from the risks of radicalisation and extremism?

Significant progress

Senior leaders and managers have now fully implemented a 'Prevent' duty action plan following a thorough risk assessment that takes into account the service's specific context as a predominantly subcontractor-based provider. They keep the plan under constant review as part of their regular monitoring of the service's safeguarding arrangements.

Since the previous monitoring visit, all remaining actions in the action plan have been completed. When the subcontractors delivering adult and community learning were

recommissioned in November 2018, a new clause was added to their contracts, setting out their responsibilities to implement the 'Prevent' duty. This was followed up swiftly when the new contracts started, with training for all subcontractors on how to identify the signs of radicalisation and extremism among learners, and how to report any concerns. Managers have developed a new policy on the use of social media that includes advice to learners on how to use it responsibly and how to stay safe online.

The great majority of apprentices and adult learners are aware of the risks of radicalisation and extremism, and what they would need to do if they had any concerns. Managers use an effective array of strategies to measure apprentices' and adult learners' levels of understanding of these risks. They conduct regular surveys that always include questions on learners' awareness of the risks of radicalisation and extremism. Observers of teaching and learning sessions take the opportunity to discuss these issues with learners. As a result of this information, managers can identify groups of learners and subcontractors where the level of understanding is low and provide additional training and support to increase the awareness of their learners.

Have managers established an effective system for reporting, analysing and acting upon safeguarding incidents across the directly delivered and subcontracted provision? Are tutors/assessors and learners/apprentices clear about how they report safeguarding incidents? **Significant progress**

The system for reporting safeguarding concerns and incidents is now well understood and used by subcontractors. Service managers ensure that safeguarding incidents are a primary focus of every review meeting with subcontractors. Senior leaders in the council track all safeguarding incidents across the service from the moment they are reported to the point when they are resolved. The effective reporting of concerns has resulted in actions being taken to protect learners from harm.

Managers at all levels of the service have access to, and use, helpful reports on the different types of safeguarding concerns and incidents. The council's performance unit provide a constructive challenge to service managers by identifying trends and anomalies in the data. For example, they question why some subcontractors do not report any concerns, or why gaps exist in the timescales between when incidents occurred and when they are reported to the service. This enables managers to seek explanations from subcontractors at their next contract review meetings.

Are elected members and senior leaders ensuring that the actions for improvement from the previous inspection are being implemented swiftly and effectively? **Significant progress**

Elected members and senior managers of the council have ensured that the very great majority of improvement actions in the post inspection action plan have been implemented effectively. As a result, progress has either been significant or reasonable against the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Senior leaders in the council are well aware that they still need to quicken the pace at which the remaining apprentices complete their programmes and that further improvements can be made to the management of subcontractors.

The portfolio holder and her deputy have developed a good understanding of the strengths and areas for further development of the provision since they took up their posts at the last council elections. They have been actively involved in evaluating the current self-assessment report and quality improvement plan. They have used their knowledge of the council's strategic priorities and the economic needs of the area to inform the commissioning process of the new subcontracted providers of adult and community learning. As a result, there is a greater emphasis on developing the skills of local residents to enter the labour market, particularly in areas such as health and social care, and on improving the digital skills of those in receipt of universal credit.

The portfolio holders and senior leaders are effective in holding service managers to account for their performance through a hierarchy of meetings that include those for chief officers of the council, portfolio holder briefings and the scrutiny committee. Although the performance management framework used by senior leaders is a significant improvement on what was available at the time of the previous inspection, it still does not have sufficient measures through which to report on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Have managers improved their use of management information to enable them to evaluate better the quality of teaching, learning and assessment? Are managers using this information more effectively to monitor the implementation of quality improvement actions?

Significant progress

Senior leaders and service managers now use data that is accurate and timely to oversee the performance of the provision. They can now access a range of useful reports that enable them to scrutinise performance across a range of indicators, such as by subcontractor, by age and by ethnicity.

Managers use in-year data particularly well to manage the performance of subcontractors. This data alerts them to emerging concerns and enables them to work with subcontractors to improve. For example, managers identified that there was a significant gap at a number of subcontractors between the overall achievement of learners and the proportion of learners who achieved their qualifications within the allocated time. This enabled managers to direct the subcontractors to tackle the reasons for the slow progress of some of their learners.

Managers now routinely collect and analyse information on the progress that learners make to higher-level qualifications, employment or volunteering once they leave the provider. However, this information is not specific enough to enable managers to evaluate the impact of the courses that they offer. For example, there is no separate analysis of the destinations of learners on employability courses as these are included with those for all other learners.

Have managers improved the arrangements for monitoring the quality of adult learning and apprenticeship provision delivered by subcontractors? Reasonable progress

Since the previous monitoring visit, leaders and managers have further improved the arrangements for managing the performance of subcontractors. Following a service-wide restructure, additional staff have been recruited to the quality team to enable it to provide greater scrutiny of subcontractors. Subcontractors report that, since the restructure, they have a clearer sense of the expectations of the service and the quality measures that they will be expected to deliver against. They value the regular training and development that they receive, particularly the renewed focus on the 'Prevent' duty and aspects of teaching, learning and assessment.

The quality team has introduced more rigour to its approach to contract management by meeting with each subcontractor monthly, following a standard agenda and ensuring that actions are recorded properly. When a subcontractor is not meeting the required standard, managers set and monitor improvement targets at follow-up reviews. Members of the team carry out observations of sessions that subcontractors' teaching staff deliver. Since the previous monitoring visit, the quality of these observations and the speed with which development actions are followed up have significantly improved.

Although there has been much progress in the arrangements for managing subcontractors, they are still not focused sufficiently on challenging subcontractors to deliver to the highest standards. Managers use a set of service-wide measures for achievement and retention to monitor the performance of subcontractors. They do not set contract targets that take into account the previous performance of each subcontractor. As a result, managers are not setting aspirational targets based on the specific performance and delivery context of individual subcontractors.

Are apprentices receiving their entitlement to high-quality off-the-job training, and have managers established the systems to ensure that this is taking place? Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have developed effective systems to monitor the progress and achievement of apprentices at subcontractors. Since the previous monitoring visit, the proportion of these apprentices completing their programmes successfully

has increased significantly. As a result, only a small number remain to complete their programmes.

The proportion of apprentices achieving their qualifications on programmes delivered through the service's own assessment centre has increased steadily since the previous inspection. However, the pace at which they do so remains slow. Many of these apprentices were transferred to the service from two failing providers and had made little or no progress at the time of the transfer. Managers have prioritised supporting these apprentices to complete their programmes at the expense of focusing on the pace at which they do so. As a result, their progress remains too slow.

Leaders and managers have developed effective systems to ensure that current apprentices are receiving their entitlement to high-quality off-the-job training. The records of the type and volume of the off-the-job training of the apprentices who were transferred from the two failing providers have not been collected retrospectively, but have been maintained more rigorously since they started with the service's assessment centre.

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