

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Warrington Borough Council
Date of visit: 29 April 2008

Context

This monitoring visit follows the inspection which took place in October 2006 at which Warrington Borough Council's (WBC) provision in adult and community learning was satisfactory in leadership and management and quality improvement and unsatisfactory in equality of opportunity. Provision was satisfactory in preparation for life and work, and community development. Family learning was good.

The provision is delivered by seven subcontractors. From September 2007, WBC has delivered 13% of family learning and new provision for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities.

During 2006/07, 1,841 learners enrolled on the adult and community learning provision.

Achievement and standards

How effective has the provider been in raising retention and achievement rates in adult and community learning since the previous inspection?	No discernable progress
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Achievements and standards in adult and community learning were generally satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. Retention was satisfactory. The data provided by WBC prior to the monitoring visit was incomplete and inaccurate. Data provided by the external agency which collects and analyses the data did not match data provided by WBC. WBC is unable to provide data in which they have confidence showing retention and achievement over the last three years. WBC is unable to provide data which differentiates between accredited and non-accredited provision.

Leadership and management

Have arrangements for the collection, analysis and use of data in adult and community learning provision improved since the previous inspection?	Insufficient progress
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At the time of the previous inspection a key challenge for WBC was to improve the collection, analysis and use of data to contribute to timely planning and monitoring of the adult and community programme. WBC has made insufficient progress on this key challenge. The collection and analysis of data is contracted out to an external agency. It was planned to move data collection and analysis in-house from September 2007, however this proved to be too complex. A tender is now being prepared to purchase software which will enable data collection and analysis to be managed by WBC from September 2008. Some improvements have been made to the current system. Enhancements to the system provide useful data for equality monitoring. Subcontractors can now enter their data directly into the management information system electronically and WBC staff can check the accuracy of the data. One subcontractor has not submitted any data. WBC has developed a separate database to monitor family learning provision which provides a range of useful reports. However, confusion over data is considerable. Managers are not analysing and using data sufficiently to monitor the performance of the provision. Managers are not collating the data from subcontractors to provide performance data for the whole provision. WBC was unable to provide retention and achievement data for adult and community learning provision for the last three years to evidence judgements on progress. The observation of teaching and learning process has been revised and improved. WBC does not have summary grade data for previous years to use for comparison purposes. Data on learner progression is not collected systematically for the whole provision, although subcontractors do collect some data.

Has the first steps provision and community learning been developed further since the previous inspection?	Insufficient progress
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The previous inspection identified the rate of the development of first steps provision in as an area for improvement. WBC has made insufficient progress on this. A first steps taster provision was organised in the summer term 2007 to extend the range of courses but did not recruit successfully. The 2007/08 contract with Priestly College is for 225 learners compared with over 300 last year. Contract meetings now discuss the engagement of priority first steps learners in learning. Priestley College has further developed clear progression routes for learners to progress from first steps provision on to accredited course provision. The contracts for 2008/09 aim to have both geographical and priority learner targets for both Priestley College and Warrington Collegiate. Within the council a greater focus exists on the neighbourhood community-based agenda. The lifelong learning team is working closely with an appropriate range of voluntary sector providers to develop a wider first steps community curriculum.

How well has an equal opportunity and diversity strategy been developed for adult and community learning?	Reasonable progress
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The previous inspection identified the development of an effective strategy for the promotion of equality and diversity in adult and community learning as an area for improvement. This has now improved and WBC has made reasonable progress. The lifelong learning service has become part of the council-wide equality strategic development. An equality impact assessment has been carried out to identify the effectiveness of the service in supporting identified council priority areas. Five key diversity recommendations were identified to develop the service further. Partnership working across the borough, with a range of subcontractors, is broadening the range of disadvantaged learners. The council and an external consultant have provided training in equality of opportunity. The annual stakeholder's conference and other council-wide initiatives have equal opportunity and diversity themes such as 'disability days'. Contracts have specific targets relating to deprived wards. WBC is beginning to use data to evaluate the effectiveness of targeted provision.

Has the system for recognising and recording learners' progress and achievement in adult and community learning improved since the previous inspection?	Reasonable progress
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The previous inspection identified the need to improve the overall standard of recognising and recording learners' progress and achievement (RARPA) in community learning as an area for improvement. This has now improved and WBC has made reasonable progress. The system based on Priestley College's RARPA system has been extended to include all learners on non-accredited courses. Training has been provided for tutors by Priestly college staff and an external consultant. The RARPA system is suitably based on a mix of tutor and learner identified objectives for their course. The learner appropriately records how successfully outcomes are achieved at mid-course and at the end of the course. However, no tutor assessment of how successful the learner has been takes place. Individual subcontractors collate returns from tutors. Some tutors do not collect all the returns for their course and subcontractor data returns are incomplete. Subcontractors review the effectiveness of courses with low average scores. WBC staff review subcontractor returns during teaching observations. Returns have not been collated.

Self-assessment and improvement planning

Have self-assessment and development planning been used effectively in adult and community learning as a quality improvement tool?	Reasonable progress
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The previous inspection identified a key challenge for WBC as the development of a thorough, inclusive and effective self-assessment in adult and community learning. WBC has made reasonable progress in using self-assessment as a quality improvement tool. WBC completed their fifth self-assessment covering the period 2006/07 in October 2007. A new self-assessment process has been developed, although this has not been recorded as a formal procedure. Subcontractors and staff are fully involved. WBC has supported subcontractors to contribute to the self-assessment process. Training and coaching is offered for subcontractors on preparing their own self-assessments. Individual subcontractor self-assessments contribute to WBC's self-assessment. Insufficient use is made of retention, achievement and progression data in the report. WBC and subcontractors collect learners' and subcontractors' feedback using a range of methods, however it is not used to provide clear evidence for judgements in the self-assessment report. The self-assessment report contributes to a development plan. The plan identifies appropriate actions and some progress has been made. WBC and subcontractors review performance against the plan twice each year. The plan was reviewed in February 2008. However the outcome of the review has not been used to update the plan.