

## **NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL**

### **CABINET**

#### **COLLABORATIVE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS BETWEEN NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL AND NORTH LINDSEY COLLEGE**

#### **11. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT**

- 1.1 To determine that a collaborative project be established between North Lincolnshire Council and North Lindsey College to develop adult learning provision, and approve governance arrangements for a proposed project board.
- 1.2 The key points in this report are:
- The council's Adult Community Learning Service is funded entirely by external grants to provide learning opportunities for adults across North Lincolnshire
  - External grant funding has reduced considerably in recent years, and there is uncertainty about the level of future funding allocations
  - The council needs to consider how best to meet future adult learning needs and extend access to learning opportunities across the area to improve skills and community well being, without incurring extra cost to council taxpayers
  - In this context the council has had discussions with North Lindsey College about developing a collaborative project to promote integrated and enhanced adult community learning provision for North Lincolnshire
  - The project will develop a strategic plan for adult learning services for North Lincolnshire, shape a broader learning offer across more localities within the area, and undertake a joint business review.
  - Proposed project governance arrangements include establishing a project board, to include elected member and officer representation from the council
  - It is proposed that the Cabinet Member for Adult and Children's Services acts as the council's elected member representative on the project board
  - A joint venture agreement detailing the responsibilities of both the council and the college will be drawn up to underpin the proposed arrangements.

#### **2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 2.1 The council has provided quality formal and informal learning opportunities to adults across North Lincolnshire for many years through its Adult Community Learning Service.
- 2.2 The Adult Community Learning Service is funded by external grants. The Skills Funding Agency provides most of the funding through its Adult Skills and Adult Safeguarded Learning funding streams. There is also a small

grant from the Young People's Learning Agency. The total value of external funding grants is currently c. £1.5 million.

- 2.3 The level of external funding has fallen considerably in the last few years, and there has been a consequent fall in learner numbers. In the present financial climate it is uncertain whether current levels of external funding will be sustained for the long term.
- 2.4 The council therefore needs to consider how best to develop sustainable adult learning services that will meet learners' needs, ensure equity of access across North Lincolnshire, and endeavour to avoid costs for local council taxpayers.
- 2.5 The council has had discussions with North Lindsey College about setting up a collaborative project to develop adult community learning for North Lincolnshire. Key potential outputs for the project include developing a strategic plan for adult learning across the area, and shaping a broader curriculum offer in more localities. The project will seek to develop more integrated and streamlined services such as a joint marketing approach and a single enrolment system. These will help achieve economies of scale and improve value for money.
- 2.6 A business review of the council's Adult Community Learning Service will also be undertaken by the project over the next year to ensure fitness for future purpose. This may result in new service structures and delivery arrangements
- 2.7 Within the proposed collaborative working arrangements both the council and the college would continue as learning providers in their own right. The council would also continue to receive and be accountable for the £1.5m grant currently received from the Skills Funding Agency.
- 2.8 Integral to the proposed project is the establishment of a project board. This will include elected member and service manager and staff representatives from the council, and equivalent representatives from the college. The role of the board will be to make recommendations on the future development of adult community learning services, and will not be vested with any decision-making authority. Decisions needed to implement board recommendations will need to be approved through the council's and college's decision-making processes.
- 2.9 There is a need to authorise the Cabinet Member for Adult and Children's Services to be the council's elected member representative on the project board.
- 2.10 Draft terms of reference have been drawn up for the collaborative project. A joint venture agreement detailing the legal responsibilities of the council and the college will be drawn up to underpin the project arrangements. The proposals are also subject to approval by the Skills Funding Agency.

### **3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION**

- 3.1 Option 1 is to do nothing. Option 2 is to carry out an internal review of the Adult Community Learning function without reference to other learning

providers. Option 3 is to build on the shared understanding with North Lindsey College to set up collaborative working arrangements with that learning provider for the development of adult learning for North Lincolnshire.

#### **4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS**

4.1 In light of the uncertainty about future levels of grant funding, doing nothing will fail to address issues of sustainability and capacity of the service to respond effectively to learners' needs. Carrying out an internal service review will allow the service to address issues of financial sustainability. However if funding levels continue to reduce, this could narrow the future capacity of the service. It would also fail to explore the potential benefits that a partnership approach with another learning provider could offer.

4.2 Option 3 is the proposed option. The factors supporting this option are:

- It will allow the council to work with a major learning provider to develop a vision for adult and community learning for North Lincolnshire that will continue to improve skills and social well-being
- It offers potential to maximise the resources of both parties to plan a more diverse adult learning curriculum across North Lincolnshire
- This in turn has the potential to develop a more co-ordinated approach to service delivery with improved access to learning, and capacity to meet learning needs more effectively
- It provides an opportunity to explore potential future economies of scale across both learning providers to improve efficiency and increase capacity
- Undertaking a business review of the council's Adult Community Learning service during the first year of the project allows sufficient time to assess future needs and consult with service staff and users
- The establishment of a collaborative project does not commit either party to any specific outcomes, and offers flexibility to develop plans for future service arrangements.

#### **5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)**

##### **5.1 Financial**

There are no financial implications in establishing a collaborative project. Part of any business review will be to consider how to minimise any residual revenue pressures or one-off costs for the council.

##### **5.2 Staffing**

There are no immediate staffing implications. The business review may result in proposals for new staffing arrangements and structures. Service staff and unions will be kept informed of developments and fully consulted on any future staffing proposals, in line with council policies.

##### **5.3 Property**

There are no immediate property implications. The project will consider longer-term use and costs of existing and potential venues for the delivery of adult community learning in North Lincolnshire.

#### 5.4 Information Technology

There are no immediate IT implications. The project will consider potential for integrated IT systems to improve future service delivery.

### 6. **OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 - CRIME AND DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER)**

#### 6.1 Statutory

The provision of adult learning is not a statutory function of the council.

#### 6.2 Environmental

There are no identified environmental implications

#### 6.3 Diversity

North Lincolnshire Council and North Lindsey College will undertake a joint impact assessment on any future recommendations.

### 7. **OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION**

7.1 Service staff and trade unions have been informed of the proposal to establish collaborative working arrangements with North Lindsey College. All Adult Community Learning staff have been invited to staff meetings to discuss any early issues. Issues raised there will be considered during the development of the project.

### 8. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

8.1 That Cabinet supports the establishment of a collaborative project between the council and North Lindsey College to develop enhanced and broader adult learning provision for North Lincolnshire;

8.2 Approves the creation of a joint project board and other governance arrangements for the proposed collaborative project as set out above, and

8.3 Authorises the Cabinet Member for Adult and Children's Services to be the council's elected member representative on the project board.

DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & COMMUNITY SERVICES

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**Background Papers used in the preparation of this report - Nil**