
Report title: Proposal to Close the Learning Online Services

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Karen Ashley
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Claire Felton, Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services
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Wards Affected	No specific ward relevance
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	N/A
Relevant Strategic Purpose(s)	'Aspiration, work and financial independence' 'Living independent, active & healthy lives'
Key Decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report authors in advance of the meeting.	
This report contains exempt information as defined in Paragraph 4 of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended	

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Committee is asked to consider whether to continue with the provision of Learning Online as an in house service and, in the event that it is considered necessary and appropriate to cease service provision in this area, the timing of the said cessation in line with the end of the academic year 2022.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Learning Online is a local service offered to residents within Redditch. The service has been running from Greenlands Business Centre since 2005.

2.2 Learning Online delivers services under the remit of Adult Learning. It offers qualifications that assist adult learners to:

- Access Higher and Further Education courses
- Progress within their chosen professions
- Change Careers
- Help the unemployed move closer to the labour market

- Learn in a small supportive environment that offers some learning time flexibility
- 2.3 Qualifications are offered in Mathematics, English Functional Skills and ICT. Mathematics and English are fully funded for learners through the Adult Education Budget and learning online holds a contract with Heart of Worcestershire (HoW) College.
- 2.4 Over the last five to six years, the numbers of learners accessing Learning Online services have declined. The covid pandemic placed additional pressure on the service. However, the funding received from HoW College is dependent on the numbers of learners both accessing courses and passing qualifications. Unfortunately, over recent years this funding has not been fully achieved. (Please refer to Appendix 2a/2b). It's likely that the Borough Council would not be the most obvious provider to those seeking to improve their qualifications as it is not a core council function and may help explain the poor take up in recent years.
- 2.5 In addition to Learning Online, Worcestershire County Council's Adult Learning service, HoW College and the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) offer a vast range of courses and services directed to meet the needs of customers and the community, including Mathematics, English and IT courses, most of which are offered free of charge. (Please refer to Appendix 1.)
- 2.6 In the context of the reduced numbers participating in courses provided by Learning Online and taking into account the alternatives available, Members are asked to consider whether this service should continue to be provided by Redditch Borough Council, in competition with those alternative providers.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The financial implications outlined within the report are as follows:-
- (i) Costs to provide the Learning online service (RBC)
(Appendix 2)
 - (ii) Staffing Costs
(Appendix 4)

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Provision of learning is a discretionary service not forming part of the Council's core functions.
- 4.2 The Learning Online service is provided under a contract with HoW College to provide courses to residents and assist them in achieving

qualifications, which are available directly from HoW College and other sources as described above

4.3 The Council is subject to the following contractual obligations:

- A written 90-day notice period.
- A requirement to support current learner(s) enrolled in training until this has been completed, if the Council ceases to provide the service.

5. STRATEGIC PURPOSES - IMPLICATIONS

Relevant Strategic Purposes

5.1 The Learning Online service supports two of the Council's strategic purposes:

- Aspiration, work and financial independence
- Living independent, active and healthy lives

5.2 From the perspective of the learner, the purpose of the service is a "flexible learning environment provided locally that offers a small range of qualifications which are available all year round."

5.3 Although other providers offer the same courses free of charge, the flexibility that Learning Online provides is not as readily available.

5.4 Members will be aware that the Redditch Borough Council Plan identifies the need to support our residents through work and financial independence and that the Council is committed to working with partners to address the skills gap.

5.5 There is also a commitment to supporting HOW college and other providers to enable people to identify and gain the skills that they need.

6. Climate Change Implications

6.2 There are no climate change implications from this report

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 7.1 The equalities implications arising from making changes to the Learning Online Service, including the potential to cease to provide the service, have been reviewed in an equality impact assessment (Appendix 3.)

Operational Implications

- 7.3 Further information about the staffing implications arising from the information provided in this report can be found in Appendix 4.
- 7.4 Should Members decide to cease to provide the Learning Online service, the Council would continue to be obliged to provide training to current customers until they complete their courses.
- 7.5 The Council would also need to refer new service users to alternative service providers if a decision is taken to cease to provide the service. This could be achieved by updating webpages on the Council's website with appropriate information.
- 7.6 The Learning Online Service currently rents accommodation in the Greenlands Business Centre offices. Should the service cease to be provided, this office space would need to be relet.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 Closing a service that offers free learning to local residents could result in negative feedback. This could be mitigated by supporting current users and signposting new learners to other local providers.
- 8.2 Part of the HoW College contract requires all current learners to complete their course/examination before the service can be terminated. To manage this risk, the Council would need to contact the other local service providers to see if they would assist.

9. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix 1 – Other Service Providers

Appendix 2 – Costs/Income/Expenditure 2016 to 2021

Appendix 3 – Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix 4 - Staffing Implications (The content of this Appendix is exempt under Paragraph 4 of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972).

9. REPORT SIGN OFF

Department	Name and Job Title	Date
Portfolio Holder	Awaiting confirmation of Portfolio Holder	16/5/22
Lead Director / Head of Service	Claire Felton- Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services	16/5/22
Financial Services	Peter Carpenter – Interim Head of Financial Service	16/5/22
Legal Services	Claire Felton – Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services	16/5/22
Policy Team (if equalities implications apply)	Emily Payne – Engagement and Equalities Advisor	16/5/22
Climate Change Officer (if climate change implications apply)	N/A	16/5/22