

EDUCATION PDS COMMITTEE
27th January 2015

WRITTEN QUESTIONS TO THE EDUCATION PORTFOLIO HOLDER

Written Questions for the Education Portfolio Holder received from Julia Wheeler

1. Why does the report Agenda Item 9 paragraph 5.7 risks & disadvantages fail to highlight the **loss of high level literacy & numeracy GCSE English & Maths** which are a mandatory level of qualification required by the Government for jobs and courses?

Reply:

The report provides an overview of the information required by members to help them understand the scope of the reduction of service. To include a list of specific qualifications risked overloading the report with detail that detracted from the strategic overview being communicated at this stage of the process. Within Bromley Adult Education College (BAEC) the GCSE English and Maths forms part of the discrete English and maths provision which is mentioned under section 5.7 of the report. If the Council proceeds to consultation on either of the options in this report, it would be at that stage that more detailed and specific information would be communicated as part of the wider process.

2. Why does BAEC have to bear the excessive burden of high central administration charges of £1,021,000, which are equivalent to 34.7% of the direct cost of running BAEC? (Agenda Item 9 Financial Implications 10.5)

Reply:

Of that £1,021k, £409k relates to depreciation charges and should not be considered an administration charge. Whilst depreciation charges aren't an immediate cost to the council, it is a measure of the economic value of using the three adult education sites, and is required to be allocation to the service in line with CIPFA's Total Cost Accounting principle.

The £612k of recharges to the Adult Education Service are therefore equivalent to 20.8% of the direct running costs, which is one of the lowest percentages of the in-house provided Council services.

These recharges are made up of a variety of costs including IT, departmental Commissioning and Strategic/Business support, and interdepartmental Support Service costs which include Finance (including payments and income services), Legal, Property and Human Resources.

Recharges are allocated to services on different bases e.g. number of computers, floor space, number of staff as well as direct estimates from support services managers. The allocation methods and bases are reviewed and updated every year to ensure that they remain relevant and accurate.

Written Question for the Education Portfolio Holder received from Michael Wheeler

1. Why are the council proposing to cancel accredited qualification courses, like GCSE English and Maths, which are government funded, free to students and for which there is a waiting list? (Agenda Item 9 paragraph 5.1)

Reply:

Although qualifications approved for public funding are free to some students and partially funded for others, they require a high level of investment from providers to implement all of the necessary procedures that support the learning activity. For example, where students access these courses free, the College is required to cover all the registration, exam and assessments costs for that learner. Due to the importance of placing students on the right course at the right level, providers now need to interview and undertake pre-course assessments for all applicants for qualification courses. Required processes such as eligibility checking and evidence gathering, registration with the Learner Record Service and monthly data returns to the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) all place additional infrastructure costs on colleges. Furthermore, qualification reform over the past few years has reduced the amount of funding the College receives from the SFA, and the College has to provide more courses for less money, and this has ceased to be sustainable.

Although GCSE English and maths were oversubscribed in September 2014 and BAEC was unable to place everyone, the numbers of unplaced students were insufficient to make a financially viable class in either subject. In direct costs alone, it would have cost the adult education service more to run the course than it would have received in funding from the SFA. Whilst the Council recognises the importance of key qualifications, such as GCSE Maths and English, it is not in a position to subsidise a non-statutory service, which is now underfunded as a result of a reduction in national grants for adult education.