



Knowsley Family And Community Education

Knowsley Adult Learning Partnership as a pilot Community Learning Trust

Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC) is reviewing governance arrangements for informal adult and community education, stimulated by 'New Challenges, New Changes', and wants to trial an emerging approach to governance which will strengthen the adult education service's ability to plan and deliver services on the basis of improved community engagement, social growth, growth of social enterprise and better learner engagement. The focus is on the possible governance model within a future Community Learning Trust (CLT) context and the need to identify what will work best to secure continuity for residents.

What was the catalyst / driver for reviewing the governance structure?

'New Challenges, New Chances' is driving a need to review the governance of a Knowsley Adult Learning Partnership (KALP) which is a well established network of equal partners from the statutory, voluntary and faith sectors. KALP has existed since Learning Partnerships were established around 1999/2000. KALP's

main aim is to shape and inform the vision and strategy for informal lifelong learning in Knowsley. A 'learning for life' vision seeks to bring about the realisation that through a responsive and high-quality learning offer, we will raise aspirations and expectations in order to improve well-being and personal enrichment, strengthen communities and families, and build the potential to enhance employment prospects.

The Chair of KALP is Head of the Adult and Community Education Service in Knowsley MBC. The authority considers it a key responsibility to promote a local vision for informal learning in the community it serves. Members of KALP include funded providers and voluntary sector organisations. The two main funders are the local authority and a local FE college. Priorities are agreed and funded collectively to inform an action plan.

Governance arrangements for these two main funders sit within their respective organisations. KALP governance sits within a local strategic partnership structure which has strong links with other cross-cutting themes

such as Health and Wellbeing, Employment and Skills and an Older People's Partnership. The FE college is a key partner on KALP but has its own governance arrangements which will determine the direction of travel for its organisation. Understanding this context will assist FE staff and governors in supporting local community learning priorities. The emerging CLT guidance will enhance this local arrangement as it will enable key funders of informal adult learning to continue supporting this priority.

Following publication of the 'Learning Revolution' in March 2009, KALP was excited about arrangements for Lead Accountable Bodies (LAB), and was the body that signed the 'informal adult learning pledge' for the local authority. It was disappointing when LAB plans disappeared with the change of Government, however, positive also that community learning continued to be an important part of the Government's adult education agenda. KALP kept abreast of the published 'Skills for Sustainable Growth' strategy (November 2010) and the developments around further community learning consultations.

The KALP Chair facilitated consultation events and represented members' views in responses. The BIS publication 'New Challenges, New Chances' was eagerly awaited. Following its publication, KALP met in January 2012 and discussed how the proposed new purpose and objectives for Government supported community learning funding would reflect or reshape the KALP. Senior officers were briefed about the response to community learning made in 'New Challenges, New Chances'. There was little persuasion needed in seeking support to move forward providing the opportunity to revisit the KALP structure and governance arrangements in the context of proposals around emerging locally-based models.

A Learn Together Partnership exists in the sub-region led by directors of Children's Services across nine local authorities. A number of active groups sit within this partnership, one of which is the local authority's Adult Education Managers' Network, which includes Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton, St Helens, Wirral, Halton, Warrington, Cheshire East, and Cheshire West. It facilitates the exchange of best practice, develops strategic planning, provides peer review support, works on collaborative activities, develops a sub-regional approach for lifelong learning and develops proposals to secure sustainable funding. It meets every two months. Discussion with the group led to consideration of piloting a CLT model on a sub-regional basis.

Given that guidance around CLT models is not yet available, KALP intends to use this document to consider proposals, identify generic lessons and put forward recommendations for those needing to cascade key points to governors or appropriate governing bodies.

What process was used to carry out the review?

- KALP members discussed 'New Challenges, New Chances' in January 2012. It was agreed that the group's vision, terms, strategy, action plan and impacts framework be revisited.
- It was necessary to identify the correct contact person within the local authority with responsibility for co-ordinating Local Strategic Partnership arrangements in order to inform them of plans for the KALP and seek out advice for consideration.
- External advice or audit was not necessary for this group as it is entirely voluntary and is not a legal entity.

- It was necessary to brief appropriate senior officers and councillors with portfolio for Children and Family Services and for advising the chair of the appropriate Local Strategic Partnership Board to whom KALP reported.
- Until the end of March 2012, KALP had reviewed its vision, terms, strategy and action plan using the broad guidance for Government supported community learning, however, KALP realised that no further steps could be taken until further guidance on CLTs was available. The group agreed to consider piloting arrangements over the 2012/2013 academic year.
- The Chair presented the LSIS bid at a Learn Together Partnership Adult Education Managers' meeting in January 2012 .

pilots. Different stakeholders bring different qualities, views and perspectives depending upon the context they represent, however, all stakeholders on both the Knowsley Adult Learning Partnership and the Learn Together Adult Education Managers' Network have a common goal which is to deliver a locally informed community learning offer. This offer needs to recognise that for many, community lifelong learning is taken up for its own intrinsic value. Many people participate for enjoyment and are driven by their desire for personal fulfilment or intellectual, creative and physical stimulation. It builds up communities and develops confidence and resilience within the individuals involved. The social relationships that develop as a result of community lifelong learning can provide networks of support and solidarity.

Feedback around CLT developments were fed back to the groups described above as well as in briefing reports to senior colleagues and elected members who have the current responsibility for governance in its broadest sense.

How have stakeholders been involved in this process?

As previously stated, the Chair of KALP is the Head of Adult and Community Education for Knowsley MBC, and a member of the Learn Together Partnership Adult Education Managers' Network. All of these roles produce valuable opportunity to engage relevant stakeholders; as an example of this in action, when the LSIS bid was presented at the Learn Together Partnership Adult Education Managers' Network in January 2012, it was agreed that if the bid were successful, there was potential for broadening the pilot CLT arrangements across the network.

Through relationships such as this, KALP is able to widen the understanding of the direction of travel regarding community learning trusts as well as to seek views/feedback about current partnerships being strongly considered as CLT

What questions have arisen for you throughout this process?

- **In the context of a CLT, is the membership all-inclusive?**

Yes. In the context of current guidance available for community learning trusts, KALP is representative of local government, local communities and local business leaders. It identifies and responds to local priorities in the context of national policy. There is emphasis on voluntary sector involvement.

- **Could the Knowsley Adult Learning Partnership be considered a group to pilot a locally-based CLT model?**

Yes. KALP is a 'local' group. Community needs and priorities are identified through effective networking, transparency and partnership working. This in turn enables resources to be targeted appropriately. The current KALP structure and membership is entirely voluntary. KALP shares a sense of responsibility and although has no legal powers, it agrees local decisions. For any trust model there needs to be accountability in order that the most effective governance arrangements can be determined. There is potentially an accountability deficit in the context of adult safeguarded learning as there are no national measures or success rates other than levels of participation attached to historical funding allocation methodologies. Therefore, locally-based CLTs will differ. County models may differ from small metropolitan boroughs. It is not cost-effective to establish overly-bureaucratic models in small metropolitan boroughs as funding could end up supporting the trust and not activity. Arrangements need to be appropriate to scale. The term

'trust' implies a legal entity. This could create conflict with the expectation of a trust in terms of existing partnership members who may be brokers of funding, funders and commissioners and also direct deliverers. Currently KALP does in fact reflect this arrangement but it works without complexity. Imposing any fixed model on such an arrangement may detract from translating vision into reality.

- **How does the direction of travel for the Knowsley Adult Learning Partnership sit with council corporate direction regarding social growth and social enterprise models?**

There is an over-riding financial need to reshape the direction of travel for local authorities set against retaining a core/critical mission underpinning the need to serve local communities. There is a constant need to convince Treasury Ministers about the value of informal adult learning, despite there being findings from lots of research to quantify this. KALP forms a solid foundation upon which to set a local footprint, transform its shape to meet a new purpose against a redefined set of objectives and determine a model that fits best. A reshaped KALP becomes the vehicle to embrace the wider agendas of social growth and social enterprise to support wider membership.

- **Could a CLT model be considered on a sub-regional basis ie the Learn Together Partnership Adult Education Network?**

No, as this would lose the 'local' aspect.

What conclusions or decisions have you come to so far?

KALP has wide membership and includes the right representation. It is a suitable partnership to pilot a locally-based CLT model. There is a structure, clear vision, strategy and action plan that can be reshaped taking into account the Government's new purpose and objectives supporting community learning. CLT models need to be locally responsive and where there is a mix of small metropolitan borough councils and larger county or shire councils within a wider sub-region, there may be a need for different models to be considered. This requires further exploration and piloting. The local authority is best placed to bring partners together and agree a local vision for its community, irrespective of the theme.

How has the changing external environment for FE and Skills influenced this review?

'New Challenges, New Chances' has impacted in the sense that it has provided a definition for community learning enabling KALP to reshape thinking and practice. Supporting this publication is the 'Colleges in their Communities' guidance.

Next Steps?

KALP will respond to emerging BIS community learning guidance.

What three lessons learned would you share with other governing bodies considering a similar change process

- From a FE perspective, there can be many conflicting priorities and from my own experience in the FE sector, having a nominated governor / sponsor / advocate for an identified theme such as informal learning can reap many benefits. Consistent representation on local partnerships is key.
- Having spent many years in both FE and in the public sector (latterly local authority adult education), it is helpful for FE colleagues to understand the difference in employment status. Being a public servant requires individuals to serve the public and their communities. It requires significant outward facing vision, leading of partnerships and collective ownership of local dimensions.
- Local authorities are extremely well-placed to pilot CLT arrangements where they currently have effective adult learning partnerships. Emerging CLT guidance will enhance these partnerships to achieve BIS' new purpose and objectives for Government supported community learning. It is important for FE governors to understand how effective these partnerships are, and by being key partners on these groups, how emerging CLTs will support governing bodies in ensuring their college can be even more responsive to their communities.

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