1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT:

1.1 This report outlines for members of the Cabinet the outcomes of the scrutiny review work on the future arrangements for the Adult Education Service in Cumbria.

1.2 Cabinet are invited to consider the 6 recommendations made in the attached report.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.1 Members are asked to consider the recommendations contained in the attached and whether they support each of these in turn.

2.2 Recommendation 1: A countywide review of existing service delivery ‘outlets’ should include a mapping exercise to consider the accessibility of current locations, and whether transport infrastructure is in place to ensure that potential learners can access these site.

2.3 Recommendation 2: In any service review activity going forward, the Children’s Services Directorate should be mindful of the inter-relationship between the 3 different types of courses that the Adult Education Service provides (pre-learning; qualifications/vocational courses; leisure courses); and particularly how the delivery of introductory level courses helps to ‘grow’ prospective learners for those vocational courses funded by the Skills Funding Agency.

2.4 Recommendation 3: In designing and implementing an Adult Education Service that caters to the different needs of Cumbria’s prospective learners, key partners should be involved in helping to shape the plans.

2.5 Recommendation 4: Any future service changes should be subject to an appropriately broad brush consultation with partners, stakeholders and community groups, with an opportunity for them to be engaged at an early enough stage to ensure they can influence what that service will look like.
2.6 Recommendation 5: If the authority decides to establish an ‘arms length’ company to oversee the running of the Adult Education Service, links should be forged between service providers to allow learners to be referred between providers, to ensure the best possible learning opportunities.

2.7 Recommendation 6: The question of where the Adult Education Service best sits in the County Council should be considered, and whether another directorate is more appropriate for this service that caters to adults, although currently sited in the Children’s Services directorate.

3.0 BACKGROUND:

3.1 Members of the Scrutiny Advisory Board Children and Young People picked up the topic of the future of the Adult Education Service in Cumbria following a referral from the Children’s Services Directorate in April 2011.

3.2 The Children’s Service asked whether scrutiny might like to convene a task and finish group to consider what the Adult Education Service currently delivers, and how it is shaped, with a view to suggesting ways in which both the range of courses and the delivery model might be improved upon.

3.3 The future for this service is a critical consideration for the Children’s Service Directorate, with a strong indication from government that the future focus for funding will be on the delivery and support of apprenticeship placements. The funding that the authority currently receives for Adult Learning has a strong focus on qualification-based and vocational courses.

3.4 The Adult Education Service comprises two distinct areas of learning: the vocational and the ‘leisure-based’. Whilst prospective learners may wish to access courses that will allow them to improve their employment prospects, there are learners who may wish to undertake a course either as an extension of a hobby or simply for enjoyment.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

4.1 The scrutiny task and finish group recognised that Adult Education provides a considerable and varied service and has an important role to play in helping Cumbria’s communities access learning to help people improve their quality of life. Individual learners might want to improve their prospects for employment, to be better equipped to help their own children with their homework, or to pursue a specific area of personal interest – eg: an additional language, or a creative/craft based skill.

4.2 The task group recognised that, as the service is currently being provided, there is room for improving the type of offer available for adult learners in Cumbria, whilst retaining the level of dedication and support from service staff. The task group felt it was important to ensure that any review of the service going forward took, as its starting point, the location of learning venues to determine whether the county has an equitable spread, which allows learners reasonable access to this service.
4.3 As with so many areas of public service provision, the task group is mindful that the economic climate means that resources are becoming ever more precious, and for the Adult Education Service the continued success of those aspects of the service funded by central government is key to ensuring that future funding is secured. At the same time, there are opportunities to consider how the leisure-based side of adult learning in the county might be improved upon and bring in a greater level of income in course fees, by creating a more vibrant service for the paying public.

4.4 The task group interviewed a wide range of witnesses and felt that they took a good overview of the service from this comprehensive pool of witnesses. It was the cooperation of witnesses from both the County Council and external partners that made this review possible.

Councillors Lisa Hammond, Councillor Gerald Humes, Councillor Majorie Rae
Adult Education Scrutiny Task Group

5 December 2011

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Appendix: Adult Education Service in Cumbria – Scrutiny Task Group Report
Children and Young People

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF ADULT EDUCATION SERVICE IN CUMBRIA
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Summary of the Group’s Findings and Recommendations

The Task Group was established by the Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Board at their meeting on 14 June 2011, to look at the options for the County Council’s provision of the Adult Education Service. Specifically, the issue of reducing funding was a key concern and it was envisaged that a scrutiny review could help to inform the Directorate’s plans for this service area going forward.

The Task Group set out to take an overview of the existing service in Cumbria, which provides a number of different types of courses, in a variety of learning environments. They wanted to consider the funding available for the delivery of the range of services in Cumbria and specifically how these were meeting local community need and supporting the county’s economic development in providing access to courses for residents. Members were particularly interested in how accessible the service was for Cumbrian residents and how barriers to learning, such as rurality and social issues, are tackled through the current service provision.

The Task Group met with a range of witnesses from the County Council’s senior officers, to external representatives from the third sector, the Skills and Funding Agency and some of the providers themselves.

From the process the Task Group noted several key points:

- There is a variety of courses provided in Cumbria, by a number of providers in different learning environments;
- There are compelling arguments for taking a fresh approach to the way the Adult Education Service is structured in Cumbria, with room for some reinvigoration in the way the service is delivered;
- There is good work being done in Cumbria to encourage learners to take their first steps back into education, and having community-based learning facilities is key to this;
- There are three discrete areas of Adult Education that need to be considered and appreciated in turn, to understand how each contributes to the improvements of the quality of people’s lives;
- The authority has a responsibility to manage the Skills Funding Agency contract in Cumbria, and therefore has to observe certain criteria in the delivery of courses that attract this funding;
- The level of funding from the Skills Funding Agency received each year is entirely dependent on the numbers of successfully completed courses in the previous year;
- The government’s agenda is changing, with funding increasingly likely to be directed towards supporting apprenticeships in future;
- There are a variety of different learning environments in Cumbria and it is timely to review the location of learning ‘outlets’ across the county to examine how the service might better be delivered, through a more partnership driven and efficient delivery model.

The Task and Finish Group members would like to thank everyone who supported and gave evidence over the course of the review.

The Task and Finish Group recommend that the Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Board forward this report for Cabinet’s consideration.
**Recommendation 1**

A countywide review of existing service delivery ‘outlets’ should include a mapping exercise to consider the accessibility of current locations, and whether transport infrastructure is in place to ensure that potential learners can access these sites.

**Recommendation 2**

In any service review activity going forward, the Children’s Services Directorate should be mindful of the inter-relationship between the 3 different types of courses that the Adult Education Service provides (pre-learning; qualifications/vocational courses; leisure courses); and particularly how the delivery of introductory level courses helps to ‘grow’ prospective learners for those vocational courses funded by the Skills Funding Agency.

**Recommendation 3**

In designing and implementing an Adult Education Service that caters to the different needs of Cumbria’s prospective learners, key partners should be involved in helping to shape the plans.

**Recommendation 4**

Any future service changes should be subject to an appropriately broad brush consultation with partners, stakeholders and community groups, with an opportunity for them to be engaged at an early enough stage to ensure they can influence what that service will look like.

**Recommendation 5**

If the authority decides to establish an ‘arms length’ company to oversee the running of the Adult Education Service, links should be forged between service providers to allow learners to be referred between providers, to ensure the best possible learning opportunities.

**Recommendation 6**

The question of where the Adult Education Service best sits in the County Council should be considered, and whether another directorate is more appropriate for this service that caters to adults, although currently sited in the Children’s Services directorate.
1. **Background and Context**

1.1 With national changes to both the funding and focus of adult education, the County Council’s Children’s Services are in the process of re-examining how this service is delivered in Cumbria.

1.2 Scrutiny was invited to provide a view on this important service and a task group of elected members was established to review the adult education service as provided at a variety of establishments across the county. These include Community Development Centres, Adult Education Centres, Further Education Colleges and Third Sector organisations.

1.3 A key question for members was whether the County Council, currently acting as both service commissioner and provider, should continue to be part of the wider delivery model, or whether it should have a role only to commission and manage the service.

1.4 The Adult Education Service provides a strategic view for service delivery, set out in its annual Service Plan. The Service is overseen by the County Council’s Learning Support Services Unit, within the Schools and Learning section of Children’s Services.

1.5 The funding for different parts of the service is provided by the Skills Funding Agency. The service is divided into 3 key areas:

- ‘pre-learning’ or introductory courses;
- vocational courses (qualifications/apprenticeships);
- elective courses (leisure based).

1.6 The courses funded directly by government are vocational qualifications including apprenticeships and non-accredited courses, with monies being passported to the authority from the Skills Funding Agency for this purpose. In the 2010-11 financial year, funding streams were no longer separated for ‘Further Education for Adult Learner Responsive’ and ‘Employer Responsive’ provision. The purpose of the funding amalgamation was to enable a more responsive approach by providers to the training and learning needs of both employers and local communities.

1.7 Funding from government to support this area of the service will reduce and, although the Adult Education Service is not a statutory service, the government have directed those authorities providing the service to focus provision upon the most vulnerable people.

1.8 The review took into account the reduced funding from government through the Skills Funding Agency, and the government’s increasing emphasis on supporting apprenticeships.

1.9 This year is the first where learning providers are not required to give details of the volume and types of learners to the Skills Funding Agency. The aim of this is to reduce bureaucracy, and the government has stated that the focus for the direction of future funding should be on the least qualified learners. There has also been a change in the performance requirements too, with contract performance measured in terms of monies earned, rather than attaining a number of targets set for priority learners.

1.10 The current delivery model in Cumbria is ‘mixed’ with ‘skills for life’, ‘family learning’ and some vocational qualifications delivered by staff employed directly by the service, with most of its non-accredited learning through Adult Education and Community Development Centres, most of which are based in schools. Aside from this, the remainder of provision is delivered through sub-contracted arrangements with external
agencies, which include academies, foundation schools (non-County Council based schools), voluntary organisations, a further education college and an arts centre.

1.11 In 2009-10, the Cumbria Adult Education Service delivered courses to 11,737 learners, of which 8,585 were ‘non-accredited’, 1,045 were family learning courses, whilst 2,107 were vocational/skills courses.

1.12 The Adult Education Service is inspected by OfSTED, along with all providers of adult learning funded by the Skills Funding Agency. Its last inspection in January 2011, received a ‘good’ rating out of the follow possible categories: Grade 1 – Outstanding; Grade 2 – Good; Grade 3 – Satisfactory; Grade 4 – Inadequate. OfSTED’s assessment report highlighted the positive impact for some learners - both as learners and parents - where their learning helps to improve their social and economic well-being. The report added that the positive outcomes for these learners affords them a greater level of social integration and support for their children at home. The report also found that “links with partner organisations are good” and that “the service is diligently planned to meet [both] county council and government priorities.”
2. Links to Council and Community Priorities

2.1 In undertaking a review of the Adult Education Service, this work links directly to the Cumbria County Council’s Plan in a number of ways. The Plan sets out the authority’s commitment to improving the lives of local people and delivering good quality services that are responsive to local need and expectation. It confirms the Council’s priorities as “challenging poverty in all its forms”; “ensuring that the most vulnerable people in our communities receive the support they need” and “improving the changes in life of the most disadvantaged in Cumbria”.

2.2 The Plan also outlines how, in the current challenging financial climate, this provides an opportunity for the authority to examine the range of services it delivers and how it delivers these. The Plan states that “Our commitment to the customer and doing things in the most efficient way might mean that you find services delivered in a new innovative way”. Reviewing the current structure and delivery model for the Adult Education Service, and whether this represents an equitable and efficient service, is a good example of this ongoing work.

2.3 A key element of the Plan is to create services around the needs of local people and to continue with endeavours to ensure that services are providing the best possible value for money, whilst targeting resources where they are best placed to meet those needs.

2.4 Within the Council Plan are a series of related policies and plans to help realise the overarching goals and priorities. Within the Anti-Poverty Strategy one of the 4 key aims is “for Cumbria to have one of the fastest growing economies in the UK” and part of this is an identified need to “reduce the impacts of poverty by encouraging children and young people to be more economically independent”. In order to achieve this, the Plan acknowledges a need to work with local partners.
3. **Role and Membership of the Task and Finish Group**

3.1 This review was referred to scrutiny by the Corporate Director for Children’s Services, in order to get scrutiny members’ views on how the Adult Education Service might be structured going forward. A key part of the review was to examine the current levels and geographical spread of provision in Cumbria and, given the existing funding arrangements, to consider whether there was a more efficient model of service provision.

3.2 It was agreed that the aims of this review would be

   i. To consider the current delivery model, and overall structure, of the Adult Education Service in Cumbria;
   ii. To consider whether the authority should move away from being a provider, to focusing on the commissioning and management side of service provision;
   iii. To recommend to Cabinet any changes or improvements that could be made.

3.3 Membership of the Task Group was confirmed as being:

   o Councillor Lisa Hammond;
   o Councillor Gerald Humes;
   o Councillor John Mallinson;
   o Councillor Marjorie Rae.

3.4 The Task Group met over a period of 5 months, and conducted witness sessions with staff in Community Development and Adult Education Centres, to get their view of the service structure and delivery on the ground, as service providers.

3.5 This final report has been drawn up as a result of the Task Group’s investigations, and details of who they met with and the evidence gathered are shown below.
4. **Witness Interviews**

4.1 The Task Group met with a series of witnesses over the course of a number of meetings and met staff at local Community Development Centres around the county. The schedule of meetings is outlined below:

- **15 June 2011** – the Scrutiny Officer (Nicola Phillips) met with the Assistant Director of Schools and Learning, Children’s Services, Caroline Sutton;
- **14 July 2011** – the task group met the Adult Education Manager from Children’s Services, Charles Searle;
- **June/July 2011** – task group members interviewed a selection of Adult Education Centres and Community Development Centre Managers, with a set of pre-prepared questions (attached at Appendix E) as outlined below:
  - Trinity School AEC – Kris Brenan provided a written response;
  - Langwathby CDC (Fellside, Penrith) – Jacqui Kitchen interviewed by Councillors Marjorie Rae and Gerald Humes;
  - Flimby CDC (Maryport) – Kath Stoddard interviewed by Councillors Marjorie Rae and Gerald Humes;
  - Moorclose AEC – Nichola Fraser interviewed by Councillors Majorie Rae and Gerald Humes;
  - Abbotsmead CDC (Barrow) – Sharon Gadsden interviewed by Councillor Tina Macur;
  - Ormsgill CDC interviewed by Councillor Tina Macur
  - Barrow Island CDC
- **12 August 2011** – the task group conducted interviews with the following people:
  - Deputy Leader of Cumbria County Council’s Cabinet – Stewart Young;
  - Third Sector Representatives – Karen Bowen, Cumbria CVS and Lesley Reid, West House;
  - Skills and Funding Agency Representative – Jon Power (Head of Provider Accounts);
  - Further Education Colleges Representative – Moira Tattersall (Principal Carlisle College).

  *A written response to questions was provided by an additional third sector representative from Barnardos.*

- **31 August 2011** – the Scrutiny Officer (Vic Milbourne) met the following representatives from the Upperby Community Development Centre:
  - Carol Wilson – Community Development Centre Manager;
  - Jean Pooley – Course Co-ordinator;
  - Billy Atkinson – Finance Manager.
- **3 October 2011** – the task group met the following finance representatives from the Children’s Services Directorate:
  - Peter George – Group Finance Manager;
  - Martin Scott – Principal Finance Officer, Schools and Learning.
- **4 October 2011** – the Scrutiny Officer (Vic Milourke) met with the Assistant Director of Schools and Learning, Children’s Services, Caroline Sutton.
9 November 2011 – the task group met the following representatives:

- Councillor Duncan Fairbairn – Cabinet Member for Adult Education;
- Caroline Sutton – Assistant Director of Schools and Learning, Children’s Services.

Meeting 14 July 2011

4.2 Charles Searle – Adult Education Manager, Schools and Learning (Children’s Services)

The Adult Education Manager provided members with a clear overview of the history of the service and its current structure. The reason why this adult-related service was in the Children’s Services Directorate was historical: it had been part of the department since the days when it was the Education Authority, with a remit that encompassed all types of education in the county.

There was a Central Adult Education team housed within the directorate that was comprised of 28 members of staff, a number of whom were part time and term time. There were 10 Adult Education Centres and 11 Community Development Centres across the County, housed respectively in secondary and primary schools. There were some 500 sessional tutors across the county.

The service is funded by the Skills Funding Agency and of the £2.8m provided this year (as well as fees paid by some learners) £1m of this was used for vocational courses and the rest for non-accredited courses, covering personal, community development and family learning. In terms of fees paid by learners this totals around £600k, whilst some learners are eligible for a 50% government-funded subsidy. Since 2001 the funding received has not been increased for non-accredited courses, so fees have had to be raised to fill this gap.

In terms of service delivery, this is currently mixed, with some delivered directly and some sub-contracted learning. In 2009-10 Cumbria’s Adult Education learners were made up of 75% female and 25% male learners, although the skills-based courses attracted a higher percentage of men. For people claiming benefits, concessions are available and around 52% of learners on skills-based courses are in receipt of income related concessions.

The benefits to the local communities are in confidence raising for those people who access courses, particularly those at a ‘foundation’ level as a gateway into other types of courses and qualifications.

The Adult Education Service in Cumbria has attained a ‘good’ rating in a recent OfSTED report, which shows a marked improvement from 2003 when it was assessed as being ‘inadequate’.

Whilst the County Council has the power to provide an Adult Education Service, this is not a statutory requirement. The current government have made it clear that their priority for adult learning is apprenticeships. A national consultation on Informal Adult and Community Learning commenced in July 2011 will be reporting its findings shortly.

For Cumbria, there are 3 possible options for the future of this service, which are:

- no service change (this was not recommended as an option going forward);
- withdraw from the market entirely and leave the local delivery up to the Skills Funding Agency and external providers;
o retain the management of the Skills Funding Agency contract and commission out the service delivery entirely with no direct delivery involvement;

o retain the Skills Funding Agency contract and improve upon the current model - this includes being the accountable body.

Where the County Council retains accountable body status for the Adult Education Service, part of that would mean assessing and ensuring requisite service standards, particularly for those that are covered by the Skills Funding Agency contract. If the authority retained only a commissioning and management role over the service, then there would be a risk in terms of quality assurance.

Readers are asked to note that this is an important consideration for the authority in determining how the service is shaped in future. This is something that was picked up in the final task group meeting with the Assistant Director of Schools and Learning on 9 November 2011 (outlined at paragraph 4.10 below).

**Evidence Gathering – June/July 2011**

**4.3 Adult Education Centres (AECs) and Community Development Centres (CDCs) staff**

There follows a summary of points raised and comments made by staff in both AECs and CDCs over a series of witness interviews with elected members in June and July 2011.

The managers and staff at a selection of AECs and CDCs were asked 6 set questions, which helped to elicit a general discussions with members. *Please see the list of centres at 4.1 of this report along with the set of questions at Appendix E to this report.*

Below is an outline of each question with an overview of responses received from managers and staff:

The County’s delivery centres have service level agreements with the central Adult Education Service under which, in return for funding, these centres provide daytime and evening courses for adults. The individual centre managers attend quarterly meetings and conferences hosted by the central Adult Education service, and liaise with central staff with regard to the development of the learning programme, quality control for teaching and learning, issues for tutors and students and providing information as required by the service level agreement.

In terms of how existing arrangements could be improved, spontaneous comments included perhaps greater contact from/with the service’s senior officers and a wider appreciation of the diversity of courses provided.

The range of courses provided, from entry level to formal qualifications, flower arranging to life skills and IT meant that there are courses catering for all levels of need. Managers of CDCs particularly made the point that the friendly, smaller scale environment was far less intimidating to prospective learners than, for example, a further education college.

The role of CDCs in helping to bolster an individual learner’s confidence is invaluable, particularly where someone may have been out of education or work for some time. The perception amongst CDC managers was that the benefit of the centre is evidenced in the range of courses provided and the learning needs that are met. The fact that the funding provided means that course fees are subsidised is an additional incentive for learners. Anecdotally, there are individual learners who go on to employment as a result of accessing an adult education course.
Whilst for some people the courses they undertake may be stepping stones to employment or higher education, for others being able to help their children with homework is a positive outcome.

There was a perception that, if the AECs and CDCs delivered more provision themselves, this would allow a more proactive approach and therefore greater diversity in the learning programme. To do this, funding would need to go directly to the centres. This type of provision may be easier for larger centres, but the view is that extra provision may be more readily managed at those larger places.

The idea of delivering more provision directly was felt to be a good idea amongst managers surveyed, and there was a perception that the delivery of Family Learning, Skills for Life and Adapted Learning could become a larger part of individual centres’ curricula, as these are already delivered directly by the service staff.

In terms of the future arrangements for the centre, there were views that some centres were better placed to develop and deliver an independent learning programme, with local learning opportunities delivered with the purpose of serving the needs of the local community, using available local assets (e.g., village halls and community centres for course delivery).

There were also views that retaining the current arrangements for the adult education service, with more devolved funding for the service to use in direct delivery. There was a strength of feeling about the centres retaining their independence and continuing to deliver an important community-based service. There were some concerns about the management structure, with management vacancies not being filled after recent retirements. Also, appropriate line management and support for centres needed to be addressed to create a uniform model of support across the county.

There were some concerns about the level of bureaucracy in terms of evidence required by the centre, tutors and students. There were calls for a review of the existing structure in some areas of the county and greater freedom over direction of funding and also more information on funding arrangements.

There was a view that there was, at present, too much prescription on how courses are run, with a need for tutors to be given greater freedom to be more responsive to the local communities needs.

Amongst staff surveyed, there was concern that any proposed changes should not impact upon the current range of quality of courses each is able to deliver. There are different relationships between centres dependent on their location, with some in more urban areas able to link up and support each other, whilst others are more rural and geographically isolated.

There is a feeling amongst CDC managers that the service they provide local communities is very important and if centres were to close this would represent a significant loss for local residents and the future of community-based learning.

Meeting – 12 August 2011

4.4 The task group undertook a day long meeting, interviewing the Deputy Leader of the County Council, and representatives from the Third Sector, the Skills and Funding Agency and Further Education Colleges.
Councillor Stewart Young - Deputy Leader of Cumbria County Council’s Cabinet

Cllr Young gave members an overview of the history of specifically the CDCs in Cumbria and why he felt that these were worth retaining in their current form. *The questions put to the Deputy Leader are attached at Appendix A.*

The CDCs were established in 1996 using monies from the European funded CREDITS initiative (Community Regeneration through Development of IT Skills) established to build community capacity for Information and Communications Technology. Using monies from the EU Single Regeneration Budget a network of Centres was established, with 78 in urban and rural areas. Many were established in primary schools, with the aim of attracting learners who would perhaps find existing learning environments intimidating, ie: further education colleges or secondary schools. This was useful for those learners who had been away from education for some time and needed to feel safe in stepping back into a learning environment.

Subsequent changes in the national landscape led to the creation of the Learning and Skills Council [now the Skills Funding Agency] where instead of funding being provided directly to the Centres, this was given to the County Council, with a management structure created to manage the Centres. A number of Centres began to close without the direct, EU funding and today there are 11 left across the County.

At the moment, there are discussions ongoing in the authority as to whether monies should be directed to the existing CDCs to re-launch these as a ‘community resource’ and these are seen as an important tool in tackling worklessness and improving workforce skills set, based within the local communities. Encouraging people back into education also helps to tackle problems with innumeracy and literacy and can lead to parents better able to support their own children’s learning.

There is widespread support from elected members for retaining CDCs and many of the courses provided are not qualification-based but are foundation stage learning for learners taking their first steps back into education. From this, learners are better placed to undertake more formal qualifications and this is the main value of these Centres. There is a general perception amongst members that the location of these Centres within local communities is key to their success in encouraging people to undertake courses. If these were reduced in number, or relocated, then it is unlikely that local people would travel to their nearest centres and there is a fear that a number of prospective learners would lose out.

Cllr Young has a strong link with the CDC in his local area, which is attached to Upperby Primary School and there is a sense of ownership from governors there. Cllr Young would like to see CDCs continue their work into the future. For Adult Education Centres housed in secondary schools, there is a concern of what will happen for Adult Education delivery as some of these become academies.

There is a clear case, in Cllr Young’s view, for both CDCs and AECs to retain management capabilities of their own services, with these standing separately to the central Adult Education Service. These are ideally placed in communities to deliver courses, with the Adult Education Service retaining a commissioning role. In that role, a commissioner would need to determine who is best placed to run a specific course and this will be a different answer for each area of the county.

In conclusion, Cllr Young asked whether the current location of the Adult Education Service within the Children’s Services Directorate was appropriate. There were differing views on this, with arguments supporting a relocation of the service into either the Adult and Local Services or Organisational Development, with the leisure-based
courses being commissioned and management from the Communities department. A proper debate was yet to take place on where this service should sit in future.

4.6 Karen Bowen, Cumbria CVS and Lesley Reid, West House - Third Sector Representatives

The questions put to Ms Bowen and Ms Reid are attached at Appendix B.

The Third Sector witnesses reflected on their working experience with the Adult Education Service. Cumbria CVS had been involved with the Service since 2007, when Cumbria CVS was formed, whilst West House had worked with the Service for around 15 years.

Cumbria CVS

Cumbria CVS have a contract with the Adult Education Service to provide ‘first steps’ work with volunteers and the adapting of courses that Adult Education provides for CVS clients, to help them into Further Education and employment. The organisation also has a Neighbourhood Learning for Deprived Communities contract, for which they are sub-contracted by the Adult Education Service.

From the Cumbria CVS viewpoint, the work that is undertaken in both AECs and CDCs is valuable, particularly as it is community based. For more rurally based learning centres, there may be an issue around the numbers of learners recruited for each course, particularly where there are minimum number requirements. It would be beneficial for there to be a flexibility built in for those centres where there is a lower footfall due to their location, and putting learning opportunities ahead of profit concerns. There are also some good third sector providers and it is good that the courses delivered are done so through a mix of both in-house and contracting out arrangements. However, funding continues to be an issue and there is perhaps an argument for working with third sector organisations generally.

In terms of how current arrangements could be improved, at the moment, the Skills Funding Agency have a £500k threshold for provider contracts and if smaller organisations worked together to establish bidding consortia then smaller organisations would not lose out to largest providers. Also, the clients for whom Cumbria CVS caters, are not people who will go on to study at higher education levels, and therefore there is an ongoing need to fund specifically designed courses with a particular focus.

Cumbria CVS would support closer partnership working between existing providers in the County, and if there was a move to contract out course provision, this would arouse concerns that those courses that created profit would be preferable that those that did not. Any target based provision can lead to inappropriate placing of learners on courses in the interests of securing future funding. Within the wider context of the government’s Localism agenda, the key aims of tailoring services and delivering at a local level cannot be met through large, national contracts. Whilst there are a number of third sector organisations who are unable to provide bigger contracts, those delivering good quality provision should be allowed to continue. Cumbria CVS have found that the Cumbria Education Service can act as an advocate for them, as a smaller organisation. In terms of the organisation’s client base, a number of learners have gone on to work placements and employment and there are specific examples of how Cumbria CVS’ input has helped individuals to significantly improve their quality of life and what they can contribute to the local community.

West House
West House work with adults who have learning difficulties, providing learning and recreational community-based courses for those learners. Since 2005 West House have worked in partnership to develop courses for their clients to help them in seeking work; this led to the development of a tailored course, with input from the central Adult Education Service.

For West House, the aim is to provide inclusion and opportunities for people in the community to access courses. However, where thresholds are in place for a number of participants per course, this can be a major barrier, and course drop-out can be a big issue. Opportunities to work jointly with other organisations are valuable.

The link with the Adult Education Service means that their knowledge and expertise can assist West House in the creativity of course design and delivery. If the structure was to change, there would be concerns if this link was lost. If courses were contracted out in future to profit-based providers it would have an impact on our clients. The current system works well for West House, with tailored courses for our clients. We have had cause to develop our own services, based upon the employment-related courses we have run for clients; this includes Café West [an in-house business that provides training places for clients]. For West House, our primarily interest is outcome-based learning and if a private company were to take over, potentially our way of working would lose out. Our work is supported by local level knowledge and expertise and is about getting people to develop their skills set and abilities within their own communities.

Opportunities to build on existing partnerships would be welcomed but the concern is that, if a profit-based approach was brought in and an accompanying target-based ethos, this may not recognise that West House’s clients can progress only to a certain level of attainment, along with their continued support into the future within their community. Ensuring that work continues to address social inclusion and equality and diversity issues is very important and it would be worrying if people’s needs were ignored in favour of profit.

The Adult Education Service has a pivotal role in helping to ensure a continued pathway for developing people with whom we work. They have also provided support in helping us to develop our bespoke course. An important part of our work is in demonstrating to the people we work with that they are able to achieve in life. There are numerous success stories from our experience, with clients going on to live more independent lives, able to secure work and travel there on their own, whilst some have gone onto work placements in, for example, the County Council.

4.7 Jon Power, Head of Provider Accounts, Skills and Funding Agency Representative

The questions put to Mr Power are attached at Appendix C.

The SFA representative provided members with a brief history of the organisation and its current role in Adult Education. The SFA is overseen by the Dept for Business Innovation and Skills, with its role in funding adult education and further education skills in England. The SFA is a national body with 1100 staff and the North West Office covers Cumbria, Lancashire and Greater Merseyside, with Mr Power based at the Liverpool office.

There is £4bn a year to invest, which represents a significant reduction from the SFA’s previous incarnation as the Learning and Skills Council. This was partly due to the separating out of young people skills which has £8bn funding. The SFA has always worked to government set targets, although the current government is far less target-orientated and has expressed a desire to focus, increasingly, on apprenticeships.
Whilst the SFA used to be a planning body, their current role focused on passporthing monies from government to providers.

In Cumbria the SFA funds:

- Adults Skills Budget (£1m) for levels 2 and 3 qualifications, but this budget is flexible in that it could be targeted at people out of work, for instance; £68k of this is for apprenticeships;
- Adults Safeguarded Learning (£1.5m) which has 4 or 5 strands to it;
- Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities (subcontracted to Cumbria CVS);
- Wider Family Learning (£134k in Cumbria) for adults and children learning together to support young people;
- Family literacy learning and numeracy (£248k), parents skills and other adults in Cumbria to support children's learning in the home environment;
- Formal First Step Learning (£213k) - short episodes of learning as first step onto other types of learning.

A dedicated arm of the SFA (the National Apprenticeships Service) works with employers to encourage young people to take up apprenticeships, which take around 2 to 3 years to complete. There is a recognition that employers are operating in a different and challenging economic landscape now, with packages of support for employers for young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) and incentive payments after 26 weeks of an apprenticeship. However, this is seen as important in a jobs market that requires a higher overall level of skill.

There are 25 Sector Skills Councils for individual skills, and these agree the frameworks for apprenticeships; this is private sector led, so it is the employers who shape the apprenticeships.

The SFA have an expectation of those providers to whom they are providing funding, set out in the ‘Conditions of Funding Grant’, which includes the Cumbria Adult Education Service. This is supported by technical documents that describe courses and expectation of deliverers, which are updated 3 to 4 times a year through guidance notes. We audit providers on a 1-2 year basis to ensure that they are meeting the requisite legal and statutory requirements within the parameters of the funding we provide.

Whilst there is an Apprenticeships Bill, the current government is keen to give providers more freedom and flexibility to deliver in their own areas, so we are provided with the funding and the broad parameters for distributing this. The funding is allocated to a geographical area, so where an authority wishes to opt out of providing an Adult Education Service, the SFA has to arrange for other providers to undertake the delivery. The downside for authorities doing this, is that they no longer have an input on how the monies are spent; where delivery was not satisfactory monies could be drawn back to the SFA and future funding would be reduced accordingly. Overall, local authorities have remained involved in providing an Adult Education Service.

The SFA provides funding to the local authority, who then determines which providers can deliver courses locally that meet the necessary criteria. For Cumbria, Adult Education continues to be under resourced so encouraging providers to work collaboratively would be a good way forward.

A government consultation on adult education is being released, entitled ‘New Challenges, New Chances’ from the Dept for Business Innovation and Skills.

Overall, for Cumbria, the key issues are:
o to continue successful delivery of service provision;
  o ensuring that funding is used fully, as unused funding is returned to the SFA and
    an equivalent portion would not be forthcoming in the following year;
  o planning and ensuring timeliness of delivery.

The SFA would encourage consortia arrangements for authorities where there are
numbers of smaller providers and a need to meet the £500k contractual minimum. The
SFA recognise that there will continue to be a need for niche contracts, including for
example with local third sector organisations (eg: Deaf Associations) and it is important
to tap into this local level expertise for specific courses.

4.8 Moira Tattersall, Principal of Carlisle College - Further Education College
Representative

The questions put to Ms Tattersall are attached at Appendix D.

The Principal provided members with an overview of where Cumbria’s Further
Education Colleges sit within the wider picture of Adult Education. There is no adult
education funding being passported into FE Colleges but they have a role as one part
of the Adult Education system and receive monies through a different funding stream
to other providers. Taking Carlisle College as an example, they do not receive County
Council Adult Education funding, with some 3000 learners attending courses on site.
FE colleges are part of the Adult Education delivery network and receive some funding
directly from the Skills Funding Agency. FE colleges ceased to be under local
authority control in 2004.

In terms of funding, the Young People’s Learning Agency funds learning for learners
aged to 16 plus and up to 25 years for people with learning difficulties. The SFA funds
19 plus and apprenticeships (which can start at age 16 years), so within this Carlisle
College receives funding for 16-18 year old students, as do sixth forms across
Cumbria’s schools.

There is some overlap for centres offering courses for 16 year olds, with some areas of
Adult Education funding in Cumbria covering Personal Community Development
Learning (PCDL) for people aged 16 year and over and also for Family Learning. This
funding does not go to local colleges but to some voluntary organisations.

Colleges are competitors for available funding for both qualification-based courses and
apprenticeships. Whereas in past years colleges could compete in the provision of
introductory courses, providing learners with a foundation upon which to build their
further and/or higher education, this is now not possible due to funding changes.
Colleges have had to cut back on these courses and now focus on qualification-based
courses. At one point, Carlisle College was the managing agent for the qualification
courses provided through local Community Development Centres, with the courses
funded and quality assured through the college.

FE colleges are generally focused around vocational skills and qualification-based
courses for people aged 16 years and over. Part of this includes supporting
apprenticeship courses both in and outside the college environment. Colleges can
also win regional or national bids to provide specifically commissioned work and
Carlisle College is currently leading for all colleges in Cumbria on the Response to
Redundancies initiative.

There are planned national changes for people in receipt of some types of benefit, with
the government seeking to address issues of skill improvement for those who are out
of work. One avenue is ‘Skills Conditionality’ where claimants will be required to
undertake a prescribed course at an identified local college, to improve their employment prospects. If claimants fail to do this, they can lose benefit payments as a result. A key concern with this is that it does nothing to address the problem that people who have been out of education for some time would be likely to find a college environment intimidating. It is an accepted fact amongst Adult Education professionals that one cannot force someone to engage with learning, and that people need to have their confidence built up gradually. There is a need to address their fears and engage people, but the resources are needed to provide this introductory step as a key building block to getting people into a learning environment.

The Carlisle College are participating in a project in partnership with the County Council to work with people who have been unemployed for 6 months to undertake work placements. The college alone could not access funding to undertake such work.

Adult Education is an important service area and should be focused upon what is best for the learners and maximising the impact of available resources. There should be a family of providers for the qualifications and skills based courses delivered through Adult Education. For the delivery of apprenticeships, there is a tendering process involved and this means there can be competition between providers, which could threaten partnership working.

With regard to introductory courses and practical learning, the Carlisle College is no longer funded to provide these types of courses but there is an argument for having each group of providers delivering on those areas at which they excel, or are best placed to deliver. This approach could lead to closer partnership working for all providers and would be an improvement to the current Adult Education Service.

There is a market driven approach to Adult Education provision at the moment and there is a question of whether available funding is being directed into the right qualifications and courses. Comparatively, the Adult Education is a small competitor, with local colleges in Cumbria having between £10-12m funding each.

In Cumbria, local employers are keen to engage with us on apprenticeships and these are important for future growth of skilled workers, with many local business bosses having been through these schemes themselves.

Meeting 3 October 2011

4.9 Peter George, Group Finance Manager and Martin Scott, Principal Finance Officer – Finance Representatives from Children’s Services

The finance officers were asked to provide the task group with an overview of the financial situation for the Adult Education Service and the associated costs. The task group received a summary of income generated by CDCs and AECs for the 2010-11 financial year, and told that the Skills Funding Agency funding for 2011-12 is expected to be similar. The figures show the income from the SFA grant and other income, which includes course fees, room hire, and income from other agencies including UK-online. The figures also show £485k to external centres.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AE Centre</th>
<th>SFA Income</th>
<th>Other Income</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper Eden</td>
<td>46678</td>
<td>28995</td>
<td>75673</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherhall/BeaconHill</td>
<td>48551</td>
<td>13990</td>
<td>62541</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workington</td>
<td>92459</td>
<td>14094</td>
<td>106553</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Whitehaven  78833   43650   122483
Wigton       30345   26891   57236
Sedbergh     36480   42298   78778
Cartmel/Ulverston  58352   95205   153557
Lakes        17690   27863   45553
Millom       28915   12128   41043
Walney       27711   7707    35418

TOTAL        466014  312821  778835

CDCs         SFA Income  Other Income  Total
Upperby      51446      18149       69595
Pennine Way  18699      12589       31288
Vickerstown  16383      11421       27804
Ormsgill     41678      18924       60602
Fellside     9755       20583       30338
Shap         9653       16696       26349
Kirkbride    11614      2890        14504
Flimby/Ewanrigg 15470     9875       25345
Barrow Island 5904      17938       23842
Abbotsmead   86432      25478       111910
Ambleside    4414       5210        9624

Total        271448   159753      431201

Payments to External Agencies
485000       485000

Direct Delivery
Family Learning 332000 332000
Skills for Life  150000  150000
Employer Engagement 200000 200000
First Steps       172000  172000
LLDD              200000  200000

Total          1054000 1054000

Payments to External Agency (NCDL Funding)
155000       155000

Management/Admin 350000  350000

Grand Total     2781462  472574  3254036

Readers are asked to note that 'external agencies' shown above are independent centres, including Barrow Disability Association, Trinity School in Carlisle and other academies.

Annually, Cumbria receives £2.7m in funding from the Skills Funding Agency and this is split across the local providers. The funding is itself split into two identifiable streams:
o Adults Safeguarding Learning – for personal/community development;
o Adults Skills Budget – more vocationally focused learning.

The cost of the management and administration of the Adult Education Service stands at £350k, with the Centres operating on a break-even basis. If there was an overspend in one area, this would be balanced out by using funding from another, so that the baseline is always zero.

Whilst the level of funding received from the Skills Funding Agency is at a similar level to previous years, there is no assurance that this will be protected in future years. The level of attainment of learners is a key factor in determining the following year’s funding and the government has already stated that its future focus will be on apprenticeships.

Members noted that there is no capital funding for Centres to purchase and/or update their equipment. However, periodically IT suites are updated on a needs led basis. For the 2012-13 budget, the Council’s members have decided to input £650k over the following 3 years to support the redevelopment of CDCs and within this there is a possibility this could support some capital expenditure. It has not yet been determined how this additional money will be allocated.

Members asked whether there was a perceived duplication of management structures, with management staff both in Centres and in the central Adult Education Team in Children’s Services. The Group Finance Manager reflected that, a precedent has been set by the recent restructure across Children’s Services and that the level of government funding loss to the service should be borne in mind. Going forward then, it seems logical that any duplication of management will not feature in any new service structure for Adult Education and that it is more difficult to oversee a service without doing so from a central point.

Meeting 9 November 2011

4.10 Councillor Duncan Fairbairn, Cabinet Member for Adult Education and Caroline Sutton, Assistant Director of Schools and Learning, Children’s Services

These witnesses were interviewed to provide the Directorate’s and Executive’s view of the Adult Education Service and any emerging plans for the future. Members put a number of questions to the witnesses and this helped to initiate a general discussion on related issues.

Question 1: What is the tone of current discussions within the Children’s Services Directorate concerning Adult Education? Also, what are the emerging visions for the future of this service?

The Assistant Director responded that preparatory work had been ongoing for the last year, with cross directorate input from Organisational Development, Environment and Adult and Local Services.

For Children’s Services, a key responsibility is to manage the contract with the Skills Funding Agency and ensure that identified outcomes are delivered. Part of this activity has to be quality assurance work by the Adult Education team and it is vital that providers of courses supported by this funding have teaching staff with the requisite standard of qualifications themselves.

The Service is reliant on the funding stream from the SFA and the more people that attend and complete the courses, the more income is guaranteed from the SFA year
on year. Part of the discussions with other directorates have included looking at the possibility of developing an umbrella company to develop a partnership of providers for Adult Education in Cumbria. The service could continue to be centrally managed by the Adult Education team for the SFA funded work, whilst developing the pool of delivery partners and to reinvigorate the choices available to prospective learners.

The main reason for having an ‘umbrella’ company is that the Skills Funding Agency want to have one big contract, rather than a series of smaller contracts. If we established a brand for Adult Education in Cumbria, the authority would retain a role as commissioner, in quality assurance, and would be a stakeholder in the service along with partners including the AECs, CDCs, FE colleges, third sector and so on. A key part of this would still be managing the SFA contract.

Another advantage of this model would be that it would minimise any reputational risk to the County Council and would need to be developed in liaison with the service’s providers and the authority’s wider partners. It is understood that the SFA monies will increasingly be linked to apprenticeships in future, and a branded organisation could link with economic development and the skills agenda, perhaps through developing the apprenticeship offer with our staff and partners.

Question 2: With an umbrella organisation, how would you be able to provide learning outlets in smaller outlying rural areas for people who cannot travel into urban areas?

The Assistant Director felt that this was possible. In the same way that the library services review invited a focus on the services provided rather than the buildings within which these were delivered, a review of Adult Education needs to examine where the services are currently being delivered and how this might be improved upon. There are a number of existing Centres where costs are disproportionate to the numbers of people benefitting from the services and it is possible to find alternate locations for delivering this service.

For the future, the key will be providing learners with courses they want at the time they want them in an accessible location. There is an opportunity through internal review to consider where places of learning are currently sited, with a view to ensuring that local communities are engaged in any consultation process.

One of the issues that needs to be considered is that, if we are going to reinvigorate the adult education service for those courses that are not SFA funded, then we need to engage partners in discussions around how we might fund these going forward. We can link with partners in delivering appropriate types of course delivery for example parenting skills, health courses, cooking on a budget through health and social care partners. A broader partnership arrangement would allow a greater array of community-based courses and greater creativity would be needed to retain learning in outlying communities. Engaging with key people – including stakeholders, providers and partners – to consult on the future shape of the Adult Education service will help to create a responsive service that is accessible to local communities.

There is a possibility of creating a ‘mutual’ for the service, with different partners focusing on their own areas of expertise. At the moment we do not have an Adult Education Strategy, and an Apprenticeships Strategic is under development. Another key consideration would need to be how the Adult Education Service links with the Local Enterprise Partnership and their Skills Boards, along with existing priorities and the wider economic strategy.

A key benefit of a partnership service model would be the collaborative advantage in those arrangements.
Question 3: We need a clear vision for taking the service forward and this should be balanced by the government’s vision – how can we ensure that ‘first steps’ learners are catered for in future?

One member noted that with introductory courses are an important element of Adult Education, in that they raise a learner’s confidence and encourage further learning, which can be a gateway to academia, apprenticeships. Without these ‘gateway’ courses, many learners would not access courses through more traditional learning environment such as those based in a school or college. Catering for these learners is key to ‘growing’ learners for SFA funded courses and, in turn, leisure-based courses.

The Assistant Director noted that wider priorities need to have associated targets, for example the number of vulnerable people completing courses. Links with Job Centre Plus and Connexions would be part of wider partnership arrangements too, and could encourage people into the introductory courses that lead elsewhere. However, for some types of courses there will never be enough public funding to make this free at the point of delivery and this would need to inform discussions on service design as part of internal review. A responsive service would, therefore, be built upon market research, partnership development, and existing learning needs.

Part of the research work already undertaken has looked at examples in other areas of the country, with services that reflect the separation of the leisure and skills agenda. In Kent, for example, there is an arms length company with a partnership model, built around three distinct service strands:

- Living – leisure, health and life-related skills;
- Learning – more targeted, introductory courses and learning for pleasure;
- Earning – linking into basic literacy and numeracy learning and linking with job centre.

This model is particularly good because it is achieved through partnership and facilitated through area co-ordinators. This is an option that Cumbria might want to consider, which is a model that ties into the ‘umbrella’ company model.

Question 4: Any proposals arising from an internal review of Adult Education would need to be subject to a wide ranging consultation process engaging all provider bodies – is this something that is being built into any proposed internal review?

There is a clear resource implication here for this work, which would require a feasibility study encompassing market research with community groups, intelligence gathering, discussions with providers and partners and linking with the Local Enterprise Partnership and District Councils. From discussions I have had with external partners to date, there appears to be an appetite to discuss this.

Question 5: How will there be an involvement in planning for the future service at a local level?

In terms of the SFA contract this is not negotiable, but an integral part of shaping the future delivery mechanism for the service would include where people are placed to deliver that service. The learning offer in each area could be linked to the Local Committees and ownership of how the Adult Education Strategy would be delivered in their area.

Question 6: Will the duplication of management arrangements – between the central service team and individual centres around the county – be part of the internal review?
In terms of existing management structure, the Adult Education Manager in Children’s Services manages the SFA contract on behalf of the authority, for which the Assistant Director is held to account by the SFA. Part of this work involves quality assurance of the teaching and learning standards from providers across the county and this is the same for every provider of the SFA contract. Meanwhile, those providers deliver the courses to learners, and have their own management arrangements for other areas of their business.

Question 7: Can you outline the standards placed on the deliverers of SFA funded courses and why the authority informs centres which courses they can provide each year?

There is a requirement for tutors of courses funded by the SFA to have a level 5 qualification. There is an issue for staff in some learning centres who are not qualified to this level. If the authority did not ensure that this standard is met, then both existing and future SFA funding would be in jeopardy.

Question 8: Would a part of the internal review work include risk assessment activity?

Risk assessment will be a key part of any proposals arising from both the scrutiny review and the internal review work itself. A key question for the future shape of the service will be what the County Council wants its role to be within the adult learning and skills agenda.

Members highlighted the concern that they anticipate a strong public reaction if the service is subject to an overhaul. However, the Cabinet Member observed that public reaction would be dependent upon how any change was negotiated.

The Assistant Director reflected that this service area is a ‘big ticket item’ that has significant impact on the priorities in the Council Plan. This service area links strongly with the Council’s plan on targeting poverty and its future development and ties in with the theme economic regeneration and with the County Council as a large local employer.
5. Findings and Recommendations

5.1 The task group felt that meeting local need should be an integral part of the future shape of the service, and part of this needs to be around local demography. To this end, courses should be provided that respond to local need which should in turn support economic regeneration, choice-based learning and encourage a proactive approach from learners.

5.2 Members felt that there exists a close relationship across the three distinct types of courses provided under the Adult Education Service. The introductory courses (including literacy and numeracy courses) engage learners who have been out of education for some time, and attract learners where the learning environment is the least intimidating. Then there are those courses where the learner can achieve a qualification or skills-based certification (including apprenticeships) which are vocational in nature. The third type of course is leisure-based learning, which is undertaken for personal development or interest; these include learning a second language, a craft etc.

5.3 Without available opportunities to bring initially reluctant learners in, and to engage them through introductory level courses, there will be fewer people available to undertake (and able to undertake) the SFA funded courses. Where learners achieve and this leads to employment, they have money to undertake leisure-based courses. So there is a level of mutual reliance between the different types of courses.

5.4 The future of the Adult Education Service is dependent the service being shaped in a way that makes it fit for 21st century learners but this could not be achieved in isolation and needs not only a widespread partnership buy-in to help with that process, but also cross directorate activity in the authority.

Recommendation 1

A countywide review of existing service delivery ‘outlets’ should include a mapping exercise to consider the accessibility of current locations, and whether transport infrastructure is in place to ensure that potential learners can access these site.

Members recognise that there is a need to review the existing arrangements for Adult Education delivery in Cumbria and that some buildings in which services are delivered are not cost effective. However, they are concerned that issues of access and infrastructure are taken into account to ensure that future learners in Cumbria’s communities have the best possible learning opportunities.

Recommendation 2

In any service review activity going forward, the Children’s Services Directorate should be mindful of the inter-relationship between the 3 different types of courses that the Adult Education Service provides (pre-learning; qualifications/vocational courses; leisure courses); and particularly how the delivery of introductory level courses helps to ‘grow’ prospective learners for those vocational courses funded by the Skills Funding Agency.

This is a key point arising from this review work. Whilst members recognise that the funding coming in from government through the Skills Funding Agency is vital for some areas of the Adult Education Service, there should be a recognition that supporting all areas of learning will have an overall impact in ensuring a healthy service going forward.
Recommendation 3

In designing and implementing an Adult Education Service that caters to the different needs of Cumbria’s prospective learners, key partners should be involved in helping to shape the plans.

The impact of Adult Education is wide ranging, effecting not only a number of the County Council’s directorates, but also key partners including Health, Police etc. Members appreciate that in order to ‘reinvigorate’ the opportunities for customers there needs to be input from a range of individuals and organisations; whilst the authority can lead on this, it cannot achieve it in isolation.

Recommendation 4

Any future service changes should be subject to an appropriately broad brush consultation with partners, stakeholders and service users, with an opportunity for these groups to be engaged at an early enough stage to ensure they can influence what that service will look like.

In the same approach taken by the Adult and Local Services in their wide ranging consultation on the first phase of the Library Services review, it is key that a range of people and organisations are involved in any future consultation of service proposals. Achieving buy-in from Cumbria’s communities will be important to allay any fears of service change.

Recommendation 5

If the authority decides to establish an ‘arms length’ company to oversee the running of the Adult Education Service in future, links should be forged between service providers to allow learners to be referred between providers, to ensure the best possible learning opportunities.

With available national funding having been reduced in the current financial year, and further reductions anticipated over the next 3 years for the authority as a whole, the Adult Education Service may be best supported by looking at a new way of structuring the service and, working with partners, to identify new ways of supporting and delivering some areas of the service.

Recommendation 6

The question of where the Adult Education Service best sits in the County Council should be considered, and whether another directorate is more appropriate for this service that caters to adults, although currently sited in the Children’s Services directorate.

The service is housed in Children’s Services for historical reasons; this service has been in place since the directorate was called the ‘Education Authority’ and its remit was education in all forms for all age groups and learners in the county.

The Task Group would like to thank everyone who supported and contributed to the review.

Report ends.