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23 February 2017

Mr John Scott  
Corporate Lead, Business Employment and Skills  
South Tyneside Council  
Town Hall  
Westoe Road  
South Shields  
NE33 2RL

Dear Mr Scott

### **Short inspection of South Tyneside Council**

Following the short inspection on 1 and 2 February 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The inspection was the first short inspection carried out since the provider was judged to be good in April 2013.

#### **This provider continues to be good.**

You, senior leaders and elected members who are responsible for setting the direction of the business, employment and skills (BES) provision delivered by South Tyneside Council have established a clear vision and strategy to ensure that the service contributes effectively to the employment and skills needs of residents of South Tyneside and employers in the North East. You have sustained the strengths identified at the previous inspection, although outcomes for the small number of learners aged 16 to 18 have declined since the introduction of study programmes.

Since the previous inspection and the relocation of the service into the economic regeneration directorate of the council, you and other leaders have overseen a significant and appropriate change to the programmes and qualifications provided. Programmes now focus very well on providing adults with opportunities to follow accredited courses that develop the industry-specific and essential work-related skills and behaviours that they need to progress into work with employers in the region. You target effectively residents who have not participated in education, training or employment for a long time and those with personal barriers to doing so. Your strategy to engage unemployed males in training programmes in the renewable energies industry, a growing labour market in the North East, is a good example of this. Adult learners on non-accredited courses gain in confidence and improve their self-esteem and, as a result, a high proportion move on to accredited courses or find paid or voluntary work.

You have established highly effective partnerships with employers, neighbouring local authorities, colleges and other learning providers to ensure that the range of provision meets local residents' needs well. You continue to deliver all of your provision through subcontractors. Subcontracting arrangements, a strength at the previous inspection, continue to be thorough and effective. The robust commissioning procedures that you apply when engaging subcontractors enable you to provide a highly appropriate range of programmes that are delivered by providers with suitable expertise. However, you rightly recognise the risks associated with subcontracting in sustaining a high level of quality across all areas of provision. The quality of provision and resulting outcomes for learners are not good enough in a small minority of the subcontractors. Your accurate evaluation of the performance of subcontractors identifies areas for improvement swiftly; however, managers need to be more demanding to ensure that providers that need to make improvements to their provision do so rapidly.

You have introduced 16 to 19 study programmes and traineeships suitably aimed at younger residents of South Tyneside for whom studying at school, college or other learning providers is not their preferred option or appropriate for their needs. Although a high proportion of learners who follow these programmes progress into further training, apprenticeships or work, leaders and managers have recognised through self-assessment that aspects of this provision are not good enough. In particular, the proportion of young people who achieve functional skills or improve their GCSE grades in English and mathematics is too low.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that action is taken to safeguard learners. Leaders and managers set clear expectations for all subcontractors through performance management processes. BES staff provide a good range of safeguarding training for subcontractors' managers and tutors. This has created a culture of respect and tolerance where the health, well-being and safety of learners have a high priority across all providers.

Good communication between managers of the service, other teams within the council and external agencies who deal with safeguarding ensures that concerns, including the risks of learners being exposed to, or expressing, extremist views, are investigated and dealt with appropriately. As a result of clear guidance and training, learners and staff know how to raise any concerns that they may have.

### **Inspection findings**

- Elected members of South Tyneside Council and leaders of the BES service are ambitious for local residents to receive high-quality and relevant education and training to improve their skills, gain qualifications and progress to further training and work. Commissioning arrangements are robust; leaders and managers undertake a good range of quality monitoring activities with all subcontractors that are informed by accurate data about learners' progress and achievements.

As a result, they have a good understanding of aspects of teaching, learning and assessment that require improvement and where the proportion of learners who achieve relevant qualifications is too low. The small BES team provides a good range of support and, where necessary, training for subcontractors' managers and staff that aims to bring about improvements. The majority of subcontractors quickly improve as a result.

- Elected members who are responsible for the governance of the BES service have a strong commitment to its success, take an active interest in how it meets South Tyneside residents' needs and are very supportive of leaders and managers. They meet regularly with leaders and managers to discuss and review the progress of the service in meeting the objectives set in the council's 'Shaping Our Future' strategy. Although leaders have provided councillors with summary information about the provision for a considerable time, they have only very recently provided detailed reports about learners' achievement and the performance of each subcontractor. Councillors welcome this new and more detailed information. They recognise that this enables them to hold leaders to account more effectively and provide more robust evidence to show that weaknesses are being addressed.
- South Tyneside Council leaders have continued to ensure that programmes meet the needs of residents, employers and local communities; this was a strength at the previous inspection. The council's strategic commissioning statement for the BES service takes good account of the skills needs identified by existing employers. It also defines the skills that residents will need to enable them to find work in new industries planned within South Tyneside and the wider North-East region. Leaders and managers have changed significantly the range of programmes that they offer. They now provide more accredited qualifications to enable adults to develop the skills they need to be active participants in the local economy.
- Leaders and managers recognise that the quality of provision and outcomes for learners on the small 16 to 19 study programme require improvement. Although BES managers continue to provide support for subcontractors to bring about improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in English and mathematics, learners make slow progress in improving their skills in these subjects. The proportion of learners who achieve functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics and the proportion who improve their grades at GCSE are too low. Other aspects of study programmes are good. All learners for whom it is appropriate carry out work experience. Most learners improve their personal and social skills well and overcome personal barriers to participating in education, training or work. As a result, a high proportion progress to further training, apprenticeships or work.
- Two subcontractors who delivered apprenticeships in administration and in information and communication technology went into liquidation during 2015/16. The circumstances leading to this, in both cases, were beyond the control of South Tyneside Council. Despite the efforts made by leaders and managers to find alternative provision, they were only successful in doing so for a few

apprentices. The achievement rates for apprentices in these two subjects declined as a result. In all other subjects, where apprentices were following programmes with other providers, achievement rates remained high. Following the demise of the two subcontractors, leaders and managers thoroughly reviewed their subcontractor risk assessment and procurement procedures and strengthened them. Systems for monitoring the progress of apprentices on programmes and for identifying those at risk of leaving are now very effective.

- A high proportion of adults following accredited vocational learning programmes achieve their qualifications. The proportion who achieve functional skills qualifications is in line with that of similar providers. Community and family learning provision targets effectively learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who have not participated in education, training or work for an extended period of time. Through participating in community and family learning, adults gain in confidence and improve their personal, social and employability skills. As a result, many are better able to take further steps into accredited learning or to look for work.
- A positive and harmonious culture exists across the provision due to leaders' and managers' careful selection of subcontractors and the training that BES staff provide for tutors. Learners are encouraged to treat each other with tolerance and respect. They respond well to this approach and, by sharing their experiences, learners improve their understanding about life in modern Britain.

### **Next steps for the provider**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and outcomes for learners improve and become at least good at all subcontractors who deliver study programmes
- the proportion of learners of all ages, but particularly those aged 16 to 18, who achieve English and mathematics functional skills qualifications and achieve A\* to C grades at GCSE improves
- managers responsible for the performance management of subcontractors reinforce high expectations and set clear deadlines for the minority of subcontractors who need to improve the quality of their provision and learners' outcomes.

I am copying this letter to the Skills Funding Agency and the Education Funding Agency. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Fraser  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

Inspectors were assisted by the quality manager as nominee. We met with senior leaders and spoke to councillors. We observed lessons and assessments taking place at subcontractors. We held meetings with, or spoke to, managers, tutors and learners. We scrutinised learners' work and assessment records. We scrutinised key documents relating to the provider's strategy and implementation plans, self-assessment and improvement planning, and safeguarding. We considered the views of learners through discussions during learning sessions and through the responses received through Ofsted's online questionnaire.