

Minutes



Leading learning and skills

Date 14 June 2006
Subject LSC Northumberland Council
Location LSC Northumberland
Time 16:00
LSC office Northumberland
Publication intent Internal

Present

Members	Jackie Axelby	Jane Blackburn
	Kelvin Brennan	Veronica Dunn
	Mary Dunning	Robert Evans
	Linda Ions	Moira Rankin
	Terry Robson	Richard Rutherford
	Sue Wilson	
Observers	Neville Hall	Austin McNamara
LSC staff	Helen Beaton	Margaret Frostick
	Ian Jones	Chris Roberts
	Tony Sacco	Nicola Cummings
Apologies	Fred Foster	
	Mark Henderson	
	Kevin Rowan	
	Derek Wise	

Item 1. Welcome and apologies for absence

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed Tony Sacco, Partnership Director, Northumberland to his first Council meeting and Chris Roberts, Regional Director.
- 1.2 Thanks were expressed by the Chair and Members to Margaret Frostick and Ian Jones for their contribution to Council. Ian has been appointed Economic Development Director for the North and will be based at the Regional office, whilst Margaret has taken a secondment opportunity with Northumberland County Council to support 14-19 developments.
- 1.3 The Chair read out a thank you card from Susan Bickerton following her farewell dinner held on 3 May.
- 1.4 Apologies for absence were noted as above.

Item 2. Minutes of the last meeting

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 26 April 2006 were accepted as a true record.

Item 3. Matters arising/action points

- 3.1 Members' attention was drawn to the updated action notes. All actions were either on the agenda, complete or progressing.

Item 4. Comments from the Chair

Meetings attended

- 4.1 The Chair attended the National Annual Chairs' event on 17/18 May where main discussions were around streamlining and strengthening accountability. Nicola Cummings has the meeting papers should members wish to see them.
- 4.2 A Regional Board meeting took place in May. Discussion items included reflections from the Chairs' event regarding accountability; reaffirmation that a regional Audit Committee would be established with Jackie Axelby as the Chair but that a regional system was yet to be agreed. It was envisaged the Regional Audit Committee would consist of one representative from each of the local offices in addition to the Chair.
- 4.3 The Northumberland Strategic Partnership (NSP) Board had met. The NSP Standing Conference dates had been agreed as 12 July and 18 October and the Chair asked if any of the members would like the opportunity to attend to let Nicola Cummings know.

Action: Members

Streamlining accountability

- 4.4 The Chair suggested this would be an opportune time to discuss streamlining accountability following an update sent to all local Chairs from the National Chair, Chris Banks. The Chair highlighted the key issues and opened to members for discussion.
- 4.5 It is envisaged local Councils will be renamed 'Local Skills Boards' but there was no indication of the number or timescales. It was important for the region to form a view on this, particularly about the retention of a body in Northumberland. Members commented that losing the word 'learning' in the title would seem inappropriate as this suggests the focus is only on skills.
- 4.6 Chris Roberts commented that this Council has a stronger feel for the local area than any other in the region. A decision about the retention of a Council in Northumberland should be based on the need, although it was noted that currently the Northumberland structure is very effective and already has well established partnership working with the Northumberland Strategic Partnership. A lively discussion ensued.
- 4.7 The Chair summarised saying statutory accountability remains with the local Council until such time as any new arrangements are formalised. Whilst the new structure may not be the preferred method, the Council needs to retain its commitment, motivation and strength to ensure continuity until decisions

are made on the future role. Members were of the view that for many years Northumberland has worked very well in partnership and it would be seriously disadvantageous not to have a robust local Council structure for the benefit of the County into the future.

- 4.8 Employer engagement needs to continue and it was proposed for a future Council meeting to consider how we can get closer to employers to seek their engagement.
- 4.9 The Chair agreed to circulate by email the update from Chris Banks to members with a request for comments by 23 June to assist in forming a regional view.

Action: Nicola Cummings

Item 5. Regional Director's Update

- 5.1 Chris Roberts highlighted the key elements from the Further Education White Paper which have driven the changes in the LSC's structure to ensure the right level of professional expertise is in place to deliver this challenging agenda.
- 5.2 One of the elements was in relation to Capital funding and the release of £1 billion nationally next year. A member asked whether this would allow any additional funding to support the Northumberland Learning Park at Ashington and allow the project timetable to be brought forward. Chris Roberts said he was very interested in the project and would take a personal role in taking forward discussions.

Item 6. Partnership Director's Update

- 6.1 Tony Sacco presented the paper which gave an update on internal and external developments of relevance to the Council.

Learner Transport

- 6.2 A member asked for clarity about membership of the Transport Partnership. The Partnership was convened by Northumberland County Council (NCC) to act as an advisory body to the NCC Executive and includes representatives from the LSC, Connexions and the six 14-19 partnerships.
- 6.3 Austin McNamara suggested that for the next meeting, Connexions could provide feedback that would help demonstrate what has happened to individual young people following the decisions on learner transport funding. He further suggested this could be an exercise that Northumberland College could undertake to feed into the next meeting.

Action: Austin McNamara/Linda Ions/Nicola Cummings

Theme 7

- 6.4 Band 3 appointments will be communicated to candidates on 21 June.
- 6.5 A member asked Tony Sacco for his view on when he thought it would be likely the new Northumberland Partnership Team would be in operation. He anticipated that this would be largely in place from August.

Information and Advice

- 6.6 Following the tender process, Connexions Tyne and Wear were announced as the successful contractor to manage the delivery of Information and Advice for 2006-2007. Detailed discussions are now taking place to ensure a smooth transition from the current arrangement.

Decision: Members received the report and it was agreed Connexions Northumberland and Northumberland College would carry out an exercise for the September meeting to provide feedback to help demonstrate what has happened to individual young people following the decisions on learner transport.

Item 7. Key challenges for 2006

- 7.1 Tony Sacco presented the paper which set out some of the key challenges facing the Council over the coming months and provided the context for discussion on how the Council can best support the Executive as the LSC moves towards its new structure.
- 7.2 Members were asked to discuss their views to determine the type and level of support that can be provided. It was hoped that by the September Council meeting a clearer way forward will have been determined. Key points noted during the discussions were:
- Learning Park – this is an exciting and major economic development opportunity, initiated by the Strategic Area Review (StAR) process. Council needs to identify how it is organised to best support the Executive.
 - StAR – noted as excellent work by the local office that cannot be ignored in continuing to inform strategic decisions and targeted intervention.
 - Not in education, employment or training (NEET) – agreed this area needed to be added as an important focus. This is a joint target between the LSC and Connexions and from 2008 will be a joint target between the LSC and the local authority.
 - Local strategic partnerships (LSPs) – to assist engagement between the local partnership team and key County level partnerships, it was suggested a meeting be held with the Chairs of the LSPs to discuss issues of mutual interest.

Action: Tony Sacco

Decision: Members received the report and supported the proposals on the key challenges. A meeting with LSP Chairs to be arranged.

Item 8. Distributed learning across Northumberland

- 8.1 Margaret Frostick presented the paper which set out the wider context and impact of distributed learning across Northumberland and provided information on the final outcomes of the el@nd project. It detailed the opportunities for further e-learning developments in Northumberland in the context of *Harnessing Technology*, the Department for Education and Skills

national e-learning strategy and the LSC's response to that document, *Provider for the Future*.

- 8.2 Veronica Dunn was asked for her comments. She responded by saying this is a key priority for Northumberland and the work and commitment needs to continue. Veronica expressed her thanks to the key partners and the project team involved in delivering el@nd, particularly Margaret Frostick.
- 8.3 Tony Sacco said he is planning to liaise with the key strategic partners involved in taking distributed learning forward to identify the next stages.
- 8.4 A member raised a comment about value for money and the funding involved to support the el@nd project in that e-learning is not necessarily the answer for all learning and this type of approach will not suit everyone.

Decision: Members received the report and supported the Executive in liaising with the key strategic partners to identify the next stages in taking distributed learning forward.

Item 9. Special Committee: Northumberland College

- 9.1 Margaret Frostick presented the paper which gave an update on the issues currently being considered by the Special Committee established to oversee LSC management action in respect of Northumberland College.
- 9.2 Following discussion, it was agreed relationships with the College have improved significantly over the past 6 to 9 months following the work of the Executive, but the LSC still needs to continue with the pressure and also support, as concern about the College remains.
- 9.3 The September meeting of the Special Committee will be a time to take stock and identify a way of moving forward with the newly-appointed Principal.
- 9.4 Linda Ions was asked to comment. She said that although the College is facing significant redundancies work is progressing to make improvements.

Decision: Members received the report.

Item 10. Audit Committee

- 10.1 Helen Beaton presented the paper which gave an update on the work of the Audit Committee.
- 10.2 J&J Training – the Audit Committee raised their concern about the lack of action regarding the recovery of outstanding funds. Since the Audit Committee meeting, there have been further discussions between LSC National Office and J&J Training where agreement was reached for J&J Training to pay the outstanding amount by instalments over the next 10 months.

Decision: Members received the report.

Item 11. Budget allocations for 2006-2007

- 11.1 Helen Beaton presented the paper which provided indicative budget allocations for 2006-2007.
- 11.2 Members were of the view they were not able to judge the impact for Northumberland as the budget allocations were very much work in progress.

11.3 LSC influence on Business Link funds was briefly discussed. It was agreed that a presentation on the status of Business Link would be an appropriate agenda item for the September Council meeting.

Action: Neville Hall/Nicola Cummings

Decision: Members received the report and agreed that a presentation on the status of Business Link would be an appropriate agenda item for the September Council meeting.

Item 12. Next meeting

12.1 The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, 20 September 2006.

Meeting chair	Jackie Axelby
Minute taker	Nicola Cummings
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