

Minutes



Leading learning and skills

Date 26 April 2006
Subject LSC Northumberland Council
Location LSC Northumberland
Time 16:00
LSC office Northumberland
Publication intent Internal

Present

Members

Jackie Axelby (Chair)	Jane Blackburn
Veronica Dunn	Mary Dunning
Mark Henderson	Linda Ions
Moira Rankin	Terry Robson
Richard Rutherford	Sue Wilson
Derek Wise	

Observers

Fred Foster	Neville Hall
Austin McNamara	

LSC staff

Helen Beaton	Margaret Frostick
Michael Gilbey	Dorothy Smith
Louise Woodman	Nicola Cummings

In attendance

Kevyn Smith, The KSA Partnership

Apologies

Kelvin Brennan	Robert Evans
Kevin Rowan	

Item 1. Welcome and apologies

- 1.1 Apologies were noted as above.
- 1.2 The Chair welcomed Fred Foster, Northumberland District Manager at Jobcentre Plus (JCP): Fred would in future attend the local Council meetings as JCPs observer representative; Dorothy Smith, Regional Director of Learning, Planning and Performance, deputising for Chris Roberts, Regional Director to present the recently published further education White Paper; and Michael Gilbey, Interim Local Director for the Northumberland local office.

Item 2. Minutes of the last meeting

- 2.1 The minutes of the last meeting held on 15 February 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.

3.2 *Minute 6.3, Regional Capital Strategy –*

Decision: it was agreed a revised version would be circulated as part of an update to be given at the June Council meeting.

Action: Michael Gilbey/Nicola Cummings

3.3 *Minute 12.2, 2006 Council Away day –*

Decision: it was agreed the date would remain as Thursday 7 December.

Item 4. Comments from the Chair

4.1 The Chair informed members that the regional Chairs had now been confirmed and James Ramsbotham would continue as Chair for the North East.

4.2 There had been a Special Meeting of the Regional Board in February to consider the local annual plans for the region. All local plans were now approved.

4.3 A routine Regional Board meeting took place in March. Items included a presentation and discussion on the future role of Academies led by the national lead; it was agreed a regional Council members event would be held on 27 September at Auckland Castle (Nicola Cummings to circulate a letter to local members); the establishment of Regional Audit Committees following the correspondence from National Office regarding the regionalisation of Committees.

4.4 The Chair had attended a Northumberland Strategic Partnership Board (NSP) meeting on 9 February where they discussed local area agreements (LAA). A meeting of the NSP Board was also held earlier today where governance of LAAs and the Community Strategy was discussed.

4.5 Members' attention was drawn to the letter from the local office regarding Council member review sessions and in particular the May event. Members were asked to complete and return the pre-questionnaire as agreed at the last Council meeting.

4.6 There was a FACT Board meeting on 2 March and Linda Ions deputised for the Chair. The 'Having a Life' Northumberland Children and Young People Plan for 2006-2009 was agreed at the meeting and incorporated the amendments that members agreed at the Council meeting on 15 February.

Item 5. Executive Update

5.1 Michael Gilbey introduced the paper which gave an update on internal and external developments of relevance to the Council.

5.2 Following the update given on Theme 7, members expressed concern that communication to members through official channels seemed to be limited. Dorothy Smith added to the update on the subject of staffing saying Band 4 appointments would be notified to candidates on Friday 28 April and Band 3

interviews would commence week commencing 8 May. It was expected by mid June that sufficient post holders would be in place to begin the transition.

- 5.3 Members' attention was drawn to the Transition Plan and it was agreed a revised version would be circulated as and when the plan is updated to ensure members are kept fully updated with the Agenda for Change process.

Action: Executive

- 5.4 Members expressed their substantial concern about the lack of clarity about the future role of the local Council and asked for assurances about the level of authority and influence. Members further requested that a message be taken to the local office staff expressing their support for everyone during this difficult process.

Action: Executive

(Terry Robson left the meeting)

- 5.5 A discussion took place regarding Audit Committees following a letter sent from National Office to local Chairs and Audit Committee Chairs, letting them know that a Regional Audit Committee would be established replacing local Audit Committees. This had been discussed at the recent Regional Board where it was agreed that local offices would continue to operate with their local Audit Committees until terms of reference for the Regional Audit Committee are issued. Members also noted that the existing Audit Committee had a role wider than the formal audit role.

Decision: Members received the paper and it was agreed the Transition Plan would be copied to members as and when it is updated, information be sought about the level of authority and influence of Councils, the executive to send a message to staff from members expressing their support.

Item 6. Stakeholder Survey

- 6.1 Kevyn Smith of the KSA Partnership presented members with the key findings of the Stakeholder Survey commissioned by LSC Northumberland.
- 6.2 One area for improvement the survey identified was partnership working and understanding other partners' agendas, specifically Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). Members discussed how the LSC's presence would be assured within the partnership structure following the establishment of the new partnership teams: this presented a threat and an opportunity. Attention was also drawn to the Natural Communities work under way, aimed at identifying the most appropriate level for engagement in respect of any given issue. Members agreed that this was an area for careful consideration. This would therefore be taken forward at the Council Member review session on 11 May.

Decision: Members received the paper and it was agreed the Stakeholder Survey in general, but specifically the LSP issue, would be discussed at the Council Member Review Session on 11 May. In addition, a copy of the survey results and details of the discussion be forwarded to the Regional Director.

Action: Executive

Item 7. White Paper – Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances

- 7.1 Dorothy Smith, Regional Director of Learning, Planning and Performance presented the key areas of the recently published White Paper.
- 7.2 The White Paper includes the Government's response to Sir Andrew Foster's report on the future role of further education (FE) colleges, and represents a major programme of reform for FE. It includes provisions to drive up the quality of teaching, to reward colleges for success and to make the sector more responsive to the skills needs of individuals and employers.

(Richard Rutherford left the meeting)

Item 8. Learner Transport

- 8.1 Louise Woodman introduced the paper which informed the Council of the two key changes proposed for the arrangement of learner transport in Northumberland. They relate to travel to denominational schools, and post 16 transport.
- 8.2 A discussion took place and members agreed that Northumberland has substantially different travel issues to other areas and that a way forward was needed which would take consideration of these issues to retain learners in the county.

Action: Executive

Decision: Members received the paper and agreed the executive would discuss and suggest a workable way forward.

(Mark Henderson left the meeting)

Item 9. Information Advice and Guidance in Northumberland

- 9.1 Louise Woodman introduced the paper which gave an update on the delivery of information advice and guidance (IAG) in Northumberland following the decision by Develop, the previous IAG managing agent, to make its IAG staff redundant on 31 March 2006.

Decision: Members received the paper.

Item 10. Distributed learning across Northumberland

- 10.1 Margaret Frostick introduced the paper which informed the Council of the wider context and impact of distributed learning across Northumberland and provided information on the final evaluation of the el@nd project which had been a contributing element in the County's e-learning infrastructure.
- 10.2 In order to give this area more prominence, it was agreed to take this forward to the June Council meeting and the Chair requested further facts and figures in a more strategic context and identification of opportunities and benefits of distributed learning.

Action: Margaret Frostick/Nicola Cummings

Decision: Members received the paper but it was agreed this item would be taken to the June Council meeting to allow further discussion in the light of the additional information which would then be available.

Item 11. Completion of TEC Legacy Fund and proposals for managing 2006/2007 Local Intervention and Development Fund

11.1 Margaret Frostick introduced this paper which gave details of TEC Legacy Fund actual expenditure up to 28 February 2006 and the actions that have been put in place to carry forward the residual elements of the funds. The paper also included a proposal to manage the 2006-2007 Local Intervention and Development Fund (LIDF) to ensure that the funding which has been slipped from TEC Legacy and which is ring-fenced for use in Northumberland, will be efficiently and effectively managed and monitored. Michael Gilbey explained that he proposed to review the situation and that it was possible that as a result the situation might alter.

Decision: Members received and endorsed the paper and it was agreed Council Member involvement would continue for the management and monitoring of 2006-2007 LIDF in view of the TEC Legacy component.

Action: Executive

(Louise Woodman left the meeting)

Item 12. Local Office Performance Review

12.1 Michael Gilbey introduced this paper which provided information on the LSC Northumberland local office performance review.

12.2 Members noted the consistency in performance and expressed their congratulations to staff especially with the added difficulties of Agenda for Change.

Decision: Members received the paper.

Item 13. Special Committee: Northumberland College

13.1 Margaret Frostick introduced this paper which provided an update on the issues currently being considered by the Special Committee established to oversee LSC management action in respect of Northumberland College

13.2 Concern was again expressed that the College's performance in meeting agreed deadlines was poor and therefore the local LSC needed to maintain high level consistent pressure. Serious concern was expressed at the poor results shown in the Ofsted report.

13.3 The Chair asked Linda Ions if she would like to make any comments. Before responding, Linda declared an interest as she is a Northumberland College Governor and Chair of the College Audit Committee. Clarification was given regarding the Regional LSC Provider and Financial Assurance (PFA) governance and management audit of the College, that had highlighted the criminal records bureau checking as an area for development. The College responded to PFA and it was agreed this area be taken out of the report, however PFA had not communicated this to the local LSC. An update was given on the recruitment of the College Principal: the recruitment and interview process was being managed by Tribal. The job was to be advertised on 28 April with interviews to take place 25/26 May and Linda understood the Chair of the local LSC would be invited to take part in the interview process.

Decision: Members accepted the paper and endorsed their support to the executive in continuing its role to work with the College to address weaknesses.

Item 14. Audit Committee

14.1 This paper provided Council with an update on the work of the Audit Committee.

Decision: Members received the paper.

Item 15. Management Accounts

15.1 This paper gave the Council the accounts financial information for the first eleven months of the financial year 2005-2006.

Decision: Members received the paper.

Item 16. Date of Next Meeting

16.1 The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, 14 June 2006.

Meeting chair	Jackie Axelby
Minute taker	Nicola Cummings
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