

# Minutes



Leading learning and skills

## Minutes of meeting

**Date** 16 February 2005  
**Subject** Council Meeting  
**Location** Meeting Room  
**Time** 16.00  
**LSC office** Northumberland  
**Publication intent** Internal

## Present

### Council Members:

Jackie Axelby (Chair)  
Susan Bickerton  
Kelvin Brennan  
Tim Capron  
Robert Evans  
Linda Ions  
Moiria Rankin  
Terry Robson  
Kevin Rowan  
Richard Rutherford

Derek Wise

### Observers

Patrick Chapman  
Brenda Grey  
Neville Hall  
Austin McNamara

## In attendance

Keith Woods, Northumberland County Council (agenda item 7)

## LSC staff

Helen Beaton  
Susan Easton  
Margaret Frostick  
Ian Jones  
Ray Malecki  
Karen Marshall  
Tina Raw  
Anne Wilson

## Apologies

Apologies had been received from:

Jane Blackburn  
Veronica Dunn  
Mark Henderson  
Sue Wilson

## **Item 1. Welcome and introductions**

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed members to the meeting. She also welcomed Kelvin Brennan to his first Council meeting and Keith Woods, Director of Schools and Lifelong Learning at Northumberland County Council in attendance for agenda item 7.
- 1.2 She gave the Council's best wishes to Patrick Chapman on his return after his illness and Patrick thanked members for their Get Well card and good wishes.
- 1.3 Apologies had been received from Jane Blackburn, Veronica Dunn, Mark Henderson and Sue Wilson.

## **Item 2. Minutes of last meeting**

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2004 were accepted as a true record.

## **Item 3. Matters arising**

- 3.1 Members attention was drawn to the action notes from the last meeting which had been updated to show the current status of each action. All matters had either been carried out or were in hand.
- 3.2 **Minute 10.3** – Kevin Rowan informed members that the RDA had set up a regional Worklessness Group which at present does not have any feed in from LSC.
- 3.3 **Minute 15.2** – Tim Capron informed members that the College had deferred for the time being the appointment of a project manager.

## **Item 4. Comments from the Chair**

- 4.1 The Chair updated members on:

- **NSP** – the NSP Board meeting was held on 9 December 2004. This was the first that she had attended. There were two key items discussed: Progress of the Workforce Development Strategy and a proposal from the Partnership Development Working Group in respect of a different form of governance for NSP. There would be more discussion after the March meeting.
- **LSC Regional Management Board** – a meeting of the LSC Regional Management Board was held on 21 January. James Rowbotham (Chair of LSC County Durham) had been appointed Chair of the Board. The meeting had discussed the terms of reference of the Board and these would be circulated to Council members when finalised. Also discussed was the 'signing off' of the annual plans.

**Decision:** Terms of reference of the Regional Management Board to be circulated to members once finalised.

**Action: Tina Raw/Anne Wilson**

- **LSC Regional Event for Council Members** – this had been arranged for 7 March and members and observers should have received invitations. The Executive Director was assisting in the design of the programme for the day.
- **DfES/GONE Dinner** – the Chair had attended a dinner on 25 January, hosted by Michael Stephenson and Jonathan Blackie to discuss the 5 Year Strategy.
- **Adult Information, Advice and Guidance** – the Chair had attended on behalf of the LSC a one-day event for the Next Step Initiative which had been held in the shopping centre in Cramlington. This consisted of display boards and a 'wheel of fortune'.

## **Item 5. Executive Director's Update (NLSC 01/2005)**

- 5.1 The Executive Director introduced the report which included updates on the following:
- Families and Children's Trust (FACT)
  - Regional Equality and Diversity Group
  - Freedom of Information Act
  - Branding
  - Local Annual Statement of Priorities
  - Northumberland Learning Park at Ashington.
- 5.2 **Regional Equality and Diversity Group** - at the last meeting members queried whether the North East Regional Equality and Diversity Steering Group and the proposed LSC Equality and Diversity Group were to address the same issues. However the LSC group would exclusively focus on learning and skills.
- 5.3 Members agreed to give their support to this group and noted that the Council may be asked, sometime in the future, for a 'champion'.
- Decision:** Members agreed to give their support to the LSC Equality and Diversity Group
- 5.4 **LSC Brand** – members' attention was drawn to paragraph 21 which included the decision of the National Management Team that local offices should no longer produce their own newsletters/magazines and that we should move to producing a regional one.
- 5.5 Members discussed this issue in detail and some were disappointed with this decision. It was hoped that when a regional newsletter was produced that there could be a separate section for each local office.
- 5.6 It was also suggested that LSC Northumberland should use the opportunity of publicity in partners newsletters (for example Northumberland Strategic Partnership (NSP) and Connexions.
- 5.7 **Northumberland Learning Park at Ashington** – in view of the fact that the County Council was not in the early round for Capital Funding the vision for the Learning Park has had to be revisited to see how much of the vision could be achieved, in particular due to the fact that the LSC Capital Money had been ringfenced for nine months.
- 5.8 The revised plan was to still work towards achieving the full vision, but to take a phased approach. The initial phase would be to build the 'College Plus'.
- 5.9 In answer to a question from a member in respect of One NorthEast agreeing to provide funding for the infrastructure of the Learning Park, the Executive Director responded that this would not be requested until a later date.
- 5.10 Tim Capron, Principal of Northumberland College, informed members that his Governing Body had met last week and talked at length about the Learning Park. A presentation had been given by Alastair Grindlay (LSC Property Adviser). The Governing Body had decided that the relocation to the learning park site and new build would be pursued. The college had now started to commit large sums of money to allow the proposal to move forward.
- 5.11 The Chair commented that she was very pleased to hear that the Governors had made such a positive commitment.

## **Item 6. DfES 5 Year Strategy: Children Act 2004 (NLSC 02/2005)**

- 6.1 Patrick Chapman, Director: Children and Young People, Government Office for the North East, introduced the report which provided information about the Children Act 2004 as it affects the LSC and detailed the timeline for implementation and identified issues for further consideration.
- 6.2 He outlined the five outcomes endorsed by the Green Paper consultation and gave details of local government reshaping in respect of the Change for Children which involved the creation of a statutory Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP).
- 6.3 Under the Children Act 2004 the LSC will have a Duty to Co-operate with the CYPP although at the moment no guidance has yet been issued.
- 6.4 Partnership working is embedded in the Act and the LSC would need to work closely with the relevant organisations to ensure they are fully engaged with the implementation of the Act to fulfil its statutory duty.
- 6.5 Northumberland County Council have already appointed a Director of Children's Services, Trevor Doughty, and it was agreed that he be invited to a future Council meeting and that the senior management team should prepare a briefing note of questions in advance of the meeting to enable a substantial debate to take place.
- Decision:** Trevor Doughty be invited to the next Council meeting
- Decision:** The Executive Team prepare briefing note of questions
- Action: Executive Director and Team**
- 6.6 The County Council also have in place a Families and Children's Trust (FACT) Board and Partnership (details of which are included in the Executive Directors Update agenda item 5).
- 6.7 Members discussed fully the implications of the Act, in particular:
- Whether the FACT would address the lack of regulations in the employment of children
  - No specific reference to employment laws and regulations
  - Possible implications in the two-tier/three-tier debate
  - The requirements of staff development to implement the Act.
- 6.8 It was agreed that this was a rapidly changing landscape and that it would be interesting to see the final details.
- 6.9 Members received the report.

## **Item 7. Putting the Learner First Update (NLSC 03/2005)**

- 7.1 The Chair suggested to members that although Agenda Item 7 and Agenda Item 8 were separate items there was a connection across the two and that there could be an advantage in them being debated together.
- 7.2 Keith Woods, Director of Schools and Lifelong Learning at Northumberland County Council introduced the report and gave a presentation which detailed the Stage One Consultation on *Putting the Learner First*, Northumberland County Council's (NCC) strategic plan for provision of education in Northumberland.
- 7.2 The presentation included:
- The consultation process

- Strategic Plan
- Case for Change
- Education Case
- Models for Secondary Education
- Capital implications
- Independent Evaluation
- Overall conclusion
- Key Recommendations
- What would happen next
- Implementation Criteria
- Consultation and Implementation
- Conclusion.

7.3 Consultation on Stage 1 would be complete by the end of February and the April meeting of the County Council would make the critical decision on how it wants to move forward. The County Council accepted that it must do something for the provision of education in Northumberland and more details would be available after April once the decision was made.

7.4 The following issues were raised with Keith:

- The Capital pot of £10m for schools – does this figure include maintenance?
- Whether a change of government after the election would affect the outcome?
- The decision to build a new school at Haydon Bridge and the distance children from the North Tyne Valley have to travel
- The possibility of Northumberland having to keep a system that no longer meets childrens needs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- The number of spare school places
- Pattern of provision nationally – only two other authorities have the same 3-tier system as Northumberland with a further 20 plus with a mixed system
- Changes to middle schools will impact on first schools but was not included in the presentation
- The possibility of 'Academies'.

7.5 At this point the Chair suggested that members should consider Agenda Item 8 bearing in mind the discussions above.

### **Item 8. The Options for Change Arising from Strategic Area Review (NLSC 04/2005)**

8.1 Ian Jones introduced the report which provided an overview of the options for change arising from the Northumberland Strategic Area Review (StAR) that will be consulted upon until the end of March 2005.

8.2 This was a crucial stage of the StAR process and it was important to gain buy-in from stakeholders to certain proposals which if adopted would bring about some bold changes to the pattern of learning provision across the County.

8.3 If members were happy to agree for the document to go forward for consultation an update paper would be brought to the April Council meeting.

8.4 Richard Rutherford, who was Chair of the StAR Steering Group, felt that it was a very interesting document, thoughts had been put down and had been

comprehensively discussed. He thanked Ian and Tina and the team for their work in processing the review. The report was a 'snap shot' as of now but was not written in stone.

- 8.5 A member queried the table in paragraph 21 to the Annex in that he was disappointed that there was no proposed lead for the West Tyne district and the omission of the Tynedale Virtual College. This was because Tynedale Virtual College would be contributing to a wide range of vocational areas.
- 8.6 It was agreed that consideration would be given to the headings in the table to make sure we give out the message that the 'lead location' would access contributions from other areas.

**Decision:** Ian Jones to consider changing the headings of the table in paragraph 21 to the Annex

**Action: Ian Jones**

- 8.7 A member pointed out that the landscape in which the LSC operates had changed with the focus heavily on provision, StAR reviews in other LSCs and the Regional Skills Partnership and how that would complement what was happening at a regional level. He also queried where 'demand led' learning lay in StAR.
- 8.8 Richard Rutherford explained that the options set out were entirely 'demand-led' – as they stemmed from a thorough review of demand. Ian Jones agreed to add a paragraph clarifying this.

**Decision:** Ian Jones to add a paragraph to the document on demand-led

**Action: Ian Jones**

- 8.9 A member commented that from a high school perspective he was very pleased with the sensitive and skilled way the LSC had worked with the high schools which had engendered a spirit of goodwill and collaboration and already new innovation had been seen. He requested that the Executive Director let all staff have this message.

**Decision:** The Executive Director to feedback comments to all staff

**Action: Executive Director**

- 8.10 Concern was expressed about boundaries and working across LSC boundaries. Members were informed that this had been discussed at a regional level and this would be included in the regional publication on the collective outcomes of the StAR and set out as a way forward. Michael Gilbey, Regional Planning and Performance Director, would act as a gatekeeper for the region.
- 8.11 The Chair commented that at the regional conference on 7 March each LSC would be showcasing an area of work and Northumberland had been asked to showcase StAR.
- 8.12 Tim Capron found the options for change very useful but requested that careful thought be given to the wording in the options, in particular the word 'would'.

**Decision:** Further thought to be given to the wording of options

**Action: Ian Jones**

- 8.13 The Chair then drew members' attention to the options outlined in paragraph 7 to the annex and suggested that these be aligned with Keith's presentation on *Putting the Learner First*.
- 8.14 The Chair stated that the LSC wished to move forward together with the County Council on these issues and Keith confirmed that it was recognised that there was no point in the County Council and LSC not doing this.

- 8.15 The Chair drew members' attention to paragraph 16 of the *Putting the Learner First Update*, which outlined issues the Council may wish to consider. These were discussed in detail and are included below.
- 8.16 Members discussed how the County Council's decision on the 2 or 3 tier system would affect the achievement of young people and whether young people in the 11-16 age group would have access to the same opportunities.
- 8.17 Concern was expressed at the planning timescales, particularly in respect of the Northumberland Learning Park at Ashington. This was due to the County Council not being included in the early Capital round and therefore the County Council were not able to work at the same pace as the college.
- 8.18 The Chair informed members that the LSC position needs to be that we want to ensure as much harmony in the planning timescales and funding as possible.
- 8.19 The Executive Director commented on the proposed models for Ashington High School and Hirst High School in that one of the options was contrary to the vision of the Learning Park and asked if Keith could give assurances we could still deliver on the Learning Park site, not just the college. She asked if Keith could give some assurance that the County Council were committed to the full vision of the Learning Park.
- 8.20 Keith gave assurances that the County Council had a continued commitment to get the best possible outcome towards achieving the benefits of the Learning Park.
- 8.21 A member suggested that maybe in developing the Children's Trust we could find a more integrated solution to some of the issues faced by Northumberland County Council and the LSC.
- 8.22 It was clear that the LSC, County Council and College have a shared vision for the learning park site. It was also clear that the LSC needed to go on record with its views on the County Council's consultation. It was recognised that there might be models that could affect some of the LSC's StAR options.
- 8.23 It was felt that the LSC should be more bold and concentrate more on the best way forward for the LSC vision first and foremost.
- 8.24 Tim Capron confirmed that the County Council and College were committed to work together towards the vision although at the moment there were difficulties with the practicalities.
- 8.25 The possible impact of the implications of the closure of schools in respect of Adult and Community Learning was raised and Keith responded that potentially there could be some implications should some venues close. However details would only be known once the outcome of the consultation had been agreed. He assured members that any negative impact would be addressed.
- 8.26 The Chair asked the Executive Director to draft a suitable press statement which would give the Council's stance on the County Council's proposals. The statement to include the following:
- The LSC welcomed the opportunity provided by the County Council to comment as part of their Stage One Consultation.
  - That in determining our position, we have been particularly keen to consider any potential impact that the County Council's proposals to move to a two-tier education system may have on the learning experience of young people from the age of 14, the age from which we have duties and responsibilities as a Council.
  - To note that we also have an interest in the manner of provision prior to the age of 14 in view of its potential implications post 14.

- The LSC agreed wholeheartedly with the County Council's view that 'to do nothing is not an option'.
- In the course of discussions it became clear that the LSC still has some issues relating to specific localities within the County.
- The LSC welcomed the reassurance and commitment from the County Council to continue to work closely with the LSC in developing the specific proposals on a locality by locality basis as part of the timetable set out by the County Council.
- Members were assured that the LSC would have further opportunity to comment at a later stage as a result of their membership of the Schools Organisation Committee.
- Therefore on balance, taking into account the views expressed above in relation to the locality issues, the LSC has concluded that there is more to be gained than not in supporting the two-tier system.

**Decision:** The Executive Director to draft a press statement outlining the Council's stance in respect of the County Council's proposal to move to a two-tier education system.

**Action: Executive Director**

- 8.27 In respect of the Options for Change Arising from Strategic Area Review members agreed that the document be sent out subject to the changes suggested above and that an update paper be brought to the April Council meeting.

**Decision:** The Options for Change document to be sent out for consultation and an update paper be brought to the April Council meeting.

**Action: Ian Jones**

### **Item 9. Local Annual Plan (NLSC 05/2005)**

- 9.1 Helen Beaton presented the report which set out the proposed business plan for the local office 2005/06. It was produced using a national template that allowed for local priorities to be included as well as national and regional items. Local office performance would be measured against the activities set out in this plan.
- 9.2 She pointed out that there had been two further drafts since the Council papers had been sent out and that further amendments would be made before it was sent to national office.
- 9.3 A member queried how budget priorities were decided and whether resources were flexible. Helen responded that now budgets were at regional level they could be vired.
- 9.4 Concern was expressed at the low payment to modern apprentices, which was more a placement allowance than a wage, and it was requested that this concern be fed back to national office. However it was pointed out that national regulations governed the payment to apprentices. It was agreed that Helen should talk to Moira Rankin and Kevin Rowan re this issue.

**Decision:** Helen Beaton to discuss modern apprentice payments with Moira Rankin and Kevin Rowan and feedback to national office.

**Action: Helen Beaton**

- 9.5 The representative from the Government Office welcomed the plan, in particular the degree of partnership and collaboration, especially in respect of Childrens Welfare and the work with the Tynedale Sure Start.

9.6 Members accepted the report and agreed to delegate final approval of the plan to the Executive Director, but that any substantial changes should be discussed with the Chair.

**Decision:** The Executive Director to give final approval of the plan but any substantial changes to be discussed with the Chair.

**Action: Executive Director**

### **Item 10. Workforce Development Strategy Update (NLSC 06/2005)**

10.1 The Chair presented the report which provided an update on the development of the County Workforce Development Strategy and the creation of the associated 'employer promise' and 'learner promise'.

10.2 The sub-group had now met four times and the action plan was still a working draft with more work to be done.

10.3 The Chair explained that whilst the report was brief members should not underestimate the time and effort of partnership working that had gone into it. Northumberland were considered to be in the vanguard of this type of development.

10.4 Once the action plan was completed the hard work would then start. There was a significant amount of work to be communicated effectively in the partner organisations.

10.5 The aim was to present the strategic document at the Northumberland Strategic Partnership (NSP) Board meeting at the beginning of March with the full document to be presented at the NSP Standing Conference in May.

10.6 Terry Robson, the Council's Workforce Development Champion, wholeheartedly welcomed the clear and concise document but questioned:

- Which of the five organisations would lead? – Answer - LSC
- Who would have overall responsibility? – Answer - *Executive Director and Ian Jones*
- What mechanism would be in place should one partner fail to deliver? Answer - *NSP Board*

10.7 Once the sub-group closed an operational group led by the Executive Director would be convened. This group would monitor and review the action plan.

10.8 It was commented that the opening times of Jobcentre Plus and Connexions were currently varied, however the Chief Executive of Connexions informed members that he was aware of this issue and was currently in dialogue with Jobcentre Plus to address the opening hours and location of offices with the possibility of co-location of services.

10.9 The final version of the Action Plan would be brought to the Council meeting in April.

**Decision:** Final version of the Action Plan to be brought to the Council meeting in April

**Action: Executive Director/Tina Raw**

10.10 Members received the report.

### **Item 11. Provider Performance (NLSC 07/2005)**

11.1 Margaret Frostick introduced the report which provided Council with an update on progress towards implementing the new arrangements for monitoring provider performance within the LSC to ensure the future purchase of quality provision.

- 11.2 It was requested in the report that Council members consider the role of one or more Council members in the new process.
- 11.3 This was discussed in detail stressing that members should be involved in the governance of the process rather than the management.
- 11.4 Richard Rutherford, Chair of the Audit Committee, felt that this should be included in the work of the Audit Committee and it was agreed that this would be taken forward.  
**Decision:** Richard Rutherford/Susan Easton to take this to the Audit Committee  
**Action:** Richard Rutherford/Susan Easton
- 11.5 Members accepted the report.

## **Item 12. LSC Northumberland Performance (NLSC 08/2005)**

- 12.1 The Executive Director introduced the report which provided an update on progress towards LSC Northumberland's targets and gave an update against the Council's self-assessment health check action plan developed from the self-assessment exercise.

### **Progress Towards LSC Northumberland Targets**

- 12.2 This review follows on from the formal review of performance by the Regional Director and his team in October 2004. The senior management team found it so valuable that they agreed to review performance in January 2005. The next formal review of performance would be in April 2005.
- 12.3 The Executive Director informed members that the outcomes for 2004/05 were better than those in 2003/04.
- 12.4 Members noted the content of the report and agreed that updates should be presented to Council quarterly or six monthly as appropriate.

### **Local Council Progress Against Action Plan**

- 12.5 The Chair drew members attention to the Action Plan which had been updated following the Council meeting in June 2004. Members would note that considerable progress on the plan had been made.
- 12.6 Specific areas outstanding were discussed:

- (1.8) devise an effective induction process for new members – Kelvin Brennan and Jane Blackburn as new members would be the first to take part in the proposed induction process
- (1.8) preparation of a glossary of terms
- (2.13) the Chair to discuss with members their contribution and development needs – *it was agreed that the Chair would reserve time before each Council meeting to meet with members. Tina Raw to co-ordinate.*

**Decision:** Tina Raw to arrange meetings between Chair and members

**Action:** Tina Raw

- (3.14) hold workshops on relevant issues

## **Annex B – Proposed Responsibilities for Council Members**

- 12.7 Following the December workshop at Dissington Hall which identified the key skills of Council members a table of areas of responsibilities for each Council member was drawn up.
- 12.8 Members were invited to consider the table at Annex B and agree the allocation of responsibilities.

**Decision:** Members agreed with the responsibilities allocated.

12.9 Four Council Members had also been approached to take a lead in respect of the four planning areas as detailed at Agenda Item 7 *Putting the Learning First Update*. Those suggested were:

- North – Robert Evans
- Central – Linda Ions
- West – Terry Robson
- South East – Moira Rankin.

**Decision:** The four leads were agreed

12.10 The TEC Legacy Committee should consist of three Council members however, with the retirement of a Council member it is proposed that Sue Wilson be appointed to the Committee.

**Decision:** Sue Wilson to join the TEC Legacy Committee

12.11 A member requested that a list be prepared for Council members giving details of the roles and responsibilities of the senior managers in the LSC.

**Decision:** A list be produced outlining the responsibilities of the senior managers in LSC Northumberland.

**Action: Executive Director/Tina Raw**

12.12 The Chair proposed that a further update be brought to the Council later in the year following work on the issues identified at paragraph 23 of the report. The aim was to have nothing left to do on the action plan.

**Decision:** An further update to be brought to Council later in the year

**Action: Tina Raw**

12.13 Members noted and accepted the report.

### **Item 13. Continuity of the [el@nd](#) Project (NLSC 09/2005)**

13.1 Due to the lateness of the meeting and in Veronica Dunn's absence, it was agreed that this report should be deferred until the April Council meeting.

**Decision:** This item be deferred to the April meeting

**Action: Tina Raw**

### **Item 14. Management Accounts for the Period Ended December 2004 (NLSC 10/2005)**

14.1 Susan Easton presented the management accounts for the period ended December 2004 and financial information for the first nine months of the financial year 2004/05.

14.2 She drew members attention to the following items in the report:

- Para 6 – reference E2E – detailed variance to date was £126,000. as there had been greater take up than expected – Northumberland had since been allocated an additional £190,000 to cover this. Numbers in learning had gone up massively in Northumberland College which may be an issue with regards to current level of funding
- Para 9 - Regional Skills Fund – this budget had now been moved to LSC Tyne and Wear
- Para 11 – LIDF- as agreed with Council £43,000 had now been transferred to ESF

- Para 13 – TEC Legacy – the Legacy Committee met last Friday and all funds have been allocated
- Para 16 – Administration – the underspend on this budget has occurred because of staff vacancies. It is intended to utilise this to upgrade the furniture in the office
- Para 17 Other Initiatives – ESF Co-financing – Tenders for the uncommitted element of the existing 2004 to 2006 allocation had been sent out this week.

14.3 In response to a query from a Council member relating to the contracting of ESF Susan confirmed that procedures had significantly improved and were now in place for monitoring/checking.

14.4 Members accepted the report.

### **Item 15. Verbal Updates from Observers**

15.1 The observer for Jobcentre Plus thanked the LSC for their continuing support on the Ellington Colliery Task Group.

### **Item 16. Any Other Business**

16.1 There was no other business to discuss.

### **Item 17. Date of Next Meeting**

17.1 The next meeting of the Council will take place on 20 April 2005.

#### **Publication no.**

**Meeting chair** Jackie Axelby

**Minute taker** Anne Wilson

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