

Minutes



Leading learning and skills

Date 24 September 2009
Subject Regional Council
Location Wynyard Park House
Time 16:00
LSC office North East Region
Publication intent PUBLIC DOCUMENT

Present James Ramsbotham, David Barker, David Butler, Mary Dunning, Graham Henderson, Sharon Oliver, Sarah Robinson, Dorothy Smith, Paul Watson, Ashley Winter, Oliver Wood.

In attendance Sue Houston - Government Office NE
Jan Thirlaway - Job Centre Plus

LSC staff Michael Johnston, Gillian Miller, John Smith, John Wayman, Ken Coulson, Petrina Lynn, David Johnson

Apologies Apologies have been received from:
Graham Randell, Kevin Rowan, Kate Welch

Item 1. Declaration of Interest

- 1.1 The Chairman drew attention to the register of interests printed on the agenda and reminded members of the opportunity to declare a potential conflict of interest in any business under discussion.
- 1.2 Mary Dunning recorded her recent appointment as Chair of Age Concern NE.

Item 2. Resignation of Council Member

- 2.1 The Chairman reported that:
 - Sharon Oliver had submitted a letter of resignation as a Council member with effect from 1 October 2009; she was moving out of the region to pursue her career.
 - Sarah Robinson had also indicated her intention to resign from the Council having secured a new position outside of the region.
- 2.2 The Chairman recorded his appreciation to both members for their work on behalf of the Council, wishing them every success in their future careers.

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Item 3. Chairman's Remarks

- 3.1 The Chairman had attended a Regional Council Chairs review meeting with Chris Banks. Over the next six months the Council was to focus on ensuring that delivery met the needs of people in the region as the full time staff moved into new organisations; not to become embroiled in the transition.
- 3.2 Regional Chairs continued to meet regularly. Each Chair was asked to identify their top three regional issues for discussion at each meeting. In future those issues would be fed into national Council. Arrangements would be made to share the list of NE issues with members.

Action: D Smith

Item 4. Minutes

- 4.1 Minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Item 5. Regional Skills Capital Development Fund

- 5.1 Submitted: Paper by Petrina Lynn reporting progress made in assessing applications to the new Regional Skills Capital Development Fund.
- 5.2 It was explained that this fund was a result of a DIUS policy to provide access to capital funding for non college providers. Over £2.5 m had been allocated to the region but in the light of the economic situation it was essential that successful bidders were able to demonstrate a strong and robust case to impact on upskilling. Accordingly, proposals had been subjected to a very rigorous assessment process, which included an element of national moderation to ensure standardisation of approach.
- 5.3 There had been 24 initial expressions of interest. The detailed assessment process outlined in the paper had resulted in a recommendation that 8 projects be supported and that 4 projects be rejected. A meeting had taken place with David Butler, as Chair of Regional Capital Committee to go through each proposal in detail.
- 5.4 Subject to Council support, recommendations would then go to national Capital Committee and Council, for final decision. BIS were also involved in the process nationally and would express a view as to whether they supported the bids.
- 5.5 In respect of those projects recommended for approval:
R09-014NE: the outcome of a PFA investigation was awaited
R09-015NE: revised project cost and cost breakdown was awaited
- 5.6 In response to members' questions:
 - The LSC was buying an asset and there was provision in the contract to ensure that it was used for the purpose intended. This was not linked to outputs. There were checks to ensure the financial robustness of the organisation.
 - Grant support was at 50%
 - It was confirmed that the recommended TTE proposal was for a grant of £100k towards the £200k cost of the Diploma Centre project.

- The audit team had reviewed all applications.

Decision: That

- a. David Butler be authorised to exercise the Chairman's delegated authority, in his capacity as Chair of Regional Capital Committee to determine whether the projects referred to in paragraph 5.5 should continue to be recommended once the required information was provided;
- b. Subject to a. above, the recommendations for grant approval, set out in the paper, be supported, and submitted to national Capital Committee for approval;
- c. Arrangements be made to brief Ashley Winter on the proposals prior to National Capital Committee.

Action: P Lynn

Item 6. 16-18 Apprenticeships and Department of Works and Pensions/Job Centre Plus strategies to assist those made redundant/subsidised wage payments

6.1 John Wayman reported:

- All age apprentice starts in 2008/09 were 13,165 9(target 11,000)
- All age apprentice completions 6950 (target 4999)
- 16-18 apprentice completions 3420 (target 3063)
- 16-18 starts 5912 / target 7250 (already an extremely stretching target) Next year's target of 8667 required a 45% improvement to meet the region's proportion of a national target; 682 needed to come from the public sector. A revised counting methodology would record all apprentices trained in the region, adding in those trained via the national employer service.
- Programme-led Apprenticeships: a Ministerial decision was awaited on whether to allow counting of non-employed starts with an employer.
- Economy: there were signs that the negative affect on apprenticeships was beginning to lessen nationally. A pilot incentive package to encourage employers to take on apprentices had been successfully trialled in Torbay.
- A support package to get apprentices made redundant back into employment had been re-tendered and two bids were currently being evaluated.
- The NAS team in the NE was now involved in a wide range of activity.
- NAS was working closely with local authorities in the region and three had announced that they were to take on significant numbers of apprentices.

6.2 In response to members questions:

- It was confirmed that there was a positive relationship between Connexions and NAS. Work was still needed so that schools ensured

equitable access to information so that an apprenticeship was seen as a route to a career.

- It continued to be an issue that demand from learners outstripped demand from employers.
- The online vacancy management system was working well for those who used it. There was a need to ensure that all providers engaged and valued using it.

6.3 Jan Thirlaway reported on the Jobcentre Plus response to the unemployed, particularly those in the 18-24 age group:-

- Whilst growth in unemployment had now slowed considerably there had been an overall increase of 60% in a year. There were 85,300 on job seekers allowance in the NE. In the same year job vacancies had reduced by 30%. The unemployment rate was 9.4%. JC+ had introduced the full range of new Government offers to support the unemployed - the full effect of this had not yet been seen.
- 18-24 unemployment in the region had increased by 50% in a year (67% nationally). County Durham and Sunderland were worst affected. There were 27,200 on job seekers allowance in August.
- A briefing was given on the 'Backing Young Britain' initiative. This was a call to all businesses, charities and government bodies to create more opportunities for young people by committing to at least one of the following initiatives:-
 - a. To become a volunteer mentor for school or university leavers to help them find their feet in the jobs market
 - b. Provide work experience places, volunteering places or a work trail to help young people learn about work, make contacts and fill their CV
 - c. Offer an internship for a graduate
 - d. Create a new internship for 18 year olds and non graduates to give them a chance to improve themselves
 - e. Provide an apprenticeship for 16 – 24 year olds
 - f. Joining a Local Employment Partnership to make sure job vacancies are advertised to local unemployed people
 - g. Bid for one of the 100,000 jobs for young people in the Government's Future Jobs Fund
- The Budget had announced a guaranteed offer of a job, work-focused training or meaningful activity to all 18 to 24 year olds before they reached the 12 month stage of their claim to JSA. The guarantee would consist of sectoral routeways, future jobs fund, work-focused training, community task force.
- An offer must be made to every eligible customer from January 2010, pre-mandation participation was voluntary, normal JSA rules applied to those not in work, offers must be made in priority order, the earliest point at which a referral can be made is week 39 (13 if fast tracked); the aim was to fulfil the Guarantee before week 50 of their JSA claim.

- JC+ was part of the rapid response partnership approach to meet the needs of those in the region who were made redundant. Arrangements were working well and approximately 367 employers had been supported.

6.4 In response to members questions:-

- There was a correlation between JSA and NEET. There was tracking across all age bands 16-24.
- There were always sufficient young people to meet the demand for apprenticeships. Some sectors had been more successful than others in terms of retaining apprentices, but e.g. construction had reduced/stopped new intake in order to be able to retain existing apprentices.
- It was noted that a lot of young people currently in FE who wanted apprenticeships but who were not identified as such. There would be benefit in a dialogue with colleges around the issue.

Item 7. Machinery of Government

7.1 Dorothy Smith reported:-

- There was some uncertainty regarding the passage of the legislation prior to the recess and this still existed. Arrangements were progressing on the basis that it would be enacted during November and the LSC would cease to exist on 31 March 2010.
- YPLA: Les Walton had been appointed chair. A number of national council members would join him on the LSC's Young People Learning Committee which would steer set up arrangements. Peter Launer was the new chief executive and the shadow senior management team had met.
- Staffing: all staff in the region had a confirmed match into a suitable place of employment. Particular appreciation was recorded to Angie Twelves, Regional Head of HR for her work with staff, local authorities and Government Office.
- Arrangements were underway to restructure the organisation into shadow mode. This would include supporting staff in readiness for the transfer to local authorities.
- Skills Funding Agency arrangements were not yet clarified. Lord Mandelson had ordered a review of all 'next steps' agencies. Chris Roberts was working with the RDA and BIS on this issue to clarify the interface between RDAs and the SFA on regional strategy.

Item 8. Regional Director's Update

8.1 Train to Gain 2009/10 academic year: due to the huge increase in demand the budget was being managed more tightly. This would include taking back money and redistributing it during the course of the year.

8.2 Letters were being sent to School 6th Forms and General FE Colleges concerning 16-18 funding. The Secretary of State was making available limited additional resources to support those with the severest financial need.

Item 9. Capital Update

- 9.1 Minutes of 12 August 2009 recording the action taken by the Regional Capital Committee and the Regional Chairman in respect of Hartlepool FE College were confirmed.
- 9.2 It was noted that National Capital Committee had subsequently approved the grant support to Hartlepool FE College, one of 12 capital applications approved. Proposals relating to Manchester College, and Skelmersdale & Ormskirk College (an outcome of the merger with Newcastle College) were still in the process of being approved.
- 9.3 It was noted that the acquisition of land by Newcastle College had now been concluded for £6m less than initially proposed.

Item 10. Regional Audit Committee

- 10.1 Minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2009 were confirmed.

Item 11. Future Meetings

- 11.1 The Regional Council would meet on 19 November 2009, 19 January and 16 March 2010.

Signed: -----

Chairman

Date: -----

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Meeting chair

James Ramsbotham

Minute taker

Ken Coulson

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