

Minutes



Leading learning and skills

Date 26 January 2006
Subject Greater Merseyside Learning and Skills Council Meeting
Location Tithebarn House
Time 16:00
LSC office Greater Merseyside
Publication intent Internal

Present Roger Hoyle, Elaine Bowker, Martin Carey, John Swain, Richard Marbrow, Kath Boullen, John Firr, Phil Round, Brian Rourke, Sue Carmichael, Elaine Owen; Sir George Sweeney
Observers: Jackie Mason (for Mike Scott)

In attendance Peter Kent, Chair of Halton College
Alan Harrison, Interim Principal of Halton College
Siobhan Saunders, Chair of Widnes & Runcorn 6th Form College
Dave Jones, Acting Principal of Widnes & Runcorn 6th Form College
Ian Pursglove, LSC National Office

LSC staff Sue Price (SMT), Marie Brookfield, Laura Edwards (minutes)

Apologies Apologies have been received from:
Council Members: Claire Dove, Gordon Burns, Heather Akehurst, Maureen Williams
Observers: Nigel Burke, Kieran Gordon, Mike Scott, Peter Morton
SMT: Sue Wood, Mike McDermott, Simon Pierce, Kirsty Evans, Joyce Wildman (Minutes)

1 Apologies and Chair's Opening Remarks

- 1.1 Roger Hoyle welcomed members and guests to the meeting and introductions were made. Apologies were noted, especially Heather Akehurst.
- 1.2 Confirmation of the North West Council Members' event was given; it will take place on 16/17 June at the Lowood Hotel, Cumbria.

2 Submission of Halton Initial Outline Proposal (IOP) for Merger Consideration

2.1 Elaine Bowker presented the IOP and gave a summary of key points. The purpose of the meeting was for Council Members to consider the outline proposal and Elaine emphasised that Council was not being asked to agree to a merger. This meeting was giving Council an early view and the next stage would be full consultation and due diligence, with both Colleges submitting a full proposal to the Secretary of State for decision.

The recommendations were for Council to agree one of 3 options:

- a) Colleges to continue to develop their proposal and to undertake local consultation
- b) Further consideration of the implications of the proposal needs to be given
- c) Significant weaknesses in initial outline proposal meaning Colleges should not proceed.

Elaine outlined the statutory and legal process and stated that Ian Pursglove was at the meeting to offer any advice on these issues. Elaine also outlined the process around Strategic Area Review, of which the outcomes publication had been circulated to Council. Support to consider the merger had been received from the Local Authority, elected members, MPs, and teachers. Elaine stressed that the reasons behind the proposal were for better educational provision in the Borough.

Siobhan Saunders joined the meeting. Roger Hoyle welcomed Siobhan and provided an update of the meetings progress.

Elaine proceeded to discuss the timetable in the IOP. Consultation would take place at the end of February if it were to go to the next phase. Regarding due diligence, tenders have already gone out but no decision will be made as yet. Type B merger was recommended and Elaine concluded that no substantive reasons to stop this moving forward were expected and asked Council for support under either recommendations a) or b).

2.2 Roger Hoyle invited Peter Kent to comment. He gave Halton College Board's perspective, which was to focus on the interest of the students. Currently there is overlap between the two Colleges in a relatively small area, both serving the same need. The merger would better serve learners, and the Board was enthusiastic to explore the best way forward as demonstrated in the appointing of the second acting Principal, Alan Harrison, to address this.

Sir George Sweeney joined the meeting.

Alan Harrison expressed hope that the Council would support option a) and referred to the work that had already been undertaken between the two Colleges to assist cultural alignment.

- 2.3 Siobhan Saunders presented the perspective from Widnes & Runcorn Sixth Form College. The preference was structured collaboration although this had not been successful in Widnes and Runcorn. The Board were first in favour of type A but two groups were formed to look at each type with liaison between both. Dave Jones, Acting Principal, was thanked for his efforts, as was Sue Price for LSC support.

Dave Jones explained that there had previously been a meeting with Ray Dowd, the former Acting Principal of Halton College to bring the two Boards together and improve the way the two Colleges work together. The focus was on what is best for students and much time and effort has gone into the proposal, with the two Colleges already working together as a partnership. Dave also expressed hope that the Council would support option a).

- 2.4 Roger Hoyle opened the discussion for Council Members to put questions to the College representatives. John Swain declared an interest as a Councillor in Halton. Elected members had already stated a preference through the consultation, but John said he was not bound by that.

Richard Marbrow asked whether the timetable was realistic in terms of one month for due diligence and three weeks for consideration by Ministers. Richard also asked whether the name 'Halton College' could be considered. Alan Harrison responded to the first question and said that previous mergers had been delivered in a month and the timescales have been discussed with KPMG. Dave Jones added that having seen the tender document, there is every confidence that the timescale can be met. Ian Pursglove responded to the second timescale question and commented that a decision could be made by Ministers within three weeks. The third question regarding the name was responded to by Elaine Bowker who believed it was a sensitive issue and retaining the name 'Halton College' would be unhelpful as it would be a new institution, a new name would be needed to reflect this. Sir George Sweeney added that it should be the decision of the new Governing Body as they would need to market the new institution. There was general agreement that it was the decision of the Secretary of State, following a request from the Corporation.

Sue Carmichael acknowledged the hard work that had gone into the proposal, but believed an overarching aspirational vision for the new institution was not stated strongly enough. John Firr expressed his support but raised concerns about the financial rather than learner focus, which does not come out strongly enough. Elaine Owen asked for clarification on the financial health of the Colleges. Elaine Bowker replied that the short-term issue of capital had created the problem and that this would be resolved in the due diligence exercise. Martin Carey acknowledged the

work that had been done and asked if there was a strategy in place to bring staff along with the proposal. Alan Harrison replied that there was a series of joint groups including HR, Unions and IT to work on issues of harmonisation. Phil Round asked whether any resistance had been identified and Alan responded that there was some among staff. Siobhan Saunders said that at the last meeting the Governors had voted in favour of the proposal.

- 2.5 Roger Hoyle thanked the College representatives for their input and requested that they withdrew from the meeting while Council considered the proposal.

College representatives withdrew from the meeting.

Elaine Bowker mentioned further support for the proposal that she had received from Derek Twigg MP, from the Chief Executive of the Council and all Headteachers in the Borough. The only lack of support was from some parents who were employees of Widnes & Runcorn Sixth Form College and a few learners. John Swain added that there was unanimous support among elected members and that there had only been one Councillor who had objected.

Following the discussion it was agreed that Council supported the proposal and it was agreed that option a) should be pursued. There were clear benefits to the proposal but the vision needs to be more strongly stated. Council would write to the Corporations in support of option a) subject to this point.

The College representatives were invited back into the meeting and Roger confirmed the substantive support of those members present for option a), with the proviso that the vision be stated more strongly. Roger thanked Ian Pursglove for his support. College representatives and Ian Pursglove then left the meeting.

3 Minutes of Meeting held on 6/7 December 2005/Summary of Meeting held on 6/7 December 2005

- 3.1 The minutes and summary of the Meeting held on 6/7 December 2005 were agreed subject to one change. It was agreed to bring together the Workforce Development Advisory Committee and Adult Advisory Committee as one Committee.

3.2 Matters Arising

Roger Hoyle wrote to Chris Banks regarding Theme 7 and his response was circulated to Council. It had been confirmed that Manchester remained the choice for the regional centre but that there was recognition of the need for local support for Council.

Martin Carey asked whether it would be possible for Council Members to have a clearer understanding of the implications of the regional and sub-regional structure. Roger replied that this would be one of the main discussion items at the NW regional event in June. John Firr suggested that it would be useful to have an opportunity to air these issues.

It was AGREED that an informal discussion would take place at 3pm on 7th February before the Council meeting.

4 Date of Next Meeting

7th February 2006, Tithebarn House, Liverpool.

Publication no.

Meeting chair

Roger Hoyle

Minute taker

Laura Edwards

Date created

27 January 2006

Document ref.

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