

**SUMMARY OF THE GREATER MERSEYSIDE
LEARNING AND SKILLS COUNCIL MEETING
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 28 NOVEMBER 2001**

PRESENT: Jim Michie (Chair), Paul Holme (Executive Director), David Atkin, Kath Boullen, Gordon Burns, Martin Carey, Sue Carmichael, Brian Davies, Claire Dove, Mike Doyle, John Firr, Heather Hardcastle, Richard Marbrow, Geoffrey Piper, George Sweeney

(OBSERVERS): Nigel Burke (Government Office for the North West)
Esther Stewart (Employment Service North West)

APOLOGIES: Veronica Laird
Peter Fletcher (Greater Merseyside Enterprise Ltd)
Kieran Gordon (Connexions Partnership)

IN ATTENDANCE: Elaine Bowker, David Brennan, Rob Burn, Clare Caffrey (Secretary to the Council), Clare Dickinson, Richard Merritt, Simon Ryder (part)

CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

Jim welcomed Esther Stewart, Assistant Regional Director of the Employment Service North West, as a new Observer to meetings. Jim also welcomed Clare Dickinson and Simon Ryder to the meeting.

MINUTES AND SUMMARY FOR ACCEPTANCE

Members agreed the content of the minutes and summary of the meeting held on 26 September 2001 and they were signed by the Chair.

MATTERS ARISING

[Sixth Form School Funding]

Members noted that figures from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) were expected the following week.

CO-FINANCING

Declarations of Interest were received from Kath Boullen and George Sweeney on the basis of their employers receiving ESF.

Members received a presentation from David Brennan outlining the background to ESF Co-financing, the local context and proposals for the future. Members noted LSC areas of interest included a) Workforce Development b) Social Inclusion c) Lifelong Learning d) Gender Mainstreaming e) Transition to Labour Market.

Members also noted that Key Policy Issues included the use of co-financing for:

- engaging employers
- capacity building in voluntary and community sectors
- community based economic development

Members discussed some of the issues around dealing effectively with contracting and funding issues and the potential impact of work on GMLSC and agreed a) to the establishment of a time bound sub group of three Council Members to advise the Executive on policy issues relating to ESF Co-financing (including capacity building and consideration with partners to address legitimate concerns). Membership from Local Council Members should be balanced and include business and community expertise and a suitable terms of

reference would be prepared. b) the Council should receive a draft Terms of Reference and details of membership at its December meeting c) David and the Strategy and Europe team should be congratulated on the work achieved to date.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Declarations of Interest were received from Kath Boullen on the basis of her employer being a Local Initiative Fund (LIF) bidder; from Claire Dove and John Firr on the basis of their employers receiving LIF funding; from Mike Doyle as Director of St Helens Chamber; from Richard Marbrow as a Liverpool Education Authority Member and as an Education Business Partnership Director. David Atkin also declared an interest during discussion as a Member of the Education Business Link Organisation (EBLO) Shadow Board.

Paul highlighted a number of items in his paper and during discussion Members noted:

National Programmes and Policies

A Government consultation document was expected in the New Year containing proposals for 14-19 year olds' education and training. The previous day, Government had announced an additional £38m to support 40,000 young people towards vocational opportunities between 2002/04. GMLSC awaited proposals in December from local coalitions of Colleges. Paul awaited guidance that week on the different funding routes for the following year and confirmed that the December Council meeting would consider the Strategic Plan and how GMLSC would translate the information received into the Business Plan for delivery.

LOCAL ISSUES

Laird Foundation

Council Members congratulated the significant contribution by Jim Mulvaney in the success of GMLSC support to the Laird Foundation's Modern Apprentices to date.

Education Business Links

Congratulations were extended to Richard and the Development Team for their significant contribution to progress towards the future establishment of an Education Business Link (EBL) company.

Work Based Learning

It was noted that locally, under-delivery was currently in line with national performance regarding spend against profile. The significant increase in the size of the programme had resulted in a number of issues. Steps and actions were in hand to improve performance,

Council Members requested receipt of Work Based Learning delivery figures which included local delivery through national providers.

LIF and TEC Legacy Funds

The list provided of Local Initiative Fund (LIF) projects was agreed in principle, including £300,000 of agreed projects, with GMLSC encouraging progress in investment. Most competitive bidding rounds were complete and work would be undertaken to assess the implications of the bidding rounds for future reference,

A review of LIF would be part of the February 2002 agenda – to include the indicative financial position, consideration of the purpose of LIF, how projects were evaluated and an indication of how it should be taken forward.

STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE

Prior to the substantive discussions planned at the December Council meeting, David Brennan informed Council Members of ongoing progress towards the Strategic Plan and they noted a) various consultative methods undertaken as part of the consultation process b) the proposed new structure for the Plan, with four objectives (reduced from five):

- Participation and achievement of young people
- Participation and achievement of adults
- Employer engagement
- Quality

In addition Council Members noted c) emerging themes relating to adults and quality and c) the following timetable:

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| - | 30 November | Consultation ends |
| - | 19 December | Council discuss draft Plan |
| - | 21 December | Targets to National Office |
| - | 14 January | Draft Plan to National Office |
| - | January-March | Consultation on draft Plan |
| - | March | Strategic Plan agreed |

Council Members agreed that the emerging findings of the strategic review should be brought to the December Council meeting. Whilst noting the ultimate responsibility of Local Education Authorities (LEA's) for decisions regarding pre 16 learning and of the LSC for post 16 learning and training (except HE), the strategy document should seek to clarify any possible external misunderstanding regarding roles. (Kath Boullen left the meeting at this point).

UPDATES FROM OBSERVERS/QUESTIONS

Council Members noted updates from each of the organisations represented at Local Council meetings.

FEEDBACK FROM ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Adult Learning Advisory Committee Meeting held on 6 November 2001

Mike confirmed that consideration had been given to the Strategic Plan, highlighting that the Committee felt that the consultation should be as wide as possible.

A wider debate had taken place on the appropriate balance between the innovative and strategic elements in the criteria for assessing Local Initiative Fund bids with a recommendation that a wider debate should take place.

The Committee had also recommended that a Council Member with a business background should have the opportunity to be involved in the applications process.

Young Peoples' Advisory Committee Meetings held on 31 October and 15 November 2001

Richard Marbrow confirmed that the October meeting had considered the Council's response to the DfES consultation on Schools Achieving Success and 16-19 Organisation and Inspection consultation documents, as required at an earlier Council meeting. Consensus on issues raised at the meeting and in written comments from Sue had been agreed and Elaine Bowker had progressed the response.

The November meeting had considered key strategic issues facing young people and the Cassels Report, in addition to receiving a presentation from David on co-financing.

Equal Opportunities and Social Inclusion Internal Meeting with Advisory Committee Members held on 20 November 2001

Advisory Committee Members had met informally with Members of the Internal Equal Opportunities and Social Inclusion Group on 20 November. The participants had discussed a number of issues relating to learning disability placements and funding and had agreed that it would be useful to establish an event planning checklist for Equal Opportunities and Social Inclusion matters. It had been agreed for participants to meet on a six monthly basis.

During discussion, Council Members noted the positive response of staff to see Council Members at recent Equal Opportunities events and Members agreed that all Council Members should endeavour to attend a future session of the training if they had not done so.

Audit Committee held on 10 October 2001

Council Members learnt from Geoffrey Piper that a number of standard future agenda items had been agreed including consideration of parts of the Risk Assessment Register and a Provider Review Summary. Mike Ellerton, Audit Manager for the Northern Region, attended the meeting and confirmed that GMLSC was well ahead in its corporate governance arrangements. National Office had agreed with the points raised with regard to whistleblowing arrangements and their response was awaited. Following the update Members agreed the final version of whistleblowing procedures should be brought to the full Council for consideration.

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

Council Members accepted the minutes of the following meetings:

- a) Equal Opportunities and Social Inclusion Advisory Committee Meeting held on 18 September 2001,
- b) Audit Committee held on 10 October 2001,
- c) Young Peoples' Advisory Committee Meeting held on 31 October 2001.

PROVIDER REVIEW

Members had received a paper providing an overview of the October 2001 review of Greater Merseyside Providers, describing significant issues and proposals to address them. Members also received a presentation from Elaine Bowker describing a) the background to the October 2001 review of Providers b) Moderated assessments reported to National Office c) Specific issues d) Common themes

Elaine informed Members that assessments of different categories of Providers had been weighted in favour of the quality of training and education when grades (excellent, good, satisfactory and concerns) were allocated.

Whilst other factors had been considered during the review, Elaine drew Council Member's attention to issues identified and outlined some of the assessment techniques in the areas of a) Quality of education b) Continuous improvement c) Leadership of management d) Delivery of agreed volumes e) Quality of planning f) Financial viability and assurance

Grades identified for Work Based Learning Providers were in line with inspection findings overall and GMLSC was keen to support Providers to work towards improved gradings. It was also felt to be useful to examine new ways of partnership working, to encourage Providers which would benefit to work with other organisations to be more effective. Claire Dove noted the reconsideration nationally of the number of Reviews undertaken but highlighted that the problem for external institutions' was that their systems and infrastructures were not designed to cope with the high number of reviews.

During discussion, Council Members agreed a) that when more refined data became available the Council should receive an analysis of sectoral issues, to include weaknesses of Work Based Learning Providers b) careful consideration was needed regarding GMLSC's definition of 'excellence' in Provider Reviews c) to ensure full value the need existed for staff to understand the quality agenda and progress work on criteria to effectively tackle the issues identified d) that GMLSC should examine any sectoral and geographic gaps identified to ensure delivery of good quality provision e) that Elaine and the staff in her team should be thanked for the work completed to date.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Jim confirmed that a review meeting with some Council Members would take place prior to the Council meeting on 19 December 2001.

DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was scheduled to take place on Wednesday 19 December 2001.

Should you any queries regarding the content of this summary, please contact:

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