



Report of the Head of Scrutiny Board and Member Development

Executive Board 22nd July 2009

Response to the Scrutiny Board (City and Regional Partnerships) Inquiry into Skills

Electoral Wards Affected: All

Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Eligible for Call In

Not Eligible for Call In

(Details contained in the report)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report provides the Executive Board with details of the recommendations from the recent City and Regional Partnerships Scrutiny Board inquiry into skills and details how the relevant Directors propose to respond to these recommendations. The report asks the Board to approve the proposed response. Because of the number of Directorates involved their responses have been co-ordinated into a single report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. Executive Board are recommended to:

Approve the proposed responses to the Scrutiny Board's recommendations.

1.0 Purpose Of This Report

- 1.1 This report provides the Executive Board with details of the recommendations from the recent City and Regional Partnerships Scrutiny Board inquiry into skills and details how the relevant Directors propose to respond to these recommendations. The report asks the Board to approve the proposed response.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 From October 2008 the City & Regional Partnerships Scrutiny Board conducted an inquiry into skills. In particular, it investigated the following three individual areas:

(a) Leeds Strategic Plan incorporating the Leeds Local Area Agreement

The background, activity and contribution of all interested parties towards achieving the relevant improvement priorities and targets contained within the LSP and any future plans in this regard. Two improvement priorities in the Leeds Strategic Plan particularly address the issue of improving skill levels to level 2 or higher, with reference to workforce development.

(b) Leeds City Region Multi Area Agreement (MAA),

The MAA for the Leeds city region has been developed to help close the gap in higher level skills, and reduce transport congestion across the city region, as identified within the City Region Development Programme (CRDP). The MAA was signed off in July by the eleven City Region Local Authority Leaders and government.

(c) The future of Further Education (FE) in Leeds

The Learning and Skills Council has consulted on the merger of Park Lane, Thomas Danby and Leeds College of technology to form a new Leeds College. The three colleges have agreed to the merger proposal, and it is expected there will be substantial investment in the FE estate.

- 2.2 The final scrutiny report, containing full details is attached at appendix 1.
- 2.3 The report makes 17 recommendations for action.

3.0 Main Issues

- 3.1 The Scrutiny Board's 17 recommendations are listed below along with response/s from the relevant Director/s.
- 3.2 The Director of Children's Services has made the following general comments with regard to the recommendations relating to her responsibilities

(a) Children's Services Officers were not directly involved in the Scrutiny Board's consultation during the Skills inquiry (as the original remit was directed to further education for those aged 19 plus). However, the final report makes five direct recommendations and two joint recommendations (with other Directors) to the Director of Children's Services.

(b) The Director of Children's Services welcomes members' interest in the areas of work identified in their recommendations, but has also noted that the Children's Services Scrutiny Board is currently conducting its own inquiry into 14-19 learning.

It is likely therefore that the Children's Services inquiry may already have identified, or benefit from being informed of, the issues raised in the Skills inquiry, so these can be given wider consideration in the context of 14-19 reform.

(c) As an overall response therefore, the Director of Children's Services suggests that the recommendations directed solely to her within the Skills inquiry should be carried forward and monitored by the Children's Services Scrutiny Board as part of its wider 14-19 review. This would support greater consistency of approach and avoid potential duplication in the future reporting of very similar information to two separate scrutiny boards.

(d) If this suggestion is adopted then by way of a starting point the following is a very brief summary of the current position in relation to the recommendations made specifically to the Director of Children's Services. More detail can be provided as required within the Children's Services Scrutiny Board's 14-19 review:

3.3 Recommendation 1:

That in view of the Learning and Skills Council funding deficit the Chief Executive seeks assurances from our partners and Skills Secretary, John Denham that the new Leeds City College will proceed as planned including proposals for an enhanced estate and that a report be presented to this Board or its successor on the outcome.

The Chief Executive states that the then Leader, Councillor Andrew Carter, expressed his strong concerns about the likely impact of the actions being taken by the LSC (to reprioritise their future spending) on the development of the Leeds City College at the initial meeting of the new Joint Regional Board for Yorkshire and the Humber. The Board resolved unanimously to seek assurances from the Secretary of State regarding the future of the FE College estate across the region. These concerns were repeated at the Economic Delivery Group which is chaired by the Regional Minister and attended by the Council's Chief Executive, and the Regional LSC Director has kept the Group's members informed of national developments. It is proposed to bring back a future report in the matter, to the Board, once the implications for the City College of the LSC's revised proposals have been fully assessed.

3.3 Recommendation 2:

That the Director Children's Services work with the new Leeds City College to identify how it can consult at area and neighbourhood level to inform the development of a curriculum that is adequately responsive to the needs of Leeds.

The Director of Children's Services has held an initial informal meeting with the new Head of Leeds City College and will take this forward once the new Principal takes up the post full-time. The Principal has been invited onto the Leeds Learning Partnership to ensure the college plays a full part in future strategy development across the city and elected members are on the new college board.

The Director of Environment & Neighbourhoods states that consultation on the development of the curriculum can be supported through the area committee meetings and local fora as appropriate.

3.4 Recommendation 3:

That the Directors of Children's Services and City Development consider and propose how this Scrutiny Board or its successor can scrutinise the outcome of the FE College merger to assess if the benefits outlined in paragraph 16 of this report are achieved over the next 3 years with regard to 19 year olds and above.

The Director of Children's Services states that responsibility for monitoring the impact of the college merger against the benefits quoted in the scrutiny inquiry, sits with the government Department for Business, Innovations and Skills (DBIS) and the new Skills Agency. However, Leeds Further Education representatives do sit on the city's Children's Trust Arrangements and if concerns were to arise about the impact of the college merger these could be raised with the DBIS for appropriate action to be taken. The Council is also a member of a sub-regional Group that reports into a regional planning group for skills and the economy. More details on these arrangements can be provided to the scrutiny board as required.

The Director of City Development has commented that the outcome of the merger will be monitored through the monitoring of the Strategic Plan and action tracker reports submitted to the relevant Scrutiny Board.

3.5 Recommendation 4:

That the Principal of the Leeds City College ensures, and provides assurances to this Scrutiny Board or its successor, that the location for the delivery of the new curriculum for 2010/2011 has regard to transport costs and accessibility.

The Director of City Development comments that accessibility will be an important planning consideration when a site is identified and a planning application is submitted. The comments of the Principal of the Leeds City College will be reported directly to the Scrutiny Board.

3.6 Recommendation 5:

That the Director of Children's Services work with our partners and neighbouring local authorities to ensure wherever possible that there are no artificial barriers that would prevent young people accessing the full curriculum at the most convenient place geographically regardless as to where local authority boundaries lie.

The Director of Children's Services states that the responsibilities for partnership and cross-boundary working relating to further education are set out in the sub-regional terms of reference that partner authorities have agreed as part of the wider 'machinery of governance' work taking place to facilitate the transfer of some aspects of the LSC's powers to local authorities. These terms of reference can be provided on request.

3.7 Recommendation 6:

That the Directors of City Development and Children's Services with the Council's partners monitor the transition from the LSC to the YPLA and the SFA to identify any areas of concern including changes in operating costs and report back to this Scrutiny Board or its successor.

The Director of City Development states that as part of the regular performance monitoring of the Leeds Strategic Plan an assessment will be made of progress in meeting learning and skills priorities and outcomes. However, it would be extremely

difficult for the Council to assess changes in operating costs at a local level. This is a national issue.

3.8 Recommendation 7

That the Director of Children's Services inform Members of Council of the arrangements being made to take responsibility for FE in 2010 and give assurances that the proposals will not impact on the improvements being made at GCSE level.

The Director of Children's Services states that the Council's Executive Board is being kept informed about the progress of the transfer of powers from the LSC to the local authority through timely 'machinery of governance' reports. The collaborative arrangements that currently exist to help the local authority, Education Leeds and further education providers to work together will be carried across and strengthened through a more joined-up 14-19 partnership. Rather than detracting from the progress made at GCSE level it is therefore anticipated that this stronger, closer partnership between providers will support a pattern of continuing improvement.

3.9 Recommendation 8

That the Director of Children's Services asks the Learning and Skills Council to explain the new funding formula that is preventing Futurepathways from recruiting NEET young people and how this can be resolved in both the short and longer-term, with the outcome being reported back to this Scrutiny Board or its successor.

The Director of Children's Services advises that in his role as Chair of the Leeds Learning Partnership the Executive Lead Member for Education has written to the Chief Executive of the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils to raise this issue. A response is currently awaited.

3.10 Recommendation 9

That the Assistant Chief Executive (Planning, Policy and Improvement)
(i) considers the development of suitable performance data and management information systems for the MAA delivery plan.
(ii) ensures that there are clear roles and responsibilities for performance management.

The Assistant Chief Executive (Planning, Policy and Improvement) supports recommendation 9 (i) and 9(ii) and will:

9(i) - make sure, working with the Leeds City Region partnership, that a suitable performance management framework is developed to underpin the MAA delivery plan.

9(ii) - make sure that within the MAA performance management framework, roles, responsibilities and accountabilities are clearly defined across the Leeds City Region partnership.

3.11 Recommendation 10

That the Assistant Chief Executive (Planning, Policy and Improvement) considers (i) the MAA delivery plan and reviews the current partnership reporting arrangements with a view to ensuring that Members are better informed and

involved in the initiatives and work being undertaken to improve skill levels through the MAA and report back to this Board or its successor on the outcome.

(ii) how Members can input at an early stage to the policy making process in developing agreements like the MAA / LAA and subsequent implementation.

The Assistant Chief Executive (Planning Policy and Performance) supports recommendation 10 (i) and (ii) and will:

10 (i) - review the current reporting arrangements to make sure that members are kept informed and involved in the initiatives and work being undertaken to improve skill levels through the MAA, as well as the pilot forerunner proposals, with a report being submitted back to the Board, or its successor, on the outcomes of this work. Consideration is being given to how information on these developments is reported to Members more widely through a range of means.

10 (ii) - develop proposals to engage elected members at an early stage in the policy making processes in developing agreements such as the MAA/LAA as these are further reviewed and refreshed. Proposals for how best to do so will be drawn up and presented to the Board, or its successor, as appropriate to each case.

3.12 Recommendation 11

That the Director of City Development

(i) considers with our partners the accuracy of the reported skill levels for Leeds based on the Government's annual population survey and whether there needs to be more accurate data in order to determine whether or not we are achieving our targets.

(ii) monitors the effects of the economic downturn on the level of skills investment if there is a fall as predicted and report on the action taken with the Council's partners to try and address this situation.

The Director of City Development comments that issues of data accuracy have been discussed with the LSC. Whilst there are some issues at the local level as the data is from a sample survey, it is considered that the costs of improving data quality outweigh any benefits. The impact of the recession on training will be considered as part of the performance monitoring of the LAA/Leeds Strategic Plan.

3.13 Recommendation 12

That the Assistant Chief Executive (Planning, Policy and Improvement) initiate a review involving the Chief Executive of Education Leeds, the Director of Environment & Neighbourhoods and the Director of City Development to consider responsibilities for the skills agenda.

The Assistant Chief Executive (Planning Policy and Performance) supports recommendation 12 and is currently working with colleagues to prepare a draft review brief to outline the scope of the review work required.

3.14 Recommendation 13

That the Directors of Children's Services, City Development and Environment and Neighbourhoods work with the Council's partners to ensure that:

(i) there are alternative suitable courses available to young people across the city who are not accepted for entry into the Leeds College of Building.

(ii) there are sufficient courses available across the city, aimed at Skills Level 1 and below.

The Director of Environment & Neighbourhoods states that skills training for unemployed adults linked to labour market needs will be kept under review. The Director of Children's Services advises that for those aged 14-19 (and up to 25 for those young people with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities) this is monitored via the 14-19 Strategy Group's work (see also the response to recommendation 8).

3.15 Recommendation 14

That the Director of City Development inform Members of this Board or its successor of the impact the Government's announcement has had on extending the Train to Gain to agency workers and be provided with the Train To Gain figures for 2008/09 when they become available.

The Director of City Development states that when the figures become available they will be reported to the Scrutiny Board.

3.16 Recommendation 15

That the Director of Resources provide further details to this Board or its successor on (i) how the Council is developing its own approach to Train to Gain funding learning opportunities and corporate apprenticeships (ii) the outcome of the Council's own skills survey which is currently being undertaken.

The Director of Resources states that a detailed report has recently been considered by Corporate Leadership Team providing an update on progress since the Leaders of the Council signed the Skills Pledge in November 2008. The report also outlined the Council's current position as an employer in relation to a wide range of initiative being undertaken in relation to skills, employability in support of the economic sustainability including Train to Gain and Apprenticeships. The Scrutiny Board (City & Regional Partnerships) will be provided with the information it has requested.

3.17 Recommendation 16

That the Director of Children's Services seek support for additional funding of the e2e scheme and that it become much less classroom based.

The Director of Children's Services reports that following representation from the Association of Directors of Children's Services a revision has been made to the medium-term financial strategy which will see more money being directed into the September guarantee and more 'head-room' given to e2e.

3.18 Recommendation 17

That the Director of City Development advise all Members of Council of the initiatives being undertaken by the Council and our partners to reach SMEs to encourage and promote training for when the economic downturn starts to recover and what success we have had in this regard.

The Director of City Development reports that this will be addressed as part of a wider briefing to Members regarding actions taken to address the impact of the recession.

4.0 Implications For Council Policy And Governance

- 4.1 There are no immediate implications for Council Policy and Governance arising from these recommendations.

5.0 Legal And Resource Implications

- 5.1 There are no immediate resource implications arising from the planned action to respond to the recommendations.

6.0 Conclusions

- 6.1 The City and Regional Partnerships Scrutiny Board's Inquiry into issues around skills has highlighted the complexity of this subject which is not led by the Council and is dependent upon a number of our partner organisations. The relevant Scrutiny Boards need to monitor progress in this area.

7.0 Recommendations

- 7.1 Executive Board are recommended to:

Approve the proposed responses to the Scrutiny Board's recommendations

Background Papers

There are no specific background papers relating to this report.