

Scrutiny Board (City & Regional Partnerships)
Skills Working Group

Meeting held on 3rd July 2008

Present:

Councillor Sue Bentley (Chair)
Councillor Geoff Driver
Councillor Lucinda Yeadon

Others in Attendance:

Robert Norreys, Head of Regional Policy, Executive Support
Melanie Taylor, Projects Officer, Executive Support
Dylan Griffiths, Project Manager (Policy), Executive Support
Martin Dean, Deputy Chief Executive, Leeds Initiative
Richard Mills, Principal Scrutiny Adviser, Democratic Services

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 It was reported that Scrutiny Board (City & Regional Partnerships) at its meeting on 23rd June 2008 had agreed to establish a Skills Working Group to look at establishing an inquiry on skills and to draw up suitable terms of reference for consideration by the Board.
- 1.2 The Board wanted to undertake an inquiry that would add value to the work being carried out by a range of agencies and partners to improve the skills of our working population.
- 1.3 The Working Group consisted of Councillors Bentley, Driver and Yeadon. Councillor James Lewis had also expressed an interest in being a member of this Working Group at the June Board meeting.

2.0 Issues Discussed

- 2.1 It was reported that MAAs (multi area agreements) are being developed at a city regional and / or sub-regional level but not regionally and will bring together key partners in flexible arrangements to tackle issues that are best addressed in partnership, such as skills deficits, housing market imbalances, transport links and other infrastructure projects. The MAA is also about agreeing a new relationship with government departments.
- 2.2 Leeds City Region MAA is around skills and transport and officers reported that the agreement is due to be signed shortly and was designed to give teeth to the city regional and place-shaping agenda, by providing the framework for more effective leadership across sectors and geographic and organisational boundaries.
- 2.3 A number of skills issues were discussed and commented upon including:
 - the role of the Learning and Skills Council as the lead agency.
 - the fact that the Council is a relatively minor partner.
 - the organisations responsible for children up to 19 years and beyond
 - the fact that often investment in skills is almost invisible.
 - how to improve our links at a city, area and regional level and the current sensitivity around the skills agenda at this time.
 - role of colleges and employers in delivering improved skills to the labour market.
 - 8,000 young people leave school and colleges in Leeds each year and join

its workforce of some 450,000. It required a great deal of effort to improve skill levels by 1% as students leaving with level 2 & 3 qualifications.

- except as an employer the Council is far removed from improving skills.
- the various agencies involved in this matter including the Learning and Skills Council, Sector Skills Council, Chamber of Commerce, different colleges, private providers, national brokers and the Government's choice agenda "Train to Gain".
- issues around worklessness and skills.
- migrant workers.
- overlap of the Council's role and the 3rd age.
- end of the Learning and Skills Council in 2011.
- future responsibility for 16 -19year olds and Every Child Matters.
- the likely establishment of a government quango and the likelihood of Leeds obtaining a contract that would contribute to the making of a more coherent skills plan.
- the agenda for improved economic performance.

3.0 Issues Raised by Members

After further discussion Members identified the following specific areas of concern, any one of which, could be suitable for a Scrutiny Board inquiry:

- the need to identify who are making the key decisions on skills and training, where is the democratic input, what threatens our ability to make choices as to where the funding comes from, are we narrowing the gap or is it getting wider, the future of FE in Leeds and why are 3 colleges merging not 5 and who decided this? how successful has this process been and what are the measures in place to determine whether we are succeeding or not given our limited involvement?
- the need to consider the responsibilities employers have in identifying the skills it requires in the short, medium and long term. Members commented that with some notable exceptions employers had not been very successful in this area and wanted to explore what the Government's "Train To Gain" agenda would contribute to this and the role the organisations like the Chamber of Commerce play, if any, in making a positive contribution to the skills agenda?
- the fact that transport is a major and fundamental issue to the successful delivery of improving the skills of its workforce.
- the Multi Area Agreement (MAA) for transport and skills in the Leeds City Region.

4.0 Recommendations of the Member Working Group

4.1 The Working Group asked that:

- (i) suitable terms of reference be prepared for an inquiry that looks at the Multi Area Agreement (MAA) for transport and skills in the Leeds City Region and also the future of FE in Leeds.
- (ii) that the draft terms of reference be submitted to the Working Group prior to them being considered by Scrutiny Board (City and Regional Partnerships).
- (iii) a note of today's meeting be submitted to Scrutiny Board (City and Regional Partnerships) on 21st July 2008.