

minutes



Meeting SKILLS: NOW AND THE FUTURE SELECT COMMITTEE

Date Monday, 17 March 2008 (commencing at 10.30 pm)

Membership

Persons absent are marked with `A`

COUNCILLORS

John Knight (Chair)
Joe Lonergan (Vice-Chair)

Peter Barnes
Jen Cole
Jim Creamer
Philip Owen

Lynn Sykes
Kevan Wakefield
Brian Wombwell

APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

The appointment by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 28 January 2008 of Councillor John Knight as Chair and Councillor Joe Lonergan as Vice-Chair of the Committee was noted.

MEMBERSHIP

The membership of the Committee, as set out above, was noted.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

None.

THE NOTTINGHAMSHIRE LABOUR MARKET AND SKILLS ISSUES

Richard Money, Research Manager, Communities Department, gave a presentation on the labour market in Nottinghamshire, covering various measures of economic activity, training, skills and qualifications. Whichever measure was used, there were repeated patterns of inactivity and poor skills. He concluded by observing that skills were poorly measured, with small survey samples and out of date figures.

Councillor Knight opened discussion by commenting that the UK valued academic qualifications more than vocational ones, and that perhaps local FE colleges were training students for work which did not exist locally. Councillor Barnes referred to the need to plan for future demands, and gave as an example jobs connected to NET Phase 2. In reply to Councillor Wombwell, Mr Money stated that the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) had warned FE colleges to be driven by employers' rather

than students' demands. He pointed out that the presentation had not covered literacy and numeracy, but these basic skills were important. Councillor Knight commented that the survey of perceived skills needs was evidence of low aspirations in Nottinghamshire.

SKILLS: SETTING THE SCENE

Geoff George, Economic Regeneration Manager, gave a presentation on the work being undertaken nationally and locally in relation to skills. He referred to the Leitch Review in 2006, and the steps being taken to implement its recommendations. He outlined the roles locally of the regional development agency, the Learning and Skills Council and other organisations, including the County Council.

Councillor Knight wondered whether there were too many quangos and competing funding streams. Councillor Wakefield stated that SureStart had been the most valuable initiative in the area he represented. Mr George pointed out that research about SureStart had proved contradictory, and there was some evidence that ambition and skills depended on the family context.

Councillor Barnes referred to Nottingham's two universities, and wondered whether local industries were sufficient to encourage students to stay locally after graduation. Mr George replied that retention of graduates in Nottinghamshire was not bad, though perhaps not all were in graduate level jobs. On the other hand, he pointed out that local employers like Rolls Royce recruited widely. Mr Money stated that the public sector was a good employer of graduates. He referred to a previous scrutiny review of higher education, which had shown that because the two universities were popular, they put less effort into developing links with their communities. This contrasted with the universities in Derby and Lincolnshire.

Councillor Owen also believed there were too many quangos, and argued that targets had to be relevant. He pointed out that young people did have aspirations, but they were not being trained in the skills they needed. Councillor Knight agreed, but questioned whether the select committee could affect attitudes about academic versus vocational qualifications.

SCOPE AND DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME

The select committee agreed the scope which had been circulated, and noted the dates of future meetings. There was discussion about witnesses during the review, with the conclusion that they should include:

- Learning and Skills Council
- Job Centre Plus
- Federation of Small Businesses
- Chamber of Commerce
- McDonald's
- Boots
- Rolls Royce

It was agreed not to invite schools or colleges, given the limited time available for the review.

The meeting closed at 12.15 pm.

CHAIR

Ref: skills/m_17march08