

Notes of Skills and Training Working Group

Meeting held on 23 November 2009 at 2 p.m. in Room 8, MDC offices

Present: Lynn Marston, Maldon District Council (MDC) (LM)
Jenny Lewsey, MDC (JL)
Helen Russell, Essex County Council (ECC) (HR)
Darren Connew, Connexions (DC)
David Stephenson, Local Delivery Group Leader & Plume School (DS)
Keith Hughes, Business Link East (KH)
Vikkie Massey, Dengie Project Trust (VM)
Keith Brown, Federation of Small Businesses (KB)
Linda Riley, Voluntary Sector Training (LR)

In attendance: Susan Hylands (notes)

Apologies: Joanna Sears, Learning Skills Council (LSC)
Hazel Berrett, MDC
Brian Farrington, Essex Chamber of Commerce

1. Welcome and Introductions

LM welcomed everyone to the inaugural meeting and introductions were made. LM advised that she was attending the first meeting but that the intention was that the group would elect a Chairman and Vice Chairman and that she would not attend future meetings. Lynn advised that the LSP had identified that there is a problem in the District around figures for children not in education, employment or training (NEETs) and the skills level within the working population. A profile of the District, prepared by ECC, was tabled and circulated for information along with an e-mail attaching data identifying a skills deficit with the 16-24 year old age group. In response to this data the LSP has suggested that a specialist group be formed with a six month life initially to look at what is already happening in the District, how this could be improved and what else could be done through working together to address these problems. The LSP had identified that the proposed Vocational Training Centre would address many of these issues, however, in light of the possibility that this may not proceed with the hub in this District, it felt that this was too important an issue to let drop. It was noted that the Blackwater Vocational Partnership will be reapplying for planning permission for the Vocational Training Centre.

2. Election of Chairman and Vice Chairman

JL was elected as Chairman and KB as Vice Chairman of the Working Group. JL, as Chairman, will be asked to attend and report to the LSP Steering Group meetings.

3. Terms of Reference

In response to a question, LM outlined the structure of the LSP Steering Group and its sub groups. There have previously been two Task and Finish Groups reporting to the Place Shaping Sub Group, looking at Accessibility issues and Natural and Built Heritage issues. The Natural and Built Heritage WG had identified some issues around specific traditional skills shortages.

Action: JL to obtain the list of issues identified by the Natural and Built Heritage Working Group.

The Terms of Reference were agreed and are attached to these notes.

4. Membership of the Group

It was noted that an invitation had been issued to Jan Smith as a private sector training provider but a response had not been received. JL advised that she would like to invite a representative, Jim Ling, from Writtle College and this was agreed.

Post Meeting Note: - JL to also invite Maya West, HR Manager from Maldon District Council to future meetings.

5. & 6. What are Partners already doing/What else could we do better to tackle the issues around Skills and NEETs in the District?

The meeting discussed items 5 & 6 together.

There was a discussion around the statistics circulated and how these were gathered and recorded. DC confirmed that the information is obtained from schools from year 8. At the end of year 11 all young people are recorded as NEET until Connexions follow up to ascertain whether a person is in further education etc and update the data. The age profile is 16 – 18 year olds. The data is based on the young person's home address. It was also noted that there has been an improvement on the data circulated in terms of results.

DS confirmed that schools and colleges need to ensure that their offer is right. Signposting to services needs to be undertaken early with those children considered vulnerable to becoming NEET. From a school's perspective this is relatively easy in terms of better liaison with Connexions. Currently Connexions delivers 1-1 careers advice to all students. KB noted that we need to identify what already happens in schools to prevent NEETs and discuss at the next meeting. DS felt that early intervention in schools should not be too difficult to achieve. Schemes such as the Princes Trust can also be accessed via Connexions.

Existing provision was discussed including the ECC apprenticeship scheme and the need to raise awareness of existing provision. The interface between schools and local employers could also be improved to identify which are the best courses that a 6th form college can offer and to increase effective employer engagement. This may be more generic skills for life courses around increasing employability and desire to work. There are also issues to be addressed around how training can be delivered within the work place as many local employers are small.

Blockages to employability were discussed. It was felt that there are some historical reasons within the District, i.e. parents with lower educational attainment, a high proportion of black economy etc. It was queried whether there is a geographic difference in the District i.e. Burnham/Maldon, urban as opposed to rural – HR confirmed that this information would be available. DC advised that occupational codes can be looked at to identify if certain jobs are flagged up. Information can also be obtained on how many are teenage parents, looked after children, youth offenders etc. Once this information is available can then look at targeting vulnerable groups.

Action: DC/HR to provide data for the next meeting.

Funding issues were discussed and it was noted that there is a significant amount of money available for this group such as the Future Jobs Fund. JL confirmed that a bid is to be made by joining up with Hearts of Essex. DS advised as LDG Chairman that they have been very successful in obtaining funding from the social deprivation fund and undertook a pilot to overcome barriers, caused by financial deprivation, to extra curricular activities. The group received £300 per student on free school meals. The funding is not restricted in terms of how it is spent and would remove any financial barriers in terms of arranging visits for young people to local companies.

There was a discussion around the group beyond NEETs and whether it was a role for this group to also look at these issues. DC advised that there is a “keeping in contact” route to try and track and support young people. HR confirmed that JSA figures are held for each district along with other data and will clarify what information is available. There is an issue around where the work is and what skills are needed and matching this with what young people are interested in doing and aspirations.

JL advised that some good work has been done in terms of the Marine Apprenticeship programme where specific local employers have been targeted and this could be replicated with other specific groups. Successes should be highlighted. Group training schemes can also be considered for smaller employers. There is also a need to link with other providers such as Writtle College, Essex Chamber of Commerce and the Shaw Trust. JL is in contact with local employers independently.

It was felt that an outline proposal could be worked up and taken to employers. It was agreed to report the principle to the next LSP Steering Group meeting on 11 December 2009, for approval.

Action: JL to report to the LSP Steering Group and seek approval to proceed with taking a proposal to local employers at the next Maldon District Business Partnership event.

Agreed: The Skills and Training Working Group to focus on the following objectives in order of priority:

- **Objective 1 – prevention - to address the young NEETs problems through earlier intervention.**
- **Objective 2 - to identify projects to address the skills shortage in the District**
- **Objective 3 – to look at people beyond NEETs but who fall into low skills groups where there may be some cross over i.e. training issues/job loss due to the economic climate.**

7. Any Other Business

There was no other business for discussion.

8. Date of Next Meeting

The group proposed that it would initially meet monthly and then address progress. Meeting dates were agreed as follows:

Wednesday 16 December 2009 at 2 p.m. in the Chief Executive’s office (Lynn Marston to attend to update from LSP) – apologies from VM

Friday 22 January 2010 at 10.00 a.m. in the Training Room, MDC offices
Monday 22 February 2010 at 2 p.m., in Room 8, MDC offices
Friday 19 March 2010 at 10 a.m., in the Council Chamber, MDC offices.