

LEARNING AND SKILLS COUNCIL STRATEGIC AREA REVIEW CONSULTATION

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report brings to Members' attention for consideration and comment the Learning & Skills Council's (LSC) Strategic Area Review of 14+ education and training, which is now subject to consultation until 28th January 2005.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The LSC Essex began the process of the Strategic Area Review in the summer of 2002. The LSC Essex area covers the local authorities of Essex including Southend and Thurrock. The County of Essex is extremely diverse with concentrations of population in the largely urban south and a dispersed population in the predominantly rural north. There are also the three economic regeneration areas of the Thames Gateway, Haven Gateway and the Stanstead/M11 corridor. In order that the skills and knowledge demanded by businesses are met, the LSC through the Strategic Area Review process is attempting to ensure there is a broad range of high quality educational provision available to young people and adults across the county.

3 DETAILED CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 A copy of the Strategic Area Review Consultation document and questionnaire is available in the the Members' Library at Rayleigh. Members will see it is an in-depth information gathering document giving details of the key issues relating to meeting the skills needs of individuals and assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum offered by schools and colleges. The consultation questionnaire offers several options under each heading for consideration.
- 3.2 The key conclusion of the review covering Rochford District is that residents tend to be qualified in similar proportions to Essex, with only 28% having no qualifications compared to 29% for Essex, and 20% having level 3 or equivalent compared to 23%. Many employers remain unaware of the business benefits of workforce development. School leavers are more likely to go into employment with training. In general a smaller proportion of residents have poor literacy and numeracy skills in comparison to Essex as a whole.
- 3.3 The key proposals coming out of the Review which affect the District are that the LSC will work with colleges to put employers' needs and priorities at the heart of what they do, ensuring they play a key role in delivering the Government's Skills Strategy. They will review the current funding system and build on the profile and reputation of the LSC.

4 OFFICER COMMENT

- 4.1 The nature of the document is such that it has been drafted for a wider audience than local authorities. The Learning and Skills Council anticipate that the Strategic Area Review process, of which consultation is a key element, will result in the right mix of curriculum provision to meet the needs of the general community, learners and employers by raising standards and success rates. Clearly, the document raises a number of issues relating to partnership and collaboration
- 4.2 There is a need to develop a more consistent and flexible approach to the development of partnerships and reduce bureaucracy. Employers report that young people are frequently 'unready' for work and lack basic employability skills. The current demand for subject choices from young people and parents does not fit necessarily with economic drivers such as The Thames Gateway.
- 4.3 Employer engagement in supporting learning can be patchy and employers rarely collaborate with training providers. There is often a miss-match between education provision and the needs of businesses.
- 4.4 The issues raised through this consultation will continue to be picked up and developed locally through our own strategic documentation e.g. the Community Strategy and the Economic Development Strategy. The LSC are a partner on the Rochford Local Strategic Partnership and it is important that over a period the LSC looks to build capacity for the community as a whole to develop skills and learning to generate a 'lifelong' learning culture.

5 RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES** that, subject to Member consideration and comment, the officer comments outlined above be endorsed.

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Background Papers:-

None

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