

BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN AND WEST NORFOLK

COLLEGE/COUNCIL STRATEGIC LIAISON GROUP

**Minutes of a Meeting of the above Group held on
Friday 15 May 2009 at 10.00 am in
Meeting Rooms 1 and 2, King's Court
Chapel Street, King's Lynn**

PRESENT:

Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk

Councillor Nick Daubney, Leader (Chairman)

(left the meeting at 10.58 am)

Councillor Mrs Z Christopher

Ray Harding, Chief Executive

Wendy Vincent, Democratic Services Officer

College of West Anglia

Peter Dixon, College Chairman

David Pomfret, Principal

Apologies for absence were received from Arlene Clark (Executive Director – Curriculum) and Roger Ward (Governor) College of West Anglia

1 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 September 2008 were agreed as a correct record.

2 **MATTERS ARISING**

None.

3 **COLLEGE CORPORATE ISSUES**

D Pomfret, Principal provided a verbal update on college issues as set out below.

(i) Consultation on College Restructure

D Pomfret advised that he had spoken with R Harding regarding the consultation process on the proposed college restructure. Consultation with staff had taken place during April/May. It was noted that between 70 and 80 posts were at risk. The financial efficiency had been the driver behind the restructure and would remain the primary focus. An article had appeared in the press last week. Letters had been circulated to students and class representative briefings had taken place. The restructure would aim to

realign the finances, and a new structure established to allow the college to move forward. A hybrid model would be put in place and the faculties section would not be included in the new structure, but would continue to provide the internal verification service.

The successes of the major contracts from RAF Marham, Palm Paper received by the college were outlined. The importance of ensuring the college was well placed to deliver such contracts was highlighted.

The restructure would explore how to deliver better services at the King's Lynn campus.

During the autumn term, a review exercise would be undertaken on the curriculum planning.

In response to questions regarding reductions in basic housekeeping costs, D Pomfret explained that earlier in the year some posts had been frozen and staff/students had been encouraged to turn off computers and lights, which had made a positive impact on cost control. The travel bill would also be reviewed. The college would continue to co-ordinate and look at providing shared services with the Borough Council.

Direct Employed Counselling Service

Reference was made to this service being discontinued within the proposals. Up to 5 part-time posts currently provided the counselling service to students. The impact of removing this service was difficult to assess due to confidentiality. Further work would be required to ascertain whether future student referrals could be made to alternative external organisations.

Community Officer Post

It was reported that it was proposed to discontinue this post within the restructure proposals.

AGREED: (1) That the update report be noted.

(2) The potential for sharing of a counselling service be discussed further with the Borough Council.

(ii) Capital Funding – latest position

The latest position regarding capital funding was outlined. It was reported that there was £300m available for the first tranche of funding. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) had appointed PricewaterHouseCoopers to deal with the criteria element of the funding available. There were five criteria on which colleges would be assessed against as set out below:

- Value for money.
- Education case.
- Regeneration plans.
- Code dependency.
- State of current buildings.

It was highlighted that there would be a gateway to pass in advance, referred to as “shovel readiness”. This meant that contractors would be required to be on site within 3 months. D Pomfret advised that it was regrettable that the college would not be in a position to pass the gateway test because in January 2009, the college had been advised not to commit any further expenses. However, those present were informed that the Principal was confident the college would score highly against the five criteria set out above.

Next steps

The tight timeframe was outlined that supported the proposals requesting funding from the LSC. An announcement was expected on the 4/5 June 2009. For the 200+ colleges, a questionnaire had to be completed, together with any supporting evidence within a tight deadline. It was anticipated that over a 100 colleges were in a position to pass the “shovel readiness” test.

In response to questions on site readiness, it was explained that the arrangements for the installation of utilities were in place to ensure the site was ready for development.

D Pomfret advised that the college would be in a position to pass the “shovel readiness” test within 6 months.

With regard to future funding, it was explained that there were a series of small tranches available. After 4 June, the ranking of the 200+ colleges would take place. It was anticipated that the college would be requested to repeat the tender exercise in order to make it more competitive. However, the college presented a powerful case and should be high on the list, but it was highly unlikely it would be supported during this current tranche of funding. There was also the likelihood that the college would be interviewed by the property consultants to obtain further evidence; there was a possibility that input would also be required from the Borough Council.

The worst case scenario was outlined and it was noted that positive rallying from MPs and officers was taking place. A meeting had been held with Henry Bellingham, MP which had resulted in a question to the House of Commons.

AGREED: (1) That the update report be noted.

(2) The Borough Council would continue to support the college.

(iii) New University Challenge

Formal notification of the short listed areas had been announced. D Pomfret tabled and explained a series of coloured maps. Those present were informed there is a realistic chance that King's Lynn will be shortlisted based on the data provided. Reference was made to a previous survey that provided an evidence base for need. Funding of £5m was available, but it did not support land acquisition proposals. Anglian Ruskin University would therefore lead on submitting a bid application. The college would lead on drafting the bid.

In order to raise awareness of this funding, it was suggested that a consultation event be held. A discussion followed which included the following points:

- Who would organise and be involved in the consultation event.
- Should the West Norfolk Partnership Management Group fund the event.
- It was suggested that a Steering Group be established.

AGREED: A representative from the college contact R Harding to discuss the consultation event outlined above.

(iv) Government Funding Priorities and indicative allocation for 2009/10

(v) College Priority Objectives

D Pomfret reported that the headline was that there was no growth relating to the public funded element of work. Funding would be available through specific tranches and presented a real challenge for 2009/10.

16-18 Training

It was reported that there was no growth nationally. However, the college had modest growth and would look to support more 16-18 year olds. The training for this age group had grown over 10% and was the best success record at COWA. The allocation for the next year would be reduced by some £300,000. The resource for providing training for 16-18 year olds would face a 6% reduction.

Adult Responsive Training

The funding for adult responsive training had been significantly reduced and £1m would be lost next year. With the restructuring of the college, the adult courses on offer would be reviewed and streamlined in some cases.

A reduced prospectus would be published during the next few weeks. It was anticipated that a negative response would be received.

Full level 2, 3 and Skills for Life

A full level of 2 and 3 Skills for Life will be available next year.

Employer Responsive Training

Government Ministers had previously stated that this programme was able to accommodate unlimited growth, but in fact the funding had “dried up” very quickly.

£1.5m was available for Train to Gain. The current contract was being reviewed.

AGREED: That the update report be noted.

(vi) Retail Skills Academy

D Pomfret explained that COWA was one of only 16-17 national providers of the first phase of the retail skills academy network. King’s Lynn and West Norfolk appeared both on national and regional maps.

AGREED: That the update report be noted.

4 **BOROUGH COUNCIL ISSUES**

R Harding, Chief Executive provided a verbal update on Borough Council issues, as set out below.

(i) Local Government Review

R Harding explained that the Council was facing challenging times, in particular, relating to the impact on staff. However, the recession had not affected staff turnover. The deadline for consultation on the two proposals for Norfolk closed this week. The Boundary Committee recommendations would be submitted to the Secretary of State on 15 July in order to allow the process to continue.

Norwich City Council had re-submitted the financial figures for the doughnut proposal on 14 May. The Borough Council had engaged consultants to analyse the two sets of financial data and this work was almost completed. The Council alongside other Norfolk District Councils and East Devon Council were considering further judicial review action.

The Borough Council had put in a number of Freedom of Information requests to the Boundary Committee for copies of minutes. The copies received contained information that had been blanked out. The Council was therefore

placing a case before the Information Commission and the Standards Board for England.

AGREED: That the update report be noted.

(ii) Growth Plan

£5.3m had been awarded which would help to lift the CAP and address the traffic issues associated with the NORA project. Norfolk County Council would implement the programme that would improve the general traffic flow within King's Lynn. The work would commence immediately and be completed by 31 March 2011. Norfolk County Council had continued with the design works whilst the bid announcement was awaited.

Morston Assets were now moving forward with the next stage of the NORA development, that had been now been amended from the original proposal. The next phase would now include a health centre, enterprise centre, retail, live/work units, etc to enable the project to keep momentum. Prudential borrowing of £5m had been secured by the Borough Council to install utilities. It is hoped that The Homes and Community Agency (HCA) will contribute £1.2m towards the cost of utilities.

R Harding reported that British Telecom had indicated fibre optic cabling may be provided for King's Lynn in response to interest shown by competitors. Discussions had been held with Gateshead Council regarding a possible joint venture. All options would be explored and a sub group of the LSP has been established to oversee this project.

AGREED: That the update report be noted.

(iii) Credit Crunch

R Harding reported that the Council monitored budgets and indicators on a monthly basis. It was highlighted that in a number of areas, the following indicators had increased:

- Number of planning applications/building control received.
- Footfall in the town centre.
- Number of Land Charges applications received.
- Income from Arts venues.
- Income from Car Parks.
- Income from Sports Centres.

Pending planning applications for Sainsbury's and Tesco proposed potential wider benefits for the area, including the extension of the Hardwick Industrial Estate to enable the whole area to be master planned and developed.

D Pomfret made reference to the direct Government response relating to the Redundancy Fund Programme that was the biggest in the region. The programme would offer up to 800 places, but could be flexible. The main link to the success of this programme would be to Job Centre Plus. Referrals would be required from Job Centre Plus to participate in the programme. Job Centre Plus had requested occupancy of 5 days per week instead of the current 3 days in the Council's Customer Information Centres in Downham Market and Hunstanton. R Harding advised that Paul Harrison, the Council's Business Development Manager, dealt with some of the biggest employers in the Borough and invited Glen Singleton from COWA to telephone him.

R Harding outlined the Government grant to the Council over the next 4 years. A reduced budget would mean some casualties. A number of service reviews were being conducted and be completed by the end of 2009. It was noted that the recycling market had collapsed and the Council's income had reduced from £300,000 to £50,000 per annum.

It was highlighted that the Council employees had not received a cost of living increase this year. However, it had been agreed that payment of the Performance Related Scheme would be paid in April rather than July.

The Council had also explored a number of other budget savings such as travel and both officer and Member attendance at conferences.

AGREED: That the update report be noted.

(iv) The Academy

R Harding reported that a business case was being prepared for submission to EEDA in order to allow the development of the Academy on the NORA site. This important matter would be discussed with COWA and Chris Hey, NCC over the next two months.

D Pomfret informed those present that a positive meeting had been held on 14 May with the School Commissioners at which representatives from NCC and Morston Assets were present. The School Commissioners were aware of the background and the potential job outputs required by EEDA, etc. It was therefore suggested that a letter be sent emphasising how important the Academy was to the area. The expression of interest would be reviewed and submitted over the coming weeks.

R Harding explained that he had recently met with Deborah Cadman, Chief Executive of EEDA to put forward the strong case of providing the area with an Academy.

AGREED: That the update report be noted.

5 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

None.

6 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed for Monday 28 September 2009 at 10.00 am, College of West Anglia

The Meeting closed 11.34 am