

MINUTE EXTRACT

Cabinet Meeting – 23rd March 2016

1. Title of Item/Report

Establishment of a Governing Body for the Learning and Skills Service

2. Record of the Decision

Consideration was given to a report that proposed the creation of a Governing Body overseeing Stockton Borough Council's Learning and Skills Service, to strengthen the governance arrangements and enhance the high level scrutiny and challenge of the service. The Governing Body would be constituted as an advisory committee established to advise the executive on the discharge of its learning and skills functions.

This proposal responded to the requirements of the new Ofsted Common Inspection Framework and findings of recent Ofsted assessments of other local authority adult skills services.

Stockton Borough Council's Learning and Skills Service was a 'good' (Ofsted grade 2) provider of post 16 education and training, delivering across the Borough, often in the most disadvantaged communities. The service aspired to become an 'outstanding' provider within the borough and one area for development highlighted in the 2014-15 self-assessment report, was to further improve the governance arrangements. The service already received scrutiny and challenge through existing Council-wide performance monitoring and through the input of Corporate Management team to the development and approval of annual service plans. Service plan priorities were included in wider Council plans which were themselves subject to scrutiny and challenge by CMT, Cabinet and the whole Council. In addition, the Lead Cabinet Member for Adult Services and Health meets with the relevant Director and Service Manager and received reports on progress and achievements. However, this scrutiny and challenge was embedded in a range of informal and formal systems.

When inspecting providers, Ofsted make judgements against the Effectiveness of Leadership and Management and they were placing much more emphasis on the robustness of governance. Similar providers to Stockton Learning and Skills Service had recently been downgraded, often to a grade 4 'inadequate provider' based on their lack of strategic overview and governance arrangements. Inspectors evaluate the impact of leadership and governors' work in developing and sustaining an ambitious culture in the provider, including at all sites and in subcontractors, and the impact this had on the aspirations of learners and staff and learners' outcomes.

It was believed it would strengthen the position in relation to future inspection if the Council was to formalise and refocus the dispersed governance approach into a new Governing Body. The Governing Body, constituted as an advisory committee, would advise the executive on the discharge of its learning and skills functions. It was envisaged that the Governing Body would meet termly to scrutinise the performance of the service and provide support to address areas for improvement. The Governing Body would make recommendations to the Director of Culture, Events & Leisure and the Learning & Skills Service Manager on strategic and performance matters and

report to Cabinet annually. This would make the high level, strategic and systematic challenge and leadership of the adult learning and skills agenda clear and explicit.

The Governing Body would need to include approx. 6-10 members with relevant skills sets e.g. education, employer relations, and strategic planning. Governors will need to 'know the organisation well', receive regular and detailed reports, and 'support/challenge the strategic leadership. They would also need to know the key strengths and areas for improvement of the service and be able to demonstrate a positive impact on raising the quality of provision.

The method of recruitment and selection of governing body members would need to be agreed in detail, but will incorporate an element of open invitation and application, alongside invited individuals identified as holding the relevant skills, and nominated representatives of key partners.

The suggested membership was:
Relevant Lead Cabinet Member (Chair)
Up to 2 Representatives of local employers
Up to 2 Representatives of Further Education colleges or other adult skills providers
Up to 3 Individuals selected for particular areas of expertise, eg schools, community, voluntary sector, social enterprise.

The Director of Culture, Leisure & Events, and the Assistant Director of Schools and Special Educational Needs would attend the Governing Body as advisors.

The committee may co-opt or invite other individuals to support specific pieces of work and invite officers of other services to contribute to discussions as advisors.

RECOMMENDED to Council that a Governing Body for the Learning and Skills Service be created.