LEARNING AND SKILLS COUNCIL
HEREFORDSHIRE AND WORCESTERSHIRE

A meeting of the Council was held at 2.00pm on Monday 3 February 2003 at Progress House, Central Park, Midland Road, Worcester.

Present:  
Mr C Swan - Chairman  
Mr A Curless - Executive Director  
Mr S Houghton  
Mr M Day  
Mr P Bannister  
Cllr D Wicksteed  
Mr R Quallington  
Mr J Worker  
Mr N Bromley  
Mr N Pringle  
Mr N Price

In Attendance:  
Mrs J Skerry  
Mrs S Todd  
Mr R Savory  
Mr P Cosgrove  
Mr C Robinson  
Mr A Brown  
Mrs S Gray  
Mrs M Reid - Council Secretary

1. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Mr R Little, Ms C Jones and Mr D Waldron.

Mr R Savory attended on behalf of Ms C Jones and Mr C Robinson attended on behalf of Mr D Waldron.

2. Declaration of Interest

Cllr D Wicksteed declared an interest as a Governor of Worcester Sixth Form College.

3. Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 2 December 2002

The minutes were approved and the Chairman authorised to sign them.

4. Matters Arising (Paper C/17/03/1)

Minute 4 (item 9b)
To maximise Council time to review and approve the LSC Herefordshire and Worcestershire Annual Plan it was agreed that Council Working Group Membership appointments should be carried forward to the 10 March 2003 Council Meeting.

Action: A Curless

Minute 5a
As the necessary information had not been received from LSC National Office it was not possible to provide the detailed analysis of Work Based Learning performance requested. This item will be carried forward to the 10 March 2003 Council Meeting.

Action: A Brown
Minute 6f
It was agreed that the presentation on the Technology Corridor should be carried forward to the 10 March 2003 Council Meeting to allow the Council maximum time to review and approve the Annual Plan.  

Action: S Gray

Minute 7a
Mr Cosgrove will forward a separate paper to Council Members on Work Experience Placements and Employer Engagement.  

Action: P Cosgrove

Minute 8
The review of the running and effectiveness of the Council (Paper C/17/03/4) would be included on the agenda of the 3 February 2003 Council Meeting.  

Action: A Curless

Minute 10
Mr Curless confirmed that letters of thanks for their contributions to the Council had been forwarded to Mr N Helme and Mrs C Bucknell.

Minute 11
Mr Cosgrove will prepare a paper on the local LSC’s strategy for working with young people for the next meeting of the Young People’s Committee.  

Action: P Cosgrove

Minute 12
The 27 January 2003 Council Meeting had been rescheduled to 3 February 2003.


a) Finance and Provider Financial Assurance Report (Paper C/17/03/2)

Mr Brown presented an overview of the key points.

He reported that work continued at both national and local levels to resolve the Work Based Learning record data errors experienced following the core system technical problems. Despite efforts by Xansa, the IT company responsible for system maintenance, National Office had indicated that accurate data was unlikely to become available during February. Local LSC Contract Managers were working closely with individual providers to address the locally estimated £960,000 operating shortfall.

The administration budget continued to be closely monitored and is expected to fall within the 92% budget requirement at the end of the 2002/03 financial year. The LSC was originally given authority to spend up to 96%.

The Council congratulated Mr Brown in his management of the budgets.

b) Review of Risk Management Register (Paper C/17/03/3)

Mr Curless provided an update on the High Risk Register, revised following discussion with the Audit Committee. Relocation to Progress House, on time and with IT systems operational, would enable risk item I to be deleted.

The Annual Plan would be reviewed and linked to both risk management and staff objectives.

The top risks would continue to be reviewed at every Audit Committee Meeting.
Mr Pringle enquired when the Council and LSC Directors could expect management information to be accurately provided. Mr Curless conveyed the Chief Executive, John Harwood’s concern and expectation that reasonable data by the end of February / early March could be anticipated.

Mr Curless gave assurance to Cllr Wicksteed that the LSC would continue to provide the range of provision and work with providers to meet quality standards. Reports on any “at risk” provider would in future be provided to the full Council following cessation of the Provider Quality Sub Group of the Council (last meeting to be held on 6 March 2003).

6. Executive Director’s Report No. 17

Mr Curless presented the key points covered in his report.

(i) Section 1b – Success for All

Following his presentation detailing the positive opportunities provided by Success for All, the Executive Director reported that staff were enthused by the new challenges, although some nervousness about possible redundancy for lower graded staff continued.

(ii) Section 1c – Reshaping the Organisation

A number of models were being considered but to date no further news had been received on proposals to be introduced.

(iii) Section 2c – Strategic Area Reviews

Mr Curless announced that provisional agreement had been reached to start the Worcestershire Strategic Area Review in September / October 2003. He was delighted it would include the whole of Worcestershire, although there were complex issues to be addressed.

(iv) Section 3 (civ) – Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE)

Mr Curless was delighted to report that the two CoVE bids submitted, the Evesham College bid on Gas Safety Training and the Farriery Training bid, had been successful. They were recognised as the highest quality bids in the country and rated 1st and 2nd nationally. The Council recognised Mr Robinson’s coaching and mentoring contributions to both achievements.

(v) Section 4 (eiii) – Skills Response Unit

Mr Curless gave an update on the development of the unit indicating that the LSC would work closely with Business Link, Jobcentre Plus and employers to take proposals forward. The Unit had been discussed at the December 2002 Employer Engagement Task Group Meeting. Copies of the minutes will be forwarded to all Council Members.

Action: A Curless

7. Directors’ Reports

a) Schools, Connexions and Higher Education

Mr Cosgrove informed the Council that the announcement of increased 14-16 curriculum flexibility had been welcomed by both schools and colleges. The cross-
county brokerage system in Worcestershire had been developed to provide participants with access to a wider range of NVQs through Work Based Learning Providers.

Greater collaboration would be required between schools in managing timetables efficiently to form viable groups to link to college provision.

Mr Cosgrove reported that Mrs Kim Thorneywork, Deputy Headteacher at Haybridge High School, had been appointed as 14-19 Inspector for Worcestershire, a post jointly funded by the LSC and LEA.

In collaboration with Connexions an initiative was scheduled in October 2003 to encourage those not in employment, education or training to take up Modern Apprenticeship opportunities.

Mr Cosgrove will prepare a paper for the 10 March Council Meeting to highlight the key issues to be addressed following the announcements made in the 14-19 White Paper. **Action: P Cosgrove**

b) **Quality and Learning Directorate**

Mr Robinson presented the report.

Clarification of the Work Based Learning under performance was continuing, with LSC staff working with each provider to agree where under spends were occurring and the causes. Early reports suggested over-estimation by providers of trainees carried forward from the last contracting year.

c) **Strategic Planning, Economic Development, Research and Workforce Development**

Mrs Gray presented her report.

Six flagship bids had been submitted to the Rural Regeneration Zone Board, which, if successful, would go forward for approval by the Board in March 2003.

She reported that Advantage West Midlands had committed £70,000 to fund a gap analysis project for the A38 Technology Corridor.

The local Modern Apprenticeship marketing plan would be launched in March to encourage employers to invest in training young people.

A new National Skills Strategy was expected in the new operating year. The Strategy would enable the LSC to react to identified needs and link them to run alongside the Skills Response Unit. Focus would continue on the 16-18 agenda. Mr Price requested further details in anticipation that he may be able to engender further support. **Action: S Gray**
8. **Annual Plan**

   a) **Update on feedback from partners, stakeholders and Council Members**

   In her presentation Mrs Gray summarised the guidance against which the plan had been drafted, and highlight the extensive internal and external circulation and consultation processes rigorously undertaken. Feedback received from partners and stakeholders had been very positive. She referred the Council to Paper C/17/03/4 and asked them to note all the elements while considering the plan.

   Mrs Gray invited views from the Council. In discussion it was agreed that the Further Education and Work Based Learning Surveys, enterprise activity, management development, the Employer Engagement Task Force, the Skills Response Unit, the new Small Firms Initiative and Centres of Vocational Excellence should be incorporated or receive increased emphasis, along with the range of issues emanating from rurality. **Action: S Gray**

   The Council authorised the Chairman to approve the final plan after the amendments had been made. **Action: C Swan**

9. **Council Review**

   The Key Findings from the Council Review in paper C/17/03/5 were considered to be a good basis for future development of the Council. Members were invited to forward views to the Executive Director on the review summary. **Action: Council Members**

   It was agreed that the quality agenda would be presented to the full Council twice annually, and the existing Provider Quality Assurance Sub Group of the Council disbanded.

   A better reporting mechanism through the task groups was proposed along with more effective use of Council Member skills.

   It was proposed and agreed that Council Meetings be held at other venues throughout the year to provide learning opportunities for Members while demonstrating cross-area commitment. It was, therefore, agreed to hold one meeting in Herefordshire, one in North Worcestershire, one in South Worcestershire and five at the LSC with two additional workshops.

   Mr J Worker agreed to chair the Employer Engagement Task Force. Minutes to be circulated to Council Members and a further meeting arranged. **Action: M Reid**

10. **Audit Committee Report**

    Cllr Wicksteed reported that the Committee had recognised the quality work carried out by the LSC Financial Accounting Monitoring Team. The Committee had also carried out an audit on its own operating procedures and effectiveness. Mr Quallington agreed to attend the next Audit Committee Meeting until a new Member was appointed pending the imminent Council Member appointments.

11. **Chairman’s Update**

    The Chairman reported on the recent Employer Engagement Task Force visit to Jobcentre Plus, which demonstrated the capability to handle 40,000 vacancies across the country while providing one point of information access for enquirers.
Council Member applications had been received and a Sift Panel scheduled for 6 February, followed by the Interview Panel on 26 February.

The Chairman and Executive Director had attended a Government Office West Midlands Dinner, where a wide range of issues had been discussed, including data access, and equality of treatment and opportunity for rural areas of Herefordshire and Worcestershire alongside urban Birmingham.

At the National Chairmen and Executive Directors’ Meeting in December 2002 the Minister, Charles Clarke, had made clear his high expectations of the LSC agenda and his commitment to achieving success.

12. **Future Council Meeting Dates**

With one exception, the meeting dates noted on Council Paper C/17/03/6 were approved. A revised schedule noting that the meeting noted for 8 September 2003 would now take place on 15 September 2003 will be circulated. **Action: M Reid**

13. **Date and time of next Council Meeting**

The next meeting will take place at 4.30pm on Monday 10 March 2003 at Progress House, Central Park, Midland Road, Worcester.

Signature ..............................................

Date ......................................................