

Personnel Committee

22nd April 2010

Office of the Chief Executive

Learning Partnership Agreement

Report of the Director of Human Resources & Organisational Development

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to consider the Learning Partnership Agreement, providing a framework for the rights, duties and responsibilities for training and development shared by the Council as employer, and its employees, represented by the Joint Trade Unions .

2.0 Description of Decision

2.1 Members are invited to consider the contents of this report, and subject to any amendments or additions, agree to the proposed Learning Partnership Agreement, which is attached as an appendix to this report.

3.0 Background

3.1 The agreement supports the work of EMT which established a target for all Council employees to achieve a minimum qualification at level 2 by 2020. Significant progress has been made, including:

- (i) The achievement of the Get On (GO) Award – the IDeA's scheme of recognition for organisations which are fully engaged with the Skills for Life agenda.
- (ii) The Leader of the Council and Chief Executive signed the "Skills Pledge" on behalf of the Council, in 2007. This commits us to supporting attainment of skills and qualifications necessary to ensure the capability and flexibility needed by today's and tomorrow's workforce. The organisation's Skills Pledge Action Plan has been out to consultation with directorate training managers, and each directorate has formulated its own action plan.

Progress towards the above targets has been achieved through access to external funding streams, e.g. EQ8, Train to Gain, LSC funding for specific target groups, etc. The internal drivers led, for the most part, by

the Service Transformation Project, with the provision of qualification training

- 3.2 Skills for Life training courses are currently free for those employees that do not have a level 2 qualification. As well as training officers in the Directorates, the Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) play a key role in identifying and assisting those who could benefit from skills for life training. This role has been supported by the City Council since 2003, including securing funding for a ULR Co-ordinator in 2005.
- 3.3 This Learning Agreement defines the principles and objectives by which the Trade Unions, the Council and others will work in partnership to support the growth of lifelong learning opportunities for all employees of Sunderland City Council. The Trade Unions and the Council recognise that a lifelong development culture is essential to the successful future of the organisation and individuals in the workforce; the Union Learning Representative and the Workforce Learning and Development Group will work in partnership to establish this culture.

4.0 Recommendation

- 4.1 The Committee is asked to receive this report and consider the Learning Agreement as part of the overall provision of support for employees.

5.0 For Decision

- 5.1 The Committee is asked to endorse the Learning Partnership Agreement as a binding agreement between the Council and the Trade Unions.

LEARNING PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

INTRODUCTION

This document is designed to provide an agreed framework for the development, implementation and evaluation of a Learning Partnership Agreement between the Joint Trades Union Committee and Sunderland City Council.

This Learning Agreement defines the principles and objectives by which the Trade Unions, the Council and others will work in partnership to establish and deliver a cohesive Learning Development Plan to support the growth of lifelong learning opportunities for all employees of Sunderland City Council. The Trade Unions and the Council recognise that a lifelong development culture is essential to the successful future of the organisation and individuals in the workforce; the Union Learning Representative and the Workforce Learning and Development Group will work in partnership to establish such a culture.

This agreement sets out the rights and duties of Union Learning Reps and employees, as well as the commitments and responsibilities of the trade unions and Sunderland City Council to establish and support joint working arrangements around learning initiatives.

This agreement will be reviewed annually and amended by joint agreement as necessary.

OUR AIMS ARE TO:

- build a successful and effective learning and development partnership between the Trade Unions and Sunderland City Council.
- recognise and support the work of the Union Learning Representative.
- give all employees the opportunity to identify and discuss their learning and development needs and support those needs as appropriate.
- widen and modernise the skills profile of employees to maximise their versatility, employability and individual potential.
- encourage employees to participate in skills for life, vocational and lifelong learning opportunities.
- build upon central Government's skills for life initiatives and Sunderland City Council workforce development initiatives.
- work with other organisations that provide learning services to ensure the partnership is a success.

WHO THE AGREEMENT COVERS

This Agreement covers all full and part time, including temporary, fixed term, casual and agency employees of Sunderland City Council.

The Trade Unions and Sunderland City Council are committed to ensuring that all employees benefit as much as possible from learning and development opportunities.

All reasonable requests to attend learning and development activities or events will be granted provided funding is available and adequate notice is given. Paid time off will be sought for employees to attend Skills for Life training.

The Trade Unions and Sunderland City Council agree to support the Union Learning Representatives within the workplace and will provide reasonable time off to carry out the duties and responsibilities associated with their role and this Agreement in line with the ACAS Code of Practice.

ULRs will be entitled to paid release for Stage One training provided through the TUC or individual unions. Time off for additional training relevant to the role of the ULR will be provided in consultation with the line manager. Time off for this training will not be unreasonably refused.

ULRs will be entitled to up to ½ day per week (but not less than 2 hours), on top of training, to effectively engage with employees, providers and the Learning Co-ordinator on matters pertaining to Lifelong Learning opportunities. Further time off will be provided for ULRs to attend any meetings/working parties set up by Management.

The employer will undertake to ensure that this Agreement will not be used as an alternative to collective bargaining with the Unions and agrees to maintain and use existing negotiation procedures and arrangements other than those specified in this Agreement.

The parties agree that all individual grievances arising from any educational or learning initiative shall, in the first instance, attempt to be resolved informally in discussion with the line manager in the first instance, before going to the Training and Learning Joint Consultative Forum (JCF). If there is a failure to agree then the issue should be subject to the existing grievance procedure within an agreed timescale.

HOW WE ARE GOING TO DO THIS?

The Trade Unions and Sunderland City Council will work together to enable the Authority to attain its strategic objectives through the development of all employees. The mechanism in place to help achieve this aim will be the Training and Learning Joint Consultative Forum which will meet on an agreed regular basis.

The purpose of the JCF is to:

- Contribute to the content of the Corporate Workforce Development Plan.

- Monitor the Plan against agreed objectives and targets.
- Review and update the Plan in line with corporate and service requirements.
- Promote equality of access to learning and development for all.
- Encourage employees to develop their skills to the maximum of their individual potential.
- Enable employees to raise productivity, quality and customer service in pursuit of sustainable improvement.
- Identify and secure resources to achieve objectives.

Areas to be included in the plan are: elected member development, management and leadership development, technical and vocational skills, core skills and life skills development. Attracting young people to work within local government and working in partnership with Union Learning Representatives and external organisations will also feature in the Workforce Development Plan.

UNION LEARNING REPRESENTATIVE GROUP

It is proposed to establish a Learning Representative Group that will be chaired by the Trade Unions. Membership of the group will include a Project Co-ordinator (subject to funding from the Learning for All Fund), representatives from the Union Learning Representative Trades Union Steering Group, elected members, Departmental training representatives and a Workforce Development Manager. A Chair, Secretary and Project Co-ordinator are appointed on an annual basis to facilitate group meetings.

The main responsibilities of the Group include:

- To establish, agree and maintain a Learning Agreement.
- To establish an agreed mechanism to democratically appoint a Chair, Secretary and members of the Steering Group, and also set out the Terms of Reference for the Group.
- Managing and monitoring progress against agreed targets.
- Contributing towards the Council's workforce development planning activities in relation to skills for life and vocational development activities.
- Assisting in the identification of the learning and skills needs of employees and the organisation.

- Identifying groups and individuals who will benefit from various learning and development initiatives.
- Producing and managing a realistic Learning Plan, setting goals and targets for projects and any other agreed initiatives.
- Developing and maintaining any contracts with outside education and training providers.

Members of the Union Learning Representatives group will be responsible for communicating learning and development information throughout the workplace and will ensure that all employees are aware of the learning opportunities that are available.

The Union Learning Representatives group will:

- Make every effort to ensure that the specific needs of employees are considered before learning takes place.
- Ensure that union members from within Sunderland City Council are given training following their appointment as ULRs.
- Assist employees and the Union Learning Representatives to make informed choices regarding learning programmes to give all concerned the ability to secure the maximum benefits possible from the opportunities available.
- Ensure that equality of opportunity is afforded to all employees so that they can benefit from the service.

The Role of Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) is to:

- Provide information on learning opportunities and providers.
- Give initial advice and guidance.
- Sign-post the prospective learner to other sources of advice, guidance and learning opportunities.
- Offer support to the employees.
- Advocate health and well-being.
- Negotiate on behalf of employees who wish to take up learning opportunities.
- Represent employees on learning and development matters with employers.

- Gather, record and organise information.

Additionally, providing their training is sufficiently extensive, some ULRs may be able to offer advice and guidance on learning and career paths. The skills brought to role are similar to those of the traditional learning representatives.

UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES

The Trade Unions and Sunderland City Council agree that any training and learning needs analysis is undertaken with the full co-operation of all the partners and that such analysis is used for learning and development purposes only. The analysis will not be used in relation to other issues such as pay, performance appraisal, redundancy or disciplinary procedures.

The Trade Unions (UNISON, GMB, UCATT and UNITE) and Sunderland City Council:

- Agree to regularly update the learning needs analysis of participants in any learning or development programme.
- Recognise the importance of equal opportunities and equal access to enhance individual learning and development.
- Will ensure that learning and development opportunities associated with this Agreement will be provided to employees in accordance with the Corporate Equality and Diversity Policy.

All individual learning records will be confidential and will be used for statistical purposes only. A designated Union Learning Representative will maintain a learning database to meet the funding requirements. Sunderland City Council's training and development records will be updated on successful completion of learning and development activities.

Other points to consider for inclusion:

The possibility of time off for learners i.e.

- Skills for life – guaranteed time off should be given, subject to operational requirements.
- Job-related training – time off should be permitted.
- Where the learner is primarily undertaking learning to benefit themselves, but there is also a benefit to their employment, consideration will be given to flexible learning provision allowing part of the learning time to be during official hours, subject to operational requirements. In such instances it is the responsibility of the learner and their ULR to make a case for management's consideration.

- Learners will be given reasonable paid time off, subject to operational requirements, to consult a ULR and discuss learning opportunities.

DEFINITIONS OF LEARNING

This Learning Agreement refers specifically to the growth and development of lifelong learning opportunities at Sunderland City Council. Learning in this document refers to the learning that is accessible to everyone, for life and for work, and especially for those who have been traditionally excluded from learning. Learning should be flexible and responsive to the needs of the learner. Learning is about individual self-development but is also about working together to meet a collective need – be it in the workplace, in the union or in society.

Learning can include:

- Job-related training designed to equip employees to undertake their current job.
- Initiatives to develop new skills and knowledge relating either to their current role or expanding scope for progression.
- Training and development that allows an employee to develop skills and confidence which may be unrelated to their current role.

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