

## **EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL**

### **PERSONNEL AND PROPERTY SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 5 JUNE 2001**

#### **SKILLS TRAINING UNIT – SERVICE REVIEW**

##### **Report by the Depute Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Resources**

#### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To review the service provided by the Skills Training Unit.

#### **2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 2.1 The Personnel Sub-Committee at its meeting on 13 February 2001 asked the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources and Head of Personnel to carry out a full review of the operations of the Skills Training Unit during 2001/02 taking account of value for money considerations and report back to this meeting of the Sub-Committee.
- 2.2 The Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources has undertaken the review and this report aims to summarise her findings and recommend a way forward. A copy of the Depute Chief Executive's detailed report is available for members on request.

#### **3. WHY DOES THE COUNCIL UNDERTAKE SKILLSEEKER AND OTHER GOVERNMENT-FUNDED TRAINING?**

- 3.1 The Council Plan for 1999/2002 outlines seven top priorities, four of which can be supported by the Skills Training Unit, namely Tackling Unemployment, Fighting Poverty, Promoting Excellence through Education and Inspiring Young People.
- 3.2 The Skills Training Unit provides government-funded training for young people under the Skillseekers banner and for adults under the Training for Work programme and New Deal initiative.
- 3.3 The purpose of the Skillseeker programme is to provide young people with relevant vocational training to allow them to access employment opportunities, thus addressing an identified national problem of youth unemployment. Similarly, other Government-funded training initiatives for adults seek to address the issue of long term unemployment amongst adults by providing relevant training to get them back into the workforce.

The Council recognises that the issues of youth unemployment and long term adult unemployment are particularly prevalent throughout East Ayrshire. It has, therefore, through the Skills Training Unit, sought to be involved in these initiatives in recognition of

- its social responsibilities to the community it serves as the local authority; and
- its position as the largest employer by far within East Ayrshire

Moreover, the Council has sought to provide directly a quality training service to young people and adults on these Government-funded programmes which goes well beyond the minimum requirements of the programmes themselves. This direct involvement in government funded training allows the Council to exercise greater control over the training, particularly of 'mainstream' Skillseekers on the Administration programme, and to use the project based training programmes to carry out environmental improvements which might not otherwise be afforded.

#### **4. WHAT DOES THE SKILLS TRAINING UNIT DELIVER IN THE FORM OF SKILLSEEKER AND OTHER GOVERNMENT FUNDED TRAINING?**

**4.1** The Skills Training Unit is currently contracted by Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire to deliver training programmes for young people and for older, long-term unemployed adults. In addition, the Skills Training Unit is contracted by the East Ayrshire Employment Initiative to deliver training for younger, long term unemployed adults under the New Deal initiative.

**4.2** Programmes currently delivered are:

- ◆ 'mainstream' Administration
- ◆ Craft Apprenticeships in Construction
- ◆ STN General Building Operations
- ◆ STN Welding and Fabrication
- ◆ STN Motor Vehicle Maintenance
- ◆ STN Horticulture
- ◆ Pre-vocational programme
- ◆ Training for Adults
- ◆ New Deal – Environmental Task Force Option

**4.3** The training programmes delivered by the Skills Training Unit are based on vocational qualifications. These are nationally recognised qualifications, designed to standards set by industry and based on different levels of competence in the workplace. They are practical qualifications that focus on achieving the right skills to do the job. They are taught and assessed in the workplace or in dedicated training centres. The table below summarises the qualification outcomes delivered by the Skills Training Unit in 2000/01.

| <b>Programme</b>                | <b>Qualification</b>  | <b>Outcomes achieved</b> |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Administration</b>           | SVQ Level 2           | 22                       |
|                                 | SVQ Level 3           | 10                       |
|                                 | Modern Apprenticeship | 11                       |
| <b>Craft Apprenticeships -</b>  |                       |                          |
| Carpentry and Joinery           | SVQ Level 3           | 4                        |
| Mechanical Engineering          | SVQ Level 3           | 4                        |
| Civil Engineering               | SVQ Level 3           | 3                        |
| <b>Special Training Needs -</b> |                       |                          |
| Horticulture                    | SVQ Level1            | 6                        |
| Welding and Fabrication         | SVQ Level1            | 2                        |
| Motor Vehicle Maintenance       | SVQ Level1            | 5                        |
| General Buildings Operation     | SVQ Level1            | 19                       |
| All STN programmes              | WordPower/NumberPower | 8                        |

## **5. WHAT RESOURCES DOES THE SKILLS TRAINING UNIT USE TO DELIVER SKILLSEEKER AND OTHER GOVERNMENT FUNDED TRAINING?**

**5.1** The Unit's staffing structure is attached at Appendix 1 for members' information. This structure has been the subject of ongoing review to ensure that the staffing mix is able to respond to trends in training programme. Any changes have been considered and approved in earlier meetings of the Sub-Committee.

### **5.2 Premises and Equipment**

The Skills Training Unit occupies premises at:

- Western Road, Kilmarnock - office accommodation for management and the Administration team plus fully equipped woodworking, engineering and motor vehicle workshops. It is principally from this location that the Special Training Needs (STN) programmes (except Horticulture) operate.
- Council Offices, Lugar - Training Officers who deliver, assess, verify and support the Administration programme for 'mainstream' Skillseekers.
- Cumnock Training Centre - One group of STN Skillseekers on the General Building Operations programme and the EASY (pre-vocational) programme.
- Annanhill Nursery, Kilmarnock - a large greenhouse and extensive cold frames for the propagation of bedding plants by Skillseekers on the STN Horticulture programme.

### 5.3 Finance

The Skills Training Unit receives its funding from five main sources – the Council, Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire, East Ayrshire Employment Initiative, Social Inclusion Partnership and projects. The table below summarises the income received from each of these sources in 1999/2000 and 2000/01.

|                                     | 1999/2000 | 2000/01  |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|----------|
| Council                             | £121,140  | £103,761 |
| Placement Income                    | £125,896  | £121,860 |
| Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire        | £353,966  | £449,969 |
| East Ayrshire Employment Initiative | £ 70,338  | £ 54,356 |
| Social Inclusion Partnership        | £ 36,000  | £ 36,060 |
| Projects                            | £ 63,849  | £111,946 |

This table shows that, although Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire is the major funder of the Skills Training Unit, each of the other sources of funding are critical to the funding of the Council's overall objectives within its STU Business Plan.

In terms of the Council's financial contribution to the Skills Training Unit, it should be noted that in the financial year prior to local government reorganisation, the total contribution made by the two former District Councils to the operation of their skills training functions was in the region of £300,000. The table below shows the budgeted and actual contribution made by the Council to the Skills Training Unit since reorganisation.

|                               | 1996/97  | 1997/98  | 1998/99  | 1999/2000 | 2000/01  |
|-------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| Budgeted Council contribution | £217,000 | £199,040 | £167,540 | £121,140  | £103,761 |
| Actual Council contribution   | £201,051 | £219,784 | £157,391 | £211,418  | £102,956 |

Thus, over the five years of the Council's existence, the contribution required by the Skills Training Unit has been reduced each year, with the exception of 1999/2000. Moreover, except for 1999/2000, the contribution from the Council required by the Skills Training Unit has been less than budgeted. The financial difficulty in 1999/2000 resulted from an overestimation of potential income against actual trainee availability and performance in that year.

## 6. HOW WELL DOES THE SKILLS TRAINING UNIT DELIVER SKILLSEEKER AND OTHER GOVERNMENT FUNDED TRAINING?

6.1 The Skills Training Unit is successfully accredited to **three** quality systems – EFQM (which applies to the whole Council, ISO 9001 (which applies throughout Personnel Services) and the Scottish Quality Management System (which applies to the Skills

Training Unit only). ISO 9001 ensures that the Skills Training Unit has effective and consistent procedures in place for the delivery of its services and EFQM and SQMS ensure, in different ways, that a culture of continuous improvement prevails in the Skills Training Unit.

Each of these quality systems is rigorously audited both internally and externally. It is significant to note that processes and procedures within the Skills Training Unit have been held up as exemplars for the other parts of Personnel Services in each of its EFQM assessments. Similarly, after an initially unsuccessful SQMS audit in 1997, the quality of the Skills Training Unit's processes and procedures has been commended in subsequent SQMS audits. The Unit's Business Planning process was introduced to support these systems and subsequently commended within external auditing.

- 6.2** Until comparatively recently, the Skills Training Unit only formally consulted its principal clients when annual contracts were being re-negotiated and these consultations tended to concentrate on contract values etc. There were, in addition, regular meetings throughout the year with the principal clients to monitor progress etc. but these consultations tended to concentrate on operational rather than strategic issues.

Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire requires that the Skills Training Unit has accreditation under the Scottish Quality Management System (SQMS). The Skills Training Unit's SQMS accreditation is independently audited annually. In this way, Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire is able to be (indirectly) satisfied with the quality of the service provided by the Skills Training Unit. However, it would be fair to say that, until comparatively recently, neither of the Skills Training Unit's principal clients regularly consulted the Unit about:

- their objectives in relation to those of the Skills Training Unit
- what they want from the Skills Training Unit
- their views on the performance of the Skills Training Unit

More recently, formal meetings have been introduced by the Skills Training Unit with its principal clients to discuss contract performance. Early feedback has been positive and beneficial for the Skills Training Unit.

- 6.3** Discussion with the local enterprise company, Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire confirmed that the Skills Training Unit delivered training programmes that were necessary for their business purposes. Proposals for new initiatives such as Modern Apprenticeship in Information and Communication Technology were warmly received by Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire and will be progressed this year. Similar discussions with the Careers Partnership concluded that the Skills Training Unit is delivering suitable programmes for their clients, the young people of East Ayrshire.

- 6.4** Over the years, the Skills Training Unit has attempted on a number of occasions to obtain, by questionnaire, the views of trainees on its performance in meeting their needs in delivering vocational qualifications. This has met with very limited success because of lack of interest by trainees evidenced by the low proportion of questionnaires completed and returned, making any meaningful analysis extremely difficult.

However, more recently, a new approach to obtaining trainees views has been piloted. This involves using recent 'graduates' from the Skillseeker programme to interview a sample of current trainees to obtain their views. This exercise is currently underway and therefore no analysis of results is available for this report.

- 6.5** There are no established arrangements for benchmarking by the Skills Training Unit. Because neighbouring authorities have withdrawn from skills training provisions, most notably in the area of special training needs, it is difficult to establish a valid group of comparators. Training providers in the commercial sector do not provide an equivalent service to that provided by the Skills Training Unit. They concentrate on providing the programmes to the minimum requirements and do not offer the 'added value' training that the Council would wish to provide in support of its wider policy commitments. Members will note that every effort is made to assess external assessment of performance through consulting funding partners as detailed in paragraphs 6.2 and 6.3 above.

## **7. HOW CAN THE DELIVERY OF SKILLSEEKER AND OTHER GOVERNMENT FUNDED TRAINING BE IMPROVED?**

- 7.1** At the current standard of provision, taking account of quality of provision, overall Council objectives within the schemes and a strong commitment to health and safety issues, it is considered that there is no appropriate alternative method of delivery for the Council in providing Skillseeker and other Government funded training. There are other training providers who could

- provide the Council with 'mainstream' Skillseekers; and
- provide an equivalent number of training opportunities for young people with special training needs and for long-term unemployed adults if the Council withdrew from direct provision in these areas.

However, as noted at paragraph 3.3 above, the Council is committed to providing high quality training which includes an element of personal and social development under these programmes. Further work would be required to establish if alternative privately managed training providers, who will have an understandable focus on financial performance, would have the same priorities. Further, by moving away from direct provision, the Council would forego the ability to influence the standards required by Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire. This could lessen, in particular, the ability of the Council to 'grow its own' employees through the 'mainstream' Administration programme and the STN Horticulture programme.

- 7.2** As noted at paragraph 4.3 above, the 'mainstream' Administration programme for young people is successful in providing qualifications and employment opportunities to young people. It allows the Council to 'grow its own' clerical and administrative staff, inducted and developed to meet the administrative requirements of East Ayrshire Council.

The Council and the Skills Training Unit, in partnership with relevant service Directors, should seek to build on these strengths in other disciplines and introduce alternative Modern Apprenticeships. For example, there are recruitment and retention problems

in Information Technology and the introduction of a Modern Apprenticeship in Information Technology could help to address these problems by allowing the Council to develop its own staff in this area. Other Modern Apprenticeships relevant to the Council's service include Housing Management, Leisure Management etc. Discussions are ongoing with service departments to identify Modern Apprenticeships that may be appropriate to introduce for the longer term benefit of their service.

- 7.3** Most of the Skills Training Unit's STN Skillseeker provision is project based and, with the exception of the Horticulture programme, it is difficult to provide work placements for STN Skillseekers. This particular scheme had some success with a recent work experience scheme for trainees from the STN General Buildings Operations programme operated in partnership with the Building and Works service.

The Skills Training Unit, in partnership with the Building and Works service and other service managers as appropriate, should seek to further build on this scheme with a view to creating a scheme which will convert work experience placements into longer term employment opportunities. The introduction of a similar work experience scheme for the STN Welding and Fabrication programme and the STN Motor Vehicle Maintenance programme should also be promoted.

- 7.4** The Skills Training Unit has made a good start on providing 'added value' training for its trainees i.e. training which goes beyond the minimum requirements of the vocational qualifications being pursued. For example, 'mainstream' Skillseekers have ready access to the full range of Training and Development courses available to Council employees and other opportunities including Customer Care, Telephone Techniques, dealing with aggressive behaviour etc. This access should be extended to all trainees, particularly with relation to training in Information and Communication Technology. Training to enhance the employability of trainees should also be strengthened by delivering an exit guidance programme which includes Job Search, C.V. Writing, Letter of Application and Interview Techniques.

- 7.5** The EASY programme addresses a specific need but operates only in the south of East Ayrshire. The Skills Training Unit should investigate the need for and potential sources of funding for an equivalent programme in the north in the areas covered by the Better Neighbourhood Services Fund such as North West Kilmarnock Shortlees/Riccarton.

- 7.6** This review of current service provision has helped the Council focus on its Skills Training Unit; reassessing Why, How and How Well we provide skills training to the community in line with Council policies. However, it is recognised that there is a need to continually consider alternatives to existing or continued provision in certain skills training areas to ensure that this training continues to reflect the local community and employers' demands while at the same time providing best value to the Council. This self assessment approach will remain an ongoing priority.

## **8. EMPLOYEE CONSULTATION**

- 8.1** Skills Training Unit's employees are involved in the development of the Unit's annual business planning process, retention of the Quality Assurance Systems and

introduction of new initiatives (eg in-house delivery, introduction of Modern Apprenticeships). Two employee surveys have been conducted within the EFQM process in 1999 and 2000 with a view to encouraging employee involvement and suggestions for improvement. They have been informed of the content of this Service Review and will be further consulted on the way forward after this Sub-Committee's deliberations. They are familiar with the issues raised within this review.

## **9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1** The previous report considered on 13 February 2001 indicated that the Unit was heading for an additional financial deficit of £15,500. Tight budgeting controls over the remainder of the year reduced this additional deficit to £4,500 which was met from within the wider Corporate Resources budget.

## **10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

**10.1** The Sub-Committee is asked to:

- a) agree that the Skills Training Unit should continue to deliver its current range of training programmes on behalf of the Council;
- b) agree that the range of service improvement measures detailed in Section 7 of this report should be pursued by the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources;
- c) invite the Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources to continually consider alternatives to existing or continued provision in certain Skills Training areas to ensure that they continue to reflect local community and employers' demands as well as providing Best Value to the Council; and
- d) otherwise note the content of this report.

Fiona Lees  
Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources  
18 May 2001

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

1. Report to Personnel Sub-Committee of Policy and Resources Committee meeting of 13 February 2001.
2. Report on Service Review of Skills Training Unit – available for Members on request from Fiona Lees or Graham Haugh

Anyone wishing further information should contact Fiona Lees, Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources telephone 01563 576013 or Graham Haugh, Head of Personnel telephone 01563 576092.

## **AGENDA**

H/reports/stu service review