

EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Thursday, 14 November 2013 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 1.10 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Mark Gray – in the Chair

Councillor Michael Waine (Deputy Chairman)
Councillor David Bartholomew
Councillor Yvonne Constance
Councillor Simon Hoare
Councillor John Howson
Councillor Richard Langridge
Councillor Neil Owen
Councillor Gill Sanders
Councillor Liz Brighthouse OBE (In place of Councillor Val Smith)
Mr Chris Bevan
Mrs Sue Matthew
Mrs Liz Smith

By Invitation: Carole Thompson

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Melinda Tilley

Officers:

Whole of meeting Sarah Jelley (Senior Policy & Performance Officer) and Andreea Anastasiu (Policy & Performance Support Officer), Sue Whitehead (Principal Committee Officer), Andrea Newman (Committee Officer)

Part of meeting

Agenda Item	Officer Attending
Item 7	Roy Leach, School Organisation & Planning Manager
Item 8 & 10	Sue Bainbridge, Schools & Learning Manager
Items 8 & 9	Frances Craven, Deputy Director for Education and Intervention
Item 9	Andrew Ball, Programme Manager

The Scrutiny Committee considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting together with the following additional documents:

OFSTED Inspection of Local Authority School Improvement and agreed as set out below. Copies of the agenda and reports and additional documents are attached to the signed Minutes.

16/13 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

(Agenda No. 1)

Councillor Waine, in the Chair as Deputy Chairman, opened the Meeting by confirming that Councillor Atkins had decided to step down as Chairman of the Committee. He thanked Councillor Atkins for her contributions to the Committee since its inception, and for her hard work.

Nominations for the election of a new Chairman were called for.

Councillor Brighthouse nominated Councillor Gillian Sanders, who seconded herself for the role.

Councillor Hoare nominated Councillor Mark Gray, which was seconded by Councillor Langridge.

Nominations were put to the vote and it was:

RESOLVED: by 10 votes to Councillor Gray and 3 votes to Councillor Sanders, that Councillor Mark Gray be elected Chairman of the Education Scrutiny Committee for the remainder of the 2013/14 Municipal Year.

17/13 INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME

(Agenda No. 2)

Councillor Gray thanked Committee and thanked Councillor Atkins for her contribution to the Education Scrutiny to date.

Mrs Liz Smith was introduced and welcomed to the Committee as the new Co-opted member, representing Primary Parent Governors.

18/13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 3)

Apologies were received from Councillor Val Smith (Councillor Brighthouse substituting), and from Mr Ian Jones.

19/13 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 5)

The Minutes of the meeting held on the 19th September 2013 were approved and signed subject to amending:-

Minute 13/13, paragraph 2:
Line 4 "academies" to read "schools".

20/13 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS

(Agenda No. 6)

The following request to speak had been agreed by the Deputy Chairman, prior to the election taking place for the new Chairman of the Committee:-

Item 6 – Mrs Sue Moon, Oxon School Bus Action Group (OSBAG)

Mrs Moon, of the Oxon School Bus Action Group, thanked the Committee for allowing her to address them.

She confirmed that she had three points to make, which were:-

- 1) that she understood that catchment areas were different from school bus routes, but she could not accept that the proposals were removed from catchment areas; they were inextricably linked.
There is no point applying for a school that you cannot afford to travel to;
- 2) regarding limiting of the issue of choice, Councillor Hudspeth had stated that his personal goal was to make all schools in Oxfordshire “good” schools. OSBAG are of the view that choice is currently one of two options:
 - a) go to your catchment school or
 - b) if the catchment school is performing badly, look for an alternative school that is doing better.

The introduction of the revised policy means that the Council are trying to cheat families out of the choice of attending their catchment schools, and are effectively saying that there is a choice, but only if you could afford to pay for it;

- 3) as for savings the revised policy would deliver, the previous consultation was flawed in that it relied on assumptions that had been queried by the Cabinet Member for Finance. Savings of £1-2 million had been suggested, but there was an absence of data to back this up.

21/13 REVISED PROPOSALS FOR THE HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY.

(Agenda No. 7)

The Committee had before them the Council’s Home to School Transport Consultation document, the current Home to School Transport Policy, the proposed Options A1 and A2 and the Frequently Asked Questions originally posted on the consultation web-site.

Roy Leach, School Organisation & Planning Manager explained to Committee that the number of issues being consulted on had been reduced to 3 main areas:

- a) **The 14-19 partnerships.** As these do not exist any more there is no need for this to be covered in the policy. However, in order to remove this matter from the new Home to School Transport Policy, it must be consulted upon;
- b) **Concessionary seat charges.** The average cost of a concessionary seat is £700.00; anything below this figure represents a subsidy. Proposed is a one-off 10% increase, then a 5-8% increase over 3-5 years;

- c) **Entitlement.** The Statutory requirement is for students to be transported to their nearest available school by the Council, if the school is over 2 miles for school aged children up to the age of 8, and over 3 miles for children aged 8-16. The Council's existing policy is more general.

As an example of the implications of the changes to the policies, the Committee were shown the map of Burford School, and its associated addresses. The map, along with the full consultation pack and maps of the other schools affected by the proposed policy, are also available on the Oxfordshire County Council web-site at the following link:

<https://myconsultations.oxfordshire.gov.uk/consult.ti/transport2015/consultationHome>

It was noted that the dots on all the maps available represent an address from which travel is provided to schools, and not an address for each child attending school. It also explained that the dots were colour coded to the nearest school to that address along the route that would be travelled to school, rather than as a straight line route. Therefore, black dots equated to an address nearest to the school that was the subject of the map. Coloured dots related to a different, nearer school, which had been coloured to correspond.

The Committee heard that in some cases villages would be split with different areas of the villages being allocated different schools. Historically these villages would have links with a particular school, and in order to avoid split communities, officers suggested that all students in these circumstances could be entitled to attend one school or another on a Travel Area basis.

It was noted that Minster Lovell was a split village between Carterton Community College and The Henry Box School, whereas students from the village are currently transported to Burford School. In terms of savings, Committee heard that students living in Brize Norton, would not be entitled to free transport to Burford School, due to the proximity of Carterton Community College.

The Committee were also asked to note that the Frequently Asked Questions attached to the Agenda had been updated and further questions now appeared on the website.

In discussion, Committee noted that this was a difficult policy area, but that the basis of the new document and methodology were leaps and bounds ahead of the summer presentation, with proposals much improved, easier to understand, fairer, eminently sensible, reasonable and logical. It was to be noted that the Council had paused and reflected on this issue, and Councillor Tilley was congratulated on the revised approach.

Although a number of Councillors were supportive of Option A2, it was noted that the statutory walking distance of 2 miles did not appear to be "rural-proof" and there may be difficulties in walking an 8-year-old 2 miles in winter across fields and bridle-ways, and it was hoped that the Admissions Team took lighting etc. into account.

The merit in retaining the provision for mileage allowance was raised. It was explained that there were reasons for retaining the provision, for example, in the case of a single child living in a hamlet with an entitlement to free transport, it may be

preferable for both the parents of a child and the Council, to pay mileage if they were willing, providing very good value for the Council. Although currently in use, a very minimal number of parents are entitled to receive these payments.

The concept of Travel Areas raised in Option A2 would enable children from the same village to attend the same school, but may make the issue unnecessarily complex, whereas in Option A1 villages were split, with some students paying for travel and some not.

Mrs Liz Jones felt that villages would be split by this. In some areas, one end of a village may be more affluent than the other, and if cost was involved, this would lead to an emotional split in her view.

Councillor Bartholomew noted that the case for Option A2 was emotional, and the issue was not one of splitting villages, but of providing free transport. Parents of school-aged children may prefer Option A2, but Option A1 may give greater savings to the wider community of Council Tax payers; there was a need to be firm and go for savings.

Although in disagreement with some of the things said, Councillor Owen agreed that this issue was one of finance and dealing with hard cash.

Councillor Brighthouse told Committee that she had spent a lot of time looking at the data, noting that in some cases, 30 different primaries were feeding into one secondary school. Currently villages do get split, and even twins get split if there is insufficient room when school places are allocated.

She agreed that the focus of this consultation is very clear; the Council were consulting on whether it can afford the current transportation costs to schools, as there is a £0.5 million shortfall on transport.

Previously contracts for school transport had squeezed companies out of business. Although unsure whether this policy was fair and equitable, from a personal perspective a family member was currently cycling to school, along roads that were congested and had potholes, and was risking injury. This had been a matter of choice for the child's parents; had a different choice been made the child would have received free transport to another school.

Concern was raised over the potential of a blank cheque being made available to academies in terms of transport and view was expressed that Option A1 removes this risk, although it was unclear whether Option A2 does the same. It was emphasised that Option A2 may prove cheaper, as there was no need to transport in 2 directions.

Carole Thomson noted that the Consultation document needed amendments; page 46, paragraph 32, line 1, the word "account" is missing, and the references to "F1 children" should be replaced with "reception children" throughout. She noted that schools had been asked to consult on these proposals. They had no idea of the impact on their budgets, and in particular if the bus routes provided are safe or not. Parents need to be made aware of which routes are unsafe, and schools needed to be informed whether or not their routes were threatened.

In terms of increasing income, Committee heard that broader works were underway with regards to transport, encouraging the use of public buses and promoting school travel. Home to School transport as community transport may be something that could be considered viable.

Councillor Hoare commented that the use of school buses by others may cause problems with child protection/safety measures, as the Council would not be able to restrict users of school transport to only parents. He noted that there were savings with Option A1 and A2, with sensible differences between the two proposals, striking at the heart of how he understands a village community to work and function. Also of note was the impact of differing term-times within schools, which would have a knock-on effect for parents in terms of childcare.

Councillor Waine reminded Committee that schools which have converted to academy status were able to set their own term-times, and asked if the Council would have to provide transport for different term dates. The Committee were informed by Roy Leach that schools have been advised that where it can accommodate changes to term dates, the Council will provide transport. Where this is not possible the school itself will have to meet the extra transport costs until the transport contracts are renewed.

In discussion, it was queried whether or not there would be an opportunity for a review of the consultation before the matter returned to Cabinet on the 28th January 2014. The Committee were advised by the Clerk that the timescales were very tight between the end of the consultation date and the meeting of Cabinet when this would be considered. It was suggested that the report to Cabinet could be emailed to members for comment. Members were split between the view that the outcome of the consultation was a matter for Cabinet, which members could comment on and attend, and the view that a thorough examination of the matter by Committee would be useful, although it was acknowledged that sight of the results of the consultation would be useful.

The Chair noted that the consultation on this matter closed on the 20th December 2013, and was due to go to Cabinet on the 28th January 2014. Mindful of the resources available to discuss this again, the issue of a further meeting was put to the vote and it was:

RESOLVED: that there would be no further meeting of the Committee to discuss the matter, but the Cabinet report would be circulated to all Committee members prior to Cabinet taking place.

22/13 OFSTED FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES (Agenda No. 8)

The Committee had before them the Oxfordshire County Council's Draft School Improvement Framework and the OFSTED Local Authority Inspection Framework, together with a presentation tabled at the meeting on the OFSTED Inspection of Local Authority School Improvement.

Frances Craven, Deputy Director for Education and Early Intervention told Committee that councillors were welcome to attend the interest sessions.

Sue Bainbridge, Schools & Learning Manager, presented the OFSTED Inspection of Local Authority School Improvement to the Committee, covering the:-

- effectiveness of corporate and strategic leadership of school improvement;
- clarity and transparency of policy and strategy for supporting schools' and other providers' improvement, and how clearly the local authority has defined its monitoring, challenge, support and intervention roles;
- extent to which the local authority knows schools and other providers, their performance and the standards they achieve and how effectively support is focused on areas of greatest need;
- effectiveness of the local authority's identification of, and intervention in, underperforming schools, including, where applicable, the use of formal powers available to the local authority;
- impact of local authority support and challenge over time and the rate at which schools and other providers are improving;
- extent to which the local authority brokers support for schools and other providers;
- effectiveness of strategies to support highly effective leadership and management in schools and other providers;
- support and challenge for school governance, where applicable;
- way the local authority uses any available funding to effect improvement, including how it is focused on areas of greatest need.

The Committee heard that whilst they were being funded programmes like "Every Child" were very important and staff within schools were being trained to deliver these programmes themselves. Exit strategy plans were in place and the Every Child Team had been to National Conferences and received national recognition for their work.

Councillor Tilley praised the Data Team within the Council, saying they were unsung heroes, providing excellent information.

Councillor Constance stated that she was impressed by the imagination that had been shown, having been forced by cuts. Lots of good points had come out of the presentation and the impact being made on vulnerable groups was noted.

In discussion, Councillor Constance asked about the formal powers for intervention, and was advised by Sue Bainbridge that a Notice is sent outlining the schools problems, giving them 15 days to put a plan together to turn the school around. Upon intervention, OFSTED become involved and the Head Teacher of the school can be scrutinised, with a recommendation that their contract be looked at.

It was confirmed that this applied only to maintained schools and the position with regards to academies was slightly different, whereby the Head of the academy would be approached first, and then escalated to the sponsor (i.e. the diocese). The Education Funding Association would then become involved, which would in turn trigger an OFSTED inspection.

During discussion, the Committee questioned the ability to allocate existing funds to give some further assistance with continuing the Every Child programme.

Carole Thomson noted that the money for continuing funding of the programme would come from the schools budget, not the County Council's budget. The Schools Forum were under pressure to find money. National leaders were also pushing to increase the number of Governors. The point was made that the money was not Schools Forum's, but money meant for schools. Carole Thomson clarified that the point she was trying to make was that schools' budgets were under pressure.

Councillor Brighthouse noted that the monies being discussed was public money set aside for education, and that local authorities struggle to provide the support needed for schools.

Councillor Sanders noted the difficulties in recruiting Head Teachers and in particular, the difficulties in recruiting "good" or "outstanding" Head Teachers. Concerns arose around the impact of the reductions of funding, as there is only so much a reduced team can achieve in terms of getting results to satisfy an OFSTED inspection.

The Committee heard that secondary school support within the Council had been reduced due to the increase in academy numbers. There had been no identified secondary school supporters within the Directorate, so there was no assurance that "good" and "outstanding" schools would maintain those same levels. There is now a secondary school specialist within post, and another is about to be supported, but the feeling is that this is not good enough.

Sue Bainbridge also advised Committee that they had struggled to find good science and English supporters. Attempts had been made to rectify this, but it was a question of finding the right skill-set. Frances Craven told Committee that the solution had to be with schools, and that she and Sue Bainbridge had been invited to join meetings with schools as partners in, and to help deal with, the issues that they faced. This way issues would be shared, rather than be seen as schools or local authority problems.

The Committee was saddened to find the Norfolk letter was to do with evaluation levels. It was noted that Oxfordshire was very rigorous and pioneering, and schools were challenged about self-examination. Committee heard that at the National Association of School Head Teachers Conference, the Conference had been asked if members encouraged their Deputy Heads to become Head Teachers. Very few admitted to doing this due to the enormous and constant changes faced by schools. However, the Committee were encouraged to hear that new and younger Head Teachers within the county had been going direct to their partnership Heads asking for support.

The Committee also heard that work being undertaken by local scientists in Oxfordshire was now being transported into schools using new technology.

The Chairman asked if this was something that select committee style working group could be set up to deal with. The Committee heard that working groups of this nature had been used in a scrutiny roll to test evidence available, rather than just take

information at face value. Such a working group could zone in on particular areas, satisfying both themselves and Education Scrutiny Committee that things were happening and making recommendations where necessary. A future OFSTED inspection was one area where this may be appropriate, in order to produce a scrutinised take on the School Improvement Framework, whilst looking at particular aspects. However, the timing and work programmes needed to be looked at, joined up and aligned so as to get the timing right. Paragraphs 2 and 3 of page 102 of the agenda pack were also noted as an area which a select committee style working group could concentrate on. Although concern was raised that maybe work may be duplicated, the Committee heard that they were not there to nod through paperwork, but to have a stronger role.

Frances Craven confirmed that she would welcome help to improve the framework, as it would demonstrate at an Inspection that the Council were not in the position of Norfolk or the Isle of Wight. Although Oxford is not high on the list of “good” or “outstanding” schools, it was improving, and a journey to that effect could be demonstrated.

Councillor Brighthouse confirmed that this was a matter not just for officers, but for Committee also, and was concerned that there is not a lot of support for officers, except from scrutiny, to do a piece of work. The Council still have a basic educational need, and schools who can't or don't deliver should be invited in alone, or visited so this can be addressed.

Councillor Hoare was not persuaded of the need for a further Committee, but felt that there could be a sharper focus on the agenda with Education Scrutiny Committee, rather than another tier of committee adding to costs. This Committee was in it's early stages and there was a need to explore the energy of the Committee.

There was discussion about the Terms of Reference, the use of select committee style working groups for specific issues, or whether meetings should be more regular rather than a select committee style working group formed, although there was further feeling that a working group of this nature would be of support to officers on this issue.

The question of whether or not to form a select committee style working group was put to the vote and it was:

RESOLVED: that a select committee would be formed. Members were asked to volunteer and interest was expressed by Sue Matthew, Councillor Sanders, Councillor Waine*, Councillor Howson, Councillor Gray and Liz Smith who were appointed.

*Councillor Waine was appointed as Chairman for the new select committee following a nomination from Councillor Sanders, seconded by Sue Matthew.

At this point Chris Bevan left the meeting and the meeting adjourned temporarily at 12.25pm.

The Committee re-convened at 12.32pm.

23/13 EXTERNALISATION PROPOSALS

(Agenda No. 9)

The Committee heard from Frances Craven on the report previously circulated at page 105 of the agenda, that extensive briefing of staff, National Association of Head Teachers, Schools Forum and Oxfordshire Governors Association had been taking place. Meetings for governors, schools business manager and bursars had also been held, so that everyone was up to speed in the context of spending reviews, and it was clear that the status quo could not be maintained. Three issues had come to the fore as areas of concern:-

- Choice available;
- Flexibility of what was on offer;
- Timescales that users would be tied into.

A joint venture seems to be a positive way forward and outsourcing had not proved a popular option. Schools are keen to be involved in the process and there was interest as to what a partner would bring to the venture. It would be challenging to present the outcomes the Council are looking for. A questionnaire had been sent out to schools seeking views in respect of outcomes, objectives and commitments and the results were due back by the end of December summarising the situation.

In discussion Committee noted that this was a sensible way forward, with soft testing a welcome partnership and evolutionary approach that was to be warmly encouraged.

Of the other counties that had already been through this process, Committee heard from Andrew Ball, Programme Manager, that Devon had been outsourced 18 months ago, Surrey 10 years ago and Staffordshire recently. Outcomes showed that academies had engaged in buy-backs from all services. In the three ventures looked at Councils had engaged schools as almost partners and there had been high buy-back levels, which were very strong.

Some Councillors noted their support for this approach, and it was mentioned in discussion as being positive that the status quo was not seen as sustainable. However, the process depended on the quality of the service offered to schools and it was discussed that sponsored academies don't buy back into services. If corporate care was joined to the services offered thereby expanding the base of services offered, this may provide a better quality vision. Andrew Ball confirmed that the providers were in dialogue, and the Payroll Services were seen as essential.

24/13 PROVISIONAL GCSE RESULTS IN OXFORDSHIRE MAINTAINED SCHOOLS AND ACADEMIES

(Agenda No. 10)

Sue Bainbridge, Schools and Learning Manager, confirmed to Committee that the report before them had previously been seen and was presented now as an amended document to take into consideration re-marks and revised figures. Amendments are shown in italics. The Committee were informed that now none of

the county's secondary schools were below the floor level of 40%, being the Government-set minimum target for schools. Councillor Tilley said that 60% was the benchmark figure, so some schools are still not good enough.

From the report, the schools with the largest percentage increases and decreases were highlighted. The Oxford Spires Academy had produced true cohort figures this year at Year 11, and the Council were comfortable with that, whereas in the past some students had been in an off-site facility and not included in the schools figures.

With regards to English & maths, schools were performing well. Although results from St. Gregory's were of concern, the Committee were informed that their A-level results were of the highest standard. At the Oxford Academy, Committee heard that a new Head Teacher had been appointed and underperformance issues were to be addressed.

The Committee also discussed the teaching within schools to D to C and C to B boundaries in order to push results up and ensure that every child gets the best education possible.

25/13 ATTAINMENT WORKING GROUP UPDATE (Agenda No. 11)

The Committee heard from Councillor Howson with regards to the Attainment Working Group, that an initial meeting has been held and a second meeting was due to take place.

26/13 WORK PLAN AND COMMITTEE BUSINESS (Agenda No. 12)

Councillor Brighthouse suggested a seminar for all members on attainment may be useful. In discussion this was felt to be a good idea, with breakdowns for key stages rather than focusing on other areas, perhaps with 3-year trends and progress measured.

Sarah Jelley, Senior Policy and Performance Officer, explained to Committee that the work programme would be scheduled in order to use officer time and resources efficiently. Four items had been noted for the next Committee agenda:-

- The OFSTED Framework select committee working group feedback;
- The Attainment working group feedback;
- The GCSE science results;
- The Home to School Transport report.

Councillor Bartholomew requested a re-vote on the decision to appoint a select committee style working group, as, if the matter had been decided by Elected Members of the Committee only, he noted that the decision to form a select committee would have gone the other way. After discussion on this issue, Sue Whitehead, Principal Committee Officer, informed Committee that she would check the position with regards to Co-opted and Invited Members for future meetings.

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However, it was agreed that the decision to appoint a select committee working group would stand.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing 2014