

EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Thursday, 16 October 2014 commencing at 9.00 am and finishing at 12.00 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Mark Gray – in the Chair

Councillor Michael Waine (Deputy Chairman)
Councillor Kevin Bulmer
Councillor Yvonne Constance
Councillor Tim Hallchurch MBE
Councillor Pete Handley
Councillor Steve Harrod
Councillor John Howson
Councillor Sandy Lovatt
Councillor Gill Sanders
Mrs Sue Matthew

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Melinda Tilley, Cabinet Member for Children, Education & Families

By Invitation: Carole Thomson, Oxfordshire Governors Association

Officers:

Whole of meeting Sarah Jelley, Sue Whitehead (Chief Executive's Office)

Part of meeting

Agenda Item

Officer Attending

6 Margaret Dennison, Interim Deputy Director – Education and Early Intervention, Sue Bainbridge, Schools & Learning Manager and Vicky Gledhill, Business Development & Change Manager

7 & 8 Roy Leach, School Organisation & Planning Manager

9 Tan Lea, Early Intervention Manager

10 Sue Bainbridge, Schools & Learning Manager

The Scrutiny Committee considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the and agreed as set out below. Copies of the agenda and reports are attached to the signed Minutes.

28/14 INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME

(Agenda No. 1)

Councillor Gray welcomed Councillors to the meeting, thanked them for coming in for the earlier start time and in response to comments indicated that this was a one off due to other meeting commitments.

29/14 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 4)

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 July were agreed and signed subject to the correction to Minute 21/14 to show that Frank Newhofer was representing the Oxfordshire Governors Association.

Responding to comments/queries Margaret Dennison indicated that the position with regard to school balances was being considered with a view to meeting with the identified schools. Following reiteration of concerns over the position with regard to Academy balances the Committee urged officers to seek a meeting between the Committee and the new Commissioner for Schools as soon as possible and in the meantime for officers to contact the Commissioner with a view to getting some assurance on academy balances.

There was a question following the implementation in September of free school meals for KS1 pupils (Minute 26/14) but it was noted that it was too early in the scheme to comment

It was AGREED that revenue balances be on the agenda for January together with an update on the position with regard to free school meals.

30/14 THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY IN THE PARTNERSHIP CONTEXT

(Agenda No. 6)

Margaret Dennison, Interim Deputy Director – Education and Early Intervention, Sue Bainbridge, Schools & Learning Manager and Vicky Gledhill, Business Development & Change Manager attended for this item.

Sue Bainbridge, gave a presentation setting out the current position on externalisation noting that the information provided was subject to consideration at Cabinet next week. She explained how it has been developed, the underlying principles and set out the key functions of a partnership model. These were about quality assurance and supporting school improvement. She also outlined the key activities necessary to forming a future partnership including the importance of the delivery of the traded offer. The traded offer also provided an opportunity for engagement with Academies.

Margaret Dennison responded to concerns from members about the lack of detailed information about the current position, indicated that what was agreed was a set of principles and since her arrival she had met with Hampshire County Council. They had their own set of challenges and so far there was not sufficient meaningful data from them about the financial model and the implications for Oxfordshire County Council. This provided a space for reflection and allowed time for professional exchange sessions. There had been meetings for an exchange of information at a professional level looking at similarities and differences. An analysis was to be presented to Cabinet and would lead to a very clear way forward. She gave

assurances that there were plans in place whatever was decided. The Committee **AGREED** that they receive an update to the next meeting.

Vicky Gledhill, Business Development & Change Manager, gave a presentation on securing outdoor learning provision. It was noted that Hill End is excluded from the Outdoor Education Centre Review. She outlined that market engagement had been undertaken and that there would be an exercise to invite proposals on outline solutions on how the provision of Outdoor Education Centres could be delivered in line with the Council's strategic objectives. She detailed the service specification and outlined the progress made using the one service approach which meant that they were expected to break even in 2014/15. This did not include corporate overheads such as back-office and property costs which were currently being met by the Council.

During discussion the Committee congratulated the efforts made by all involved in the Outdoor Education Centres and commented on the value of the service they provided. It was noted that the commitment and passion of the staff was integral to the success of the service and that they must be integral to its future. Responding to concerns that the service should remain affordable under externalisation Vicky Gledhill stated that affordability and access were key service specifications.

31/14 UPDATE ON ACADEMY CONVERSIONS

(Agenda No. 7)

Roy Leach, School Organisation & Planning Manager, updated the Committee on the current level of academy conversions. He noted that approximately 3/4 of secondary, 1/5 of primary and 1/3 of special schools had converted to academy status. The level of conversion of special schools had not changed in 20 months. The greatest change currently was in primary schools where there were more at the planning stage.

Responding to questions, Roy Leach indicated that some schools had considered and rejected the idea of conversion but that he had no doubt that over time they would reconsider. He expected that only a small number of secondary schools and around a half of primary schools would not be academies by the start of the next School Year. He clarified that schools who were voluntary converters needed to be financially stable but sponsored academies need not.

The Committee discussed the implications for the Council of a reduced number of maintained schools and in particular the likely reduction in staff and the implications of the loss of economy of scale particularly for the remaining maintained primary schools. Roy Leach indicated that there was work being carried out to explore options for schools to join together collaboratively to purchase services.

32/14 SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING

(Agenda No. 8)

Roy Leach, School Organisation & Planning Manager, presented the data on Schools capacity, admissions and preferences.

During discussion the following points were made:

- 1) Members paid tribute to the work done by officers in the face of huge increases in the numbers of children.
- 2) They recognised the pressures the expansion programme placed on capital funding. It was suggested that representations were needed to central government to persuade them that prudent planning should not be dealt with harshly but should be rewarded.
- 3) An on-going problem was identified with regard to need arising from small housing developments without S106 money.
- 4) There was discussion of what could be done about those schools identified in the information provided that had a disproportionate number of places available. It was noted that schools did go in and out of favour with parents and that a poor Ofsted inspection would have an impact. Roy Leach commented that the number of spaces in Oxford was expected to fall with Oxford Academy and Oxford Spires taking more pupils.
- 5) There was discussion of the introduction of University Technical Colleges such as the one at Banbury and the impact this could have on school place planning. Early planning was important.

33/14 PARTICIPATION STRATEGY

(Agenda No. 9)

Tan Lea, Early Intervention Manager presented the updated participation strategy. She noted the improving picture but that there was still more work to do particularly around vulnerable groups.

During discussion members questioned Tan Lea on the actions being taken to sustain improvement and she outlined the approach being taken including the role of hubs and the importance of partnership working with schools, businesses and colleagues in the Economy & Skills Team. She confirmed that action included early intervention for those at risk and where necessary home visits to follow up where information was lacking.

Responding to a question on how councillors could help Tan Lea referred to information on the web site that they could signpost for people and the importance of engaging local businesses.

Members welcomed the event with businesses referred to in the report. Tan Lea reassured members that they were not ignoring the part that Small and Medium Enterprises could play. There was some discussion on the use of BTEC qualifications and Tan Lea confirmed the importance of having a broad range of choices for young people. This included the promotion of apprenticeships. Reference was made by a member to the amount of work carried out by voluntary groups and the significant funding they received from for example Town Councils. It was important that their role was managed to ensure best use of their efforts.

There was some discussion over the amount and quality of career advice in schools and Tan Lea explained the work being done with schools to improve the situation.

Responding to questions on Annex 2 Tan Lea clarified that the figures set out were aspirational and that in no way was the Committee being asked to approve it today.

Members **AGREED** it would be helpful for the figures to be broken down to locality level and considered at locality meetings.

34/14 PERFORMANCE OF WHITE WORKING CLASS BOYS

(Agenda No. 10)

Sue Bainbridge, Schools & Learning Manager, presented a report on the educational attainment of white working class boys and stressed that this purely presented the current information. There was no reason to assume that only the same general approach to tackling low attainment would work for this group and she was interested in the comments and guidance from members. She added that this matter was of national interest and that a report had recently been produced by the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission. She undertook to send a link to members.

She referred to the work of the Access and Achievement Steering Group which was looking for best practice and schools bucking the trend. She was hoping to involve a greater level of experts, e.g. from Further and Higher Education. In response to a question Sue Bainbridge outlined the composition of the Group. It was in the early stages and they were meeting with HMI to look at the Groups composition and HMIs involvement.

Sue Bainbridge explained that there were some characteristics of best practice such as having an inclusive culture, high expectations, the best teachers in lowest sets; directed feedback, parental engagement and evaluation. These applied to all low attaining groups and she queried if there is something different we should do for this particular group.

During discussion the following points were made:

- 1) Members highlighted the importance of role models and there was discussion of the mentoring system. It was suggested that a focus on the father and son relationship may be useful. To explain to fathers, failed by the system in the past, the opportunities available now. Sue Bainbridge supported the importance of parental involvement and the support of others and referred to the successful reading campaign using volunteers. There was reference to the involvement of Oxford University who gave an opportunity to young people to go on trips that made a difference to their motivation and aspirations. A member commented on the work done by a local youth worker and stressed the need to support local workers.
- 2) Reference was made to the Big Brother system in America and Sue Bainbridge responded that buddying schemes were used for instance at Hill End for the most vulnerable young people.

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- 3) Members highlighted the academically successful education models elsewhere such as India and China and queried if there were lessons to be learnt. It was suggested that the experiences of children here were very different and that in addition to academic success we also prized creativity and innovation. What was apparent in these countries was the lust for education. Sue Bainbridge commented that schools were most interested in best practice in schools near to them which provided concrete examples of best practice.
- 4) Responding to a comment that in today's employment market it seemed that young people leaving education without 5 GCSEs were unemployable, Sue Bainbridge replied that it was essential to focus on preparing children for life not exams. Our best schools were doing that. There were different pathways for different children and an approved providers list had been developed to meet the needs of these young people. Attention was drawn to an Ofsted consultation which was an opportunity to change the current over emphasis on exams
- 5) Responding to a member who would have liked to see key stage 1 data where he felt significant strides were being made Sue Bainbridge undertook to bring this data back to a future meeting. She also indicated that she would circulate information about a Pupil Premium Conference to be held on 12 Nov 2014
- 6) The role of governors to help identify those in need of support was recognised and they had the responsibility not to give up on any child.

It was **AGREED** that data on the performance of white working class boys at KS1 be submitted to a future meeting

35/14 FORWARD PLAN AND COMMITTEE BUSINESS

(Agenda No. 11)

During discussion of the Forward Plan members **AGREED** the following items as a priority:

- Revenue balances
- Free School meals – to investigate the hidden cost of free meals. Suggested that the provider be invited and that portion size also be considered
- Schools Forum Funding

Other items in the plan were to be moved to the April meeting. An additional item was raised on attainment in Stem subjects so as not to lose sight of it.

The Committee also **AGREED** that the Ofsted Inspector be invited to a special meeting arranged as soon as possible and preferably in November;

The Chairman highlighted issues around Carillion that were raised at a meeting of the Schools Forum and it was **AGREED** to ask the Performance Scrutiny Committee to investigate.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing

2014