

EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Wednesday, 14 March 2018 commencing at 1.30 pm and finishing at 3.15 pm.

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Michael Waine – in the Chair

Councillor Mrs Anda Fitzgerald-O'Connor (Deputy Chairman)

Councillor Sobia Afridi

Councillor John Howson

Councillor Jeannette Matelot

Councillor Gill Sanders

Councillor Alan Thompson

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Hilary Hibbert-Biles

By Invitation: Ms Carole Thomson
Mr Ian Jones
Dame Kate Dethridge, Deputy Director, Regional Schools Commissioner.

Officers:

Whole of meeting Deborah Miller and Lauren Rushen (Resources).

Part of meeting Jo Brown (Children's Services).

Agenda Item Officer Attending

The Scrutiny Committee considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting, together with a revised Work Programme tabled at the meeting and agreed as set out below. Copies of the agenda and reports and additional document are attached to the signed Minutes.

86/18 INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME

(Agenda No. 1)

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and in particular the Deputy Director, Regional Schools Commissioner, Dame Kate Dethridge and members of her team who were attending for a question and answer session at Agenda Item 6.

87/18 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Suzanna Bartington and Richard Brown.

The Committee was advised that Richard Brown had resigned his position as a co-opted member as he was no longer eligible having resigned as a governor.

88/18 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 4)

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 December 2017 were approved and signed as an accurate record.

Matters Arising

In response to a question raised under Minute 78/17, the Chairman reported that a letter had been sent to all Oxfordshire M.P s regarding the underfunding of the high needs block and that there would be a report back to the Meeting in June.

Councillor Hibbert-Biles, Cabinet Member for Public Health & Education reported that she had attended a meeting with the Department for Education who had acknowledged that Oxfordshire were underfunded and that dialogue had now been opened.

89/18 REGIONAL SCHOOLS COMMISSIONER

(Agenda No. 6)

The Deputy Director for the Regional Schools Commissioner, Dame Kate Dethridge attended the Meeting for a question and answer session regarding the work of the Regional School Commissioner and school performance across Oxfordshire.

By way of introduction the Deputy Director gave a brief overview of the work carried out by her office. The Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) covered North West London and South Central which covered 27 local authority areas from North London to Northampton. The RSC supported schools in difficulty in finding supporting sponsors; supported Multi Academy Trust development, school improvement and school grants - including managing £140mn school improvement grants for schools, MATs and an emergency fund.

The RSC established, developed and maintained relationships and believed in working in collaboration to achieve a best solution for schools and children. Stakeholder engagement was another key role of the RSC and had a MAT reference group, together with events that were run for maintained and academy schools on subject specific topics such as improvement of disadvantaged learners and the Pupil Premium.

During questions and discussion, the following points were made:

1. Performance at KS2 in Oxfordshire was reaching the expected standard, reading was slightly above and writing was slightly below. Results were in line with national levels but progress was an area of focus. Maths was slightly below average. At KS4 the national average was 42.9% versus Oxfordshire at 48.1% so the county was performing better than the national average. For Ofsted, academy schools had 74% good or outstanding ratings, this was 95% for maintained schools.
2. When asked what the Commissioner's response was to tackling underperforming academies, the Deputy Director explained that when a school was underperforming it would be identified in September or October by a data triage. The RSC would then talk to MATs and would hold them to account of any underperformance. This would include meeting with the MAT CEO and Head Teacher and looking at their school improvement offer and progress. The RSC meet each term with the LEA including The Director, Roy Leach and Councillor Hibbert-Biles. When a school had been placed into special measures a robust solution was needed. The RSC talk to local sponsors and the local authority to find a solution that was in the best interests of the school and pupils. If the school was in a Trust we see it as the responsibility of the Trust to communicate what was happening to parents and pupils, not the role of the RSC. It was noted that this communication was not monitored so it was not known whether this happened in all cases.
3. The Head Teachers Board (HTB) was not a decision-making body, any decisions were made by the RSC. RSC would communicate with the HTB at a point where the project lead had found a strong sponsor or brokerage solution and would take this to the Board to stress test the solution. The minutes were published on the RSC website, the RSC had been requested to have more detailed/fulsome minutes and a weblink could be provided.

In response to how the RSC would expect a Dioceses to find a new sponsor, the Deputy Director explained that the request might require different treatment but that they would consider a mixed MAT (some of which existed for CofE schools) but there were no Roman Catholic mixed MATs that they were aware of at the moment and would seek to appoint a new Roman Catholic MAT.

4. In relation to how RSC consult parents about the future of the school their children attend, the Deputy Director explained that Ofsted information was shared widely and it was good practice for a MAT to engage.
5. When asked how many academies in Oxfordshire were currently operating with a deficit budget for 2018/19, the Deputy Director stated that it was Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) that held this information, but it would be fewer than 2% nationally as 98% of schools received an unqualified opinion on their accounts. The RSC could however provide this information for 16-17.
6. Referring to the letter from Lord Agnew encouraging RSC's, their teams and the ESFA to involve chair of governors and non-executive board members in their meeting, the Deputy Director reminded members that the Trust was the employer. Moving forward the RSC would meet with a different range of people

and would be keen to meet with Chairs and CEOs to support them in their position.

7. When asked if the RSC would nominate a trustee for a MAT Board, the Deputy Director stated that the RSC would not put people on to a Trust Board but may make recommendations to a Trust e.g. when they wanted somebody with particular skills in relation to risk or health and safety for example. The RSC ran an Academy Ambassador Programme to upskill Trust members and could sign post schools to this programme. It had been very successful in upskilling people.

The RSC's view on whether an underperforming Trust could take on either new or convertor schools was that the first consideration was the capacity of that Trust and the likelihood of success. The RSC would always consider a range of options to seek to improve schools. If there was capacity in the Trust then there might be a reduced risk in taking on additional schools but if they had recently taken on new schools there would be a higher risk associated with taking on a new school. A balance needed to be struck.

When asked whether the RSC thought there was an optimum or a minimum size for a Trust? The Deputy Director stressed that the RSC needed to be very clear about why a Trust wanted to grow and they needed to supply growth plans. If the Trust was very small, then the RSC were noticing more conversations between MATs seeking to merge e.g. 2-3 MATs becoming a single MAT of 6 schools.

8. In response to a question on the length of time the RSC would allow a school to be both in financial special measures and rated inadequate, the Deputy Director stressed the importance of it being as short a time as possible - ideally within 9 months at the most. The shortest time was usually around 6 months. Sometimes this was outside of the RSC control e.g. land issues or due diligence and the capacity of the local authority.
9. When asked about how the RSC gathered local intelligence about individual academies, the Deputy Director explained that the RSC wanted as rounded a picture as possible. The RSC met with the local authority (the last meeting they had was just before Christmas) and worked in partnership with them. Information from the local authority helped them to make the right decisions that were not just data driven.
10. In response to a question around how the RSC were addressing the rise in permanent exclusion in Oxfordshire academies: The Deputy Director reported that they held MAT meetings, together with looking at school performance data including attendance and absences. These meetings provided the RSC an opportunity to challenge schools about exclusions. The RSC also looked at exclusion figures over time and Trust Boards would be challenged over this where there wasn't improvement.
11. When asked whether the RSC would agree to single academy trusts or whether there was a preference towards MATs and if it were MATs whether local or

national, The Deputy Director answered that they haven't had many single academy trusts - mainly MATs but that they were not in a position to refuse a single academy trust. The preference was always towards the right solution and in many cases, that would be a local solution.

12. In relation to schools that had been judged as inadequate by Ofsted and were in a poor state of repair so unable to secure sponsorship, The Deputy Director acknowledged that there was a problem. The RSC worked in partnership with the ESFA and the local authority to find a solution. There were rare and exceptional cases but the RSC did everything they could. She indicated that she was aware of the case the committee was referring to and the building had been less than attractive to sponsors but that the RCS were working in partnership to find a solution.
13. When asked what future the RSC felt that UTC/Studio Schools had in Oxfordshire, The Deputy Director explained that it had been mixed to date - 2 pieces of legislation to support this. Firstly, the duty to write to parents regarding the options and secondly meeting with parents at least once per year had made a difference. Teaching schools had also made partnerships with UTCs to improve standards, sometimes working with MATs and in some cases even joining MATs.

In relation to how the RSC ensured that vulnerable groups received the correct interventions, the Deputy Director explained that they would always look at vulnerable pupil data to check how disadvantaged pupils were doing against other pupils, looking at schools where there was no gap. They had also held very robust conversations about this and hosted many events to find the best way forward to support vulnerable learners.

Following the question and answer session, the Chairman thanked Dame Kate Ethridge and her team for their attendance and openness and stressed that the Committee was keen to maintain the good working relationship established between the County Council and the Commissioner's Office.

90/18 ANTI-BULLYING CHARTER FOR VOLUNTARY ADOPTION BY SCHOOLS (Agenda No. 7)

In response to a motion from Council about reviewing the prevalence of prejudice-related bullying in schools and online, the Committee had previously received a short report outlining policy and guidance on prejudice-related bullying and cyber bullying and how the Council was working to tackle the issue.

At its meeting on 13 December the Committee recommended that an Anti-Bullying Charter be developed for voluntary adoption by schools. The report now before the Committee outlined the progress that had been made towards achieving this.

Ms Brown, Anti-Bullying Co-ordinator, in introducing the report explained that following a meeting with the Cabinet Member for Education and the Deputy Director to discuss the content of the Charter, it was felt that Anti-Bullying Alliance 10 key principals on tackling bullying would be an excellent basis for Oxfordshire's Anti-Bullying Charter.

Following gaining permission from the Alliance (who were one of the main organisations signposted in the Department for Education guidance “Preventing and Tackling Bullying” and were currently funded by the DfE to deliver the “All Together” programme which Oxfordshire had been successful in securing), the new charter was launched on the 28th February and 38 schools had already adopted the charter.

Any school would be able to contact the Anti-Bullying Co-ordinator to sign up for and adopt the Anti-Bullying Charter. Schools would then be provided with a copy of the Anti-Bullying Charter to display in their reception areas to show their commitment to those key principles. This would provide a strong message to everyone in the school community. It would also provide an opportunity to signpost Oxfordshire guidance, templates and protocols to support schools to develop good practice. Some short guidance for schools to accompany the charter was currently being written.

Schools who wished to achieve further recognition for their practice in relation to Anti-Bullying alongside the Charter could also receive the Oxfordshire Anti-Bullying Charter Mark

The Committee welcomed the progress made thus far and made the following points:

- The Committee requested that the information be disseminated through the headteachers and chairs meeting;
- There was a request that the charter and guidance be circulated to all members of the Committee;
- The committee requested that the guidance on cyber bullying should be sent out with the charter in order that schools could deal with it appropriately
- The Committee requested that a short summery of the guidance around cyber bullying be produced and sent to all schools and all governors.

91/18 SCHOOL ABSENCE AND ATTENDANCE

(Agenda No. 8)

The Committee had previously agreed to undertake a review of educational attendance in Oxfordshire. The Committee had before it a report which outlined a suggested scope for the review, following a presentation given by officers at the last meeting in December. The report also sought approval from the Committee to co-opt another non-Cabinet member to the deep dive investigation.

Following discussion, the Committee **AGREED** the scoping document subject to the end date of the Review being moved to September 2018 and the following members be appointed onto the Group:

Councillor Jeanette Matelot
Councillor Sobia Alfridi
Councillor Michael Waine
Mr Ian Jones.

92/18 FORWARD PLAN AND COMMITTEE BUSINESS

(Agenda No. 9)

The Committee considered a revised forward plan which had been circulated at the meeting (a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes) and **AGREED** the business set out on the forward plan. Subject to the Chairman and Deputy Chairman managing the timing and order of business for the efficient and effective running of the Committee.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing