

EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Thursday, 22 January 2015 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 12.47 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Mark Gray – in the Chair

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

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Tilley

By Invitation: Carole Thomson
Ian Jones

Officers:

Whole of meeting Sarah Jelley (Senior Policy & Performance Officer); Sue Whitehead (Chief Executive's Office)

Part of meeting

Agenda Item	Officer Attending
6	Mark Jenner, School Intervention Manager and Lucy Wawrzyniak, School Intervention Leader
8 & 9	Rebecca Matthews, Interim Deputy Director for Education and Learning; Gillian McKee, Finance Business Partner (CEF)
10	John Mitchell, Assistant to the Director for Children's Services
11	Rebecca Matthews, Interim Deputy Director for Education and Learning

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

1/15 INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME

(Agenda No. 1)

Councillor Gray welcomed Councillor Curran as a new member of the Committee and also welcomed Rebecca Matthews as the Interim Deputy Director for Education and Learning.

2/15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 2)

Apologies were received from Councillor Hallchurch.

3/15 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 4)

The Minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2015 were agreed and signed.

In response to a query on minute 35/14 the Committee was advised that the intention was for the Ofsted Inspector to attend the April meeting.

Following some discussion in relation to minute 32/14 it was agreed that Roy Leach, School Organisation & Planning Manager come to a future meeting in relation to issues around pupil place planning, small housing developments and the use of S106 or CIL funding.

4/15 ANNUAL REPORT OF SERVICE FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN.

(Agenda No. 6)

Mark Jenner, School Intervention Manager and Lucy Wawrzyniak, School Intervention Leader presented the contents of the report drawing attention to the headlines summarised on page 2. Responding to questions they clarified what a virtual school was and that over the 7 years that it had existed they had seen improvements in attendance and attainment.

During discussion members congratulated officers on the report and in particular noted that the case studies were helpful. In considering the report the following matters were discussed:

- 1) The impact of raising the leaving age to 18 particularly as regards the FE sector. The Committee was advised of some difficulties with young people being able to access more academic courses. Schools looked to provide academic learning and the FE sector was more vocational. Young people who had worked hard to achieve 7 C grades found themselves unable to continue to academic A levels as often schools were not flexible enough to take them. They could end up at colleges where there was less support, taking the wrong courses and dropping out before they were completed. Officers expressed the view that they would like to see some of the funding from the pupil premium plus going into this area.

- 2) The Committee also recognised the importance of alternative provision such as apprenticeships. In response to concerns that over the effectiveness of the efforts to aid transition from school to adult life the Committee was advised of efforts by the County Council to actively offer training opportunities to young people in their care. A member asked that a future item be included on the agenda looking at the effectiveness of transition provision.
- 3) There was discussion over the particular difficulties for children in care homes and the added difficulty where there was out of county placements.
- 4) The Committee noted the large numbers of agencies that could be involved with the one child and the importance of partnership and joint working to effectively co-ordinate work for the benefit of the child.
- 5) A Member recognised the huge cultural change taking place to get schools to accept their corporate parenting responsibilities.
- 6) In response to a query about how they were getting the message out to Head teachers and Governors officers advised of the actions being taken and noted that the young people themselves were the best advocate of the work being undertaken.

Councillor Gray noted that he would be visiting the virtual school and that the challenge for the Directorate was around those schools not undertaking their corporate parenting role.

5/15 EDUCATION ATTAINMENT WORKING GROUP UPDATE

(Agenda No. 7)

Councillor John Howson presented the findings from the last meetings of the Education Attainment Working Group.

Following a query on the information on the bottom table of page 41 where a heading appeared to be missing it was agreed that this be clarified to Committee Members by email.

A Member commented that the figures had been taken to his locality meeting and concerns had been raised at the lack of accountability on levels of performance. Members discussed the role of the Committee which was one of monitoring, influence and identifying trends and some concern was expressed that the performance indicator targets set were ones over which the County had little responsibility. Attainment would be a regular item on agendas. Going forward the Commissioner would have an important role to play. Members highlighted the importance of targets being cascaded down to schools and the need for local councillors to have the information on local attainment to administer the challenge or praise to schools in their area. Councillor Gray commented that Performance Scrutiny Committee had asked that this Committee ensure that all councillors were briefed on the attainment results. Locality meetings in January would consider the information which councillors had received.

The Education Scrutiny Committee AGREED to:

- (i) accept this report from the Attainment Working Group.
- (ii) disband the working party in view of a lack of officer time to support its work, but keep the main issues under review on a regular basis.

6/15 SCHOOLS FORUM FUNDING

(Agenda No. 8)

Rebecca Matthews, Interim Deputy Director for Education and Learning and Gillian McKee, Finance Business Partner (CEF), presented an overview of Schools Forum role in decisions made about the use of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) – annually and in relation to any unspent DSG balances retained from previous years.

During discussion a member highlighted that it was unclear where the authority and responsibility for decision making lay and he would welcome a discussion with officers on the reporting chain and who ultimately ratified the decisions made. Carole Thomson, commented that she had previously given a presentation to this Committee on this matter and would be happy to circulate it to new members.

Officers responded to individual questions explaining the source of underspends, and clarifying that the funding formula did not take into account the numbers of children in a school on a child protection plan. Pupil premium was the mechanism for providing additional funding for these children.

The Education Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the report.

7/15 SCHOOL REVENUE BALANCES

(Agenda No. 9)

Rebecca Matthews, Interim Deputy Director for Education and Learning and Gillian McKee, Finance Business Partner (CEF), attended for this item. The report updated the Committee on the maintained schools identified as having consistently retained surplus revenue balances, at the end of the last four financial years, and the work undertaken to challenge these schools about the plans for use of these balances.

Responding to concerns over the level of retained balance Rebecca Matthews noted that they had looked carefully at all the schools identified in the report and all would be clearly advised that large balance retained over a period of years was not acceptable. However the majority had sound reasons for those balances such as being a very small school where changes in numbers of pupils can have a devastating effect on budgets. It was necessary therefore to take a school by school approach and they were meeting with a small number of schools where there was particular concern. This would put a marker down that the County Council was taking this issue seriously.

During discussion members queried whether the safety net of balances should be held at school level or could be aggregated to be used more effectively, particularly as a growth fund for new school places. The Committee was advised that this was

not possible for academies and free schools and School Forum had taken the decision not to opt for that for maintained schools. Carole Thomson added that figures were always a snapshot and that there was a huge amount of fear in schools about the prospect of future cuts. She noted that the Committee should not get this out of kilter as many schools were very close to the wire in terms of their budgets.

The Education Scrutiny Committee AGREED:

- (a) to note the contents of the report; and
- (b) to note that work challenging schools on use of balances is expected to be completed in Spring 2015 and recommendations for further action will be included in a subsequent report.

8/15 FREE UNIVERSAL FREE SCHOOL MEALS

(Agenda No. 10)

The Children and Families Bill, placed a duty on state-funded schools in England to provide free school meals for all Reception, year 1 and year 2 children with effect from September 2014. The Education Scrutiny Committee received a progress report on the introduction of the new arrangements in July 2014 and subsequently asked for a report on the costs of the new arrangements. This report is the response to that request.

John Mitchell, Assistant to the Director for Children's Services presented a report on the associated implementation costs to schools and the council including consideration to the consequences of parents not declaring FSM. In relation to paragraph 13 he updated the Committee that 4 bids had been successful and paid tribute to Gail Witchell and the Team in Corporate Facilities Management who had assembled the bids.

Referring to the concerns that it would lead to a reduction in the number of parents claiming free school meals thus affecting pupil premium he noted that there had been a fall-off in numbers known to be entitled but that this was also reflected in other years so there was likely to be some other reason behind the fall that would need further investigation.

There was some discussion about what could be done to get the message out to parents about the need to claim where entitled. One member noted that her school had sent letters out to parents and organised a prize draw for parents sending in their claims. Other suggestions included involving the press and amending the standard admission form to include free school meals claims as part of the school admissions process. Central Government was looking at how the pupil premium information could be obtained in other ways and any support that the County Council could provide would be helpful. John Mitchell undertook to consider and follow up the suggestions made.

During further discussion a member queried how the Committee could follow through on this issue. Some of the measures were short term and there was a question over the on-going extra costs to schools and whether the grant was sufficient. John

Mitchell confirmed that the on-going costs to schools were a gap in their knowledge and that such information would be interesting. He added that these costs were the responsibility of schools and provided for by Government.

A member referred to the following motion passed by Council and sought an update:

“This Council asks the Education Scrutiny Committee to consider asking those schools which currently do not, to provide school breakfast clubs for their pupils. In particular, it is asked to consider the impact this would have on raising attainment, improving absence rates and lateness and to investigate how sponsorship, alongside the Pupil Premium, might fund the breakfasts. This information should then be provided to all schools in the County.”

The Committee was advised that no action had been taken so far and AGREED that so far as possible officers promote breakfast clubs and encourage their introduction.

The Education Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

9/15 EXTERNALISATION UPDATE (Agenda No. 11)

Rebecca Matthews, Interim Deputy Director for Education and Learning provided an update including on the School Improvement Service going forward. Councillor Tilley at the table.

Councillor Tilley stated that when attending Schools Forum she had learnt that all HR facilities were to be based at Eastleigh but that the HR professional staff would be based in Oxfordshire. Rebecca Matthews added that the delivery model would be reviewed in a year. In response to a comment that if schools were going to buy in to the services they needed a guarantee of service of more than one year Rebecca clarified that the review was about where the service was based and not the service.

Rebecca Matthews updated the Committee on the current position with traded services. Cabinet had decided not to continue with the Hampshire Partnership with regard to school improvement services. An alternative model was still being developed. Schools would be consulted and involved in devising an acceptable model. She detailed the approach being taken and referred to the work of the Teaching Schools Alliance who would be a key player. It was intended that a draft model would be available for consideration at the next meeting..

During discussion the following points were made:

- 1) There was concern about the level of information and transparency given that Councillor Tilley had not known about the delivery model until informed at Schools Forum. Councillor Tilley assured councillors that that matter had been addressed.
- 2) The staff were a precious resource and there was concern that they would walk away as the package for only one year would not be attractive.
- 3) The strong family of schools working together in Oxfordshire, involving maintained and academies alike, was valued and Members expressed some

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concern that the changes not affect that. There was a worry that if the services fragmented and schools did not buy in then it would reduce the Council's ability to understand what was going on in our schools. Councillor Tilley replied that she understood the concern and recognised the fears as everyone had worked very hard to keep schools together.

- 4) A member expressed concern over the lack of transparency and that Members were not being informed. They need to understand what was happening on such a major issue.

10/15 FORWARD PLAN AND COMMITTEE BUSINESS

(Agenda No. 12)

Members considered the forward programme of items and agreed items for the April meeting. Items on the loss of pupil premium, unemployment, NEETs (including consideration of technical qualifications and apprenticeships) and the impact of raising the leaving age should come later in the year.

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Date of signing 200