

(Agenda Item 10)

The Cabinet considered a report (CA10) which set out the recommendations of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee following its review of the operation of the Charging in Schools Policy.

Councillor Fitzgerald-O'Connor, speaking as Chairman of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee, **commended the recommendations from the Committee and welcomed the views expressed in the letter from Abingdon Citizen's Advice Bureau. She stated that while not within the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee's remit, she would undertake to discuss with the Music Service how charging policy operated in relation to that service and communicate this information back to the Scrutiny Committee.**

**Councillor Waine expressed thanks to Mr Michael Hocken and Ms Karen Thomas of the Abingdon Citizen's Advice Bureau for raising this issue and for their input. His detailed response to the Scrutiny Committee's recommendations and the Citizen's Advice Bureau advice is set out in Annex 1 to these Minutes.**

**RESOLVED:** to:

- a. endorse the Cabinet Member's response to the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee's recommendations;
- b. Advise the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee accordingly.

### **ANNEX 1:Item 10: Charging Policy For Activities In Schools Minute 129/06**

**Response of the Cabinet Member for Schools Improvement (response shown in red type)**

**A: Comments on the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee:**

- (a) **to re-issue a clear and unambiguous statement of law, practice and general policy on schools' charging on behalf of the authority as LEA;**

**Agree - letter to heads and chairs of governors in September.**

- (b) **to ensure by authorising a short letter of guidance to schools, that letters issued by schools to parents concerning plans and arrangements for school trips make it clear that the schools can only request voluntary contributions;**

**Agree, will include this in letter above.**

- (c) **to ensure that schools' charging and remissions policies and examples of trip notices are included in the materials required for submission to each School Improvement Partner (for roll-out before September 2006 in Oxfordshire secondary schools and September 2007 in the County's primary schools). [For reasons of resource efficiency, details of schools' charging policies should be systematically included in the inspection materials to be produced under the regular schools monitoring regime.];**

**This is not proper to the SIP role or in line with the 'New Relationship with Schools'.**

- (d) **to ask the Director for Children, Young People & Families to prepare, by September 2006, a detailed report on the sources and allocation of funding to alleviate social deprivation for consideration by the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee.**

**A report can be produced detailing the allocation of such OCC funding for this purpose, this may not be possible by September. Details of non-OCC funding (eg via PTAs) are not readily available without consulting schools individually.**

**... This report should include a specific assessment on the dedication/earmarking of a proportion of such funds to increase access to participation in school trips (particularly for schools in rural areas)**

**This information is not available at this time.**

**... and, to this end, to henceforth include a specific line for school in the budget planning spreadsheet;**

Agree that this can be done and a line or perhaps lines will be added in relation to school trips and similar activities to enable future reports on these matters to be prepared without difficulty.

**(e) to ask all schools to ensure their prospectuses include a summary of their charging policy;**

It is not a legal requirement to include summaries in prospectuses but we shall ask schools to consider doing so when we write to them.

**(f) that the Council perform, in effect, a sponsoring role - acting as the contact between the local schools and businesses;**

OCC has no capacity to act in this way, as an intermediary between schools and businesses – that must be something for individual schools to do.

**(g) to engage the support of local MPs to promote the benefits of links between businesses and schools;**

Agree - Cabinet member for Schools Improvement will write to local MPs.

**(h) to request Officers to report back on the prospect of or possibility of reviewing the music tuition charging policy in the light of the costs for music tuition in primary schools.**

The Music Service is part of the Directorate for Social & Community Services. It is suggested that the Director of the Music Service be invited to address the scrutiny committee.

#### **B: Comments on the submission from Abingdon and District CAB:**

The offer of help with such a survey is acknowledged. However it will still result in demands being made of CYP&F and of schools and such a task is still not a sufficiently high priority to warrant resources being committed to it. Schools will be reminded, strongly, of the legal requirements (see recommendations) and it remains the position that if a school is identified as failing to follow the legal requirements then officers will work with that school to help them address that issue.

We shall, however highlight the need for evidence of policy and practice as part of Authority's Audit of Educational Inclusion. This audit is carried out with schools every three years or more frequently where concerns have been identified. It examines pupil progress and looks at school evidence for effective practice in inclusion of vulnerable groups.

#### **C: Action proposed in response to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee:**

(a) to re-issue to heads and chairs of governors guidance on matters to do with charging;

(b) to include in this guidance:

- (i) a clear and unambiguous statement of law, practice and general policy on schools' charging on behalf of the authority as LEA;
- (ii) reference to the fact that letters issued by schools to parents concerning plans and arrangements for school trips make it clear that, in certain circumstances, only voluntary contributions may be sought;
- (iii) a suggestion that schools might consider to including summaries of their charging policies in their prospectuses;

(c) to ask the Director for Children, Young People & Families to prepare, as soon as possible, a detailed report on the sources and allocation of County Council funding to alleviate social deprivation for consideration by the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee;

- (d) henceforth to include lines in each individual school's budget planning spreadsheet to identify sums allocated for school trips and similar activities;
- (e) to ask the Cabinet Member for Schools Improvement to write to local MPs to promote the benefits of links between businesses and schools;
- (f) to ask the Director for Children, Young People & Families to include consideration of schools' charging practice in the context of its audit of Educational Inclusion;
- (g) to invite the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee to ask the Director of the Music Service to address the Committee.