

EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Thursday, 9 July 2015 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 1.00 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Mark Gray – in the Chair

Councillor Michael Waine (Deputy Chairman)
Councillor Steve Curran
Councillor Tim Hallchurch MBE
Councillor Pete Handley
Councillor Steve Harrod
Councillor John Howson
Councillor James F. Mills (In place of Councillor Richard Langridge)
Councillor Sandy Lovatt
Councillor Gill Sanders
Councillor Les Sibley (In place of Councillor Kevin Bulmer)
Mrs Sue Matthew

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
8, 10, 11 & 12	Rebecca Matthews, Interim Deputy Director, Education & Learning
12	Sarah Burnham

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.

20/15 ELECTION OF THE CHAIRMAN FOR THE COUNCIL YEAR 2015/16 (Agenda No. 1)

It was proposed seconded and following a vote by a show of hands it was:

RESOLVED: That Councillor Mark Gray be elected as Chairman of the Education Scrutiny Committee for the 2015/16 Municipal Year.

21/15 ELECTION OF THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN FOR THE COUNCIL YEAR 2015/16

(Agenda No. 2)

Councillor Michael Waine and Councillor John Howson were proposed and seconded for the role of Deputy Chairman and following a vote by a show of hands it was:

RESOLVED: That Councillor Michael Waine be elected as Deputy Chairman for the 2015/16 Municipal Year.

22/15 INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME

(Agenda No. 3)

Councillor Gray welcomed everyone to the meeting and in particular Martin Post, Regional Schools Commissioner for South-Central England and North-West London and Judith Fuller from his office.

23/15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 4)

Apologies were submitted from Councillor Langridge (Councillor Mills substituting) and Councillor Bulmer (Councillor Sibley substituting).

24/15 REGIONAL SCHOOLS COMMISSIONER DISCUSSION

(Agenda No. 7)

Martin Post, Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) for South-Central England and North-West London, gave an overview of his role and the work of the Head Teachers Board.

During questions and discussion the following points were made:

- 1) The elected members of the Head Teachers Board, made up of 4 elected and 2 appointed members, were elected by Heads and governors of academies.
- 2) If an academy school needed support the role of the RSC was to challenge the Governors and sponsors to get the best support they can, wherever that support came from including local authorities, teaching schools or local schools. However it was for the governors and sponsors to seek that support.
- 3) If a local authority had concerns about an academy school then they should be shared with him and his office. He would follow up any concerns raised with him. The relationship with local authorities was crucial to carrying out the job.
- 4) Asked about performance monitoring in the context of the coasting schools agenda Mr Post detailed how schools are monitored. He agreed that the same standards should apply to academy schools as to maintained schools and in noting that schools were responsible for their improvement detailed some of the measures open to him. Working with local authorities was an important aspect of the process.
- 5) He commented that he did have access to some of the 'soft' information on academies and that sharing that with local authorities was part of the reciprocal

- arrangement of working well together. If he was asked for such information he would be happy to let local authorities know if he could make it available or not.
- 6) Currently the definition of free school did not include UTCs and studio schools and decisions on these remained with the Minister.
 - 7) Asked about pupil place planning and transport costs Mr Post replied that when looking at commissioning free schools need was an important factor and the Head Teachers Board considered need and the impact on other schools. It was his duty to promote free schools so long as they met educational need. Mr Post indicated that there was severe basic need in his region. When looking at projects it was important to ensure that local information was considered and they did take into account the views of local schools and local authorities.
 - 8) Mr Post undertook to take comments back on the difficulty of developers being reluctant to provide S106 money for schools as they argued that there would be free schools with other funding provided. He would be happy to receive information on actual examples of this happening.
 - 9) In response to a question about multi academy trusts Mr Post commented that it was not his place to push such trust but it was important that schools not be isolated.
 - 10) There was some discussion on the issue of children not in education, employment or training (NEETs). Mr Post accepted that post 16 education was a difficult issue but that there was some innovative work with UTCs, studio and free schools. He agreed that currently there was no overall framework to support NEETs.
 - 11) With regard to multi academy trusts based outside the County area and how the Council could get warning of difficulties that may result in schools closing, Mr Post stated that each Regional Schools Commissioner was responsible for specific academy trusts. For example he was responsible for ARC. Commissioners met with these chains and would hopefully get early warning. Where a school within a multi academy trust, based outside the county failed, it would not necessarily impact on any school within the County area. Cases would be discussed on an individual basis.
 - 12) He was looking at ways to encourage more local multi academy trusts that could have benefits around recruitment and retention of staff and transition between phases of education.

The Chairman thanked Mr Post and Ms Fuller for their attendance and openness and stressed that the Committee was keen to ensure a good working relationship between the County Council and the Commissioner's Office.

25/15 DISCUSSION ON THE MATTERS RAISED DURING THE PREVIOUS ITEM (Agenda No. 8)

Rebecca Matthews, Interim Deputy Director, Education & Learning attended for this item. She commented that there were a number of very positive messages from Mr Post's discussion with the Committee about the importance of local views and the openness of communications. It was early in the relationship but there were indications that it could be a very good two way process.

During discussion the following points were made:

- 1) There were still concerns over the position of small rural primary schools with a fear that there was not a good governance model in place that would avoid the County Council having to use its residual powers. There was a role for the County Council in advocating for those small rural schools. Rachel Mathews advised the Committee of actions being taken to support such schools. Small outlying schools were a concern.
- 2) With regard to communications the Committee noted that it sounded positive but it was part of an emerging process as no framework was set down. Rebecca Matthews was not aware that there was a forum for the Commissioner to meet with local authorities.
- 3) With regard to the dominance of large multi academy trusts the Committee had a role to play in advocating for more local multi academy trusts based in Oxfordshire. Rebecca Matthews informed the Committee that they were looking to hold an event in the autumn promoting sponsorship.
- 4) It was important to take him at his word and to contact him with any concerns over the performance of academy schools. Rebecca Matthews explained that she had a monthly phone call with Judith Fuller and that phone was used where concerns arose. She would take up his offer to be able to request information.
- 5) Whilst commending his recognition of the role of governors some concern was expressed at his reliance for information on local authorities. With the reducing resources of the County Council it was queried whether it would be in a position to have this information. Rebecca explained briefly what actions were being put in place to ensure that schools were known to the Council. It was important to have better intelligence on all schools even the good ones in order to be in a better place to challenge performance.
- 6) There was some discussion on the issues around pupil place planning which is key to the work with the Commissioner. It was noted that in terms of free school policy there was a need for clarity on who is responsible.

In conclusion the Committee commended a positive discussion with the Commissioner and AGREED that he be invited to attend again in a year.

26/15 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 9)

The Minutes of the meeting held on 16 April were approved and signed subject to the following:

- It being noted that there had been discussion at several points of children not in education, employment or training (NEETs) being excluded and not picked up by the systems in place. It was AGREED that Councillors Curran and Councillor Handley meet with Rebecca Matthews to consider how the question of NEETs could be taken forward by this Committee.
- Minute 12/15 – Councillor Waine is Chairman of the School Organisation Stakeholders Group.

During discussion of the minutes the following matters were discussed:

- 1) It was noted that the report on school balances would be submitted to the next meeting.

- 2) On minute 14/15 on children on the edge of care and exclusions the Committee was advised that information was still being collected from other local authorities.
- 3) That NEETs be included on the agenda for the next meeting.

27/15 UPDATE ON LOCAL AUTHORITY ARRANGEMENTS FOR SUPPORTING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT (LAASSI) FRAMEWORK INCLUDING THE RISK REGISTER

(Agenda No. 10)

Rebecca Matthews, Interim Deputy Director, Education & Learning updated the Committee on the preparatory actions taken by the officer LAASSI Forum and highlighted changes to the risk assessment register. It was noted that on action (i) in the report the Board could not submit bids but only support them. On action (j) they had not been successful in filling the post and officers were pursuing other options.

During discussion of the risk assessment attention was drawn to trigger 6 on the gaps between pupils eligible for Pupil Premium and those not eligible where Oxfordshire was not doing well enough in reducing the gaps at KS2 and KS4. A vulnerable learners' strategy was in development and would be brought to Committee for consideration.

In considering section 5 on measures that an effective LA has the Committee asked for information to the next meeting on the situation in Oxfordshire.

During further discussion it was queried whether the provision of schools was part of the framework and within that S106 funding was a key factor. The Committee's programme should include some consideration of S106 funding for school provision. A member cautioned against too much focus on individual schools to the loss of the bigger picture. He referred to the general picture on take up of school meals and persistent absenteeism figures where the aggregate position needed consideration.

Rebecca Matthews responding to questions undertook to provide some figures to back up the broad RAG rating in the next report. The Chairman responding to a comment from a member noted that staff turnover was an issue he would wish to see on the forward work programme. The Committee could also come back to the issue of UTC and free schools, their admissions policy and implications for performance.

The Committee received and noted the report.

28/15 SERIOUS CASE REVIEW: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION SCRUTINY

(Agenda No. 11)

The Committee received a report on the implications for the Education Scrutiny Committee following the serious case review. Rebecca Matthews, Interim Deputy Director, Education & Learning attended for this item and highlighted four key areas as set out at paragraph 4 of the report.

During discussion the following points were made, with Rebecca Matthews responding to questions:

- 1) With regard to children missing from education most of these children were vulnerable because they were not engaged with an individual school. The measures described in the report were intended to ensure that various groups share information. There was a problem solving approach with a focus on ensuring that the right people were round the table.
- 2) It was explained that there were a number of reasons why a child could end up without a school ranging from being an unaccompanied asylum seeker to permanent exclusions and health reasons. She agreed that the children of travellers could also find themselves without a school place.
- 3) There was some discussion of how the Council could ensure that it know of all such children. Rebecca Matthews advised that although it was true that they only knew what they knew, systems were in place and local knowledge was good. She explained the use of the fair access panels.
- 4) Referring to the work of the fair access panels it was suggested that children did not suddenly become vulnerable at age 11 and it was questioned whether there was work to be done with primary schools to aid early recognition of vulnerable youngsters. Rebecca explained that often the issues were handled in a different way at primary schools but that there may be the need for something similar to a fair access panel at primary school level and there were pilots in place.
- 5) Rebecca Matthews agreed with comments that the relationships with families were the key to effecting change at primary school level. There was some good work around the innovative use of cyber space to reach parents and children.
- 6) There was discussion around the information provided on exclusions. The Committee noted with concern that there were incidents where schools persuaded parents to remove children under threat of permanent exclusion (paragraph18). A member expressed concern that there was a difficulty with collecting data on fixed term exclusions from some academies and queried whether this should be raised with the Regional Commissioner. It was suggested that the Council had a strong case to take to Government over non co-operation if it was putting children at risk, It was noted that free schools did not have to take children who had been permanently excluded.
- 7) There was some discussion of the process to claim back money from a school where a child was excluded in order to fund alternative provision.
- 8) On home schooling parents are not obliged to inform the authority where they choose to home school. In many cases the authority would know because a child is taken out of school. Where a child was never enrolled the Council would not necessarily know. In addition there was no right of access to the home to monitor provision.
- 9) Rebecca Matthews commented that it might be useful for the Committee to have some of the figures underpinning the report on an annual basis and undertook to circulate this information to members.

In conclusion the Committee recognised that there was good work going. The awareness of schools had been raised and there was possibly scope for the local authority to include attendance and exclusions in the position statement. There was a need to follow up academies that did not provide the necessary information. There was concern that there was a group of children who are not being tracked. A member suggested that the Committee needed to report upwards to ensure that action was

taken and there was general support for the suggestion of a cross party motion to Council from members of the Committee to put pressure on central Government.

The Committee noted the report and that the Chairman, with Councillors John Howson, Gill Sanders and Michael Waine draft a possible motion for circulation to members of the Committee with a view to it being considered at a meeting of the County Council.

29/15 FREE SCHOOL MEAL ATTAINMENT GAP AT KS4

(Agenda No. 12)

Rebecca Matthews, Interim Deputy Director, Education & Learning, together with Sarah Varnum presented the report that provided information about what steps are being taken to narrow the gap in achievement between that of vulnerable learners and all pupils.

During discussion members considered the particular problems of small rural schools. A member cautioned against too much focus on a specific problem and officers commented that it was about new ways of working.

Members highlighted the problem relating to white working class boys where there was still a large gap and the work needed in this area. Role models in schools were important and careers advice must start at primary school level to be effective. Carole Thomson highlighted early intervention in language levels. She also invited members to attend a meeting of the Oxfordshire Association of Governors where Neil Carberry of the CBI would be speaking. It was agreed that members receive details by email. The Chairman hoped that addressing the attainment gap would inform the work of the reformulated children's centres.

30/15 FORWARD PLAN AND COMMITTEE BUSINESS

(Agenda No. 13)

Following discussion it was agreed that the Forward Plan be amended to reflect the following priorities;

For the next meeting:

Revenue Balances
Vulnerable Learners Strategy
NEETs

Other items highlighted:

Recruitment and retention of teachers (December meeting)
Update on Free School Meals (including impact on pupil premium grant and issue of low take up)
LAASSI Framework update

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..... in the Chair

Date of signing

2015