

1. Education Scrutiny Committee

- 1.1 The Education Scrutiny Committee has a membership of 11 county councillors, 4 co-opted members and is chaired by Cllr Mark Gray. The county councillor membership is politically proportional to the membership of the Council. The Committee met 5 times in 2016/2017.
- 1.2 The Education Scrutiny Committee provides a county wide view of the provision of all the schools in Oxfordshire. As stated in the Terms of Reference of the Committee, the key functions of the Committee include:
- To assist the Council in its role of championing good educational outcomes for Oxfordshire's children and young people;
 - To provide a challenge to schools and academies and to hold them to account for their academic performance;
 - To promote joined up working across organisations in the education sector within Oxfordshire;
 - To review the bigger picture affecting academic achievement in the county so as to facilitate the achievement of good outcomes;
 - To represent the community of Oxfordshire in the development of academic achievement across the county, including responding to formal consultations and participating in inter-agency discussions;
 - To contribute to the development of educational policy in the county.
- 1.3 There were visits to one school in this year.
- 1.4 The committee was successful in securing attendance at the July 2016 and March 2017 meetings of the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Ofsted Regional Director to ensure the committee can effectively focus upon the continued improvement of schools in Oxfordshire.

Expansion of the Acadamisation Programme

- 1.5 Following the White Paper 'Educational Excellence Everywhere' the committee discussed and considered the implications for the expansion of the academisation of schools in Oxfordshire and raised concerns about the cost implications and the future viability of smaller rural schools of which there are a number in Oxfordshire. The committee was clear that its supports the encouragement of locally grown multi-academy trusts to meet the needs of both large and small schools in Oxfordshire and raised this with Martin Post, the Regional Schools Commissioner, at the July 2016 meeting.

School Funding Changes

- 1.6 The committee has continued to consider the changing responsibilities and resources in relation to school improvement and support over the last year. The committee has discussed concerns regarding the reduction of resources to the local authority whilst authorities continue to maintain responsibility for carrying out statutory duties.

- 1.7 A national consultation about the introduction of an Early Years national funding formula was undertaken with changes being implemented from April 2017. The committee is currently considering its response to the current national consultation of the Schools national funding formula and High needs funding reform which is due to be implemented in 2018/19. When the change in the way schools are funded is implemented Scrutiny committee members agreed that the committee will monitor the impact on schools and school improvement in Oxfordshire.

Responsibilities of the Regional Schools Commissioner

- 1.8 New government guidance issued in April 2016 has changed the responsibilities and role of the local authority. The Regional Schools Commissioner is now able to intervene in maintained schools in addition to academies. Martin Post, Regional Schools Commissioner for South-Central England and North-West London (RSC) attended the committee meeting in July 2016. The scrutiny committee raised with the Regional Schools Commissioner the concerns around schools that had been judged as inadequate and questioned about the action that had been taken in relation to the underperformance of academies in Oxfordshire. The RSC reported that he is closely monitoring 12 schools in Oxfordshire that were underperforming and was considering introducing further monitoring around the governance to ensure rapid improvement. However the RSC emphasised that it is the Academy Trust's responsibility to ensure school performance improves through the school improvement plan. The committee also expressed concern that not all academies were providing figures on attendance and the RSC would follow this up.
- 1.9 The committee asked about seeking appropriate sponsors for academies and the RSC gave an assurance that he would continue to seek the views of the local authority to identify the most appropriate sponsor and also to name sponsors promptly to ensure rapid improvement of schools.

Oxfordshire Schools Strategic Partnership

- 1.10 The first Oxfordshire Schools Strategic Partnership Annual Report was presented to the committee at the September 2016 meeting. The Oxfordshire Strategic Schools Partnership Board (SSPB) brings partners together to promote the development of sustainable school to school support across the county. The committee heard that in the first year of working together the board has been successful in engaging schools and partners so that the work includes all key partners in the current educational landscape in Oxfordshire. A recruitment and retention project by Oxford University and Oxford Brookes University was commissioned and presented to the committee at the December 2016 meeting. An operational group had also been established which manages the school improvement function.

- 1.11 The Education Scrutiny Committee stressed the importance of the board's priority of improving attendance and the committee's future focus should be working in partnership on this priority.

Recruitment and Retention of Teachers

- 1.12 The recruitment and retention of teachers in Oxfordshire has been a key issue examined by the committee at a number of meetings this year. Several people over the year came to discuss recruitment and retention of teachers with the committee including primary and secondary schools, Oxfordshire Teaching Schools Alliance, SOHA housing association, Oxford Brookes and Oxford University. Schools reported that their biggest concern was finding and keeping good teachers. Factors that were raised to the committee from the different attendees at meetings were that there are national and local shortages of numbers being trained especially in some specialities and the high cost of housing in Oxfordshire was also a barrier. The committee was informed that the shortages of numbers of teachers being trained was a result of the national allocations policy which limited the number of training posts on offer and did not take account of local need.
- 1.13 The committee recommended that the Cabinet Member requested of the Secretary of State that there should be a revised allocations policy that allows Oxfordshire schools to recruit sufficient trainees to meet the future needs of local secondary, primary, nursery and special schools.
- 1.14 The committee also recommended in the meeting in April 2016 that the local authority explores possible options for the sale of local authority land for new housing for teachers. A meeting in December 2016 has taken place with the interim Oxfordshire County Council Director and the cabinet member to explore this option further and this will be explored further in the coming year.
- 1.15 A report had been commissioned by the Strategic Schools Partnership Board to look at recruitment and retention of newly qualified teachers in Oxfordshire Schools. The report was presented to the committee in December 2016. One finding was the significance of teachers' existing connections to the locality and in some cases to individual schools as a key factor in attracting new teachers. There were specific recommendations about recruitment and retention and the committee accepted the report and made several recommendations that the report be shared widely with schools and that the local authority and schools work together on a programme of emphasising that Oxfordshire was a great place to live and work. The report has since been shared with schools and the local authority's Director of Human Resources.

Primary School Educational Attainment

- 1.16 The committee scrutinised educational attainment and noted that although Oxfordshire performed broadly in line with national averages, performance in writing tests was in the lowest 25% nationally. Also the committee noted that

there was a significant amount of underperformance of schools in Oxford City and Banbury.

Secondary School Educational Attainment

- 1.17 The committee received a report in December 2016 on secondary school attainment. A new secondary school accountability system was implemented in 2016 with the measures for schools from 2016 are: Attainment 8, Progress 8, Attainment in English and Maths (A*-C), and English Baccalaureate (EBacc) entry and achievement. The committee scrutinised the provisional results published by the DfE and noted that Oxfordshire performs less well when compared against its statistical neighbour group. However there continues to be variation in performance between localities and types of school within the county. The Didcot and Oxford localities show higher progress between key stages 2 and 4 than pupils with similar prior attainment nationally. Three localities, Bicester, Abingdon and Witney show that on average pupils make slightly less progress in these areas than pupils with the same prior attainment nationally. All three of these localities have lower attainment scores as well. Oxford city also shows low attainment from the low prior attaining cohort although high prior attaining pupils in Oxfordshire continue to perform well. The committee invited the principal of The Oxford Academy to the March 2017 meeting to hear first hand what the school had put in place to reach the highest progress 8 results in the county.

Educational Attainment of Vulnerable Learners

- 1.18 In the March 2017 meeting the focus will be on the progress of vulnerable learners with the case example of the Oxford Academy. Oxfordshire's performance compared with national levels is poor across all groups of vulnerable learners, including special educational needs, disadvantaged and looked after children. However, there are some success stories: the overall Progress 8 score for The Oxford Academy is considerably higher than other schools in Oxfordshire and the 14th highest of all secondary schools nationally.

Ofsted profile in Oxfordshire

- 1.19 In the meeting in July 2016 the committee noted that the proportion of primary schools and secondary schools judged as good/outstanding had increased for the 2015/16 academic year however the number of inadequate schools had increased by 1 to 7 and that in 2015 Ofsted decided that Oxfordshire was a local authority of concern regarding early years outcomes due to Ofsted ratings and children's outcomes. HMI had conducted a number of visits and the early years team had changed its practice which had resulted in early years settings improving their ofsted ratings following support. Members expressed concern over the reduction in the school improvement function and possible effects on attainment, however the committee was assured that the schools strategic partnership board was tasked to ensure partners worked together so that statutory duties are met.

Exclusions

- 1.20 School exclusions were a focus in July and September 2016 meetings. The committee was concerned to note that permanent exclusions from primary schools and secondary schools had increased for the 2015/16 period although this is likely to be an underestimation as data from some secondary academies was not available due to technical problems in sharing details. The committee asked for a further analysis of data around year 10 as this has the highest number of permanent exclusions.
- 1.21 The subsequent report showed that the rate of permanent exclusion of pupils in year 10 had increased year on year for the last 3 years with a higher rate of girls than previously. The committee was also concerned about the high number of exclusions of looked after children. As a result of the committee scrutinising the data one particular school has been identified for further investigation with regard to their looked after children exclusions.

Elective Home Education

- 1.22 In December 2016 meeting the annual report for Elective Home Education was received and members have asked for more information to be gathered around the spike in home education that occurs in year 10 to ascertain the factors that might be contributing to the numbers increasing for this particular year group. The committee also expressed its concern about the unregulated nature of home education.

Pupil planning process

- 1.23 The pupil planning process was reported in December 2016. Oxfordshire is experiencing rapid growth due to changes in birth rates and new housing developments in the county and this is having a significant impact on the demand for, and supply of, school places.
- 1.24 The Education Scrutiny Committee considered a report that set out the pupil place planning process in Oxfordshire, summarising current pupil planning data, and commented on specific issues relating to pupil place planning. The committee considered that there is currently effective pupil place planning ensuring the needs of Oxfordshire families are met