

**MINUTES of the meeting of Education Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Brockington, Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday, 5th April, 2004 at 10.00 a.m.**

**Present:** Councillor B.F. Ashton (Chairman)  
Councillor J.P. Thomas (Vice Chairman)

Councillors: N.J.J. Davies, R.M. Manning, Mrs. J.E. Pemberton,  
D.C. Taylor, Ms. A.M. Toon and W.J. Walling

**Church Members:** Mr P. Eyles, Mr J.D. Griffin

**Parent Governor** Mrs. S.E. Wright

**Members:**

**Co-opted Teacher** Ms. E. Christopher, Mr C. Lewandowski, Mr J.D. Pritchard

**Representatives:**

**Co-opted** Mr . A. Marson, Miss S. Peate.

**Headteacher**

**Representatives:**

**In attendance:** Councillor D. W. Rule (Cabinet Member – Education)

**60. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor H. Bramer, Councillor Mrs S.J. Robertson, and Rev. I Terry.

**61. NAMED SUBSTITUTES (IF ANY)**

Councillor J.G.S. Guthrie substituted for Councillor H. Bramer and Mr P. Eyles substituted for Rev. I. Terry.

**62. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Mr P. Eyles declared a personal interest in agenda item 12 – School Transport Review.

**63. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 19th January, 2004 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**64. HEREFORDSHIRE CHILDCARE INFORMATION SERVICE - NATIONAL AWARD FOR SERVICE DELIVERY**

The Committee were invited to note the role of the Herefordshire Childcare Information Service, (CIS) and the national commendation of the high quality of its work.

The Director of Education reported that since January 2002, the CIS had been incorporated into the range of services under the oversight of the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP), and worked within the early years part of the Council's Education Directorate. The CIS provided a range of services to parents/carers, early years providers and employers within the County. These were

outlined in more detail in the leaflet made available to Members with the agenda. During the autumn of 2003, Herefordshire CIS had been included in a national assessment of all 150 English LEAs. Herefordshire's service had been judged to be among the 30 LEAs whose service had reached the highest level of quality, for which the national quality award was given. The award had been made on the basis of a rigorous independent assessment process.

The Committee congratulated the Herefordshire CIS on receiving the national quality award for service delivery and, after questioning Mr B. Twitty, CIS Information Manager, noted the range of advice, particularly in relation to the Nursery Education Grant, and career opportunities offered by the service.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted.**

**65. SCHOOL OPINION OF THE VALUE OF THE QUALITY OF CENTRAL LEA SERVICES PROVIDED BY HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL**

The Committee received information on the results from the survey of schools carried out in the spring term 2004.

The Director of Education reported that during the early part of the spring term 2004, all schools in the County had been asked to give their assessment of the quality and responsiveness of the centrally managed LEA services provided by the Council. Copies of the letter and survey form were attached to the report at Appendix 1. The detailed responses received from schools had been aggregated and Appendix 2 to the report provided a summary for each of the 43 services included in the survey. There were 26 areas which could broadly be compared across the 2000 Audit Commission and the 2004 Education Directorate surveys, and these were summarised at Appendix 3. Of these 26 areas, 88% (23) showed improvement in satisfaction levels as expressed by schools. Those services that showed the greatest improvement in satisfaction levels were: Educational Psychology (+1.0), Payroll Services (+0.95), Learning Support Services (+0.83) and the Pupil Referral Service (+0.73). The service area to show the largest decrease in satisfaction levels was Support for Pupil Performance Data (-0.45).

On scrutinising the report the following principal points were made:

- While the replies gave a good snapshot of the services at a particular time the number of responses from the Special School sector had been comparatively low and this needed to be taken into account when considering the statistics.
- While 'Support for 14 – 19 Education', 'Support for ICT in the Curriculum', and 'Support for Pupil Data' had recorded 'medium' scores in the secondary sector, it was emphasised that considerable progress had been made in these areas. The services, run jointly between the Learning & Skills Council (LSC) and the Council, were currently without a co-ordinator and therefore there may have been some confusion over service provision. It was further reported that interviews for a co-ordinator had recently been held and that an appointment would soon be made.
- Improvements could be seen in the overall scores for Children's and Students' Services. The Director of Education reported that, while there were areas of concern, the Service, through the better use of resources, had found more time to talk to schools about children causing concern.
- In response to concerns the Director of Education commented on a number of areas concerning Job Evaluation.
- The Director of Education acknowledged that while there had been improvements in the SIMS software system, further work was needed. He

also reported that a pilot scheme was underway to develop a direct line link to the County Treasurer's CEDAR accountancy system. It was suggested that a seminar be held to inform members of the issues involved in the provision of education software systems.

- In response to questions regarding the cost of IT support to schools, the Director of Education reported that a number of factors were involved e.g. the rural nature of the County and the number of systems covered. It was noted that schools could opt out of the services and obtain their own technical support if they thought it prudent to do so.

**RESOLVED:**

That

- (a) The report be noted and a report be presented to a future meeting on the issues raised by the survey concerning the 'Support for 14 – 19 Education' service; and**
- (b) The Director of Education arrange a seminar to inform Members of issues concerning Information Technology in schools, particularly in relation to the SIMS software and the cost of IT support to schools.**

**66. BEST VALUE REVIEW OF THE INSPECTION, ADVICE AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SERVICE - STAGE 3 REPORT**

The Committee considered the Stage 3 report of the Best Value Review of the Inspection, Advice and School Performance Service (IASPS). The detailed Best Value Report was made available separately.

The Head of Inspection, Advice and School Performance Service reported that having undertaken the Best Value Review, the Team considered three main options and judged that Option C 'that the Service be retained within the Council but restructured and managed through a Local Partnership Board be endorsed' was the preferred option. The Team believed that Option C achieved the most appropriate balance in recognising the quality of the existing Service whilst establishing the imperative, agenda and method of securing the improvements required, if the Service was to continue to meet the needs of the schools, the Council and the County of Herefordshire.

In reply to concerns regarding the establishment of a Partnership Board, the Head of IASPS reported that the Board should be a proactive body with a majority of headteachers. It should be able to offer not only advice, but also the capacity to influence operational activities of the Service. In relation to the secondment of teachers from schools into advisory work, the Head of IASPS reported that the Board should also establish operational protocols and procedures to be shared between schools and IASPS. It was, however, noted that schools were currently finding it difficult to recruit to vacant posts which made secondments more difficult to arrange.

**RESOLVED:**

That **(a) the outcomes and findings of the Best Value Stage 3 report on the Inspection, Advice and School Performance Service be accepted and;**

- (b) the recommendation set out on page 36 in section 13.0 of the Best Value Review report namely - 'that the Service be retained within the Council but restructured and managed through a Local Partnership Board' - be**

accepted and recommended to the Strategic Monitoring Committee.

**67. OFSTED SCHOOL INSPECTIONS SINCE 1 SEPTEMBER 2003**

The Committee received an update on the outcomes of Ofsted School Inspections (both Locally and Nationally) since 1st September 2003.

The Head of Inspection, Advice and School Performance (IASPS) reported that, at the end of the last academic year 2002 - 2003, no schools in Herefordshire were judged by Ofsted to require 'special measures' or have 'serious weaknesses' or to be classified as 'underachieving'. Appendix 1 to the report contained summary paragraphs from 5 reports published so far in the current academic year. He highlighted that Gorsley Goffs Primary School had been assessed as underachieving. However, measures had been taken to address this criticism and the school was now moving forward.

The Committee noted that the inspection report for Westfield Special School was due to be published. The Director of Education commented that, as there were high expectations for facilities in special schools, the report may contain reference to the condition of the building. He reported that Westfield had been included for replacement as part of the unsuccessful first round bid under the "Building Schools for the Future" bid.

In answer to concerns regarding underachieving schools and the robustness of self-evaluation, the Director of Education reported that, following training, self-evaluation was monitored by the School Governors.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted.**

**68. PUPIL ADMISSIONS - TRANSFER OF YEAR 6 PUPILS TO HIGH SCHOOLS, SEPTEMBER 2004**

The Committee considered the outcome of the newly introduced admission arrangements for high schools under which parents were entitled to express three preferences for admission of their children into Year 7.

The Director of Education reported that the new admission arrangements had worked well with a high degree of parent satisfaction and that the number of admission appeals was down on previous years. He also reported that the numbers on school waiting lists had reduced since the report and he updated the Committee with the current numbers.

The Director further reported that lessons learned from the introduction of the new arrangements for secondary school admissions would be kept in mind when implementing equivalent co-ordinated admission arrangements for primary schools due to be implemented for the September 2005 intake.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted.**

**69. RACE RELATIONS ACT 2000 - MONITORING OF INCIDENTS IN SCHOOLS**

The Committee considered the Council's implementation of the requirement to monitor all incidents of racial harassment in the County's maintained schools.

The Manager of Pupil, School and Parent Support reported that, with advice and support from the Council's Race Equality Officer and relevant local groups, the

Education Directorate had given considerable attention to strategies for reducing the possibility that racist attitudes and incidents would occur within schools. A line graph appended to the report indicated the relatively small, though growing, number of pupils in Herefordshire who had minority ethnic origins. It was emphasised that the rise in the number of incidents reported was judged not to be a sign of an increasing number of incidents, but rather a greater recognition of the importance of reporting. Appendix 1 to the report outlined the key features of the Herefordshire Educational Services Strategy for preventing (and dealing with) racial intolerance and harassing behaviour. The report described the monitoring of racist incidents and the range of responses of intervention.

The Committee acknowledged that the County was not rich in cultural diversity. Pupils may therefore have a limited work and social experience of the diversity they would meet in other parts of the Country. The Director of Education reported that the Directorate were assisting schools to expand the cultural knowledge of pupils and he cited a number of examples.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted.**

## 70. MONITORING OF CAPITAL AND REVENUE EXPENDITURE

The Committee received a report on revenue and capital expenditure up to 31st March, 2004.

The report indicated that a higher than anticipated underspend on the Revenue Budget, in the region of £300,000 was being anticipated and this was further described in the report, and outlined in Appendix 1.

Expenditure on Education capital projects was summarised at Appendix 2 to the report. The report highlighted that overall, the capital programme had been delivered within budget, with neither significant over or under spend; that one of the largest items of expenditure related to the acquisition of the new site for the replacement of Whitecross School and that there were 15 projects in design or at construction. This meant a commitment to future spending of £3.9m had been made. 11 projects over £100,000 had been completed within the financial year. In accordance with this Committee's decision in January 2004 (minute 57 refers), the Chairman had visited 6 of these major projects

Since publication of the report the Chairman had also visited the capital improvement scheme at St Martins Primary School, aspects of which he had commented on to the Director of Education. The new early years provision based on the site of Hunderton infant and junior schools was working well. The benefits for staff and pupils, following improvements to two laboratories at The Minster College, Leominster were evident. However, urgent improvements, of which the Cabinet Member (Education) was aware, were needed to the boy's toilets.

The Director of Education reported that many of the school improvement schemes required major funding. These had been included in Herefordshire's 'rural' bid, which had been unsuccessful, under the government initiative 'Building Schools for the Future'. The Cabinet Member (Education) reported that despite the government's intention to allocate one funding allocation to a 'rural' bid, all the first round bids had been allocated to urban areas, an issue he had taken up through the LGA.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted.**

**71. SCHOOL TRANSPORT REVIEW - INTERIM REPORT**

The Committee were informed about the work of the School Transport Review Group.

The Chairman of the Review Group (Councillor B.F. Ashton) reported that the Group had considered the Council's discretionary policies that currently applied. Further opinion was being sought on areas relating to: Denominational Transport, post 16 transport, transport provision for under 5s and transport for children with SEN. A further report would be made to a future meeting.

During debate on Denominational Transport the Committee noted a comment that should this be withdrawn from denominational schools then this would be seen as a major change and a significant number of pupils might be prevented from attending their chosen school. It was confirmed that 'Transport for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN)' related to investigating the better organisation of transport use.

In the course of further debate the Chairman confirmed that various transport-related schemes such as the yellow bus scheme, would be taken into consideration in the review.

In reply to concerns, the Director of Education reported that any major changes to education transport policy would require extensive prior consultation with schools, parents and the public.

**RESOLVED: That the report on the work of the School Transport Review Group be noted**

**72. SURE START (WHOLE COUNTY) - 2 YEAR PLAN**

The Committee were informed about the two-year action plan for early years provision and the development of early years services in the County.

The Director of Education reported that the DfES had relaunched all early years work under the general title of Sure Start. Instead of having to develop Early Years Strategy Plans, LEAs were now expected to have a Sure Start Plan covering the whole of their area for the 2-year period 2004-06. This Plan, a copy of which was available to Members on request, would need to be approved and monitored by the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP). Within the Plan, 5 major goals had been identified within which actions had been grouped under a number of sub-headings. Delivery of the plan was also likely to be influenced by legislation expected to arise from the Green Paper, 'Every Child Matters'.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted.**

**73. EARLY YEARS EDUCATION - "COMMUNICATION MATTERS"**

The Committee were informed of the imminent publication of a new Herefordshire training video, *Communication Matters*, on early years education.

The Director of Education reported that the training video had now been completed for use by Early Years Groups, LEA nurseries and school reception classes. The response to previews had been very encouraging. The training video would be launched, with an accompanying training manual, during the summer term and would be shown before the next Early Years and Child Care Partnership meeting,

and members of the Committee were invited to the viewing.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted.**

The meeting ended at 12.12 p.m.

**CHAIRMAN**

