

**MINUTES of the meeting of Education Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Brockington, Hafod Road, Hereford on Tuesday, 22nd June, 2004 at 2.00 p.m.**

**Present:** Councillor B.F. Ashton (Chairman)

**Councillors:** H. Bramer, J.D. Grffin, R.M. Manning, Mrs. J.E. Pemberton, Mrs. S.J. Robertson, J. Stone, D.C. Taylor, Ms. A.M. Toon, W.J. Walling and S.E. Wright.

**Church Members:** J. D. Griffin, Revd. I. Terry.

**Parent Governor** Ms. K. Fitch, Mrs. S. E. Wright

**Members:**

**Co-opted Teacher** C. Lewandowski, J. D. Pritchard

**Representatives:**

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

**Headteacher**

**Representatives**

**In attendance:** Councillors T.M. James, R.I. Matthews, D.W. Rule (Cabinet Member - Education) and R.M. Wilson (Cabinet Member – Highways and Transportation).

**1. CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN**

The Committee noted the reappointment at Council on 21st May, 2004, of Councillor B.F. Ashton as Chairman and Councillor J. P. Thomas as Vice-Chairman.

**2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Ms. E. Christopher and Councillors N. J. N. Davies and J. P. Thomas.

**3. NAMED SUBSTITUTES**

Councillor J. Stone substituted for Councillor N. J. J. Davies.

**4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor R. M. Manning and Mr. A. Marson declared personal interests in agenda item 11 – Review of Discretionary Policies Applicable to Home to School Transport.

**5. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 5th April, 2004 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**6. POLICY ON 14-19 EDUCATION**

The Committee was informed of the key issues surrounding the 14-19 phase of education both locally and nationally.

The Head of Inspection, Advice and School Performance Services reported that

nationally the situation regarding 14-19 education was complex. In essence, the government was seeking to increase the numbers of pupils staying in education and training post –16; provide a wider range of choice of courses to young people; target the skills gaps and broaden the curriculum at Key Stage 4 (14-16 year olds) with particular emphasis on preparation for the world of work. The report highlighted the work of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in this area of education; the likely impact of the “Tomlinson Report”; details of areas in which Herefordshire performed well and those areas where further improvement should be strived for; the work undertaken since the 14-19 Conference held in October 2003; the employment of a consultant to draft a “Strategic Framework for the implementation of the 14 – 19 agenda in Herefordshire” and the establishment and roles of The Herefordshire Learning Partnership.

The Committee noted that the Increased Flexibility Programme (IFP) for 14 – 16 year olds, funded by the LSC and managed by the Marches Consortium was now into its second year of operation. Nine secondary schools were involved in the programme and it was anticipated that more would be involved in due course.

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

## **7. HEALTH AND SAFETY OF PUPILS DURING EDUCATIONAL VISITS**

The Committee was informed of the action taken to ensure the safety of pupils and young people engaged in off-site activities and visits.

The Committee heard that, in accordance with guidance issued by the DfES, written guidance, including policy and good practice, had been revised by the Authority and distributed to all Local Education Authority (LEA) schools involved in off-site trips and activities.

An advisory service had been set up and made available to schools, the Youth Service and Duke of Edinburgh Awards Group. In response to DfES recommendations a national programme of training for Educational Visit Co-ordinators (EVC) had been launched. The report outlined the local delivery of training and course content (Appendix 1 to the report). One of the duties of the advisory service was to monitor off-site activities and visits and this was undertaken through a system of approval and notification – further detailed in appendix 2 to the report.

The Committee noted that more specific training had been offered to schools including: the basic Expedition Leader Award; 6-hour first aid and 16-hour outdoor first aid courses and that these were payable from school budgets at cost price. It was fully appreciated that the health and safety of pupils was of paramount importance. However, concern was expressed that schools may be dissuaded from organising visits due to the official procedures involved. In response to questions concerning training for parents assisting on visits, the Committee were informed that it was for the Headteacher or Group Leader to decide the number of assistants and the level of skills required. Concern was also expressed about both the issue of teachers who also undertook the driving duties on visits and the general availability of teaching staff to undertake such visits following implementation of the Workforce Reform Agreement.

In view of the various concerns the Committee requested that a further report be submitted to a future meeting.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted and in view of the concerns raised a**

further report be submitted to a future meeting.

#### 8. THE STANDARD SCHOOL YEAR PROPOSAL FOR 2005/2006

The Committees views were sought on proposals for the standard school year for 2005/2006.

The Head of Inspection, Advice and School Performance Service reported that the Local Government Association (LGA) had issued a document (Appendix 1 to the report) which included a letter from the Secretary of State stating that he was attracted to the arguments in favour of standardising the length of school terms. The LGA continued to have meetings, especially with the NASUWT, and had agreed a number of principles, outlined in the report. Following consultation with local teacher unions, 4 options for school term and holiday dates, copies of which were appended to the report, had been distributed to schools and Diocesan Authorities for consultation. Results of the survey gave a clear signal that version C was preferred, followed by version B. Further consultation had been undertaken with the Herefordshire Association of Secondary Headteachers and Unions who had reaffirmed support for version C. He further reported that during the same period negotiations had continued across the region with many Councils receiving rejections of the LGA proposal about the school return date after the Easter break. A number of Councils in the region appeared to have agreed a 7<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> April holiday break.

The Committee discussed the report and was generally in favour of standardising the school terms thereby bringing a degree of uniformity across the region.

**RESOLVED: That the action taken in the report be agreed and that the Cabinet Member (Education) be recommended to consider adopting the school terms and holiday dates 2005/2006 as set out in Version C contained in Appendix 2 to the report.**

#### 9. MONITORING THE PROGRESS OF CAPITAL SCHEMES

The Committee received a report on capital expenditure for 2004/05 and were provided with information about progress towards the replacement of Staunton-on-Wye Primary School, and the prospect for "Building Schools for the Future".

The Head of Policy and Resources reported that projected expenditure on capital projects in Education for 2004/05 had been summarised in Appendix 1 to the report. Projects were shown individually where building contracts had been let and construction was underway, or where projects were still at the design stage. During 2004/05, major building schemes were to be completed at Lea Primary School (June 2004), Green Croft Early Excellence Centre (July 2004) and Cradley Primary School (October 2004). Design work was currently underway on a number of other major schemes. Acquisition of the new site for the replacement Whitecross High School had not been completed during the last financial year, as anticipated, but the acquisition would need to be completed this summer to allow the PFI scheme to proceed. Allowance also needed to be made for other land acquisition at Staunton-on-Wye, Sutton St. Nicholas and Little Dewchurch. Information on the replacement of Staunton-on-Wye Primary School was detailed in the report.

The Head of Policy and Resources further reported that government ministers had decided not to support any further 'pilot' authorities under the "Building Schools for the Future" scheme. The Herefordshire bid had been assessed as good and was realistic in terms of the ability to deliver. The bid was, however, assessed as being "high risk" in terms of what the DfES called "corporate capacity" due to the small size

of the Authority and its limited experience with the single PFI project. It was anticipated that an announcement would be made later in 2004 on the schemes to be given approval to start in 2006/07 and 2007/08.

The Committee noted the position regarding the replacement Staunton-on-Wye Primary School. In response to questions regarding the "Building Schools for the Future" scheme the Committee noted that long-term funding for the scheme was thought to have been committed by the government. The Committee also noted that notwithstanding the failure to secure funding under the scheme for the long-term improvement of schools in the County, the long-term education capital programme may be further complicated by the likely impact of the "Tomlinson Report" concerning the physical constraints of school buildings to deliver changes to curriculum subjects suggested in the report.

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

#### **10. REVENUE OUTFURN 2003/04 AND BUDGET 2004/05**

The Committee considered a report on the revenue budget outturn for 2003/04 and the revenue budget estimate for 2004/05.

The Manager of LMS and Planning reported that the revenue budget outturn for 2003/04 showed an uncommitted underspend of £403,000 (0.5%), further detailed in Appendix 1 to the report. Due to lower than anticipated levels of inflation and improved efficiencies in Home to School Transport, savings in this area had been greater than projected. He further reported that the Authority had met both DfES performance indicators for the Education budget 2004/05. Spending delegated to schools had met the target set by the DfES and spending on central items was within the limit set by the DfES. A summary of school balances were detailed in appendix 2 to the report. The Committee also noted that the Education Directorate were working with the Governors of the one secondary school currently in deficit to formulate and implement a budget recovery plan for the school.

The Committee noted that the system of 'banded funding' did not replace 'statemented' funding. Funding for 'statemented' pupils transferred into the County would be honoured. However, they would be subject to the usual statement review process. Anomalies between the 'statement' and 'banded' system, highlighted during the first year of operation, would be reviewed, an example being the difference in the maximum level of support available under the systems.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted and an update report on the banded funding scheme be considered at a future meeting.**

#### **11. REVIEW OF DISCRETIONARY POLICIES APPLICABLE TO HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT**

Councillor R. M. Manning and Mr A. Marson declared personal interests in this item.

Comments of the Committee were sought on the conclusions of the review of the discretionary policies for provision of home to school transport.

The Head of Policy and Resources reminded the Committee that as part of the cross-service Best Value review of transport, the Committee had established a working party to review the discretionary policies, detailed in appendix 1 the report, for the provision of school transport.

He reported that following initial consultation the Working Party felt that no change

should be made to the policies covering: Boarding points; Year 10/11 whose home address changes; Travelling times; Vacant seats for all age groups and Public Service route subsidy. Further consultation had been undertaken on: Denominational transport; Post-16 transport; Transport for under 5s and Transport for children with SEN, the results of which were detailed in the report.

In relation to denominational transport he reported that the Working Party had identified the following four options for consultation: 1. Maintain the status quo; 2. Remove any form of subsidy; 3. Seek parental contributions and 4. Free transport with mileage limits. These were further defined in the report. The Working Party had concluded that options for the future should be between 1, 2, and 3. However, due to the limited number of responses and no clear pattern the Working Party were reluctant to make a particular recommendation and proposed that the Scrutiny Committee consider options 1, 2 and 3.

The Committee debated the options. Particular consideration was given to the low response to the questionnaire; the nature of the questions asked; the range of consultees involved; the government's support for distinct and specialist schools into which category denominational schools might fall; the potential effect on poorer families in rural areas; the high degree of inter-school support between all schools in the County and the fact that many LEAs did not support denominational transport. Concern was expressed that the bigger picture needed to be considered when weighing up the potential financial savings, particularly when any changes could only be implemented over a number of years.

The Head of Policy and Resources briefly reported upon the options considered concerning Post-16 transport; Transport for under 5s and Transport for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN), further detailed in the report.

**RESOLVED: That the report and recommendations of the Working Party be noted and the following recommendations be submitted to the Cabinet Member (Education) for consideration:**

- a) **Denominational Transport.**  
That the status quo be maintained.
- b) **Post 16 Transport**  
That the current charging levels be maintained (subject to annual review) but no additional subsidy be offered on the basis that Education Maintenance Allowances (EMAs) were available to cover costs.
- c) **Transport for Under 5s**  
No change to existing policy.
- d) **Transport for Children with Special Educational Needs**  
That the existing policy be amended to benefit only those students who have not reached their nineteenth birthday, and those students not in receipt of a mobility allowance.

## **12. EDUCATION OF EXCLUDED PUPILS**

The Committee were informed about the current policy and practice for the placing of pupils in alternative schools following permanent exclusion.

The Head of Children's and Students' Service reported that a relatively low number of children were permanently excluded from primary schools and that there were

arrangements, outlined in the report, to support such pupils. The majority of permanent exclusions came from secondary schools (indicated in Appendix 1 to the report). Usually, permanently excluded students would be placed, as an interim measure, in the Reintegration Support Base (RSB) attached to the Aconbury Centre, Hereford, where their needs would be assessed. Parents of students were given advice and support from a specialist Social Inclusion Assistant. Most of the students were subsequently placed, via the cluster arrangements (indicated in Appendix 2 to the report), in a secondary school, if this was felt to be appropriate. The report briefly described the 'cluster' system and the development of a protocol, the draft of which was included at Appendix 3, to clearly state the policy and practice for placing permanently excluded pupils in schools.

The Committee debated the current exclusion policy, particularly in relation to schools with a zero tolerance policy towards drugs, and noted the position concerning the appointment of independent exclusion appeal panels to hear exclusion cases. The Committee also noted that the cluster groups, indicated in Appendix 2, required review. Clarification was requested on the relationship between the Council's exclusion policy and a schools zero tolerance policy to drugs.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted and a briefing note be circulated to Members on the relationship between the Council's exclusion policy and a schools zero tolerance policy to drugs.**

### 13. PUPIL REFERRAL SERVICE (PRUS): PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee considered progress made towards implementing the targets identified during the Best Value Review in 2002 (Appendix 2 to the report) and considered any further action that needed to be taken.

The Head of Children's and Students' Services briefly highlighted the work of the Pupil Referral Units (PRU) for Key Stage 4 pupils at St. David's, Hereford, and The Priory, Leominster, and the PRU for Key Stage 3 pupils at the Aconbury Centre, Hereford. She commented that all three PRUs had had very successful Ofsted inspections in 2000 (summarised at Appendix 1) and anticipated that further good reports would be achieved.

She reported that Appendix 2 to the report listed targets identified during the Best Value Review of the Service – reported to the Committee on 3rd December 2002 – which had been updated to show current progress. Following the Best Value Review, an outreach class has been developed and piloted for 6-8 statemented pupils with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD). That class provided for KS4 pupils and was attached to The Brookfield School, Hereford.

She highlighted that currently there was cause for concern about the consequences of there being a very small number of girls for whom an EBD statement for The Brookfield School was appropriate. The specific point of concern was that, at any moment in time, Brookfield did not have an appropriate peer group of girls for the school to be regarded as co-educational provision. The situation, which had attracted comment from Ofsted, would be kept under review. She reported that if it proved to be a longer-term problem, alternative provision may need to be developed for the small number of relevant girls.

In response to questions the Committee were informed of the range of full time; part-time or out-placements offered by PRUs. The Committee also noted that the pressures on staff in the service were high and the stress levels were a major factor in staff movement.

**RESOLVED: That the progress report on the Pupil Referral Service be noted.**

**14. BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2003-2004**

The Committee considered the outcomes on the national Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) relating to the Education Directorate for 2003-2004.

The Head of Policy and Resources reported upon the performance indicators and highlighted that 12 targets had been achieved or exceeded; 9 targets had been missed by a narrow margin and 4 targets had been missed by over 10 %. The report outlined the reasons or actions being taken to improve the situation.

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

**15. BEST VALUE REVIEW OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS SERVICES**

The Committee considered the progress of the Best Value Review of Special Educational Needs Services.

The Committee noted that the initial review had been extended to encompass all Special Educational Needs (SEN) Services and this had necessitated further and more extensive research. The Review Team would shortly produce the Stage 3 report and expected to submit the report to the Committee in October 2004.

**RESOLVED: That the progress of the Best Value Review of Special Educational Needs Services be noted.**

**16. OUTCOMES OF PARENTAL APPLICATIONS FOR YEAR 6 PUPIL TRANSFERS TO HIGH SCHOOLS, SEPTEMBER 2004**

The Committee were informed of the outcomes of parental application for Year 6 pupils into High Schools for September 2004, including details of appeals.

The Head of Policy and Resources reported that formal appeals had taken place for applications relating to five high schools and the results were detailed in the report. He commented that the new system of 3 preference applications had produced a considerable improvement in the number of parents satisfied with the outcome. The report indicated the places allocated for September 2004, compared with the number of places available. The waiting list, which included pupils whose parents decided not to appeal, would remain open until September. Currently there were no Year 6 pupils unplaced for September 2004. However, the position was subject to change as families moved over the coming months. While the introduction of the new secondary sector transfer system had been relatively smooth, he warned that the introduction of a similar system for the primary sector may be more problematical due to difficulties in establishing robust data on parents of children entering the primary sector.

**RESOLVED: That the update report on the transfer of pupils for September 2005 be noted.**

The meeting ended at approximately 5.00 p.m.

**CHAIRMAN**

