

MINUTES of the meeting of Education Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Brockington, Hafod Road, Hereford on Tuesday, 14th December, 2004 at 10.00 a.m.

Present:	Councillor	B.F. Ashton (Chairman)
	Councillor	J.P. Thomas (Vice Chairman)
	Councillors	R.M. Manning, Mrs. J.E. Pemberton, Mrs. S.J. Robertson, J. Stone, D.C. Taylor, Ms. A.M. Toon and W.J. Walling
	Church Members	J.D. Griffin (Roman Catholic)
	Parent Governor Members	(none)
	Teacher Representatives	J.D. Pritchard (Primary Teachers)
	Headteacher Representatives	A Marson (Secondary Headteachers) and Miss S. Peate (Primary Sector Headteachers)

In attendance: Councillor D. W. Rule (Cabinet Member – Children’s Services)

33. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Mr. S. Boka, Councillor H. Bramer, Mr. M. Carter, Councillor N.J.J. Davies, Mr. C. Lewandowski and Revd. I. Terry..

The Committee Officer (Scrutiny) reported that an apology had been received from Mr M Carter. Mr Carter, Head of Westfield School, Leominster, had only been elected to serve as the Special Sector Teacher Representative the day before the meeting and had not had sufficient notice of the meeting to enable him to attend.

34. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

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

35. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

36. MINUTES

Minute number 24 – Update on Ofsted School Inspections since September 2003 – be amended to reflect the Committees support for Weobley High School while in its current situation of being placed in special measures by Ofsted.

In response to questions raised under Minute 26 – School Travel Initiatives-regarding recent changes to the number of unallocated seats on buses carrying students to denominational schools, the Director of Education reported that arising from changes to the number of students attending denominational schools and a review of school transport contracts, the number of vacant seats had reduced. He

briefly outlined the policy concerning the use of vacant seats by non-denominational students, for a fee, and the degree of notification given to the parents/guardian of such students warning that the number of vacant seats would be reduced.

RESOLVED: That subject to the amendment concerning minute 24 above the minutes of the meeting held on 5th October, 2004 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

37. EDUCATION WELFARE SERVICE - POLICY AND PROCEDURES ON SCHOOLS ATTENDANCE

The Committee received an update on the policies and procedures followed by the Education Welfare Service when monitoring and promoting good attendance by pupils in school.

The Head of Children's and Students' Services reported upon progress since the last report (February 2003) in reducing the pupil absence figures. Appendix 1 set out the authorised and unauthorised absence figures between 2001/2004. She reported that, in partnership with the police, truancy sweeps continued to be conducted. Children found unaccompanied by an adult were removed from the street and taken to a place of safety where they were interviewed. The Education Welfare Service (EWS) worked supportively with families and schools to ensure that the problems of non-attendance were addressed at an early stage. In those cases where parents consistently failed to send their children to school the EWS were increasingly resorting to the use of penalties awarded against the parents. Legal action may be considered in some cases. A Penalty Notice system, set out at Appendix 2 to the report, had been announced in the local press.

The Committee noted the generally pleasing trend in reducing the number of absences. However, they noted that in 2003/04 absences in the secondary sector had risen (7.75%). The Committee requested that future reports include comparative statistics with both neighbouring authorities and nationally. The Committee also noted that in most cases "Traveller Children" were recorded as authorised absences while the family were travelling.

In response to concerns expressed regarding children absent with a parent, and those absent without the parents' knowledge, the Head of Children's and Students' Services reported that the EWS had a carefully graded approach to ensure that pupils returned to regular school attendance. She commented that EWS understood that problems occurred when pupils were absent without their parents' knowledge or were late due to parents work commitments. However, she emphasised that it was the parents responsibility to ensure that their child was in school.

The Committee also noted that schools were actively discouraging parents from taking children out of school for family holidays during term time.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and future reports include comparative statistics with neighbouring authorities and nationally.

38. SUPPORTING PUPILS LEARNING ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE (EAL)

The Committee considered the support offered to schools where they had pupils whose first language was not English.

The Head of Children's and Students' Services reported that there had been a significant increase over the last 6 years in the number of newly arrived pupils whose

first language was not English. The vast majority spoke a wide range of first languages and required support to speak English in order to access the National Curriculum. She reported that the expectation was that such pupils would be fully included in Herefordshire schools and that the Herefordshire Learning Support Services would support schools in meeting these pupils' needs. The support available was set out in the information booklet included as Appendix 1 to the report.

The Committee noted that schools had embraced the cultural diversity and that the schools had found that the curriculum and values of the school had been enriched by the experience. The Committee noted that no further specific funding was triggered through the number of such pupils at school. It was considered that this funding issue may be an issue for discussion at the Schools Forum.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

39. SECURITY IN SCHOOLS

The Committee were informed of the approach to security in schools.

The Head of Policy and Resources reported that the Council had a duty to ensure the safety and welfare of both pupils and staff on school premises, and as part of its asset management, was also responsible for protecting its sites, buildings and contents. At the same time schools must be welcoming and stimulating places to enhance teaching and learning. The report set out how the various individual risks were managed to minimise the chance of any unforeseen event occurring, and its impact if it did occur.

During discussion the following principal points were noted:

- Discussions with the Fire Service were ongoing concerning the categorisation of school buildings according to level of risk.
- It was estimated that it would cost up to £20 million to install sprinkler systems in all schools. This would probably be to the detriment of general maintenance as no separate funding was available.
- By the nature of the buildings, it would be difficult or more costly to install sprinkler or alarm systems in old rural schools. Also, due to their rural nature it took longer for emergency services to get to the site.
- With the increase in ICT equipment in schools, rural schools especially were becoming increasingly attractive to thieves.
- Sprinkler and alarm systems were installed in new build schemes. Attention was also paid to the overall security during the design stage.
- It was reported that nationally, more damage had arisen from water damage caused by sprinkler systems than fire.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted.

40. PRIMARY SCHOOL PROVISION IN HEREFORD CITY

The Committee were informed of the strategy for providing school places in Hereford City, particularly south of the river.

In accordance with the request at the October meeting for more information, the Head of Policy and Resources reported upon the projected pupil numbers in Hereford City Primary schools, further details of which were set out in Appendix 1 to the report. This information had led to the following conclusions:

- In the City as a whole pupil numbers were expected to fall by 300 over the next 3 years, although admissions in reception were likely to stabilise at current levels.

- South of the river, pupil numbers may increase. There should be no further reduction in pupil admission numbers. Planned admission levels may need to increase to cater for housing development and the known numbers of children.
- West of Hereford, there may be advantages, after allowing for the expected increase in admission levels in 2008, in reducing admission limits to help individual school organisation and planning.
- Outside central Hereford, no increase was expected in pupil numbers. In the absence of any large-scale housing development, consideration could be given to reducing admission limits to help in school organisation and bring greater stability to school planning.

The Head of Policy and Resources further reported upon a proposal for the amalgamation and phased replacement of Hunderton Junior and Infant Schools to form a new all-through primary school on the current site. A copy of the draft informal consultation document concerning the proposal was attached at Appendix 2 to the report.

The Committee noted that the current buildings had major technical faults, including concrete cancer, and that significant investment would be needed if they were to be maintained in the long-term. Replacement would have to be undertaken in a phased manner at an expected cost of at least £4 million.

The Committee were informed that the Governors of Hunderton Junior School supported the proposal as it offered greater opportunities to better manage the facility.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the proposed amalgamation and phased replacement of Hunderton Junior and Infant Schools be supported in principle.

41. PROGRESS OF MAJOR CAPITAL SCHEMES - AND TARGETED CAPITAL FUND

The Committee received a progress report on the Education Capital Programme and considered the recently announced DfES financial allocations for future years.

The Head of Policy and Resources reported that 48% of the capital resources allocated for education in building projects had been spent. Projected expenditure on capital projects in Education by the end of the 2004/05 financial year was summarised in Appendix 1 to the report. Discussions with the County Treasurer were ongoing about how the anticipated £725,256 under-expenditure could be carried forward into 2005/06.

He highlighted that major building schemes at Cradley Primary and Weobley High schools had been completed. Work had commenced on site at Ledbury Primary with work at Fairfield High and Kingstone High (new sports hall) due to commence in January 2005. It was anticipated that the PFI contract for the replacement of Whitecross High School would be signed by Christmas 2004.

He further reported that DfES future capital borrowing allocations for Herefordshire (for the period 2005/6 to 2007/8) were significantly lower than in previous years. He also reported that confirmation had been received of the capital allocations to be devolved directly to schools. While this showed an increase from £2,275,601 in 2005/06 to £3,040,463 in 2007/08, the fact that the devolved sums to schools were higher in 2007/08 than the Council's borrowing allocation caused some concern and the implications would be considered by the Schools Forum during the Spring Term.

The Committee noted that Herefordshire had not been included in the next two waves of 'Building Schools For the Future', an issue that caused some concern to Members, particularly in relation to the condition of The Minster College, Leominster. However, the County had been successful under the 'Targeted Capital Bids' for a replacement school at Sutton and a sports hall for Weobley High School.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

42. EDUCATION BUDGET REVENUE MONITORING REPORT 2004/05

The Committee received a report on the education revenue expenditure for 2004/05.

The Committee noted that the projected underspend had increased to £465,000. The main variations to the budget were set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

RESOLVED: That the Education Revenue Expenditure 2004/05 report be noted.

43. HEREFORDSHIRE'S LOCAL PUBLIC SERVICES AGREEMENT

The Committee considered progress made against the Education elements of the Herefordshire Local Public Services Agreement.

The Head of Policy and Resources highlighted that, while good progress was being made in achieving the targets, target 11 (Early Years) was heavily dependant on the performance of individual settings run by third parties. The Committee noted that target 6 (Looked After Children and Young People) and target 9 (GCSE Outcomes) had been extremely ambitious and, for a number of reasons e.g. the varying aptitude of different cohorts and the reliability of statistics used, these particular targets were unlikely to be met.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

44. SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS PROVISION & SUPPORT SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Committee noted that the progress of the Improvement Plan (Stage 4) of the Best Value Review of Special Educational Needs Provision and Support Services had been delayed due to the need to conduct further extensive consultation. It was anticipated that the Improvement Plan would be presented to the next meeting of the Committee at which time the Committee may make comments or suggestions for amendment which the Cabinet Member (Children's Services) may or may not chose to incorporate into the final Improvement Plan.

RESOLVED: that the position be noted and the Improvement Plan for the Best Value Review of Special Educational Needs Provision and Support Services be considered at the next meeting.

45. BEST VALUE REVIEWS - UPDATE

The Committee considered the progress made on the seven Best Value Reviews conducted between 2000 and 2004.

The Director of Education reported that five best value reviews of the Education Service had been carried out between 2000 and 2002 namely:

- Pupil Admissions and Exclusions
- Provision and Distribution of School Places

- Education Welfare Service
- Education Services for Schools
- Medical and Behavioural Support Service and Pupils Educated by Parents

All the reviews had been completed and Stage 4 Improvement Plans had been produced. Progress against the individual improvement plans had been detailed in Appendix 1 to the report. In all cases significant improvements had been implemented. Since further improvements would be as a result of either new legislation or through Council Performance Management the Director reported that no further updates were planned for these reviews.

The Director of Education further reported that the Improvement Plan (Stage 4) for the review of the Inspection, Advice and School Performance Service, was due to be considered by the Committee in March 2005. The position of the Special Educational Needs Provision and Support Service, as reported earlier in the agenda, was now also due to be considered in March 2005.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

46. URGENT ITEM - DR. E. ORAM, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

The Chairman and Committee paid tribute to Dr. Eddie Oram, Director of Education.

The Chairman reported that Dr. Oram would be retiring at Christmas after 7 years as Director of Education for Herefordshire and almost 20 years with the former Herefordshire & Worcestershire County Council. He commented that Dr Oram had been a driving force behind many of the positive achievements in Herefordshire schools. The Committee wished him a long and happy retirement.

The meeting ended at 11.47 a.m.

CHAIRMAN