

MINUTES of the meeting of Education Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Brockington, Hafod Road, Hereford on Tuesday, 23rd September, 2003 at 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillor J.P. Thomas (Vice Chairman in the Chair)

Councillors: H. Bramer, N.J.J. Davies, Brig. P. Jones CBE, R.M. Manning, Mrs. S.J. Robertson, D.C. Taylor, Ms. A.M. Toon, W.J. Walling,

Church Members: J. D. Griffin.

Parent Governor Members: Mrs S.E. Wright.

Co-opted Teacher Representatives: C. Lewandowski, J.D. Pritchard.

Co-opted Headteacher Representatives: Mr A. Marson.

In attendance: Councillors: P.E. Harling, D.W. Rule (Cabinet Member - Education) J. Stone and D.B. Wilcox.

20. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor D.C. Short (Chairman), Mr M Burgess, Councillor J. E. Pemberton and Rev M Smith.

21. NAMED SUBSTITUTES (IF ANY)

Councillor Brig P. Jones C.B.E. substituted for Councillor Mrs J. E. Pemberton.

22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

23. MINUTES

A point of clarification was requested in relation to minute No 4 – Declarations of Interest – concerning when to declare an interest. Having received advice Councillors Mrs S.J. Robertson and Ms A.M. Toon requested that their declarations, referred to in minute No 4 be deleted.

RESOLVED: That, subject to the above, the minutes of the meeting held on 14th July, 2003, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

24. YEAR 2003 PROVISIONAL RESULTS FOR HEREFORDSHIRE SCHOOLS

The Committee considered the Summer 2003 provisional results at Key Stages 1,2,3,4 and 5 for Herefordshire Schools.

The Head of Inspection, Advice and School Performance Service emphasised that the results for the year 2003, outlined in the report, were provisional and subject to a margin of error, in general, of + or – 1% due to a number of papers being remarked, particularly in English at Key Stages 2 and 3. He reported that overall, the results indicated another positive performance in Herefordshire. At the primary stage results seemed to have reached a plateau. At Key Stage 3 (14 year olds) achievement levels had risen in maths and science but fallen in English. At Key

Stage 4 (16 year olds) GCSE figures continued to improve significantly.

In the course of discussion the Committee noted that due to inconsistencies a high number of exam papers, particularly in English, had been re-submitted for re-evaluation and that each year there seemed to be changes to the exam criteria which made it both difficult for teachers to plan course work and to compare results. The Committee requested that the Director relay the congratulations of the Committee to pupils and schools on the continued improvement in attainment levels. However, they did not want the schools to become complacent over the exam results.

The Head of Inspection, Advice and School Performance Service cautioned that while steady improvements were being made in County schools, the DfES were scrutinising the results to ensure that further improvements were being made in line with other Local Education Authorities.

RESOLVED

That

- (a) Pupils and schools be congratulated on their level of attainment shown in the provisional exam results. However it was stressed that schools should not become complacent about the good results,**
- (b) concern be expressed over the apparent inconsistency in marking, particularly in KS2 and KS3 and;**
- (c) the appreciation of the Committee be conveyed to the LEA staff for their contribution to raising the attainment levels.**

25. MONITORING OF PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2002 - 2003

The Committee considered the performance against Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI) and Local Service Agreement (LPSA) targets for 2002/2003.

The Director of Education reported that the Directorate was required to report annually to the Audit Commission on thirty Best Value Performance Indicators. In twelve cases, performance had improved or been maintained, and in eight cases performance had fallen since last year. Six of the indicators were new and therefore no results were available as yet, whilst the definition for a further four had been redefined so that performance could not be compared with previous years.

The Directorate had also signed up to four Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) targets that could be broken down into eight separate measures. Progress was encouraging and the targets remained realistically within the range that could be achieved despite the high demands in some areas, especially the target for performance in GCSE. Individual targets, including comments, were attached to the report at appendix 1.

In the course of scrutinising the indicators and targets the following comments were made:

- In future reports the Committee wished to see reference to performance against local indicators.
- Accepting that there should be a 'norm of expectation' in relation to pupil achievement, the Committee expressed some concern about the pressure to achieve ever-higher targets.
- It was noted that some BV targets had now been removed and therefore gaps appeared in the numbering sequence.
- On questioning BV46 the Committee received a definition of 'unauthorised absence' from school. It was noted that the main areas of concern related to

the number of parents that take their children out of school, particularly at primary age, and those who take unauthorised holidays during term time. The Committee suggested that schools should be requested to encourage parents/guardians to keep pupils in school or to notify the school of any absence.

- Progress on Early Years Provision was dependent on outside providers. The Committee noted that the DfES were now questioning the accreditation scheme that the LEA had signed up to and that there was growing uncertainty as to how the Council would meet the LPSA targets concerning Early Years Provision.
- While the provisional examination figures for summer 2003 suggested a substantial improvement in pupil attainment, the targets, particularly the LPSA stretch target, looked very demanding.
- The Committee noted that while currently there were looked after children (LAC) capable of attaining 5+ GCSEs at grades A* to C this may not be the case by the target date of March 2005.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted and it be recommended that the Cabinet Member (Education), encourage schools to remind parents/guardians of their duty to keep pupils in school or to notify the school of any absence.

26. SCHOOL WORKFORCE REMODELLING

The Committee considered the introduction of the National School Workforce Remodelling Programme and its implications for Herefordshire.

The Head of Inspection, Advice and School Performance Service reported upon a national agreement to start the process of reducing excessive workloads for teachers and to enable teachers to focus on their professional responsibilities. The costs to schools of the Programme had to be met from budgets allocated to schools under Local Management of Schools (LMS) arrangements. Herefordshire had received a 100% Standards Fund Grant of £91,000 from the DfES for 2003/4. The grant was specifically designed to help 'LEAs develop their capacity to support schools in remodelling their workforce'. The report indicated the contractual changes being made to help reduce the workload burden. Appendix 1 to the report indicated the administrative and clerical tasks teachers should not routinely be required to undertake.

While appreciating the budgetary implications on schools, the Committee were pleased that a move was being made to reduce the burden on teachers.

The Committee discussed how Job Evaluation/Single Status had effected morale in schools and, in particular, its effect on recruitment. They also discussed the timetable for implementing the programme and how Herefordshire compared to other authorities. The Director of Education acknowledged that there were a number of authorities ahead of Herefordshire in implementing the programme. However, while Job Evaluation had caused a number of problems, there was a clear intent by the authority to implement the remodelling programme.

RESOLVED

That

- 1. the report be noted and a further report be presented to the January meeting;**
- 2. the Director of Education inform the Cabinet Member (Human Resources and Corporate Support Services), of the concerns now**

expressed regarding the effect that Job Evaluation/Single Status had had on morale and recruitment in schools.

27. BEST VALUE REVIEW STAGE 1 REPORT - SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS PROVISION AND SUPPORT SERVICES

The Committee considered the Stage 1 Report of the Best Value Review of Special Educational Needs Provision and Support Services.

It was reported that the review had now completed the initial analysis of the services, a description of which was attached to the report at appendix 1. An action plan had been drawn up which detailed further research and consultation exercises required in order to complete stages 2 and 3 of the review process. Following the widening of the review as reported to the Committee in July 2003, it was now anticipated that the review process would be completed by Easter 2004 rather than the end of 2003 as stated in the report.

The Committee briefly discussed issues relating to 'exceptions to the rule', mentioned in BV43a & b in table 8, and year 10 assessments. It was questioned whether, following the introduction of 'banded funding', an indicator should be introduced into the report.

RESOLVED: That the Best Value Stage 1 report on Special Educational Needs Provision and Support Services be accepted.

28. STAFF SICKNESS ABSENCE

The Committee considered a report on the levels of staff sickness and absence in the Education Service.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

29. TRAINING AND SUPPORT OF GOVERNORS

The Committee were invited to review the current plans for the training and support given to school governors.

The School Services Manager reported upon the budgetary arrangements for the training and support of governors. While the report outlined the planned training programme for 2003/04 he acknowledged that the position of governor was voluntary and that due to the rural nature of the County the travelling time may influence the numbers attending courses. He commented that there was a strong possibility that over the coming months a number of new governors would be appointed who would need induction training. In response to these issues the programme was due to commence for the school year 2003/04 and a number of training sessions were to be held either at individual schools or on a 'pyramid' basis. He also commented upon the National Training Programme for Clerks to Governing Bodies, which brought in a comprehensive programme to introduce strategies for raising the status of Clerks. A copy of a letter to Chair of Governors advising of changes that had resulted from the Education Act 2002 was attached to the report at appendix 1.

The Committee noted that while the numbers attending courses may be low, the training gained should be cascaded back to governing bodies.

RESOLVED: That the report be accepted.

EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED:

That under Section 100 (A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Schedule 12(A) of the Act, as indicated below.

THE FOLLOWING IS THE FULL MINUTE OF THE PROCEEDINGS**30. MONITORING OF EDUCATION CAPITAL AND REVENUE BUDGETS FOR 2003/04**

The Committee received a report on expenditure to date on the Education Revenue Budget, and were informed about the progress of the 2003/04 Capital Programme for Education and the prospects for further schemes to be committed.

The Director of Education reported that at this stage in the year it was anticipated that education expenditure would be contained within the overall budget, although it was clear that a number of significant transfers needed to be made between school and LEA budget headings, as detailed in the report. An assessment had been carried out of revenue expenditure to the end of August 2003. The position, using the main categories of spending was set out in table 1 to the report.

He also reported that the first round of capital monitoring had involved an examination of progress on all schemes at the end of July 2003. Care was being taken to ensure the forecast level of spending accurately reflected the expected spending in 2003/04 and the overall spending position was being kept under careful review. The actual spending against each scheme to 2nd September 2003 was shown in Table 2 (an exempt report) to the report.

The Head of Policy and Resources reported that there was a margin of £600,000 available for new allocations and consideration was now being given to identifying other schemes that could be committed during the current financial year. Any such commitments made would take into account the fact that further commitments in the current financial year would have implications for 2004/05 and possibly for subsequent financial years. Five schemes, listed in paragraph 10 of the report, had been identified as being in accordance with the previously agreed 8 priorities for capital expenditure.

The Head of Policy and Resources briefly updated the Committee in relation to the provision of sports halls at Kingstone and Weobley. He commented upon the use of grant funding, income from the use of facilities and operating costs in relation to Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contracts.

On being asked whether some schools had this year set a deficit budget the Director of Education reported that a deficit budget could only be set under agreed circumstances following which the Directorate helped the school formulate an action plan to bring it back into surplus. He commented that in a small number of cases schools had either under-estimated their expected income or had reached a point where their level of resources needed to be reviewed. Due to government changes to the Formula Funding Budget, this year a number of schools had received a reduced budget. The budget situation had been compounded by increased costs i.e. Superannuation for teachers, pay awards and performance related pay.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the 8 priorities for capital expenditure, set out in paragraph 9 of the report and the 5

schemes, assessed as being high priority and set out in paragraph 10 of the report, be accepted.

This item disclosed the amount of any expenditure proposed to be incurred by the authority under any particular contract for the acquisition of property or the supply of goods or services.

31. HOME TO SCHOOL/COLLEGE TRANSPORT - DISCRETIONARY AREAS OF POLICY

The Committee were invited to approve the remit and membership of a group to consider discretionary policies on home to school transport and a proposed timetable.

The Director of Education reported that two national policy papers had recently been received. The Government had issued a paper – ‘Travelling to School – an Action Plan’, and the Local Government Association had issued a document ‘Children on the Move – accessing excellence’.

The Director issued supplementary information at the meeting, which briefly outlined the scope of the publications. He reported that both papers signalled potentially significant changes in home to school transport requirements and expectations and suggested that considerations relating to the proposed working group, set out in the agenda papers, be deferred until a report assessing the implications could be presented.

RESOLVED: That consideration of the report on Home to School/College Transport – Discretionary Areas of Policy be deferred pending a report to the next meeting on the implications of the publications: ‘Travelling to School – an Action Plan’ and ‘Children on the Move – accessing excellence’.

The meeting ended at 12.26 p.m.

CHAIRMAN