

MINUTES of the meeting of Education Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Brockington, Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday, 19th January, 2004 at 10.00 a.m.

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

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

Church Members Mr P. Eyles

Parent Governor Mrs S.E. Wright

Members

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

Representatives

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

Headteacher

Representatives

In attendance: Councillor Mrs J.P. French, (Cabinet Member – Human Resources and Corporate Support Services), P. E. Harling, D.W. Rule (Cabinet Member – Education).

45. CHAIRMAN

The Committee noted that, at Council on Friday 16th January, 2004, Councillor B.F. Ashton had been appointed Chairman of the Committee.

46. NEW AND RETIRING MEMBERS

On behalf of the Committee the Chairman welcomed Miss S. Peate, Head of Little Dewchurch, who had been nominated by the Primary Heads Association to serve as Co-opted Primary Headteacher representative.

He also thanked Mr M. Burgess, Primary Sector Governor representative, whose term as a governor expired in January 2004 and Mrs S. Wright, Secondary Parent Governor representative whose term would expire in July 2004. The Committee expressed their appreciation for the contribution both had made to the work of the Education Scrutiny Committee.

47. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Mr M. Burgess, Councillor N.J.J. Davies, Mr J.G. Griffin, Rev I Terry and Councillor Mrs S. Robertson.

48. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor J. Stone substituted for Councillor N.J.J. Davies and Mr P. Eyles substituted for Rev I. Terry.

49. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

50. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That subject to recording the attendance of Ms E. Christopher the Minutes of the meeting held on 18th November, 2003 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

51. BANDING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS - INTERIM PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee considered progress made to date with regard to the banding project in primary schools.

The Head of Children's and Students' Services reported that resources for children with severe and complex special needs (those whose needs could not be met by School Action or School Action Plus) were allocated through the statutory assessment process. To increase efficiency and flexibility, a system of banded funding had been devised as an alternative method of funding for pupils with more severe and complex needs. Following a pilot study, the scheme had been introduced for all new assessment requests in primary schools from September 2003, although statutory assessment is still an option parents may choose. The response from schools had generally been positive. Statistics for requests for statutory assessment and banded funding 2002-2003 were attached to the report at appendix B. These indicated that the number of requests for statutory assessment was falling. A Working Party were looking at feedback and the introduction of banding into secondary schools from September 2004.

In response to questions on how the delegated funding was used by schools the Committee noted that, while the employment of Teaching Assistants was popular, it was for the school to decide the appropriate method of support.

The Committee discussed the method of funding the system and noted that banding assessments were regularly reviewed.

While noting that comparative work with other LEAs had been undertaken during the draft stages of the system, the Committee requested a detailed report on comparisons with other LEA systems.

RESOLVED That the report be noted and a further detailed report comparing the Herefordshire system with systems adopted by other Local Education Authorities be presented to a future meeting.

52. ICT TECHNICAL SUPPORT

The Committee considered the progress made towards providing a satisfactory ICT technical support service to schools.

The Head of Inspection, Advice and School Performance (IASPS) pointed to the fact that in a rural County the provision of ICT technical service to all schools was problematic. The main difficulties were described in the report. Prior to the start of the financial year 2003/2004 the Education Systems Support (ESS) Service had undertaken a series of meetings in an attempt to sort out the problems and establish a realistic set of expectations as to what the ESS service could actually deliver and what schools could properly expect once they had bought into the service. In order to increase the number of technicians available to support the work in schools, charges to schools had been raised, as detailed in the report, and technical support increased via the broadband project. The technicians had been re-organised on a regional basis so that schools with contracts could expect a routine visit from the

same technician once a fortnight. This had enabled closer relationships to be established and allowed technicians to understand the particular needs of the schools with which they worked. Informal evidence suggested that the contracts were now working much better with a sharp reduction in the number of complaints from headteachers.

The teacher representatives reported a general improvement in the service. However, schools employing their own technicians were experiencing recruitment problems due to Job Evaluation uncertainties.

RESOLVED: That the report be accepted.

53. YEAR 2003 RESULTS FOR HEREFORDSHIRE SCHOOLS

The Committee received an up-date on the Summer 2003 results at Key Stage 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 for Herefordshire Schools.

The Head of Inspection, Advice and School Performance Service reported that, bearing in mind the limitations of such data, the results for Herefordshire schools and pupils indicated another positive overall performance in 2003. He commented on the good performance at various Key Stages. However, he reported that the results for a single year should be viewed over a longer period to determine trends. He further reported that few LEAs had met the LPSA target which Herefordshire was seeking to achieve.

The Committee debated the results and noted that in general, the County performed above the national average with girls continuing to outperform boys. It was noted that the recent statistics now included the results of those test and exam papers sent back for re-marking.

The Committee congratulated the pupils, parents and schools on the results.

RESOLVED: that the report be accepted.

54. HEREFORDSHIRE PLAN AND PARTNERSHIP PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee considered progress in implementing the Herefordshire Plan, particularly that of the Learning Education and Training Ambition Group.

The Head of Policy and Resources reported that the Partnership was led through ten ambition groups that took responsibility for delivering each ambition in the Plan. The ambitions, and the Cabinet Member within whose remit the ambition fell, were listed in the report. The Education Service provided significant support to all but one of the ambitions and progress to date, highlighting the input by the Directorate, was detailed in the report.

He further reported that the number of different partnership arrangements within the field of education had prompted a review, resulting in the proposal to combine the Learning Partnership with the ambition group to create one group at which strategic issues could be considered.

Prior to its demise the Learning Education and Training Ambition Group had been in the process of producing an action plan to achieve the stated aims. Progress in pursuing those targets so far identified in the action plan had been listed in the final column of Appendix 1 to the report.

The Committee noted that Appendix 1 indicated the current position in relation to the

various targets for the Learning and Training Ambitions Group. The Committee were disappointed that the action plan failed to define many milestones for years 1, 5 and 10. They requested that a further report, including a more comprehensive action plan, be presented at a later meeting.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and a further report, including a comprehensive action plan to achieve the defined aims, be presented to a later meeting.

55. MONITORING OF PERFORMANCE TARGETS IN EDUCATION BUSINESS PLAN 2003 - 2004

The Committee were invited to consider the performance against Key Local Targets in the Education Business Plan between April and December 2003.

The Director of Education reported that, in addition to Best Value Performance indicators and Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) targets, the Directorate also set local targets for areas of particular local relevance. There were currently 74 local targets supporting the eight strategic priorities. Progress towards attaining the targets was summarised in Appendix 1 to the report. He highlighted four performance exceptions. One had exceeded the original target and three had fallen below target. These were detailed in the report.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

56. SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS WITH SCHOOLS

The Committee considered the content of Service Level Agreements with schools for 2004/05.

The Director of Education outlined the history and effect of the delegation of services to schools under Service Level Agreements. Appendix 1 to the report gave a short description of the services. He reported a number of changes to SLAs in relation to the maintenance of the supply teacher register and vacancy list and the issuing of contracts of employment. The cost of pre-employment medical checks would now be included in the SLA. The net effect of the changes would be to increase the amount of funding delegated to schools.

The Committee noted that, where there was a clear direct duty for the LEA to provide a service, e.g. pupil admissions and assessment for SEN, that service would not be delegated.

In response to questions regarding the SLA relating to the Education Staffing and Appointments Service, and the effect of Job Evaluation, the Director reported that separate discussions were currently being held with schools regarding elements of the Job Evaluation Scheme. Teacher representatives suggested that there seemed to be direct tensions between the Job Evaluation Scheme and the Government's intended changes in schools e.g. school workforce remodelling programme. The Committee agreed that, following the introduction of the Job Evaluation Scheme, a report be presented detailing the effect of the Scheme on school staff.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and a report on the effect of the Job Evaluation Scheme on School staff be presented following the introduction of the scheme.

EXCLUSION OF 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**57. MONITORING OF EDUCATION REVENUE AND CAPITAL 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.

The Director of Education reported that revenue expenditure to the end of November suggested that, overall, there was likely to be a small underspend by the end of the financial year. Within the overall total, a number of budget adjustments were now being made in the areas of delegated banded funding, pupil admissions and new SEN placements. He also reported that as a result of the Transport Review, savings of approximately £200,000 were likely on home-to-school transport. A list of key changes producing the projected overall budget underspend of £200,000 was shown at Appendix 1 to the report.

The position on individual capital schemes was set out in Appendix 2. An outline of progress on major schemes since the last report to the Committee was set out in the report.

In response to questions concerning expenditure on replacement schools at Lea and Cradley, and refurbishment works at Mordiford Primary School, the Committee noted that Lea and Cradley were Aided Schools and therefore outside the LEA capital programme. In relation to the capital budget for the replacement of temporary classrooms, it was noted that this would be undertaken in accordance with the Asset Management Plan.

The Committee debated the merits of the Committee undertaking a series of visits to schools to see the various capital projects. It was suggested that, following consultation with the Director, the Chairman together with the local Member undertake visits.

In response to questions regarding the LEA bid under the Government's initiative 'Building Schools for the Future', the Committee were informed that the result of the bid were expected on 9th February 2004.

RESOLVED: That the report on the monitoring of education revenue and capital budgets for 2003/04 be noted and, following consultation with the Director of Education, the Chairman, together with the local Member concerned, visit the various Education capital projects as considered appropriate.

Appendix 2 disclosed the amount of expenditure proposed to be incurred by the authority under particular contracts for the acquisition of property or the supply of goods or services.

58. CPA - EDUCATION COMPONENT

The Committee considered the rating of the Education Service contained within the Corporate Performance Assessment (CPA) of the Herefordshire Council.

The Director of Education reported that the CPA of Herefordshire Council, as updated to take account of statistical information collected annually, had been reported in December, 2003. The Assessment included a rating for the Education component which showed a movement from the previous year from 4 stars (Excellent) to 3 stars (Good). A detailed analysis was attached to the report at Appendix 1 indicating that the difference in ranking between the two years was explained by changes in what had been included in the scoring. The Director highlighted that the biggest influences were the inclusion of Lifelong Learning for the first time and changes in Special Educational Needs (SEN) and the report indicated other key changes.

The Committee noted that the low funding levels for Lifelong Learning had been inherited from the previous authority. While the Colleges provided the bulk of the service, a review of the Council's service was under way which Ofsted would inspect later in the year. The Committee also noted that the Lifelong Learning Service were already working with the Youth Service on inclusion issues.

RESOLVED: That the report be accepted.

59. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the range of business it anticipated it would need to consider during the coming financial year 2004/05.

Appendix 1 to the report listed the wide range of matters that would need to be reported to the Committee during the coming year, with a provisional indication of the particular meetings at which items would most appropriately be considered.

The Committee noted that items discussed earlier in the meeting would be added to the programme namely:

- Banding in Primary Schools – a further detailed report comparing the Herefordshire system with systems adopted by other LEA;
- Herefordshire Plan and Partnership Progress Report – particularly in relation to the formation of a comprehensive action plan;
- a report on the effect of Job Evaluation Scheme on school staff following the introduction of the scheme.

The Committee requested that Connexions be invited to address the Committee on work they undertake and a report on the Education Welfare Service Improvement Plan be added to the programme.

RESOLVED: that the Education Scrutiny Committee work programme as amended above be referred to the Strategic Monitoring Committee.

The meeting ended at 12.17 p.m.

CHAIRMAN