

MINUTES of the meeting of the School Organisation Committee held at the Shirehall, Hereford, on Monday 7 July 2003 at 3.00 pm.

Present:

Local Education Authority

Church of England

Roman Catholic Church

Learning & Skills Council

School Governors – Primary

School Governors – Special

Special Education Group

Councillors Mrs MD Lloyd-Hayes, J Stone, JP Thomas.

Rev M Smith.

Mr C Jones.

Mr A Curless.

Mrs J McColl.

Mrs K Rooke.

Mr H Cullen.

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

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

RESOLVED: That Councillor JP Thomas be appointed Chairman for the ensuing year.

(Councillor JP Thomas in the Chair)

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

RESOLVED: That Reverend M Smith be appointed Vice-Chairman for the ensuing year.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Mr H Cullen.

4. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no named substitutes.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

6. MINUTES

RESOLVED: THAT the Minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2002 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

7. SCHOOL ORGANISATION PLAN: REVISED GUIDANCE

The Head of Policy and Resources informed Members that the revised guidance was more prescriptive and aimed at all authorities with differing types of schools and varying racial backgrounds. He pointed out paragraph five of the revised guidance on the development of a strategic vision - 'to increase diversity and to encourage collaboration between schools, in order to raise standards and promote community cohesion'. He stated that for Herefordshire he felt this could mean increasing the number of high schools applying for specialist college status.

In relation to the point on expansion of popular schools, the Head of Policy and Resources stated that he did not think this would apply to Herefordshire, due to the fall in numbers in the primary and secondary schools in the County. Members were advised that consultants were being employed to look into the drop in primary school numbers and to look at comparisons with other LEAs. Discussion was held on the need to try to maintain village schools with the drop in primary school numbers and to examine the possibility of a confederation of schools in the future. He added that further information on this would be provided at a future meeting.

Members agreed that emphasis needed to be put on equal opportunities for all children in schools within the County. Members were advised that racism was an issue of concern for the government and had been put forward as an item on the plan in conjunction with showing the varying ethnic backgrounds within schools. The Committee noted that the largest ethnic group for Herefordshire was travelling families. It was pointed out that 96% of children were classed as white British and therefore Members felt it was important that pupils were taught from an early age about racism and the differing ethnic backgrounds that were throughout the Country. Members were informed that after a recent inspection, Ofstead had stated that they were happy with the current teaching in the schools on racism and different ethnic backgrounds.

RESOLVED: THAT the revised DfES guidance in relation to the Local Education Authority's School Organisation Plan be noted.

8. SCHOOL ORGANISATION PLAN 2003 - 2008

The Head of Policy and Resources explained to Members that this years plan was similar to the previous plan but with a focus on special education needs and inclusion. He added that there were the same amount of pupils as last year with a wide spread of pupil numbers across county schools from very small village schools to quite large secondaries. A discussion was held on special schools and Members were informed that less than 1% of pupils were involved with special schools and this was mostly boys with statements. However, it was noted that pupil numbers for these schools were actually rising across the county rather than falling as with the primary and secondary schools.

In relation to early years development, the Head of Policy and Resources stated that LEA nurseries did not have all available places taken up, this was due mainly to the start and finish times of the nurseries not fitting in with parents' working hours, which created a significant under use. Therefore the LEA was looking to reduce the capacity of their 13 nurseries. Concerning denominational school places, the Head of Policy and Resources stated that it was difficult to assess the voluntary aided school places as these were now not only restricted to children who attended church, but catchment area children were also a main concern. Members discussed the demographic trends both nationally and locally, which showed a decrease in pupil numbers. Members were reassured that the army base in Hereford and their attached families had been taken into account when compiling the information for the plan. The Head of Policy and Resources advised that further statistics and demographic information would be provided at the next meeting of the Committee in October.

Members felt that within the plan the item dealing with racial harassment needed to be expanded upon to ensure that a full understanding of the issue was provided along with a study of the various ethnic backgrounds within schools. Likewise there was a need to emphasis equal opportunities for all children within the County schools. It was pointed out that school buildings were now taking on a wider role

within the community and were not used solely for schooling, but for community use as well.

In summary Members agreed that there was unlikely to be any significant changes to the plan that would result in reconsidering the way in which educational provision was made within the County. However, the Head of Policy and Resources advised that within the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) it was proposed to require developers to donate £1,000 to a local school when carrying out housing development in the area.

Members of the Committee expressed their thanks for the hard work undertaken by members of staff involved in the compiling of the School Organisation Plan.

RESOLVED:

- That (a) **the draft School Organisation Plan 2003-2008 be approved for further consultation;**
- (b) **it be noted that the special educational needs provision within schools was increasing rather than decreasing;**
- (c) **the plan reflect the different ethnic backgrounds and take into account the large number of travelling families within the County;**
- (d) **equal opportunities be provided for all children within the school system;**
- and**
- (e) **the plan expands upon the information provided to schools on racial harassment.**

9. SCHOOL ORGANISATION COMMITTEE – SCHEDULE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Head of Policy and Resources informed the Committee of the statutory requirement to put forward a schedule of future meetings. In compliance with recent government guidance, two meetings a year must be held. In the past schools and other interested parties had expressed concern that they had not always been aware in advance of when the School Organisation Committee meetings were to be held and felt that they had lost the opportunity to feed in any comments. Therefore a schedule of meetings for the year had been prepared.

RESOLVED: THAT the programme of future meetings for October 2003 and February and May 2004 be approved subject to sufficient business.

The meeting ended at 4.30 pm

CHAIRMAN