

**MINUTES of the meeting of Education Scrutiny Committee held at Brockington, Hafod Road, Hereford on Tuesday, 18th November, 2003 at 10.30 a.m.**

**Present:** Councillor J.P. Thomas (Vice Chairman)

**Councillors:** N.J.J. Davies, Mrs. J.A. Hyde, R.M. Manning, Mrs. J.E. Pemberton, Mrs. S.J. Robertson, D.C. Taylor, Ms. A.M. Toon and W.J. Walling

**Church Members:** J.D. Griffin

**Parent Governor members:** Mrs S.E. Wright

**Teacher Representatives** C. Lewandowski, J.D. Pritchard.

**In attendance:** Councillor D.W. Rule MBE (Cabinet Member – Education)

**32. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor H. Bramer, Mr M. Burgess and Mr A Marson.

The Committee stood in silence in memory of the late Councillor Reverend D.C. Short MBE.

**33. NAMED SUBSTITUTES**

Councillor Mrs J.A. Hyde substituted for Councillor H. Bramer.

**34. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**35. MINUTES**

In response to a question the Head of Policy and Resources agreed to provide a written answer on the use by schools of devolved capital allocations to support the schools' revenue budgets.

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the meeting held on 23rd September, 2003 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**36. SAFER ROUTES TO SCHOOLS**

The Committee considered the opportunities and action taken to date for developing arrangements designed to produce safer routes for schools.

The Committee had been informed in March that a need had been identified to ensure that schools benefiting from Safer Routes to School in the future should begin work on developing their own school travel plans. It had been recognised that additional resources would need to be allocated to support schools in this task.

Funding had been identified within the Local Transport Plan (LTP) to appoint a School Travel Adviser or School Travel Advisers using funding allocated for Safer Routes to School Training Support. A best practice example in North Yorkshire had recruited qualified teachers as advisers.

In September 2003, the Government had announced the provision of additional funding over the next 2 years to help support the development of school travel plans. This would include funding for more local authority based school travel advisers as well as capital resources. It was proposed to combine these resources with the funding earmarked within the LTP to provide 1 full time co-ordinator and up to 3 part-time teachers. This would establish a good level of support for Schools seeking to develop a School Travel Plan.

In the course of discussion the following principal points were made:

- That an advantage of employing part-time teachers rather than creating an extra post within the Education Department was that they were familiar with the way in which schools operated but did not require the Council to provide them with office space. The example of North Yorkshire had demonstrated the merits in this approach.
- The development of travel plans was linked into the curriculum encouraging pupils to participate in developing plans and schools to take ownership of the plans.
- Some concern was expressed that there were insufficient resources available under the programme to fund bigger schemes such as footpaths to rural schools eg Burghill Primary School. It was acknowledged that there was a particular difficulty in financing that Scheme.
- It was asked whether once a scheme had been implemented it was ever re-evaluated as part of a safety audit. The Senior Transport Planning Manager said that resources did not permit this, however, the relevance of measures should be ensured by reviewing travel plans with each new intake of pupils. An annual re-survey was part of the Council's procedure although this was reliant on feedback from parents and schools. If a particular concern existed this should be reported. He noted that a number of safety measures were outside the remit of the safer routes to Schools Programme.
- It was suggested that the proposed approach would place an additional burden on teachers and raise false expectations but would not provide a solution.
- It was confirmed that the Council was mindful of the opportunities linked to new building developments and travel plans could prove helpful justification in pursuing these.

## **RESOLVED**

**That (a) the proposed arrangements for developing safer routes to schools be generally welcomed but noting**

- (i) that the availability of funding for the physical infrastructure for larger schemes needed to be considered;**
- (ii) the importance of parental involvement**

(iii) the advantages in safety audits for both new and existing schemes

(iv) the importance of coordination between Directorates

(b) an update be provided in six months time including information showing the output from travel plans to establish that they were providing value for money.

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

The Committee considered the remit, Membership and timetable of a Group to consider discretionary policies on home to school/college transport.

The Committee had been advised in September of the Government's publication of a consultation document: "Travelling to School: a good practice guide", describing what the Government considered needed to be done to change the way children travelled to school. It was reported that the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) were now seeking the views of local education authorities and others prior to making any legislative changes.

It was suggested that it would be appropriate for the Council to take account of these potential changes when reviewing the Council's current discretionary arrangements. The DfES were inviting LEAs to pilot schemes in the autumn of 2004, and it was suggested the Group's remit was widened to develop proposals for consideration as a pilot as well as considering the Council's current discretionary arrangements and options for modifying those policies.

The report set out the proposed membership of the Group and a suggested timetable for its work. In the course of discussion it was proposed that the composition of the Review Group as set out in the report be modified so that instead of providing a place each for both the Diocesan authorities they should hold one place between them and with the vacated place being filled by a teacher representative.

It was requested that Members of the Committee be informed of the areas the Review Group agreed should form the initial consultation.

**RESOLVED: that a Review Group be established comprising one representative nominated by the Diocesan Authorities; Mrs S Wright as a parents representative, Mr C Lewandowski as a teachers representative, the Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Committee; and Councillors R.M. Manning and D.C. Taylor.**

### 38. SOCIAL INCLUSION EDUCATION POLICY

The Committee considered the document: "Inclusive Education in Herefordshire setting out the commitment of the Herefordshire Education Service to inclusive education.

It was noted that the document, a copy of which was appended to the report, was one of a range of elements in the Council's strategy for dealing effectively with inclusion issues.

The Head of Children's and Student's Services reported that one omission identified to date was looked after children. The document had already been discussed within the Education Directorate and Special Schools. A wider consultation was currently underway.

In the ensuing discussion the following principal points were made:

- In response to a question the Head of Policy and Resources advised that he considered that the Authority was in a position to be able to meet its responsibilities under the Disability and Discrimination Act 1995.
- There was support for the view expressed in the policy that adequate resourcing was the key to the confidence with which teachers felt able to approach the inclusion of learners with disaffection or disability. It was requested that the broader issue of staff training in this context should be borne in mind.
- It was confirmed that in implementing its policy care was taken to ensure that in meeting the needs of the pupils concerned the Authority's actions could not be construed as seeming to condone or encourage poor behaviour and that, whilst meeting any special needs, pupils were not unnecessarily singled out.
- It was noted that the Policy stated that when developing new provision for children with special educational needs the Council would promote inclusive options. It was suggested that there were circumstances in which special provision was required. The Head of Children's and Student's Services acknowledged that for certain children full-time mainstream education would not be appropriate, necessitating the continued use of the Special schools. She also noted the development of a completely new school for children with Emotional and Behavioural difficulties.

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

### **39. BUILDING SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE**

The Committee was invited to note the bid submitted to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) for inclusion in the first phase of the Government's initiative: "Building Schools for the Future".

The report described the initiative and noted that the Cabinet had agreed that a bid should be made covering all 14 of the County's high schools. This acknowledged that Whitecross High School would require no further expenditure beyond the PFI scheme and the strategy for the two aided high schools may be implemented through national arrangements for aided schools.

The DfES had indicated that they were seeking to support one rural pilot in the first phase of the programme and it was to be hoped that Herefordshire's bid, allowing all the County's schools to be improved, would be chosen. If the bid were unsuccessful the Council would be allocated a place in the national programme between 2006 and 2020. In those circumstances the Council hoped it would be selected in the later years of the programme.

In the course of discussion the Head of Policy and Resources confirmed that account was being taken of falling rolls and whilst the bid included all 14 schools it envisaged reduced capacity at each school. This would be the subject of further discussion with Schools.

A summary of the draft proposals for each school was appended to the report. The Head of Policy and Resources reported that in submitting the bid some assumptions had been made, including one that a new sports hall would have already been provided at Kingstone High School following a successful bid on the New Opportunities Fund (NOF). However, having been passed to external consultants by NOF the scheme had been modified resulting in a £150,00 shortfall. In response to questions he explained that the new design afforded higher priority to changing facilities for people with a disability. Whilst the Council was not opposed to this design it had led to the increase in cost. His view was that the Council had the resources available to meet the shortfall and the Scheme totalling £1.3 million should proceed.

The Committee expressed some dissatisfaction at the way in which the Council's plans had been disrupted but supported the view that work should proceed to provide the long-awaited facility at Kingstone High School. The Head of Policy and Resources agreed to explore the principle of generating income from the facility making it available to the wider community but cautioned that the indications were this would be problematic.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the action to proceed with the development of a sports hall at Kingstone High School supported.**

**40. REVIEW OF SMALL SCHOOLS - BRILLEY PRIMARY, ST. MARY'S OF HOPE CE PRIMARY SCHOOL (HOPE-UNDER-DINMORE), KINGS CAPLE PRIMARY, LONGTOWN PRIMARY AND DILWYN PRIMARY**

The Committee was informed of pupil numbers in 5 very small schools and asked whether or not the position of any of the five schools, whose pupil numbers were below the levels specified for review in Herefordshire's School Organisation Plan, should be examined further.

The report set out the Council's policy governing the review of small schools and described the position at each of the five primary schools. No action was proposed at 4 of these schools. Concern was, however, expressed about St Mary's Primary School, Hope under Dinmore. The latest evidence suggested that the school would continue to struggle to achieve and sustain numbers above 20 and did not appear to have the whole-hearted support of the community.

The Head of Policy and Resources reported that since the report had been prepared an additional child had enrolled in the school. More children were also attending and due to attend the Happy Days Nursery Group, located at the school.

In the ensuing discussion the following principal points were made

- The Head of Policy and Resources said that it was hard to pinpoint a particular reason a number of local children did not attend St Mary's.
- That the policy in the School Organisation Plan was that no further review of St Mary's should be undertaken within five years of the previous review unless pupil numbers were to fall by a further 25% below the level considered during that review. It was confirmed that numbers at the start of the Autumn term were above the 25% level.
- The Local Member commented that the growth of the Happy Days Nursery Group gave the school potential. The School had to be allowed time and the

importance of the role of village schools in the community should not be overlooked. In his view the school did have the community's support. The Council should be looking to support the school not to review it with the associated pressure that would bring.

- That the school was shortly to be inspected by Ofsted and the outcome of that inspection would be pertinent to any future review of the school. The Head of Policy and Resources suggested that it would be logical to revisit the position in September 2004 as part of an annual assessment of school numbers.

**RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Member (Education) be advised that no action be taken in relation to St Mary's Primary School, Hope Under Dinmore.**

#### **41. EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2002 - 2007**

The Committee received an update on progress made in implementing the second Education Development Plan 2002-2007 (EDP2) and the potential impact of the Single Education Plan (SEP) and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES)/Local Education Authority (LEA) compact.

The Head of the Inspection, Advice and School Performance Service (IASPS) presented the report and commented on performance against targets. He highlighted the achievement that no school in the County was within a negative OFSTED category although he cautioned that with changes in the inspection regime it was becoming harder to continue to maintain this position. Results during 2002/2003 were in line with the experience nationally. Performance in primary schools in particular had plateaued, but there were continuing improvements at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. Results remained above the average at every Key Stage. He also drew attention to a report in the Sunday Times on a league table of percentages of pupils achieving A and A\* grades at GCSE which showed 4 Herefordshire schools in the top 50. On the basis of pupils attaining 5 GCSEs at grades A-C Herefordshire ranked 25th out of 150 LEAs. Herefordshire was therefore one of the top performers in the Country.

A year 2 supplement to the EDP 2 had been produced as required by the DfES and a summary was appended to the report. No feedback on this had yet been received from the DfES. The head of IASPS noted that the importance of the EDP was being reduced, drawing attention to the DfES intention that each LEA would have a Single Education Plan which would become operational with effect from 1 April, 2005. In addition the LEA was expected to draft and agree a School Improvement "Compact" with the DfES by the end of December, 2003. It was likely that the SEP and Compact would supplement and then replace the EDP over the coming year.

In response to a question as to whether the development of the SEP would mean that the Authority would face new targets the Head of IASPS commented that he believed the targets in the Council's Local Public Service Agreement remained valid but the situation was complex and he intended to prepare a report on target setting.

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

#### **42. POST-OFSTED INSPECTION ACTION PLAN MONITORING**

The Committee considered progress made in implementing the Action Plan prepared in response to the LEA Ofsted report in January 2001.

In the course of discussion the following principal points were made:

- That written responses would be prepared explaining how recommendation 7 could show an overall progress rate of 100% and the action in relation to recommendation 11.
- Some concern was expressed about communication in the area of special Education Needs and progress in relation to recommendations 17, 18 and 19, whilst noting the action planned to implement these recommendations.

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

**43. COMPLAINTS, COMPLIMENTS AND APPEALS**

The Committee noted the summary of comments, complaints and appeals relating to the Education Directorate for the period 1st July, 2003 to 31st October, 2003.

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

**44. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee noted the range of business it was expected it would need to consider in 2003/2004.

It was requested that consideration be given to the length of future agendas.

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

The meeting ended at 12.50 p.m.

**CHAIRMAN**

