

LIFELONG LEARNING SELECT COMMITTEE

SEN GROUP

Thursday, 1 March 2001.

PRESENT: Councillors Michael Brand, Brenda Jennings, Clare Martens and Jane Bramwell.

QUESTIONS TO JOHN BECKERLEG (General Manager supporting Cabinet Member Margaret Aston)

Q1 In your role as General Manager supporting Cabinet Member Margaret Aston please describe your current areas of operation and responsibility.

1.1 Portfolio arose from Members' aspirations to focus on children who were assessed as having Special Needs and/or under care of Social Services.

In particular driven by:

- Root and Branch Review of Children's Services
- Wendover House report
- Need for Education and Social Services to work more closely together
- Desire to focus more on "looked after children" as corporate parent.

1.2 Other authorities have divided areas of responsibilities but Buckinghamshire County Council is slightly different in its groupings.

1.3 However whilst the aspirations are clear we must give more thought to the principles.

"Not as clear at the beginning as we should have been".

JB notes that when portfolios were published parts of the organisation had had no input into the process.

1.4 Particular areas of concern:

a Special Schools (who were told of change not consulted)

Concerned they would be managed by Social Services.

Also that funding would be sucked away from Education into Child Protection.

b Logistical issue of responsibility for pupils moving between portfolios as they move in/out of mainstream.

c Effect on parents and children. How do parents view Special Schools?

Q2 What are the current management structure and reporting lines?

2.1 JB reminded us that in pilot he is also still Director of Social Services.

As far as the pilot is concerned three of his senior managers (Roz Vahey, Clive Lee

JB illustrates picture by reference to Peter Scott who reports to three portfolio holders (see notes from P Radford plus diagram).

2.2 JB more comfortable with hierarchical management structure. Current model more matrix based and

...“we didn’t demonstrate success with this in the past”.

Q3 How might position be clarified?

3.1 Currently in discussion with Margaret Aston/Mike Appleyard/Peter Mooney. Shared thinking on a proposal which creates a portfolio which combines responsibility and budget for:

- all SEN including responsibility for implementation of SEN Strategy and Vision
- Child Protection
- Exclusions

Attraction is that it clarifies responsibility for SEN strategy and facilitates support for intervention.

3.2 Meeting develops into more informal discussion as group investigate:

What about this proposal in the context of increasing delegation plus autonomy of schools?

Where would departments fall?

Where would PRU’s fall?

JB feels he has spent ... “two to three months trying to disentangle what was created”.

Nevertheless there is need for a “children’s champion”.

There are clear benefits to be had through earlier intervention (numerous examples) and joint working with Social Services in, for instance, exclusions.

(JB has serious concern that he cannot provide sufficient resources for excluded pupils.)

- 3.3 JB feels that we need to draw together all those who may be affected and get their inputs before moving ahead and

... “confirming a model which may not be achievable”.

- 3.4 However whichever way you divide the cake you get different slices and whilst some barriers may be removed others may be created.

Q4 What are the lines of communication between all parties?

- 4.1 Agreement that some important lines of communication have been lost. In particular we have to establish networks into portfolio holders.

Q5 What changes in working practices are necessary between Education and Social Services to enable children’s services to be delivered more effectively?

- 5.1 There are two different cultures/value systems.

Schools are sometimes suspicious of Social Services. Has Buckinghamshire County Council under-estimated the cultural change required?

- 5.2 There are many opportunities for closer working and some authorities are taking this route, eg

Shared staff training

Milton Keynes piloting aspects.

Michael Brand thanked John Beckerleg for his attendance and fullness of his responses on behalf of the Group.

QUESTIONS TO BRIDGET CAMPBELL (Member of South Bucks Downs Syndrome Association Representative on Parents Consultative Group, Parents Partnership Group, SEN Strategy Group. Previously representative on SEN Panel + Children’s Board when in existence. Also Governor at Juniper Hill School – Special Needs Governor – where her 10 year old son attends.)

1 Format for Meeting

The Group had not submitted written questions. Topics were open for discussion.

2 Background to South Bucks Downs Syndrome Association (DSA) and its relationship with LEA

- 2.1 40 families in Association, representing perhaps 60 – 70% of families with Downs Syndrome children. As yet no equivalent branch in north of county.

- 2.2 BC’s involvement started six years ago.

- 2.3 DSA had fought to get voice heard and five years ago regular meetings at officer level were started including Headteachers/Educational Psychologists.

Initially they felt professional resistance, but in the last four years there had been a noticeable improvement. Issues with Education Psychologists still apparent.

3 Channels of Communication

- 3.1 Five years ago BC was invited to meetings which subsequently became Parents Partnership Group – parents forum.

Feeds views to Parents Consultative Group (includes Buckinghamshire County Council officers) and through to SEN Strategy Group (officers plus others but no Buckinghamshire County Council members) (Councillor Margaret Dewar used to attend).

These three groups continue to run and are very helpful in parents airing views and exchange of ideas.

- 3.2 BC also on SEN Panel and Children's Board which was mix of representatives, officers and Buckinghamshire County Council members.

These two bodies have been discontinued as part of Buckinghamshire County Council Modernising.

- 3.3 BC greatly regret this:

“Parents Consultative Group will wither and die if the links with members are severed.”

As a direct result of parents involvement the number of cases going to tribunal fell and user links were established with conciliation service.

The SEN Panel was a crucial link into the decision making process at Buckinghamshire County Council, as it reported to Education Committee which had powers over budget.

- 3.4 BC feels strongly that links with portfolio holders **AND** other members should be restored.

4 The effects of delegation of MLD/SPLD funding

(Is there some missing here?)

- How does the LEA monitor whether or not a school is discharging what is still the LEA's responsibility in respect of statemented children.

- 4.2 Illustrates budget point with reference to Juniper Hill School budget and how it will be able to continue the level of support currently available to her son if the budget is cut.

Good SAT's results paradoxically lead to less money – penalising a school which is performing well – but which still has statemented children requiring support.

5 Continuation of Learning Support Service

- 5.1 BC has concerns over future of this service. Her particular concern is the future of the Downs Syndrome Team – which is one of the major achievements of the Association.

Councillor Michael Brand thanked Bridget Campbell for her time and helpful responses.