



Buckinghamshire County Council

Report

Cabinet

AGENDA ITEM: 11

Date 10 September 2001

Title Response to Recommendations of Lifelong Learning Select Committee

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Electoral Divisions Affected All

Summary

The Lifelong Learning Select Committee made a number of recommendations to the Council on 26 April 2001. This report provides a response to these recommendations.

Recommendation

That the Cabinet supports the portfolio response to the Select Committee's recommendations as outlined below.

Computers for Schools Group

- Recommendation 1 : Accept
- Recommendation 2 : Accept
- Recommendation 3 : Accept
- Recommendation 4 : Accept
- Recommendation 5 : Accept
- Recommendation 6 : Accept
- Recommendation 7 : Accept

Special Needs in Portfolio structures

- Recommendation 1 : No further action required
- Recommendation 2 : Cabinet to Advise
- Recommendation 3 : Cabinet to Advise

Communications

Recommendation 1 : Cabinet to Advise

Recommendation 2 : Cabinet to Advise

Education Service Plans

Recommendation 1 : Accept

Recommendation 2 : Accept

Recommendation 3 : Accept

Recommendation 4 : Accept

Recommendation 5 : Accept

A Computers for Schools Group

Recommendations of the Lifelong Learning Select Committee

Recommendation 1: Before targets are set they should be fully costed and the financial consequences and funding arrangements for them recognised as an integral part of the initial decision making process.

Accept

Recommendation 2: Every effort should be made to take up the appropriate Standards Fund offers on a timely basis, especially when failure to do so may unfavourably impact on ability to reach targets,

Accept

Recommendation 3: Funding of the replacement and maintenance of computers must be recognised and established. Ideally this should be identified in the Section 52 Budget statement or in the County's capital programme.

Accept

Recommendation 4: In recognition that there may be no further NGFL funding beyond 2001-2 a separate item in the medium term financial plan should identify the required financial expenditure over the next three years (reflecting the possible worst case spending pressure)

Accept

Recommendation 5: The establishment of an appropriate series of measures to reflect the progress of ICT in the teaching and learning processes should be established.

Accept

Recommendation 6: That the Best Value Review of Support Services should be requested to consider alternative reporting arrangements for ICT within Education with a view to achieving a corporate wide approach to ICT.

Accept

Recommendation 7: That an action plan be developed to implement all the above recommendations.

Accept

Comment

1. Local targets are set and costed through the EDP process. The computer pupil targets are externally set by the DfEE. The Standards Fund Grant is the funding mechanism for implementation.
2. This recommendation is supported in principle, but funding decisions on the take-up of Standards Fund have to be taken in the light of all priorities.
3. There is currently no additional funding in schools' budgets to meet the necessary increased expenditure on computer hardware, software and connectivity.
4. There are indications that the Standards Fund will continue until 2007, however no details of eligible expenditure are yet available.
5. The following measures to monitor the progress of ICT in teaching and learning are already in place:
 - Regular monitoring of OFSTED reports
 - School Supported Self evaluation of ICT with 5 termly monitoring visits to all schools
 - Monitoring of GCSE results
 - Monitoring of Teacher assessments at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3
 - Annual survey of hardware.
6. This recommendation should be referred to the Best Value Review of Support Services.

B Special Needs in Portfolio Structures

Recommendations of the Lifelong Learning Select Committee

Recommendation 1: That the position of SEN, special schools (and potentially PRUs) within the portfolios should be reviewed;

No further action required

Recommendation 2: That there should be some permanent body at Member level which monitors Special Educational Needs;

Cabinet to Advise

Recommendation 3: That links between parents and decision taking Members be re-established through some form of mechanism.

Cabinet to Advise

Comment

1. The responsibility for policy development for special educational needs and for the management of the Pupil Support and Learning Support teams was placed within the Children and Young People Portfolio by the previous County Council. Operational support for all schools, including special schools, and school improvement responsibilities was placed in the Schools Portfolio. The new County Council has confirmed this allocation of responsibilities. The County Council felt that the over-riding consideration was that special education should be within the same portfolio as the education of looked-after children and such related responsibilities as children in need and child protection. It is recognised – and is very much in line with the ‘whole Council’ approach – that the Children and Young People Portfolio will need to work closely with the Schools Portfolio to ensure proper co-ordination of special education across the board.
2. The modernised structure does not include any permanent body of elected members for the specific purpose of monitoring special educational needs. The general thrust of modernisation is not to have standing sub-committees or panels overseeing particular services.
3. The recommendation here alludes to the fact that parents were represented on the former Special Educational Needs Panel. Parents are now represented on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Lifelong Learning through the elected parent governor representatives. Beyond this, any proposal for a formal link could be constrained by the consideration set out in comment 2 above.

C Communications

Recommendations of the Lifelong Learning Select Committee

Recommendation 1: That the Local Education Authority should, as a matter of urgency, formulate and introduce a communications policy which should be harmonised with the developing Corporate Communication Strategy;

Cabinet to Advise

Recommendation 2: That the LEA consider how to take appropriate steps to encourage schools to recognise that they are supported by, and included under the ‘umbrella’ of the County Council.

Cabinet to Advise

Comments

1. The Lifelong Learning Select Committee did not take evidence from anybody in the Education Department when formulating this recommendation and may not have been fully aware of the range of communications produced by the Department. Very briefly summarised, the Department produces newsletters, information booklets, policy documents, guidance documents, guidance booklets and directories for headteachers, governors, teachers, youth

workers, partners (e.g. providers of early years education) and parents. There are also regular meetings for headteachers, governors and partners, and ad hoc meetings as necessary for parents. A range of information is available in libraries about the library service in particular and the County Council in general. There is not, and has never been, a formal communications policy for the education service, and it is difficult to see how one could be formulated which could cover the entire range of communications without being over-prescriptive. However, the extent and pattern of communications with schools was the subject of consultation with schools by the then Director of Education some three years ago. In principle it might be possible to produce a policy which prescribes matters such as house-style, graphic style or a logo, but clearly this would be inappropriate for one portfolio to try to adopt at the present time. I would suggest that all portfolios should wait for the Corporate Communications Strategy before attempting to formulate communications policies of their own.

2. I do not think that schools are in any doubt that they are supported by and included under the 'umbrella' of the County Council. Schools may tend to think of the County Council primarily as the local education authority, but this is probably inevitable, and I do not see it as a problem that needs to be addressed. As far as communications are concerned all external communications published by the former Education Department carried the County Council logo, which also appears on the sign-boards outside LEA-maintained schools.

D Education Service Plan

Recommendations of the Lifelong Learning Select Committee

Recommendation 1: That consideration be given to reducing the number of targets aimed at specific areas.

Accept

Recommendation 2: That there needs to be greater transparency in how the strategic aims of the Council are linked into, and supported by the plan;

Accept

Recommendation 3: The presentation and style of the plan should be simplified to improve comprehension;

Accept

Recommendation 4: Comparisons with the targets of current and previous achievements must always be included;

Accept

Recommendation 5: The Education Service Plan should be circulated to the Lifelong Learning Select Committee every time it is updated.

Accept

Comment

To be exact there were 12 service plans for the Education Department in 2000/01, one for each team. The document that the Select Committee asked to see was a return, in the form of a table, showing achievement against service plan targets during the year up to 30 November 2000, with predicted out-turns for the whole financial year. It was designed by the Cabinet Support Team for use as an internal management document. I do not think the Select Committee had the original service plans before it when it considered the return.

On the specific recommendations I would comment as follows:

1. I think there is no doubt that the Education Department set itself too many targets in 2000/01; some 160 overall. The service plans for 2001/02 contain fewer targets. I take the Committee's comment about 'targets aimed at specific areas' to mean that some of the targets were too narrow, and referred to a particular task rather than a measured standard of performance; this too, was addressed in preparing the service plans for 2001/02.
2. Each of the Education service plans for 2001/02 quotes and links directly to the relevant policy steers issued by the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee last autumn.
3. It is not intended to report on service plans this year in the same way as last year. A simplified system of reporting has been adopted, with four-monthly reports on flagships, service plan outcomes, and Best Value Performance Indicators. This is a Cabinet decision and will be the same for service plans and other performance indicators from all portfolios.
4. I understand that against some targets the Select Committee felt that the statements of achievement as at 30 November were not specific enough. I think that this recommendation is covered by my comments above.
5. The service plans for 2001/02 have now been submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Lifelong Learning. I think that it is for the Committee to decide whether it wants to add service plans to its programme in the future.

Your questions and views

If you have any questions about the matters contained in this paper please get in touch with the Contact Officer whose telephone number is given at the head of the paper.

*If you have any views on this paper which you would like the Cabinet to consider, or if you wish to object to the proposed decision, please inform the Head of Cabinet Support by **9.00am on 10 September 2001**. This can be done by telephone (to 01296 382966), Fax (to 01296 383441), or e-mail to cabinet@buckscc.gov.uk*