



Buckinghamshire County Council

Minutes

SCHOOL ORGANISATION COMMITTEE

AGENDA ITEM: 3

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SCHOOL ORGANISATION COMMITTEE HELD ON 9 APRIL 2003, IN THE COACH HOUSE, MAIN HALL 1, GREEN PARK, ASTON CLINTON, COMMENCING AT 2.30 PM AND CONCLUDING AT 4.40 PM

MEMBERS PRESENT

Schools Group

Mrs C Bevins , Mr C Brownlee, Mrs C Hinds (for Paddy McNeish), Mr D Richardson and Mrs J Wainwright.

Buckinghamshire County Council

Mr B Allen, Mrs M A M Aston (Vice-Chairman), Mrs P Bacon, Mrs M Baldwin, Mrs M Clayton and Mrs B Lay.

Oxford Diocesan Board of Education

Mr J A Loarridge OBE (Chairman)
Mr D Sullivan

Northampton RC Schools Commission

Mr B O'Byrne

Learning and Skills Council

Ms M Wilkes

Officers Present

Ms C Gray – Democratic Services Officer
Mr P Holmes – Acting Head of School Organisation
Mr R Popat – Senior Solicitor Education
Ms C Neill – Consultant Project Manager
Mr J Frank – Head of Special Educational Services
Ms R Cooper – Special Educational Services

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

Buckinghamshire County Council
Clare Martens

Northampton RC Diocese
Mrs M Ball

Oxford Diocese
Mr L Stephen

Schools Group
Mr R Butcher
Mrs P McNeish

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

1 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2003, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

SEN Update

Members noted that £3.5 million had been allocated from the Department of Education and Skills following a bid made by the Council for a complex primary school, in Stoke Leys/ Kynaston, Aylesbury to provide for pupils with moderate and severe learning difficulties and with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Correspondence

A response from the DfES was awaited in connection with the decision making process in closing sixth forms.

2 POST 16 PROVISION – LOCAL LEARNING AND SKILLS COUNCIL

Ms Wilkes reported that the responsibility for 6th form admission policy lay with the Local Education Authority. Students were still considered as 6th formers even if they were under age if they were following the 6th form programme. Non-UK EEC students were eligible but funding for other students depended on their parents residential status. The arrangements were the same for students with special needs.

She also reported on Flexibility Projects being undertaken in the County. 420 14 year old children had been included in the South of the County and 150 children in Aylesbury. These children would attend Colleges of Further Education to take part in lessons which were part of the school curriculum. This was particularly aimed at vocational qualifications and new GCSE subjects, these projects had been met from DfES funds allocated to the partnerships for the first cohort.

There were issues relating to the league tables in connection with the Flexibility Project as results would not be included. They were currently awaiting information from the DfES. The feedback from the students had shown high levels of motivation as they felt that they were gaining important life skills. These were part time programmes, approximately half a day a week which had to be organised into the school timetable. The costs of transport for these Projects had been met.

3 SEN UPDATE

Members of the Committee welcomed Jeff Frank, Head of Special Educational Services to update members on Special Educational Needs.

He referred to the £3.5 million which had been allocated from the Department of Education following a bid made by the Council for a complex primary school, in Stoke Leys, Kynaston, Aylesbury. He commented that whilst it was excellent to receive this funding there were still shortages of funding for preventative work. He emphasised the importance of providing good training for staff, such as the 'Warner' Training which looked at interviewing techniques to ensure children were safe.

The Best Value Review of Special Educational Services had been completed and also the Review of Social Care of Children and Families. The recommendations set out in the Review were now being addressed. He referred to one initiative where 3 Monitoring Placement Officers had been appointed to review children who had out of county placements, where it was felt that their needs had been met. The officers would be self-funding by reducing the amount of out of county placements. If one child did not need to continue having an out of county placement this would fund at least one officer. This would be undertaken only with the parents agreement and the child would receive a re-integration package. They were also looking at each officer reducing 10 statements over the year (30 in total).

The Inclusion Policy was in draft form which should be in place in time for the LEA OFSTED. There was an indication that OFSTED would focus on themes, one of which was likely to be Special Educational Needs.

He informed Members that Rebecca Cooper had been appointed as the new Consortium Project Manager. Consortia had been renamed as the Continuum Project to show that special schools were not in a vacuum but part of mainstream provision, where there would be more flexibility for children to access provision and to have their needs met. The Continuum Project would involve Pupil Referral Units, the Learning Support Department and

mainstream schools so that all the provision could be drawn together under one plan.

The Children and Young People portfolio were meeting regularly with the Schools Portfolio to discuss the best way forward in relation to the SEN Policy and Strategy and an Issues Paper would be sent to all schools in relation to 'Phase 2'.

Special Educational Services have developed mediation services for parents. This was a home grown service which was free, with volunteers acting as mediators. This service would be sold to other authorities, as some unitary authorities were too small to operate such a service.

There was a Pre-School Co-ordinating Group which was a multi-agency group involving health, education and social care. This was a joint-funded project and his Service and the Early Years Service had contributed £35,000 each to the project. This Group would look at early intervention for pre-school children to prevent children having special needs in later years.

Members thanked the Head of Special Educational Services for his presentation and raised the following issues:-

- A Member commented that some new young parents were not receiving enough information. In response to this, it was noted that the Senior Educational Psychologist provided an excellent 'portage' service, which was an extension of the role of parent partnership. This was a model from America which looked at early support for parents to help them through the process. In addition there was the Child Information Service helpline.
- In connection with this a Member commented on the importance of health visitors, and that Primary Care Trust's should continue to fund them, despite their budget pressures.
- In light of the Climbie Inquiry, all children would now be put on a database. A Member reported that he had attended a headteacher's conference where the Inquiry had been discussed and the importance of all agencies to share information for the welfare of the child. There were 15 agencies that dealt with children in care and there had been cases where some parents had to ring several agencies before they got any assistance. Some instances had been recorded where 24 phone calls had to be made before help was received.

Members commented that they would find it helpful to have an update on special educational needs every six months.

4 CORRESPONDENCE

There was no correspondence to discuss.

5 DETERMINATION OF STATUTORY NOTICES

The Committee received and noted the report from the Secretary on the Statutory Notice for the Change in Category for Hawridge and Cholesbury CE

School from voluntary controlled to voluntary aided. One objection had been received to which the Chairman of Governors had responded. The prescribed information from schools had been put on the Council's website.

Members of the County Council commented that they still had concerns that there was no evidence that the change in category would benefit the pupils in any way and that the assurances about future admission arrangements were insufficient and would be too selective. However, as the School Adjudicator had previously rejected these as valid grounds for objection, in other similar proposals, they decided not to object but instead abstained from voting. One Member felt that voluntary aided schools disregarded parental preference. A Church Representative commented that all parents were consulted on the proposal. The syllabus was locally agreed as part of the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education.

The Schools Group also abstained from voting for the same reasons as the Members Group. A Member of the Schools Group thanked the Secretary for producing a summary of the prescribed information and so reducing the amount of documentation sent to Members of the Committee when considering these type of proposals. A Member of the Schools Group expressed concern regarding a school who had tried to reduce their standard number, which had been objected against. However, they had now changed status to a voluntary aided school and the standard number was being decreased year by year. The Head of School Organisation reported that it was not being decreased and that he had been speaking to the Chairman of Governors. If they were decreasing numbers, a formal objection would be made.

A Church representative reassured Members that all CE aided schools were now statutorily required to consult with the Diocesan Board of Education on admission policy and to note their comments. However, if any school ignored the advice of the Board and the matter was referred to the Adjudicator, the views of the Diocese would be critical. The Board would be against any school being more exclusive.

The Oxford Diocesan Board of Education and the Northampton RC Schools Commission voted for the proposal.

Buckinghamshire County Council and the Schools Group abstained from voting.

RESOLVED

That approval be given to the Statutory Notice relating to the change of category for Hawridge and Cholesbury CE School from voluntary controlled to voluntary aided.

6 CONSULTATION PROCEDURE RELATING TO THE POSSIBLE CLOSURE OF VERNEY AVENUE SCHOOL

The Committee received and noted the report of the Strategic Manager for Schools on the consultation procedure relating to the possible closure of

Verney Avenue School, High Wycombe. The Acting Head of School Organisation reported that meetings had been held with the school, parents and local residents. 3 parents and 84 residents had attended the meeting. The Head of Special Educational Services was working with the school to ensure appropriate placements were given to all the children. The closure of the school was part of the SEN Strategy.

A Member asked whether they could be assured whether every parent would be happy with the school closing. The Head of Special Educational Services reported that this assurance could not be made, but that where parents had any concerns, they had discussed these with them immediately and had met with them personally. He commented that the level of dissatisfaction was not high. The school was not viable economically or providing the full curriculum due to poor funding from decreasing pupil numbers. Therefore, it was not in the pupil's interest for the school to stay open. The pupil's of the school were happy to move.

Members asked that their thanks to the headteacher be placed on record for his work with the pupils and parents in this process.

RESOLVED

That the start of the consultation process on the possible closure of Verney Avenue School be noted and to confirm that if objections are received after the Statutory Notices have been published these will be presented to the Committee at their meeting on Wednesday 10 September.

7 ADMISSIONS REVIEW

The Committee received a presentation from Carol Neill, the Consultant Project Manager on the Admissions Review 2003. The review included looking at admission policies and procedures for the County and the catchment areas of secondary schools. The reason for the review was due to the Code of Practice 2003, changes required over recent years because of legislation, Ombudsman and judicial review decisions and because no complete review had been undertaken for a long time.

The Code of Practice required that an admissions forum be established and that arrangements for challenging and vulnerable children be looked at and also standard numbers and net capacity for schools. The Code of Practice requirements for secondary schools were as follows:-

- Co-ordination of admission arrangements – secondary scheme
- One application form only per child
- One preference list – ranked
- Preference before 11+ test results
- No option to change after cut off date
- National offer date for secondary schools – 1 March

The Code of Practice requirements for primary schools were as follows:-

- Co-ordination of admission arrangements – primary scheme
- One application form for each LEA
- One preference list – may be ranked
- Local offer date for primary before 15 April
- All children to receive one offer from each LEA

The Consultant Project Manager reported that the Code of Practice was difficult to implement for the County because of the timeline for the 11+ procedure and there was also only one list for secondary transfer for upper or grammar schools. There were also 44 admission authorities within the County and 10/14 LEAs.

The Review also included the 11+ testing arrangements, the over-subscription criteria and the catchment area for secondary schools. Professional evidence and supporting academic evidence would still be required for Review Panels and the reviews would be undertaken with experienced headteachers. If there were no nominated circumstances then the parents would have to ask for a selection appeal. They were looking at changing the way headteachers made their recommendations, which was welcomed.

In looking at the over-subscription criteria, the Consultant Project Manager commented on the changes in the way society viewed siblings. Some households had children from different parents and there was a view that all groups of children should be treated the same, whether they had a sibling or not. The County would consult on this issue.

They would also consult on whether the distance to school should be part of the over-subscription criteria or the child's score in the 11+.

With regard to the review of catchment areas, she and another Consultant, Alan Milsted had visited all grammar schools in the County to discuss the proposals, which would be consulted upon. Upper schools were not visit individually, but as a group, as a full consultation had been undertaken with upper schools last year. Schools were generally in broad agreement to the changes to catchment areas.

The Consultant Project Manager reported that there were three types of scheme; equal preference, first preference first and the nearest school. The County preferred the equal preference scheme so that the parent did not have to rank the schools which should address the difficulties raised by the Rotherham decision. The nearest school scheme was considered not appropriate with the geography of Buckinghamshire.

In terms of the timetable, Members noted that there would be a formal consultation in June and a decision would be made in the Autumn in order to notify the Secretary of State at the beginning of next year. During discussion Members noted that the transport arrangements would not change and out of county children would not be discriminated against in this process. If the first preference scheme was used, this could cause a dilemma for parents if they put a grammar school first and the child did not qualify in their 11+ test.

Members thanked the Consultant Project Manager for her presentation.

8 DfES CONSULTATIONS ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO SCHOOL ORGANISATION PLAN AND ON CHANGES TO THE REGULATIONS AND GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOL ORGANISATION COMMITTEES

The Acting Head of School Organisation updated Members on the key points in the consultation by the DfES on proposed changes to School Organisation Plans and on changes to the regulations and guidance for School Organisation Committees. He informed Members that the main rationale to the consultation was to update the regulations to take account of changes in education law and policy since 1999 and that from 2003 the School Organisation Plan would only need to be published on a 3 yearly cycle rather than the current annual cycle unless there was a dramatic change to local circumstances.

The following comments were made:-

- The proposal that community schools may publish proposals to expand or to add a sixth form did not mention the involvement of the Learning and Skills Council
- A Member referred to the example of the change of category from controlled to voluntary aided and the advice from the School Adjudicator that the school did not need to provide evidence that it would benefit the pupils. However, the revised statutory guidance included the need to focus on ensuring that changes to local school provision would support higher standards.
- The strong presumption that proposals put forward by popular and successful schools would be approved did not refer to funding arrangements.

The Committee noted the proposed changes to School Organisation Plans and to the regulations as they affect the role of School Organisation Committees.

9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Bedgrove Infant and Junior School – Possible change to Foundation Status

The Acting Head of School Organisation reported on the possible change to Foundation Status which could be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee in June. However, Members noted that other options were being discussed to ensure that pupils in the Infant School could obtain a place at the Junior School.

Nomination for Schools Group – The Secretary to the Committee reported that 5 nominations had been received and the election process would now take place.

School Organisation Plan – A draft copy of the plan would be sent to Members before the next meeting in June for their comments.

Building to Cope with Growth

The Acting Head of School Organisation reported on the following:-

- There was no change to the Aylesbury area
- Chiltern/South Bucks
The Chesham Park Community College Project would take approximately 5 months longer than planned.
The drama and music facilities for the Misborne School was a month behind.
- Wycombe
The process for Great Marlow School had been delayed indefinitely because of planning/highway issues.
Highcrest Community - work would start on site in the next month to hopefully occupy in November
John Hampden Grammar – the Sports Hall would be finished in August 2005.
Princes Risborough Upper School – the work would commence this September to finish early 2004. The contract would be retendered later this month which would mean at least a 3 month delay.
- A Member commented whether the Plan addressed the fact that there was likely to be a 20% over capacity for primary schools in 2007. The Acting Head of School Organisation reported that the main areas to address in the School Organisation Plan for 2003 were to reduce temporary classrooms, to remove buildings that were built in the post war period and to provide appropriate specialist facilities. He also commented on the new way of measuring school capacity called net capacity.
- Funding from the Government in relation to the Extended Schools Programme would not reach Buckinghamshire until 2007.

Tom Thorpe – Chairman of Waddesdon

Members noted with sadness the death of Tom Thorpe the Chairman of Governors for Waddesdon who had been tragically killed at home. They asked that their thanks be recorded for his contribution to Buckinghamshire and that it was a privilege to have known him.

10 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The following dates were agreed:-

Wednesday 25 June 2003 (9 July to be cancelled)

Wednesday 10 September 2003

Wednesday 14 January 2004

Wednesday 21 April 2004

Wednesday 7 July 2004

CHAIRMAN