

MINUTES of the meeting of the **EDUCATION, LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE** held at 11.00am on Tuesday 25 March 2011 at County Hall, Kingston upon Thames.

These minutes will be confirmed by the Select Committee at its meeting on 20 May 2011.

Members:

- * Mrs Dorothy Ross-Tomlin (Chairman)
- * Mrs Denise Turner-Stewart (Vice-Chairman)
- * Mr Nigel Cooper
- * Mr Steve Cosser
- * Mrs Clare Curran
- Mr Peter Lambell
- X Mrs Sally Marks
- * Mrs Diana Smith
- * Mr Keith Taylor
- Mr Chris Townsend

Ex officio Members:

Mr Geoff Marlow
Mrs Lavinia Sealy

Co-opted Members:

- * Mr Michael Hall (Sub for Mr Derek Holbird)
- x Mrs Mary Reynolds
- * Mr Sean Whetstone
- * Jerry Oddie – Secondary Heads' Phase Council
- * Mr Duncan Hewson – Parent School Governor
- * Mrs Cecile White - Parent School Governor

* = Present

x = Present for part of the meeting

PART 1
IN PUBLIC

12/11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE [Item 1]

Apologies were received from Mr Peter Lambell and Mr Chris Townsend.

13/11 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS [Item 2]

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 25 January 2011 were approved as a true record of the meeting.

14/11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]

The following declarations of interest were made for all items on account of being School Governors.

Nigel Cooper – Esher High School
Steve Cosser – Losely Fields Primary School and Broadwater School
Clare Curran – Therfield School and Eastwick Infant School
Dorothy Ross-Tomlin (Chairman) – Langshott School
Diana Smith – Beaufort Community Primary School
Sean Whetstone – Polsden Lacey Infant School

15/11 QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS [Item 4]

There were no questions or petitions.

16/11 RESPONSE FROM THE CABINET TO ISSUES REFERRED BY THE SELECT COMMITTEE [Item 5]

There were no responses to report.

17/11 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME/ RECOMMENDATION TRACKER [Item 6]

Members requested that the item on the Transformation of Services for Young People, due for committee in July, be brought forward to the meeting on 20 May. This was following information received by Members from the Assistant Director for Young People outlining proposed changes to the transformation programme. These changes have been proposed subsequent to approval of the original plan from the joint Education, Learning & Development and Safer & Stronger Communities Select Committee in November 2010.

One Member requested confirmation that the committee's meeting dates were well placed to coincide with the School Admissions process. The Committee Manager confirmed that committee dates have been adjusted to coincide with admissions and school term dates.

18/11 DETAILED SERVICE BUDGET AND DRAFT DIRECTORATE STRATEGY [Item 7]

Declarations of Interest:

None Received

Witnesses:

Mrs Paula Chowdhury - Acting Senior Finance Manager Adults, Childrens Schools and Families.

Mrs Lynn McGrady - Finance Manager - Schools and Learning

Mr Ben Byrne – Head of Youth Justice

Key Points from the discussion –

From Members Questions and Comments:

- i. The Chairman acknowledged the absence of any senior officers for this item and gave apologies for Cabinet Members Peter Martin and Kay Hammond, for Nick Wilson (Acting Strategic Director of Children, Schools and Families) and Peter-John Wilkinson (Acting Assistant Director for Schools and Learning).
- ii. One Member asked if the Council was lobbying for an increased Designated Schools Grant (DSG). Officers explained that the Council had lobbied with the previous Labour Government for an increased DSG but were now awaiting legislation from the Coalition Government to indicate how this is to be taken forward.
- iii. The Member also queried if the Service budget was also an appropriate model for academies.
- iv. One Member expressed concern that some Children's Centres are still running at a loss. Whilst acknowledging that some communities are supportive of their Children's Centres, a different approach might be required for other centres.
- v. Referring to the Savings Proposals for 2011-15, one Member highlighted the fact that the Schools Improvement Services appear to have been hit twice in budget savings. Officers confirmed that this was the case and that consequently there will be decreased funding for Babcock 4S. The service is currently working to see if it can continue to afford annual school visits.
- vi. Members expressed the need for the committee to monitor the viability of School 6th Forms in the future as impending cuts could put smaller 6th Forms in jeopardy and reduce standards. The Chairman confirmed that this would be considered as part of the forward work programme.
- vii. Jerry Oddie reiterated that impending cuts is a big concern for schools and that loosing 6th Form status can have hugely detrimental effect on secondary schools.

Actions/Further information provided:

That Phil Osborne, Head of Early Years and Childcare Service, submits a paper to Members of the Committee with details of the services' approach to Children's Centres and attends a meeting of the committee if Members feel it necessary.

Recommendations:

That Commercial Services forward trading surpluses of £250,000 from 2010/11 to fund this IT investment.

19/11 REVIEW OF GOVERNOR SERVICES [Item 8]

Declarations of Interest:

Witnesses:

Sue Boustead – Strategic Governance Manager – Babcock 4S
Penny Plato – Chief Advisor Education – Babcock 4S

Key Points Raised During the Discussion –

From Members Questions and Comments:

- i. One Member asked officers if Babcock 4S taking on Governors' Services in Croyden would result in less funding/resources for Surrey. Officers reassured the committee that Babcock 4S are still maintaining a high level of service in schools across Surrey.
- ii. Officers are improving links between the Babcock 4S and the Surrey County Council website.
- iii. Officers are working with the Chair of Governors at Therfield to encourage more former students to become governors. They hope meetings will produce some good new ideas and good results by September.
- iv. Governor Services are continuing to work with Local Diocese to encourage use of the standard template agenda.
- v. Having used Governors Electronic Learning (GEL), one Member was not impressed with the overall package and asked what the response was from a questionnaire sent to users of GEL. Officers said there is resounding support for the GEL package but some modules need evaluating and adapting to suit the needs of governors. Officers were keen to work with Sean Whetstone to discuss improvements to GEL.
- vi. The committee agreed that it would be acceptable for Governors Services to adopt the 'One Stop Shop' application form for any new governor applications. This will save the service from having to duplicate applicant data onto another Surrey County Council form.
- vii. One Member asked how local Diocese can contribute to school governor appointments and asked if they could be invited to comment on applications. Both the service and the Member agreed to communicate between themselves on appointments and will come back to the committee if there are any issues with this.

A Member asked if there are any standard or discretionary payments given to Advanced School Governors (ASG). Officers said that there are no standard payments. On occasions an ASG can claim expenses for major meetings but the work is always voluntary.

Recommendations:

That the head of Governor Services provides an update for the Education Select Committee bulletin in 6 months time and a full report to Select Committee in 12 months.

That Sean Whetstone meets with Officers from Governor Services to discuss the usefulness of GEL

20/11 SURREY VIRTUAL SCHOOL FOR CHILDREN IN CARE [Item 9]

Declarations of Interest:

Witnesses:

Maureen Giles - Head of Virtual School

Jane Clarke – Head of Inclusion – Children, Schools and Families.

Key Points from the discussion:

A recent OFSTED inspection validated the work of the Virtual School. OFSTED praised certain areas and identified key areas for improvement.

Progress Made:

- Significant progress in tracking people in care. Development of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) have been key to good practice and lead to high quality academic planning for children in care. They are robust and easily accessible and the service is working to improve PEPs further.

Key areas for improvement:

- Fixed term exclusions remain unacceptably high.
- Personal Education Plans (PEP) are not seen by all as an academic document.
- Lack of provision following children being excluded or returning to the County
- There are high numbers of out of county placements, which are expensive to fund.
- Quick access to information from other authorities when receiving children from out of County.

From Members Questions and Comments:

- i. Members noted the good feedback from OFSTED and praised the work of the officers in the virtual schools team.

- ii. Members questioned the poor outcomes/results for key stages 2, 3 and 4 and asked if there were any inherent factors hindering the progress of children in care at these stages. Officers stated that ideally there would be no children in care by this age (approx age 14). Children still in care at this age are often the most difficult/complicated cases. There is also a large cohort of children coming into care around key stage 4 which often results in high levels of absence and low aspirations. Surrey has a higher number of this cohort in comparison with other authorities. Officers explained that with the introduction of additional staff there is now more resource to focus on improving this area.
- iii. One Member asked why Surrey does not appear to do as well in comparison to other authorities. Officers stated that comparisons with other local authorities are difficult as the number of children in care varies significantly with each authority so the focus is on assessing individual progress. Now that the virtual school has more resource and some well established systems in place to track progress, more detail on individual progress will be available over the coming 12 months.
- iv. Referring to the high rates of Fixed-Term Exclusions (FTE), a Member asked how was the service is tackling this and what alternative provision and support is available to children who have been excluded? Officers listed the key steps that are being taken to decrease the amount of FTEs which are:
 - Working with schools and senior teachers at key points prior to any FTEs.
 - The virtual head-teacher contacting schools immediately following an FTE to discuss reasons for exclusion and assess circumstances which lead to the decision.
 - Looking to avoid FTEs by providing interim support to pupils and the schools where possible.
- v. One Member asked how the service interacts with looked after children and how closely it works with families, youth workers and education welfare officers. Officers explained they meet often with individual children and the children are aware of the service and the work they do. Officers also spoke of the well-established links with social workers, youth justice and education welfare officers and have confidence that the different agencies work well together.
- vi. Jerry Oddie, representing the Secondary Phase Heads Council, explained that there are significant fluctuations in attainment data and that this is due to the small numbers being taken into account. One child's individual attainment can have a major impact on overall statistics and the same children are often moving in and out of care. Much of the performance of looked after children depends on the placement of a child. It is more difficult for schools to work with parents and children if they live far away.

Actions/Further Information Requested:

Recommendations:

- (a) That the Cabinet be aware there are significant challenges, including inefficiencies, being reported around the lack of timely information sharing between children's social care and education systems.
- (b) That the Cabinet endorses, as part of the current IMT priority review for the Children, Schools and Families Directorate, an immediate solution.

21/11 ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION TASK GROUP REPORT [Item 10]

Declarations of Interest:

Witnesses: Ruth O'hare, Margaret Widdows

Key Points from the discussion:

Members noted the good work of the Elective Home Education Task Group. One Member expressed how the final report to cabinet demonstrates that the authority is prepared to listen to residents and act on petitions to support the improvement of policy in areas such as the approach to home educators.

Members also praised the constructive input from officers involved.

Actions/Further Information Requested:

Recommendations:

That the report is approved by the Select Committee to go forward to Cabinet.

22/11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING [Item 11]

The next meeting will be on 20 May 2011.

[The meeting finished at 12.50pm]

Chairman