

SELECT COMMITTEE - EXTENDED SERVICES

MINUTES of a meeting of the Select Committee - Extended Services held in the Stour Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 15 February 2012.

PRESENT: Mr R B Burgess (Chairman), Mr A R Chell, Mr R J Parry, Mr K H Pugh, Mr K Smith and Mr M J Vye

ALSO PRESENT: Miss H Dowling, Miss H Perry, Mr A Sandhu, MBE and Mr M J Whiting

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr S Carter (Learning Plus Manager) and Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Declarations of Members' Interest

1. Mr K Smith declared an interest as a Member of the Board of the Dover Extended Services (DES) project.
2. Mr M J Vye declared an interest as a Member of the Extended Services Committee of the Canterbury Academy, which is tasked with attracting funding for the Academy's extended services programme.

2. Introductions

The Chairman welcomed all those present and explained that Miss Hanna Dowling and Miss Hannah Perry were attending the meeting as observers. Both were visiting the County Council to gain work experience.

3. Extended Services - 'One Year On' Report (Item 1)

1. Members considered an update report of progress on each of the 18 recommendations in the Select Committee's final report, published in December 2010. Mr Carter introduced the update for each, and responded, along with Mr Whiting and Mr Sandhu, to Members' comments and questions. The points arising under each recommendation are listed below.
2. Mr Carter acknowledged the vast changes which had emerged in the relationship between schools and the KCC, and the policy changes made by the Coalition Government in the funding of extended services, since the Select Committee had identified its Terms of Reference and started its work. These changes had meant that action on some of the Committee's recommendations had necessarily been limited or delayed. However, there are still some good examples of extended services, now called Learning Plus, going on in Kent.

Recommendation 1

Mr Carter explained that, due to changes in government policy, he had informed both the Education, Learning and Skills Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee (ELSPOSC) and Customer and Communities Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee (CCPOSC) in July 2011 that it was not appropriate or timely to take action on this recommendation. Many schools, however, have taken the initiative to move towards local collaboration over extended services. Members commented that:-

- It is important that various groups of schools across the county have the opportunity to share and benefit from best practice, and Mr Carter advised that work is ongoing on the best way to achieve this.
- Although progress has been hampered, Kent should still advertise and promote to the Government the initiatives that it has established.

Mr Carter announced a draft report, *'The Impact of Extended Services in Kent'*, the final version of which Kent would promote to the Department for Education. Mr Whiting added that a communication plan would be developed to accompany the final report and that he and/or the Leader of the KCC would write to the Secretary of State to promote both documents. Members welcomed this as a way forward and asked that a copy of both be sent to them when available, and that the outcome of this promotion be reported to the Committee which replaces the relevant POSC in the KCC's new Governance arrangements.

The update on progress was NOTED, and the work going on around the impact report and communication plan, and the contribution they would make, was welcomed.

Recommendation 2

Members commented that:-

- The concept of the promotion is more important than the form it takes, but promotion should be 'top-down', starting from the Government.
- As performance is patchy, Kent should identify a good example of extended service provision and promote it.
- It had taken a disappointingly long time – over 12 months - for the Director and Cabinet Member to write to all Head Teachers and Chairmen of Governors emphasising the importance and benefit of extended services, and Members were concerned that this showed a lack of priority given to this subject.

The update on progress was NOTED.

Recommendation 3

Although 'no further action' is recorded for this recommendation, discussions around local children's commissioning models are ongoing and it may be possible to incorporate extended services provision in those discussions. Mr Whiting agreed to discuss with Mrs Whittle to take this forward.

The update on progress was NOTED, and the opportunity to address the issue under the new Board was welcomed.

Recommendation 4

Members commented that:-

- Consortia may have been viewed by some as expensive to establish and run, but the experiences of those so far established had proven this not to be the case.
- Mr Carter pointed out that training for people setting up consortia was available via a government programme, and discussions on support for schools forming consortia will be sought with the Kent Association of Head Teachers. Plans are underway to run a pilot using the knowledge, experience and expertise of the Learning Plus Team, in conjunction with the Kent Challenge Team.
- The Select Committee had found evidence that extended services raises attainment, but schools would still have to make a decision to commit money to training.

The update on ongoing work was NOTED.

Recommendation 5

Mr Carter advised Members that there is no national organisation to champion extended services or produce training materials. Kent is one of the few councils in the South East to retain an extended services team, so there is no neighbouring authority with whom Kent can pool resources and expertise, or share best practice. Mr Carter is, however, chair of a group called the South East Learning Partnership, which provides an opportunity to share resources, expertise and best practice with colleagues working in extended services in the wider South East region.

The update on progress was NOTED.

Recommendation 6

Members commented that:-

- It is a pity that 'community cohesion' will not be included as an area of focus for Ofsted, but the inclusion of 'the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils' and a measure of their 'behaviour and attitudes towards others...' is welcomed.
- Mr Whiting added that the inclusion of this focus would contribute to 'narrowing the gap' in attainment, which is a key KCC priority.
- Mr Whiting also pointed out that the establishment of schools consortia should encourage schools of all types and levels to work together.

The update on progress was NOTED and welcomed.

Recommendation 7

Members commented that:-

- This is one of the Select Committee's most important recommendations, and although it will take a while to establish, it is important not to lose track of it.
- Mr Carter said the Select Committee's recommendation of a Consortium Co-ordinator post had unfortunately come at a time when funding for schools, and school budgets, were being reconfigured and changed, so promoting the idea was bound to be a challenge. Examples of existing partnerships which have trialled a co-ordinator could be used as models to help promote the concept - eg the Quartet schools in Thanet, which have jointly funded a co-ordinator, and the Dover Extended Services (DES) model, which has adopted a commercial approach and secured sustainable sponsorship from a local leisure company.
- District boundaries need not be a barrier to schools from one area joining an initiative being run in a neighbouring area. KCC could adopt a signposting role to help schools benefit from neighbouring projects.

The update on ongoing work was NOTED.

Recommendation 8

Members commented that:-

- This recommendation had had a better outcome than expected, having achieved the retention of 7 posts instead of the 4 expected and retaining Mr Carter's post as centrally-funded.
- It is hoped that at least some of these posts can be retained for longer than the present limit of 31 August 2012.
- The services of the Extended Learning Team will be chargeable to schools and Academies, and KCC should encourage schools to spend some of their pupil premium funding on the provision of extended services. Spending just 10% of the pupil premium on extended services would make a big difference to what can be achieved.

The update on ongoing work was NOTED, and its success welcomed.

Recommendation 9

The update on ongoing work was NOTED.

Recommendation 10

Mr Carter explained that the Community Youth Tutor (CYT) role had been protected as part of the Youth Service, and he was liaising with Nigel Baker, Head of Integrated Youth Services, on broadening their range of activity. Mr Sandhu said that the Youth Service has a number of outreach workers who work with any young person in a community, whether or not they attend a youth centre.

Members commented that:-

- Extended services could be seen as one big youth club!
- Locality Boards could take up and look into the issue of Community Youth Tutors.

- The continued existence of the CYT role was welcomed. A community and the local voluntary sector could get behind the provision of this service. Good initiatives, such as a youth café, had already arisen from such links.
- Mr Sandhu commented that the potential contribution of Locality Boards was a major issue and one which the KCC needs to embrace. The best way of finding out what services local people want, and where and when they want them, is to ask them.
- Members reported that several Locality Boards have youth provision high on their list of priorities.

The update on ongoing work was NOTED.

Recommendation 11

Members asked about the register of youth service vehicles, which the Select Committee recommended should be compiled, and Mr Carter undertook to look into this.

The update on ongoing work was NOTED.

Recommendation 12

Members asked Miss Perry and Miss Dowling for their views on the value of the Freedom Pass. Miss Perry said she no longer qualified for a Freedom Pass, being over 16, and paying the £19.50 weekly cost of bus fares between home and school (having previously had free transport) had come as a shock. Miss Dowling explained that, living in Bromley, she was not eligible for the Kent Freedom Pass scheme, although she attends school in Dartford. As a resident of a London Borough, she is still eligible for free bus and rail travel, which she much appreciated as she is aware how much her Kent school friends have to pay.

The update on progress was NOTED, and further progress on this recommendation will be reported to the Education, Learning and Skills Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee (ELSPOSC) in March 2012, prior to a Cabinet decision being taken.

Recommendation 13

Members commented that:-

- The provision of rail concessions for young people could be included as a condition when rail companies' franchises are renewed by the Government, although Mr Whiting commented that introducing new requirements when renewing a franchise could be difficult.
- The picture of need would be helped by having survey data of the number of young people who travel to school using the bus and train, and Mr Whiting undertook to see if this data was available.
- Mr Whiting commented that a Young Persons' Rail Card was not much help for accessing school, as it could not be used before 9.00 am, or to buy a season ticket.

The report of 'no further action' was NOTED, with disappointment.

Recommendation 14

Members commented that:-

- Individual Members could support this initiative locally by using part of their Community Grant allocation, and some already do.
- Briefings on how Members could contribute could be arranged via Locality Boards.
- Mr Whiting suggested that Members also talk to Schools Funding Forums, and undertook to discuss outside the meeting the best way of approaching these, perhaps by a joint letter from the Select Committee Chairman and Cabinet Members.
- Mr Sandhu compared this issue to the shared use of school/community minibuses; it's such an obvious idea it is difficult to think of a reason not to do it.

The report of 'no further action' was NOTED, with disappointment.

Recommendation 15

The update on ongoing work was NOTED.

Recommendations 16 and 17

These two recommendations are closely related and were considered together.

Mr Carter said that he was awaiting the outcome of the Government's consultation on a Giving White Paper, which included the role of volunteers. He commented that it could be difficult in the current economic climate to set up and administer a countywide scheme to engage volunteers, who could be rewarded with vouchers for free activities, but this is something which could be encouraged at a more local level.

The update on ongoing work on both these recommendations was NOTED.

Recommendation 18

Mr Carter reported that Kent has performed well so far in the number of its schools which are achieving accreditation at the 'established' and 'advanced' levels of the Quality in Extended Services (QES) scheme.

Members commented that:-

- The QES scheme demonstrates genuine quality of performance and should not be seen as purely a funding issue.

The update on progress was NOTED, and its success welcomed

4. Comments from Observers

1. The Chairman asked Miss Dowling and Miss Perry to tell the Select Committee about their experiences of extended services in their own schools.

2. Miss Dowling explained that students studying for the International Baccalaureate at her Grammar School have to complete 50 hours of volunteer work as part of their course, and could not gain a pass without completing this. The school has two after-school clubs, for sports and arts/crafts, which cater for a range of ages and have a minibus service to pick up participants and volunteer helpers.

3. Miss Perry commented that her Grammar School concentrated more on academic achievement and had not embraced extended services as much as it could have done. She said she was not aware of extended services or much volunteer activity at the school.

4. Members asked Miss Dowling and Miss Perry how extended services provision could be improved, and Miss Perry said that provision would be more effective if ideas and drive for it were to come from students.

5. It was commented that, during evidence gathering, the Select Committee had been told that Grammar Schools tended not to embrace extended services as much as other schools, preferring to concentrate on academic achievement, and their reluctance to embrace this could lead to them not developing 'the whole child' and possibly turning out more NEETs (young people not in education, employment or training). Mr Whiting said many Grammar Schools support their students in pursuing the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme and other volunteering opportunities. Members gave examples of volunteering schemes and projects at their local schools.

5. Summing Up and Next Steps

(Item 2)

1. The Chairman acknowledged Members' passion and enthusiasm for the subject, which is still very apparent more than a year after the Select Committee had completed its review. Because of the number of work streams which were still evolving, Members felt it would be most helpful for them to have a further update on progress in approximately six months' time.

2. RESOLVED that the Select Committee reconvene in the autumn of 2012, with the Cabinet Members, to receive a further update report on activity which is currently ongoing but has not been able yet to proceed as far as the Committee and the Cabinet Members would have liked.

3. Members also agreed that, when the new document, *'The Impact of Extended Services in Kent'*, to which Mr Carter referred earlier in the meeting, becomes final in 2-3 months' time, an informal briefing be arranged, to which all KCC Members should be invited.

Conclusion

1. Mr Whiting thanked the Members of the Select Committee and the officers who had supported them for all the work they had put into the review, and for allowing him to be engaged in it. Mr Sandhu echoed these comments and said the key issue he had taken away from this and other topic reviews is the paramount importance of good communication. Members should also be prepared to shout about what is good about Kent's services.

2. Miss Dowling and Miss Perry thanked Members for allowing them to attend the meeting as observers and said it had been very interesting to follow the discussion.