

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

EDUCATION CABINET COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Education Cabinet Committee held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 14 January 2014.

PRESENT: Mr L B Ridings, MBE (Chairman), Mrs P T Cole (Vice-Chairman), Mr M A C Balfour, Mr H Birkby, Mr D Brunning, Mr L Burgess, Mr G Cowan, Mrs M E Crabtree, Mr S C Manion, Mr M J Northey, Mr J M Ozog, Mr Q Roper, Mr W Scobie and Mr M J Vye

ALSO PRESENT: Mr R W Gough

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr P Leeson (Corporate Director Education, Learning and Skills Directorate), Mr K Abbott (ELS Director Finance Business Partner), Mr R Dalziel (Area Education Officer - North Kent), Mrs A Gamby (Head of Early Years & Childcare), Mr D Shipton (Head of Financial Strategy), Mr K Shovelton (Director of Education Planning and Access), Mrs M White (Area Education Officer - East Kent) and Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

161. Membership

(Item A2)

The Committee RESOLVED to note that Mr L Burgess had joined the Committee in place of Mr A Crowther.

162. Declarations of Members' Interest relating to items on today's Agenda

(Item A4)

Mr M A C Balfour made a declaration of interest regarding item D3 on the grounds that his wife ran an Early Years school.

163. Minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2013

(Item A5)

RESOLVED that, subject to the addition of Mr Brunning and Mr Roper to the list of those present, and some small corrections to the text of Minutes 150 and 159, the Minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2013 are correctly recorded and they be signed by the Chairman.

164. Verbal Update by Cabinet Member and Corporate Director

(Item A6)

1. The Cabinet Member, Mr Gough, and the Corporate Director, Mr Leeson, gave their verbal updates and highlighted work undertaken since the last Education Cabinet Committee meeting, which included the following:

Update on Sevenoaks Grammar School Annex

2. Mr Gough explained that, following the update given at the Committee's December meeting, the Secretary of State had turned down two applications, from Invicta Grammar School and the Weald of Kent Grammar School, for the establishment of a grammar school annex in Sevenoaks. Legislation stated that no new grammar schools should be established, so the question to be determined about the application was whether it should be classed as an expansion or a new school. A key issue had been that both schools were single sex while the proposed annexe would be mixed sex. Mr Gough recommended to Members that they read the letters sent to the two applicant schools by the DfE as these set out the issues which would need to be addressed by each school in any new application. The planning process for the proposed new school annex would continue, and the County Council was pursuing with the schools ways to address the specific concerns expressed by the Secretary of State.

Ofsted Annual Report

3. Mr Leeson reported that Ofsted had published its annual report and league tables shortly before Christmas, in which Kent had scored as follows:-

- 55th out of 150 local authorities, in terms of the percentage of secondary school pupils having access to a school rated 'good' or 'outstanding';
- 130th out of 155 local authorities, for the percentage of primary school pupils having access to a school rated 'good' or 'outstanding'; and
- 68% of the total of Kent's school population had access to a school rated 'good' or 'outstanding', and 25,000 more children in Kent were receiving a good education than in the previous year.

4. Mr Gough responded to comments and questions from Members and the following points were highlighted:-

- a) the legality of the process for proposing and pursuing new grammar school provision was challenged, as legislation clearly stated that no new grammar schools were to be established. Detail of the wording of the legal documents had previously been requested by the speaker but had not yet been received. In the speaker's opinion, the County Council had let down the people of Sevenoaks. Mr Gough undertook to respond to the speaker's concerns outside the meeting. He said he did not believe it would have been right to ignore a petition signed by more than 2,000 local people. He asserted that the people of Sevenoaks had not been let down; the County Council had proceeded with what local people had asked for; and
- b) another speaker set out similar concerns and said the County Council was investing time and resources in something which was essentially a gamble.

5. Mr Gough reiterated that there was a Sevenoaks issue and a West Kent issue. There was pressure on places in West Kent so it seemed bizarre not to tackle the two issues together. He said he had had a difference of opinion with the Secretary of

State about the need to change the law, to allow the provision of new grammar school places in West Kent.

6. RESOLVED that the information given in the verbal updates and in responses to questions by the Committee be noted, with thanks.

165. 14/00001: Proposal to expand Lawn Primary School, Gravesend
(Item B1)

1. Mr Dalziel and Mr Shovelton introduced the report and explained that the reason for the proposed expansion was the demand for school places.

2. RESOLVED that:-

- a) the Education Cabinet Committee endorse the decision proposed to be taken by the Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform, to issue a public notice to expand Lawn Primary School by 10 Reception places, from a PAN of 20 to 1FE; and
- b) subject to no objections being received to the public notice:
 - (i) expand the school;
 - (ii) allocate £350,000 from the Education, Learning and Skills Capital Budget;
 - (iii) authorise the Director of Property and Infrastructure Support, in consultation with the Director of Governance and Law, to enter into any necessary contracts/agreements on behalf of the County Council; and
 - (iv) authorise the Director of Property and Infrastructure Support to be the nominated Authority Representative within the relevant agreements and to enter into variations as envisaged under the contracts.

166. 14/00002: Proposal to expand Chantry Community Academy, Gravesend
(Item B2)

1. Mr Dalziel and Mr Shovelton introduced the report and explained that the consultation had produced a largely positive response in favour of the proposals.

2. RESOLVED that:-

- a) the Education Cabinet Committee endorse the decision proposed to be taken by the Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform, to issue a public notice to expand Chantry Community Academy by 30 Reception places, from 1FE to 2FE; and
- b) subject to no objections being received to the public notice:
 - (i) expand the school;

- (ii) allocate £6,000 per classroom from the 'revenue re-organisation' for classroom improvements;
- (iii) authorise the Director of Property and Infrastructure Support, in consultation with the Director of Governance and Law, to enter into any necessary contracts/agreements on behalf of the County Council; and
- (iv) authorise the Director of Property and Infrastructure Support to be the nominated Authority Representative within the relevant agreements and to enter into variations as envisaged under the contracts.

167. 14/00003: Proposal to relocate and expand Tunstall CE Primary School, Sittingbourne
(Item B3)

1. Mrs White and Mr Shovelton introduced the report and explained that the reason for the proposed expansion was the demand for school places. Unfortunately there was insufficient room to expand at the current site and relocation was therefore required. The response to the consultation had been largely positive, but strong objections had been raised.

2. In discussion, Members made the following comments:-

- a) an objection on planning grounds was raised to the proposed relocation of the school;
- b) in response to a question about the need for expansion and the site chosen for it, Mrs White explained that, to address Sittingbourne's growing population, a feasibility study into expanding several local schools was carried out. Sites at Eden Park and Stones Farm had previously been considered, but then pupil numbers had not justified the County Council purchasing either of these. As well as being too small to accommodate the necessary expansion, the current Tunstall School site was in the shared ownership of the Diocesan office and a local landowner. There was currently pressure on school places in South Sittingbourne, and although Westlands had recently expanded, it had not been possible to expand at Rodmersham, due to objections from the Governors of the school. A possible site for the expansion of Tunstall School had been the playing field at Fulston Manor School. A feasibility study had been undertaken but had not progressed as the site was compromised in terms of highway access (sharing the Ruins Barn Road with Kent Science Park) and the County Council would have had to purchase the land;
- c) a comment was made that it was good that south Sittingbourne schools were filling their own school places rather than drawing children from north Sittingbourne. The fact that a village would be retaining its own school was supported by several speakers;

- d) in response to a question about the likely outcome, if the expansion were not to go ahead, Mrs White explained that the school was likely to have to reduce to ½FE. This would put pressure on other schools in the area which were already full, and a school operating at ½FE would be vulnerable. Mr Leeson added that schools taking ½FE had historically had problems delivering a curriculum and had to federate themselves to remain viable;
 - e) concern was expressed that the expansion of Tunstall school would attract children to it from other areas of Sittingbourne; and
 - f) one Member, who had taken part in the consultation, reassured the Committee that the Strategy Group on which he had served had been involved in public meetings in 2013 at which the ideas and options had been examined.
3. The recommendations in the report were then put to the vote and it was RESOLVED that:-
- a) the Education Cabinet Committee endorse the decision proposed to be taken by the Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform, to issue a public notice to relocate and expand Tunstall CE Primary School by 210 places, from 1FE (30) to 2FE (60);
carried by 7 votes to 2 with 2 abstentions
 - b) and, subject to no objections being received to the public notice:
 - (i) relocate and expand the school;
 - (ii) allocate £4,818,000 from the Education, Learning and Skills Capital Budget;
 - (iii) authorise the Director of Property and Infrastructure Support, in consultation with the Director of Governance and Law, to enter into any necessary contracts/agreements on behalf of the County Council; and
 - (iv) authorise the Director of Property and Infrastructure Support to be the nominated Authority Representative within the relevant agreements and to enter into variations as envisaged under the contracts.
carried by 7 votes to 2 with 2 abstentions

168. 14/00004: Proposal to expand Iwade Community Primary School, Sittingbourne
(Item B4)

1. Mr Shovelton and Mrs White introduced the report and summarised the consultation process. They explained that the main driver for the proposal to expand the school was the expansion of housing provision at Iwade.
2. In discussion, Members made the following comments:-

- a) concern was expressed that some children were currently missing out on school meals (as these were currently brought to the school by an external provider) and the proposed expansion of the school might worsen this situation. Mrs White responded that the feasibility of including a kitchen in the proposed expansion was being investigated; and
- b) a consultee's comment included in the report referred to the provision of changing facilities for older children. Officers explained that it was unusual in a Primary School to be able to provide separate changing facilities for boys and girls, although this issue was often raised by schools when seeking improved premises.

3. RESOLVED that:-

- a) the Education Cabinet Committee endorse the decision proposed to be taken by the Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform, to issue a public notice to expand Iwade Community Primary School by 210 places, from 2FE (60) to 3FE (90), and
- b) subject to no objections being received to the public notice:
 - (i) expand the school;
 - (ii) allocate £3,500,000 from the Education, Learning and Skills Capital Budget;
 - (iii) authorise the Director of Property and Infrastructure Support, in consultation with the Director of Governance and Law, to enter into any necessary contracts/agreements on behalf of the County Council; and
 - (iv) authorise the Director of Property and Infrastructure Support to be the nominated Authority Representative within the relevant agreements and to enter into variations as envisaged under the contracts.

169. 14/00005: Proposal to relocate and increase the designated number of The Foreland (Community Special) School, Broadstairs
(Item B5)

1. Mr Shovelton and Mrs White introduced the report and summarised the consultation process, which had produced a largely positive response in favour of the proposals. In response to a question, they explained how the proposed new school buildings would fit into the site; if it did not prove feasible to use part of the site for the SMILE centre, this facility would be provided at other sites nearby, and dual use of the field would require an upgrade of the entrance and fencing off and would hence be a project in phase two or three of the development.

2. RESOLVED that:-

- a) the Education Cabinet Committee endorse the decision proposed to be taken by the Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform, to issue a public notice to increase the designated number of The Foreland School, adding 40 additional places (the relocation and rebuilding of the school not being subject to statutory education public notice as the site is within two miles as the crow flies of the current site); and
- b) subject to no objections being received to the public notice:
 - (i) increase the designated number, subject to planning for the new school buildings on the Pysons Road site;
 - (ii) allocate £9,650,000 from the Education, Learning and Skills Capital Budget;
 - (iii) authorise the Director of Property and Infrastructure Support, in consultation with the Director of Governance and Law, to enter into any necessary contracts/agreements on behalf of the County Council; and
 - (iv) authorise the Director of Property and Infrastructure Support to be the nominated Authority Representative within the relevant agreements and to enter into variations as envisaged under the contracts.

170. Budget Consultation and Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement *(Item D1)*

1. Mr Shipton introduced the report. He said the Draft Budget would be published on 14 January and reminded the Committee that it was being asked to consider the consultation feedback and provisional Local Government finance settlement.

2. He said the consultation had been successful, with over 3,000 responses to the online '2 minutes, 2 questions' exercise and 487 responses to the online budget tool. He said this was the best ever response to a consultation on the budget. The responses to the three elements of the market research were consistent and were also consistent with the views of staff.

3. Most respondents had expressed a view that the County Council should look to savings which had to be made through efficiencies and transformation rather than cutting back on existing service provision. Over 70% of respondents also supported a small increase in Council Tax in order to offer some protection from savings on front-line services. The more detailed budget modelling tool identified that those services for the most vulnerable and those in which people had no choice other than to receive support from Council services were the most highly valued and should be protected.

4. He explained that the 2014/15 settlement had been broadly as expected, with technical changes which meant some funds which had previously been allocated during the year had been rolled into the Revenue Support Grant - for example, the

amount top-sliced for the New Homes Bonus had been reduced, which increased the Revenue Support Grant but reduced the amount paid as an in-year adjustment.

5. It had been feared that the New Homes Bonus would be removed entirely and transferred into the single Local Growth Fund in 2015/16. However, this would not now be the case and New Homes Bonus would roll out as originally planned. The provisional settlement had also confirmed that the separate grants previously allocated to support Council Tax freezes would be rolled into the Revenue Support Grant settlement and thus would be safeguarded from being removed in future settlements. The conclusion is that indicative settlements for 2015/16 and 2016/17 looked better than anticipated during the consultation.

6. The Dedicated Schools Grant, announced on 18 December, had included the same allocation of funds per pupil as previously, and individual schools could not reduce their budgets by more than 1½%. Mr Abbott added that one part of the Dedicated Schools Grant – the higher needs funding for higher and further education students – would not be known until 31 March 2014. The impact of this on the draft budget for 2014/15 meant that the budget was slightly higher than expected, but that £81 million of savings would be needed to balance the budget.

7. Some Members expressed disappointment at not having the opportunity to discuss the draft budget in public as a Committee and pass comments to the Cabinet Member, Mr Gough, before the Cabinet meeting on 22 January. Mr Shipton explained the dilemma that officers had faced this year and last in managing the budget consultation process around very tight preparation and publishing deadlines for the budget itself and its reports to Cabinet Committees, as the process had not been able to start until the Local Government settlement had been announced. The Chairman suggested that the convening of an all-party budget group very soon after the Cabinet Committee meeting would give Members an opportunity to consider the draft budget and make comments on it to the Cabinet Member before 22 January. This suggestion was accepted and the Democratic Services Officer undertook to arrange this. The Democratic Services Officer clarified that the timetable for publishing reports to public committee meetings was set out in statute and was not something the County Council could change via its constitution.

8. Responding to a question about the likely impact on the draft budget of the gains in Council Tax Freeze grant and in the New Homes Bonus, Mr Shipton said that, although the settlements were slightly better than expected (for example, the County Council was £600,000 better off in terms of the New Homes Bonus than it had expected to be), there would still be challenges in achieving a balanced budget.

9. RESOLVED that the provisional settlement and the feedback from consultation be noted and a cross-party budget group of Members be convened to give Members an opportunity to consider the final draft budget and make comments and recommendations on it to the Leader and Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform by 22 January 2014.

171. Recruitment and Training of School Governors

(Item D2)

1. Mr Gough introduced the report and Members of the Committee made the following comments, many of them from their own experiences of being School Governors:-

- a) attracting School Governors had been a challenge for many years, and to address this the County Council would need to promote the rewards of the role and the valuable difference that Governors could make. The role and work of Governors had been criticised by Ofsted in past inspections, and people considering volunteering to be Governors would need to be sure that they had sufficient spare time and energy to take on the role;
- b) some Members were able to recount at first-hand that the training they had received upon becoming Governors had been excellent;
- c) the role of Governor, especially in Local Education Authority schools, needed to be clarified and confirmed. Schools could specify the profile of Governors which they wanted to attract. The Education Cabinet Committee should be kept informed of the progress of the review;
- d) briefings on Governorship for newly-elected Members would be most helpful, and the County Council would need to consider how best to promote the Governor role. The workload of Governors had increased in recent years but was still manageable; and
- e) new Governors were supplied with a pack of information, but the role could be daunting to those coming to it for the first time. Vacancies for Governors should be carefully advertised so the role was fairly but realistically represented.

2. In response to a question about Parent Governors, Mr Leeson reassured Members that there were no plans to discontinue this role, although there was scope to reduce their number and make their role more flexible.

3. Mr Leeson added that the vacancy rate of 29% for School Governors was too high. Reviewing the recruitment gave an opportunity to rethink who needed to be on a Governing body and what skills were needed. He agreed with Members' comments that the complexity of the Governor role had increased in recent years and that some Governing bodies now operated in quite a different way from previously, with some taking a more strategic approach than others. A good Governing body would lead a good school, and addressing outstanding issues around Governorships would help improve a school.

4. RESOLVED that:-

- a) Members' comments on the recruitment and training of School Governors, set out above, be noted, and the Committee be kept informed of the progress of the review;
- b) support be given to:

- (i) a review of the nomination and appointment procedures for local authority Governors; and
 - (ii) a briefing session for elected Members on the roles and responsibilities of 2013 school governance, with the aim of improving the quantity and quality of nominations in 2014; and
- c) a face-to-face induction event to be attended by all newly-appointed local authority Governors.

172. Early Years and Childcare Strategy 2014 - 17

(Item D3)

1. Mrs Gamby and Mr Gough introduced the report and highlighted key areas of the Strategy and how it would be taken forward. Mr Leeson added that Kent's Early Years and Childcare Strategy had produced better outcomes than the national average, so a good percentage of the service was expected to be rated 'good and better' in any Ofsted inspection. There were still areas, however, in which more work was needed – for example, Children's Centres and integration with Social Care Services. *A report on the contribution made by Early Years Services to Children's Centres would be made to this Committee's March meeting.* The County Council had provided good quality advice and training to the Early Years sector and encouraged providers to group themselves into clusters and networks. The overall aim was to increase the number of children whom the Early Years service helped to prepare for school, and future work should be concentrated on the areas which made the largest contribution to the preparation; personal development and language development.

2. Mrs Gamby referred to the County Council's collaboration with the Early Years sector and the good response that this had elicited. Over 700 Early Years providers had been invited to meetings to discuss collaboration, of whom, 500 had been keen to take part and a further 70 had been keen to lead on collaboration by working to improve networking and drive further improvement.

3. The Chairman added that work on collaboration would have to overcome the challenges of the large number of Early Years providers and the transitory nature of many of them; some organisations had been set up by parents to support their own young children and were then discontinued when those children passed the age at which such organisations were useful to them. Mrs Gamby added that, to address this transitory nature and support continuity and progression, good local intelligence about provision was necessary.

4. Mr Leeson responded to comments and questions from Members and the following points were highlighted:-

- a) the good practice shown in the report was welcomed. There were some gaps in provision but reassurance that the County Council was monitoring and addressing these. Mr Leeson added that, although the quality of Kent's Early Years provision was good overall, some areas of greater deprivation had lower provision. This was a challenge being faced nationally by many local authorities;

- b) the report indicated initial planned savings in 2014/15 of £300,000, and concern was expressed that, if staffing numbers were to be reduced as part of those savings, the development work currently going on would be at risk. Mr Leeson reassured members that staffing resources would be adapted to accommodate a shift in policy in a way which would ensure that previous good practice could continue. It was important to maintain good work practices and target resources, and encouraging clusters would help manage demand. Any staff reduction would be gradual and at no risk to service provision;
- c) some special needs conditions were possible to identify early, which would allow important information about the condition to be passed to a child's primary school when they started there;
- d) the role of Children's Centres as a vital support for families was acknowledged, and the move of the Children's Centres service to the Education, Learning and Skills directorate in April 2014 was welcomed;
- e) although some Early Years provision was transitory, some had continued in the same location for many years and offered support to generations of parents and children. The quality of provision and the targeting of resources varied greatly, however, with some providers being unable, for example, to identify autism early enough to make a useful contribution to treating it. Mr Leeson said that early identification of special educational needs (SEN) issues was essential to ensure that they were properly addressed when a child started school. He advised the Committee that, via the Special Teaching and Learning Service (STLS), £5million of resources from the Government had been devolved to 12 special schools in Kent, with 50% of this funding being dedicated to the Early Years sector to target children with SEN. The Early Years Advisory Service (EYAS) linked into this work, which would continue as a priority; and
- f) Kent's Early Years and Childcare Strategy was vital in supporting children and families and giving children a good start in life, as this had been proven to help a child's future personal and academic development. Being aspirational in Early Years was vital, and if the County Council could achieve what it set out to achieve in its Strategy, this would be good. The outcomes of the current document would be seen in 2017, although the Chairman added that he wished to see the work reviewed before that date.

5. RESOLVED that:-

- a) the Committee's comments, set out above, be noted, and the draft Early Years and Childcare Strategy be endorsed for consultation; and
- b) a report on the contribution made by Early Years services to Children's Centres be made to this Committee's March meeting.