

SELECT COMMITTEE ON LIFELONG LEARNING

Tuesday, 15th March, 2005, at 6.00 p.m.
at the Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor Mrs Ridley (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs Dunn (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors Mrs Coulter, Donegan, Finch, Ms Hart-Bowman, Mrs Pearce, Rahman, Rogers and Ryder; Mr Guest, Mr Hatton, Mrs Hewitt-Clarkson, Mr Nottingham, Mrs Roe and Mrs Simms.

OFFICERS

The Director of Finance (Lead Officer to the Committee), Director of Education and Lifelong Learning, Assistant Directors of Education (Community Education), (Resources and Planning) and (School Effectiveness), Ms Pearson (School Development Adviser, Directorate of Education and Lifelong Learning), Mr. Partridge (Head of Team, Lifelong Learning, Directorate of Education and Lifelong Learning), and Mr Sanders (Directorate of Law and Property).

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Mrs A Capell (Diocese of Worcester)

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Declarations of Personal Interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, were made by the following:

In respect of the items on the agenda indicated in view of their respective governorships of the schools referred to:

Councillor Mrs Coulter – item 7 (Update on the Primary Schools Review) and item 9 (DfES Consultation on Three Year Budgets for Schools) – Netherton CE Primary School.

Councillor Donegan – items 4 (Draft Equality and Diversity Action Plan 2005/06), item 5 (Standards in Dudley Schools (2004 Key Stage 4 Results)) and items 7 and 9 – The Halesbury School and Tenterfields Primary School

Councillor Mrs Dunn – item 7 – Huntingtree and Rufford Primary Schools.
Mr Guest – item 7 – Netherbrook Primary School.

Mr Hatton – items 7 and 8 (Update on the Secondary Schools Review) – Russells Hall Primary School and Bishop Milner RC Secondary School.

Mr Nottingham – items 8 and 9 – The Crestwood School.

Councillor Mrs Ridley – items 7 and 8 – Christchurch and Netherton CE Primary Schools and the Coseley School.

Mrs Roe – items 5 and 8 – the Redhill School.

Councillor Finch declared a Personal Interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, in agenda item no. 4, in view of the employment of his wife as a mid-day superintendent at Sycamore Green Primary School.

Mrs Hewitt-Clarkson declared a Personal Interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, in item 7 in view of her Deputy Headship of Wollescote Primary School.

65 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillors Boys and Wright and Reverend Morphy.

66 SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was reported that Councillor Donegan was serving in place of Councillor Wright for this meeting only.

It was also noted that Mrs Capell was in attendance at the meeting as a representative of the Worcester Diocese of Education in view of Reverend Morphy's unavailability to attend.

67 ORDER OF PROCEDURE

RESOLVED

That, pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 13 (i) items 6 (Headteacher Induction Programme) and 11 (National Learning and Skills Council Consultation Paper on Reforming the Funding and Planning Arrangements for First Steps, Personal and Community Development Learning for Adults) be considered, respectively, as the next two items of business and that the remaining items on the agenda be considered in the order set out on the agenda.

68 HEADTEACHER INDUCTION PROGRAMME

A report of the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning was submitted setting out the policy of the Directorate for the induction of headteachers and indicating the content of the induction programme for new headteachers.

The induction programme, which was currently undergoing an external, formal evaluation, included provision for all newly appointed headteachers to have an experienced headteacher as a mentor and for continuing professional development advice to be available as a crucial part of the induction process.

In attending the meeting to give an assessment arising from her recent personal experience of the programme, the newly appointed Headteacher of the Ridge Primary School, Deborah Hudson, confirmed that she had found the induction arrangements to have been extremely useful in familiarising her with the structure, personnel and procedures of the Directorate of Education and Lifelong Learning, in clarifying the appropriate professional development and support available, and in assisting her in networking with fellow Heads and officers within the Education and Lifelong Learning Directorate.

RESOLVED

That the Directorate of Education and Lifelong Learning policy for the induction of Headteachers new to the post, as attached to the report now submitted, be supported and endorsed.

NATIONAL LEARNING AND SKILLS COUNCIL – CONSULTATION PAPER ON REFORMING THE FUNDING AND PLANNING ARRANGEMENTS FOR FIRST STEP, PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT LEARNING FOR ADULTS

A report of the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning was submitted on this consultation paper by the Learning and Skills Council, in which changes were proposed to the funding and delivery of adult and community learning.

Significant changes were proposed to the funding arrangements currently made and the general points in this regard were expanded upon in paragraph 15 of the report now submitted. Briefly, however, there would be no safeguarded funding for Local Education Authorities, as had been the practice in the past and all providers would be able to bid for monies. As a result of the proposed application of the multiple deprivation index for the distribution of finance, Dudley's allocation would be reduced considerably. This would have severe ramifications for the Council in providing for both First Steps Learning and Personal Development Learning.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the Committee find the proposals of the Learning and Skills Council unacceptable; that the extreme concerns of the Committee be conveyed to the Cabinet and that the Cabinet be asked to respond to the consultation paper on behalf of the Council, having regard to the views of this Committee.
- (2) That representations also be made to Government through the Members of Parliament for the Borough.

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DRAFT EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ACTION PLAN 2005/06

The report of the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning was submitted under cover of which was set out the draft Equality and Diversity Action Plan for 2005/06 for the Directorate of Education and Lifelong Learning.

In the discussion on this item, in response to a question on the extent to which use was made of the professional skills of persons seeking to migrate to Great Britain, by way of asylum or other means, it was indicated that while the LEA endeavoured to support them and urged them to participate in appropriate courses, that this was more an aspect covered by Colleges and Universities and could only be undertaken when they had achieved refugee status.

RESOLVED

That the Equality and Diversity Action Plan of the Directorate of Education and Lifelong Learning for 2005/06 be supported.

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STANDARDS IN DUDLEY SCHOOLS – 2004 KEY STAGE FOUR RESULTS

A report of the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning was submitted providing data on the performance of schools in the Borough in Key Stage 4 inasmuch as this related to the National Curriculum Assessment, Ethnic Minority Assessment Data and the Assessment Data for pupils in public care.

Consideration of Key Stage 4 had been deferred at the meeting of the Committee held on 25th January, 2005, to enable the data to be scrutinised more closely given its late circulation.

RESOLVED

That the information in the report be noted.

UPDATE ON THE PRIMARY SCHOOLS REVIEW

A report of the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning was submitted summarising the responses to the consultation document "Primary Review Refresh 2004".

The report indicated that forty-nine responses had been received during the consultation period, which had expired on 31st January, 2005. Overall, responses had been broadly supportive of the statements in the consultation document. In expanding on the report, the Assistant Director of Education (Resources and Planning) indicated that the majority of concerns raised had referred to question 6, which related to the definition of "local" in the context of an excellent school located within the local community with which all primary schools would have access, in the light of the average distance travelled by a primary school child to school. In this regard, the Assistant Director confirmed that endeavours would be made to keep the distance to under two miles. The Assistant Director confirmed further the aim to comply with Audit Commission expectations regarding place planning but to minimise the impact to the public.

A suggestion was made that surplus capacity in schools might be utilised for non-teaching purposes and a further suggestion was made that the LEA should be cautious about disposing of properties in case additional accommodation was necessary in the future.

One member expressed his concern about the impact of school closure in a small community, in response to which the Assistant Director indicated that the LEA could be creative in some of the more thinly populated areas of the Borough but that schools had to remain financially viable.

In responding to questions asked, the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning referred to the increase of 7% in value per pupil which he emphasised did not translate to current provision owing to the reduction in pupil numbers; acknowledged that while the use of schools for outside activities might be supported in principle, such use had to be related to the financial provision made to the Council; reported that, in the context of buildings for the future, the current statistics indicated that the birth rate was levelling out and confirmed that the largest single issue was the reduction in family sizes. Further to this, the Assistant Director (Resources and Planning) referred to the relationship of school planning with that of the Unitary Development Plan in relation to the locations of major residential developments.

RESOLVED

That the recommendations in the report now submitted be supported, viz:

- (1) That the responses to the Primary Review Refresh consultation document and the observations of the Select Committee be summarised and published;
 - (2) That further detailed analysis be undertaken leading to proposals and recommendations for specific changes required to achieve the principles set out in paragraph 4 of the report and remove at least 2,000 surplus primary places (10% margin); or at least 2,500 surplus primary places (7.5% margin); or at least 3,000 surplus primary places (5% margin).
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UPDATE ON THE SECONDARY SCHOOLS REVIEW

A report of the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning was submitted on progress on consultation with Dudley Secondary Schools to date on the secondary schools review which also clarified the expectations of the DfES of Local Authorities preparing for Building Schools for the Future (BSF).

In introducing the report, the Assistant Director of Education (Resources and Planning) explained the background to BSF, this being a national initiative intended to transform secondary education through rebuilding or refurbishing every secondary school in England over a 10 to 15 year programme. The programme was focussed on raising standards and encompassed a wide range of government policy areas, including extended schools, integrated services, community use and social regeneration. The initiative was focused largely on the statutory age range 11 - 16 years and on school based learning.

The report confirmed the projections of the Directorate that the declining birth rates currently threatening the viability of some primary schools would be evident in secondary schools in the next few years unless action was taken. In developing proposals for the removal of surplus capacity from secondary schools therefore, it was proposed that the Council would be guided by similar principles and intentions to those details in the Primary Review Refresh consultation document. In addition, local authorities would be expected to take full account of the government policy areas detailed in relevant DfES guidance.

The report indicated the nature of the proposed consultees and confirmed that secondary headteachers had already been consulted over the overall approach to be taken. The consultation process was intended to engage pupils and staff from all phases of education. The report stated that further reports would be submitted in due course, covering the project scope, governance arrangements and other relevant areas and noted that any proposals developed for individual schools would be required to follow statutory processes and appropriate DfES guidance.

The draft consultation document “Learning for the Future – Developing the Education Vision for Dudley: Transforming Secondary Education (March 2005)” was attached to the report now submitted. Reference was made in that documentation to design factors for new or rebuilt schools that it was proposed would remedy current problems with existing school buildings, including insufficient staff accommodation, car parking space and other related issues. In discussing these points, one member expressed a wish for the situation with lockers to be considered.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report now submitted be noted.
- (2) That the consultation document “Learning for the Future – Developing the Education Vision for Dudley: Transforming Secondary Education” be noted.
- (3) That the background to the review of secondary schools be received.

DFES CONSULTATION ON THREE YEAR BUDGETS FOR SCHOOLS

A report of the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning was submitted on consultation by the DfES on three year budgets for schools.

The Government's five year strategy for children and learners published in July 2004 had included a number of proposals for new school funding arrangements, which would be introduced from April, 2006.

Consultation on the proposals, a summary of which was appended to the report now submitted, would expire on 13th May, 2005. It was indicated in the report that the Schools Forum would be requested to respond direct to the DfES or, alternatively, to make any observations for inclusion within a Dudley response.

In introducing the report, the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning confirmed his view that the DfES was endeavouring to move forward in a positive way and that a five year financial strategy which gave advance financial information to schools regarding their budgets for three years was totally advantageous for financial planning and should enable improved continuity.

RESOLVED

- That the DfES consultation on the new school funding arrangements be noted.
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QUARTERLY CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted seeking consideration of the performance of the Council in relation to the activities relating to the terms of reference of the Select Committee on Lifelong Learning, for the third quarter of 2004/05.

In introducing the report, the Director of Finance, as Lead Officer to the Committee, drew particular attention to the targets to improve the education and performance of looked after children and to reduce school absenteeism.

In the discussion on the report, in response to a question, the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning explained the reasons why the target of preparing statements of special educational need within 18 weeks had not been met. The Director also explained the reasons why the target of 15 school days to make an alternative placement for an excluded pupil within 15 school days was difficult to meet. In reply to a further question on the extent to which the Council was upgrading school premises to enable them to comply with Disabled Discrimination Act requirements, the Director advised the Committee of the Council's legal duty to take all reasonable steps in this regard and indicated that, while the Council was endeavouring to improve premises, this was ultimately a resource issue.

Other issues raised in the discussion referred to libraries, regarding borrowing of books, access to websites and talking books.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the report be noted.
 - (2) That reports be submitted to the Committee at the first meeting in the new municipal year on progress on the following targets:
 - To improve the educational performance of looked after children
 - To reduce school absenteeism
 - To issue special educational need within 18 weeks
 - (3) That a report on issues surrounding libraries, including borrowing, access to websites and talking books, be submitted to the first meeting of the Committee in the new municipal year.
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DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON
LIFELONG LEARNING

The draft Annual Report for the 2004/05 municipal year was submitted.

RESOLVED

That the report be referred to Council.

The meeting ended at 8.10 pm.

CHAIRMAN