

Meeting of the Council - 24th July, 2006

Report of the former Select committee on Lifelong Learning

Annual Report of the former Select Committee on Lifelong Learning for 2005/06

Purpose

1. To receive and note the annual report of the former Select Committee on Lifelong Learning for 2005/06.

Background

2. Article 6 of the Council's Constitution requires Select Committees to report annually to the full Council on their workings and to make recommendations for future work programmes and amended working methods if appropriate.
3. There were three important issues and developments during 2005/06, which significantly affected the work of the Select Committee:-
 - (a) the creation of the new Children's Services Directorate (see paragraph 5);
 - (b) Annual Performance Assessments and preparation for the Joint Area Review (JAR) of Children's Services (see paragraph 6);
 - (c) changes in School OFSTED Inspections.
4. Notwithstanding these issues, the Committee work programme for the 2005/06 municipal year included:-
 - Youth Service Plan
 - Extended Schools Update
 - Equality and Diversity Annual Report
 - Capital Strategy
 - Remodelling the School Workforce
 - Exclusion, Attendance and Admissions
 - Primary School Review
 - Adult Learning Inspection
 - Foundation Stage Education
 - Quarterly Performance Monitoring
 - Revenue Budget 2006/07
 - Youth Offending Service
 - Children and Young Peoples Plan

- Green Paper – “Youth Matters”.

Children’s Services

5. Following the Council’s decision to create a new Children’s Services Directorate, the Committee was briefed in detail on the implications of this and the requirements of the Children Act 2004 and the Green Paper which preceded it “Every Child Matters”. It became clear that this would require significant change in the Terms of Reference of the Committee and two dedicated Working Groups were appointed – one to consider the overall provision of Children’s Services and a second to consider their Terms of Reference and a potential modus operandi for a new Children’s Services Select Committee for 2006/07. The Working Groups’ recommendations were approved by the Committee, and are now incorporated in the revised Constitution of the Council..

Annual Performance Assessments and Joint Area Review of Children’s Services

6. From 2005, every local authority responsible for Children’s Services is required to submit an Annual Performance Assessment (APA), which is considered by OFSTED and CSCI (the Social Care Inspectorate). The Committee were briefed on the outcome of the APA Judgements and were pleased to hear that the service was considered to be performing well, although six areas of improvement were identified, which it was felt would be the likely focus of the (then) forthcoming Joint Area Review. That eventually took place in March 2006 and included a review of the work of the Committee, including attendance at the March meeting of the Committee by representatives from the JAR Inspection Team. The results of the JAR were published on 23rd June 2006 and the outcome from the JAR will heavily influence the new Children’s Services Select Committee work programme for 2006/07.

School OFSTED Inspection Arrangements

7. As part of what the Department for Education and Skills described as “A New Relationship with Schools”, changes have been made to School OFSTED Inspections, which:-
 - (a) require all schools to produce a self-evaluation as the starting point for inspection, planning and external relations;
 - (b) reduce the notice OFSTED inspections give to Schools from 6 – 10 weeks to 2 – 5 days;
 - (c) reduce the maximum interval between inspections from 6 years to 3 years;
 - (d) reduce the length of inspections and the size of inspection teams,

and mean many more inspections will be completed in any year. It has been the Committee’s practice to hold special meetings to consider School OFSTED reports, in the context of the LEA’s support for schools and particularly the relationship between that support and School performance.

Given the increased number of completed inspections towards the end of 2005/06,

the Committee was no longer able to consider each report in detail, but concentrated on key Council issues and other matters on an exception basis.

8. The implications of other changes resulting from "The New Relationship with Schools", e.g. School Improvement Partners, three year budgets etc, will no doubt be included in the 2006/07 Work Programme of the new Select Committee.
9. In addition to these specific issues, arising from the Committees agreed work programme, particular consideration was given to:-
 - (a) the Council's role as corporate parent, and the support and guidance afforded those children in the Council's care;
 - (b) the levels of Exclusion and School Attendance, where the Committee were particularly pleased to see that the upward trend in permanent exclusions over the last five years had now levelled off and early indications were for significant reductions in 2005/06;
 - (c) School Performance in 2005 and key stage results, where Dudley continues to achieve at or just above the national average in most measures;
 - (d) the Primary School Review, for which the Committee held a special dedicated meeting;
 - (e) Schools Budgets 2006/07 and the further review of the Schools Funding Formulae;
 - (f) the regular and systematic review of the parts of the Corporate Quarterly Performance Report relevant to the Committee's Terms of Reference. Good performance in some areas and the need for further improvement and corrective action in other areas e.g. the issue of SEN statements; was noted.
 - (g) the support made available to schools and particularly those in special measures or with serious weaknesses. It was very gratifying to hear that the two schools in Special Measures had now been removed from that category.

Conclusion

10. The former Select Committee and its successor have and will play a key role in the continuing development of the Education and Lifelong Learning Agenda in the Borough, particularly since the OFSTED Inspection of the LEA in 2002. Whilst the focus of the new Children's Services Select Committee will change to reflect the "Every Child Matters" outcomes, there will continue to be important "Education issues" for the new Committee including support for schools, the Council's corporate parent role and school performance and key stage results.

Finance

11. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report at this stage.

Law

12. The requirement for the Committee to make an annual report to the Council is contained in Article 6 of the Constitution.
13. The relevant statutory provisions regarding the Council's Constitution are contained in Part II of the Local Government Act 2000, together with Regulations, Orders and Statutory Guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

Equality Impact

14. The Committee has taken equality and diversity issues into account whilst scrutinising the areas of work described, particularly in relation to front-line service delivery and issues such as attendance and exclusion and engagement of potentially disenfranchised groups in normal service delivery.
15. The work of the Select Committee in 2005/06 was almost solely targeted at services for children and young people and their views were heard and considered in the Committee's deliberations.
16. The Select committee on Children's Services, at its meeting held on 22nd June, 2006, approved the submission of the Annual Report, as set out above, to Council.

Recommendation

17. That the Annual Report of the former Select Committee on Lifelong Learning for 2005/06, as set out above, be received and noted.

Susan M. Kidney

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Chairman of the former Select Committee on Lifelong Learning