

**SPECIAL MEETING OF SELECT COMMITTEE ON LIFELONG  
LEARNING**

Tuesday, 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2005 at 6.00 p.m.  
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

**PRESENT:-**

Councillor Mrs Ridney (Chairman)  
Councillor Mrs Dunn (Vice-Chairman)  
Councillors Boys, Mrs Coulter, Donegan, Finch, Hart-Bowman, Rahman,  
Rogers, Ryder and Wright; Mr Hatton, Mrs Hewitt-Clarkson, Mr  
Nottingham, Mrs Rowe, Mrs Simms and Mr Guest.

**OFFICERS**

The Director of Finance (as Lead Officer to the Committee), The Director of Education and Lifelong Learning, The Assistant Director of Education (Access and Inclusion), Mr D Bishop-Rowe (Head of Sutton School - on secondment as SEN Strategy Manager) and Mr J Jablonski (Directorate of Law and Property).

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE**

Councillor Adams - Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning  
  
Approximately forty members of the public.

59

**MINUTES**

**RESOLVED**

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 25<sup>th</sup>  
January, 2005 be approved as a correct record and signed.

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**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The following members declared a Personal Interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct in respect of agenda item number 5 (SEN Strategy- "Giving Every Child the Opportunity to Succeed" for the reasons indicated as follows:-

Councillor Mrs Coulter – as her son attends the Brier School  
Councillor Donegan - as he is a Governor of Tenterfields School  
Councillor Hart-Bowman – as the Old Park, Sutton and Rosewood  
Schools are in her ward  
Councillor Rogers - as his wife is an Inclusion Assistant with  
Worcestershire Local Education Authority; and  
Mr Nottingham in view of his involvement with Campus 21

61 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillor Mrs Pearce, Mrs Chapman and Reverend Morphy.

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62 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE FOR THIS MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE

It was reported that Councillor Donegan had been appointed as a substitute for Councillor Mrs Pearce for this meeting of the Committee only.

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63 SEN STRATEGY- "GIVING EVERY CHILD THE OPPORTUNITY TO SUCCEED"

A report of the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning was submitted by way of introduction to a presentation on the SEN Strategy document "Giving Every Child the Opportunity to Succeed" to be given at this meeting so that the Committee might consider the Strategy and make any comments for the further consideration of the Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning and the Director. A copy of the Strategy document - "Giving Every Child the Opportunity to Succeed" - the Dudley Strategy for Children with Special Educational Needs - "Putting Learning First for Dudley" - had previously been circulated to members of the Committee. A copy of the presentation to be given was also available for members at the meeting.

In her introduction the Chairman welcomed those present to the meeting, in particular, Councillor Adams, Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning and the members of the public present who would, at the appropriate time, be given the opportunity to comment.

Following the Chairman's introduction the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning introduced Sharon Menghini (Assistant Director of Education - Access and Inclusion) and David Bishop-Rowe the Head of Sutton School who was currently on secondment as the SEN Strategy Manager.

The Director of Education and Lifelong Learning also referred members to the extract from the OFSTED report 2002 in relation to Special Educational Needs (SEN), a copy of which was tabled at the meeting, referring to the unsatisfactory nature of the Local Education Authority's (LEA) strategy for SEN and despite that the continuation of the pattern of special school provision much as before and the recommendation for the LEA to agree firm plans for the future of special schools, units and relevant central services. Consequently, over the last two years there have been an ongoing process to produce the plan required leading to the current strategy document which was not about straightforward inclusion but, as evidenced from the title, was about how to meet special educational needs most effectively. There was a need, therefore, to make improvements and change and for those changes to be sensitive and it was considered that the current proposals would lead to overall improvements, were sensitive and provided an appropriate solution to meet the need for change.

Sharon Menghini then commented on the various consultation documents that had previously been referred to the Committee including the consideration given by this Committee at its meeting held on 29th September, 2004, giving rise to a number of points which were considered and led to the proposals in respect of provision being provided in five areas of the Borough instead of the four areas previously proposed; the carrying out of the necessary statistical analysis; the retaining of the better special schools and the retention of specific provision for those children with the most complex needs. All of which were contained in the current proposals.

David Bishop-Rowe then gave a presentation summarising the content of the Strategy document - "Giving Every Child the Opportunity to Succeed".

Following the presentation given Sharon Menghini then referred specifically to the need for the Strategy to be flexible to take account of fluctuating pupil numbers and trends; to ensure that capacity issues were being met as effective use was not being made of resources across the Borough; that the Strategy Plan when adopted had children at its centre, that detailed action planning needed to be done to cover issues such as governance for new special schools and personnel issues and that the defining of the difference between inclusion units in mainstream schools (INCS's) and additional resource centres (ARC's) still needed to be worked on.

Following the comments made members and other persons present then proceeded to make comments on the points raised in connection with the presentation given during which the Chairman sought, and received, an assurance from the Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning that the Strategy would be considered by the Cabinet and by the Council, therefore, a decision on the Strategy would be made by full Council.

Following the making of various comments and observations the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning reported, in particular, that the proposals were not about dogmatic inclusion with the movement of pupils to mainstream provision rather the proposals contained a continuum of appropriate provision. Furthermore, the proposals were sufficiently flexible to meet new patterns of need. He also reiterated that the comments made would be taken into account as on previous occasions and considered that they were a significant advance and improvement on previous proposals and were a better deal for young people. He also reiterated that individual parents and organisations, including OFSTED, had complained about the existing provision. Arrangements would also be made to monitor and review the proposals annually by this Committee.

Councillor Adams then concluded by reiterating various points made about the need for change given the unsatisfactory provision overall and expressed concern about comments made and the need for the position to be resolved given the recruitment situation. He also commented that the Strategy included an increase in the total for all specialist provision from 698 to 783 which indicated that a strict inclusion agenda was not being followed, rather that the Strategy attempted to provide the best that could be provided for the children of the Borough. He also considered that the Directorate of Education and Lifelong Learning had listened and consequently adapted its proposals for the Borough and that significant advances had been made. He also considered that there was a need to talk to the children involved. The evolutionary nature of the Strategy was also reiterated and that, having listened to the professionals, a judgement had to be made as to the best way forward. So whilst the current proposals were better than those previously submitted, they were flexible and would evolve and change.

Arising from the consideration given to this matter it was

#### RESOLVED

- (1) That the Cabinet member for Education and Lifelong Learning and the Director of Education for Lifelong Learning be requested to consider the following comments in relation to the Dudley Strategy for Children with Special Educational Needs:
  - (a) That the children involved need to be consulted on the proposals.
  - (b) That, rather than proposing five locally based township centres and three new special schools, consideration should be given to retaining and improving the existing provision so as to minimise disruption to pupils and ensure that the sharing of current expertise amongst existing schools was better facilitated.

- (c) That, whilst the principle of seeking to improve provision was supported, it was queried whether the latest proposals, given that they did not contain costings or details about resources, were the best way forward and because of this whether the implementation date of September 2007 was realistic.
  - (d) That personnel issues, in particular, needed to be clarified as soon as possible particularly in relation to the new schools, given the detrimental effect the current position was having on recruitment and retention of staff and given difficulties in recruiting.
  - (e) That references to the provision post 16 needed to be made more explicit.
  - (f) The proposed use of the ARC's as mini special schools was queried and required clarification as it was considered that this would result in segregated provision.
  - (g) That the proposals, involving as they do the merger of existing provision, would lead to a reduction in parental choice.
  - (h) That, whilst it was considered that the key principle could be agreed upon, in the light of objections raised, there was a need to develop incrementally alternative strategies involving the development of one or two successful models along the lines of Campus 21 which it was considered should be retained in its current form.
  - (i) The view expressed by some members that the current proposals were an improvement on previous proposals and that they should be taken forward and, if appropriate, refined in the light of comments made at this and subsequent meetings.
- (2) That, in the light of the adoption of the Strategy as proposed or subsequently amended in view of further consideration to be given to it, the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning be requested to submit on an annual basis a report reviewing the implementation of the Strategy for consideration by the Committee.

The meeting ended at 8.40 pm

CHAIRMAN