

**Committee:**               **Scrutiny Committee for Education**

Date:                       12 June 2002

Title:                      Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Education held at 10.00 am at Pelham House, St Andrews Lane, Lewes, East Sussex

Subject:                  Minutes

Attending:               Barnes Field Garvican Kramer Livings McPherson Mrs Waite Whetstone Woodall

Councillor Simmons, Lead Cabinet Member for Education, was also in attendance

Chief Officer - Denise Stokoe, Director of Education

Scrutiny Lead Officer - Roger Howarth, Scrutiny and Best Value Co-ordinator

Legal Adviser – Jonathan Ruddock-West, Assistant Director of Legal and Community Services

Financial Adviser – Greg Roberts, Education Department

## 2.     MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

2.1     RESOLVED – to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 13 March 2002.

2.2     The Director of Education referred to minute 42.2 wherein she had been asked to report to the next meeting with details of key statistics in relation to the overall number of teaching vacancies in East Sussex and the adequacy of provision of specialist subject teachers.

2.3     The Director explained that it would have been difficult to provide meaningful information at this time of year, when the staffing situation in many schools was likely to change in the near future, given that resignations would take effect from the end of the school year and new recruits would not be in post until September. She undertook to send members of the Committee a briefing note on the situation as soon as some meaningful information was available and in any case before the next meeting of the Committee.

## 3.     APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

3.1     Mr T Campbell (RC Diocese) and Mr J Taylor (C of E Diocese).

## 4.     BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN 2001/2002 : FINAL QUARTER AND OVERALL PERFORMANCE FOR 2001/02

4.1     The Committee considered a report by the Chief Executive and the fourth quarter monitoring report.

4.2 Members raised a number of detailed points on the monitoring report, to which the Director of Education responded.

4.3 The Committee agreed that the definition of “core services” in relation to Education ought to be defined in greater detail by the Cabinet. There was a particular concern that activities such as sport, music and the arts, which often had a community dimension involving participation out of school hours, had a demonstrable practical and utilitarian value which was not always reflected in the priorities set for the Education Service.

4.4 RESOLVED – to note the report of the Chief Executive and the fourth quarter monitoring report.

## 5. BEST VALUE AND SCRUTINY PROCEDURES

5.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Legal and Community Services which had been considered by the Cabinet on 28 May 2002 and referred to all Scrutiny Committees for consideration.

5.2 The following observations were made by members:

1. Generally, the scrutiny and Best Value procedures appeared to be working well and had contributed to a culture change within the County Council, which manifested itself in greater cross-party co-operation and a growing recognition of the need for evidence-based judgements over opinions.
2. There is room for further improvement in developing the dialogue between the Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees. It should be recognised that, within the Scrutiny Committees, there is a source of expertise (ie other than the Lead Member) and its potential contribution to research and forward planning has yet to be fully utilised.
3. The Committee does not agree with the view expressed in the report that Chief Officers should “without exception” be required to give evidence to project boards. While Chief Officers have an essential contribution to make, there may be many occasions when another senior officer is better placed to give evidence on a particular topic.
4. Many members remain unclear about the circumstances in which call-in is an appropriate response. The call-in procedure has so far been invoked only once and hence there is necessarily a lack of practical experience among members or any accumulated body of “good practice”. Some further training would be welcomed.
5. There is a view held by some members that the appropriate Lead Cabinet Member should be routinely called to attend Scrutiny Committees to explain their activities at first hand and answer questions.
6. The adoption of a Cabinet system and individual Lead Cabinet Member decision making has led, in some cases, to a loss of the sense of “ownership” of decisions, particularly by Opposition members. It was

suggested that the County Council should consider this aspect of the modernised structures when evaluating the constitution.

## 6. ICT AND EDUCATION IN EAST SUSSEX

6.1 The Committee received a presentation by Steve Marsh, Manager, Policy and Performance Review, Education Department. The presentation was, in part, a response to some of the critical comments in the recent OFSTED inspection report concerning the local education authority's management of ICT in the curriculum.

6.2 The Committee thanked Mr Marsh for his presentation and asked him to report again to the Committee in six months' time on the progress which had been made. The Committee considered that it was premature to decide whether to undertake a scrutiny review of this area.

## 7. SCRUTINY REVIEWS

7.1 The Committee considered a report by the Scrutiny Lead Officer.

7.2 RESOLVED – to (1) note the re-configuration of the Scrutiny Review of Attainment of Pupils in Early Years to a Best Value review of Early Years Child Care and Development Partnership, replacing the proposed Best Value review of Community/Lifelong Learning;

(2) agree provisionally to undertake a scrutiny review on the theme "Citizenship Education" which would include, as key elements, Race/Equalities issues and Personal, Social and Health Education. The Committee agreed that a group comprising officers of the Education and Social Services Department should be established to give initial consideration to the scope and structure of such a review. The Scrutiny Lead Officer was asked to inform those members not present at the meeting of the proposals and to propose the membership of the Project Board in the light of expressions of interest received.

## 8. FORWARD PLAN

8.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Legal and Community Services and the Forward Plan for the period June to September 2002.

8.2 The Committee asked the Director of Legal and Community Services to consider how the Forward Plan could be edited in future so as to include only those meetings which had not yet taken place at the time of the Scrutiny Committee meeting.

## 9. LOCAL HEALTHY SCHOOLS SCHEME

9.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Education.

9.2 RESOLVED - to (1) support the continued involvement of the County Council in the East Sussex, Brighton & Hove Healthy Schools Scheme, with the aim of promoting the participation of all local education authority schools; and

(2) consider at a future date the feasibility of undertaking a scrutiny review of the Scheme.

## 10. BEST VALUE REVIEW OF HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT

10.1 The Committee noted that a final monitoring report on the Best Value review of Home to School Transport was due to be submitted to this meeting. The Director of Education advised the Committee why this had not been practicable.

10.2 The Director referred to the recent establishment of a joint procurement unit for home to school transport, in accordance with the main recommendation arising out of the Best Value review. The new unit would be operational in October 2002 and the recently appointed head of the unit would be in post in July. The present transport team would continue to complete the necessary contractual arrangements which would have to be in place by the start of the next school year. Numerous organisational and staffing issues had had to be resolved and work was progressing in these areas.

10.3 In the circumstances, the Committee accepted that it would not have been possible to present a meaningful evaluation of the new arrangements to this meeting and agreed that the necessary monitoring report would be submitted as soon as such an evaluation could reasonably be made.