

Committee: **Scrutiny Committee for Education**

Date: 10 December 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 Livings Kramer Mrs Waite Whetstone

Mr J Taylor (C of E Diocese)
Mrs J La Coste (Parent Governor)
Mrs S Maynard (Parent Governor)

Chief Officer - Denise Stokoe, Director of Education

Scrutiny Lead Officer – Peter Davidson

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

Financial Adviser – Greg Roberts, Education Finance Manager

25. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

25.1 RESOLVED – to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 23 October 2002.

25.2 A number of members expressed the view that they would prefer the minutes of meetings of the Education Scrutiny Committee to be expanded beyond their present function as a record of decisions made and action agreed and to include a summary of questions asked or points raised by members and the information provided in response. The Director of Legal and Community Services was asked to note this view and discuss the matter further with the Chairman.

26. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

26.1 Councillor McPherson and Mr T Campbell (RC Diocese).

27. DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST

27.1 Councillor Field declared a personal, non-pecuniary interest in those parts of item 29 below which related to careers guidance, by virtue of being a Director of Sussex Careers Service.

28. REPORTS

28.1 Reports on the matters dealt with in the minutes below are contained in the minute book.

29. RECONCILING POLICY AND RESOURCES

29.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Executive and the Director of Corporate Resources.

29.2 The Committee was informed by the Financial Adviser that the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2003/04 had been announced on 5 December, after the agenda papers had been published. The County Council had received a guaranteed "floor" increase of 3.5% in grant, equivalent in cash terms to £10m more grant than this year. However, standstill budget pressures amounted to about £37m.

29.3 The Committee noted that the Cabinet's current guidance was for departments to plan on the basis of standstill budgets. For Education this equated to some £15m and any new pressures on the Education budget would have to be found from savings in the overall standstill budget. The Government had transferred some specific grants into general funding, including nursery education grant for 3-year olds and Key Stage 1 class size grant which had been separately identified in the Local Government Finance Settlement and added to the standstill budget. Some Standards Funds had also been transferred into general funding, but without any addition to the national spending totals. If these schemes, currently grant funded, were to continue in 2003/04 the grant element of about £1.9m would have to be found from savings.

29.4 The Financial Adviser reminded the Committee that the additional £10m for next year was entirely due to short term floor protection which was fixed at the discretion of Government and could well disappear in the future, resulting in an even more difficult financial situation.

29.5 The Director of Education informed the Committee that the Schools Minister had written to all schools within the last few days suggesting that the County Council had benefited from a cash increase in education funding of 6.5% whereas in reality this was merely an increase in Formula Spending Share (FSS) and was not reflected in additional grant. It would be difficult to explain to schools that the ostensible increase in FSS did not imply that more resources would be available to them. The misleading impression created by the Minister's letter should be rebutted.

29.6 RESOLVED to (1) make following comments to the Cabinet in relation to the reconciling policy and resources exercise:

Budget

1. In the present circumstances, the Cabinet is recommended to aim for a stand-still budget rather than impose any cuts in services and to prepare for a worsening financial situation in future years, including the possible abolition of the "floor".

Community Education and Lifelong Learning : Key Objectives 2002/03

2. Key Objective No. 4 should be rephrased to read "enable childcare to be provided for 0 – 14 year olds" (rather than "provide childcare....").

Schools Improvement

3. Insufficient prominence has been given to Early Years Development. The Early Years Development Plan is a key factor in providing a firm foundation for secondary education.

4. The question of how the Standards Fund relates to the improvement targets for primary schools should receive further consideration in the light of the Government's financial settlement.

Access to Schools

5. The Government's stated intention is that capital build and maintenance of secondary schools will be through the Private Finance Initiative. The Cabinet should note the difficulty in planning at the outset for school places over the 25 year life of the PFI project and acknowledge the need for developing in-house expertise in assessing long-term costings.

6. A higher profile should be given to the work of the Equalities Officer. Each service area and each policy steer should include a reference to equalities in the broadest sense.

Special Education

7. There is no specific mention of looked after children for whom the County Council has a corporate parenting responsibility. Primary schools in particular should receive guidance on how they can provide help to looked after children in order to forestall problems later.

Strategic Partnerships and Community Learning

8. The Committee believes that the work of the Connexions service needs to be made more widely known. It is intending to invite all members of the County Council to a presentation on the service at its next meeting.

(2) request the Director of Education and the Director of Corporate Resources to reply to the Schools Minister's letter setting out the actual implications of the Government's finance settlement as far as it relates to education and to ask the Chief Officers to circulate their reply to members of the Scrutiny Committee for Education, all Headteachers and Chairs of Governors;

(3) request the Financial Adviser to circulate to members of the Scrutiny Committee a further version of the summary budget table (page 7 of the report) updated in the light of the Government's settlement; and

(4) ask the Director of Legal and Community Services to invite all members of the County Council to attend a presentation on the "Connexions" service to be given at the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on 23 April 2003.

30. SCRUTINY REVIEW OF EDUCATION FOR CITIZENSHIP

30.1 The Committee considered the final report of the Project Board and a brief covering report by its Chairman. The Committee expressed its thanks to everyone concerned in carrying out the review.

30.2 The Committee noted that in the Evidence Index (page 6 of the report) there should be a reference in criterion no. 7 to the links with Hastings and Rother Primary Care Trust on drugs and sexual health work.

30.3 RESOLVED - to approve the report and refer the following recommendations to the Cabinet for consideration and the County Council for approval:

1. The Education Department Equalities Group should explore the resourcing of a project to engage schools and communities in the production of an anti-racist video, with an accompanying booklet and poster and supported by a training programme for staff in schools and for governors by March 2003. (Criteria 5.5)
2. The Education Equalities Adviser should secure a meaningful web presence on the e-zone supporting citizenship and equalities by March 2003. (Criteria 5.8)
3. The LEA should use positive multi-racial images on publicity, particularly admissions information, with immediate effect. (Criteria 5.3)
4. The Education Department through its strategic partner should ensure that all governing bodies are provided with information and training opportunities to ensure they meet their responsibilities in respect of effective multi-racial recruitment and retention, equalities and citizenship by November 2003. (Criteria 5.8)
5. The Education Department should explore the capacity of the PSHE team to develop further aspects of personal and health education related to the Healthy School Development Folder by March 2003. (Criteria 5.6)
6. The PSHE team should develop evaluation packages to help schools to monitor and assess the impact of personal responsibility for health and anti racist policy projects. These assessment tools should examine the effectiveness of outcomes and possible behaviour changes and work will start from April 2003. (Criteria 5.6)

31. ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING

31.1 At the suggestion of the Chairman the Committee agreed to adjourn the meeting without considering the remaining items of business on the agenda in view of the time which had elapsed and the discomfort arising from the failure of the heating system. The items not considered were the Forward Plan and the Council Plan Monitoring report. Updated versions of these reports would be considered at the Committee's next meeting.