

Committee: **Scrutiny Committee for Education**

Date: 26 November 2003

Title: Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Education held at 9.30 am at County Hall, St Annes Crescent, Lewes, East Sussex

Subject: Minutes

Attending: Barnes Field Kramer Livings Mrs Waite Whetstone

Mr A Campbell (RC Diocese)
Mr J Taylor (C of E Diocese)
Mrs S Maynard (parent-governor)

Chief Officer - Denise Stokoe, Director of Education and Libraries

Legal Adviser - Jonathan Ruddock-West, Assistant Director of Law and Performance Management

Scrutiny Lead Officer - Peter Davidson

Financial Adviser - Greg Roberts

At the invitation of the Chairman of the Committee, the following Members spoke on the item indicated:

Councillor Simmons - item 30
Councillor Stroude - item 30

25 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

25.1 RESOLVED - to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 17 September 2003.

26 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

26.1 Councillors Garvican, McPherson and Woodall.

27 DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

27.1 Councillor Barnes declared a non-prejudicial interest in item 30, by virtue of his trusteeship of the Etchingam under 5's playgroup.

27.2 Councillor Field declared a non-prejudicial interest in item 30 in that her husband is a financial director of Frewen College, an independent specialist school.

27.3 Councillor Kramer declared a non-prejudicial interest in item 30 by virtue of her position as having the Leisure and Cultural Development portfolio for the Cabinet Committee of Hastings Borough Council.

27.4 Mr Jeremy Taylor declared a non-prejudicial interest in item 33 by virtue of his involvement in discussions on behalf of the Board of Education for the Diocese of Chichester about a possible partnership agreement with William Parker School which could lead to the school securing voluntary aided status.

27.5 Councillor Mrs Waite declared a non-prejudicial interest in item 31 by virtue of her being a member of the Chartered Institute of Librarians and Information Professionals.

28 REPORTS

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

29 PRESENTATION ON THE WORK OF THE SUSSEX LEARNING AND SKILLS COUNCIL

29.1 The Committee received a presentation by Dr Norman Boyland (Chairman) and Mr Henry Ball (Executive Director) of the Sussex Learning and Skills Council with a view to informing Members about the work of the Council.

29.2 Dr Boyland and Mr Ball welcomed the opportunity to give Members an insight into the work of the Sussex Learning and Skills Council and to explain its main objectives, which include the 14-19 agenda, the Post-19 agenda and Strategic Area Reviews. Both Dr Boyland and Mr Ball also wished to express their gratitude to East Sussex County Council for its role in developing a strong partnership with the Sussex Learning and Skills Council.

29.3 The Chairman of the Committee, Councillor Livings, thanked Dr Boyland and Mr Ball for their presentation.

30 RECONCILING POLICY AND RESOURCES

30.1 Councillor Simmons, as Lead Cabinet Member for Education and Councillor Stroude, as Lead Cabinet Member for Children and Young People; and Libraries, attended at the invitation of the Chairman of the Committee so as to answer Members' questions and to comment on the proformas contained within the report. The Director of Education and Libraries and Mr Greg Roberts, Education and Libraries Finance Manager, also explained to the Committee the nature of the budgetary challenges facing the department. The Director informed the Committee that almost 50% of the LEA block had been identified as being unavailable for savings and that this would have a distorting effect on the effect of the savings target on the remainder. As a consequence, the savings potentially required elsewhere from within the budget would have to be higher.

30.2 Members of the Committee expressed a number of concerns about those services identified in the report where savings could potentially be made. Members were particularly concerned about the severe impact that potential cuts would have to Playlink, the Youth Service, Cognitive Assessment Tests (CATS) and Home to School Transport for denominational schools. Members also expressed a concern about finding a just formula for the distribution of the grant for providing assistance to schools in financial difficulties, so as to also take into consideration those schools which have kept themselves within budget. The Director undertook to keep the Committee informed of the process for agreeing the formula for the distribution of this grant.

30.3 In response to Members' concerns, both the Director of Education and Libraries and Councillors Simmons and Stroude reminded the Committee that the process of identifying areas where savings might be possible was still in its early stages and that the report did not contain any definite proposals.

30.4 RESOLVED – to note the report and to ask Cabinet to note the Committee's concern that some of the areas identified in the report as ones where savings could be made are

extremely important in helping the LEA deliver a balanced educational service to East Sussex and that the level of cuts proposed could threaten the viability of those services.

31 LIBRARY SERVICE BEST VALUE REVIEW - FINAL MONITORING REPORT

31.1 The Committee considered the final monitoring report on the Best Value Review of the Library Service by the Director of Education and Libraries.

31.2 The Committee asked for training to be provided for Members on the Library Service and that with a view to increasing their understanding, Members also proposed to visit at least one library facility in the county.

31.3 RESOLVED – to (1) note the progress being made against the recommendations contained within the report; and

(2) ask the Director of Education and Libraries and the Scrutiny Lead Officer, Peter Davidson, to arrange a visit for Members of the Committee to at least one library facility in the county.

32 BEST VALUE REVIEW OF THE MEANS OF RAISING ATTAINMENT IN PUPILS IN EARLY YEARS

32.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Education and Libraries. Ruth Szulecki, Early Years and Childcare Manager, was also in attendance to answer Members' questions.

32.2 RESOLVED - to thank Ruth Szulecki and her team for the progress being made against the recommendations contained in the report and to note that the final monitoring report is planned to be presented to the Committee at its meeting in June.

33 HASTINGS AND ROTHER 16+ REVIEW INTERIM REPORT

33.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chair of the Scrutiny Review Board.

33.2 The Chair of the Scrutiny Review Board, Mr Jeremy Taylor, informed the Committee that he planned to have meetings with Councillor Simmons, Lead Cabinet Member for Education and Mr Henry Ball, Executive Director of the Sussex Learning and Skills Council, to discuss in further detail the consultation process for the 16+ Review. Mr Taylor also thanked on behalf of the rest of the Board Members both the Local Education Authority and the Sussex Learning and Skills Council for their willingness to make available documents that the Board felt it necessary to consider.

33.3 The Committee discussed the use of the term 'consultation' and the fact the public were often not clear about the nature of the differences between an informal and formal consultation. The Chairman of the Board agreed that this matter would be discussed in more detail.

33.4 RESOLVED – to (1) note the contents of the report; and

(2) receive the final report of the Scrutiny Review Board at the Committee meeting on 17 June 2004.

34 THE COUNCIL PLAN 2003/04 – QUARTER TWO PROGRESS REPORT

34.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Law and Performance Management and the Director of Education and Libraries.

34.2 The Committee discussed the modification of a number of targets contained within the Council Plan. The Director of Education and Libraries explained to the Committee that it was not the practice of the Education Department to modify targets where it could not meet these. However, she believed that it was appropriate to modify 2.1f so that the target was amended from 30 June 2003 to 31 March 2004, as this target was still achievable within the lifetime of this Council Plan.

34.3 RESOLVED – to note the monitoring report.

35 FORWARD PLAN

35.1 The Committee noted the Forward Plan for the period 1 December 2003 to 31 March 2003.