

Education Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee

Annual Report 2015-6

1. Introduction

The Committee welcomed Cllr Peter Fortune who has taken over from Cllr Stephen Wells as Portfolio Holder for Education. We thank Cllr Wells for his service and close co-operation with the committee over the past three years and thank Cllr Fortune for his thoughtful and co-operative approach since his appointment.

2. Overall Objectives

The Education PDS Committee decided that the overall objectives of their work should remain those established previously.

Select Committee hearing on key objectives

At the first meeting of the year the Committee held a Select Committee style hearing on a variety of key issues, the most important of which was the pressure on school places as a result of the increase in pupil numbers. Cllr Peter Dean, the Chairman of the Development Control Committee and Cllr Colin Smith, the Deputy Leader of the Council (in the absence of the Leader who was abroad) appeared before the committee. Members generally agreed that the Planning Service should be involved in all discussions around potential new schools and expansions of existing schools to resolve planning issues at an early stage. There was also a need to identify education sites for development in the Local Plan to meet future demand for school places, and the Chairman of Development Control Committee emphasised that this was likely to include Green Belt land.

3. Improving pupil, school and governance performance.

The Committee's key objective is improving pupil, school and governance performance.

The Committee considered, at each of its five meetings, a report on *Ofsted* inspections and, where necessary, the steps being taken by schools to respond to matters highlighted in the inspections.

The Governor Approval Panel consisting of Cllr Peter Fortune, Cllr Nicholas Bennett and Mr Rob Northcott, the former head teacher of Langley Park School for Boys, met throughout the year to interview and approve prospective LA governors.

The Committee, as in 2014-5, is to consider reports on *Elective Home Education* and an update on on those young people '*Not in Education, Training or Employment*' (NEETS) at it's March meeting.

4. Progress towards all schools becoming academies

Our second key objective is:

To encourage all Bromley schools to become academies.

The Committee's Academies Working Group met on 28th January 2016 and will meet again in March. The Working Group noted that the majority of the remaining schools still under Local Authority control were now in the process of becoming academies or taking active steps towards that end. One of the central issues which the Portfolio Holder was taking forward with government was the fact that Bromley was now third in the country for the number of schools which had converted and that it was becoming increasingly uneconomic to run a traditional Education Department with so few schools still under LA control and that a 'tipping point' has been met which should lead to all schools converting.

During the coming year it is proposed that the Committee should examine what the education function of the LA would look like once operational control of schools disappears.

5. Extending provision and diversity of choice

The continued rise in pupil numbers required several meetings of the *School Places Working Group* under the Chairmanship of Councillor Judi Ellis.

The Committee continues to be concerned about the ability of the Authority to meet its' statutory responsibilities. A number of applications for school expansions have not received planning permission. The Portfolio Holder, together with Cllr Philpott his Executive Assistant, have commissioned data packs showing the pressures on school places in each ward.

6. Commissioning of services

Plans to commission education services were discontinued following market testing as the bids did not provide sufficient benefit to the Council. An appraisal is being carried out to establish whether there are other options for the delivery of individual and/or groups of service, for example shared services with other local authorities, social enterprise/ mutual options etc.

7. Education Budget

The Committee's work had been greatly assisted by Councillor Neil Reddin's chairmanship of the *Education Budget Sub-Committee* which has undertaken an in-depth examination of the savings required to meet the Council's balanced budget for 2016-7.

8. Adult Education

We reported last year on the deficit in the Adult Education Budget largely as a result of reductions in government grant. Following a full examination of the service and a comprehensive consultation with staff and students, the Portfolio Holder recommended the closure of the Widmore Road centre and the transfer of courses to other centres. The Committee added three recommendations to the report which were subsequently agreed by the Council's Executive.

The Committee will be receiving further reports setting out the criteria to be used in developing the 2016/17 curriculum and the implementation of the Impact Assessment Action Plan,

9. SEN Transport

The Committee supported changes to the SEN Transport policy to operate from September 1st 2015. The new policy includes trialling muster points for some students.

10. Youth Offending Service

A joint meeting was held on 22nd July 2015 with members of the Care Services and Public Protection PDS Committees examining the performance of the Youth Offending Service.

The Committee took evidence from Doug Patterson, Chief Executive, Kay Weiss, the Assistant Director Safeguarding, and the then interim Head of the Service.

The meeting was called to consider a report from HM Inspectorate of Probation which found the Service to be poor. Members of the three committees cross-examined the witnesses on how the Council had failed to recognise that the service was seriously underperforming. The meeting received firm assurances that as a result of the inspection an Improvement Plan had been put in place which was being overseen by a newly created Youth Offending Services Management Board

chaired by the Chief Executive. Having considered the evidence the meeting agreed that the Education PDS Committee would have a standing item at each of its meetings to monitor progress.

A report has been presented at each of the subsequent Education PDS meetings by the new Interim Head of Service, Mr Brennen. Progress is being made, albeit slowly in some areas, to address the issues raised by the Inspection.

10. Regional Schools' Commissioner

Dominic Herrington, the Regional Schools' Commissioner for the South East of England attended the Committee's meeting in January 2016 and gave a presentation on his role. Mr Herrington is responsible for the academies and free schools in 22 local authority areas stretching from Bromley to the Isle of Wight and Hampshire.

The main responsibilities of the RSC are:

To take action when an academy is underperforming;

Decide on the development of new academies;

Address underperformance in maintained schools through sponsored academies;

Make recommendations to ministers about free school applications;

Encourage organisations to become academy sponsors;

Approve changes to open academies

Amongst the issues discussed with Mr Herrington were: the need for a local authority governor on academy governors to maintain the link with the local authority; the importance of Multi-academy Trusts (MATs) and, the role of free schools in the new education landscape.

12. 2016-17 Select Committee Structure

It has been agreed by the *Constitution Improvement Working Group* that the Education PDS should act as a prototype for a new way of working. From May the Education PDS Committee will be transformed into the Education Select Committee. The Portfolio Holder will still face public questions and give an update at each meeting and take questions from the committee but pre-decision scrutiny of the Portfolio Holder decisions will be restricted to those called in.

The Select Committee will select issues for in depth examination and a call for evidence will be published. The sessions will follow the pattern already established by the PDS Committee in its examination of safeguarding and the inquiry into the performance of the Youth Offending Service.

13. Thanks

This brings to an end my fourth report on the work of the Committee. I should like to pay tribute to all the members of the Committee for their hard work and co-operation. I also thank Councillor Neil Reddin for his support as Vice Chairman and Chairman of the Education Budget Sub-Committee, and to Cllr Judi Ellis who chaired the School Working Group. Tony Wright-Jones, the Secondary School's representative left the committee part way through the year on the reconstitution of St Olave's Governing Body. Tony was a valued member of the PDS and he is much missed. The Committee also places on record, the work of Jane Bailey, Director of Education, and all her staff. During the year Kerry Nicholls our long serving committee clerk transferred to service other committees and her place was taken by Philippa Gibbs who has returned to Bromley after working

for Sevenoaks District Council. We are delighted that Philippa has the same hard working and efficient attributes as Kerry and we have enjoyed a seamless transition of regime.

Councillor Nicholas Bennett JP
Chairman Education PDS Committee