

Annual Report from Education, Children & Families Select Committee

Chairman: Cllr. Nicholas Bennett JP

Vice-Chairman: Cllr. Neil Reddin

1. The Committee has now been in its present form as a Select Committee for three years and has bedded in well. All the members serving on the Committee have expressed their view that the way the Committee undertakes scrutiny and produces subsequent policy proposals is more effective than in the old PDS format where the emphasis was largely on scrutiny of the Portfolio Holder and his proposed decisions. The Select Committee process recognises that policy flows from the Executive but that, by Committee having control of what it scrutinises, it is able to examine in detail specific areas and make proposals for improvements. The new system holds the Portfolio Holder to account at each meeting and also over the year calls the senior officers for examination of their work. In addition, the Sub-Committee and, when necessary the main committee, scrutinises contract decisions which the Portfolio Holder is minded to make.
2. The expansion of the Sub-Committee's role to include performance monitoring has enabled the Committee to give a fuller examination of the budget, the capital programme, contracts and risk registers, the Portfolio Plan and the annual reports of the Virtual School, Private Fostering, Adoption, Local Authority Designated Officer, the Independent Reviewing Officer, the Annual ECHS Complaints Report and the Bromley Safeguarding Children Board. These annual reports are produced at great cost and effort and deserve proper consideration. The Sub-Committee also invited the whole membership of the main Committee for the report into St Olave's School.
3. The Select Committee met five times in the year with an additional meeting to examine the sustainability of the Education Budget. This was one of two inquiries covering the entire budget under the Portfolio. The children's social care budget accounts for 20% of the Council's total controllable budget and therefore must play a considerable role in the way in which the total budget is managed and controlled. The Education budget is largely devolved to schools but some 2% is controlled by the Council. The Committee has made 22 proposals in total, across the two budgets, to improve the effectiveness, economy and efficiency of the way the budget is spent.
4. In addition to the two Reports referred to above the Committee conducted three other major inquiries into:
 - ***Post 16 Non-university technical education and apprenticeship Opportunities in Bromley***
 - ***The impact of Benefit Changes on Children and Families***
 - ***Lifelong Learning***
5. Three mini inquiries were held on the ***Youth Offending Service*** and ***Adult Education***. Given the importance of the role of the Council as ***Corporate Parents***, the Committee also looked at how Council Members could play a greater role in the lives of the children which the Council looks after.

6. The Portfolio Holder appeared for scrutiny at all but one of the meetings and, in addition, the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Education Care and Health Services, the Interim Director of Children's Care and the new Director of Education have all been before the Committee for scrutiny sessions.
7. The Committee was very pleased that the ***Living in Care Council*** arranged for the Committee to view their new video '***Listen When I Speak***' and it raised important issues which we have considered in our examination of our role as Corporate Parents.
8. The Committee had one important presentation during the year when Gillian Palmer, the Interim Director of Education, presented a valuable research report on ***Education Outcomes in Bromley***. The report was extremely helpful, particularly to new members of the Council, on the factors affecting progress at each of the key stages in the education of Children in the Borough.
9. The Committee will have new leadership in 2019-20 as I take on the role of Mayor and Cllr Reddin stands down as Chairman of the Sub-committee. We hope that the new Chairman and Deputy Chairman will build on the progress made by the Select Committee and its Sub-Committee. There are number areas for further improvement. We hope that all witnesses will, in future produce written evidence to be circulated with the agenda and secondly that the range of witnesses can be expanded outside the Council staff. We appreciate that it has been difficult to get schools to give evidence (and we are grateful to those who did respond to the inquiry on post 16 education). We were disappointed that the NHS, the largest employer in the Borough could not find anyone to attend the Post 16 education inquiry.
9. I would like to thank the former Executive Director of Education, Care and Health Services, Ade Adetosoye OBE, Gillian Palmer, the former Interim Director of Education, Jared Nehra, our new Director of Education and Janet Bailey, Interim Director of Children's Care, together with all their staff for their help and assistance with the work of the Committee during the year.
10. My thanks also to all the members of the Committee and Sub-committee both elected and co-opted for their thoughtful contributions and cross party cooperation.
11. The behind the scenes work of preparing for the Committee includes an annual meeting with colleagues to discuss the year ahead and then, with my Deputy Chairman, an agenda planning meeting and a call over meeting with officers for each meeting in the annual cycle. I want particularly to pay tribute to Cllr Neil Reddin, the best Deputy I have ever worked with. Neil and I have worked closely together over six of my seven years as Chairman and I shall miss his calm, common sense approach both as Deputy Chairman and in his efficient chairing of the Sub-committee. Last but not least a huge thank you to Philippa Gibbs, our Committee Clerk and administrator. Without her hard work in preparing the agendas, writing the minutes and drafting our Inquiry Reports the Committee would not operate in the efficient and effective way which it has done over the past years.

Cllr Nicholas Bennett MA JP

Chairman

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