

Lancashire County Council

Education Scrutiny Committee

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday, 19th January, 2011 at 10.00 am
at the Cabinet Room 'C' - County Hall, Preston**

Present:

County Councillor Clive Grunshaw (Chair)

County Councillors

K Bailey	S Fishwick
Mrs R Blow	J Jackson
K Brown	A Jones
Mrs P Case	A Knox
K Ellard	S Riches
C Evans	C Wells
P Evans	M Younis

Co-opted members

T Charnock	(RC Schools representative)
F Kershaw	(CE Schools representative)
K Wales	(Free Church Schools representative)

County Councillors J Jackson and K Ellard replaced County Councillors A D Kay and Y Motala respectively as members of the Committee for this meeting.

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillor S Derwent and Mrs J Hamid, Coopted member representing Parent Governors (Secondary)

2. Disclosure of Personal/Prejudicial Interests.

There were no declarations of interest in relation to matters appearing on the agenda.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on the 2nd November 2010

County Councillor Riches referred to the discussion on Academies and stated that it was important the Committee received information regarding the insurance liabilities of the Governors of Academies across a range of issues, including corporate manslaughter. In response Mr Stott, the Director for Universal and Prevention Services assured the Committee that the implications in terms of

insurance liability would be included in future reports and was already being addressed in briefings for Governors of schools which were considering becoming Academies.

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting held on the 2nd November 2010 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

4. Revenue Budget 2011/12 and 2013/14

In response to a request from the Chair there was general agreement amongst the members of the Committee that County Councillor Susie Charles, Cabinet Member for Children and Schools, be allowed to attend the meeting and speak in accordance with the Code of Conduct. The Cabinet Member was accompanied by Mr Stott, the Director for Universal and Prevention Services and Mr Hart, the Director of Capital Investment and Resources from the Directorate for Children and Young People.

A report was presented regarding information considered by the Cabinet on the 6th January 2011 including the County Council's Financial Position as at 30th November 2010 and Revenue Budget 2011/12 and 2013/14 recommendations. Details of the Cabinet resolutions insofar as they related to education were also presented.

The Chair referred the members of the Committee to the separate summary of the budget proposals relating to education which had been circulated previously for ease of reference. Having familiarised themselves with the proposals as set out in the summary the members of the Committee then discussed each proposal in turn and the following points were raised.

Efficiency Saving – Special Educational Needs (SEN) Transport.

In response to queries from members of the Committee Mr Stott confirmed that there was no specific budget for SEN transport, the costs of which were funded from a single budget stream. Mr Hart added that the efficiency saving was in the first instance around improved procurement, routing and possible shared use of transport.

The Cabinet Member informed the meeting that a government green paper was expected in relation to reform of the SEN legal framework which would have implications for service provision. It was noted that the continuing personalisation of services, increased choice and more cost effective use of transport would contribute to savings.

Service Policy Proposals

Specialist Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Transport

It was reported that the County Council provided training for passenger assistants who would travel between home and school with younger children or those with severe disabilities. However, in some cases the passenger assistants were also

staff from the school and similar training was provided by the school. In order to achieve further efficiency savings it was suggested that a joint training programme be developed for all passenger assistants.

In order to develop their independence it was suggested that capacity be developed so that where appropriate young people with SEN could be encouraged to make greater use of public transport. However it was recognised that such a move would need to be balanced against risks both to the individual, parents and others and may result in a need for additional passenger assistants. Mr Stott reported that whilst there were significant efficiencies which could be achieved the safeguarding of individuals was paramount. The Cabinet Member informed the meeting that issues such as the potential risks associated with SEN transport were discussed with the Parent Carer Forum which provided valuable feedback.

It was noted that when County Council vehicles were not being used for SEN transport they could be used for other purposes such as transporting people to/from hospital, thereby making better use of vehicles.

With regard the provision of SEN transport by parents in certain circumstances Mr Hart confirmed that the effect of rising fuel costs and inflation had been factored into the budget proposals so that if parents chose to provide transport themselves the County Council would be able to provide some assistance though the full benefits of the measure would only become apparent in 2012/13 and subsequent years. Mr Stott informed the meeting that the County Council would continue to consult with parents and develop strategies which would take their needs into account as part of the ongoing transport review which was expected to deliver significant savings.

Statutory Responsibilities for Schools

The Committee noted that the government White Paper had significant implications for the role of local authorities with regard to education and this would impact on the relationship between the County Council and schools in Lancashire.

It was reported that the estimated £2 million saving over three years reflected the fact that certain functions would no longer continue to be the responsibility of the County Council, including school improvement. However, it was emphasised that many schools in the County recognised the value of services provided by the County Council and had indicated the desire to continue to 'buy in' those services. It was noted that the County Council would continue to work in partnership with schools and where appropriate provide school improvement services on a cost effective basis.

Interest on School Balances

The Cabinet Member reported that in the past schools had benefitted from the County Council providing them with preferential interest rates on school balances

and that the intention was to offer a fixed percentage below the County Councils pooled rate with a 'floor'. It was noted that the proposal would mean that schools earned a lower rate of interest on their balances than at present but Mr Hart highlighted that schools would still receive a better rate than that offered by the commercial market.

It was noted that the Schools Forum had been consulted and had broadly accepted the proposal.

Reduction in Area Based Grant

A specific question was asked about the £5M allocation by the County Council to support Early Intervention. It was reported that such funding had been used to recruit additional social workers, to commission early intervention proposals from the Locality District Childrens Trusts and appoint early intervention officers for two years.

With regard to the cessation of funding from the Area Based Grant (ABG) in relation to teenage pregnancy it was noted that important work in this area was already provided for children during years 8 and 9 at School and often involved the County Council working in partnership with the Police, Health and District Councils on joint initiatives. Mr Stott informed the meeting that the work done in schools underpinned the teenage pregnancy strategy and Mr Hart assured the Committee that whilst partner organisations would also be looking at their respective budgets every effort would be made to maximise the available resources in the future.

In response to a query from the Chair Mr Hart stated that many of the services affected by the reduction in ABG were around literacy/numeracy or connected with behaviour which schools were now expected to provide directly. Mr Hart added that members of the Committee would be provided with a list of school facing activities which would not be provided in the future outside of the meeting.

It was further reported that in future schools would provide support for each other in relation to some services and the County Council had worked with schools in relation to school improvement. Mr Stott added that the proposed change also presented an opportunity for the County Council to trade certain services both within Lancashire and to schools outside of the County and could provide an additional source of income. It was also noted that funding for schools had been simplified by combining the majority of previously separate funds into a general fund, giving schools greater flexibility as to how to use resources.

In response to concern about the impact on the local education authority Mr Stott acknowledged that in the future there would be a more pluralistic market due to the introduction of Academies and Free Schools. However, he added that the County Council would not become complacent and would continue to build on its

achievements and provide good quality services which could be made available on a largely traded basis to schools.

Denominational Transport

It was noted that the Committee had discussed the introduction of a parental contribution towards the cost of denominational transport at the last meeting. In response to a query regarding a possible challenge to the decision taken by the Cabinet Member to implement the £2 charge with effect from September 2011 Mr Stott confirmed that whilst the County Council had responded to various queries he was unaware of any move towards a judicial review. It was reported that other authorities had decided to completely withdraw from providing travel assistance on denominational grounds whereas in Lancashire from September 2011 the County Council would still meet 60% of the costs of such transport.

Increased income from Lancashire Outdoor Education Service

It was reported that many local authorities had in the past chosen to dismantle their outdoor education provision whereas Lancashire had maintained facilities at four different sites.

The Committee was informed that the proposed developments at the Tower Wood facility would provide greatly improved accommodation and offer an opportunity for the facility to be also made available for use by other groups, during parts of the year when the centres were not used for education, thereby generating additional income. In response to concerns that the improvements would be in competition with a similar facility in the area which was run by the Scouts Mr Stott reported that rather than competing the County Council could work with the Scouts to ensure that the two sites complimented each other.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and Officers for the contributions.

Resolved:

1. That the report be received and the comments of the Committee as set out above noted.
2. That the Clerk, in consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Committee prepare a list of recommendations for circulation to members of the Committee in order to formulate a response on behalf of the Committee to the Cabinet's Budget Proposals;
3. That the response of the Committee on the budget proposals be presented to the Cabinet at its meeting on 3rd February 2011.
4. That a list of the school facing activities which would not be provided in the future following the reduction in Area Based Grant be circulated to the members of the Committee outside of the meeting.

5. Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business presented for consideration at the meeting.

6. Date of the Next Meeting

Resolved: It was noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Education Scrutiny Committee would be held at 10am on the 15th March 2011 in Cabinet Room 'C' at County Hall, Preston.

I M Fisher
County Secretary and Solicitor

County Hall
Preston