

Lancashire County Council

Education Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday, 6th December, 2018 at 10.30 am in Committee Room 'D' (The Henry Bolingbroke Room) - County Hall, Preston

Present:

County Councillor Christian Wakeford (Chair)

County Councillors

M Dad	E Nash
L Beavers	J Potter
A Cheetham	J Rear
S Clarke	A Schofield
B Dawson	D T Smith
A Gardiner	D Stansfield
A Kay	P Steen

Co-opted members

Mrs Janet Hamid, Representing Parent Governors (Secondary)
Dr Sam Johnson, Representing CE Schools
Mr Kenvyn Wales, Representing Free Church Schools
Mr John Withington, Representing Parent Governors (Primary)

County Councillor Alan Schofield replaced County Councillor Cosima Towneley for this meeting.

1. Apologies

None were received.

2. Disclosure of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

County Councillor Peter Steen declared a non-pecuniary interest as he was a governor at Bacup Maintained Nursery.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2018

Resolved: The minutes from the meetings held on 10 September 2018 be confirmed and as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

4. The Future of Maintained Nursery Schools

The Chair welcomed John Readman, Interim Executive Director of Education and Children's Services; Steve Belbin, Head of Education, Quality and Performance; Helen Belbin, Senior Advisor; Andrew Good, Head of Financial Management (Development and Schools); Sue Conron, Head Teacher Duke Street and Highfield Nursery Schools; Sacha Walker-Byrne, Head Teacher Fairfield Nursery School; Sue Allan, Head Teacher Ribblesdale Nursery School; and Jan Holmes, Head Teacher Walton Lane Nursery School, to the meeting.

The report presented explained that the Interim Executive Director of Education and Children's Services had set up a task and finish group in recognition of the significant financial challenges being faced by maintained nursery schools (MNS) and their valuable role in the early education of vulnerable children in Lancashire. The intended outcome was to support maintained nursery schools sustainability and future direction.

The purpose of the report was to provide members of the Education Scrutiny Committee details of the work undertaken by the task and finish group between June and October 2018.

It was felt that the task and finish group was more of a working group going forward as there was still considerable work to be undertaken.

It was highlighted that maintained nurseries and independent nurseries were experiencing difficulties due to Central Government's funding formula. It was noted that if a child with complex needs was presented to private carers they would nearly always direct the families to maintained nurseries as they had the expertise. The committee discussed and agreed to present an all-party Notice of Motion to Full Council to request that Central Government review the funding formula for Lancashire.

Members enquired on the numbers for children in maintained nursery schools (MNS). The authority worked to around 14,000 children per cohort of children. The numbers in MNS had remained broadly stable over the years. It was reported that LCC was one of the early adopters of universal credit and this had some impact on the systems in terms of the number of parents who were eligible.

It was acknowledged that the early year's sector was wide-ranging. There were 150 schools in Lancashire with nursery classes and there were 551 childcare providers, 24 MNS and around 500 child minders.

Resolved: That;

- i. The report be noted
- ii. The proposed actions in the future and the intention to have regard to relevant statutory guidance be noted
- iii. An all-party Notice of Motion be submitted to February Full Council around the funding formula from Central Government

- iv. An update from the working group be presented to the June 2019 meeting.

5. Schools in Financial Difficulty

The report presented provided the Education Scrutiny Committee with an update on Lancashire schools in financial difficulty (SIFD), their categorisation, and the support that was being provided.

The SIFD system classified schools into one of four categories based on various financial indicators;

- Category 1 – Structural deficit beyond recovery. The school was financially non-viable and strategic solutions were required.
- Category 2 – Schools had significant deficits requiring intensive intervention and focused support to recover, or had no recovery plan
- Category 3 – Schools in a vulnerable position burning through reserves, losing pupil numbers and moving into or on the brink of deficit. It was also schools that were recovering from significant financial problems but where the recovery plan was on track. They required intervention and monitoring to prevent failure in the next 3 years.
- Category 4 – Schools with no financial issues but had continued monitoring of financial indicators to confirm ongoing financial health.

When information was provided to the June 2018 meeting, categorisations were based on forecast data from January 2018. There was a small improvement across the sector in terms of their financial stability.

Members were informed that the focus at the moment for the Financial Management Team was to look at secondary schools who were approaching a financial challenge. In February 2019 LCC would be hosting a finance seminar with invited secondary head teachers. In addition, the DfE would be in attendance along with The Association of Schools and College Leaders (ASCL) to discuss curriculum led planning.

In March 2019 new budgets would be issued to schools based on the 2019/2020 allocation. It was reported that LCC would look at how it was delivering its services internally to ensure best value for money.

Although the overall education budget had increased, because of increasing numbers, the per pupil rate of funding had remained flat.

The committee was informed there were around 13,500 to 14,000 pupils in each cohort from 0 – 18. It was difficult to give a Lancashire picture because numbers varied from district to district.

Members were informed of the improved progress of schools but were concerned about the consequential impact on the standards. There was also concerns raised around staffing. It was reported that the training budget was one area impacted upon as well as staffing, particularly non-teaching staffing..

It was confirmed that the authority received two types of investment. One was Basic Need Funding which ensured there were sufficient places for the pupils. The second was Condition Survey Funding which ensured that primary and secondary schools continue to be maintained in a fit state. It was acknowledged that there was limited capital funds to maintain the buildings. However, there was a capital reserve available to deal with emergencies. All primary and secondary schools received funding yearly. They had delegated control on how they spent that money. This could be used for investment in maintenance and technology.

Members were advised that if a school had no educational issues but had a financial deficit, LCC required the school to have a recovery plan. This plan meant the school had to recover in three years. However, if the school had a quality issue as well, it would become a forced academy. If it was a forced academy and had a deficit, this deficit was borne by the authority.

It was pointed out that Pupil Referral Schools were short stay schools but some pupils could be in these schools for 3 to 4 years because they had been excluded permanently from a primary school. The intention was for them to be reintegrated.

Regarding apprenticeships, it was reported that Lancashire had more than any of its regional counterparts. Employers expectations had changed and they were looking for older young people. So there was now a trend of less apprenticeships starting at 16 and more at 18. The Lancashire Enterprise Partnership supported and promoted apprenticeship growth.

Resolved: That;

- i. The report presented be noted.
- ii. An update on the figures of schools in financial difficulty including how this has transitioned over time be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.

6. School Governance

The Chair welcomed Ajay Sethi, Head of Learning Services and Skills, to the meeting.

The report presented explained that the purpose of governance was to provide confident, strategic leadership and create robust accountability, oversight and assurance for educational and financial performance. It also provided background information on the governance of schools, the role of the local authority and the provision of support to Lancashire schools.

Schools were autonomous institutions hence the need for governing boards. In Lancashire there were around 8500 governors in schools and this was one of the largest volunteer groups in the country. The governors had three strategic core responsibilities which were to support the strategic vision of the schools, Hold the head teachers to account for educational performance, and, and monitor the financial performance of the schools. There was training and development for governors which was face to face or online.

The committee enquired what it could do to help mitigate the concerns over governor vacancies and with the recruitment of governors. Members felt they could help with recruitment if they knew where the vacancies were. It was vital to have the information available in order to push and support the filling of the vacancies in various parts of the county. Historically East Lancashire was the most difficult area for recruitment. It was stated that it would be beneficial for councillors to attend chairs forums to see what questions were being raised. Members requested details of the vacancies in the various areas to be circulated and also dates of the chairs forums.

It was noted that governing bodies now had to complete a skills audit and the committee enquired if the information from these audits was collated so as concerns in certain areas could be highlighted. However, the committee was informed that the information from these audits stayed within the individual schools.

Members were informed that there was a recruitment campaign that ran almost constantly informing different media outlets. There was a website called 'Inspiring Governance' which schools used to search for volunteers to become governors. Through the LCC Communications Team there were a number of area based news releases and staff notices.

Resolved: That;

- i. The report presented be noted
- ii. Details of chairs forums be circulated to members along with details of governor vacancies in all districts.

7. Education Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2018/19

The work plan for the Education Scrutiny Committee for the 2018/19 municipal year was presented to the Committee. The topics included were identified at the work planning workshop held on 10 July 2018.

Regarding budget proposals there was a request for an item on the integrated transport service provision of bus passes for excluded secondary pupils to be added to the work plan.

Resolved: The report and work plan presented be noted.

8. Urgent Business

There were no items of Urgent Business.

9. Date of the Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Education Scrutiny Committee is due to be held on Wednesday 6 February at 10.30am, Cabinet Room C, County Hall, Preston.

L Sales
Director of Corporate Services

County Hall
Preston