

NOTES OF THE CONSULTATION MEETING BETWEEN ELECTED MEMBERS, OFFICERS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF THE OXFORDSHIRE GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION (OGA) HELD AT COUNTY HALL ON TUESDAY 11 FEBRUARY 2020 AT 4.00pm

Present:

OGA Representatives: Carole Thomson [Chair] (CT), Judith Bennett (JB), Doreen Rose (DR), Stan Terry (ST), Brenda Williams (BW)

OCC Elected Members and Officers: Tim Brock (JP) [Lead Officer – Governor Services], Chris Hilliard (CH) [Consultant Director for Children's Services], Allyson Millward (AM) [Head of Access to Learning], Cllr. Michael Waine (MW).

In attendance: Katie Paxton [Clerk].

Apologies were received from Cllr. Lorraine Lyndsay-Gale. MW advised he needed to leave early.

1. Matters arising from notes of meeting held on 17 October 2019

The notes had been previously approved by email. The highlighted questions would be deleted.

1.1 Progress on the Education Strategies

The draft document on improving education outcomes had gone out to consultation, closing at the end of February. The document would then be revised before consideration by Education Scrutiny Committee and subsequently to Cabinet. There was a target date of 1 September 2020 for finalisation, approval and publication of a three-year strategic plan.

1.2 Premises maintenance plan (any update on when 2020-2021 work will be approved?)

The plan was due to go through Cabinet in February 2020 with a view to being able to notify schools before the start of the financial year whether work would be done. AM would ensure that information was conveyed on Schools News. **Action: AM**

It was noted that it would also be helpful if County Councillors were notified of relevant schools that would be having work done.

1.3 Dynamic Procurement instructions to be made available

Information had been circulated. It was possible to go onto the portal to get a list of what was available.

Concerns were expressed about staff turnover leaving Schools Forum Services and Contracts Committee unsupported. Other staff were being trained to cover. Information about who was handling which area would be useful for Forum members and schools.

1.4 Strategic plan for falling rolls

Discussions had taken place in Schools Forum and Education Scrutiny Committee. It would be taken before the School Organisation Stakeholder Group (SOSG) for on-going consideration. OGA felt that it was important that the issue was addressed and a plan put in place.

There was a concern regarding small schools and there was a Small Schools Working Group looking at issues. Changes to funding had meant that small schools were particularly badly funded under the national funding formula due to the inclusion of the lump sum in the minimum per pupil allocation. All schools would get a minimum 1.84% uplift but this would be insufficient to meet anticipated pay pressures. Many schools across the county had already cut

back to minimal support staff. Funding concerns were compounded by having other factors such as SEND included in the calculation so that two schools could receive the same funding despite significant differences in high/low deprivation. Some of the issues around the area were complex.

The additional investment in education would benefit some schools and local authorities that had been poorly off for some time. However, in Oxfordshire only 56% schools would gain significantly as a result of the additional investment.

It was agreed that a recommendation be made to Cabinet that MPs be briefed fully on funding, especially with regards to small schools and any schools that would be adversely affected.

It was noted that the new MP for Wantage had been appointed to the Education Select Committee and had a background in social mobility.

F40 was holding a briefing for MPs in July 2020, date to be confirmed.

CT had attended a constructive F40 meeting with the Chair of the SEND Review and it would be interesting to see if the Government took note of the Review's recommendations.

1.5 OGA meeting on Sustainability

The Spring Open Meeting would take place on Saturday 14 March 2020 at Oxford Spires Academy. The speaker would be Ann Finlayson, Chief Executive of SEEd (Sustainability and Environmental Education). It was hoped that some information would also be provided by OCC about the work on sustainability. Officers and members would be very welcome.

It was hoped that the Summer Open Meeting would look at wellbeing: no speaker had yet been arranged as yet.

1.6 Communication

OGA requested that it was made clear that alternates were welcome to attend Heads' and Chairs' briefings if the Chair could not make it. **Action: TB**

2. Home education discussion:

CH had sent a note in advance of the meeting. This included the link to the current DfE document:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/550416/Children_Missing_Education_-_statutory_guidance.pdf

This statutory guidance directed all schools, whether local authority maintained, academy or free school, to report any pupil that was being removed from the school for the purposes of elective home education. There was a free mediation service available to facilitate discussions between the parents and the school. However, if parents decided on elective home education, the local authority could not intervene.

The focus visit from Ofsted had been a positive experience which would be reported in full to Education Scrutiny in due course. There were some issues around children and social care and education that would need to be considered by the Cabinet Member and Education Scrutiny Committee. One was the extent to which primary schools were engaging the services of educational psychologists at the appropriate time.

OGA noted that there had been a lot of concern about schools' ability to access educational psychologists for some years. They were also not cheap and could not provide the formal diagnosis which was often necessary and only possible through CAMHS.

Another issue identified by Ofsted related to the number of children being electively home educated in Oxfordshire increased by some 20% over the last couple of years. There were also children who were having flexi-schooling, i.e. they were on a reduced timetable then a re-integration timetable. This should only take place with agreement between families and the school and for a fixed period. However, Ofsted noted that there was a greater propensity to do so in Oxfordshire than elsewhere. It would be raised through Education Scrutiny, these consultation meetings and in Heads' and Chairs' Briefings when the information was published.

There were a number of concerns about elective home education: OGA had been alerted to concerns in connection with Muslim girls being taken out of school, missing out on educational opportunities and potentially to be married at a young age. In addition, a number of parents had indicated that they were coerced to home educate their children as a result of off-rolling. This needed proper investigation and data gathering.

Governors were concerned about flexi-schooling contracts, to ensure that they were not legally exposed in the event of challenge.

It was noted that parents had an absolute right to school placement and elective home education, but there was no right to flexi-schooling and headteachers could refuse any request.

Ofsted inspections considered attendance of pupils for whatever reason. Absence on a regular basis could amount to concerns about safeguarding, which was a limiting judgement. It was suggested that information on attendance, flexi-schooling or reduced timetables and details about any pupils who were removed from the school roll and their destination be reported to governors as a standard item on the headteacher's report. However, governors should be aware of the information in a broad way to inform their strategic awareness, not of specific detail, and their obligations and workload should not increase as a result.

4.47pm MW left the meeting

OCC held a spreadsheet of data showing what was happening school by school in terms of pupils being removed. Assumptions were not made on the basis of numbers seeming high in a specific school.

It was noted that there was no legal entitlement or obligation on OCC to ensure that the quality of education that children were getting under elective home education was sufficient. Efforts were being made to reduce the number children who were electively home educated by early intervention and keeping them in mainstream education.

The latest DfE guidance recommended that local authorities made contact with parents on at least an annual basis. This was not currently being done but it did not include any obligation to ensure that education was adequate.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/791527/Elective_home_education_guidance_for_LAv2.0.pdf

It was felt that being an inclusive school put additional stress on staff particularly when it related to the behaviours of particular children and there were inadequate staff or resources to support the children.

Flexi-schooling guidance should be strengthened to state that Headteachers were strongly advised to contact the OCC Inclusion team to ensure that they and their Governing Board could be confident that arrangements agreed would not lead to challenge at a later date. Deborah Bell would be notified of comments. **Action: TB**

3. Viability of small schools and the impact of the continuing presumption against closure

Some DfE information had been re-circulated which had led to press comment: it was understood that academies had been removed from the list, as they did not fall under the presumption against closure.

The paper that had gone to Education Scrutiny about sustainability had been helpful.

Whilst there could be other positive benefits in working together with other schools in a federation, MAT (multi-academy trust), etc, there were no automatic financial savings. In fact, financial constraints on schools meant that there was no capacity for doing joint working or sharing expertise. This fell disproportionately on smaller schools without a senior leadership team.

4. OCC High Needs Review

The Review would go to DLT very soon before going to Schools Forum for consideration: no date had yet been set. It was hoped that more expertise could be developed to keep pupils in their local schools with recommendations around top up rates. There was widespread concern that the Review had dragged on.

5. Update around recruitment challenges for both schools and the Directorate

A report on school headteacher recruitment from Kim James would come before the next meeting.

The Deputy Director role had been advertised and the recruitment process would follow; interviews were likely to be in March 2020. It was not known whether there would be any involvement from any headteacher or governor in the assessment centre or interviews. It was hoped that an update on the appointment of the Deputy Director would be available at the next meeting.

There were concerns around the current consultation about staff paying for car parking which would put those schools affected at a particular disadvantage when recruiting.

Lucy Butler had resigned as Director of Children's Services, leaving in April 2020. Thanks were offered for her work and support.

It was noted and welcomed that there were now more people working in Governor Services than there had been for some time.

6. Date of the next meeting: Monday 11 May 2020 at 4.00pm

Provisional dates for the next year to be provided by the local authority.

The meeting ended at 5.18pm