

HERTFORDSHIRE SCHOOL ORGANISATION COMMITTEE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 9 NOVEMBER 2005

PRESENT

Schools

Dr Dena Coleman
Peter Fielden
Richard Jameson
Paul Rosen
Michael Taylor

Church of England

Jon Reynolds
Alick Burge
Roger Martin

Roman Catholic Diocese

Paul Goggins
Sally Livesey
Alan Scouller

HCC

Robert Gordon [Chairman]
Clare Berry
Richard Roberts
Richard Smith
Elam Singham
Aislinn Lee

Learning and Skills Council

David Tofts

In attendance:

Dinah Tuck
Lindsay Martin:

Secretary to the Committee
head of School Access

1. Apologies, membership and attendance

No apologies were received.

Elam Singham has replaced Tanis Kent as the Labour member of the Local Authority group.

2. Election of Chairman for 2005/6

Members discussed paragraph 55 of the non statutory procedural guidance issued to SOCs with effect from 1 August 2005. The secretary had clarified with the County Secretary and the DfES School Organisation Unit that the guidance was only advisory and reflected challenges to the impartiality of the Chair which had arisen in other areas. The SOC was entitled to make its own decision and a decision to elect the Cabinet member as Chair would not invalidate any decisions reached by the SOC.

Members expressed their view that Robert Gordon had proved an excellent procedural chair for the SOC and always handled impartially proposals coming forward for decision.

Members were also conscious of the recently published White Paper which proposed the abolition of the SOC in the near future. The view was expressed by several members that in these circumstances the re-election of the existing chairman would provide continuity.

Following this discussion when all members of the SOC were able to express their views Jon Reynolds[CE] proposed and David Tofts [LSC] seconded the appointment of Robert Gordon as Chairman and his appointment as Chairman for 2005/6 was approved unanimously.

The Chairman thanked his colleagues for their confidence in his impartial chairing of the SOC.

3. Election of Vice Chairman for 2005/6

Paul Goggins was appointed Vice Chairman for 2005/6.

4. Minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2005

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2005 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

5. Matters arising

Actions on the minutes were noted.

6. Decision Maker's Guidance

Members noted the revised guidance for SOCs which came into force on 1 August 2005. Members also discussed the implications of the White Paper "Higher Standards, better Schools for all" published on 25 November 2005. No time scale for the proposed abolition of the SOC will be known until the Education Bill is published early in 2006.

7. Consultation on proposals for primary schools to seek Foundation status.

Members noted the consultation document on a stream lined route for primary schools to seek Foundation status and that the fast track process for Community and Voluntary Controlled secondary schools to become Foundation Schools came into force on 1 August 2005.

8. Repeal of School Organisation Plan requirement

Whilst the statutory requirement to publish a School Organisation Plan has been removed the LA will incorporate a section on school planning in the Children and Young Persons' Plan. The guidance on what the plan should contain has not yet been received. The LA undertook to continue to make available their annual pupil projections to other agencies such as the Dioceses and LSC who found them very useful.

9. Amalgamation of Summercroft Infant and Nursery School and Suumercroft Junior School in Bishop Stortford.

Members noted that the LA had determined to discontinue Summercroft Infant and Nursery and Summercroft Junior Schools with effect from 31 December 2005 and to establish a new two form entry community school with a 60 place nursery on the current school sites with effect from 1 January 2006.

10. Reports to Education Panel on school size and revised school reorganisation and area review process

Members noted the two reports which had been submitted to the Education panel on 10 October 2005.

School Size and Effectiveness

Revised School Organisation and Area Review Process

Lindsay Martin introduced these reports. Members who wished to see the research document on which the report on school size was based should contact LM. Richard Jameson and Sally Livesey asked to receive this document.

Action LM

School size and effectiveness

Some members expressed concern at the comment in section 5.1 that leadership and management was of higher quality in larger primary schools. It was clarified that this comment is based on Ofsted grades given to Hertfordshire schools. It was possible that the fact that smaller schools sometimes have more difficulty in recruiting headteachers could have affected this statistic.

It was also clarified that schools in the three tier areas of the County had not been included in this research as this data would not be relevant to any review in those areas.

A question was raised about the under funding for primary schools referred to in paragraph 6.2. The constraints on the current funding system may leave the LA very little room for manoeuvre on this issue which has been raised by primary schools in the Schools Forum.

The Education Panel at its next meeting will receive a report which will look at other aspects of school organisation.

Area reviews

It was clarified that the list of stakeholders in section 9 refers to parent governors from each school in the area.

Members welcomed involvement of more stakeholders in open discussions to inform the formulation of options for formal consultation.

The report on School Organisation and the Area Review Process would go to Cabinet on 14 November. The proposed review programme over the next 2-3 years is intended to shorten the period of uncertainty in areas to be reviewed.

It was agreed that a reformatted copy of the Area Review report together with the Cabinet resolutions would be circulated with the minutes of this meeting. **Action LM/Secretary**

11. Future meetings

Members agreed to meet at 10am on Thursday 26 January 2006 to consider the enlargement of Loreto College [VA school] and the closure of Boxmoor Special School if any objections are received..

Members noted that this was the last meeting for Dr Dena Coleman on the Schools group and Sally Livesey on the RC group. The SOC thanked them for their service to the Committee since its inception in 1999.

The meeting closed at 10.50am