

**To: All Members of the County Council
and of the Children, Schools and
Families Scrutiny Committee
All Chief Officers**

cc: CSF officers
All officers named for 'actions'
Committee section

**From: COUNTY SECRETARY'S
DEPARTMENT**

Ask for: David Roberts

Ext: 25562

Minicom: 6611

My Ref: DR/kp

Your Ref:

**CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY 18 JUNE 2003**

MINUTES

ATTENDANCE

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

County Councillors

T I Ambrose, D E Billing, N K Brook, P T J Channell, A D Dodd, B C Engel,
F Guest, D W Hills, D E Lloyd, T G M Kent (Chairman), B J Lamb,
M H O'Neill, S Quilty (Vice-Chairman), I Simpson, R H Smith, J Taunton.

Parent Representatives

P Cherry - North Area
C Broadhurst - East Area
T Douris - West Area
M W Thompson - South Area

Church Representative

*J Reynolds - Education Board of the Diocese of St Albans

Teacher Representatives

*P Brooks - National Association of Governors and Managers
*J Hayes - National Union of Teachers
*G Rowlands - Association of Teachers and Lecturers
*S Springett - National Association of Head Teachers

Health and Voluntary Sector Representatives

*L Wallace - Chairman of Hertfordshire Association for Young People (HAYB)

(* = for part of meeting)

Also present:

Executive Members

R I N Gordon (Children, Schools and Families)

*D Beatty (Resources)

P V Goggins, *M Green, S E Jones, L R Kercher, A Lee, S J Mills and E Singam.

CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Action

Membership Changes

Since the last meeting, Nigel Brook and David Lloyd had replaced Keith Gray and Roy Clements; Ian Simpson had filled the vacancy for a Liberal Democrat County Councillor; and Seamus Quilty had been appointed Vice-Chairman.

MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee held on 19 March 2003 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

PUBLIC PETITIONS (Standing Order C 11)

Mr Mark Greenberg presented a petition on behalf of local residents regarding the allocation of secondary school places for Year 6 children from Eastbury Farm JMI School.

John Evans

The Committee agreed to refer the petition to the Director of Children, Schools and Families for consideration and report to the Local Member (Roy Clements) and group spokesman.

Alan Sapsford

In addition the Committee requested that the Achievement Panel should review the action that is being taken to support achievement at Bushey Hall School.

Gill Jones
(Jackie Goodhall
to note)

QUESTIONS (Standing Order C 9 (4))

1. **Pat Cherry** asked the Executive Member, **Robert Gordon**, the following question:

'I note from this years budget that 2 million pounds is to be raised from Council tax to fund the new strategy for behaviour and achievement, please could you tell me how you propose to make parents' aware of this fact and also by increasing the awareness of parents' how do you perceive that partnerships can be formed between parents' and the LEA?'

Robert Gordon replied:

“Most of the developments funded by this additional money were planned to commence at the beginning of the 2003/2004 academic year. Preparation work and discussion with schools is now well underway.

Sites have been selected for additional Learning Support Units and Nurture Groups using indicators of need and achievement levels. Discussion is taking place with heads and governors to agree upon specific arrangements and dates for these new units to be opened. Recruitment is also taking place to strengthen the Behaviour Support Teams with additional educational psychologists, specialist teachers and mental health workers.

The initiative was featured in the most recent edition of Herts Direct, and thereby, brought to the notice of all Hertfordshire residents. A Steering Group will be established to support and monitor the development programme. This will include parent governor representation.

An integral part of the strategy will be to work with schools to help them develop their policies and procedures for promoting good behaviour and dealing with difficulties when they arise. This will be reflected in school policies which will be generally available to parents: through greater awareness of the issues by Governing Bodies, and through direct contact with individual parents whose children have emotional and/or behaviour difficulties.”

Pat Cherry asked the following supplementary question:

“How will I know when the Steering Group is to begin its work?”

Robert Gordon replied:

“I will make sure you are notified.”

2. **Tanis Kent** will ask the Executive Member, **Robert Gordon**, the following questions:

- (a) *“How far has the PFI bid to replace The Gables and possibly other children’s homes progressed and what exactly is the bid for?”*

[asked by Tanis Kent on behalf of the members who visit children’s homes group]

Robert Gordon replied:

“The PFI bid to replace the Gables is a part of the proposal to the Department of Health which has been approved subject to the successful submission of an Outline Business Case to The Treasury. The bid is to replace the Gables, to replace Stansfield and to provide an additional six children’s homes to replace accommodation currently procured out-county.

The other successful part of the bid is to replace one Family Support Centre and to refurbish the remaining ones. The unsuccessful part of the bid was to build hostel accommodation for high-support care leavers.

The timetable now is that we aim to make our OBC to a meeting of The Treasury group which considers these in December 2003 and to the Department of Health for initial scrutiny in October 2003. Before submission to the Treasury the OBC will be considered by the Children, Schools and Families Schools Resources Cabinet Panel which will make a recommendation to Cabinet.”

- (b)** *“When is the youth Service property self-financing scheme which was reported to the property panel in February and which has been around since 1991 actually going to happen?”*

Robert Gordon replied:

“Agreement of the Youth Service Property Programme was deferred by Cabinet pending the consideration of the services property needs. This will be determined in the light of the outcome of the youth theme under the aegis of Herts Together. It would be premature to decide which (if any) premises should be disposed of and in which to invest until this is clear which properties are appropriate to the future needs of the service.

Tanis Kent asked the following supplementary question:

“How long will this process take?”

Robert Gordon replied:

"I am conscious of the concerns that you express and I share them. However it is important that we conclude the property review before taking action. I am hopeful that the review should be concluded by the end of the year."

- (c) *"What is being done to meet the concerns of the Redbourne parents who attended the County Council meeting on 20 May 2003 and presented a petition?"*

Robert Gordon replied:

"At the time of the petition, seven Redbourne children had not secured a place at a ranked school. This figure should reduce as a consequence of the final rounds of continuing interest and appeals. A particular issue affecting Redbourne is that few of its children wish to attend their nearest school, the Astley Cooper. A general feature of the rules (as influenced by the national Code of Practice) is that children are advantaged in seeking their nearest school. County-wide very few children who rank their nearest school have failed to get a ranked school."

Several matters should assist the position next year. It appears that the cohort is smaller; the number of siblings obtaining places from outside the priority areas should decline; it is hoped that more children in Redbourne will rank the single-sex option in St Albans; and the inclusion of adopted national cycle routes as part of designated routes will bring the 'Nicky line' into play."

I am also continuing to pursue options for expanding capacity in Harpenden schools. One potential option at St George's could not be progressed this year when the Government failed to agree any VA major capital boost in Hertfordshire. This option remains of interest to both the LEA and the school."

Derek Hills asked the following supplementary question at the invitation of **Tanis Kent**:

"Will there ever be sufficient places in St Albans secondary schools?"

Robert Gordon replied:

"The position is complicated. Redbourne parents as a rule do not want their children to attend local schools and prefer schools in St Albans. It seems that the vast majority will get their school of preference and the changes introduced this year will help further. If St George's or other Harpenden schools can be increased in capacity then the situation will be improved further. I accept that parents go through a good deal of pain in waiting to see if their preferences can be met. With that in mind I am meeting a group of parents next week to clarify issues where I can."

3. **Cliff Broadhurst** asked the Executive Member, **Robert Gordon**, the following question:

"According to a recent study in seven English education authorities by the SCRE centre at the University of Glasgow for the DfES, more than a quarter of Primary School children say they have skipped school, without their parents' knowledge."

Could the Executive Member tell me:

1. *If Hertfordshire was one of the seven LEAs?*
2. *How the figures for primary truancy in Hertfordshire compare with the above study?*
3. *How recent is the Hertfordshire data and does he consider there is a problem here?*

The main reason the study respondents gave to researchers was bullying, with other reasons including boredom, dislike of particular teachers and wanting to avoid tests.

4. *Have the Authority done any recent studies on the causes of truancy in Hertfordshire schools (primary and secondary) and if so could he make the results available in an appropriate way?*

Robert Gordon replied:

1. *"Hertfordshire was not one of the seven LEAs considered in this study."*

2&3 *Unauthorised absence in Primary schools in Hertfordshire was 0.4% in the most recent DfES survey (2001/2002) which equalled the national average. Attendance data for 2002/2003 is being collated by the DfES and should be available in August. Any unauthorised absence is a problem, but there seems to be no evidence that this is a particular issue in Hertfordshire.*

4 *In addition to regular truancy sweeps across Hertfordshire, we are part of the DfES strategy to tackle truancy and took part in the national truancy sweeps project in November and December. (There was a further project in May for which data are being collated.) The data from the earlier project was as follows:*

- (a) Number of sweeps – 12*
- (b) Total number of pupils stopped – 176*
- (c) Number truanting – 8 (all of secondary age)*
- (d) Number of pupils with their parents – 132 (56 primary, 76 secondary)*
- (e) Number without their parents – 44*

The data confirms that parentally condoned truancy is an issue. Some of the reasons given include:

- We got up late*
- It's her birthday*
- Needs new trainers*
- Needs a haircut*
- Missed bus and it wasn't worth going in late.*

Parents are challenged about their child's absence, warned of the potential legal consequences and that their child's attendance will be monitored in future."

Cliff Broadhurst asked the following supplementary question:

"You have not answered question 2 and what are we doing about the problem of parents condoning truanting?"

Robert Gordon replied:

"I accept your point in relation to question 2, however officers have not seen the Glasgow work. We suspect it varies from the normal truancy figures and we are not sure that we have the equivalent data to enable a comparison. I find it extraordinary that parents condone truancy. However we do have a range of anti-truancy policies which are affective and truancy is not a marked problem here."

PART 1 ('OPEN') BUSINESS

1. SCRUTINY UPDATE AND WORK PROGRAMME REPORT 2003/2004

[Officer contact: Julia Harries, Committee Administrator
Tel: 01992 555563]

The Committee considered a report on progress since the last meeting on recommendations made to the Executive, action in response to petitions and the current status of live scrutiny issues together with the forward work programme for the Committee.

In connection with Item 11 – Provision for Children and Young People with Autistic Spectrum Disorder – the Director of Children, Schools and Families reported that the report the Committee had requested for wider distribution was not yet complete.

In connection with Item 5 – Operation CoachMan – it was noted that members of the Committee were welcome to attend the meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Committee on 21 October 2003 when this issues would be considered.

In connection with Item 10 – Review of the Scrutiny of Services for Disabled Children – it was agreed that the report of the on this issue should be submitted to the Special Needs Panel for consideration and following that be reported back to this Committee. This item would be added to the Committee's work programme.

Julia Harries
Nicola Hayden

Julia Harries

2. PARENT PARTNERSHIP SERVICE

[Officer contact: Chris Goodwin-King
Tel: 01992 555922]

The Committee considered a report describing the findings of a questionnaire sent to parents who had contacted the Parent Partnership service between 1999 and 2002. Two of the parents who had taken part in the survey, Mrs Hurd and Mrs Sherwood were present at the meeting, and in response to Members' questions, commented on their experience of using the parent partnership service and how they felt awareness of the service could be improved.

Conclusions:

The Committee thanked the parents for their input and noted in particular:

- very high levels of satisfaction with the service
- the concern that access to the service could be 'hit and miss'
- support for initiatives to further promote the services to parents especially through schools
- that the service has an important role in supporting school staff as well as parents.

The Committee recommended that the Director of Children, Schools and Families consider:

1. Further ways of promoting the service to schools;
2. Ways of extending the service to cover the whole range of Children, Schools and Families activity.

Ray Shostak
(Chris Goodwin-King)

3. SCRUTINY OF THE PLACEMENT NEEDS OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

[Officer contact: Cheryl Hopkins, Assistant Director of
Local Services Division
Tel: 01992 555916]

The Committee considered a report summarising the main issues covered in a report to the Corporate Parenting Panel on 7 May on the placement needs of looked after children.

The Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Panel, Peter Channell, commented to the Committee on the findings of the Panel.

Conclusions:

The Committee welcomed the helpful report and supported the drive to support more foster carers.

Cheryl Hopkins

4. SCRUTINY OF PAF TARGET C 18: Reducing the Number of Children in Public Care who are Reprimanded, Given a Final Warning or Convicted as a Proportion of all Children Receiving Similar Outcomes.

[Officer contact: Cheryl Hopkins, Assistant Director of Local Services Division
Tel: 01992 555916]

The Committee considered a report following the consideration of the Corporate Parenting Panel of a report on the numbers of looked after children who offend and the performance of the Council set against indicator C 18 – the ratio of the number of looked after children aged 10 to 17 years in trouble with the Police compared to children in the population as a whole.

The Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Panel, Peter Channell, commented to the Committee on the Panels' main findings.

Conclusions:

The Committee recognised that the statistics were very volatile due to the small numbers involved. However, the Committee welcomed the progress in this area and the positive results from the pilot scheme.

Cheryl Hopkins

The Committee requested that the Director of Children, Schools and Families provide statistics on this area of performance in the member bulletin on a 6 monthly basis.

Cheryl Hopkins
(Janet Briscoe)

5. "TRAFFIC LIGHT" MONITOR INDICATORS

[Officer contact: Richard Calvert
Tel: 01992 588818]

The Committee considered a report as background to the separately circulated quarterly "Traffic Light" Monitor report which was to be considered by the Resources Scrutiny Committee and had been circulated to all members of the Council. This enabled the Committee to monitor and scrutinise progress against key performance indicators arranged according to each Best Value promise.

In response to questions from members, the Director of Children, Schools and Families commented that this monitoring report would be the last one to refer to the "old" Children, Schools and Families targets. Future reports would relate to the new targets that have been agreed.

The Committee noted this report highlighted the following issues/ concerns raised by performance data:

- poor school attendance and attainment of looked after children
- health care of looked after children
- the slight decline in standards in KS 2 science
- the importance of assisting the needs of carers/the whole family when assessing the needs of children with special needs.

Conclusions:

The Committee requested that the Director of Children, Schools and Families report to members on work on school attendance for looked after children in the regular members bulletin.

Richard Calvert
(Janet Briscoe)

6. BUDGET MONITOR FOR CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES – APRIL 2002 TO FEBRUARY 2003

[Officer contact: Mike Robinson
Tel: 01992 555737]

The Committee noted the report relating to the Revenue and Capital Budgets.

The Director of Finance attended the Committee for this item and reported to the Committee that since the end of the period which was covered in this monitoring report the overall revenue position had worsened and details of this would appear in the next monitoring report.

Conclusions:

The Committee noted the theme of overspends on Transport and suggested that this might be an area for the Director of Children, Schools and Families to review.

Ray Shostak

7. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PREVENTATIVE STRATEGY

[Officer contact: Andrew Wellington,
Senior Development Manager
Tel: 01992 556980]

The Committee considered a report which outlined the background to the Hertfordshire Children and Young People's Preventative Strategy and progress in its development; set out Hertfordshire's position in relation to the requirements laid out in the Government's interim guidance on developing local preventative strategies; and outlined the main issued and planned developments for 2003/2004.

During discussion on the report a Member suggested that it would be helpful to have the local strategies identified by division if possible.

Andrew Wellington

The Committee recognised the tensions between the need to ensure consistency in quality and efficacy of the plans and the need to nurture the partnerships responsible for producing and delivering them. The Committee also recognised the need to ring fence funding for prevention to prevent it being swallowed up by crisis intervention work.

Conclusions:

The Committee noted the report and agreed to review progress in 12 months time.

Andrew Wellington
(Julia Harries)

8. UPDATE ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF QUADRANTS

[Officer contact: Cheryl Hopkins, Assistant Director of
Local Services Division
Tel: 01992 555916]

The Committee considered a report which gave up-to-date information on the outcome of quadrant scrutiny meetings and made proposals for future scrutiny of the effectiveness of quadrant workings.

The Committee recognised the continuing pressures on quadrant staff due to the shortage of staff. The Committee welcomed improvements already made as a result of this scrutiny.

Conclusions:

The Committee agreed to establish a Topic Group to continue scrutiny in this area and that there should be a rolling programme of updates on quadrant performance and annual visits.

Cheryl Hopkins

(Note: Topic Group size 7 (4:3) Membership R H Smith, D E Lloyd, D W Hills, N K Brook, L R Kercher, T G M Kent, and one vacancy)

Julia Harries

9. FUTURE OF LEAVESDEN GREEN, ALBAN WOOD INFANT AND ALBAN WOOD JUNIOR SCHOOLS

[Officer contact: Lindsay Martin, Senior Manger
- School Places
Tel: 01992 556718]

The Committee considered a report which provided the Committee with the opportunity to consider the future of Leavesden Green, Alban Wood Infant and Alban Wood Junior schools as part of the wider consultation on these proposals. It was noted that it was planned that the Cabinet would consider these issues at their meeting on 13 October 2003 when a decision would be taken on whether or not to publish statutory notices.

The consultation concerned the proposed closure of Leavesden Green primary school and the amalgamation of Alban Wood Infant and Junior schools.

A number of members of the public and a member of the school teaching staff were present for this item. At the invitation of the Chairman the member of the school teaching staff addressed the Committee setting out his arguments against the closure of the school.

In response to members questions the Director of Children, Schools and Families commented that this was the first of a number of school closure proposals that would be coming forward in the months ahead as the Council takes action to address the problem of falling school rolls and the level of surplus places in the North Watford area.

After a lengthy debate the following conclusions were reached:

Conclusions:

The Committee recognised the need to address the issue of falling rolls to support the overall standard of provision in Hertfordshire. The Committee also recognised the quality of education provided by Leavesden Green School.

Comments to Cabinet

The Committee recommended that the Cabinet should ensure that:

Lindsay Martin
(David Roberts)

1. The standard of educational provision in this area should be the most important consideration in the decision to close any school.
2. This possible closure is be looked at in the context of the wider area.
3. Consideration is be given to housing allocation in district plans as well as agreed developments
4. The effects on nursery education for three and four year olds is considered.

10. PROPOSALS BY WEST HERTS COLLEGE TO DISCONTINUE CERTAIN PROVISION ON THE COLLEGE'S DACORUM CAMPUS

This item was considered as a matter of urgency under section 100 B of the Local Government Act 1972 owing to the need to consider the college's proposals at this meeting of the Committee.

The Committee considered a report on the proposed changes to the provision of courses at the Dacorum Campus of West Herts College. To assist with the Committee's consideration of this issue the Committee welcomed to the meeting Andrew Bragg (Principal of West Herts College), Richard Boniface (Deputy Principal Academic of West Herts College), Roy Bain (Executive Director, Learning and Skills Council) and David Tofts (Learning and Skills Council).

The Chairman invited Andrew Bragg to outline and explain the College's proposals to the Committee. Following this Roy Bain explained to the Committee the Learning and Skills Council's reaction and response to the College's proposals.

Conclusions:

The Committee were deeply concerned about the changes being proposed by West Herts College. Although they accepted that the numbers of students involved were low the Committee felt that the total cessation of full time academic courses was a substantial change in provision and there should have been a full consultation process.

The Committee agreed to establish a topic group of members to engage with the College, Learning and Skills Council and schools and consider:

1. The implementation of the current proposals
2. The future provision for 16 to 19 year olds
3. The phased withdrawal of recreational courses

(Note: The size of the topic group was 9 (5:4) membership: F Guest, P T J Channell, D E Lloyd, J Taunton, R H Smith, D Billing, E Singam, one vacancy for a Liberal Democrat nominee and one vacancy for a parent or church representative.)

11. ITEM REFERRED TO THE COUNTY COUNCIL (Standing Order SC 7 (2))

The Opposition chose agenda item 10 West Herts College, to be reported to Council on 15 July 2003.

ANDREW LAYCOCK
County Secretary