



City of Westminster

Minutes

Meeting:

Committee of the Cabinet (Improving Education in Westminster)

Date of meeting:

16 December 2009 at 9.00am

Members:

Councillor Colin Barrow, Leader of the Council (Chairman)
Councillor Mark Page, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Co-opted Members:

Councillor Nickie Aiken
Councillor Lindsey Hall

Also Present:

Councillor Carolyn Keen

Apologies:

None

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1. MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

- 1.1 The Committee noted its membership and terms of reference and noted also that the two non-Cabinet Members (Councillors Aiken and Hall) are co-opted members of this Cabinet Committee.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 Councillor Aiken declared an interest as a parent of school children in Westminster and Councillor Hall declared an interest as a Governor of St George's School. The Leader declared that he had a child with SEN and was the Chairman of the National Autistic Society.

3. IMPROVING EDUCATION IN WESTMINSTER (report of Strategic Director, Children and Young People – agenda item 3)

- 3.1 Michael O'Connor, Strategic Director, Children & Young People, Angela Drizi, Operational Director for Schools and Learning and Chris Undrell, Head of Finance were present. Michael O'Connor introduced the report which outlined the Council's proposed response to the recommendations of the Westminster Education Commission and the actions required to improve education in Westminster. These were set out in a draft action plan. In addition to the actions proposed in response to each recommendation of the Education Commission, the action plan set out the views from the stakeholder workshops, Policy and Scrutiny and the Lead Member (ie the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People).
- 3.2 The Leader said that the report was the first formal response from the Council's Education team to the Education Commission's recommendations - some of which the Officers supported and some they did not. He added that the Committee was agnostic as to the mechanism for commissioning education services from now on - the overriding priority was to offer an improved service to the children being educated and, in this respect, the Leader queried whether all the externalisation options had yet been fully explored.
- 3.3 The Leader reiterated the Cabinet's position (agreed in November) that implementation of actions taking forward the Education Commission's recommendations must take place by September 2010 (ie the beginning of the next academic year) and he welcomed the aim, set out in the officers' response, to raise attainment in Westminster by 2012. In his view, what was needed, was a specific timetable for making progress towards this aim in order to maintain momentum and impetus.
- 3.4 Members worked their way through Appendix 1 to the report - the draft Action Plan - which addressed each of the Education Commission's recommendations, as follows:

Recommendation 1

Ensure that senior management from Children's Services make an annual visit to all schools to gain a greater understanding of the merits of individual schools.

The proposed action to achieve this was endorsed.

Recommendation 1.2

Each school's wider achievements should be celebrated in the publishing of a School Report Card and collated into an annual "Education in Westminster" report which should be offered to the Children and Young People's Policy and Scrutiny Committee for external scrutiny and analysis.

Councillor Aiken was anxious to be assured that, given that a national school report card was being developed by the DCSF, the Council's proposed pilot programme with one secondary and one primary was not simply going to be another level of bureaucracy. Angela Drizi said that schools would not be asked to duplicate information. After discussion it was agreed that the Council's pilot would commence with information from 2008 and then, as the DCSF's national scheme caught up with the Council, more could be added in.

Recommendation 2

Strongly encourage members to become Governors of Westminster schools in order to gain a greater understanding of schools and be enabled to input into their performance.

Councillor Aiken felt there should be an emphasis on encouraging people other than Councillors to become governors. The Leader said he wanted to see elected members reconnected with education through serving as governors and to improve communication on education to councillors who are not governors. Officers supported both Councillors and other community representatives being represented on Governing Bodies.

Recommendation 3

Review early years provision to determine how effectively it is targeting those most in need.

The Leader questioned how parents would feel the difference once the four proposed actions were implemented. He asked to see the "before" and "after" position as, currently, his concern was that the proposed actions were a little weak and the nature of the parenting service to be provided was not clear. Michael O' Connor said this would be brought back to the Committee together with all the links between the various parenting services and plans for the re-commissioning of services. Members also wanted more assurance around the ability of multi agency meetings in Children's Centres to identify all vulnerable

parents and their young children. The next report needs to specify how this will happen.

Recommendation 4.1

Work with schools on raising aspirations through extended services, to ensure that opportunities for young people are maximised.

Members understood that the headteacher of the Westminster Academy had claimed that the cost of offering extended services was some £250,000. Officers confirmed that the Academy was seen as an extended school and had received some £ 50,000 in recognition thereof. Quintin Kynaston School had received similar funding and provided extended facilities without additional funding and it was not clear what the Westminster Academy were asking for over and above what other schools were already receiving. The Leader said that the aim should be (by 2010) for every child to have the facility to stay at school to undertake homework prior to returning home. Furthermore parents must be made aware of where this facility exists. Councillor Hall asked for the positive effect of after-school clubs at primary level to be explored and for the involvement of the voluntary sector (eg retired teachers being asked in to mentor,etc) to be looked at.

Recommendation 4.2

Work with schools on raising aspirations through gifted and talented programmes, to ensure that opportunities for young people are maximised.

Councillor Aiken was concerned about the resourcing of this. She was not happy to approve the actions on the basis of the figures set out until she had seen an evaluation. Officers confirmed that an evaluation will come to the next meeting. Councillor Aiken also said that, as a parent, she had not been aware of the current gifted and talented programme. Given that the programme was about aspiration with an element of fostering the best, there needs to be more focus on it and efforts made to make it better known to parents. Councillor Hall felt that headteachers were the key to this action and to actions throughout the action plan. A summit with headteachers was proposed. The Leader felt that, in addition, Michael O'Connor and Angela Drizi should visit schools to take the schools through the Council's vision. He wanted more information on the gifted and talented programme and felt that the proposed response needed considerable strengthening before it could be approved by the Committee.

Recommendation 5.1

Ensure that pupils and their parents and carers have access to high quality, impartial guidance and advice to enable them to make appropriate choices.

Councillor Hall suggested introducing a pupil's report card also. The Leader was of the view that with the number of existing managers available, accurate schools information should already be available to access on the Web rather than this

activity being shown as an action for the future. Councillor Page said progress could be made by not seeking to make it too complex at the outset - if there was a demand, then more information could be added.

Recommendation 5.2

The Council should facilitate improved information sharing between primary, secondary, special schools and the pupil referral units at the point of transition.

The Leader considered the proposed actions to be "inputs". Angela Drizi said that the successful "outcome" is for schools to have sufficient information on each child. This will be made clear when the action plan is finalised. The aim is to have electronic transfer of information on pupils with accountability in the system so that the centre can challenge schools who are failing to do this. The Leader proposed that the pupils' final school report should be passed on to the pupils' next school. Overall the action plan needs more "outcomes".

Recommendation 6

Extend the educational opportunities for children with special educational needs by securing the future of outreach services delivered by special schools (and other specialist provision) and consider the development of a cross borough boarding and respite provision for those children with greatest need.

The recommendation of the Education Commission on boarding was proposed for rejection. There had been little support for it in the workshops and there was a view from parents of SEN pupils that the Commission had misunderstood their "needs" which were for respite facilities rather than boarding facilities. After discussion, the officers agreed to look at setting up a forum of relevant participants, eg parents of SEN children, Local Authorities and charities, such as the National Autistic Society, so that we get to the right answer on this issue.

Recommendation 7

Address the lack of provision for students with behavioural and emotional difficulties so that early support is offered and, where possible, children are able to succeed in a mainstream educational environment.

The Leader asked why the Behaviour Support team had been abolished. Angela Drizi said that this had happened because funding for behaviour support had been delegated to schools, at the request of the schools. This being the case, Members took the view that the schools need to be asked for details on what programmes they are running and the funding needs to be identified within the funding formulae. This is a vital service where early intervention in borderline cases is essential to prevent longer term problems. Officers were asked to strengthen the action points and indicate what support can be offered from the centre for identified behavioural support packages being run by schools.

Recommendation 8

Increase its capacity to share best practice and resources through the development of a collaborative inner London board and the amalgamation of its secondary education support functions with neighbouring councils where appropriate.

The Leader flagged up the risk of commissioning services from other London Boroughs, for example Hammersmith & Fulham, and then continuing to retain management in-house. Michael O'Connor said that the Council was now close to deciding which London Boroughs to work with to commission services and was looking wider than other boroughs, i.e. at the private market. This is to be spelt out in the action plan together with identified packages of services capable of being 'shared' with other boroughs and providers. A key part of further work is getting to grips with the options and issues around recommendation 8. The Leader considered that the Council should be agnostic about the method by which education is commissioned and that any issues around externalising the provision should be resolved as the next priority.

Recommendation 9

Have the right to strategic engagement with all schools if children's educational experiences are jeopardised and have the right to access information from academies to allow such interventions to be made.

The Leader felt that the action plan needed to be amended to reflect a more forthright approach to acknowledging failings in individual schools, although it was agreed that the position was different with Academies where the Council could only use persuasion in the hope of influencing outcomes.

Recommendation 10

Appoint a Cabinet Member for Education and invite the Director of Schools and Learning to attend the Strategic Executive Board in order to demonstrate the Council's commitment to educational improvements and to take forward these recommendations.

Action endorsed.

Recommendation 11

Parenting – all parties agree that this is a priority in Westminster and parenting is referred to in the Commissioner's report, albeit with no specific recommendation (apart from obliquely within the "targeting early years" recommendation)

Action endorsed.

Recommendation 12

Commissioners recommend that further attention is given and, if necessary, resources made available to enhance attainment in the key subject areas of English and Maths.

The Leader and Councillor Page expressed support for the proposed actions. There is an argument that setting such ambitious targets in the knowledge of forthcoming financial constraints is setting up the Council to fail. However, we want to show drive and aspiration. We intend to show that we want to make a step change in improving education and setting tough targets which we may miss by a little should not be considered to be failure.

- 3.5 The Committee having worked through the action plan, the Leader invited Mike More, the Chief Executive, to sum up.
- 3.6 Mike More highlighted the fundamental repositioning of education within the authority and the vision being created. The headteacher summit concept is important as there is a leadership challenge in delivering the vision and ambitions which will be spelt out in the Leader's Speech to the Council in March 2010. There are areas for more work, including Extended Schools, Gifted & Talented, Early Years, Collaboration.
- 3.7 A second meeting should take place in January to consider these areas and an updated action plan and to examine in more detail the individual performance of secondary schools and underperforming primary schools, including the role of the Council in supporting them to improve. A further meeting will be necessary in February when we are clear about the role of the LEA and the education team and the action plan can be signed off prior to the Leader's Speech in March. Michael O'Connor confirmed that more information on the cost of implementing the action plan would be submitted to the next meeting with the investment plan to be finally confirmed at the February meeting. Angela Drizi also promised an individual performance analysis for each secondary school and low performing primary schools for the January meeting.
- 3.8 **Resolved:**
 - 1. That the summary at paragraph 3.6/3.7 above be endorsed and the issues for action set out in the minutes be followed up
 - 2. That an end of year letter be drafted for stakeholders on progress to date and the programme going forward

4. **End of Meeting**

4.1 (NB: there had been an adjournment from 10.35 - 10.40 am)

The meeting ended at 11.20 am

Chairman

Date