

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2008 at County Hall, Northallerton.

PRESENT:-

County Councillor Heather Garnett in the Chair.

County Councillors:- Michelle Andrew, Andrew Backhouse, Margaret Ann de Courcey-Bayley (substitute for David Heather), Michael Heseltine, Caroline Seymour, Martin Smith, Jim Snowball, Melva Steckles and Tim Swales.

Members Other Than County Councillors:-

Jos Huddleston (Non-Conformist Church).

Suzanne Moore and Dr P Stowell (Parent Governor Representatives).

Maggie Allen (Voluntary Sector).

In attendance

Executive Member County Councillor John Watson.

Richmondshire District Council – Councillors Paul Cullern and Helen Grant and Penny Hillary (Scrutiny Support).

Officers:- Janet Bates, Stephanie Bratcher, Louise Dunn, David Eaton, Bernadette Jones, Phil Mellor, Ann O’Connell, Chris McMackin and Jane Wilkinson.

One member of the public.

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors David Heather and Chris Pearson.

COPIES OF ALL DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED ARE IN THE MINUTE BOOK

CHAIRMAN’S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Following their recent appointment to the Committee the Chairman welcomed and introduced Mrs Suzanne Morris and Dr Patricia Stowell the new parent governor representative members of the Committee. She also welcomed County Councillor Martin Smith to his first meeting and said that she looked forward to working with them in the future.

171. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the Meetings held on 2 and 8 May 2008 respectively having been printed and circulated be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

172. PUBLIC QUESTIONS OR STATEMENTS

The Chairman said that the Richmondshire District Councillors present at the meeting had indicated that they may want to ask questions in respect of agenda item 4.

RESOLVED

That during consideration of agenda item 4 Richmondshire District Councillors Paul Cullern and Helen Grant be invited to ask questions.

173. SCHOOL ADMISSION APPEALS CODE

CONSIDERED -

Covering report of the Head of Scrutiny and Corporate Performance on the new School Admission Appeals Code that came into force on 17 January 2008.

The Committee received a presentation from Phil Mellor that described the statutory background to the new Code and outlined the changes that had been made. He said that the main effect of the changes were to strengthen the statutory basis of the Code and to rule out ranked preferences for school admissions. The Committee was also provided with a range of statistical information on the number of primary and secondary admission appeals received in North Yorkshire since 2004. Members noted the large increase in the number of admission appeals submitted since 2006 and the affect this had on the percentage of appellants allocated their first preference. Details of the admission appeal timetable for 2008/09 in North Yorkshire were also disclosed. A copy of the presentation slides was placed in the Minute Book. By way of further background information Members of the Committee were also given a copy of the "2008/09 Guide For Parents – Admission To Secondary School" produced by the County Council. Members were informed that a copy of the Guide was given to all parents about to apply for a place for their child.

Bernadette Jones said that the changes introduced in the new Code had attracted a significant amount of press coverage. The discontinuation of the ranked preference system had resulted in fewer first preferences being granted and therefore greater numbers of parents being dissatisfied. This was reflected in the figures for North Yorkshire. However the figures for North Yorkshire compared favourably to those published nationally but she acknowledged that some schools in North Yorkshire were significantly oversubscribed.

The Committee was advised that the Government had the previous week issued a further new draft code in which the withdrawal of the ranked preference system remained unchanged. The new draft code however contained provisions that would for the first time allow schools to expand to meet demand. Bernadette Jones said that this was not the first time this had been proposed and she was sceptical whether it would now go ahead. The reality was that it would be very difficult to achieve and would have a significant affect on all schools which was why the proposals had been abandoned previously.

Members requested that they be supplied with statistical information for admission appeals held in North Yorkshire for both secondary and primary schools in 2008 when available. Members further requested that the information be provided on an individual school basis as this would enable them to see if parents perceptions of their being disparity in local areas was correct. Officers agreed to provide the information requested when available which would probably be sometime in September 2008.

Members asked a number of questions through which various issues were clarified including the following:

1. That many parents mistakenly believe that they can choose which school their child attends – the reality is that they can express a preference which is by no means guaranteed. Whilst aware of disparity between some schools at

a local level the Local Education Authority must abide by the legislation and can do nothing to alter parental choice.

2. The Local Education Authority acknowledges that the appeals route is becoming more complicated and litigious for parents. Support is therefore made available to parents in a number of different forms. The Guide to parents includes an explanation of the selective system and has been awarded the Plain English crystal mark. It directs parents to where they can get help and is available in different languages.
3. Following an admission appeal hearing, parents are sent a questionnaire on the appeal process. The results are then reported annually to the Executive. Over the course of the last four years recorded satisfaction levels have been very high at about 90%.
4. Appeal hearing results are communicated to parents in writing and include the reasons for the decision made. At the appeal hearing itself parents can be accompanied if they so wish.

Members noted the arrangements and thanked the Officers concerned for the information they had provided to the Committee.

RESOLVED –

That the information provided at the meeting be noted.

That statistical information on admission appeals held in North Yorkshire during 2008 for both secondary and primary schools on an individual school basis is sent to all Members of the Committee when available.

174. DELIVERING INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE TO SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES IN NORTH YORKSHIRE

CONSIDERED -

Report of the Corporate Director – Children and Young People’s Service on the decision by the County Council to outsource to Igen (Inspiring, Guiding and Enabling) the contract to deliver information, careers advice and guidance to schools and colleges in North Yorkshire with effect from 1 April 2008.

The Committee received a joint presentation from Louise Dunn and Ann O’Connell on Information Advice and Guidance to Schools and Colleges as part of Integrated Youth Support. A copy of the presentation slides together with the Spring 2008 edition of 14-19 North Yorkshire quarterly magazine setting out the activities provided by Igen were circulated at the meeting and copies placed in the Minute Book. The presentation described the scope of the contract, its aims and objectives and the indicators used to measure performance. The Committee was given assurances that Igen would continue to commit the same number of days for each school as had been the case previously. Transfer of the Contract was still in the transition stage and further progress reports could be made available to the Committee in due course.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Richmondshire District Councillor Paul Cullern said that at a meeting of the Richmond Youth Council young people had asked if the timing of careers interviews could be reviewed so that they took place before students chose their options. At present students had their interviews after they had chosen their options which many found unhelpful.

In response Members were advised that the timing of careers interviews was decided by individual schools. Any alteration of interview times would need to be agreed and planned on a joint basis between Igen and the school. The Igen Contract was responsible for the supply of the resource only and lacked the capacity for interviews to be delivered across the county at the same time. Louise Dunn said that she was happy to attend in person a meeting of the Richmondshire Youth Council to explain the position and would also respond in writing.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Cullern for bringing this matter to the attention of the Committee and said that she keen to promote further engagement with youth councils in the county. She said that on behalf of the Committee she would send a letter of thanks to Richmondshire Youth Council for bringing the timing of careers interviews to the attention of the Committee.

The Chairman said that the Committee would continue to keep a watching brief on the contract and would be pleased to receive further progress reports in due course.

RESOLVED –

That the information contained in the report and presented at the meeting be noted.

That a further progress report including performance management information on the Igen Contract be referred to the Committee in due course.

175. 14 – 19 EDUCATION REFORMS

CONSIDERED -

Briefing report of the Corporate Director – Children and Young People’s Service on the Government’s 14-19 Agenda.

Janet Bates introduced her report and gave a presentation that provided the Committee with the up to date position on the 11-19 educational reforms and the challenges they posed for the County Council and its partners. A copy of the presentation slides circulated at the meeting was placed in the Minute Book.

Members thanked Janet Bates for an interesting and informative presentation that brought home to them the enormity of the task ahead. They commented that it would be interesting to see if the new vocational qualifications would in the future receive equal recognition as traditional qualifications.

The Chairman said that the Committee was keen to develop a greater understanding of the topic and to monitor progress of the delivery plan. She agreed to speak with Janet Bates outside of the meeting about the Committee’s continued involvement.

The Chairman also said that she had been asked by the Executive Member to consider establishing a joint scrutiny task group with the Transport and Telecommunications Overview & Scrutiny Committee to look at transport issues arising from the educational reforms. Members of the Committee supported this suggestion and the Chairman said that she would report the outcome of her discussions with the Chairman of the Transport and Telecommunications Overview and Scrutiny Committee to the next meeting.

RESOLVED –

That Janet Bates be thanked for her briefing report and presentation the contents of which are noted.

176. WORK PROGRAMME

CONSIDERED -

Report of the Head of Scrutiny and Corporate Performance asking the Committee to note the information in the report and confirm, amend or add to the list of matters shown on the work programme (attached at Annex A).

A Member said that she thought that a presentation on the new Library Strategy "New Look, No Shush" consultation should be added to the Committee's forward Work Programme. Members supported her suggestion.

The Scrutiny Support officer confirmed that monitoring reports on 14-19 Education Reforms and Delivering Information, Advice and Guidance to Schools and Colleges in North Yorkshire as agreed earlier in the meeting would be incorporated into the Committee's Work Programme. She also confirmed that a report on issues involving drugs and alcohol would be included on the agenda for the next meeting and that Members would receive an update on the scrutiny review "A Sporting Chance" at the next mid-cycle briefing meeting.

RESOLVED –

That the information contained in the report is noted and approved and the matters referred to in earlier agenda items are incorporated into the Committee's Work Programme.

JW/ALJ