

# STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE

## MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 5 OCTOBER 2009

**Councillors:** Irene Neill (*Chairman*) (P), Ellen Crumly (P), David Holtby (AP), Mollie Lock (P), Alan Macro (*Vice-Chairman*) (P), Ieuan Tuck (P).

**Also present:** Councillor Brian Bedwell, Councillor Barbara Alexander, Andy Tubbs (Chief Advisor for School Improvement), Sam Shepherd (Economic Development Officer), Andrew Breavington (School Improvement Advisor), Chris Bryan (National Challenge Advisor), Alan Bartlett (School Improvement Partners), Michael Wheale (Executive Headteacher, John O'Gaunt School), Paul Dick (Executive Headteacher, Trinity School and Interim Executive Board Chairman for Winchcombe Primary School), Linda Valenti (Executive Headteacher, John Rankin Junior School), Charlotte Wilson (Associate Headteacher, Trinity School), Neil Spurdell (Headteacher, John O'Gaunt School) and one member of the press.

### PART I

#### 11. APOLOGIES.

An apology for inability to attend the meeting was received on behalf of Councillor David Holtby.

#### 12. MINUTES.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> July 2009 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**RESOLVED** that Sam Shepherd would follow up the availability of the Skills and Enterprise Action Plan.

#### 13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

There were no declarations of interest received.

#### 14. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S TRUST BRIEF.

Andy Tubbs outlined that it was a statutory requirement for the Council to lead a partnership of organisations/agencies working with children and their families through a Children and Young People's Trust. Andy Tubbs indicated that all statutory partners had a duty to co-operate through better information sharing, joined-up working, shared planning/commissioning of services and effective early intervention.

Andy Tubbs stated that the last Joint Area Review (December 07) judged West Berkshire to be providing 'good' services and when this was last updated in the 2008 Annual Performance Assessment by OFSTED (December 2008), services were again rated as 'good' against all categories.

The Children and Young People's Plan covered 2008-11 and was updated annually to guide aims, priorities and action against all five every child matters outcome areas. Andy Tubbs flagged up that planning was guided by two overarching themes:

- reducing inequalities including narrowing the gap between the lowest achievers and the average
- ensuring that we set high expectations for all against our already high baseline.

## **15. SCHOOLS' STANDARDS REVIEW**

Andy Tubbs gave an overview of the criteria for schools in National Challenge which were, those judged against the percentage of pupils gaining five or more GCSE grades at A\*-C including English and maths. National Challenge started in June 2007 when the Department of Children Schools and Families announced a new floor target of 30% minimum. Andy Tubbs indicated there were two West Berkshire schools in National Challenge (John O'Gaunt and Trinity).

Andy Tubbs highlighted the criteria for schools in Special Measures which were, those judged by OFSTED as not providing an acceptable standard of education against a range of measures in the Framework for School Inspection. Andy Tubbs indicated there were two West Berkshire schools in Special Measures (John Rankin Junior and Deanefield).

Andy Tubbs drew attention to the fact that there were rising expectations on school performance and an equally increasing number of demands on schools to balance in-class time and overall school management. The Council had provided ongoing support for schools in many different forms but once a school is in National Challenge or Special Measures, powers the Council could enact include:

- Issuing a formal Warning Notice to the governing body
- Placing additional governors on the governing body
- Replacing the governing body with an Interim Executive Board
- Withdrawal of the delegated budget
- Requiring a school to federate with a successful school
- Placing an Executive head teacher in the school to strengthen leadership
- Closure of the school and replacement with a Trust School or an Academy.

Andy Tubbs highlighted that the most important factors in a successful school were strong leadership, good governance and consistently high quality of teaching and learning. Andy Tubbs indicated that weaknesses in leadership had been, among other factors, a prime cause of underperformance in struggling West Berkshire schools. Andy Tubbs drew attention to the high percentages seen in categorising West Berkshire schools and explained that comparison with similar local authorities might be misleading because the number of school in West Berkshire were comparatively low.

Councillor Barbara Alexander added to the presentation by saying that poor results might be explained by certain cohorts. Councillor Barbara Alexander flagged up that parental concern could influence the quality of students that local authority schools receive and that the press could be responsible for influencing parental confidence. Councillor Barbara Alexander discussed the Standards and Effectiveness Panel and suggested it be given more powers to intervene in a school earlier (i.e. before they are placed in a category) and revising the Panel's Terms of Reference might assist this. Councillor Irene Neill supported Councillor Barbara Alexander's comments.

Alan Bartlett said that a School Improvement Partner only had limited time to work with a school to enact improvement and this could at times come too late to assist certain cohorts. Chris Bryan welcomed the additional funding West Berkshire Council had made available over and above government funding to support struggling schools.

## STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE – 5 OCTOBER 2009 – MINUTES

Michael Wheale indicated that strong leadership from the Head Teacher had the biggest impact, particularly because it models for other staff, directs budgets and therefore maintains good teaching staff. Paul Dick suggested that the Council's intervention powers could be used earlier to prevent schools being categorised and advocated Interim Executive Boards as a method. Paul Dick stated that at times too many people could be involved in school improvement.

Linda Valenti said school improvement should focus on what the school did well and build on the strengths through a tailored approach. School Improvement Partners were said to be a vital part of the picture.

Andrew Breavington raised the need to grow local leaders in West Berkshire schools so succession planning was more successful.

Councillor Irene Neill queried the experience of Executive Head Teachers. Linda Valenti said the partnership model worked well but added that teaming up with other schools should not just be over a problem and could be encouraged on an ongoing basis. Chris Bryan agreed that it was important that schools did not become isolated and added that links with universities were crucial for attracting graduates. Michael Wheale indicated that the Executive Head Teacher approach did not work too well in John O'Gaunt as there was a lack of clarity on who held decision making power. Michael added that affordable levels of housing were a significant factor in securing good teachers in this area.

Councillor Irene Neill asked what the impact of the Intensifying Support Programme had been. Andy Tubbs stated that there had been some success in some schools in literacy and numeracy but the picture was complicated and depended on the level of commitment.

Councillor Alan Macro queried how the successful school Head Teachers support the less successful sufficiently, whilst maintaining standards in their own schools. Paul Dick outlined that it was about keeping an eye on the ball but that a Head Teachers own performance could improve as a result of expanding their experience. Alan Bartlett drew attention to 'Gaining Ground' an initiative that joined schools up nationally and was seeing Denefield join with a school in Cirencester.

Irene Neill asked Andy Tubbs how soon he would be alerted to a school in trouble and what would help make intervention more timely. Andy Tubbs mentioned that the Council had introduced a new risk assessment procedure so an early warning system should be in place and following this a 'formal advise notice' could be issued to governors to set out concerns ahead of any formal warnings.

Linda Valenti made a plea that interventions of any kind be managed carefully with staff to prevent morale from deteriorating.

Councillor Irene Neill thanked all the officers and guests for attending the meeting and suggested that the Committee met on another day to allow time to consider their recommendations.

Officers and guests departed.

**RESOLVED** that the Committee would meet on the evening (6pm) of 11<sup>th</sup> November to consider their recommendations.

### 16. **WORK PROGRAMME 2009/10.**

The Committee discussed item OSMC/09/24 (improved use of public transport) and agreed they would like to look at this between October 2009 and January 2010 in a 'task group' environment. Item OSMC/09/41 (commissioning education and training

## STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE – 5 OCTOBER 2009 – MINUTES

services for 16-19 year olds) was discussed and considered for a piece of work in the Committee's January meeting. The Committee also wished to consider OSMC/09/42 (supporting small schools) between its January and April meetings in a 'task group' environment.

**RESOLVED that** the Work Programme would be amended to consider OSMC/09/24 (improved use of public transport) in a task group environment between October 2009 and January 2010. Item OSMC/09/41 (commissioning education and training services for 16-19 year olds) would be considered in January 2010. OSMC/09/42 (supporting small schools) would be considered between January and April 2010 in a task group environment.

### FUTURE MEETINGS

The Committee agreed to meet at 6pm on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2009 to consider the evidence from this meeting and make their recommendations around school performance. The January meeting was moved from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> January 2010.

*(The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 8.45pm)*

**CHAIRMAN** .....

**Date of Signature:** .....