

Schools' Workforce Joint Consultative Panel

A meeting of the Schools' Workforce Joint Consultative Panel was held on Tuesday 12 July 2011

Present: David Campbell, Councillor Carol Clark, Sue Foreman, Councillor Ken Lupton, Bob Lupton, Councillor Ann McCoy, John Morgan, Stephen Payne, Lester Russell and Hannah Walter

Officers: Lynda Brown, Eric Jewitt (CESC), Michael Henderson (LD), Paul Hiser and Derek MacDonald (R)

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Hans Ruysenaars, Cllr Steve Nelson, Cllr Mick Eddy, Cllr Ross Patterson, Elaine Kay, Ian McKenzie and Cllr Andrew Sherris

SWJC 1 /11 Appointment of Chairman

AGREED that Hans Ruysenaars be appointed Chairman for the 2011/12 Municipal year.

As the newly appointed Chairman had submitted his apologies for this meeting the Panel took nomination for vice chairman.

SWJC 2/11 Appointment of Vice Chairman

AGREED that Councillor Mrs Ann McCoy be appointed vice Chairman for the 2011/12 Municipal year.

Councillor Mr McCoy took the Chair for the meeting.

SWJC 3/11 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 March 2011 were agreed as a correct record.

SWJC 4/11 Staffing Issues

In response to a request at the Panel's previous meeting Members were provided with copies of teaching supply costs for 2009/10 and 2010/11.

It was explained that although there were variances from one year to the next in some schools, the overall budget remained fairly static at around £3 million.

It was noted that high supply costs didn't necessarily indicate particular problems with the school.

The Panel asked that the figures also be provided in percentage terms and be e mailed to all Panel members as well as being included on the next agenda. It was reiterated that it was not possible to extract payment totals associated with cover for sick leave only, and the figures presented included all forms of absence cover. The Chair indicated that if the Panel had any concerns, suggested by the figures, about particular schools, then it may be possible to investigate further.

The Panel asked that figures provided be rounded up or down.

Officers explained that the Health and Wellbeing Group had met and would be attempting to determine the level of staff absence in each school and the reasons for that, whilst trying to identify any problems.

Reference was made to stress audits and it was noted that these would be introduced at schools and would be discussed at governing bodies meetings during the autumn term.

Noted that absence management training had been arranged and details of the courses would be distributed to schools.

The Panel discussed Head teacher stress and agreed that it was a fundamental responsibility of the Chair of a school's board of governors to monitor the work/life balance of their Head teacher. This was supported within the Workforce Agreement. Processes needed to be in place to ensure such monitoring took place, however there were concerns that this was not always the case.

It was agreed that a reminder relating to each boards responsibility to the Head teacher, together with other general reminders would be placed on governing boards' agendas.

AGREED that information be received, the discussion be noted and necessary actions followed up.

SWJC 5/11 Health and Safety

Members were reminded that the Panel had previously asked if consideration could be given to preparing a Health and Safety Checklist. It was explained that this would be available shortly and would be rolled out to schools.

Noted that further advice to raise schools workforce awareness of asbestos containing materials had been provided to school governors

It was noted that long established educational visits guidance (HASPEV) and accompanying supplements, totalling some 150 pages, had been revised by the DOE replaced by 8 pages of concise guidance.

In Stockton, all Chairs of Governing bodies had been advised that schools would continue to have all residential, domestic and foreign educational visits appraised and challenged by the Health and Safety team to ensure the adequacy of the control measure to safeguard students and the school staff. Once assurance was provided, visits would be 'endorsed' on behalf of the LA. Any schools not attaining the necessary standard would be advised not to proceed until suitable and sufficient control measures were established.

Consultation would take place during the autumn term to review this arrangement.

Educational day visits, would continue to be risk assessed by schools using a common sense approach to risk management.

The new Educational Visits Guidance also provided clarity on the driving of school minibuses, which was previously subject of some ambiguity and confusion.

It was noted that safeguarding during school visits had recently been scrutinised by Ofsted inspectors.

Workforce representatives recognised the strong support schools received from the Council's Health and Safety Unit.

AGREED that the information be received and discussion noted.

SWJC 6/11 Schools' Capital Investment

The Panel received a general update relating to Capital Investment in schools.

It was explained that the Council's Cabinet had received a report in June which had provided details of the James Review. The Review had recommended a fundamental change in how schools' capital was administered with significant implications for Local Authorities as well as DfE, Partnerships for Schools, Diocese and Schools.

The Government had not formally responded to the Review and there had been no indication of funding levels. Consequently, the Council could not, at this stage, finalise its strategy.

In the meantime officers from Education, Technical Services and Finance met regularly to review the situation and analyse information to ensure nothing was missed.

It was noted that the situation, in terms of roles, was not consistent throughout the borough with pockets of rising numbers and pockets of falling numbers

With regard to the free school application in Ingleby Barwick it was explained that it had slipped from the pilot to the second round. Supporters of the school would be interviewed in August and were likely to be advised of the outcome in September.

Another group had come forward promoting a Free School for SEN provision. Very little information was known and after considerable efforts by officers a meeting had been arranged to discuss the matter with the group, in August.

The Panel went on to discuss All Saints application to be an Academy. The Council had indicated that it would wish to discuss this with All Saints; however, the Council's position would be to retain All Saints within the Stockton Family of Schools. Workforce representatives explained that they had met with the Head teacher of All Saints and had indicated that they were against the change to an Academy.

The Panel noted that the reasoning behind the move may be centred around the increased freedom the school would enjoy as an Academy, in comparison to the current position as a PFI school, which was quite limiting.

It was explained that the school had also indicated that it would wish to create a 6th Form. Members noted that, currently, it could only apply to be an Academy 11 – 16 year olds and any application to be a 6th Form would need to be applied for later.

The Panel felt that this move would only benefit All Saints and would have a severely negative affect on the 6th form education available to all students in the Borough, particularly with regard to breadth of curriculum. It was agreed that the current collective provision had served students best.

Panel Members received updates on the two Academies. Issues around capital funding were still to be resolved. It was hoped that Myplace would be part of the Northshore site but a response on this from Government was awaited. When funding was known it would be important to move quickly.

AGREED that the information be received and the debate noted.

SWJC 7/11 Government Policy

The Panel discussed existing and emerging Government Policy.

Concern was expressed that the English Baccalaureate would not include Religious Studies. It was noted that Religious Studies was one of the most popular humanities subjects with students.

A large number of secondary schools throughout the country were becoming Academies for financial reasons. Governing Bodies in Stockton may consider it but it was hoped any move to be an academy would be done responsibly, to reduce any effect on other schools.

NASUWT and NUT representatives reiterated their opposition to Academies.

The Panel heard of proposals to relax CRB regulations and the employment of staff working with children. The Panel was concerned over safeguarding issues but noted that schools could check records and make an informed decision.

The Education Bill was going through the Committee stages and was likely to receive Royal Assent in September/ October

The Panel discussed pensions and the recent industrial action.

AGREED that discussion be noted.

SWJC 8/11 Any Other Business

Some of the workforce representatives referred to the procedure that had been followed with regard to consulting with Unions on certain policies. Recently, the circumstances of the consultation process had resulted in reps being unable to respond and the policies had been brought in without, what the representatives considered, had been meaningful consultation. It was suggested that problems with one of the policies could have been avoided if consultation had been carried out in a different way.

Officers were asked to liaise with representatives to establish the specific problems and agree a way forward.

The Panel noted that Sue Foreman, who had been a longstanding member and previous Chairman of the Panel, would be retiring soon and this was her last meeting. The Panel thanked Sue for her invaluable contributions and wished her the best for the future.

SWJC 9/11 Work Programme

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