MINUTES of the meeting of the EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE held at 10.00am on 29 March 2012 at County Hall, Kingston upon Thames.

These minutes are subject to confirmation by the Select Committee at its meeting on 17 May 2012.

Members:

* Dorothy Ross-Tomlin (Chairman)
* Denise Turner-Stewart (Vice-Chairman)
* Nigel Cooper
* Carol Coleman
* Clare Curran
A Peter Lambell
* Andrew Povey
* Diana Smith
* Keith Taylor
* Chris Townsend
A Marsha Moseley
A Linda Kemeny

Ex officio Members:

A Mrs Lavinia Sealy (Chairman of the Council)
A Mr David Munro (Vice-Chairman of the Council)

Co-opted Members:

* Derek Holbird
A Mary Reynolds
A Sean Whetstone
* Cecile White
A Duncan Hewson

Substitute Members:

* Chris Norman
* Colin Taylor
* Simon Parr

In attendance:

* Tim Hall, Cabinet Member for Children and Learning
* Kay Hammond, Cabinet Member for Community Safety

* = Present for all of the meeting
A = Apologies
PART 1

IN PUBLIC

18/12 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS [Item 1]

Apologies for absence were received from Peter Lambell, Marsha Moseley, Linda Kemeny and Mary Reynolds. Colin Taylor attended as a substitute for Peter Lambell, Chris Norman attended as a substitute for Linda Kemeny and Simon Parr attended as a substitute for Mary Reynolds. Duncan Hewson gave apologies for the meeting.

19/12 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING: 19 January 2012 [Item 2a] & 1 February 2012 [Item 2b]

The minutes were agreed as a true record of the previous meeting.

20/12 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS [Item 3]

The following Members have stated a personal declaration of interest for all items on account of being School Governors.

Nigel Cooper – Chandlers Field Primary School
Clare Curran – Therfield School and Eastwick Infant School
Duncan Hewson – Holy Trinity C of E School
Peter Lambell – Brooklands School
Dorothy Ross-Tomlin (Chairman) – Langshott School
Keith Taylor – St Bedes Junior School
Sean Whetstone – Polesden Lacey Infant School
Cecile White – Oatlands School

Dorothy Ross-Tomlin is on the management committee of a short-stay school.

21/12 QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS [Item 4]

No questions were received.

22/12 RESPONSE FROM THE CABINET TO ISSUES REFERRED BY THE SELECT COMMITTEE [Item 5]

None

23/12 RECOMMENDATION TRACKER AND FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME [Item 6]

- Members suggested the future funding of new schools consultation as an item to add to the work programme.
- The committee reiterated that it wanted to review the 2012-2017 Children and Young peoples strategy and as soon as possible agree a date for it to come to committee.
- It was agreed to track the impact of the new Ofsted framework for inspecting schools and include this on the work programme.
24/12 SURREY OUTDOOR LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT [Item 7]

Declarations of Interest:

None

Witnesses:

Toby Wells, Deputy Head, Youth Support Service
Martin Cusselle, Head of Surrey Outdoor Learning & Development
Kay Hammond, Cabinet Member for Community Safety

Key Points Raised During the Discussion:

1. Toby Wells introduced the item and placed the Surrey Outdoor Learning and Development (SOLD) service within the context of the wider changes to the Youth Support Service (YSS). Increasing participation by young people in the county in education, training and employment, safeguarding the future of services and meeting the objectives in medium term financial plan (MTFP), are the key drivers behind this paper.

2. The committee then viewed a short video relating to the activities offered by SOLD.

3. Martin Cusselle then took the committee through a presentation on SOLD (attached to these minutes as appendix 1). The service operates facilities at High Ashurst (Box Hill), Henley Fort (Guildford), Thames Young Mariners (out of county in Ham) and the Angel Blue canal boat. The service has utilised lottery funding to upgrade and improve services on some of the sites. SOLD offer curriculum accredited learning opportunities, and challenges young people to manage risk and to develop leadership skills. The service has avoided standardising the sites and has ensured each has a different offer that can cater to a range of user groups. A strength has been the investment in staff, which has allowed for an enthusiastic and capable team to develop. The service works with a range of groups such as schools, disability groups, young people not in education employment or training (NEETs), corporate groups and voluntary organisations such as Scouts and cadets. SOLD will be cost neutral in 4 years time, as the money received from the county will be reduced to zero at the end of this period. SOLD are in a strong financial position, as of the end of December 2011 the value of bookings for 2012/13 was £500,000 and the service expects this to exceed £700,000 by April 2012. Toby Wells concluded the presentation by underlining that the key challenge to the service is to grow the business, whilst ensuring it continues to deliver public benefit to Surrey’s vulnerable young people. The YSS is deliberating a number of potential operating models for the future of SOLD and will bring them back in a paper for the October 2012 Select Committee. The YSS is keen on engaging members over the summer to shape the potential recommendations.

4. The Chairman praised the service and urged members to visit one of the sites to witness the activities that take place. The Cabinet Member for Community Safety stated that SOLD was a
great asset to Surrey and its youth engagement focus follows the ethos of youth diversion to combat young people becoming NEETs.

5. Members inquired about how the service balances work with young people and hosting corporate events to generate income. Witnesses replied that no corporate work is allowed to take place at any of the sites during the key April to August period, the peak period for work with young people. The corporate manager has to cross-reference any potential bookings with the pipeline of youth related bookings, the latter taking priority. The aim of providing corporate events was to provide income during the slack Autumn and Winter periods. Witnesses also replied that they have market tested their corporate offer and rather than target the high level business executives they have specialised on courses and events for new graduates and new starters entering work for the first time. An example of this focus was work with the South Coast Ambulance Service to support the induction of new graduates. Witnesses pointed to the recent experience of SOLD in developing the Surrey Future Jobs programme, preparing young adults for the world of work.

6. In relation to the history and heritage aspects of Henley Fort members asked whether SOLD had considered marketing the centre to local history societies and retirement groups. Witnesses responded that they do get interest from that sector and want to maximise the potential of the site to increase multi generational work. Henley Fort has already hosted heritage days and has been the recipient of gifts and loans of artefacts.

7. Members posed the question whether other activities can be provided at sites across the Surrey, with particular reference to the wide portfolio of land and assets owned by the authority. Members also asked how SOLD compares to other local authorities across the country. Witnesses replied that SOLD has an outreach team that visits schools as part of the curriculum mainly working with years 5 and 6. There is unused capacity at the 3 existing sites, which can be brought into use through growing the staffing capacity. In relation to the rest of the country Surrey is in a healthy position. Other authorities are closing and standardising services, which reduces the scope of the business on offer.

8. Members wanted to see a business plan that pulls together the responses and comments made during the committee. The Deputy Head of Service for YSS said that this business plan will be created through the engagement process and as part of the report on the future of SOLD. This will be presented at the October 2012 Select Committee.

9. Members wanted to know about the services used by vulnerable, learning disabled and Looked After Children (LAC). The Head of SOLD responded that the service works with some looked after children through schools and independent placements on summer courses such as the National Citizenship programme. SOLD is heavily specialised in working with disabled and learning disabled children as they are an integral part of the client base.

10. Members inquired about how the service is marketed to schools. Witnesses responded that an important form of contact was from
direct marketing to schools itself. SOLD has commissioned literature that speaks schools' language to highlight the benefits of working with SOLD. Another example of marketing was hosting inductions for new teachers at one of the sites to demonstrate the range of activities and learning opportunities that are on offer. The Cabinet Member for Community Safety concluded by highlighting that other outdoor learning services are available in the County, such as the Greenspace Partnership. It is healthy to have active competition, which can improve the standard on offer to young residents.

Actions/Further Information to be Provided:

- Scrutiny Officers to explore the possibility of holding a select committee meeting at Henley Fort during September / October 2012

Recommendations:

a) That the committee notes the content of the report and commends the officers for the level of enthusiasm that they bring to their work.

b) That officers undertake a more detailed appraisal of the options for the development of SOLD, and produce a business plan, for scrutiny in advance of a paper being presented to Cabinet in December 2012.

Select Committee Next Steps:

None.

25/12 REPORT OF THE CHAMPIONING PARENTS TASK GROUP [Item 8]

Declarations of Interest:

None

Witnesses:

Tim Hall, Cabinet Member for Children and Learning
Peter-John Wilkinson, Assistant Director for Schools and Learning
Jerry Oddie, Chair of the Secondary Phase Council

Key Points Raised During the Discussion:

1. The Chairman introduced the report and highlighted the key recommendations to Members. The Chairman also thanked the Task Group, for their contribution over the past 5 months, and officers for the support they provided in producing the report.

2. The Task Group discovered that what the Council is doing well it can do better, and the report endorses many of the findings in the Public Value Report (PVR). The Task Group report makes 36 recommendations to cabinet and has been circulated to senior officers. The Secretary of State for Education has expressed interest in the work of the group, which will send him a letter
outlining the findings. The Chairman gave examples of some of the recommendations such as; a need for more of the available information to reach parents; and that there needs to be consistency in the use of pupil premium across schools. The Task Group wanted to support parents but also recognised that parents have responsibilities as well.

3. Members discussed the importance of taking the parent’s perspective, in addition to raising standards, and asked how the Task group approached this subject. The Chairman and members of the Task Group replied that there had been extensive debate over what constitutes a good school. Similar to the PVR the Task Group recognised that being a good school is broader than the Ofsted definition. However this was considered the best measure available for enunciating the benchmark the Task Group wanted all schools in Surrey to reach.

4. Members registered concerns over the reference to empowering parents, on page 3 of the report, which was considered a very powerful statement. Members believed that an issue was that some parents were very empowered against those who had difficulties in engaging with and accessing services. It was agreed to amend this reference and that the aspiration should be for all parents to have access to high quality of information in relation to services for their children. The Assistant Director for Schools and Learning highlighted the enormous complexities of the range of admissions policies and systems across Surrey’s schools. Needs of parents vary across Surrey and Members raised concerns over the increasing use of the internet in accessing information on schools and how parents who were not IT literate would suffer as a result.

5. Members then discussed the issues concerning recommendation 8 and the Admissions Code of Practice. The Cabinet Member for Children and Learning stated that an issue was the mixed market in admission that saw some schools encouraging difficult children to enter into home schooling thus leaving the main mainstream system. The Cabinet Member for Children and Learning believed that the real issue was both in-term and in-year admissions which the authority has much less leverage over, delays of months in placing looked after children was cited as evidence. The Chairman supported this pointing to examples referred to by the Head of Virtual Schools who had heard of a lot of excuses from schools why they could not admit LAC. The committee agreed to amend recommendation 8 to reflect this issue.

6. Members discussed Home School Link Workers and raised concerns over their financing and management as, Members were keen on having a consistent service across Surrey’s schools. The Assistant Director for Schools and Learning informed the committee that the roles came into existence through government funding. Home School Link Workers were funded through extended services by schools, however this has now been mainstreamed into school’s budgets. The decision on funding home school link workers rests with the Schools Forum or the individual schools themselves.

7. Members discussed inconsistencies around the pupil premium and how Surrey ensures that all schools target it appropriately and effectively. The Cabinet Member for Children and Learning
informed the committee that all schools had to provide a yearly return to central government on how they have spent the additional money. The committee might want to analyse this at a future meeting.

8. The Assistant Director for Schools and Learning raised concerns over the campaigns currently underway to create free schools in the county. The proposed schools are in places where there is not additional need, whilst other areas of the county do require increased school capacity yet have not been the focus of free school initiatives. The Cabinet Member for Children and Learning stated that the service is happy to engage with potential schools to focus on where they could provide the most gain to the county, however some groups have not entered into any dialogue with the county whatsoever. The Assistant Director referred to the excellent relations with academies in Surrey and how cooperation has assisted in improving standards. Members do not want to have an antagonistic relationship with free schools and want to identify areas of common interest.

9. Members discussed recommendations 34 and 35. The Chairman asked all present to raise it at their individual groups to encourage more Members to make links with local schools. Members raised the point that it was important to understand whether parents were engaging with councillors in their general role or specifically on issues pertaining to schools and parenting.

10. The committee discussed the issues around the new Ofsted framework and the Chair of the secondary phase council informed Members about how this was affecting the morale of head teachers across both the county and nationally. The Chairman agreed that this was an important issue and will be discussed further at an upcoming meeting. It has been placed on the committee’s work programme.

11. The Chairman concluded the item by thanking all Members, witnesses and officers who supported the task group for their contributions.

**Actions/Further Information to be Provided:**

- Add in witnesses to the appendix to ensure that all contributions are recognised.

**Recommendations:**

a) That the task group takes on board the feedback provided by the committee and makes the agreed changes to the report prior to presentation at cabinet in April.

**Select Committee Next Steps:**

None.
26/12  DATE OF NEXT MEETING [Item 9]

Noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Thursday 17 May 2012 at 10.00am.

[Meeting ended: 12.27pm]

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Chairman