

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the **Developing Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee** held at the County Hall, Durham on **Tuesday 4 November 2008** at **10.00 a.m.**

PRESENT:-

Councillor C Potts in the Chair

Members:

Councillors Armstrong, J Bailey, A Bainbridge, B Bainbridge, Blakey, P Brookes, M Dixon, Holroyd, Lethbridge, Maslin, E Paylor, Savory, J Shiell, Simmons, Stradling, K Thompson, and B Wilson.

Other Members:

Councillors Bleasdale, Harrison, Martin, Jopling, E Paylor, Taylor, L Thomson, Turner, Wilkes, Wilkinson, Wright, and Vasey.

Co-opted Members:

Mr A Barker, Mrs O Brown, Mr R Pye, and Mrs A Tallentire.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor G Huntington, Ms L Bailey, Mr P Mackie, and Councillor Mrs M Robinson.

A1 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Blakey declared an interest in this item due to her ward area having a vested interest in the criteria for Durham Johnston School.

A2 Items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties

There were no items from co-opted members.

A3 Consultation on Community Secondary Schools Admission Criteria

The Committee received a consultation document from the Director of Children's and Young People's Service on the criteria for admission to

Community Secondary Schools from September 2010 and beyond (for copy see file of Minutes).

Maureen Clare, Head of Access and Inclusion Services of the Children's and Young People's Service advised of the background to the public consultation on Community Secondary Schools admissions. The Office of the School Adjudicator had said that the Authority should review its current school admission arrangements. The Adjudicator had made a ruling on Durham Johnston School which had implications for every other school in the county. The principles included in this were that having associated transport is not fair and equitable on admissions so this could not be used in the future. There were also issues to do with distance criteria. Areas put forward as possibilities by the Adjudicator were of having catchment areas or feeder schools. In the spring the Admissions Forum must make recommendations to the Cabinet on the way forward and in the meantime the Authority is undertaking a wide consultation on this. Those consulted include schools governing bodies, MP's, local councillors, and parents.

The Committee noted that since the consultation document had been published comments received have led to the proposed distance criteria being further developed namely:-

1. Children who have applied for a place at the nearest school. Priority will be given to those children who would otherwise have to travel the furthest distance to the next nearest school .
2. Other children – Priority will be given to those children who live nearest to the school applied for.

Members noted the proposals for consultation, in particular the criteria to be used to allocate places. The following comments were made:

Over Subscribed Schools

- The criteria would only apply if schools were over subscribed. Currently 6 community schools out of 36 secondary schools in the county were over subscribed. The amount they are over subscribed varies from a few to around 20. When the admission limits are set they should be at the right level to accommodate all those likely to request to go there as far as possible and within physical capacity to accommodate students.

Family/Sibling Links

- Criteria 3 of the consultation proposals were felt to be appropriate. However members felt that a family/ sibling link should not apply to those children in a schools sixth form. Currently Durham Johnston School and others schools criteria on this differ and all schools should have the same criteria.

Fair and Equitable: Distance

- Currently there are differences in the criteria applied to Durham Johnston School as to all the other community schools in the county. It was felt that the same criteria should apply to all community schools in the county, and that the criteria seeks to redress the disadvantages for those children living in an area of deprivation.
- Having said that there is concern that depending on the geography of an area, and how close schools are together it may be that someone living close to a school may not get a place when someone living far away may. The example provided was that pupils living in the Dales may be able to get a place at Durham Johnston School before someone living next door to the school. It was pointed out that the revised distance definition, if adopted, would resolve this.

New Buildings

- The criteria drawn up must have regard to the changes that are likely to occur as new schools are being built possibly on different sites, to the school amalgamations, and new house builds. It could be that children from areas that were historically able to get a place into a school may no longer. They would have to build schools which are the right size and ensure that admissions limits are set at the right level.

Specialist Schools

- A great deal of schools already have a specialist status i.e. science, language, sport, and these schools should be able to accommodate pupils from the catchment area as well as those pupils who would like to attend a particular school due to its specialism. Members noted that the appeals mechanism could be used to seek a place on that basis however the appeals should be monitored and if there were a high number, measures would need to be taken to address this.

Resolved:-

The response be prepared in line with the comments made. The draft would be circulated to the Members who had been present at the meeting, for their comment, prior to the response being made to the Children's and Young People's Service.