This is the third year of “big conversations” on education in the Bradford district. The Public Forum for Education (PFE) started life in 2007 as the “Education Strategy Group”. It was set up by the Council to ensure that the wider community could shape the way forward in education, offering challenge and fresh ideas and work with the Council to ensure a world class education system. It was re-named the Public Forum for Education in 2008 to more closely reflect its nature as an open forum, where everyone with an interest could contribute.

PFE has no formal membership. Events are widely publicised, including in the local media. The participants identify the themes for discussion which in 2009-10 were:

- Community cohesion and education
- Future options for education services from 2011, (end of 10 year Serco contract)
- The global dimension in education
- Stakeholder engagement, evaluation of the work of PFE
- Tackling bullying
- Young people and their education and skills achievement

The Big Conversations use an “open space” approach; participants identify topics they wish to discuss and invite others to join them. Participants are encouraged to speak openly, be innovative, address hard questions, and “think the unthinkable.”

Council decision makers – senior elected members and officers, join the debates and listen to views. They report back to PFE what action they have taken as a result.

The education review has been a major focus for education in 2010, as the Council prepares to bring back responsibility for education services at the end of the 10 year contract with Serco (Education Bradford) in July 2011. Two of the PFE debates this year have been consultation meetings for this purpose.
Big Conversation 1: Community Cohesion  
30 Sept 09, City Hall, Bradford

What you said
● We want our children to grow up in a society they are proud of and to which they can contribute
● Good schools and racially diverse schools are not mutually exclusive. We need to strive for good schools which are also racially diverse
● One way of eliminating discrimination is to ensure that schools with a majority of ethnic minority children are successful - success eliminates discrimination
● Schools cannot address community cohesion alone. There are many influences including parental views and extremism in some sections of the community
● Proper mixing, not just superficial visits
● There are concerns about the polarization of views amongst young people from all backgrounds and ethnic origin
● We need to educate our children about the concept of equality and rights and responsibilities
● Before we talk about diversity and linking schools we need to meet the unique needs of children within our own schools. Where is the policy and policy response to specific communities e.g. Muslim communities?
● Building new schools can be the focus to involve young people and the community
● Faith communities involved in schools – help or hindrance?
● 2 minutes silence in place of act of worship – realistic alternative or cop-out?
● Make links between Sunday schools, Madrassahs, scouts, guides, etc
● Faith is an important component of identity, need to be secure in our identity to “reach out”
● Need for rules - to keep schools safe some extreme views should be excluded, for example intolerance or preaching hate
● Should we emphasise common humanity?
● Aspirations to be “one community at one” useless without dialogue. It starts in your own backyard

What happened as a result
● Senior people working on community cohesion from the Council and other education partners met to consider the views from PFE
● Local Authority governors were briefed on their responsibilities for promoting community cohesion and managing diversity
● A partnership steering group was established, to bring together the different strands of diversity and cohesion support for schools, aligning activity to priorities. This includes the work of the Schools Linking Network
● Views were fed into the review of education
● Meetings took place with community leaders to discuss school and community links, engaging parents, different types of schools and school places
● The Council is supporting the “Call for Engagement” strategy of the Bradford Council for Mosques, on Masajid and Madaris engaging with their communities, especially in relation to fostering interaction with local schools
● Bradford was the pilot English city for a British Council Active Citizens programme, on the theme of intercultural dialogue. 30 active citizens including school governors participated

Big Conversation 2: Future Options for Education Services in the District Post  
July 2011, 7 November 09, Challenge College

The annual PFE conference marked the launch of the public consultation on the review of education services.

What you said
● Governing bodies need effective support to discharge their responsibilities
● Bradford is often portrayed as being on its uppers, we must reverse this perception
● Need to develop confidence in young people and inspire them to aim high - schools should have a philosophy of developing self confidence and esteem
● Some say no one should make a profit out of education, but sometimes the private sector may provide the best option; the local knowledge and expertise of voluntary organisations can also add value
● We should engage with private schools, especially in the teaching of English and Maths; do not be too proud to make approaches
● The presentation identified some of the barriers Bradford faces, which seem clear and real, but are we sure we have identified the root cause and put in place genuine and bold action that will tackle them, or are we playing at the edges?
● We need to realign in terms of philosophy and what really matters; assessing what we value, rather than valuing what we can assess
● Services should work better together for the benefit of children, particularly children with disabilities - often the parent is the one holding together all the different providers
What you said  
- There should be good practice days for schools  
- Schools need a central contact to get advice on international links  
- Global horizons broaden experience, for teachers, governors, pupils and parents  
- Support retiring teachers by having a package of volunteering opportunities  
- There are so many initiatives which need a more joined up approach  

What happened as a result  
- Global dimension practice days have been held and primary and secondary school network groups established  
- A point of contact has been established in both the Council and Education Bradford for international dimension work. The British Council now channels information through these links and consults them about funding bids from Bradford to ensure that they fit with overall district priorities  
- Bradford is now represented on a regional international schools committee which supports schools to identify opportunities and submit bids  
- The 2010 Active Citizens pilot engaged 30 volunteers from across the district, including school governors, school staff and parents, in an African exchange and local social action. The Council’s successful bid for the 2011 programme involves a second cohort of active citizens  

Focus Group on Stakeholder Engagement  
14 April 10, City Hall, Bradford  
The purpose was to consider stakeholder engagement in education and feed findings into the review of education. This included an evaluation of the Public Forum for Education.  

What you said  
- The Terms of Reference are fit for purpose in terms of engaging people but wording should change: to reflect that responsibility for education of young people with learning difficulties extends to age 25; to include further education and academies; and to include both carers and parents  
- Community interaction is good and is moving forward, need to build on this  
- The format of the PFE Annual Report – what was said, what happened as a result - is a model of good practice to share  
- It’s about building successful pathways to draw out opinion, developing ‘networked-in’ forums and using agencies working directly with groups to publicise  
- We should build on the progress made in bringing children together, for instance at events; school councils could be brought together  
- Need to consider the timing, location and structure of meetings to ensure good involvement and feedback. PFE meetings could “showcase” new buildings – e.g. special schools, new college campus at Keighley  
- Build on work being done, e.g. participation training in children’s centres  
- More joining up of Council and other agencies in getting information out  
- Adopt “services wrapped around individuals” approach, e.g. libraries bring people in and have computer access, so use for publicity leaflets, interactive website etc  
- Area based partnerships are working well and could be the base for other initiatives  
- Set up a PFE interactive website to ask the questions posed at PFE and extend the debate  
- Information is given to “representatives” e.g. head teachers, chairs of governors, but do they share it – notices on staff room notice boards, on agenda of governing body meetings etc? There needs to be much more encouragement to do this
Topics were proposed for Future PFE debates: education and skills provision; fostering community involvement in schools; bullying; poverty

What happened as a result
- Findings from the Focus Group were fed into the Education Review
- The Terms of Reference were amended in line with the advice
- A strategy for parental participation was launched in September. Area parent networks are being consulted about involving parents in PFE
- PFE meetings are more widely publicised in line with the advice
- The proposed topics for debate are included in the PFE programme
- Children’s services websites are being revamped and will include PFE

Big Conversation 4: Tackling Bullying
30 June 10, City Hall, Bradford

What you said
- Tackling bullying is an area that all services should take seriously since it can have a massive impact on children’s self esteem
- Need to imagine a school that had no bullying and consider how this might have been achieved. What strategies and interventions would be in place?
- Some bullying is undetected. Some schools record incidents more vigorously than others
- We need to share the learning from children taking a lead role in tackling bullying, providing support, buddy ing and acting as peer role models, as the two schools we have heard from have done

What happened as a result
- The Healthy Lifestyle Survey, undertaken in partnership with Health partners, Education Bradford and the Council, reached over 10,000 students and has provided a rich source of information. As a result schools have data on the health and well-being of their students which they can use to identify priorities
- The Safeguarding Children Board and NSPCC are continuing to work jointly on raising awareness of bullying, focussing particularly on young people with disabilities
- The b someone campaign is moving into its third phase with the focus on young people becoming b someone ambassadors, inspired by the anti-bullying ambassadors at Parkside School and buddies at Knowleswood Primary School. This involves supporting their peers in their educational environments including work on anti-bullying. This is words translating into action across the district
- Some bullying is undetected. Some schools record incidents more vigorously than others

Big Conversation 5: Learning Provision for Age 14-19, 29 Sept 10, City Hall, Bradford

What you said
- Support for apprentices will be difficult in the current economic climate
- Vocational areas may not be the most appropriate for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities. This group of students faces a lack of employment opportunities. There is a loss of seamlessness of funding and transition at 19 plus. Need to maintain parent confidence and provide them with more support, the system often appears adversarial
- Should be a special school/one campus/one community
- Employer engagement adds value, providing opportunities for employers to influence the curriculum and to reinforce the work ethic
- Need an overview of economic position locally and nationally and curriculum and support services that maximise knowledge and aspiration and identify pathways for learners
- Effective planning should take into account transport, communities and local authority boundaries
- Need to consider what the authority can provide, could do jointly and what others might do better e.g. other authorities/organisations, multi-agency approaches

Next Steps
The Council and its partners value feedback from the Public Forum for Education. Reports from the “Big Conversations” are considered at high level meetings and have contributed to shaping policy, including the education review, Changing our Council, the b someone campaign, locality working, 14 – 19 provision and community cohesion strategy.
The PFE Annual Conference, “Schools Engaging with their Local Communities” Saturday 13 November 2010, Belle Vue Girls’ School.
The conference will also look at the impact of PFE over the year and plan the programme ahead.

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