

APPENDIX 1

LANGUAGE LEARNING TASK AND FINISH REVIEW GROUP

19th March, 2009

PRESENT – Councillor Hughes (in the Chair); Councillors Davies and Richmond, Mr. P. King, Headteacher, Corporation Road Primary School and Mrs. Choudhury, Bangladeshi Community representative.

APOLOGIES – Councillor Long and Mr. Moyes.

Officers – Karen Graves, Democratic Support Officer.

The Chair welcomed and introduced everyone to the meeting and advised that the main focus of this meeting was to discover the level and areas of need in regard to language learning. The Task and Finish will have two strands – children and language learning and language learning and the community.

With this in mind, the following points were discussed and considered :-

- Corporation Road Primary School (the School) had excellent community links. Any provision of language learning had to reflect the needs of the Community. Mr. King suggested that the Group make contact with a representative from Adult Learning as they frequently use the School. (N.B. This group met with Ruth Bernstein during a previous meeting).
- The School currently had Bengali, Polish, Russian, Lithuanian and Hungarian children on its roll with two dedicated support teachers to assist them. Mr. King advised that, in his experience, the age of a child made no difference to ability to learn English and that a special needs child was easily identified by the speed at which the English language was grasped.
- Councillor Richmond stated that it was equally important that children, parents and teachers were able to communicate. The Chair stated that English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) would be contacted to gather details as to what language teaching was available and how widely available the classes were.
- Mrs. Choudhury advised the Group that she was a student currently studying in Durham and had recently done a dissertation on language, she stated that as children were learning English from an early age the mother tongue was in danger of disappearing. Many of the older generation of the Bengali community regarded this as a cultural issue and would prefer the children to speak in their mother tongue.
- Council Richmond agreed that it was essential that there should be a language bond with their own country and Mrs. Choudhury advised that she could read and write in both English and Bengali and was often called upon to interpret for members of the Bengali community.
- The Chair asked if women relocated to the United Kingdom would they be isolated as she felt it was essential that they were helped and not left in isolation. Mrs. Choudhury

advised that Surestart assisted people with children however there was little support for childless families.

- The Group agreed that there was a need for language learning for adults to be provided.
- Mrs. Choudhury stated that another cultural issue regularly encountered was that the older generation of the Bengali community could not understand why women should learn English as they were fully provided for and looked after by their husbands.
- Councillor Davies stated that it was good for women of all nationalities to learn English so that private and personal appointments to Doctors, Dentists etc. could be attended alone and a degree of independence could be maintained.
- Mr. King advised that Group that he was aware of at least one occasion where a child had been kept off school to act as an interpreter when a parent was attending a medical appointment at the hospital and it was hoped that adult learning classes would reduce this practice.
- The Chair summed up by stating that a proper mapping exercise as to what is currently available in the community by way of language learning needed to be undertaken. This could be a paper exercise assisted by officers. There is also a need to find a language learning resource to help with social integration and cohesion for new migrants and longer-term migrants from harder to reach communities, as described by Mrs. Choudhury. LSC finance had been cut and some community needs are currently not being met. The Group wanted to highlight the need, investigate what currently existed and formulate recommendations to Cabinet.

IT WAS AGREED – (a) That the Group felt that there was a need for Adult Language Learning to be made available to the wider community.

(b) That ESOL and other officers of the Council with responsibility for language learning be approached to determine what is currently available and any gaps which they have already identified.

(c) Once the above information has been gathered the Group reconvene to progress the Review.