

SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD

Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Management Board held on Wednesday, 16th May 2012 at 9.00am at the Civic Offices, Telford

PRESENT: Councillors D.R.W. White (Chairman), V.A. Fletcher, M.B.Hosken, M.G. Ion (substitute for R.J. Sloan), A.D. McClements and C.R. Turley.

Councillors S.Bentley, S.P. Burrell, A.J. Eade and J.M. Seymour (Call-in signatories)

Councillor P.R. Watling – Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Families

Also Present: J. Collins (Assistant Director: Education, Culture & Skills), J. Eatough (Assistant Director: Law, Democracy & Public Protection), S. Jones (Scrutiny Group Specialist), P. Smith (Democratic Services Team Leader), K. Swallow (SDM – Integrated Planning, Placements & Commissioning).

SMB-48 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillors G.M. Green and R.J. Sloan

SMB-49 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

SMB-50 CALL-IN REQUEST – PLANNING OF SCHOOL PLACES: REVISED PLANS FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL PROVISION UNDER THE BUILDING SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE PROGRAMME

The Chair reported that a valid call-in request had been received following the publication of the following decisions by Cabinet on 26 April 2012:

(a) that, having taken into consideration responses to the formal consultation process detailed in the report, approval be given to submit the revised plans for the Building Schools for the Future programme to PartnershipsforSchools, namely:

- To build a new 900 place Christian faith Academy for ages 11-18 in Priorslee to replace the existing Blessed Robert Johnson Catholic College.

- To build a new 1200 place Co-operative Academy for ages 11–16 on the Oakengates Leisure Centre site.
- To relocate Lord Silkin and Grange Park Primary onto the shared site in Stirchley, to encompass an 1150 place Learning Community comprising primary, secondary and Post 16 education.
- To rebuild Charlton School as a 1200 place 11-16 school to enhance secondary provision in Wellington.

(b) that authority be delegated to the Assistant Director – Education, Culture and Skills, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families, to co-ordinate the implementation of any interim governance arrangements as may be required.

Attached to the agenda was a copy of the Call-in request form, together with revised proposals that had been agreed at a preliminary informal meeting between the Chair and lead Call-In member (Councillor Burrell) on 9th May 2012. A proposed motion was tabled by the lead Call-in member, and the Chair advised that this would be the document which the Board would vote on at the end of the meeting. In accordance with the Member Call-in Protocol, the lead Call-In member and the Cabinet Member: Children, Young People & Families each tabled a document summarising the arguments and points they would be making during the meeting. Attached to the agenda was the report of the Assistant Director: Education, Culture & Skills that was considered by Cabinet on 26th April 2012.

The Assistant Director: Law, Democracy & Public Protection then outlined the procedure to be followed at the meeting, a copy of which was attached to the agenda.

Councillor Burrell (lead Call-in Member) presented the tabled document setting out the reasons for the Call-in and the justification for the proposals calling on Cabinet to reconsider their decision. The revised proposal was as follows:

“1) The decision to build a 900 place Christian faith academy in Priorslee needs to be re-considered, taking into account a more detailed transport plan that details the implications for the Council, in respect of home to school transport, parents, in respect of the impact on them of transporting their children to the new school and the environment, in respect of the impact to the overall carbon footprint if these proposals are implemented;

2) The revised plans for the Building Schools for the Future programme are re-considered particularly in relation to the planning of school places across the Borough, but particularly in respect of

- a) the availability of school places for pupils from Priorslee;
- b) how current planning ought to be taking account of population growth in Newport and Muxton and the effect on Burton Borough, an

- already oversubscribed school;
- c) the overall reduction of school places in Telford, a growth area.

3) The strong consultation response against the closure of Wrockwardine Wood Arts College was not adequately considered when the original decision was made.”

The Lead Call-in Member put forward the view that the Cabinet’s plans would result in 400 fewer secondary school places in the Borough. While this might address the current “dip” in the number of secondary age children, after 2018 it was predicted that numbers would rise, and there were likely to be capacity issues in some schools. A longer term approach was needed, and it would be better to defer some of the capital to address any need for extra capacity in a few years time. The rationale for re-locating the Blessed Robert Johnson (BRJ) Catholic College in Wellington to a new Ecumenical Academy in Priorslee was challenged, and it was questioned whether the remaining schools in Wellington would be able to accommodate those non-denominational BRJ pupils that did not wish to move to Priorslee. In relation to the proposals for a new faith Academy in Priorslee, it was contended that there would not be enough places at the new school for the children of local residents, even based on current numbers and ignoring new house completions and proposals for the expansion of Priorslee Primary Academy. Concerns were also expressed that Burton Borough School in Newport had been oversubscribed for a number of years, and the Cabinet’s proposals failed to address a situation that would only get worse with the additional demand arising from planned new housing developments in Newport and Muxton.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Families then responded to the call-in request. On taking office last year, the new Administration had felt that the original BSF proposals were not sustainable, particularly in Wellington where there were too many secondary school places. Officers had been asked to look again at the planning of school places in order to make it more sustainable, resulting in the current proposals. There had been extensive consultation with governing bodies, parents and pupils, and the Council had worked hard to address any concerns that had been raised. Officers then explained the rationale for the proposals, including the projected pupil admission numbers for future years both across the Borough, and, more specifically, those relating to the proposed Faith Academy at Priorslee – details of which were included in the tabled papers. The combined information suggested that there would be sufficient secondary places available in Wellington, Priorslee and Newport, and that there would not be a shortfall of places at the proposed Priorslee Academy for local residents. In terms of the suggestion about increased transport costs and carbon footprint as a result of the re-location of the BRJ College, data on BRJ pupils showed a significant number lived closer to Priorslee than to Wellington. Regard had been taken of the strategic Local Transport Plan, and a detailed travel plan for the new Priorslee Academy would be produced once the site had been finalised and a planning application submitted. In relation to the proposal to

build a new Co-operative Academy on the Oakengates Leisure Centre site, there would be significant benefits of economy of scale. The Council had worked hard with both Wrockwardine Wood and Sutherland Colleges to address the concerns that had been raised in the initial consultation, as a result of which the Heads of both schools could assure parents that the proposal would not damage the wellbeing and chances of pupils.

Following a short adjournment, Board members asked a number of questions to both the lead Call-In member and the Cabinet member. These related to:

- the consultation process on the Cabinet's proposals;
- that parents may have chosen to send their children to Wrockwardine Wood College on the basis of the original plan that the school would be moving to a new site in Priorslee;
- why any detailed transport plan could not be produced in advance of decisions on the re-organisation of schools;
- the capacity of the proposed Priorslee faith Academy to accommodate pupils from Priorslee and Redhill primary schools;
- the views of the Dioceses of Shrewsbury, Lichfield and Hereford on the proposals;
- the campaign that resulted in 1600 signatures on a standard letter opposing the proposals for Wrockwardine Wood Arts College;
- the impact that a new school would have at the proposed site in Priorslee

Having heard detailed responses from both sides to the questions, the lead Call-in member and the Cabinet member were invited to sum up. Councillor Burrell urged the Board to ask the Cabinet to re-consider its BSF policy, which would not meet the needs of the Borough in the longer term. Councillor Watling stated that Department for Education rules on BSF did not allow any planning beyond 2018. Within these constraints, it was believed that the current proposals took a broader view, were sustainable and would best meet the needs of children and young people in the Borough.

Having considered all the written and verbal evidence that had been submitted, and the responses to questions, the Board:

RESOLVED – that the Call-in request and proposal, as tabled at the meeting, be rejected, and that the original Cabinet decision be noted.

The meeting ended at 12.08 pm.

Chair:

Date: