

CABINET PANEL ON SCHOOL ORGANISATION

THURSDAY, 5 JUNE 2008

PRESENT:- Councillors Fionuala Foley (Chair), Nick Martin, Garry Perkins, Colin Lovell and Brian Mattock.

1. Appointment of Chair

Resolved – That Councillor Fionuala Foley Chair this meeting of the Panel.
(Councillor Fionuala Foley took the Chair.)

2. Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded Members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting.

3. Public Question Time

The following question was asked in accordance with Standing Order 28.

Questioner

Mr. James Relph, Governor, Haydonleigh Primary School, Swindon.

As Cabinet are already aware, the Governing Body of Haydonleigh Primary School have serious concerns over the ability of the school to cope in the eventuality that admission numbers increase to 2 form entry on a permanent basis. Even though our premises clearly need to expand in order to cope with additional numbers, we have been led to believe that budgets for this year have already been allocated and that the money needed for such expansion may not be easily found. Given that the alternative way of dealing with the admissions crisis would be to transport children from the northern sector to schools with spare capacity, can Haydonleigh's Governing Body be given assurances that, if the decision to increase admission numbers permanently is taken, the money that would have been spent on the cost of transporting children will be used to offset some of the hardships that the schools taking the increased numbers are going to face?

Response

The Chair thanked Mr. Relph for his question. She advised that as the Cabinet Panel on School Organisation was made up of only five members of the Cabinet and had a specific remit in respect of school organisation matters only, it was, unfortunately, not appropriate for a response to be provided to this particular question in this forum, and she suggested to the questioner that the question should more appropriately be re-submitted to a future meeting of the Cabinet itself for response, and that she would welcome his or other governors attendance at the Cabinet to ask the question, or at a future meeting of the Cabinet Open Forum when the issue could also be discussed.

4. The Permanent Expansion of Abbey Meads, Catherine Wayte and Haydonleigh Primary Schools.

The Group Director, Children submitted a report concerning proposals to

permanently expand Abbey Meads, Catherine Wayte and Haydonleigh Primary Schools in the Swindon Northern Sector. The Cabinet had considered the outcome of pre-statutory consultation and authorised the publication of statutory proposals to permanently expand the three schools at its meeting on 13th February 2008. (Minute 125 2007/08 refers.)

Following legal advice by Mr. Andrew Ferguson, Head of Litigation on the required statutory process and a presentation of the proposals by Mr. Ian Bickerton, Director of Access and Provision, and Mr. Gareth Cheal, Admissions Manager, the Cabinet Panel considered the proposals in detail and, in particular, (a) the reasons why the Council was proposing the expansion, (b) the responses received following the publication of the statutory notices, and (c) the guidance provided to decision makers by the Department for Children, Schools and Families on the key factors to be taken into account in the reaching of a decision on whether or not to support the expansion of a mainstream school.

Mr. James Relph, Governor, Haydonleigh Primary School, advised that whilst Haydonleigh Primary School recognised the need for, and had no objections to, the proposed expansion plans, it did have concerns at the pressure that the expansion would have on existing school infrastructure and that it was hoped that the Council would be able to identify additional funding to help it provide improved facilities for the newly expanded school.

Ms. Laura Brierley, Head of Catherine Wayte Primary School, expressed her support for the proposed expansion plans, but reminded the Cabinet Panel that her school was also experiencing pressures on existing school infrastructure as a result of increased numbers of pupils. She also hoped that the Council would be able to identify funding to enable action to be taken to overcome the impact of this pressure.

The Chair and Councillor Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, commented that the Council fully understood the concerns felt by the schools. The Council was very appreciative that the three schools had agreed to expand to admit extra pupils due to the pressure on primary school places as a result of housing growth in this area. Capital funding had already been agreed to provide the extra accommodation for classes, and it was also recognised that the extra pupil numbers in the schools would place more pressure on the infrastructure and facilities. Whilst it must be recognised that the Council has only a finite amount of capital funding available and many priorities for work in schools across the Borough, the needs of the schools that are to be expanded are understood and the Cabinet will be looking at these very seriously against other priorities when the Capital programme is reviewed again during the year.

Resolved – That the Cabinet Panel on School Organisation advises that In reaching its decision it has carefully considered the report of the Group Director, Children, the representations of the Director, the representations from the schools attending the Panel meeting, and the Department for Children, Schools and Families Decision Makers Guidance for expanding a mainstream school.

Before making its decision, and in accordance with the Department for Children, Schools and Families Guidance, the Cabinet Panel has considered the following matters:-

- a. Was any information missing in order to reach a decision?

The Cabinet Panel was satisfied that all necessary information was present.

- b. Does the published Notice comply with statutory requirements?

The Cabinet Panel was satisfied that the Notices complied with statutory requirements in the case of each school.

- c. Has the statutory consultation been carried out prior to the publication of the Notice?

The Cabinet Panel was satisfied that the necessary statutory consultation had taken place in respect of each school.

- d. Are the proposals linked or related to other published proposals?

The Cabinet Panel was satisfied that the three proposals it was considering are linked and that there are no other current published proposals that should be considered at the same time.

The Cabinet Panel's decision on the proposals to permanently expand Abbey Meads, Catherine Wayte and Haydonleigh Primary Schools is as follows:-

- a. To approve the proposals, as set out in the statutory Notice attached as Appendix 3 to the report of the Group Director, Children, to permanently expand Abbey Meads Primary School.
- b. To approve the proposals, as set out in the statutory Notice attached as Appendix 4 to the report of the Group Director, Children, to permanently expand Catherine Wayte Primary School.
- c. To approve the proposals, as set out in the statutory Notice attached as Appendix 5 to the report of the Group Director, Children, to permanently expand Haydonleigh Primary School.

The reasons for the Cabinet Panel's decision to approve the above proposals were as follows:-

Creating Additional Places

The Cabinet Panel felt that there was strong evidence to support the need to create additional places at the above schools in order to enable parents within the Swindon Northern Sector to obtain a place within a local school, bearing in mind that there is no other spare capacity within the other schools in the Northern Sector, and the identified increasing demand for places in the Northern Sector from September 2008, as set out in the table at Paragraph 2.1 in the report of the Group Director, Children.

Affect on Standards and School Improvement

The proposals will match school place supply as close as possible to pupils and parents needs and wishes, and achieve the Government's and the Council's aim to ensure that every child receives an excellent education. Abbey Meads, Catherine Wayte and Haydonleigh Primary Schools contribute to raising standards in English and Mathematics. For the Local Authority these are currently above the national average.

Expansion of Successful and Popular Schools

Abbey Meads, Catherine Wayte and Haydonleigh primary School have a history of over subscription of admissions that highlights their popularity with parents. The schools are judged by OFSTED to be good to outstanding during recent inspections.

Travel and Accessibility for All

The proposals will not have the effect of unreasonably extending journey times or increasing transport costs. If the proposals did not proceed due to the demand for places in the Northern Sector area there would be an increase of transport costs and an extension of journeys for parents.

Capital Funding

The Cabinet Panel is satisfied that any capital funding required to implement the proposals will be available.

Special Educational Needs Provision

The Cabinet Panel is satisfied that the proposals will not affect the current level of Special Educational Needs Provision in that the Abbey Meads, Catherine Wayte and Haydonleigh Primary Schools will continue to offer a range of provision to respond to the needs of the individual children.

Views of Interested Parties

The Cabinet Panel considered the views of interested parties, as expressed in the pre-statutory consultation, and noted that there was a significant majority in support of the proposals. It was also noted that there had been no objections or comments made to the statutory Notices.