

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE CABINET

Thursday, 17th November, 2005 at 6.00 pm
In Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor Caunt (Leader of the Council) (Chairman)
Councillors Evans, Fraser-Macnamara, Jones, Mrs Martin, Miller,
Mrs Millward, Mrs Shakespeare and Vickers.

Minority Group Members nominated to attend meetings of the Cabinet:
Councillors Crumpton, G H Davies, Mrs Ridley, Sparks, Tomkinson
and C L Woodall (Labour Group); Councillors Hart and Tyler (Liberal
Democrat Group).

Officers

The Chief Executive, Director of Finance, Director of Law and Property,
Director of the Urban Environment, Director of Children's Services,
Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services, Assistant Director
of Education and Lifelong Learning (Resources and Planning),
Democratic Services Manager - Directorate of Law and Property.

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MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 2nd
November, 2005 be approved as a correct record and signed.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors G H Davies, Tomkinson, Mrs Ridley, Tyler, Vickers, Mrs
Martin, Miller, Evans and Jones declared personal interests in the
Primary School Review due to their Governorship of various Primary
Schools in the Borough. The Leader reminded the meeting that these
Members were covered by the dispensation given by the Standards
Committee on 13th September, 2005.

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APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of
Councillors Ali and Foster.

CHANGES IN REPRESENTATION OF MINORITY GROUP MEMBERS

It was reported that Councillors Mrs Ridney and Tomkinson were serving in place of Councillors Foster and Ali as representatives of the Labour Group for this meeting of the Cabinet only.

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE – PRIMARY SCHOOLS REVIEW

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the background to the Primary Schools Review, the initial consultation responses received and the proposals for future action.

Appendix 1 to the report set out a detailed analysis of the responses received during the consultation on the proposals to change the pattern of primary school provision in Dudley. The proposals for change, as summarised below and set out in Appendix 2 to the report, took account of the responses received:-

Proposal 1 - Beauty Bank Primary School

To close Beauty Bank Primary School with effect from August 2006. The Beauty Bank buildings and site would remain open as an annexe of Greenfield Primary School for an initial period before consolidation on a single site.

The Governors of Greenfield Primary School would assume responsibility for all aspects of the Beauty Bank annexe with effect from 1st September, 2006. The Head Teacher of Greenfield Primary School would be responsible for the overall leadership and management of both sites.

Beauty Bank staff would become part of the Greenfield Primary School staffing establishment. Beauty Bank pupils would transfer to the Greenfield Primary School roll. It was expected that current Beauty Bank staff and pupils would remain on the Beauty Bank annexe site.

The admission number for Greenfield Primary School, Hill Street site would remain at 40. The admission number for the Beauty Bank annexe would be reduced to 20 allowing a combined admission number for Greenfield Primary School of 60. The Hill Street site had capacity for 280 places and the Beauty Bank site 208.

Greenfield and the Beauty Bank annexe would be consolidated onto a single site at the earliest opportunity.

Proposal 2 – Highfields Primary School

To close Highfields Primary School, with effect from September 2006 and provide alternative places for children at Christ Church, Church of England, Hurst Hill, and Wallbrook Primary Schools.

Additional capacity would be created at Christ Church, Church of England (CE) Primary School to expand capacity to 420 places for pupils aged 5 - 11. Current provision for younger children at Christ Church CE Primary School would continue. This building would be completed during the next academic year. Whilst Highfields Primary School would close in August 2006, the site would remain open if necessary, as an annexe to Christ Church CE Primary School for those pupils who had expressed a preference for this school.

Should there be a requirement to use the Highfields Primary School buildings and site as a temporary annexe, the governors of Christ Church CE Primary School would assume responsibility for all aspects during this period. The Head Teacher of Christ Church CE Primary would be responsible for the overall leadership and management of both sites during this period.

Posts would become available at Christ Church CE Primary and other Dudley Schools. These posts would be open to Highfields staff in accordance with the model policy.

The planned admission number at Christ Church CE would be increased from 45 to 60 from September 2006. Should the demand for places at the school from parents of children attending Highfields Primary exceed the planned capacity of 420, an agreement would be sought with the governors for a temporary additional increase to enable parental preference to be met and families to attend the same school. Similar arrangements would be reached, if required, with Wallbrook and Hurst Hill Primary Schools.

The governing body of Christ Church CE Primary would assume responsibility for the annexe. The day-to-day organisation and composition of both sites would be the responsibility of the Head Teacher.

Pupils who expressed a preference for Hurst Hill, Wallbrook or any other Dudley school would transfer in September 2006.

Proposal 3 - Holt Farm Primary School

To close Holt Farm Primary School with effect from September 2006 and provide alternative places for children at Hurst Green and Olive Hill Primary Schools.

The Holt Farm buildings and site would remain open from September 2006 as an annexe of Hurst Green Primary for an initial period until consolidation on a single site. The Governing Body of Hurst Green Primary would assume responsibility. The Head Teacher of Hurst Green Primary would be responsible for the overall leadership and management of both sites.

Holt Farm staff would become part of the Hurst Green staffing establishment. Holt Farm pupils would transfer to the roll of Hurst Green Primary and remain on the present site until they transferred to a single site.

The planned admission number for reception in September 2006 at Hurst Green would remain at 55 until additional capacity was created to enable an increase to 60 and a total capacity for 420 children. The Holt Farm annexe would retain its current admission number and nursery provision until consolidation on the Hurst Green site. Further consultation with the community would be undertaken regarding early years and pre-school provision in the Holt Farm annexe or local area.

The planned admission number to reception at Olive Hill Primary School would be increased to 60 from September 2006. Should the demand for places from parents with children attending Holt Farm Primary School exceed the places available at Olive Hill or Hurst Green, an agreement would be sought with the governors for an additional, temporary increase to enable parental preferences to be met and ensure families attended the same school.

Further consultation would take place on options for consolidation onto a single site.

Proposal 4 - Sycamore Green Primary School

To close Sycamore Green Primary School with effect from September, 2006 and provide alternative places for children at Bramford Primary School and the new Wren's Nest Primary School and Children's Centre.

The Sycamore Green site would remain open from September, 2006 as an annexe of Wren's Nest Primary School and provide for those children whose parents had expressed a preference for Wren's Nest. The Governing Body at Wren's Nest Primary would assume responsibility for all aspects of the Sycamore Green annexe. The Head Teacher of Wren's Nest Primary School would be responsible for the overall leadership and management of both sites. It was expected that staff currently at Sycamore Green would transfer to the staffing establishment of Wren's Nest Primary School. The split-site school would remain until the completion of the new Wren's Nest Primary School and Children's Centre, when all children would then be educated in the new buildings.

The planned admission number for the new school would be 60 and there would be 420 places for pupils aged 5 - 11. The new buildings would also accommodate a Children's Centre offering a range of provision for children aged 0 - 5 and their families. During the initial period of operating from two sites, the admission numbers for both sites would remain as per the existing arrangements, with 45 at the Sycamore Green annexe and 60 at the Foxglove Road (Wren's Nest) site.

Proposal 5 – Maidensbridge Primary School

To close Maidensbridge Primary School with effect from September, 2006 and provide alternative places at Church of Ascension Church of England (CE), Dawley Brook and Blanford Mere Primary Schools as required.

Additional capacity would be created at each of these schools and, if required, at St Mary's CE Primary School. The Maidensbridge site would remain open as an annexe of one of the local schools to minimise disruption and enable completion of necessary construction work.

The preferred option was for the Maidensbridge site to remain in use as an annexe of a local primary school for a period until consolidation on a single site. This would enable children attending Maidensbridge to transfer to the roll of another local primary school while remaining on the Beechcroft Road site. Maidensbridge staff would become part of the staffing establishment of that school. This option would address many of the concerns raised during the consultation, lead to better use of the available resources, enable community use and minimise disruption.

The choice of local primary school would be the subject of further consultation with parents and primary schools in the Kingswinford North and Wall Heath area. The first stage of this process would be to consult with the governing bodies concerned before the end of December to determine options for the most appropriate partner school.

Proposal 6 - Mount Pleasant Primary School

To reduce the planned admission number to reception in September 2006 to 45. This would reduce the total capacity over a period of years to 315 places for pupils aged 5 -11. Provision for nursery age and younger children would remain unchanged.

Proposal 7 - Thorns Primary School

Thorns Primary School would retain its current admission number of 30 and a capacity of 210 places for children aged 5 -11. In accordance with the duty of the Council to review school place planning on a regular basis, this would be reviewed annually.

Proposal 8 - Blowers Green Primary School

Blowers Green Primary would retain its planned admission number of 45 from September, 2006 subject to annual review.

Proposal 9 - Priory Primary School

Priory Primary would retain its planned admission number of 90 subject to annual review.

Proposal 10 - Netherton Church of England Primary School

Netherton CE Primary would have a planned admission number of 45 from September 2006 subject to annual review.

Proposal 11 - Kate's Hill Primary School

Kate's Hill Primary School would retain its current planned admission number of 50 subject to annual review.

Proposal 12 - Lutley Primary School

Lutley Primary School would retain its current planned admission number of 85 subject to annual review.

Proposal 13 - Peters Hill Primary School

Peters Hill Primary School would retain its current planned admission number of 120 subject to annual review.

Proposal 14 - Brook Road Primary School

Brook Road Primary School would retain its current planned admission number of 45 subject to annual review.

Proposal 15 - Remaining Primary Schools

All other proposals would remain as set out in the consultation documents and as specified in Appendix 2 to the report.

Dudley Strategy for Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN)

The Council adopted the SEN strategy in July 2005 and it was recognised that opportunities existed to align the Primary Schools Review and the SEN Strategy. Further proposals would be developed in due course.

Children's Centres

The Council had reviewed funding to establish Children's Centres to provide a broad range of services for children aged 0 - 5 and their families. The first phase was in operation and proposals would be developed regarding the location of a further eleven Children's Centres. When completed, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) target of 17 Children's Centres for Dudley would be achieved.

A range of concerns were expressed by opposition representatives regarding the proposals. These included issues associated with the decision-making and consultation process, the documentation and information used, the overall management of the process and the methodology for formulating proposals and identifying individual schools for closure. Concern was also expressed that insufficient consideration had been given to alternative proposals and that adequate responses had not been given to all issues raised during the consultation period. In view of these concerns, the Cabinet was requested to reconsider the proposals and provide for further discussion at Area Committees and full Council.

Individual Cabinet Members and the Director of Children's Services responded to the issues raised. The proposals had been the subject of extensive consultation, in accordance with legislative requirements, and a further period of consultation would take place following the publication of statutory notices. All responses and representations had been considered, however, it was indicated that few viable alternatives were available. The proposals had been formulated to minimise the impact on the education of existing pupils. The Council had a duty to review school places, taking account of previous Ofsted inspections and Government requirements. It was envisaged that failure to take action, or further delays in decision-making, could have serious financial and other implications in future years.

It was noted that following the statutory notice period and further consultation, a decision would be made by the Schools Organisation Committee in January, 2006, in accordance with the timetable of events set out in Appendix 2 to the report.

The Cabinet placed on record its thanks to the Cabinet Member for Lifelong Learning and all officers involved in formulating the proposals and in attending the various meetings that had been arranged in connection with the Primary Schools Review.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the report and consultation analysis, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report of the Director of Children's Services, be noted.
- (2) That the proposals set out in Appendix 2 to the report be approved and the Director of Children's Services be authorised to publish statutory notices and carry out further consultation in accordance with the proposals and timescale set out in Appendix 2 to the report.

The meeting ended at 7.45 pm.

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL