

DUDLEY SCHOOL ORGANISATION COMMITTEE

Tuesday 13th December, 2005, at 6.30 pm in Committee Room 2, The Council House, Dudley

PRESENT: -

Mr Bell (Schools Group) (Chairman)
Councillors Mrs Dunn, Finch, Mrs Ridley, Vickers, and Wright (LEA Group);
Mr Conway (alternate member representing Secondary Schools), Mrs Jessup (alternate Member representing Primary schools), Mr Patterson and Mr Timmins (Schools Group); Reverend Morphy (Church of England Group); Mr Potter (Roman Catholic Church Group)

Officers

Ms Stroud (Pinsent Masons) – Independent legal adviser to the Committee and Mr Sanders and Mr Jewkes – both Democratic Services, Dudley MBC, representing the Secretary to the Committee

Also in attendance

Mr Watson – Assistant Director of Children’s Services (Resources and Planning), Mr Gordon – Assistant Director of Law and Property (Dudley Property Consultancy), Mr Insley (Senior Architect) – all representing Dudley MBC

38 ELECTION OF CHAIR

RESOLVED

That Mr Bell be elected Chairman of the Committee for the twelve month period expiring on the date of the first meeting of the Committee after 13th December, 2006.

(Mr Bell thereupon assumed the Chair)

39 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR

RESOLVED

That Councillor Mrs Dunn be elected Vice Chair of the Committee for the twelve month period expiring on the date of the first meeting of the Committee after 13th December, 2006.

40 MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 3rd May, 2005 be approved as a correct record and signed.

41 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Mr Patterson enquired as to why the minutes referred to officers present at the meeting by their designations, rather than by their names, and requested that in future names were included. In responding, Mr Sanders explained that the usual practice in Dudley MBC minutes was to refer to officers by designation, however as SOC was an independent body, names of officers could be included from now on should this be the wish of the Committee.

In connection to Minute 33 – Matters Arising From the Minutes, Mr Patterson enquired as to the current position with regard to Ellowes Hall Sixth Form. The Assistant Director of Children’s Services – Resources and Planning (Mr Watson) responded by stating that he could give no further update at this time but that a report on the matter would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

In connection with Minute 36 – Children and Young People’s Plan: Consultation on Draft Regulations and Guidance, Mr Patterson enquired as to whether or not the newly created position of Director of Children’s Services had been advertised prior to an appointment being made. Councillor Vickers, as the Cabinet Member for Lifelong Learning of Dudley MBC clarified the appointment process.

RESOLVED

- i) That, in future, an item for ‘Matters arising from the minutes’ be provided for in agendas for the Committee.
- ii) That names of officers, as well as their designation, be recorded in the minutes.

42 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mrs Dunn declared a personal interest in relation to Agenda Item 6 – Discontinuation of Hasbury and Halesowen Schools and Establishment of New Voluntary Aided School in Halesowen, in view of the fact that she had been involved as ward Councillor in fundraising events organised by the school.

43 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the Meeting were submitted on behalf of Mrs Cappell, Mrs Eden, Reverend Johnston, Mrs Lewis, Mr Seaton and Mr Spurrell and the Director of Children's Services, Mr Freeman.

44 DISCONTINUATION OF HASBURY AND HALESOWEN C.E. SCHOOLS AND ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW VOLUNTARY AIDED C.E. SCHOOL IN HALESOWEN

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Children's Services on the proposed discontinuation of Halesowen C of E Primary School and Hasbury C of E Primary School and the consequential establishment of a new voluntary aided C of E school on the Hasbury site. The report indicated that no objections to the proposals had been received and contained reference to consultations with parents, staff and governors held in accordance with statutory requirements, copies of documents relating to which were appended to the report.

In the discussion on the issue, the Committee having had regard to the DfES guidance, were not satisfied on the exact nature of the proposal regarding the accommodation of the new school in remodelled buildings on the Hasbury site; or on the financial arrangements proposed, given particularly that the contribution from the Church of England could not be confirmed. There were also concerns regarding the adequacy of consultation, as it appeared that some parents were under the apprehension that the new school was to be accommodated in brand new buildings rather than in remodelled existing facilities. There were also concerns that insufficient research had been conducted in respect of obtaining planning permission to modify the public right of way which ran through the proposed site of the new school.

The Committee then voted by group and it was

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY by all groups present

That determination of the proposal be deferred to a future meeting of the Committee to be held on Tuesday 2nd February, 2006, pending the preparation of additional information and evidence by the Local Authority concerning the following: -

- Details of the plans for remodelling the existing Hasbury school buildings and additional building matters including proposals for the public right of way on the proposed site.
- Details of the arrangements for financing the proposals and costings setting out the extent of capital investment required.

- Evidence showing that local parents and the governing bodies involved have been consulted and are aware that the proposals do not entail the construction of a new school on the Hasbury site, but the remodelling of the old school.

45 REVIEW OF DUDLEY SCHOOL ORGANISATION COMMITTEE CONSTITUTION AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

A joint report of the Director of Children's Services and the Director of Law and Property (as Secretary) was submitted inviting the Committee to consider a number of amendments to the SOC Constitution and Terms of Reference.

Mr Sanders reported that the SOC had approved a written Constitution in April 1999 and that the document had not been reviewed since that time. Due to the Council's adoption of new executive arrangements under the Local Government Act 2000, several of the titles of officers and names of organisations referred to in the document were now outdated. The removal of the requirement for SOC's to approve a School Organisation Plan meant that all references to this plan were now inappropriate. The membership of the LEA Group required updating to reflect the change in political control of the Council since 1999. Further proposed amendments to the Constitution included the addition of a paragraph providing for the entitlement of the Local Authority at their discretion to appoint an additional group of SOC members consisting of representatives of local community groups, for the modification of the Committee's quorum arrangements, and the updating of budgetary arrangements stipulated in the Constitution. The views of the Committee were sought regarding the appointment of the additional group referred to.

A proposed revised version of the Constitution and Terms of Reference was appended to the report. The Committee discussed the proposed amendments and highlighted additional modifications as necessary.

RESOLVED

- i) That the Committee approve the revised Constitution and Terms of Reference, subject to the following alterations: -
 - a) The reinstatement of Paragraph 8.5 of the original Constitution relating to the Committee's ability to see/hear a delegation about a particular issue.
 - b) That line three of Paragraph 8.3 be amended to read 'majority vote within the group'.

- c) The addition of 'community, foundation and denominational' to the list of categories of governors eligible for membership of the Schools Group, as prescribed in Paragraph 3.6.
- ii) That the Committee opt not to seek the establishment of a sixth group of representatives of community groups at this time and thus no recommendation be made to the Local Authority.

46 TRAINING

The Chairman reminded the Committee that a training evening for SOC Members had been scheduled for 12th January, 2006 and informed Members that this session was to consist of a seminar led by the Legal Adviser to the Committee, Ms Stroud, in which Members would be given further information from the DfES guidance on School Organisation decision-making in order to assist them in determining future Local Authority proposals. Members commented that the guidance already issued by Ms Stroud was sufficient to assist Members in making their decisions and it was suggested that the evening of 12th January, 2006 be used to convene a full meeting of the SOC in which the schedule relating to the determination of current school discontinuation proposals could be discussed.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that as per the discussion, future meetings of the SOC were scheduled for the following dates: -

- Thursday 12th January
- Thursday 26th January
- Thursday 2nd February

The meeting ended at 9.45pm.

CHAIRMAN