

**PRIMARY SCHOOL ORGANISATION CONSULTATION**  
**NOTES OF A MEETING HELD AT LONGMEADOW SCHOOL**  
**ON 20 MARCH 2008**

**GOVERNORS' MEETING HELD AT 5.00pm**

Present: Cllr. Ann Hartley (Shropshire County Council – Portfolio holder, Children's Services), Ian Budd (Assistant Corporate Director, Children's Services), Norrie Porter (Head of Premises and Planning), Huw Roberts (Headteacher Longmeadow School) Colin Hopkins (Diocesan Director of Education, Lichfield). Rob Hudson (Human Resources Team), Governors: Mr. M. Dineen, Mr. G. Felton, Mrs. J. Gentle, Mr. P. Gibbs, Rev. Goldenburg, Mr. J. Hitchings, Mrs. C. Pocock, Mr. T. Seston, Mr. M. Underwood, Mrs. J. Van Wyk, Mr. R. Williams, and Mrs. E. Yiend.

Also in attendance: David Owen (Note taker).

Ian Budd opened the meeting and introduced those present. He explained:

- the reasons for the review;
- the review process; and
- possible next steps

Governors were invited to comment and ask questions on the proposals.

1. Mr. M. Underwood was concerned that the leadership of each school understood the full implications of the proposals.

A. Ian Budd confirmed that the Chair and Vice Chair of both schools had agreed to work together in the interests of the community although, to date, there had been no consensus on a long term vision. Mr. Seston (Chair of Governors) confirmed that there had been feedback to Longmeadow governors. Mr. Hitchings (Vice Chair) advised that both sets of governors had agreed to put together a fact file which the Local Authority would help populate.

2. Mr. Underwood asked if the timetable allowed sufficient time for communities to feel they had been properly consulted or if the timing could be more flexible?

A. Ian Budd confirmed that the timetable could be amended if it was felt that the community needed more time although there was a delicate balance to maintain between sufficient time for consultation and prolonger uncertainty. Ann Hartley noted that the Cabinet could extend the formative consultation period. Norrie Porter pointed out that at the statutory consultation stage all items had to be specific.

3. Mr. Seston asked if there was a government deadline on timing for any reorganizations?

A. Ian Budd responded that to be part of the Primary Capital Programme for 2009/11 the submission had to be submitted during the summer of 2008.

4. Rev. Goldenburg expressed his concern that the meetings were being held on Maundy Thursday, an important Christian festival and that this might prevent some people attending.

A. Ian Budd confirmed that issues of faith were important to the Local Authority. The meetings had to be held during the fortnight before Easter as they had to be in the first half of the consultation period. Any delay in the process would mean no decision in the summer term and, consequently, an increase in the period of uncertainty for the schools which the Local Authority was anxious to minimise. Meeting dates had been agreed in conjunction with the schools concerned.

5. Rev. Goldenburg asked what educational advantages existed in the proposals?

A. Ian Budd answered that the County Council had a clear vision of what could be achieved through the school day and beyond with high quality teaching staff, buildings etc. Although outcomes across Shropshire were very good overall, there were very few Ofsted rated "outstanding" schools. This number, it was believed, could be increased. The independent reference concluded that there was no significant difference in standards between smaller and larger schools.

6. Mr. J. Hutchings stated that Longmeadow had in the past been a 300 plus successful school. The backbone of the success had been the "family atmosphere" that had been created (it was close to being rated "outstanding" in the Ousted report) and asked how this could be perpetuated in a new school?

A. Norris Porter responded that it was likely that at least one member of staff would have to be lost if the situation was to remain unchanged. Following a merger, there would be greater opportunity for sounder financial arrangements and a generally more stable background. There would also be greater opportunity to access staff with specialist skills.

7. Mrs. Petcock noted that the consultation document suggested that there would be a slight increase in numbers at Oakland and asked how this had been calculated?

A. Norrie Porter answered that a combination of historic intake and known family patterns was followed. In answer to a comment from Mr. Roberts that it was an "imprecise science" he agreed that it was not perfect but had been reasonably accurate in the past.

8. Rev. Goldenburg was concerned about a divisive feeling in the village and asked what other groups would be consulted as part of the process?

A. Ian Budd gave examples of the Parish Council, Parochial Church Council, early years providers and any opinion formers in the community which might be appropriate.

9. A governor felt that there was an opportunity to create an excellent school for Bayston Hill. He regretted what he saw as some “negativity” and felt that the possibilities had not been sufficiently put forward with regard to the “bigger picture”.

10. Referring to a campaign run on behalf of Oakland School, Mr. Hitchings pointed out that it referred to that school’s closure. He noted that Longmeadow, with its long and proud tradition, would close also and he felt that some words used were “ill advised”. The proposals needed to be put carefully and much “bridge building” was necessary, but he hoped that this was possible in the interests of what was best for the children of Bayston Hill.

11. A governor asked what the local authority could do to minimize things said in the campaign, some of which implied criticism of Longmeadow School. It was possible, he suggested, that some Longmeadow parents might ask why this governing body was not campaigning similarly.

A. Ann Hartley responded that the the Local Authority had facilitated a round table meeting with both schools but regretted that campaign had become “two sided”. Mr. Sesten believed that Longmeadow Governors had acted “professionally” and had not taken advantage of the situation.

12. Rev. Goldenburg asked for clarification of the meaning of “amalgamation” in this case.

A. Ian Budd confirmed that there was no technical legal way of amalgamation without the formal closure of at least one of the existing schools. This fact had been highlighted by some campaigners

13. Mr. Dineen recalled that it had been the governors’ policy for all public comment to be made through either the Chair or Vice-Chair and as a whole it had “kept its own counsel”. He noted that the local Member of Parliament was publicly supporting the Oakland campaign without referring to Longmeadow governors views. Governors agreed that there was a need to encourage both schools to work together to view the proposals as an opportunity rather than a threat.

14. A governor asked of the position with regard to the existing headteachers and the process of amalgamation?

A. Ian Budd confirmed that if one school remained that head would take over the new school. There would be a potential selection if both schools were to close. Speaking in the earlier staff meeting, a trade union official had expressed concern about the uncertainty of the competition process model of reorganisation. He noted that there would be difficulty in ensuring everyone was confident of the equality in the process. He also understood that there was a possibility of getting dispensation from the Minister for a competition if there was sufficient consensus. In all cases of amalgamation, it was important that the staff, communities and children worked together as had been done successfully in the county in recent years.

15. Mr. Underwood felt that there was a need to involve both governing bodies as soon as possible.

A. Ian Budd explained that if a new school was established a temporary governing body would be established incorporating members of both existing bodies. If one of the schools was to expand, the authority would work closely with the Diocese and governing bodies to alter governance arrangements to reflect both school communities. A protocol was being agreed with the trade unions which would be used in setting up the new school structure. He noted that there was usually no difficulty in redeploying skilled school administrators in the local area and that the Authority was expecting 40 headteaching vacancies to occur in the next three years. It was very likely that both the Council and Lichfield Diocese would be interested in bidding to run the new school if that was the chosen method.

Mr. Hopkins confirmed that the Diocese would be interested in bidding if there was a competition. He believed that the community needed reconciliation and was concerned about any suggestion of a “shot gun wedding” approach. The church would like to work with both governing bodies to seek the right solution for the children.

Ann Hartley thanked all for their attendance and the meeting closed at 18.30.