

PRIMARY SCHOOL ORGANISATION CONSULTATION

NOTES OF A MEETING HELD AT BEECH GROVE CE (CONTROLLED) JUNIOR SCHOOL HELD ON 11 MARCH 2008

GOVERNORS' MEETING HELD 5.00pm

Present: Cllr. Karen Calder (Shropshire County Council – Cabinet Member) Liz Nicholson (Corporate Director, Children and Young People's Services), Norrie Porter (Head of Premises and Planning), Steve Rayner (Lichfield Diocesan Education Authority). Nicholas Turner (Headteacher Beech Grove School).
Governors: Mrs. A. Ashworth, G. Bell, M. Bennett (Chair of Governors), Mrs. E. Channon, Mrs. D. Ellis, Mrs. E. Leek, Mrs. P. Musson, N. Phillips, Mrs. J. Quinn, Mrs. W. Richards.

Apologies were received from Mrs. J. Bridgewood and Mr. R. Pugh.

Also in attendance: David Owen (Note taker).

Liz Nicholson opened the meeting and introduced those present. She explained:

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

A full discussion with governors was held and the following points raised and questions answered:

1. In the case of a competition (bullet point 3) who would make the final decision.

Norrie Porter explained that the Cabinet would be the final decision making body even in the case of a competition. If referred to the adjudicator, it would take approximately an additional 3 months. He felt that it might be possible to have the competition waived if there was a wide consensus but pointed out that there were a number of checks and balances built in to the system.

2. A governor asked about the proposals for building work at the school.

A. Norrie Porter responded that significant funding was available for capital works, and that a higher priority would be given to reorganized schools. No plans had been made for building work at this stage. The Authority together with the Governors and school community would consider what would be needed and there would also be the opportunity to consider providing community facilities. A Project Board would be created which, would include governor representation, to oversee procurement and management of the scheme.

3. It was agreed that it was important that staff, children, families and the community should be involved in deciding what form the school remodeling would take and it was particularly important that governors from both of the existing schools were involved in the process. In relation to staffing, officers confirmed that it was intended that compulsory redundancies were to be avoided as part of the process. A meeting with a representative of Human Resources had been held with staff and a protocol would shortly be in place. It was also confirmed that headteachers displaced by the proposals would receive support from the Local Authority. Liz Nicholson confirmed that Shropshire did not wish to lose good heads. There was a large turnover of headteachers with a significant number currently approaching retirement age.

5. A governor asked how the new governing body would be created.

A. If the amalgamation was to proceed it was likely that a temporary governing body would be created from the existing membership of both bodies and no election for staff or parent Governors would be held until the new body was set up. Steve Rayner advised that he had experience of a similar situation where a shadow governing body consisting of 50% membership of each of the two merging schools was formed.

6. Mr. Bennett told the meeting that governors had, in principle, supported the concept of amalgamation for some time and had previously made informal approaches to the Governors of the Infant School. He believed that Governors would support the principle subject to reassurance on staffing, remodeling and that sufficient funding was available. Governors were not prepared to accept amalgamation “on the cheap”.

7. Governors felt that, should the proposal go ahead, it was important that the school should become one unit immediately because at other schools difficulties had occurred where pupils and staff “commuted” between sites. Liz Nicholson suggested that Governors might want to contact other schools in the county e.g. Albrighton Primary School where a similar amalgamation had taken place.

8. Governors emphasized their belief that the existing religious character of the school should be maintained. It was pointed out that parents in Oswestry, the second largest town in the county, should retain the opportunity of sending children to a Church of England school. It was noted that the infant school building would automatically transfer into church ownership if the C of E status was maintained.

9. A governor raised the question of budget share and, in particular, if amalgamation would result in a cut of the overall budget.

A. Norrie Porter confirmed that the many of the factors for funding were based on the area of the building and Free School Meal figures which would be constant in

the new building. There was also the possibility of some cost reducing with heat source from ground and other environmentally friendly improvements.

10. Mr. Bennett stated that the school currently got less per pupil than smaller schools and that this situation had the effect of dividing large and small schools. Liz Nicholson assured the meeting that the matter would be addressed by the newly constituted Policy Commission and would also be referred to the Schools Forum. Karen Calder believed that the Schools Forum would not “hold back” on the issue.

11. Governors asked if the one year lead time was sufficient to complete necessary building work for a September opening of the combined school, especially taking into consideration the priority given by the construction industry to the 2012 Olympics.

A. Officers confirmed that the current £16m project at Monkmoor was proceeding ahead of schedule and under budget. Such projects did need careful planning but had been satisfactorily completed in the past. Norrie Porter hoped that, if there was a high degree of consensus on 19th May, it would be possible to let contracts with a start date in October. This should enable a September 2009 completion. Priorities would need to be clearly identified however.

12. Steve Rayner confirmed that the Diocese would be willing to visit and talk with governors of the Infant school about being a church school.

13. A governor raised the issue of traffic difficulties at the start and end of the school day at both sites.

A. Norrie Porter referred to a scheme at the Wilfred Owen school on the Monkmoor Campus in Shrewsbury which may be a model for improvement.

13. Mr. Bennett believed the governors felt that both schools could improve if they were a single unit and felt that they would be better able to “compete” with other through schools in the area. He was sure that the staffing structure was such that it could provide excellence provided the physical structure could be delivered. A special meeting of the governing body would be convened and he invited governors to email him with requests for information or visits before they came to a consensus view.

Liz Nicholson thanked everyone for their attendance and emphasized that the Local Authority wanted to be certain that it was dealing with everybody equally and fairly. If any issues rose or information was needed she encouraged Governors to contact Norrie Porter who would be the link person in the process.

The meeting closed at 18.15.