

PRIMARY SCHOOL ORGANISATION CONSULTATION

NOTES OF A MEETING HELD FOR MOUNT PLEASANT INFANT AND JUNIOR SCHOOL HELD AT THE INFANT SCHOOL ON 17 MARCH 2008

GOVERNORS' MEETING HELD AT 5.00pm

Present:

Governors

Officers/Members

Cllr Joyce Allaway (MPI)	Cllr Karen Calder
Alan Brannen (Headteacher MPJ)	Mr Norrie Porter
Kevin Breeze (MPI)	Mr John Rowley
Judy Clowes (Chair MPJ)	Mrs Helen Woodbridge (Note Taker)
Liz Fairless (MPJ)	
Ray Hughes (MPJ)	
Cate Jones (MPI&J)	
Linda Mckeown (MPI)	
Malcolm Price (Chair MPI)	
Margaret Pritchard (MPJ)	
Mark Ramsey (MPJ)	
Cllr Eileen Sandford (MPJ)	
Gail Shields (MPI&J)	
Neil Thomas (MPI)	
Jane Turner (MPI)	
Dave Watts (MPJ)	
Janet Weston (Headteacher MPI)	

John Rowley opened the meeting and introduced those present. He explained:

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

Dave Watts asked if both governing bodies were in agreement that a new school should be created, would it hold any weight.

John Rowley replied that he would be very surprised if that was not taken seriously and Cllr Karen Calder confirmed that the views of the governing bodies would hold a great deal of weight.

Ray Hughes asked if it would be physically a new school or just a new school by name.

John Rowley confirmed that it would be new by name in the first instance. However there was no preconceived idea about any new name for the school.

John Rowley went on to say that whichever route was taken, there would not be significant differences for the staff with the exception of the headteachers.

Judy Clowse asked about the governing body if a new school was opened.

Norrie Porter advised that a shadow governing body would be appointed which would most probably consist of existing members of both governing bodies – with an independent Chair if one could not be agreed upon. There would not need to be elections for staff/parent governors. Norrie suggested that the school should opt for the largest governing body size to accommodate as many existing governors as possible. This could then be reduced at a later stage.

Cllr Joyce Allaway asked if the interest of outside bodies in running a new school (as per option 3), was realistic.

John Rowley explained that it was impossible to be certain about the bodies might enter a competition. However, his understanding was that it was unlikely that there would be many bidders, if any. Interest from other bodies has generally been confined to secondary schools or to some urban areas where the school was no longer a reflection of the local area.

John Rowley pointed out that the number on roll is forecast to drop slightly but is it then reasonably stable for a period of years. A drop to 190 is predicted by 2012.

Cllr Eileen Sandford asked if the proposed housing developments had been taken into account.

John Rowley confirmed that they had been and that there is a fairly accurate formula for predicting how many children will be provided by a particular development. It needs a lot of houses to generate a significant number of children.

Alan Brannen asked about the situation with teaching staff on temporary contracts. The inability to advertise permanent contracts may have a detrimental effect on the performance of the schools.

John Rowley noted this question and promised to respond as there are complications in any transitional phase. There is guidance in the protocols and he agreed to check and respond later.

Alan Brannen asked if the Junior School was inspected and found to be unsatisfactory would this affect the process.

John Rowley advised that if a proposal was already underway then it would not have any effect. However, he didn't think that the school would be inspected during this period. If any Shropshire school is ever found to be unsatisfactory then the Local Authority works with it to get it out of an Ofsted category as soon as possible.

Judy Clowes asked if it could affect the decision.

John Rowley said that the timescale would not allow this. Both schools have already been inspected during the current inspection cycle.

Cllr Eileen Sandford was concerned for the best outcome for the children of the area. She thought that the selection of the headteacher for any new school should be made independently and not by virtue of the fact of which school they were currently headteacher.

John Rowley thanked her for this and noted her point. He said that he was anxious that there were no misunderstandings about the consequences of the various options.

John Rowley went on to talk about the school buildings. If the proposal went ahead then the school would still be broadly in the same buildings – there may be some refurbishment and adjustment. As time goes on, the school would become eligible for the Primary Capital Programme funding which could lead to new buildings.

Ray Hughes asked if amalgamation meant that the school would move higher up the priority list.

Norrie Porter advised that this would be consulted upon. One key element for the funding would be the schools with the greatest stability. In the long term, separate schools would not be discriminated against. The Local Authority would be keen to work with the governing body on this. Norrie Porter advised that there would be around £11 million available over the next three years.

Alan Brannen asked if this was dependent on Shropshire limiting surplus places.

Norris Porter advised that this wasn't the case. However the surplus places are being paid for so the priority is to match places to local demand. The recently commissioned Policy Commission will be looking at the problem.

John Rowley advised that there are proposals to merge infant and junior schools going on nationally and he pointed out the educational advantages. However, this was in no way a criticism of the existing schools.

Mark Ramsey asked if there was any statistical evidence to back this up.

John Rowley replied that statistics could always be provided to back up points and was quite wary of using them. However, looking at Ofsted outcomes 62%

of primary schools are judged good or better whereas only 55% of infant and junior schools are judged good or better. There are recognised dips in performance (and socially) at transition stages and continuity would reduce this. Children with special educational needs are particularly affected at any transition stage.

Gale Shields asked if improved performance was the reason for the proposal.

John Rowley advised that it was one of the reasons. The same outstanding staff/leadership in one school would be more beneficial.

Judy Clowes advised that there are a relatively high proportion of children with special education needs at the schools. She worried about the impact that a long period of consultation, and therefore uncertainty, would have on the leadership of the schools.

John Rowley recognised her concerns and advised that there was a fine line to be drawn in balancing wide consultation with the effect on the schools. The professional associations are keen for decisions to be taken quickly to minimise any adverse effect on staff. However, there is also a desire for consultation. The approach taken is trying to achieve a balance.

Jane Turner asked if on the 19 May it was known who was going to be the new headteacher, what would the future hold for the unsuccessful headteacher.

Cllr Eileen Sandford stressed that Cabinet would have to consider the proposal very carefully.

Cllr Karen Calder warned against second guessing the outcome of the consultation.

Alan Brannen asked if on the 19 May, the agreed proposal would be public.

John Rowley advised that it would be. Then statutory consultation would take place.

Norrie Porter advised that if the proposal was for a new school, then the requirement to open up to competition would extend the process.

Cllr Eileen Sandford asked how the responses would be collated.

John Rowley asked people to respond in any of the ways listed in the consultation paper – particularly after they had taken the time to reflect.

Cllr Joyce Allaway asked for clarification about the statement to stay in both building for up to five years.

Norrie Porter was surprised at the statement and was not sure where it had come from. The governing body would decide how to use the buildings - they

could decide to give up one or some of one building for example to a related service ie Sure Start.

Cllr Joyce Allaway asked if either building was currently big enough to house the school.

Norrie Porter advised that in their current form, then no they weren't. So a debate would be needed about what would be best. Norrie said that if it was his decision, then he would, for example locate the Foundation Stage in the current Infant School buildings and locate Year 1 upwards in the Junior School building, and then also house some family services.

Gale Shields asked if any decision about the buildings would be taken by the new governing body.

Norrie Porter confirmed that this was the case.

Dave Watts asked about the date for the final decision and if there was any way that it could be speeded up as the uncertainty will impact upon teaching and learning.

John Rowley said that the important point was the end of July (depending on the involvement of competition).

Linda Mckeown asked if it was a new school, would one of the existing headteachers be appointed to the headship.

John Rowley advised that there was a requirement to advertise any new headship nationally. However, a distinction should be made between advertising and the process of selection. Governors would be encouraged to sign up to the protocol and consider deciding between the two existing headteachers – but governors could decide to look further afield.

Cllr Eileen Sandford asked about legality.

John Rowley advised that it would be governed by legal process. There was a collective desire to make decisions for children/people. Limitations were introduced for the right reasons.

Malcolm Price asked if the notes of this meeting could be sent to both schools.

John Rowley confirmed that this would be done - everything will be communicated back.

Malcolm Price asked if there could also be some answers to the budget queries raised in the staff meeting. He would particularly like financial information on the headteacher cost saving, deputy headteacher posts, administrative hours, rates savings, breakdown of salary protection £24,000.

Norrie Porter advised that updated financial information on proposed amalgamated schools would be available after the Easter holidays. This would be for three years and on an individual school/amalgamated school basis. Any budget would be set by the governing body and the allocation would be as per the Local Authority formula.

Cllr Karen Calder asked if it would be a good idea to have a joint governing body meeting.

Cllr Eileen Sandford thought that this would be a good idea,

Cllr Joyce Allaway reminded all that this was not just a budget saving exercise.

Cllr Eileen Sandford pointed out the effect of empty places on the whole budget and the need for all schools to be viable.

John Rowley offered the opportunity for anyone to contact officers at Shirehall with any questions comments and brought the meeting to an end.