

EXECUTIVE BOARD

At a meeting of the Executive Board held on Wednesday, 12 December 2007 in the Bridge Suite, Halton Stadium

Present: Councillors McDermott (Chairman), D. Cargill, Gerrard, Harris, McInerney, Nelson, Polhill, Swain, Wharton and Wright

Apologies for Absence: None

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: D. Hennessy, I. Leivesley, A. McIntyre, G. Meehan, D. Parr, M. Reaney, D. Tregea, L. Cairns and G. Cook

Also in attendance: 2 public, 1 press

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER POWERS AND DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PORTFOLIO

Action

(NB The Councillors below declared personal interests in the following item of business for the reasons shown:

Councillor Harris – governor of Bankfield School

Councillor Nelson – governor of the Grange School

Councillor Swain – governor of Halton High School

Councillor Wharton – son attends Fairfield High School and wife has a contract for Employment at that school as an Invigilator)

EXB67 SECONDARY SCHOOL RE-ORGANISATION - KEY DECISION

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Children & Young People providing a summary of the process undertaken for the second round of pre-statutory consultation on the reorganisation of secondary schools and secondary special school provision. A summary of the responses received at the time that the report was produced was provided and key issues outlined .

In addition, a further update on the outcome of the consultation, along with recommended proposals for the

next stage of consultation, were tabled for consideration. This information had not been available previously as the consultation period had only concluded on 7th December 2007: the Cross Party Members' Advisory Working Group had subsequently met on 10th December 2007.

A number of key issues had arisen from the consultation process and these were considered by the Board in detail as follows:

Zone Lines

It was advised that the local authority had to go through an Admissions Forum Process each year and any movement of the proposed zone line would be part of that process. It was possible that the zone line could move location; however, this would be for specific reasons, for example if there was a major build in the area and the school could no longer cope with the number of pupils coming through.

Should the school apply for Trust Status at some time in the future, it would be responsible for its own Admissions criteria; however, any changes to the admission arrangements would have to be agreed with the local authority. If the local authority did not agree with the proposed changes, and could not come to a compromise with the school governing body, the matter would be taken to the School Adjudicator. Discussions had been held with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and, although it could not be guaranteed, it was anticipated that the school would be expected to follow the policies that the Council had set out.

School Size

Concerns had been raised about the potential size of some schools and whether they would be too big. It was considered that, if managed correctly, schools could be successful regardless of their size. This was evidenced by the schools currently within the Borough, which showed no correlation between size and performance.

There was a consensus that 750 should be the lowest number and officers had been advised that, if a school was kept open despite falling rolls, the Authority would be seriously challenged about its use of resources as, due to the funding formula, there was a negative impact on a school's budget should the numbers on roll fall.

Pupil Numbers

It was advised that Building Schools for the Future (BSF) required that the Authority forecast pupil numbers for the period 2007-2017 using National Statistics Data, which had been done. However, as this data was not broken down across Runcorn and Widnes, further forecasting had been carried out using the numbers already in the Borough's primary schools, together with Primary Care Trust data based on live births within the Borough. A number of various scenarios had been examined using these figures and it had been determined that, even allowing for anticipated growth, both communities could be accommodated with there still being a surplus of places. Members were advised that only a certain level of surplus could be planned for as the DCSF would only agree to figures that were evidence based.

In addition, consideration was given to the proposal that all young people between 16 and 19 remain in employment or schooling. It was advised that 78% of young people nationally were already in either training or education. Therefore, the impact of this announcement was relatively low.

Choice

It was advised that the numbers currently in Year 7 of Fairfield High School had not been influenced by the re-organisation proposals as parents had expressed preferences for schools prior to the start of the BSF process. It was further advised that the Government used the term 'choice' to outline how it expected all parents and pupils to have access to high standards in whichever school they attended and that, so far as was possible, parental preference should be met in terms of the school their child attended.

Consultation Process

Comments were raised in respect of the consultation process. It was noted that this had been wide-ranging although concerns had been raised in certain areas about the timing of the information. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that there had been some issues raised during the first round: in the second round of consultation, letters were sent home with pupils due to the postal strike that had been ongoing at that time. However, so far as he was aware, these issues had been resolved in the second stage of consultation. It was confirmed that every endeavour would be made to ensure that any further consultations would be

carried out as fully as possible.

Alternative Proposal

Members were advised that Fairfield High School had submitted a further alternative proposal at the end of the consultation procedure that the school remain open as a “small school by design” in accordance with recently announced government proposals. However, there was uncertainty regarding a number of elements around this proposal and so Members were advised that, at the current time, the proposal be rejected as incomplete and flawed. However, Fairfield High had the opportunity to consider the questions raised by the Working Group in terms of revisiting the proposal as part of the formal statutory consultation process. The questions were listed under item 3 of the report.

Hard Federation

Consideration was given to the hard federation process, which it was hoped would make the transition clear for everyone, providing certainty for the pupils of both schools. It was advised that, throughout this process, Ofsted would still be monitoring the provision from both schools, which was a further safeguard against any deterioration in standards whilst changes were ongoing.

Halton High School

It was confirmed that the Board was currently only being requested to consider the principle of whether or not Halton High School should be replaced by an Academy. It was noted that no “closure” would take place until an Academy was built. Only when the funding and sponsor was in place would the issue of where the school should be sited be considered. The Working Group had requested that, at this time, Members be granted an opportunity to consider this in further detail.

The Board requested that a form of words be provided in the resolution regarding Halton High School to make it clear that the term “closure” was purely technical: in practice, there would be no loss of provision.

Workforce Strategy

Members were advised that a joint workforce working group had been established, agreeing its terms of reference, frequency of meetings and a communication strategy.

Outcomes from these meetings had been produced on a laminated poster for all schools outlining the names and contact details of the group's members, and its aims. In addition, a range of personnel one-to-one meetings had been held, which had been utilised by a number of staff: more were subsequently to be provided.

The process so far had identified a number of key concerns, which would be used to develop actions and strategies. In addition, proposals had been shared with the Trade Union with a request for a steer on areas to be prioritised, for example "At Risk" and "Redundancy Policies". The BSF TUPE Staffing Protocol Policy had been circulated and a number of policies were now nearly in their final stages.

In moving the resolution, the Members involved in the Cross Party Advisory Working Group were thanked, and Fairfield High School was commended on its input in the process to date.

Reason for Decision

Secondary provision must be reorganised prior to entry into the BSF programme.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

The initial options along with the alternative options were all assessed and considered against the Government criteria.

Implementation Date

The next phase of consultation was to commence in January 2008.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Building Schools for the Future proposals be agreed, as set out below, as the basis for Statutory Consultation;
- (2) Council be invited to support the Building Schools for the Future proposals as set out in the said report; and
- (3) the Executive Board receive a report at its next meeting on any views expressed by Council in respect of the Building Schools for the Future proposals.

PROPOSALS AGREED

RUNCORN

1. The Grange Comprehensive

A change of the Lower Age Range Limit for the Grange Comprehensive.

This will require a Statutory Notice issued in June 2008.

2. The Heath – A Specialist Technology College

The Heath – A Specialist Technology College to expand to 1200 pupils using capital investment from BSF Funding.

A Statutory Notice will not be required.

3. Halton High

The closure of Halton High and develop a new Specialist Academy with provision for 11-19 year olds.

Further work to be carried out on securing a sponsor.

Exploration of 3 site options for location.

To provide up to 1,050 places for pupils aged 11 – 16 plus 100 places for Post 16's.

A Statutory Notice will be required and issued in 2008 at a date to be agreed once a sponsor has been secured.

Note: No closure will be effected until all the relevant outstanding matters in respect of the Academy have been resolved. The Academy will be in place before Halton High is physically closed.

4. Cavendish Special School

No change to the designation of Cavendish agreed by the School Organisation Committee in April 2006.

5. St. Chad's Catholic College

No recommendation.

WIDNES

6. The Bankfield and Chestnut Lodge

The Bankfield to expand to 1,050.

The re-building and co-location of Chestnut Lodge onto the Bankfield Site through Capital Investment from BSF.

A Statutory Notice will not be required.

7. Fairfield High

Close Fairfield High.

This will require a Statutory Notice.

The Notice will be issued in January 2008 proposing the closure of Fairfield High School and listing Federation as a transitional safeguarding arrangement.

A hard federation will be encouraged and facilitated by the Local Authority with a view to it commencing as soon as is practicable.

A hard federation would need to be agreed by the two schools. It would have one governing body, a strong leadership team with an Executive HeadTeacher and an associate Headteacher, a common set of goals and could continue to operate across split sites. Both schools would retain their separate identity, receive individual school budgets and Ofsted Inspections and report separately on performance.

If a Federation cannot be agreed, an alternative transitional safeguarding arrangement will need to be implemented.

8. Wade Deacon

The expansion of Wade Deacon High from 1125 to 1500 places for 11 –16 year olds funded through BSF capital investment.

A Statutory Notice will be required and this will be issued in February 2008.

The Notice will propose a planned admission number of 300 from September 2010.

From this date, Wade Deacon will operate across two sites; the current site and Fairfield site until the building work on Wade Deacon is complete.

All Fairfield pupils at the time of the closure will become pupils attending at Wade Deacon.

9. Ashley School

The co-location and rebuilding of Ashley School onto the Wade Deacon Site.

A Statutory Notice will not be required.

10. Introducing Zoning Admission

The introduction of Zoning Admission Criteria in Widnes.

Consultation on the admission criteria will be undertaken as part of the annual consultation on Admission Arrangements.

11. Saints Peter and Paul Catholic College

No recommendation.

MINUTES ISSUED: 18th December 2007

CALL IN: 27th December 2007

Any matter decided by the Executive Board may be called in no later than 27th December 2007

Meeting ended at 10.38 a.m.