

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD

At a special meeting of the Children and Young People Policy and Performance Board on Tuesday, 17 July 2007 in the Marketing Suite, Municipal Building

Present: Councillors Dennett (Chairman), Horabin (Vice-Chairman), Drakeley, Fraser, Gilligan, D Inch, J. Lowe, Parker, M Ratcliffe and Stockton

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Higginson

Absence declared on Council Business: None

Officers present: L. Derbyshire, L. Butcher, A. McIntyre and M. Winstanley

Also in attendance: Councillor McInerney (in accordance with Standing Order No.33) and members of the public

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

Action

(Note: Councillor Stockton declared a Personal Interest in the following item of business as a Governor at The Grange Comprehensive School.)

(Councillor Horabin declared a Personal Interest in the following item of business as she had a grandchild at Wade Deacon High School.)

(Councillor Gilligan declared a Personal Interest in the following item of business as a Governor at St Peter and Paul's Catholic College.)

(Councillor McInerney declared a Personal Interest in the following item of business as a Governor at Farnworth CE and Lunts Heath Primary Schools.)

CYP13 PRESENTATION: BUILDING SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE (BSF)

The Board considered a presentation from the Operational Director, Children and Young People which:-

- Set out the vision and aims for Halton's Building Schools for the Future;
- Highlighted background and rationale to the proposals;

- Set out the Government requirements and the options that were available i.e. Closure, Amalgamation and Federation;
- Outlined the Widnes Consultation Proposals in relation to The Bankfield School, Chestnut Lodge, Wade Deacon High, Fairfield High, Ashley Special School and St Peter and Paul's Catholic College;
- Outlined the Runcorn Consultation proposals in relation to The Heath Specialist Technology College, the Grange Comprehensive School, St Chad's Catholic High School, Halton High School, Cavendish Special School and The Bridge (Key Stage 3) Pupil Referral Unit;
- Highlighted that BSF would enable the Authority to invest in children, the workforce, new buildings, learning resources, new technology and a safe and integrated learning communities; and
- Set out the next steps of the BSF programme.

The Board was advised that the consultation period on the first phase of the programme ended on the 20th July 2007. The minutes of the meetings would be put on the BSF website for information. A large number of feedback forms, emails and letters of response had been received. All responses would be collected and summarised into key issues along with alternative proposals and would be put into a report for consideration by the Executive Board at its October meeting. If the Executive Board approved the proposals for the second phase, a six week statutory consultation period would commence. During this period public notices would be sent out. At the end of the statutory consultation period, responses would be collected and a summarised report would be presented to the Executive Board for a final decision in January 2008.

If the Executive Board wished to consult on alternative proposals it would result in the statutory process not being complete until the end of Spring 2008.

Arising from the presentation, the following comments, questions and responses were raised by the Board:-

- (1) Halton Borough Council's Constitution gave the power to the Operational Director for

Learning and School Improvement to deal with all school admissions. Pupils attending the Federated Schools should have the same admission rights as those at the final stage.

Can written assurance be given, that the Council's Schools Admission Policy will be such that, pupils entering Fairfield High School during the period of Federation with Wade Deacon High School, will be subject to the same rights of admission to Wade Deacon when the Fairfield site is closed. If there is to be a bottleneck of pupils in some entry years we should ensure that the Federated High Schools affected are given special consideration for temporary external accommodation under the control of the Wade Deacon Governing body.

The Admission Rights should also be extended to their siblings, who would be attending Primary Schools in the eastern sector of Widnes. This would go a long way to alleviating the fears of some parents that Fairfield pupils from the eastern side of Widnes are getting a raw deal.

In response, the Board was advised that parents would continue to have the right to express a preference within Halton. The Federation of Wade Deacon and Fairfield High School was intended to protect the education of the pupils over the transitional period. The two schools, in the federation option would be working very closely together.

- (2) Would the Admission Policy be based on the catchment area and siblings? Would the catchment area be extended?

In response, the Board was advised that currently the Admissions Policy was based on:-

- 1 Children in Public Care;
- 2 Siblings; and
- 3 Distance.

In respect of the catchment area, it was explained that a circle is drawn around the

area of the school and the size of the circle would depend on the choices that parents made each year.

The Board was also advised that at the public meetings postcode information had been displayed which outlined where people were currently accessing education. It had highlighted that people travel throughout the Borough to access education.

It was also emphasised that if the proposal to Federate Wade Deacon School High School with Fairfield High School was approved, it was likely that any pupils attending those schools would continue to do so. The transition period, it was explained, could take as long as 2013.

The Portfolio holder for Children and Young People highlighted that there had been concerns that all the number of pupils in Fairfield School currently would not be able to fit into the new school after Federation with Wade Deacon High School. He indicated that this was not an issue as a large number of pupils would attend the Bankfield School and there would also be a fall in pupil numbers in 2013.

- (3) It was suggested that the circle should be a semi circle (zoning);

The Board was advised that options available to the Authority when considering the Admission Policy were, proximity, zoning or feeder schools.

- (4) Why had the model been chosen and did the proposals take account of the Government proposals for pupils to stay in education until the age of 18?

The Board was advised that in respect of the numbers, a range of issues had been considered – the current number of pupils, the birth rate, planning and trends to obtain a ten year figure. However, it was highlighted that demographics did not stay the same.

The Board was also advised that in relation to pupils staying in education, employment or training until the age of 18, at the present time, these were only proposals by the Government. However, the BSF programme would design in flexibility to accommodate such matters.

- (5) Concern was raised at the length of time the transition period would take and the effect it could have on pupils well being and education. It was highlighted that there would need to be ownership and partnership for the proposals.

In response, it was reported that a school could move to a hard federation earlier in the transition process. The schools could look at re-organising i.e. a split site school. However, new build could not commence until the funding had been acquired at the end of financial close. The BSF process and timetable was outlined in detail for members of the Board.

In reply to this response, clarity was sought on whether the pupils would move from one site to another site or only share facilities, resources and staff?

In response, it was reported that under the Federation option, it would be the two affected schools to negotiate the mechanisms for this to happen in order to ensure disruption to the pupils was minimised.

Other authorities, it was explained, had done a range of different arrangements i.e. used mobile buildings, vacant schools and moved pupils between each school. Options for the arrangements would be considered at the detailed planning stage were financial implications would also be considered. Funding would not be available until the end of the process and the Authority would use the current finances and resources to the best effect during the transitional period.

- (6) Concern was raised for the current pupils, especially at the Grange Comprehensive School. It was emphasised that they would need to feel that they belonged and disruption

to their education and emotional feelings should be kept to a minimum.

The Board was advised that the pupils who would benefit from BSF would be current primary pupils not those pupils in secondary education. It was reported, that the Authority had a duty to protect and secure and stabilise provision of education both currently and in the future.

- (7) In Federation – would there be Governors for both schools?

In response, it was reported that if it was a hard Federation, there would only be one governing body which would be facilitated by a specialist working with the two schools. This had worked well in other authorities, but was new to Halton.

- (8) Was it the intention to have a hard federation for the teachers also and what was the rationale concerning ring fencing the available jobs to the Wade Deacon staff?

In response, it was reported that the BSF programme expanded on successful performing schools i.e. those whose standards were above the national average and building on that to increase opportunities in new schools as they were developed. In this respect the jobs would be ring fenced and the Authority would look to provide other opportunities for the remaining staff.

In reply clarity was sought on whether any analysis had been undertaken on the staff?

In response, it was reported that there had been a detailed analysis of the staff commissioned and over the next five years there would be opportunities created from staff taking retirement and natural movement to other jobs.

In reply, it was suggested that the proposal, at this time, to ring fencing jobs would not gain support for the proposals or encourage partnership working between the two schools

as Fairfield staff would feel disadvantaged.

The Portfolio holder for Children and Young People reported that Wade Deacon High School and The Heath Specialist Technology College were currently the best performing schools in the Borough and that had to be a consideration under the BSF programme to obtain the funding. The programme secured additional funding for the schools. However, it was emphasised that teachers were valued in the Borough and there would be further opportunities for them over the five year period. A Workforce Strategy Plan was also being put into place.

The Board was further advised that significant resources had been put into developing the Workforce Strategy Plan. A first draft would be ready for consultation with Trade Unions and Management in September. It was highlighted that this would be a comprehensive policy that all staff could sign up to and would offer opportunities for them over the transitional period.

- (9) Was the fall in pupil numbers in both Widnes and Runcorn and was the data available to the Board? There was also a problem with people living on the edge of the Borough obtaining a place in secondary education provision, what would the situation be in 2011?

The Board was advised that there were currently 564 pupils in Halton High School and the proposals for the Academy would accommodate 1050 pupils.

The Board was further advised that the information relating to pupil numbers in the Borough was available on the Council's BSF website. It was reported that if some schools are expanded it would create surplus in other schools. The proposals, it was believed, would create enough capacity and opportunities for parents and pupils in the Borough.

- (10) Academy Schools – do they select pupils on a specialism and under the BSF programme would the schools be open in the evening?

The Board was advised that the Academy would have a specialism which would be linked to the sponsor. For example, Salford Academy was sponsored by the BBC and Channel 4 and therefore had a specialism in media. Halton would look for a sponsor that would compliment the needs of the Borough as the sponsor would define the ethos and specialism of a school. There was more flexibility in respect of how you meet the national curriculum in schools with a specialism. However, currently any of the high schools with a specialism in the Borough have a choice to select proportion of their pupils on specialism but they choose not to.

- (11) Could the rationale relating to increasing the size of the schools be explained and is there any detailed research showing that the higher the number of pupils, the less likely there is to be an increase in attainment levels?

In response, the Board was advised that consultants had undertaken research on this matter and there had been mixed views. There was one belief that small schools were more effective and that 900 pupils was too big (although criteria for BSF say 900 is acceptable), and there was also an opposite belief that larger provision provides a more diverse curriculum and opportunities. Larger schools, however would need to be carefully organised and would not affect class sizes.

In reply, it was suggested that further research be undertaken to achieve positive results on whether the size of the schools actually affected attainment levels. It was also suggested that this information be circulated to all Members of the Board.

- (12) Concern was raised regarding the length of time of the transitional period, 2007 – 2013 and that it could continue beyond that time and the effect this could have on attainment levels. Attainment levels were below national average, particularly in English and Maths and clarity was sought on the support mechanisms that would be put in place to ensure that

attainment levels continued to rise in the Borough.

In response, the Board was advised that the national average was 59% and Halton were achieving 52% and credit should be given to the schools in the Borough for all the work they had undertaken to achieve the increase. However, more work would need to be done as schools ranged from 33% to 77% in attainment levels. The proposals would not disrupt the whole community and funding would be increased to secure education during the transitional period to maintain and improve standards of attainment.

- (13) BSF Programme – Regarding the extended services agenda – How would this be supported if schools were federated as there would be large geographical gaps in some areas?

It was reported that the extended services agenda enabled all localities to access all facilities in that area not just in schools. An audit on extra activities was currently being undertaken by secondary and primary schools and gaps in provision and duplications being identified in order to widen opportunities locally as part of the BSF programme.

- (14) Concern was raised that less academic pupils would be disadvantaged in a larger school and whether the larger schools would result in larger classes. Clarity was also sought on the amount of finance available from the Council.

It was reported, that re-organisation would require a factor to develop a school which represented approximately £1/2m between two schools over the five year period. In addition a range of other support packages would be available.

It was further reported that class sizes would not be increased. Research on school sizes would be available on the website.

- (15) How much would the Government funding be?

In response, it was reported that the Authority would know when the final Business Case was submitted. Presently, there was only indicative figures available depending which phase the Authority was at and Halton were currently only at Phase six.

In reply, clarity was sought on whether the funding would be via a grant or loan?

It was reported that the funding could be mixed via Private Funding Initiative credit, Borrowing, Capital Grant and School Funding and was likely to be a combination of funds.

(16) It was reported that alternative proposals had been put forward and the Authority had met, provided advice and guidance on them. It was noted that these would be considered;

(17) Clarity was sought on the increase in the number of new communities in the schools throughout the Borough. It was suggested that information on this be circulated to all Members of the Board.

In reply, it was reported that there had been an increase but in comparison to other local authorities it was only a modest increase.

(18) How would staff be retained and recruitment be dealt with during the transitional period to ensure that affected schools would not be continually using supply staff?

It was reported that this matter would be addressed in the Workplace Strategy and it would be highlighted that the BSF programme would create new opportunities in the Borough.

In reply, clarity was sought on whether all vacancies would be externally advertised?

In reply, it was reported that under current local authorities at risk procedure a member of staff would complete an application form for a vacant post, if successful could secure the job before it was advertised externally. The Authority would be looking to develop a school model policy as part of the Workforce Strategy.

The Portfolio holder for Children and Young People reported that the Government Office North West had indicated that the Authority had to consider a range of priorities which included truancy and surplus places. It was predicted that there would be over 1000 surplus places in the Borough. It was suggested that maintaining the current level of surplus places including premises costs could be in the region of £1m. This funding was being diverted from education.

The option of doing nothing, with the prediction of the fall in pupil numbers, would result in young people losing out on the significant investment in education. Education provision would also be affected as the pupil numbers would decline by 2013 and by that time funding from the BSF programme would not be available. He indicated that alternative proposals would need to be realistic in order to secure the funding. He suggested that an all party consultation group be established to consider the BSF programme as it progressed. He added that if the Authority chose to do nothing the Government Office North West Office would make a decision on the surplus places on behalf of the Authority. He encouraged all Members to support the proposals and enable the Authority to secure funding for the future of education in the Borough.

RESOLVED: That the views of Members expressed during the meeting, be noted, recorded appropriately, and considered as part of the overall consultation exercise during the Executive Board's forthcoming decision making process.

Strategic Director
– Children &
Young People

Meeting ended at 8.40 p.m.