

**BUILDING SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE
MEMBERS ADVISORY WORKING GROUP
10th December 2007**

Present: Cllr Tony McDermott
Cllr John Swain
Cllr Tom McInerney
Cllr Tim Sly
Cllr Linda Redhead for Cllr Chris Rowe
Cllr Eddie Jones
Cllr Rob Polhill
Cllr Mike Wharton
Cllr Margaret Radcliffe

Officers

Present: David Parr
Gerald Meehan
Dick Tregea
Daniel Hennessy
Ann McIntyre

Unable to attend: Cllr David Findon
Cllr Phil Drakeley

Item	Discussion	Action
1.0	Apologies for absence – there were no apologies	
2.0	Minutes of the last meeting – 9 th October 2007	
2.1	It was noted that John Swain had been present at the last meeting.	
2.2	It was noted that the PFI explanatory document was to follow via e-mail but it is to be presented at this meeting.	
2.3	The minutes were agreed.	
3.0	Consultation Summary	
3.1	The Consultation Summary was presented to the Group. The second phase of the pre-statutory consultation commenced on 2 nd November 2007 and closed on 7 th December 2007. The following main themes raised were highlighted:	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The closure of Fairfield • Location of Halton High (new Academy) • School size • Pupil Numbers • Funding • Workforce 	
3.2	Gerald Meehan shared some of the responses to BSF from pupils. It was agreed that it was exceedingly important to consider the views of young people and a request was made to share the pupil responses from the consultation.	
4.0	School Size	
4.0.1	Discussed school size in relation to performance of schools. It was agreed that it was the management/leadership of the school that had the greatest impact on the performance of the school and that this was not necessarily related to school size. There is no definitive position on school size and overall school effectiveness.	
4.1	Pupil numbers	
4.1.1	The data used to calculate the pupil numbers was presented. It was noted that the National Statistics data 2001 census and updated midyear estimate was the Governments starting point. The data shows 7,400 children in Halton at the midyear estimate, however, this figure is not broken down into Widnes and Runcorn. The data presented by Daniel Hennessy was discussed,	

	<p>including the live births data obtained from the PCT that has been used to calculate the projected pupil numbers for the future. An updated version of the National Statistics and projected surplus places for the next 10 years was circulated to the Group.</p>	
4.2	<u>Zoning</u>	
4.2.1	<p>It was noted that the Zoning line would be dealt with as a separate issue outside the BSF process in the annual Admissions process. This is agreed every year by the Executive Board. The process was outlined to the group and it was noted that a consultation process would take place with the schools and community before the positioning of the line was agreed.</p>	
4.2.2	<p>It was highlighted that a Trust school or Academy can make their own admission arrangements but they must also consult all bodies that this process would affect. The Local Authority could object to a process proposed by a Trust School or Academy that was not deemed as meeting the Admissions Code of Practice.</p>	
5.0	<u>Closure</u>	
5.1	<p>Ann McIntyre presented the information regarding the Fairfield school closure proposal. The group discussed the National census data and the school pupil figures for Fairfield. The figures show a decline in numbers over the last few years since 1999. Information on first preferences was discussed and compared with figures for Wade Deacon, Bankfield and Sts Peter and Paul.</p>	
5.2	<p>The financial viability of Fairfield was discussed. Fairfield has had financial difficulties over recent years due to declining pupil numbers. The LA has had to support the school and there has also had to be a reduction in staff.</p>	
5.3	<p>Based on the October 2007 data, if pupil numbers continue to fall as expected the school funding could reduce by £350,000 for 2008/2009. This figure could potentially increase year on year.</p>	
5.4	<p>Ann McIntyre explained the Dedicated School Grant and how this reduction in funding for Fairfield would effectively be shared by the other schools. It was noted that financial viability of schools is a key consideration by Government as part of its consideration of BSF.</p>	
5.5	<p>David Parr noted that it could be possible for the Council to fund this deficit, but a figure of £350,000 could require an</p>	

	extra 1% on the Council Tax.	
5.6	Concern was raised for the pupils remaining at Fairfield with the falling numbers and reducing budget. It was considered that, if agreed, the Hard Federation with Wade Deacon should start as early as possible to safeguard the educational provision for the remaining children.	
5.7	The Hard Federation was discussed and it was noted that the proposal would be to use both sites with the staff of both school working flexibly.	
6.0	<u>Workforce</u>	
6.1	It was noted that 3 meetings of the BSF Joint Working Group had taken place to date with all Union representatives. The meetings had been very well attended. The Workforce Strategy process has been signed up to and a Communication Strategy developed.	
6.2	A notice board poster with all names of the members of the Workforce Group with contact details had been developed. Statements from each meeting of the Joint Working Group had been added to the poster and distributed to schools so that all staff are aware of the outcomes of the meetings and progress made.	
6.3	Personnel had offered one to one meetings with all affected staff. With regard to policy development, the policies for prioritisation had been agreed as Handling At Risk/Redeployment/Redundancy; and Recruitment/Vacancy process for New, Expanding, Federated or Amalgamated Schools.	
7.0	<u>Alternative Proposals</u>	
7.1	Gerald Meehan introduced the alternative proposal from Fairfield High School. The Fairfield High proposal is the only alternative proposal received. The Government BSF requirements were outlined. It was noted that the proposal had been submitted two days prior to the end of the second pre-statutory consultation process.	
7.2	It was proposed that the proposal for a 'small school by design' including aspects of a 'studio school' at Fairfield High be rejected as it stands and that the school be asked to reconsider all BSF and local requirements and, should Fairfield consider it appropriate, a revised version of the proposal to be presented during the statutory (3 rd) stage of consultation.	
8.0	Daniel Hennessy outlined the statutory process.	

<p>8.1</p> <p>8.2</p> <p>8.3</p> <p>8.4</p> <p>8.5</p>	<p>The Council has now completed the second round of pre-statutory consultation to get views of the community on the Council's proposal. The next stage would be a statutory notice stating the Council's intentions. There is either a 6 weeks or 4 weeks period (depending on the nature of the notice e.g. closure or expansion) allowing the community to respond formally to the statutory notice. The Council then has 8 weeks/2 months to make the decision based on the information received from that Consultation.</p> <p>It was noted that only one school organisation proposal can be put forward per school for consultation.</p> <p>It was agreed that the proposal for a Studio School within a small school by design at Fairfield High was incomplete and appeared flawed and, therefore, the Members Advisory Working Group had no option but to reject the proposal.</p> <p>The Leader rounded up the process and it was agreed that the group would make a recommendation to Executive Board that will also go to Full Council to submit a statutory notice to close Fairfield High School.</p> <p>It was agreed that a letter would be sent to the Fairfield High proposers to communicate the decision that the proposal had been rejected in its present format and with a suggestion that they resubmit in the statutory 3rd stage of the consultation.</p>	<p>AMc</p>
<p>9.0</p> <p>9.1</p> <p>9.2</p> <p>9.3</p> <p>9.4</p>	<p><u>Halton Academy</u></p> <p>There are 3 possible sites for the Academy; the current site, Halton Sports site and Wharford Farm</p> <p>It was noted that the site of the Academy does not need to be agreed at this time. Additionally a sponsor is still to be found who will need to be consulted upon this. Discussed possible arrangements with a Social Enterprise such as a University.</p> <p>Cllr John Swain reported that the Governors and staff at Halton High had chosen Wharford Farm as the preferred site for the Academy. Parents had been invited to a meeting regarding the proposals and although the turn out had not been as good as expected, those that did vote, voted in favour of Wharford Farm.</p> <p>The main issues being raised by parents, other than the site move were those of transport and the impact on the</p>	

	Leisure Centre if the school moves site. It was noted that there would be transport arrangements for pupils if the school moves site in the form of a clear transport strategy. The long term viability of the Leisure Centre was not considered an issue.	
9.5	The Group considered the map which showed the location and proximity of the 3 proposed sites.	
9.6	All children from Halton High and local area would be eligible to attend the Academy. The Council would have to agree the admission policy and would wish to ensure fair access to the re-located school (if this is agreed) for all current and future children from the current Halton High catchment area.	AMc
9.7	It was agreed that a Seminar would be arranged for all Members where the 3 sites could be considered and their pros and con discussed prior to the next meeting of this Working Group.	DT
9.8	Dick Tregaea to meet with colleagues from Daresbury Park in the near future and will convey the comments regarding the Wharford Farm site to the Group.	
10.0	<u>Members questions</u>	
10.1	A Digest of questions and answers arising from the recent communications on BSF was circulated with the papers and discussed. It was agreed that this would be circulated to all Members of the Council for background information.	AMc
11.0	<u>PFI Information</u>	
11.1	Background information on PFI was provided to the meeting.	
11.2	Discussed PFI and Prudential Borrowing. These funding scenario options were outlined by Ann McIntyre. Borrowing amounts were compared and the possible repayable costs by Halton Council.	
11.3	One of the benefits of PFI is that the financial risk in relation to the building is transferred to the provider. PFI requires a detailed funding agreement for the facilities costs. PFI requires the provider to return the building to the Council in the same state of repair following completion of the tender period.	
11.4	PFI Costs were discussed but it is considered too early to say what the financial commitment for the Council will be. The schools involved and the designs need to be agreed	

	<p>first. It was noted that, if necessary, the specification would be reduced to meet any funding gap, however, schools would still be built to the same high standard identified within the relevant Building Bulletin.</p>	
11.5	<p>It was noted that the financial risk would be transferred to the builder, however, the delivery risk of the service or school would remain with the Council.</p>	
11.6	<p>It was noted that a robust contract would be drawn up including collective targets and outputs that would be delivered.</p>	
11.7	<p>It was noted that most Authorities have a mixture of PFI and design and build with prudential borrowing.</p>	
11.8	<p>It was noted that approximately 66% of costs is covered by PFI credits.</p>	
11.9	<p>It was noted that the correct pupil number data is imperative at this stage. Incorrect figures could result in the Council having surplus places in the future in the new buildings.</p>	
12.0	<p><u>Draft Statutory Notices</u></p>	
12.1	<p>An illustrative example of a draft notice for closure and draft for expansion was included in the papers.</p>	
12.2	<p>It was agreed that the recommendation put forward to Executive Board would be that a Statutory Notice will be issued for:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) the closure of Fairfield High School; (ii) the expansion of Wade Deacon; (iii) to extend the age range at The Grange 	
12.3	<p>It was noted that a recommendation would also be included for the Executive Board to agree in principle to the arrangements for The Heath, The Bankfield, Ashley and Chesnut Lodge, although a Statutory Notice is not required for these schools.</p>	
12.4	<p>A further recommendation supporting the closure of Halton High and its replacement with an Academy School was also agreed.</p>	
12.5	<p>The proposals in respect of Sts Peter and Paul, St Chad's Catholic College and Cavendish were noted.</p>	

13.0	<u>Next Steps</u>	
13.1	There will be a meeting in January or February 2008 with the DCSF, Office of the Schools Commissioner, 4P's and the Council the entry requirements for BSF Wave 6. This will initiate the next detailed stage of the BSF process.	
13.2	The 'Strategy for Change Part One' will then be drafted providing the vision for transforming secondary provision in Halton. In April or May 2008 there will be a formal introduction into BSF Wave 6. The Strategy for Change will be expected in draft with the vision having been consulted upon. Over the next 5 – 6 months the Strategy for Change Part two will be developed showing how the Council and along with the Governors, staff and pupils will deliver the its vision through the BSF Programme. The Halton BSF Project Board will be set up in January 2008.	
13.3	It was agreed that the next meeting of this Group will take place in February 2008 and then again at the end of consultation in March 2008. It was agreed that the meetings would be held at 3.00 pm.	