

EXECUTIVE BOARD

At a meeting of the Executive Board on Monday, 19 May 2008 in the Marketing Suite, Municipal Building

Present: Councillors McDermott (Chairman), Gerrard, McInerney, Polhill, Swain, Wharton and Wright

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Harris and Nelson

Absence declared on Council business: Councillor D. Cargill

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

Also in attendance: 2 Members of Public

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER POWERS AND DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

EXB1 MINUTES

This item was deferred until the next ordinary meeting of the Board.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PORTFOLIO

(NB Councillor Swain declared a personal interest in the following item of business in respect of the update on the Academy due to being a governor of Halton High School.

Councillor Wharton declared a personal interest in the following item of business as his son attended Fairfield High School and his wife had a contract of employment there as an invigilator.)

EXB2 DECISION ON THE STATUTORY CONSULTATION TO CLOSE FAIRFIELD HIGH SCHOOL AND EXPAND WADE DEACON HIGH SCHOOL - KEY DECISION

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Children and Young People summarising the responses to the Statutory Consultation on the closure of Fairfield High School and the expansion of Wade Deacon High School, outlining the background, statutory consultation

Action

undertaken, financial implications and the decision making process.

In addition, a further report was tabled at the meeting. It was reported that this report had been considered in detail by the Cross Party Members Advisory Working Group on 15th May 2008. The report detailed the rationale for the proposal, identified who had been consulted, the response to the consultation and the issues raised, it provided a summary of previous consultations, transitional arrangements and the reasons, factors and criteria which needed consideration prior to a decision on the proposal.

It was reported that the Cross Party Members Advisory Group had been unanimous in their support for the closure of Fairfield High School due to declining pupil numbers and the expansion of Wade Deacon, which was a successful and popular school. The Group also supported the encouragement of both schools to collaborate quickly prior to the establishment of a hard federation.

The Board received a further update in respect of the overall position covering:

- the Academy proposal and the position regarding potential sites, sponsors and the size of the post 16 provision being 200 planned pupil places;
- the Grange, where the schools were currently consulting on the proposals to establish a hard federation;
- The Bankfield;
- The Heath;
- Chestnut Lodge and Ashley Schools; and
- meeting with Partnership for Schools in respect of the Council's projected pupil numbers – it was advised that the Partnership was in agreement with the Council's pupil numbers and the methodology used.

The Statutory Consultation that had been undertaken, outlined in Appendix A to the tabled report, was described in detail to the Board. In particular, the Board noted that only thirteen of the responses received had disagreed with the proposal to close Fairfield High School.

Appendix C within this document outlined a summary of objections. Appendix D provided outlined the summary of responses to the proposal to expand Wade Deacon High School. Appendix E and F detailed all the key issues raised in writing by the respondents to the consultation. Members were provided with a summary of all the questions and

detailed answers to each issue raised were considered by the Board. This information was included in the separate report Appendix B and included information on school size, pupil projections, class size, traffic and safety, use of site, extended and community use, choice, culture, shared sports, admissions, funding, governing body, improvements, site assessment and communication.

In particular, it was noted that the Department for Children, Skills and Families (DCSF) and OFSTED Inspections of schools did not support the assertion that larger schools meant lower standards of behaviour. It was reported that there were benefits to having larger schools in terms of enhanced facilities and funding and that a model of smaller units or "schools within school" so that, to pupils, the school did not look or feel large.

Members recalled that, in the second round of consultation, an alternative proposal had been submitted by Fairfield High School. The Executive Board had previously found that the alternative proposal was incomplete and flawed and lacked information crucial to its proper evaluation. The school had been advised of the information that was necessary for evaluation and discussions had been held with the school to clarify the information needed. However, no new information or other alternative options had been submitted.

It was confirmed that school travel plans would have to be developed for the new site and all efforts would be made in the interim period to minimise pupil movement. Congestion was a concern and the school and Local Authority would be encouraged to look at ways to manage this, for example by trialling different start and end times for pupils. Planning for vehicular access and quick routes in and out of school would be required in the site development under BSF.

The Board further noted that it had been suggested that the rationale to close Fairfield High School was in order that the Council could sell the land. The Board was advised that the closure was due to the declining pupil numbers. Members noted that the land would transfer to the Local Authority from September 2010 but would be managed on an interim basis by Wade Deacon. Consideration would be given to retaining some part of the land for future community use once it was no longer needed by Wade Deacon in 2013. An undertaking had been made that if any of the land were sold, the proceeds would go to the BSF funding envelope for the good of the pupils of the Borough. In addition, through

BSF, the Authority was looking to offer more extended provision and community access.

In terms of Fairfield's Performing Arts Specialism, it was advised that options were currently being discussed and explored with the SSAT part of DCSF regarding retaining this at Wade Deacon in the interim period, and the future options for an additional specialism for Wade Deacon if, after a re-inspection by Ofsted, it retained its high performance status.

In terms of disruption to pupils during future capital building work, which would need undertaking across the authority, the Council was confident that this could be kept to a minimum through robust project management and good communication as previously evidenced at St. Chad's Catholic High School. Furthermore, it was explained that, through the BSF programme, the Authority would be looking to enhance the sports facilities at Wade Deacon.

The Board then went through each of the factors/criteria for consideration in detail outlined at Appendix G, contained within Appendix A to the tabled report, outlining implications for both the closing school and the expanding school. In terms of federation, it was advised that this was for the two schools to agree. The Council had encouraged a Hard Federation but could not impose this. Additional support could be provided by the Authority for both schools if federation was supported.

Further information was also provided in terms of the Workforce Strategy, the Strategy for Change and the Gateway Review. It was advised that the Gateway Review Team had concluded that the current programme development was a healthy programme with some operational recommendations.

The Board commended the Strategic Director - Children and Young People, the Operational Director – Business Planning and Resources, and the BSF Programme Director, and all those who had been involved in this process to date.

Reason(s) for Decision

The reasons for the decision and the main factors/criteria considered to close Fairfield High School and expand Wade Deacon High school were:

- due to the continuing decline in pupil numbers.

Insufficient pupil numbers were forecast in Widnes to ensure the continued financial and curriculum viability of Fairfield High School;

- expansion of Wade Deacon High School a successful and popular school; and
- as further detailed in the Building Schools for the Future Report (Appendix A) document Appendix G (15th May 2008).

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

In the first and second round of consultation a number of alternative options were proposed, each of these was assessed and evaluated in detail, in particular in relation to the government criteria.

Implementation Date

The decision to close Fairfield High school would take effect from 31st August 2010 and to expand Wade Deacon High school from 1st September 2010.

RESOLVED: That having regard to the statutory guidance and in pursuance of the powers set out in Part 2 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and the related regulations, the following related proposals be approved:

- (1) with effect from 31st August 2010, Fairfield High School be discontinued;
- (2) with effect from 1st September 2010, Wade Deacon High School be expanded by the admission number for that school being increased to 300 to give effect to the enlargement of the school;
- (3) with effect from 1st September 2010, the Wade Deacon admission numbers for Years 8 to 11 be expanded to accommodate pupils transferring from Fairfield High School;
- (4) with effect from 1st September 2010 the Fairfield High School Site (detailed on Plan Ref. F1 attached to the report) be appropriated from the Children and Young People Directorate to Corporate to be managed as an integral part of the Council's corporate estate but that the Council permits the Fairfield School site to be managed on an interim and revocable basis as part of the Wade Deacon "campus" from 1st September 2010

to continue until 1st September 2013 or such later date as the Chief Executive may prescribe; and

- (5) the Chief Executive be authorised to take whatever actions are necessary to give effect to the above decisions.

Chief Executive

EXB3 SCHEDULE 12A OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 AND THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

The Board considered:

- (1) whether Members of the press and public should be excluded from the meeting of the Board during consideration of the following item of business in accordance with Sub-Section 4 of Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 because it was likely that, in view of the nature of the business to be considered, exempt information would be disclosed, being information defined in Section 100 (1) and paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972; and
- (2) whether the disclosure of information was in the public interest, whether any relevant exemptions were applicable and whether, when applying the public interest test and exemptions, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed that in disclosing the information.

RESOLVED: That as, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information, members of the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business in accordance with Sub-Section 4 of Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 because it is likely that, in view of the nature of the business, exempt information will be disclosed, being information defined in Section 100 (1) and paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

PLANNING, TRANSPORTATION, REGENERATION AND RENEWAL PORTFOLIO

EXB4 UPTON ROCKS LOCAL CENTRE

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy outlining the current status

of this potential development and seeking the Board's view on the way forward.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the initial offer from Peel Holdings be rejected; and
- (2) if any revised offer does not reflect the District Valuer's valuation, the site be remarketed.

Strategic Director
- Corporate and
Policy

MINUTES ISSUED: 23rd May 2008

CALL IN: 2nd June 2008

Any matter decided by the Executive Board may be called in no later than 2nd June 2008

Meeting ended at 3.50 p.m.