

CABINET

MINUTES of the meeting held on Tuesday, 10 August 2010 commencing at 2.00 pm and finishing at 2.55 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Keith R. Mitchell CBE – in the Chair
Councillor David Robertson (Deputy Chairman)
Councillor Arash Fatemian
Councillor Ian Hudspeth
Councillor Jim Couchman
Councillor Kieron Mallon
Councillor Michael Waine
Councillor Rodney Rose
Councillor Mrs J. Heathcoat

Officers:

Whole of meeting Chief Executive, Julie Dean (Corporate Core); Director of Children, Young People & Families, Roy Leach (Children, Young People & Families).

The Committee considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting, together with a schedule of addenda tabled at the meeting, and decided as set out below. Except insofar as otherwise specified, the reasons for the decisions are contained in the agenda, reports and schedule, copies of which are attached to the signed Minutes.

88/10 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

(Agenda Item. 1)

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Louise Chapman.

89/10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

(Agenda Item. 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

90/10 QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

(Agenda Item. 2a)

In accordance with Section 3 of the Cabinet Procedure Rules, the Chairman had allowed the following question from Councillor Richard Stevens to Councillor Arash Fatemian to be considered prior to Agenda Item 3:

'Will the Cabinet member please confirm that the projected savings from the revised commissioning arrangements in respect of carers' services agreed by Cabinet at their last meeting will be reinvested in services for carers?'

Councillor Fatemian confirmed that the County Council would continue to support all carers, adding that the projected savings from the revised commissioning arrangements in respect of carers' services would be reinvested into services for carers.

91/10 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS

(Agenda Item. 3)

The Cabinet were addressed by the following people in relation to Agenda Item 5:

Mr F. Newhofer, local resident

Councillor Larry Sanders, local member

Councillor John Tanner, local member

Councillor Mohammed Altaf-Khan, shadow cabinet member for Schools Improvement.

Mr F. Newhofer raised a number of questions with regard to the current academy situation generally and about schools within the Oxford area:

- That competition, which the academy model advocated, rather than collaboration, would serve to raise attainment levels – his view was that there was no evidence to substantiate this, indeed it would perpetuate the system of segregation in schools;
- It would be a missed opportunity if discussion amongst Oxford schools did not occur, there being greater potential for shared resources and a shared curriculum if a policy of federalisation was to be implemented.

He urged therefore that the Cabinet to defer any decision until October to allow discussion to take place with all Oxford schools as soon as the school holidays were over.

Councillor Larry Sanders pointed out that there had been little public interest in the consultation and the figures had clearly indicated little support for an academy. He added that the petition had been largely signed by people of an ethnic minority background who were 'unimpressed by the proposals' and wondered whether their views had been taken into account within the consultation responses. He urged the Cabinet not to take any decision until all Oxford schools, including Oxford School, could have the opportunity to think more around alternative proposals.

Councillor John Tanner expressed his view that the Government finance for academies may not now be as available as it was prior to the election. He asked what discussions had taken place at officer/member level with regard

to the prospects of funding. He added that the outcomes of the local public consultation had been a resounding 'no', coupled with a dissatisfaction at 'the continual messing about'. He asked for a delay in the decision making process to allow for a co-operative approach for all schools in the area.

Councillor Mohammed Altaf - Khan spoke in support of a delay to enable the exploration of other routes, particularly in light of the possibility of further Government legislation. He strongly urged to Cabinet not to rush into making a decision, but to take more time and involve more people and more schools in discussions.

92/10 OXFORD SCHOOL - AUGUST 2010

(Agenda Item. 4)

Cabinet had agreed in September 2009 that a feasibility study be undertaken into the replacement of Oxford School by an academy. As part of the study, two parallel consultations had been undertaken: one to ascertain stakeholders' views about the legal closure of Oxford School and one seeking views about the academy that it is proposed would replace Oxford School, should a decision to close it be made. The consultations had been launched on 7 June 2010 and had concluded on 19 July 2010 and the outcome of the closure consultation element is here reported to the Cabinet to inform a decision about whether or not to proceed with the publication of a Statutory Closure Notice.

Councillor Michael Waine introduced the report CA4, at the same time responding to the points made by the speakers:

- A significant amount of supplementary resources had been put into Oxford School since the National Challenge which had supported better results, taking the School from below floor targets to just above. However, there was still a large gap with other schools and the potential to sustain the improvement was questionable;
- The previous Government had signed the project off in March and a letter had been received from the outgoing Minister for Schools, Vernon Coaker MP, wishing it every success. The new Government had equally given its full commitment to the establishment of more academies and a supportive letter had been received by CfBT from Michael Gove MP. There had been delays, but this authority had tried hard to proceed as expeditiously as possible with a view to giving a sense of certainty to the community;
- Every effort had been made during the consultation period to reach all groups within the community, particularly parents of children at the School, to the extent that school gate meetings had been held with parents. Very few had attended the public meetings, which had indicated an indifference to the closure;

- The responses expressed by the petitioners were very important to the consultation, and their view that the School was improving was correct, but this was from a very low base;
- From experience, the Governing Bodies of the current two Oxfordshire academies were dynamic, focussed, provided good challenge and maintained direct links with the staff and parents. It was hoped that this would manifest again if another academy was to be established;
- Additional resource was not guaranteed at the moment. The Government had given their wholehearted support to the academy, but any additional support would be part of the comprehensive spending review. However, the Directorate had just been informed that £150k capital funding would be made available to support the initial refurbishment, if it should go ahead; and
- It was possible for schools to be highly competitive, but also collaborative at the same time. CfBT were committed to collaborative working with the aim of raising achievement.

Other views expressed by Councillor Waine and the other members of the Cabinet included the following:

- It was the Cabinet's view that an academy would offer the best way forward for the community, in that it would have the tools to work in innovative ways. It would offer potential for the community to have a good school in its midst, one which could be a school of first choice. The aim was to set up, with CfBT, a base of excellence for the teaching of English, and of English as a second language;
- The younger end of the 3 – 19 age range could attend a 'school within a school', which would be part of the overall ethos and leadership of the Academy and a part of the overall direction of school improvement;
- No reference was made in the consultation responses and the petition to a wish for an improvement in the current attainment levels;
- The North Oxford Academy was now the first choice for many parents. It previously had a falling capacity, now it had a waiting list and its attainment levels had doubled. The Governing Body was focussed and was attracting professional people to its membership. The proposed Academy could benefit from the same.

In reference to paragraph 16 of the report, Roy Leach reported that the YPLA had since acknowledged receipt of the consultation but had indicated that it did not wish to make any contribution to the consultation.

The Cabinet, following consideration of the outcome of the consultation on the proposed closure of Oxford School to enable its replacement by an academy,

RESOLVED: (unanimously) to proceed with the publication in September 2010 of a Statutory Notice for the closure of Oxford School, to be determined following a further six week period of representation.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing