

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on 10 July 2007 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 3.30 pm

Present:

Voting Members:

Councillor Sue Haffenden - in the chair

Councillor Ann Bonner (part of meeting)

Councillor Marilyn Badcock

Councillor Ian Brown (in place of Councillor Bill Service)

Councillor Nick Carter

Councillor Mrs Anda Fitzgerald-O'Connor

Councillor Jean Fooks

Councillor Deborah Glass Woodin (part of meeting)

Councillor David Nimmo-Smith

Councillor Val Smith

Councillor Melinda Tilley (in place of Councillor Lawrie Stratford)

Councillor David Turner

Councillor Carol Viney

Mr Ben Jackson

Mrs Sue Matthew

Ms Bernadine Spencer (part of meeting)

Other Members in Attendance:

Cabinet Member for Schools' Improvement

Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Families

By Invitation:

Mrs Carole Thomson, Oxfordshire Governors' Association (part of meeting)

Mrs Brenda Williams, COTO (part of meeting)

Ms Karen Thomas (Oxfordshire Resident)

Officers:

Whole of meeting: K. Coldwell (Corporate Core)

Agenda Item

Officer Attending

5	John Mitchell (Children, Young People & Families)
6 & 7	Julian Hehir (Corporate Core)
6	Michael Chard (Corporate Core)
8	Sue Howarth (Children, Young People & Families)
9	Rick Harmes (Children, Young People & Families)
12	Michael Mill (Children, Young People & Families)

The Scrutiny 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 the following additional documents:

- *suggested recommendations from Karen Thomas in relation to Agenda Item 5;*
- *a written statement in relation to Agenda Item 12 submitted by Steven Sensecall (Kemp & Kemp Property Consultants)*

and agreed as set out below. Copies of the agenda, reports, schedule and additional documents are attached to the signed Minutes.

25/07 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

Apologies for absence and temporary appointments were received as follows:

Apology from

Councillor Bill Service
Councillor Lawrie Stratford
Mr Chris Bevan

Temporary Appointments

Councillor Ian Brown
Councillor Melinda Tilley
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26/07 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mr Ben Jackson declared a personal interest at Agenda Item 6 by virtue of being a parent of a child with special educational needs.

Mr Ben Jackson declared a personal interest at Agenda Item 9 (Young Child Carers (and support for them)) on the grounds that his wife and daughter had disabilities.

27/07 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 22 May 2007 were approved and signed subject to the following amendments:

- (a) Item 16/07 – Draft Report: Effective Communication to Parents of Children with SEN – deletion of the following wording:
 - (c) (ii) to re-word this recommendation in order to emphasise that methods of communication to parents and carers of children with Special Educational Needs needed to be improved
- (b) Item 20/07 – Children & Young People’s Plan (CYPP): Review of Year One – amended as indicated (in bold italics and strikethrough):
 - more emphasis should be given to enjoyment ~~rather than~~ **as well as** to achievement as all children and young people need to develop a strong sense of self worth which is not dependent upon achievement;

- this Committee welcomes the *take-up of vocational studies by vocational achievement* of young people in Oxfordshire as this is good for morale and therefore often enhances academic achievement;
- (c) Item 22/07 – Scrutiny Work Programme – to delete Carole Thomson’s name from the list of people that had expressed an interest in participating in a task group to work with officers to review the implementation of the Children & Young People’s Plan over the coming year and feed into the review of Year 2 of the Plan in 2008.

28/07 SPEAKING TO OR PETITIONING THE COMMITTEE

The following requests to address the meeting had been agreed:-

Request from	Agenda Item
Councillor Zoé Patrick (as a local member)	12
Councillor Jim Moley (as a local member)	12
Councillor Jerry Patterson Leader of the Vale of White Horse District Council)	12
Councillor Bill Melotti, District Councillor for Wantage (Vale of White Horse District Council)	12
Councillor James McGee (Vale of White Horse District Council)	12
Ms Lorraine Todd (Mayor of Wantage)	12

29/07 CHARGING IN SCHOOLS ‘MINI’ SCRUTINY REVIEW: EVALUATION
(Agenda Item 5)

[Lead Member Review Group comprises Councillors Mrs Anda Fitzgerald-O’Connor, Mrs Sue Matthew and Mrs Carole Thomson].

This item had been placed on the agenda to enable the Committee to evaluate progress made with regard to implementing the recommendations from the Charging in Schools ‘Mini’ Scrutiny Review.

The main emphasis of this piece of work had been to look at the extent to which the law and model policy and guidance on charging was put into practice in schools.

Other lines of enquiry had included:

- ways of sharing and promoting good practice
- the Intra/Internet – its capacity for business and community suggestions
- actions to highlight problem school practices and particular schools
- resource and monitoring issues
- issues of fairness and equity around charging and the question of "what else can we be doing to ensure the operation of a fair and open charging policy?"
- creative thinking and publicity about charging for extra curricular activities
- SEN and the Deprivation Index.

The Cabinet Member for Schools' Improvement, together with Mr John Mitchell (Education Officer and Assistant to the Director for Children, Young People & Families) attended for this agenda item in order to answer the Committee's questions in relation to progress regarding the implementation of the Review recommendations.

A selection of the questions, together with the officer responses are listed below:

- **Some parents could afford to pay for school trips but were choosing not to. Could schools indicate that help was only available for those parents who were on benefits or low incomes?**

Communications with parents about trips should emphasise the voluntary nature of contributions and that, in the absence of sufficient contributions, trips might have to be cancelled. Where charging was permissible (eg for board and lodging) then only those parents who were on certain benefits were entitled to remission. A letter had been sent to the headteachers and governors of all Oxfordshire schools which provided them with updated guidance for schools about charging and other related matters. This guidance emphasized the need to draw attention to the matters mentioned above.

- **In relation to the £500,000 allocated though the funding formula, to schools with the highest index of socio-economic deprivation, what was that index based on and had the rural deprived been included?**

Mr Mitchell undertook to set out in writing to all members of the Committee what this was based on.

Ms Karen Thomas (Oxfordshire Resident – formerly of Abingdon Citizens' Advice Bureau) informed the Committee that she had contacted a number of Oxfordshire schools by means of a Freedom of Information request in order to ascertain the degree of compliance with the charging in schools policy. She added that the schools had been selected using a random number generator. However, she was unable to circulate the results of her research as only ten out of the thirty-six schools surveyed

had responded to her request for information. Ms Thomas then circulated some suggested recommendations to the Committee.

The Committee **AGREED**:

- (a) in relation to Recommendations D(i) and D(ii) to request the Assistant to the Director for Children, Young People & Families to circulate the report on the sources and allocation of funding to alleviate social deprivation to all members of this Committee;
- (b) in relation to Recommendation H to request Dick Hallam to provide all members of this Committee with a list of charges for music tuition in primary schools;
- (c) to request the Assistant to the Director for Children, Young People & Families to add to the model charging policy summary for parents the wording “for events outside the school day please refer to the full policy, a copy of which should be available from the school”; and
- (d) to note the recommendations provided by Karen Thomas (formerly of Abingdon Citizen’s Advice Bureau) as listed below:

The Committee table a further small scale review of Schools’ Charging (suggested date – September 2007), with particular reference to the research undertaken by Karen Thomas (This will give a clearer indication of the degree of compliance within schools, with minimal resource implications on the authority itself);

Additional guidance be sent by the FOI Team to all schools regarding their obligations concerning the above. To those schools that have not complied with the research, a stern rebuke from the CYP&F Directorate should be issued;

Dependant on the results of the sample survey above, consideration be given to the implementation of a one-off full scale monitoring exercise, to gauge the degree of compliance with Education Act schools charging legislation throughout the County; and

Establish a rolling programme of a certain number of schools, on a yearly basis. This would ensure that schools are kept fully aware of their obligations, and are put in the position of ensuring that practice actually meets with policy.

In response to these recommendations the Assistant to the Director for Children, Young People & Families stated that the Directorate would take up any breaches of the charging policy or failure to comply with Freedom of Information requests with the school(s) involved, in line with existing practice within the Directorate.

Councillor Waine undertook to meet with Ms Thomas and Sharron Jenkinson (Senior Advisor Curriculum, Learning and Inclusion) in order to discuss how to make further use of random monitoring techniques.

30/07 EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TO PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH SEN: FINAL SCRUTINY REVIEW REPORT

(Agenda Item 6)

[Task Group Members comprise Mr Ben Jackson, Mrs Sue Matthew and Councillors Melinda Tilley and Val Smith].

At the October 2006 meeting of the Committee, it had been agreed that the Committee undertake an investigation into how 'Effective Communication to Parents of Children with SEN' is in Oxfordshire. The aim of the investigation was to explore areas such as parents' awareness of SEN activities and newsletters, how parents could communicate with each other on this subject and whether the Council supplied services were the correct avenues for the dissemination of information.

Members of the Review Group talked to the review report, highlighting the key findings and recommendations in the report.

Following discussion, the Committee **AGREED** to submit this Review to Cabinet subject to:

- (a) a number of editorial changes which would improve the grammar and English used; and
- (b) the revision of recommendation c)i) (as amended in bold italics and strikethrough):

dependent upon the workload of practitioners, consideration be given to the setting of a A target date ~~should be set~~ to assess whether all of the appropriate lead professionals to support children with Special Educational Needs are in post countywide (~~Dependant upon the workload of practioners~~);

31/07 PLANNING, PREPARATION AND ASSESSMENT TIME IN PRIMARY AND NURSERY SCHOOLS – IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT: FINAL REPORT

(Agenda Item 7)

On 12 December 2006, this Committee had agreed as part of its work programme to undertake a scrutiny review of 'Workforce Remodelling' and had appointed Councillor Sue Haffenden, Mrs Sue Matthew and Mrs Brenda Williams to the Lead Member Review Group.

Members of the Review Group talked to the review report, highlighting the key findings and recommendations in the report.

At this Committee's previous meeting, Councillor Waine had undertaken to immediately action Recommendation 11 ('urge the DfES to conduct a wide-ranging, independent survey of the actual cost of successful and sustainable models of implementation of PPA time in primary and nursery schools with a view to this informing the grant settlement for 2008/9 if possible, or 2008/9 if possible, or 2009/10 and future years') in light of the current funding review - County Council's response to the consultation due to Government by 2 June – and to send a copy of this draft report to all local MPs and the relevant Minister as a matter of urgency.

In response to a question from the Committee, Councillor Waine reported that local MPs had undertaken to follow the request through.

The Committee **AGREED** to submit the Review Report to Cabinet subject to the Task Group, in conjunction with Mr Hehir, amending Recommendation 11 as follows:

- (a) removing the call for the DfES to conduct a wide ranging independent survey of the actual cost of successful and sustainable models of implementation of PPA time in primary and nursery schools;
- (b) strengthening this recommendation in order to urge the government to provide adequate funding for PPA time, in particular in the grant settlement and removing the wording "if possible"; and
- (c) including the following wording (as indicated in bold italics):

...the implications in terms of workload for different groups of school staff ***especially the increased work for headteachers which impacts on recruitment and retention...***

32/07 YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN (Agenda Item 8)

The Annual Youth Justice Plan is one of the strategic plans which is subject to approval by full Council following consideration by both the Cabinet and the relevant Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules set out in the Constitution.

On 17 July 2007, the Cabinet would recommend the Plan to Council, having regard to any comments from this Committee. The Committee had therefore been asked to consider any advice which it would wish to put forward.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Families, together with Ms Sue Howarth (Acting Deputy Head of Youth Offending Service) attended before the Committee in order to answer any questions which members of the Committee may have wished to ask.

A selection of the Committee's questions together with the officer responses are listed below:

- **Was the two rating awarded to Mental Health and Substance Misuse a lower rating than the Service would want?**

A rating of three meant that the service was excellent and a rating of two meant that the service was good.

- **A top priority target for the Service was to support young people engaging in education, training and employment. Was this problem specific to Oxfordshire or was it a national problem?**

This was a national problem. Oxfordshire fared no better nor worse than the national picture.

- **Would a scrutiny review into the participation and involvement of children, young people, parents and carers in the Youth Justice System be helpful?**

Ms Howarth undertook to report back to this Committee on whether a scrutiny review into the participation and involvement of children, young people, parents and carers in the Youth Justice System would be helpful.

Following debate, the Committee **AGREED** to forward the following advice to Cabinet:

This Committee wishes to:

- (a) congratulate the Service on the improvements made with regard to reducing the number of new entrants to the youth justice system following investment in preventative services and the great teamwork shown by staff;
- (b) express concern that all funding streams for preventative services for young offenders are currently at risk from April 2008, including the Children's Fund, Positive Activities for Young People and the Youth Justice Board Prevention budget;
- (c) strongly urge that funding needs to be ring fenced in the form of specific grants for this area of work, which should not go into the general revenue grant; and
- (d) emphasise the importance to society of preventative work which supports children and young people and their families.

33/07 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 9)

Members of the Committee had before them a composite list of suggestions for the Scrutiny Work Programme.

The Committee was asked to:

- (a) consider whether it wished to replace any items in the proposed Work Programme (A.) with items in the supplementary list (B.) or additional suggestions from Members; and
- (b) decide which reviews from the proposed work Programme (A.) should commence first and second.

The Committee was also asked to consider any other suggestions for inclusion in the work programme.

Those Members who suggested items at this Committee's last meeting, spoke to their items, in order to provide further information on them and to suggest the best method of undertaking the activity (Scrutiny Review/Question & Answer session/Select Committee/Task & Finish Group).

Following debate, the Committee **AGREED**:

- (a) the following substantive items in priority order:
 - (1) **Young Child Carers (and support for them)** – (Scrutiny Review) Sue Matthew, Mrs Anda Fitzgerald-O'Connor, Ben Jackson, Carol Viney and David Turner.
 - (2) **Educational Attainment amongst the most deprived children across all Key Stages** – (Scrutiny Review) – Val Smith, Sue Matthew, Brenda Williams, David Turner, Bernadine Spencer.
 - (3) **Sport in Schools** – (Select Committee) – Councillor Nick Carter expressed an interest in participating subject to confirmation of the time commitment required.
- (b) Other items for future inclusion in its work programme:
 - (1) **Why is it that 95% of children referred to EBD schools are boys?** ("Mini" Scrutiny Review/question & answer session).
 - (2) **Headteacher recruitment and retainment** (to include workload and issue of Federation Schools) – (question & answer session).
 - (3) **The effectiveness of the various external and in house agencies that might be called upon in relation to Personal, Social and Health issues in schools** – (are we helping the children and young people as much as we could be?) ("Mini" Scrutiny Review).
 - (4) **An ongoing review of implementation of the Children and Young People's Plan after 1 year** (and feed into the review of

Year 2 of the Plan) reporting back to the Committee periodically. (Task Group) (Councillors Glass Woodin, Fooks, Viney and Sue Matthew and Bernadine Spencer).

34/07 TRACKING SCRUTINY ITEMS (Agenda Item 10)

Report back on advice by this Committee to the Cabinet or Council.

- **Healthy Schools Scrutiny Review**

The Cabinet's response is listed below:

Recommendation 1

The national target is for all schools to be participating in the Healthy Schools Programme by December 2009 and 75% of schools to have gained the Healthy Schools Status. (In Oxfordshire we have set a target of 85% of all schools achieving the Status by December 2009) Although the Healthy Schools Programme is a key driver to improve health outcomes for children and young people, schools are **not required** to engage with the Programme. The identification of a Healthy Schools Development Fund for which schools could apply to help them start the process (e.g. some time to conduct the audit and to develop specific projects) could provide a much needed incentive, and scrutiny are asked to identify the source for this funding

Recommendations 2 and 3

The Review Group only visited a very small number of schools, which are not necessarily representative of the picture across the County. The move to integrated services both at county council level and through localities should better support the needs of children and young people in schools. The parallel development of multi-agency strategies and collaborative working should also improve the quality of monitoring of the effectiveness of the support provided. We must await the outcome of this monitoring after a full year's working.

Recommendation 4

Medium or long- term planning is difficult for the Healthy Oxfordshire Schools Team due to lack of committed funding which is invariably short term. This is compounded by a predicted Government cut in the Healthy Schools grant funding in 2008 and an actual Government cut in the funding via the Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) for the Drug Education Consultant post. For these key areas of work to be sustainable they need to be part of the Joint Commissioning Strategy.

Recommendation 5

Since capital funding is devolved to schools, it is recommended that the Directorate write to secondary schools to remind them of the importance of providing well maintained lavatory facilities as a human right in terms of personal dignity and basic health need.

Recommendation 6

Whilst most schools are now trying hard to improve the quality of school food in line with the new nutritional standards, a lack of adequate and welcoming dining facilities can mitigate against the uptake of school meals. Schools generally are giving time and thought to this and county officers, including those from Food with Thought, are available for advice.

Recommendations 7 & 8

This endorsement of the value of the newsletter and celebration events is welcomed.

Recommendation 9

Nominating a Member Healthy Schools Champion would be a welcome development.

The Committee **AGREED** to:

- (a) note the Cabinet's response; and
- (b) query its response to Recommendation 9 with Councillor Waine as the response stated that 'Nominating a Member Healthy Schools Champion would be a welcome development' whereas the recommendation had asked for a Member Children's Champion to be nominated and that included within his or her remit should be the promotion of and involvement in celebratory events around "Healthy Schools".

35/07 FORWARD PLAN

(Agenda Item 11)

No items had been identified for consideration.

36/07 CALL IN OF CABINET DECISION: PROVISION OF ADDITIONAL SECONDARY PUPIL PLACES IN WANTAGE, GROVE AND SURROUNDING VILLAGES

(Agenda Item 12)

On 20 June 2007 the Cabinet considered a report (CH12) which summarised the findings from the public consultation which concluded in January 2007 and recommended a way forward to meet the future demand for secondary school places in the area.

The Cabinet had been recommended to:

- (a) consider the Options as set out in the paper and decide to:
 - (1) proceed with Option A and propose 2 schools each with 1,250 pupil places; or
 - (2) proceed with Option B and expand King Alfred's Sports and Community College to 2,500 pupil places; or
 - (3) proceed with Option C and provide a new 600 place 11-16 school for Grove and retain King Alfred's Sports and Community College under the existing arrangement; and
 - (4) authorise Officers to complete negotiations with developers to secure a sufficient and appropriate site to meet the needs of the selected option and any possible future expansion and report back on the potential implications in terms of timeline and cost of the preferred option.

The Cabinet had resolved to:

- (a) proceed with Option C and provide a new 600 place 11-16 school for Grove and retain King Alfred's Sports and Community College under the existing arrangement; and
- (b) authorise Officers to complete negotiations with developers to secure a sufficient and appropriate site to meet the needs of the selected option and any possible future expansion and report back on the potential implications in terms of timeline and cost of the preferred option.

On 25 June 2007 notice was received by the Proper Officer of a request signed by 12 members of the Council, in accordance with the Council's Scrutiny Procedure rules set out in the Constitution, in the following terms:

"We request that the Proper Officer of the Council calls in the decision of the Cabinet taken on 20 June 2007 and listed at Item 11 of the decisions list – Provision of Additional Secondary Pupil Places in Wantage, Grove and Surrounding Villages for the following reasons:

- the educational aspects of the option chosen have not been taken into account
- the views of local people as evidenced in an opinion poll have not been fully taken into account or listened to
- deliverability of the option chosen, in terms of the new development, is questionable, and this has not been fully considered
- there was no information provided on the projected pupil number estimations."

[signed]

Zoé Patrick, Jim Moley, Dermot Roaf, Alan Armitage, Alan Bryden, Lesley Legge, Bill Bradshaw, Jean Fooks, David Turner, Bob Johnston, Janet Godden, Mrs Gail Bones.

The Scrutiny Committee was asked to decide whether to:

- (a) refer the issue back to the Cabinet with comments; or
- (b) accept the Cabinet's decision.

The Cabinet Member for Schools' Improvement together with Mr Michael Mill (Strategic Manager (Property and Assets)) attended before the Committee in order to answer the Committee's questions.

The Committee also had before it:

- a spreadsheet on housing and pupil forecasts for Wantage and data on the anticipated intake into King Alfred's School into year 7 last September, which had been requested by Councillor David Turner and supplied by Mr Mill; and

- a written statement from Councillor Zoé Patrick in relation to this item.

Councillor Patrick, speaking as a local member, made the following points:

- in her view the Cabinet had chosen to make the decision into a local political issue. TV cameras had been in place and media coverage pre-arranged for two Conservative district councillors who attended the meeting and requested the Cabinet to go for Option C at the outset;
- therefore her first complaint was that proper and correct procedure had not been followed at the Cabinet meeting and it had not been conducted in the interests of the public. She added that it was apparent that local Conservative district councillors had been briefed ahead of the meeting about the decision to be taken, but herself and Councillor Moley as local members had received no such briefing and had experienced problems gaining access to a preliminary copy of the report;
- in her view, the views of local people as evidenced in an opinion poll had not been fully taken into account or listened to. BMG Research had been commissioned to undertake a survey across a cross-section of the community, but the favoured option had been ignored. Councillor Patrick stated that based on initial preference it was clear that Option A was the favourite, but this result had been ignored. She then asked why an undeliverable option had been consulted on;
- although the issue of a sixth form had significant weight with the respondents, it was not at all clear that all reasonable sixth form options had been explored. There had been no mention of joint sixth forms or collaborative sixth forms. She further commented that it was regrettable that the sixth form solutions presented had been so narrow and not more flexible and inclusive of collaboration and partnership, as this was seen as central to achieving the future 14-19 agenda; and
- she urged Councillor Waine to look again at the recommendations.

Councillor Jim Moley, speaking as a local member, made the following points:

- at the Cabinet discussion he had focussed on the results of the two MORI type polls in favour of diversity and commonsense and therefore had spoken in support of Option A;
- in his view, Option B - which was favoured by current senior staff and governors offered the threat of even greater monopoly provision - even the ultimate provision of a 2500 plus comprehensive on one site. This was a vision which had specifically been rejected by the 2003 MORI type poll and he joined with Wantage Town Council in opposing that option;
- since Option A was the wish of parents and the community he questioned why this was not being taken to the Secretary of State in order to challenge the schools' liberation of public property and stated that surely the consumer should be protected from the activities of this monopoly provider;

- Option A had been put to the community as a viable and feasible option. He asked if the Cabinet now believed that it had put forward an unviable option. He further added that in the context of the Cabinet Member's assertions in Saturday's Oxford Mail this question should be answered;
- Option C offered diversity but of an uncertain nature. In his view, the Cabinet had a duty to demonstrate how it would deliver this option to meet the legitimate aspirations of Grove and Wantage.

Councillor Moley then asked the following questions:

- how would Option C secure sufficient land for growth and the sixth form promised by Councillor Waine;
- how would Option C be arranged to meet the needs of each phase of housing?
- how would the concerns raised by the developer in relation to Option C be addressed?

Councillor Jerry Patterson (Leader of the Vale of White Horse District Council), stated that in his view, Option C was the wrong choice for the future well-being of Grove for the following reasons:

- in his view Option A was the best option, and his Council's Planning Officers felt that Option C would be inferior to Option B if no sixth form was to be provided, especially in light of the government's focus on 16-19 education;
- there was a lack of clarity regarding when and how the school would be delivered;
- poor quality temporary classrooms would not be satisfactory; and
- the report made no mention that housing numbers might increase, as the South East Plan was still at draft stage.

Councillor Bill Melotti (District Councillor for Wantage – Vale of White Horse District Council), spoke in favour of Option C and against Option A. He highlighted what he perceived to be the damaging effects of Option A on the current King Alfred's Sports and Community College and the lack of information regarding how the legal issues associated with Option A would be dealt with.

Councillor James McGee (Vale of White Horse District Council) stated that in his view, Option C was the most viable option because it provided parents with choice. He stated that he did not wish for foundation stage provision to be moved from King Alfred's.

Ms Lorraine Todd (Mayor of Wantage), spoke in favour of Option A as she supported the move to create two schools of equal size. She commented that a sixth form should be provided in order to create a better sense of community.

Councillor Haffenden then read out the following statement on behalf of Mr Steven Sensecall (Kemp & Kemp Property Consultants):

Dear Councillor Haffenden

Thank you for giving Persimmon an opportunity to speak at today's Scrutiny Committee, but following our meeting this morning with Mike Mill from the Education department, which was part of an ongoing dialogue with officers on the Grove Airfield development, we have concluded that we can rely instead on this short statement.

Mr Mill provided very helpful clarification as to the position regarding the options for secondary school provision in Grove and on the basis of that discussion we would confirm that we are happy to work with Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) and other stakeholders to achieve the best solution for education in Grove. At the next Grove Airfield Development Team Meeting with officers from OCC and the Vale there will be a session on the education issue, which Persimmon's education advisor will attend and at which we can discuss this matter in greater detail.

The Committee then conducted a question and answer session. A selection of the questions asked, together with the Cabinet Member and officer responses are listed below:

- **What was envisaged for Wantage and Grove? Would a sixth form be provided?**

Councillor Waine stated that the county council was looking for a school that had the potential to grow, adding that the report to Cabinet had been written to give a lead as to what the Cabinet wanted to see.

He further stated that he had commented on sixth form provision at Cabinet. The option of the new secondary school in the first instance would need greater collaborative working on the 14-19 agenda between all the local schools including Didcot. No single secondary school could meet the needs of diplomas on its own.

Mr Mill stated that the development of either a 11-16 or 11-18 secondary school would start with provision for the youngest pupils, starting with year 7, then gradually adding future years and potentially a sixth form if the governors wished this and the school was successful and popular. He added that it was hoped that all sixth forms in the vicinity would work together.

- **When would the new school be provided?**

A meeting had taken place with Kemp & Kemp Property Consultants that morning and they now had a clear direction with regard to what action needed to be taken. Negotiations would now commence. It was

the aspiration that a 600 place school would be delivered as quickly as possible. Although the report to Cabinet had stated that 150 secondary school places were needed in Grove by 2011 and a further 550 by 2026, the school could be in place by 2012.

- **With regard to Option A, had the objectors known what the implications of King Alfred's new foundation status would be in terms of preventing the county council from taking a particular view and concluding with a protracted legal battle?**

The change to foundation status had taken place in order to protect the position of King Alfred's School. The legislation and the interpretation of the legislation was new and therefore a risk in terms of knowing what the end result would be. The County Council would only have the power to close a Foundation school but a decision could be challenged and the final decision taken out of the county council's hands at some point in the future. This scenario had been discussed at the public meetings.

- **Why had the letter from Councillor Waine printed in the Oxford Mail not been referred to in the 20 June report to Cabinet or informed the recommendations?**

Councillor Waine responded that his statement at the Cabinet meeting had dealt with this matter.

- **Did the Cabinet have knowledge of the figures on Grove which had been supplied by Mr Mill, prior to making their decision on 20 June?**

Mr Mill responded that meetings had been held with the Cabinet on two occasions; one of which had been held in Grove. Information had been shared with Cabinet Members but had not been before the Cabinet on 20 June.

- **What had been done to address public concern regarding the consultation process? The consultation did not appear to have been well managed. The low level of response rates was a cause for concern and photocopies of the original response forms appeared to be suspicious.**

Councillor Waine stated that consultation meetings conducted by the county council were generally poorly attended, and there had been a low response rate to the written consultation. It was necessary for members of the public to attend one of the consultation meetings in order to gain an adequate grasp of the subject.

Mr Mill stated that the consultation processes used by the county council were currently under review. This had been why the decision had been taken to carry out an opinion survey. It had been difficult to explain the concept of foundation status and the legal consequences of

Option A. However, these matters had been explained in full at the public meetings. Supplementary meetings for parents had also been organised in most of the primary schools.

- **Which option had King Alfred’s school preferred?**

Mr Mill responded the school had preferred Option B.

- **Why had there not been any meetings with the local county councillors who represented Wantage and Grove?**

Councillor Waine responded that he had been invited to meet with local county and district councillors at their request and had done so. He had also held meetings with lead members of the opposition.

Mr Mill stated that he had consulted with and brought local members up to date and had held several meetings with them.

The Committee then **AGREED** (by 9 votes to 2 and 3 abstentions) not to refer this decision back to Cabinet.

.....in the Chair

Date of signing.....2007