

CABINET

MINUTES of the meeting held on Tuesday, 2 November 2010 commencing at 4.00 pm and finishing at 4.55 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

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Altaf-Khan (Agenda Item 6)

Officers:

Whole of meeting Chief Executive, R. Leach (Strategic Lead, School Organisation & Planning, S. Whitehead (Chief Executive's Office)

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.

117/10 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

(Agenda Item. 1)

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillor Louise Chapman.

118/10 MINUTES

(Agenda Item. 3)

Cabinet received the minutes of the meeting held on 19 October 2010 for information and agreed that they be submitted for approval to the next meeting.

119/10 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS

(Agenda Item. 5)

The following request to address the meeting had been agreed:

Item 6, Oxford School – Outcome of Closure Consultation – Councillor Altaf-Khan, Shadow Cabinet Member for Schools Improvement.

120/10 OXFORD SCHOOL - STATUTORY CLOSURE NOTICE

(Agenda Item. 6)

The replacement of Oxford School with an academy requires the formal closure of the school. Cabinet agreed on the 10 August 2010 to the issuing of a formal statutory closure notice which was published on the 6 September 2010. The period in which representations could be made by interested parties closed on the 18 October 2010 and these are summarised in the report (**CA6**).

Councillor Altaf-Khan, Shadow Cabinet Member for Schools Improvement spoke against the recommendations highlighting the number of comments in the representations received that referred to poor consultation. He noted that there were no comments in support of the proposals and referred to discussion in the Council meeting about the need to take on board consultations received on matters. He felt that a number of groups such as the local mosques had not been consulted. They represented significant numbers of children and despite lack of consultation with them being raised previously they had not been consulted.

Councillor Altaf-Khan went on to comment that originally it was expected that the Academy would bring with it further money. However there was no detail about financial benefit in the report and he felt that the only change would be to give away a public asset. He believed that because of the process followed and the lack of consultation with local parents, a number of them would take their children away to other alternatives such as faith schools or look at the alternative of free schools. He felt that Oxford School would be left where it was rather than improving as intended.

A Cabinet Member drew attention to the low response numbers and queried whether Councillor Altaf-Khan in those circumstances felt that they were a good reflection of local views. Councillor Altaf-Khan replied that he saw that the numbers were low for the statutory consultations but that people had opposed the proposals in their hundreds at the informal stage. The mosques were opposed but had not been consulted.

Responding the Cabinet Member for Schools Improvement commented that during the statutory notice period the representatives of the mosques were in exactly the same situation as any one else and perfectly entitled to respond to the consultation. It was an opportunity for all to comment within the statutory process.

The Cabinet Member for Schools Improvement introduced the contents of the report commenting that he was keen to respond to each of the representations set out in Annex 4 and referred to in the report. In particular he drew attention to paragraphs 15 and 18 that should be borne in mind when considering the representations and noted that individuals would receive a written response to their representations. He outlined the history and context leading to the current position and stressed that due process had been followed throughout. The proposals had gained the support of two different governments. In addressing the representations in general he believed that no new questions had been raised and that there was no other viable way forward.

Responding to the individual representations Councillor Waine, supported by Roy Leach, Lead Officer, School Organisation & Planning made the following points:

- 1) The consultation had fully complied with statutory regulations. CfBT had in addition carried out school gate meetings with parents. Roy Leach added that letters had gone to all parents of children at the school, there had been a note on the gate, a notice in the Oxford mail and contact with feeder schools.
- 2) In relation to comments about lack of evidence that an academy would improve education provision Councillor Waine commented that his experiences of the academies in Banbury and Oxford were that they were popular schools. Parents were choosing to send their children there. CfBT had made it clear that parental engagement was a priority and a stakeholders group would be set up to feed directly in to the Governing Body. He denied that the proposals were based on political dogma and noted that the legislation had come from the previous government. The standard of attainment was all important with the aim of creating a real community school that was the school of choice for parents in East Oxford.
- 3) Referring to comments about reducing choice he commented that the academy gave the potential to offer a wider choice of another good school.
- 4) Councillor Waine refuted comments that the closure was inappropriate and politically motivated. It was a pragmatic choice to bring about a

- positive change. The legislation was from the previous government and officers had been involved in putting the proposals forward.
- 5) Responding to comments that an academy would not be good for the community he referred to a recent visit to the North Oxfordshire Academy. He expressed disappointment that more scrutiny members had been unable to attend as they would have heard from the parents themselves. Parents were keen to get their children in to the School
 - 6) He confirmed that the admission policy would be the same as that existing now.
 - 7) With reference to comments about a lack of confidence in the body running the Academy Councillor Waine stated that CfBT had a strong track record in school improvement.
 - 8) He noted that there were complaints that representations made during the informal consultation had had to be restated but unfortunately that was required by the statutory process.
 - 9) There would be local representation in the running of the school with a parent representative on the Governing Body but additionally with stakeholders groups feeding in their views.
 - 10) Councillor Waine accepted that there had been an initial problem with printing consultation literature but otherwise could not agree that the process had been badly managed.
 - 11) He agreed that the current school did a fine job of responding to groups in the community but that CfBT would not change that. They were committed to social cohesion. He commented that in some ways it was a community school in name only as a large number of parents choose to send their children elsewhere. The aim was to make it a good school that parents would choose for their children.
 - 12) Councillor Waine believed that it was time for a clear decision that would end the uncertainty and give a positive future to the school. The Council had done all that it could to expedite the proposals to minimise uncertainty and stressed again that they had been supported by two different sets of Government Ministers. He welcomed the improvements in attainment by Oxford School but noted that they were from a low base.
 - 13) Responding to the point made by Councillor Altaf-Khan, and in annex 4 about resources Councillor Waine replied that this point had been dealt with at the time of the Scrutiny call-in. There would be a three year start up grant together with the usual top slice of County Council funding. This was in line with other academies. Capital was different but he had stressed previously that the plans were about a change from within that was not dependent on a capital scheme. There would be a small sum of money available and the County Council had done its utmost to lobby Government on behalf of the School.
 - 14) In relation to representations about a more federal structure for City schools he had not been asked to attend any meeting or to take part in any discussions. He believed that under the proposals collaboration between the schools would be real.
 - 15) Referring to representations about improvements in exam results he commented that there had been a slight falling off in the most recent

results and continued pressure from Government for improvement in all schools.

- 16) In response to comments that permanent changes were already taking place Councillor Waine stressed that the steps being taken were perfectly normal for the process of setting up all academies. The Head Teacher was a Head Teacher designate and the appointment was not paid for by the County Council. It was part of the process and part of the legislation.
- 17) He denied that the process had been in any way rushed since the initial proposals in August 2009. CfBT had a strong track record and the Head Teacher designate was working hard to ensure a smooth transition.
- 18) Councillor Waine added that schools are self managing and that Oxford School had already taken a first step to distancing itself from the Local Authority.
- 19) Referring to the comments from Councillor Altaf-Khan he clarified that there was no question of giving a public asset away. It would remain an asset for the public. With regard to parents taking their children away, parents were already choosing to go elsewhere. He felt that it would be unfortunate if the success of the Academy was put at risk because of misleading statements or misunderstanding.

The Cabinet Member for Police and Policy Co-ordination spoke in support of Academies referring to the positive experience in his Division.

Responding to a question from the Leader, Councillor Waine highlighted the Council's role as co-sponsor and emphasised that CfBT were keen to work with the County Council and schools in Oxford City.

RESOLVED: following consideration of the representations made in response to the statutory closure notice with particular reference to the legal issues detailed in paragraphs 15 and 18 to approve the closure of Oxford School with effect from midnight, 31 December 2010, subject to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools signing the funding agreement for the replacement academy.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing