

Children, Young People and Family Support Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

Special meeting held 9 March 2016

PRESENT: Councillors Chris Rosling-Josephs (Chair), Mohammad Maroof, Pat Midgley, Chris Peace, Lynn Rooney, Colin Ross, Ian Saunders, Cliff Woodcraft (Deputy Chair), Peter Rippon and Brian Webster

Non-Council Members in attendance:-

Jules Jones, (Parent Governor Representative - Non-Council Voting Member)
 Joan Stratford, (Diocese Representative - Non-Council Voting Member)
 Alison Warner, (School Governor Representative - Non-Council Non-Voting Member)

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 Apologies for absence were received and substitutes attended the meeting as follows:-

<u>Apology</u>	<u>Substitute</u>
Councillor Nasima Akther	No substitute nominated
Councillor John Booker	No substitute nominated
Councillor Katie Condliffe	No substitute nominated
Councillor Sheila Constance	No substitute nominated
Councillor Aodan Marken	Councillor Brian Webster
Councillor Karen McGowan	No substitute nominated
Councillor Jack Scott	Councillor Peter Rippon

2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

2.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the public and press.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

4.1 The following questions were received from members of the public:-

- (a) Mike Hodson (Carterknowle and Millhouses Community Group) questioned whether the Committee was aware that the report to the Cabinet meeting on

17th February 2016, regarding the school places consultation and recommendations, was not correct in claiming that the proposal to build a new secondary school on the Bannerdale car park was formally consulted on, and thoroughly explored. Mr Hodson stated that there was no Council proposal to this effect and it was a third-party proposal. It was only included on the Council website in the 'alternative option' document on 27th November 2015 – the day the consultation finished. The original single proposal – only for buildings on the Holt House site, and subsequent piecemeal changes to Council proposals, were both probably illegal and certainly against the Local Government Ombudsman's good practice guidelines.

- (b) Umberto Albarella raised the following three questions:-
- (i) The 'consultation' document of the Council, rather at the last minute, added the following proposals – 'Build a new 3-4 entry primary school at Ecclesall Infants and allow Ecclesall Junior to be the junior phase for Clifford'. No more detail was provided and this is now the proposal that the Council is supporting. How can a consultation that provides such minimal level of detail, and so little time, be regarded as credible, particularly when most of the local community was kept in complete darkness?
 - (ii) Many in the local community supported the expansion of the Infant School to three classes per year, which would feed the Junior School, and with Clifford allowed to expand locally. This project would have solved the issue of the extra need of school places and would have been much more cost effective. Why was such much more logical choice ruled out, rather than opting for a project that will have a devastating impact on the Ecclesall community?
 - (iii) Access to the Ecclesall Infant School playground is very difficult at the moment, with 180 children hosted on site. An increase to 630 children will obviously require a substantial change to the access to the ground, with massive problems for the people living in the area. Will houses be knocked down and why did such a serious issue not feature at all in the consultation document?
- (c) Nicole Brown raised the following questions:-
- (i) was there a right to reply in this meeting and could members of the public offer further explanation if the reply to their questions contained inaccuracies?
 - (ii) why did there appear to be an issue in terms of the Council investing in faith schools?
 - (iii) what was the Council's definition of the word 'over subscription'?

- (iv) why was Silverdale School built for 150 per year in 2009?
- (v) why do Councillors appear to be making decisions based on poor information and inaccurate advice?
- (d) Jen Hardy referred to a number of questions she had raised at the Cabinet meeting on 17th February 2016, to which she had not yet received responses. Ms Hardy questioned the clarity of the way forward to secure junior places for Clifford children within a through school. She considered the suggestion that children go to a reduced single-form entry, under-funded school, under split leadership, was unacceptable. Clifford need a designated, funded junior phase.
- (e) Ted Gunby stated that the planning permission for the Bannerdale site arose from almost two years' consultation with the community. In particular, the consultation reached firm agreement about the need to protect open space in the area. Would the Committee please scrutinise the way in which the Cabinet disregarded the planning permission for the site and other statements by the Council. Mr Gunby added that, in the planning documents, the Council stated 'should a future applicant wish to develop any of the open space, instead of the housing area, it must have a compelling rationale, showing how the open space could be replaced within the site' and "quantitative shortage of open space in the area means that proposals for the loss of open space will not be permitted" (Core Strategy Form B). Furthermore, he stated that the Cabinet decision is also in conflict with (i) Sports England licensed the building of the car park on sports pitches for a limited time (now expired) with the condition that the green space would be restored and (ii) the planning documents which stated "the north of the area (including the car park) is a former tip, which has poor ground condition, which means the area precludes housing development".
- (f) Ann Blair (Governor at Clifford School) questioned how many Councillors had seen the document produced by Clifford Governors, which outlined the way forward.
- (g) Neil Fitzmaurice requested that the decision be deferred until the Scrutiny Committee had considered relevant issues and made recommendations to the Executive. Mr Fitzmaurice stated that there were so many aspects to this complex issue, which needed to be considered calmly and fairly, outside pressures from those wishing to close down the decision, and suggested that more time was needed, and alternatives should not be ruled out. He added that he was very concerned at the implications of traffic which he considered to have been a consideration in rejection of other options. In addition, he commented that schools were closing down green spaces, not just during school hours, but also in holidays and at weekends.
- (h) Fiona Greensit raised the following questions:-

- (i) Would it still not be easier, and presumably less expensive, to allow Clifford to expand on its current site, rather than build a whole new primary school on one Ecclesall Junior site? This would also serve to alleviate the issue of pollution and traffic problems, and stop the Infants from losing a lovely playing field, which also serves the Juniors.
 - (ii) Can you please explain why it is better to build a new school rather than support the current schools in expanding?
 - (iii) Ecclesall Junior School currently offers 1200 church places to the local community. This is going to be reduced to 120 – why?
 - (iv) If the new through school does go ahead, how is the transfer going to happen from the old junior school to the current primary school? Has the Council thought about how this will affect the children and their families?
- (i) Helena Jones raised the following questions:-
- (i) When Tapton, Silverdale, King Egbert and Newfield, and possibly other schools, are willing to expand, why are you proposing to spend money on a new school?
 - (ii) Although not discussed in the consultation in detail, catchment areas will be radically changed, and this will lead to upset and disruption. All this can be avoided if current schools are expanded. If child numbers drop in the future, one school will inevitably be left as the least popular, and individuals' choice will lead to another under-filled school. Why disrupt catchments and spend money on a new school, when local schools are ready and willing to expand?
- (j) Jason Leman raised the following questions:-
- (i) Can the promised 'Big Conversation' after the decision by the Cabinet, include consideration of whether a housing development is built on the Bannerdale site, or whether the whole site is used for the proposed secondary school?
 - (ii) King Egbert and Newfield have both offered to expand, along with Silverdale, which had the potential to take projected demand in the short-term at least. Why can't the founding of the new school be delayed to allow a fuller process of development, rather than rushing the decision?
 - (iii) The HSBC recreation ground has been muted as an alternative site, in a similar area to currently oversubscribed schools. Why was this proposal not seriously considered in the Cabinet report?

- (iv) Is there an actual plan of the new school proposed on the Bannerdale site?
 - (v) How much money would the sale of the Bannerdale site for housing raise?
 - (k) Peter Scott raised the following questions:-
 - (i) What alternatives were considered to the development of the Ecclesall Infant School site to include the Junior School?
 - (ii) If alternatives were considered, what were they, and why were they discounted?
 - (iii) What efforts were made to invite residents near Ecclesall Infant School (not parents) to participate in the consultation process?
- 4.2 The Chair stated that all the questions raised would be referred to the Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families, who would arrange for written responses to be provided.

5. CALL-IN OF THE CABINET DECISION ON SCHOOL PLACES IN SHEFFIELD

- 5.1 The Policy and Improvement Officer, Diane Owens, submitted a report regarding the call-in of the decision of the Cabinet made on 17th February 2016, to:-

“Authorise the Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families, and where necessary, in consultation with the Executive Director, Place, to take all necessary steps, including bringing forward the necessary capital approval submissions to Cabinet, to:-

- (i) commission a new 11-18 school on the car park area of the former Bannerdale site, as described in this report;*
- (ii) support the temporary expansion of Silverdale to provide an additional 60 secondary school places in 2016/17 and 2017/18, as set out in this report;*
- (iii) undertake a 4-week consultation on a proposal to expand Ecclesall Infant School to become a through primary school, offering 90 places per year, as set out in this report; and*
- (iv) commission a new 2-18 school on the former Pye Bank School site, as described in this report.”*

5.2 Signatories

The Lead Signatory to the call-in was Councillor Aodan Marken, and the other signatories were Councillors Penny Baker, Shaffaq Mohammed, Robert Murphy

and Colin Ross.

5.3 Reasons for the Call-in

The signatories had confirmed that they wished the Committee to scrutinise the decision to ensure that the proposal provides the best allocation of school places.

5.4 Attendees

- Councillor Jackie Drayton (Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families)
- Councillor Robert Murphy (Signatory and acting for the Lead Signatory to the call-in)
- Councillor Shaffaq Mohammed (Signatory to the call-in)
- Jane Ludlam (Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families)
- Antony Hughes (Children's Commissioner and Director of Inclusion and Learning)
- Alena Prentice (Assistant Director, Inclusion and Learning Services)

5.5 Councillor Robert Murphy addressed the Committee, as representative of Councillor Aodan Marken, Lead Signatory, indicating that he had a son who attended a school in the south west of the City. He stated that he fully understood the need for more school places in the south west of the City, and had raised this issue with the Cabinet Member on a number of occasions. He commented that, in his opinion, the decision to close Abbeydale Secondary School was taken too hastily, without proper consideration being given to the needs of the local community, or in terms of future planning. In terms of the consultation process regarding the present proposals, Councillor Murphy stated that it was difficult to consult on something, when all the options had not been made clear, and considered that calling-in the Cabinet decision would give the public, and Members, more time to give proper consideration to the proposals.

5.6 Councillor Jackie Drayton, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families, thanked everyone for attending the meeting, particularly the members of the public, and indicated that her comments would both provide an explanation of the Council's position in this regard, as well as providing an initial response to the questions raised by members of the public. She also stated that every effort would be made for written responses to be sent to the questioners, as early as possible. Councillor Drayton stated that, although the Council consulted on a set of proposals with regard to school places in the City, the initial consultation was undertaken as a statutory requirement, but it had been made clear that, following people's views on the proposals, further proposals could come to light, and would be placed on the Council website, as a means of further consultation. This had included the receipt of detailed proposals from Clifford School. The Council had based its proposals on a clear set of criteria, which included looking at where school places were needed, the need to protect green space, the need to provide additional housing, where possible, and the need to provide good quality schools for children in the City. As part of the consultation, a number of people raised concerns with regard to potential traffic congestion and reduction in air quality, as

well as concerns regarding over-development in terms of the Holt House School proposals. A number of people stated that they were happy with the schools as they were and where they were, and details of the proposals to enlarge Ecclesall Infant School to become an infant and junior school, were placed on the Council website. Based on all the comments received as part of the consultation, the proposals were submitted to the Cabinet at its meeting held on 17th February 2016.

- 5.7 Councillor Drayton stressed that Ecclesall Junior School would be retained as the feeder school for children at Clifford Infant School. The Council was very mindful of the number of appeals made by parents in connection with the allocation of places at schools in the south west of the City, which had included, in some cases, parents who actually lived in the school's catchment area. This referred mainly to Silverdale School, and it was considered that the proposed expansion of the school, to provide an additional 60 places, would alleviate the problem. Councillor Drayton stated that Members and officers had met with the Head and Chair of Governors of Clifford School to discuss the proposals, and would continue with such meetings to ensure the proposals progressed satisfactorily. It was appreciated that there could be traffic implications in terms of Ecclesall Infant School, and any concerns would be addressed as part of a statutory four-week consultation process, together with the planning process. In terms of the Bannerdale site, there had been extensive consultation, which had resulted in a considerable number of responses and comments received from members of the public. Whilst this site was deemed suitable for housing, the Council was very mindful to maintain the open space on the site, and there were no plans to fence off this open space. The decision to close the former Abbeydale Secondary School had been made in the light of falling school numbers, which resulted in it no longer being financially viable to keep the school open. The Council had looked at all the options, including possible development of the HSBC site, in accordance with the agreed criteria, but it had been considered that this land would be too expensive, whereas the Council currently owned the Bannerdale site.
- 5.8 In terms of the issues raised with regard to catchment areas, Antony Hughes stated that a full consultation would be held later in the year with regard to proposals for admissions to the new secondary schools.
- 5.9 Members of the Committee raised questions and the following responses were provided:-
- A number of suggestions had been made as part of the consultation regarding Clifford School, which had included a suggestion to move the provision at Clifford to the Ecclesall Junior School site on Ringinglow Road, which would have to be agreed by the Diocese, and the Governors of both schools.
 - The proposals regarding development on the Ecclesall Infant School site would be considered as part of a further consultation exercise, as well as part of the planning process.

- It had been identified, based on projected population forecasts and demand for places, that there would be a need for additional provision at secondary schools in the south west of the City, and plans were being made to increase the capacity at Silverdale, which would result in ten forms of entry by 2023/24.
- A formal assessment in terms of air quality and traffic congestion had not been undertaken in respect of the proposals regarding Ecclesall Infant School, as this would be done as part of the next stage of the proposals.
- It was believed that there had been a proper and extensive consultation exercise undertaken in connection with the proposals, and Members would like to express their thanks and appreciation to the officers responsible for this work. The original proposals, together with any additional or amended proposals suggested following consultation, were all included on the Council website, in order to provide an opportunity for members of the public to comment, and a number of people had submitted multiple comments. All the responses received as part of the consultation exercise were lodged in the Council Leader's Office and all Cabinet Members were notified of these and given the opportunity to view them prior to the meeting on 17th February 2016. Consideration would be given to making all the consultation responses public, but this would need to be clarified with Legal Services, in the light of possible confidentiality issues.
- The reason for the urgency in terms of making the decision at the Cabinet meeting on 17th February 2016, was that there was now a considerable amount of work required, including further consultation and planning applications and, where relevant, negotiations with Academy sponsors, to ensure that the additional capacity was ready by 2018.
- Council Members and officers had met with the Governors of all the schools involved, to discuss the proposals and listen to their views, and they were all in favour of the current proposals. Arrangements would remain for further meetings to be held with the Governors as the proposals progress.

5.10 Members of the Committee also made the following comments:-

- The Diocese did not want to see a reduction in faith places in the south-west of the City, and would be responsible for funding the expansion plans at Ecclesall Junior School.
- As part of the planning process, members of the public were entitled to attend meetings of the Planning and Highways Committee to put forward their views.

5.11 As a summary, Councillor Jackie Drayton again expressed her thanks and appreciation to the Council officers in terms of the excellent work undertaken regarding the consultation exercises in respect of the various proposals, and to all those groups and members of the public who had responded to the Council as

part of the consultation. She stated that she believed that the proposals would go a long way to solve the problem of shortages of school places in the south west of the City and, consequently, reduce the number of appeals parents had been compelled to make as a result of such a shortage.

5.12 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the reports now submitted, together with the comments now made and the responses provided to the questions raised; and
- (b) agrees to take no action in relation to the called-in decision, but consider whether issues arising from the call-in need to be added to its Work Programme 2016/17.

(NOTE: Prior to the passing of the above resolution, an alternative motion, moved by Councillor Brian Webster and seconded by Councillor Colin Ross, in the following terms, was put to the vote and negated:-

“This Committee:-

- (a) recommends that no further action be taken in respect of recommendations (ii) and (iv);
- (b) notes flaws with the initial consultation process for the provision of additional primary and secondary school places in the south west of the City and, in particular, the addition of further options in the course of that consultation;
- (c) further, notes with concern that the current proposals risk being to the detriment of local green space, air quality, traffic flow and community cohesion; and
- (d) therefore, refers this decision back to the Cabinet, with the recommendation that a full and proper consultation be held, for a period of no fewer than six weeks, on all possible options for primary and secondary school provision in the south west of the City.”)

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

6.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Monday, 14th March 2016, at 1.00 pm, in the Town Hall.

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