

**SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL**

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

**Meeting held 3 August 2016**

**PRESENT:** Councillors Ian Saunders (Chair), Steve Ayriss (Deputy Chair),  
Andy Bainbridge, Terry Fox, Kieran Harpham, Karen McGowan,  
Mohammad Maroof, Abtisam Mohamed, Josie Paszek, Roger Davison,  
Alison Teal and Bob Pullin (Substitute Member)

**Non-Council Members in attendance:-**

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:-

**Apology**

**Substitute**

Councillor Olivia Blake	No substitute nominated
Councillor John Booker	No substitute nominated
Councillor Craig Gamble Pugh	No substitute nominated
Councillor Colin Ross	Councillor Bob Pullin
Councillor Cliff Woodcraft	Councillor Roger Davison
Alice Riddell (Observer)	

**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 Chair stated that public questions would be accommodated during the consideration of Item 6 on the agenda – Call-in of the Cabinet Decision on Primary School Places in Ecclesall.

**5. CALL-IN OF THE CABINET DECISION ON PRIMARY SCHOOL PLACES IN ECCLESALL**

5.1 The Policy and Improvement Officer, Diane Owens, submitted a report on the call-in of the decision of the Cabinet made on 20<sup>th</sup> July, 2016, to:-

- i. *“Approve the proposal to increase the capacity and upper age range at Ecclesall Infant School as described in the statutory proposals. The lower age range would remain and would not change. This approval is conditional on the granting of planning permission before 1<sup>st</sup> July 2017.*
- ii. *Agree the commitments and actions outlined at 4.2 in the report (see below)*

*4.2 There were some very strong feelings aired during the consultation. The most common overall response was to raise issues and many of these were around how the proposals would be implemented. Many called for further opportunities to understand, comment on, and shape the proposals if they are to proceed. In order to address the specific issues raised during consultation and to allow for that further consultation, we would propose the following:*

- *Transition: that Cabinet makes a commitment that the Local Authority will support work led by the three governing bodies and the Diocese to come together during the Autumn Term, in partnership with families, to put together clear transition plans to address the issues raised during this consultation, including consideration of a 2019 start for transition and the extent to which Ecclesall CE Junior classes could be taught in the new buildings, whilst taking into account the implications for the Junior school and the future children from Clifford who would transfer.*
- *Traffic & parking around Ecclesall Infant: in acknowledging the strength of feeling around existing issues relating to traffic and parking it is proposed that agreement to proceed is subject to the scheme being acceptable in planning terms, following further engagement and consultation, including work around traffic impact.*
- *Design: further work would be required working towards detailed design, with further opportunities for residents and parents to engage, contribute and see what is planned before designs are finalised as well as engagement around ensuring that construction is undertaken considerately*
- *Ecclesall Junior site: that Cabinet makes a commitment that the Local Authority will support Governors and the Diocese to ensure that work takes place on the Ecclesall Junior site to create a good environment for a smaller number of pupils, within the constraints of the current financial position facing the Local Authority, school, and the Diocese.*
- *Clifford I & Ecclesall J: that Cabinet makes a commitment that the Local Authority will support work led by the two governing bodies and the Diocese to come together during the Autumn Term in partnership with families to put together clear plans around future leadership and timing.*
- *Sustainability: the Council’s commitment to supporting the long-term success and sustainability of these three local schools and their neighbours*
- *Early Years: there was little support for this development during the consultation, the need in terms of places is currently unclear, and we would not wish to destabilise existing local provision. Should the need develop in the future then this could be a possibility and would be subject to fresh consultation”*

## 5.2 Signatories

The Lead Signatory to the call-in was Councillor Steve Ayris, and the other signatories were Councillors Roger Davison, Shaffaq Mohammed, Bob Pullin and Alison Teal.

## 5.3 Reasons for the Call-in

The signatories had confirmed that they wished the Committee to scrutinise the decision to give further consideration to other options.

## 5.4 Attendees

- Councillor Jackie Drayton (Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families)
- Councillor Shaffaq Mohammed (signatory to the call-in)
- Alena Prentice (Assistant Director, Inclusion and Learning Services)
- Joel Hardwick (School Organisation Manager, Inclusion and Learning)

5.5 Councillor Steve Ayris stated that a number of Members had received representations in terms of the proposals, particularly with regard to the consultation process, and it was considered that the Cabinet should explore options which had not been discussed previously.

5.6 Councillor Roger Davison added that a number of representations had also been received from the schools themselves which, again, he considered had not been properly discussed.

5.7 Councillor Bob Pullin stated that he had received numerous approaches from constituents raising questions on the proposals, particularly with regard to the consultation process. He stated that he had concerns with regard to the increase in the number of pupils and the adverse effects of the development on the Ecclesall Infant School site. He also expressed an interest in further understanding the research undertaken prior to the making of the decision.

5.8 In response, Alena Prentice stated that there had been full and thorough consultation on the proposals, with the Council listening very carefully to the views of parents and stakeholders in terms of the proposals. She stated that, included in the Cabinet report were a number of supplementary proposals which would hopefully address many of the issues raised as part of the consultation. One of the main issues of concern related to the transition arrangements, specifically regarding the impact of such arrangements on pupils, but also including the impact on stakeholders and parents. The Clifford Governors and the Diocese would be working up a detailed plan to ensure that transition for the pupils ran as smoothly as possible. Ms. Prentice stated that the Council had also received a number of representations with regard to the effects of the new development on the Ecclesall Infant School site in terms of traffic and parking, but stressed that the proposed scheme would be subject to a planning application where these issues, and any other physical aspects of the scheme, would be considered.

## 5.9 Public Questions

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

- (a) Alex Miller raised the following two questions:-
- (i) The only alternative option mentioned is the “Clifford” option. Given this has been dismissed before, what other options were considered?
  - (ii) As discussed at the Cabinet meeting, the Governing Bodies of Ecclesall Infant and Junior Schools, cannot be described as supporting this proposal, despite them using the word “support” in their consultative response. Is the analysis in Appendix 2 to the report, too simplistic to be of any value?

In response, Joel Hardwick stated that a number of different alternatives in terms of Clifford Infant School had been considered, both in the options appraisal, which took place in summer 2015, and in the autumn consultation. These included relocating from the Psalter Lane site to the Carter Knowle Junior School building, and Clifford School’s preferred option of extending on the Psalter Lane site. In considering the best way to provide additional school places in the area, the option the Council had chosen to consult on was the enlargement of Ecclesall Infant School. Alena Prentice added that, although not all the Schools’ Governors were in favour of the Council’s proposals, the Governing Bodies had expressed their support. In the light of the level of concern raised during the consultation, including a number of people calling for a further opportunity to understand, comment on and shape the proposals if they were to proceed, the Cabinet, as part of its decision, had agreed a list of commitments/actions, which would be subject to further consultation.

- (b) Laurence Mosley, Governor of Clifford Infant School, raised the following five questions, relating specifically to Clifford Infant:-
- (i) Why can’t the School have a junior phase in 2015, which it was promised after the options appraisal;
  - (ii) Would Ecclesall Junior School become Clifford Junior School, as had been interpreted by the Governors, together with most other people reading the Cabinet report? This needs to be made explicit as currently the ambiguity is leading to confusion for all communities, especially families and therefore children.
  - (iii) Why is it the case that the Authority does not think it can instruct Ecclesall Junior School, when they have the authority as it was a voluntary controlled school? The governance system for such schools means that Foundation (Diocese) Governors were in the minority, and the Authority was able to instruct other Governors how to vote if necessary.

- (iv) Could the arrangements in terms of a through, split site for Clifford Primary School be set at 2019?

In response, Alena Prentice stated that considerable feedback had been received from representatives of Clifford Junior School, with the majority expressing a wish to see a quick move to Ecclesall Junior School. The arrangements need to be implemented on a phased approach, and there was a need for all the schools involved, including the Governing Bodies and parents, to work together and arrive at a suitable decision, with such decision having the support of parents. There was a need to commence facilitated discussions very quickly. Councillor Jackie Drayton added that as Clifford Infant School was a Church of England School, the Diocese had a strong role in terms of what would happen.

- (c) Umberto Alberella raised the following three questions:-

- (i) It is fairly obvious that last Autumn, the Council decided to go ahead with the development of the Ecclesall Infant School playground, and that no objections from the local community were going to stop that. There are many elements that suggest this was going to be the case, including the four-week consultation run in May/June had only one option available and, as Council staff admitted during consultation meetings, there was no plan B. How could this be a credible consultation, particularly with no alternative options? Despite this major flaw in the consultation process, to their credit, people committed to it, and the response was very clear. During parents' consultation meetings, the response was mixed, but at residents' meetings, there was complete consensus against the proposal and in favour of alternative options. Moreover, and according to Council statistics, a staggering 81% of the written responses (A) expressed concerns about the proposal, (B) favoured alternative options and (C) expressed an outright objection to the proposal. Yet, the Council has decided to go ahead, ignoring the will and concern of the local community. What was the point of having a consultation in the first place?
- (ii) Financially, the proposal also makes little sense. The original £9m estimate (Council figure from last June) has now been lowered to £4.9m, presumably on the basis that, rather than having a completely new building, there will only be an extension of the current buildings, yet there are still 450 children that will need to be accommodated in the building – down from the original 630. This hardly seems to justify a decrease in cost from £9m to £4.9m. Therefore, either quality will be compromised or the cost will spiral up. However, even the hardly realistic £4.9m is more expensive than alternative options, such as local expansion of Clifford Infant School, the swap of the Infant and Junior School, or the retention of Year 3 on the Ecclesall Infant site.
- (iii) Until recently, our community operated fairly harmoniously. We have had a great green space enjoyed by most, the school was very well

respected and in tune with the local community, and my daughter and all other children I know had a fantastic time there. Now, social cohesion has started collapsing, people are divided and there is a widespread feeling that our voice is ignored, as well as a growing distrust of the actions of the Council, and the school management. This was completely unnecessary, as alternative options existed and had been ignored. What are the real reasons for the Council going ahead with such an unpopular choice?

In response, Alena Prentice confirmed that there were no alternative options as the Council had held lengthy and detailed consultation in Autumn 2015, on the back of a series of option appraisals in Summer 2015. It was always going to be difficult to arrive at a solution that everyone was happy with, but it was considered that, and based on the responses following the consultation, the proposal being considered was the most acceptable one. She accepted that there had been a reduction in the overall cost estimate in terms of the development plans, but stressed that the current plans were much more efficient. She added that there was good, ample space for the development proposals at Ecclesall Infant School. She stated that there had been a general consensus at residents' meetings and that the Council, at these meetings, fully understood how the proposals could impact on residents living within the immediate vicinity. In terms of the results of the consultation, the majority of responses were very complex, and did not include a simple "yes or no" response in terms of being in favour of, or against, the proposals. Representatives at Ecclesall Infant School were very sad to hear of a possible breakdown in relationships, and had expressed an intention to continue working closely with parents.

Councillor Jackie Drayton added that it was clear that action needed to be taken in this area on the basis that 15 children, living in the catchment area of Ecclesall Infant School, had not been able to get a place at the school, and had been forced to attend other schools, some of which were some distance away. This had caused a lot of concern and upset on the part of both parents and children. It was hoped that the School's green space could be protected, as much as possible, whilst undertaking the development plans. She stated that, on behalf of the Council, she hoped that all stakeholders had been able to put forward their views, and that such views had been considered. Councillor Drayton referred to specific issues in terms of Clifford Infant School as the school buildings were owned by the Diocese, so its views would also have to be taken into account.

- (d) Neil Fitzmaurice raised the following two questions:-
- (i) Could the Committee refer this issue back to the Cabinet, with a view to the Committee then conducting its own review of the issues and concerns of local residents; and
  - (ii) Has there been any party whipping prior to this meeting?

In response, Councillor Jackie Drayton stated that the Council's vision was ultimately to ensure there were sufficient places for children to enable them to attend school in their local area, and that there was a need for the Council to work

with all relevant stakeholders in order to achieve this vision. She stressed that action was required as there simply was not enough places for all children living in the catchment area at the present time, and referred to the need for the process to continue to ensure that additional capacity was created as soon as possible. With regard to the issue of party whipping, the Chair stated that this was covered in the Council's Constitution, and confirmed that there had not been any pre-meeting of the Labour Group.

- (e) Chris Fry referred to the petition submitted objecting to the proposals and queried whether, as part of the consultation responses, this had been classed as one response or individual responses, based on the number of signatures.

Joel Hardwick stated that the petition had been classed as one response, from the lead petitioner. He added that the Cabinet had been notified of the petition, prior to making its decision.

5.10 The signatories to the call-in, and Members of the Committee raised questions and the following responses were provided:-

- The proposed designs in terms of the development of Ecclesall Infant School should address all the concerns raised as part of the consultation. All the issues raised would be given detailed consideration as part of the planning application process and the public were also entitled to attend the meeting of the Planning Committee, and speak, subject to the Chair's agreement.
- The proposed plans in respect of Clifford Infant School had been put forward by the School's Governors, so it was not possible to confirm whether anyone had spoken to the owner of the property next to the School. The Council had asked the Diocese for confirmation of the status of the property, and the sale price.
- It was accepted that the proposals with regard to having a through school on the Clifford Infant School site had received a lot of backing, and had been included as part of the options appraisal, and looked into in considerable detail. The Council had continued its dialogue with the Diocese but, to date, the Diocese had not indicated that it would be providing any funding in terms of the purchase of the property next door to the School. Although the purchase of the property would address the need for places, this option would not address the current constraints of the Ecclesall Junior site and therefore, would not be the best long-term use of the Council's available capital and assets.
- There was no barrier in terms of the Authority being able to invest from its Capital Programme in connection with development proposals at Clifford Infant School. However, the Authority must always provide evidence in terms of how it has spent money producing additional school places, as well as having to provide evidence of value for money.

- In terms of looking at alternatives, specifically in terms of the Clifford Infant School site, the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families and the Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families, had met with the School's Governors and the Diocese to discuss the possible alternatives.
- In terms of any future expansion plans, the Authority had a duty to look into taking action, in connection with the provision of additional school places, based on the evidence. Therefore, no guarantee could be given, at this stage, that no further expansion would be required in the area. If there were any plans in the future, any proposals would be fully consulted on.
- It was not the case that the Council was investing in Academies, and not faith schools. The decision in terms of newly built schools having to be academies had been made by the former Coalition Government.
- The Authority was well aware of the congestion issues in terms of Ecclesall Infant School, and would ensure that any traffic management issues would be addressed during the development works. The development proposals would also hopefully result in the removal of some, or all, of the temporary mobile classrooms currently in the playground at Ecclesall Junior School.
- It was not considered that any further investigations, or studies in terms of looking at any alternative options, would be necessary. Considerable work had already been undertaken in terms of looking into the physical comparison on both Ecclesall and Clifford Infant School sites, and it was considered that there was now a need to move towards a facilitated discussion between the Governors and Diocese in respect of Clifford Infant School. If Members wanted any further information in terms of site comparisons, rationale and ethos, they should liaise directly with the officers leading on this work.
- It was not considered necessary to establish a shadow Governing Body to look at the ethos/financial structures/nature of education, which would ultimately lead to the production of a staffing/resourcing plan, as the existing Governing Body at Ecclesall Infant School would be able to undertake this work.
- There was a statutory duty on the Council to provide sufficient school places for all children requiring them.
- The outcome of the proposals would be to ensure that there were enough primary school places in the Ecclesall area, which has seen sustained increases in the pupil population over the last few years. The proposals would also leave sustainable schools for the long term, in respect of this part of the City.
- As part of the consultation, approximately 700 letters had been sent to parents of children at, and those residents living within close proximity to, Ecclesall Infant and Junior Schools, and five public meetings had been held

to discuss the proposals. There had been a very good response to the consultation letters and during the process, and based on the questions/concerns raised, the “Frequently Asked Questions” section on the Council website had been updated. There was also a notice published in The Star and details posted on the Council website. Several meetings had also been held with the Governing Bodies of each of the three schools, and the Diocese of Clifford Infant School.

- The officers involved in this work did not believe the process had been flawed in any way, particularly in the light of the detailed consultation exercise which had been undertaken with all stakeholders.
- From looking at trends in terms of population growth and the number of young families in the Ecclesall area, it was believed that sufficient school places would be provided in this area for the long-term.

5.11 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted, together with the comments now made and the responses provided to the questions raised;
- (b) expresses its thanks and appreciation to the officers involved for the work undertaken with regard to the proposals; and
- (c) agrees to take no action in relation to the called-in decision.

The votes on the above resolution were ordered to be recorded, and were as follows:-

For the resolution (8) - Councillors Andy Bainbridge, Terry Fox, Kieran Harpham, Karen McGowan, Mohammad Maroof, Abtisam Mohamed, Josie Paszek and Ian Saunders.

Against the resolution (4) - Councillors Steve Ayris, Roger Davison, Bob Pullin and Alison Teal.

(NOTE: Prior to the passing of the above resolution, an alternative motion, moved by Councillor Steve Ayris and seconded by Councillor Roger Davison, in the following terms, was put to the vote and negated:-

“That this Committee requests a further full consultation to be conducted with all stakeholders, especially the Diocese, on both the Clifford and Ecclesall Infant School proposals, to be brought forward with costings and consideration of all implications, including planning and highways.”

The votes on the alternative motion were ordered to be recorded, and were as follows:-

For the Motion (4) - Councillors Steve Ayris, Roger Davison, Bob

Pullin and Alison Teal.

- Against the Motion (8) - Councillors Andy Bainbridge, Terry Fox, Kieran Harpham, Karen McGowan, Mohammad Maroof, Abtisam Mohamed, Josie Paszek and Ian Saunders).

## **6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

- 6.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Monday, 19<sup>th</sup> September, 2016 at 1.00 p.m. in the Town Hall.