

PRIMARY SCHOOL ORGANISATION CONSULTATION

NOTES OF A MEETING HELD AT CLUNBURY CE PRIMARY SCHOOL HELD ON 18 MARCH 2008

GOVERNORS' MEETING HELD AT 5.00pm

Present: -

Fiona Arrowsmith	Governor
Revd Barney Bell	Governor
John Croxton	Governor
Andrew Davies	Governor and Head Teacher
Patricia Greenaway	Governor
Sue Grimes	Governor
Michael Levisieur	Governor
John Marston	Governor
Frank Morgan	Governor
Lynne Morris	Governor
Jackie Moulder	Governor
Tracy Price	Governor
Val Redgrave	Governor
Helen Spreadborough	KS2 teacher
Ian Terry	Diocesan Director of Education
Anne Williams	Governor
John Baxter (JB)	SCC Education Places Manager
Ian Budd (IB)	SCC Assistant Director of Children & Young Peoples Services
Sara Findlay-Siewwright	SCC Human Resources Adviser
Ann Hartley (AH)	Portfolio Holder for Children & Young Peoples Services
Carl Wellington	Note Taker for the Meeting

Introduction

Ian Budd opened the meeting and introduced those present. He explained:

- the reasons for the review;
- the review process; and
- possible next steps

Andrew Davies asked how schools would be notified of the decision.

IB explained that schools would receive a telephone call the day after the decision was made. If the decision was to continue the process, then meetings would be set up with staff, governors, etc., to advise and help as the process took place, which was likely to take a year to implement, i.e. September 2009 would see the revised position, although this could change depending upon other factors.

In summary, the County Council valued the work being done at Clunbury School, and welcomed visions on developing it further.

Ian Terry stated that he was always impressed when coming to the School. The staff were 'ahead of the game' both locally and nationally, and already provided education for the future.

Tracy Price asked why there was a desire to change what the School was doing, if it already worked.

IB explained that it was a question of working with all parties to develop a vision for the future across the County as a whole, making sure that staff were equipped and trained to continue to deliver high quality education and good learning and working environments for the next generations. There was no single blue print, though, so it was important to develop the vision locally to the area.

Andrew Davies asked how much the School would be involved in the next stage, if they could have an input and if the Diocese would be involved at all levels.

IB responded emphasising that this was very much the case. It was important to work with the staff, the governors and the wider community in all decisions, including the building development opportunities that the PCP would bring.

Ian Terry confirmed that the Diocese had been fully committed to education for many years and stated that education on the site had to be in accordance with the trust deed. The Diocese were fully committed to working with everyone at Clunbury to provide what the local community feels is best.

IB explained that, in terms of the site and buildings, Lydbury North CE Primary was restricted, whereas Clunbury had undertaken good investment over the years, although further investment was certainly needed to bring it into line with the requirements of the Building Bulletin standards for primary school design. There had never been two building projects the same in Shropshire, and this was in some ways down to involving staff, governors and the children in decisions that reflected the values, ethos and ideas locally. The County Council was also willing to hear of alternative site opportunities for the School.

John Croxton referred to the legal models in the consultation document and had concerns over the timescales involved. He felt that unless it was feasible to delay the final outcome to 2010, then the 'options' were narrowed down to two.

IB confirmed that no alternative sites were known of but the team would also welcome suggestions for alternatives if any existed. In terms of the site, there were more strengths for consideration at Clunbury than at Lydbury North. The County Council's Primary Capital Strategy (PCS) would be submitted in June for consideration over the summer by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). Meanwhile, the County's local capital funding could enable capital projects to begin.

The options in the consultation document were three legal processes. Other options had to make sure that any work done considered both communities. The statutory consultation, if it were the chosen route, would have to be clear about how other options would bring about the required vision.

Val Redgrave stated that she felt that the new site option was not viable at this time.

IB explained that if an alternative site option was offered, then this would have to be properly investigated.

Val Redgrave was concerned that the consultation document suggested a new site for a school would be in the south-west of the area and that this was not in the direction of the two communities.

IB explained that this section of text was not referring to the selection of sites. The County Council had checked thoroughly and there was no land, including glebe land, available. The capital funding that was to be made available could be used for the purchase of land, but there was a particular preference to spend the money on the schoolchildren.

Val Roberts stated that she felt that the 3rd option was unlikely and asked what would happen to the staff.

IB explained that recent legislation had brought a requirement to allow competition to provide education in such cases. However, it was possible to get special dispensation that would allow a preferred set up.

Ian Terry added that if there was a religious character involved in a current set up, then it was expected that that set up would continue. That was a particularly relevant point where any alternative proposal from a provider involved a change of religious character.

IB then explained the staffing procedures and priorities. The County Council had been very successful in such instances in the past, in ensuring staff had been offered jobs and acknowledging retirement requests.

Val Redgrave emphasised that everyone was happy with the staff at Clunbury and would not wish to lose them.

Tracy Price asked about the staff of the other school in the process.

IB explained that past success had been due, in part, to the general turnover of staff which was around 10% across the County. Most staff would be slotted into posts.

Lynne Morris asked how this would work. A 10% turnover in this situation would not fit in. Without bias and with respect to staff at Lydbury, they might not be suitable. Where a small set of staff existed, the slotting in may not work neatly and thereby the County picture not reflected at Clunbury.

IB explained that the staffing protocols existed for all schools across Shropshire and gave an example of where it had worked elsewhere in the County. It was most important to seek continued employment for all Shropshire staff. There was usually some flexibility in support staff hours and, whilst not the case here, one or other head teacher might seek retirement. The Authority needed to listen very carefully to what was required locally. For any displaced staff, there were usually vacancies within close proximity to where they lived.

Lynne Morris felt that the exercise was simply one of money saving.

IB acknowledged that there were pressures on budgets, but where the County Council made decisions on school reorganisation, they had to undertake tests that showed and backed up that they were in the best educational interests of the area.

Val Redgrave stated that the Lydbury staff should be slotted in if they were needed at Clunbury and if they wanted to be.

IB explained the collaborative working processes involved in each of the examples given in the consultation document. This would involve working with the governors and the Diocese to

form/expand the governing body and, when this was in place, look at the budget and the structure of the school, and how staff might be slotted in to accommodate the skills available.

Val Redgrave asked if all staff would be slotted in, even if the governors did not want them, and asked if this had led to 'weeding out' staff in other cases.

IB explained that the situation would be the same as it was for all schools in Shropshire, and that was to seek continued employment for all staff. 'Weeding out' would go against protocols.

Val Redgrave then asked if there was to be any choice where staff might be considered totally inappropriate.

IB stressed that, whilst there would not, the staffing structure would need to be appropriate and so the situation of working with one which did not work would not arise. There would be opportunities to discuss where staff would or would not fit in with the structure and the ethos of the school. Consideration of alternatives in their area could then be made.

Val Redgrave then asked if that meant that members of staff were fully protected.

IB responded in the affirmative.

Lynne Morris stressed the need to consider the children first in the process. They would suffer if inappropriate staff were appointed.

IB agreed and made the point that the two communities were very similar. A successor school might be slightly larger than either of the schools at the present, but essentially it would still be considered a small school.

JB explained the funding policy whereby the allocation of money was based on the number of pupils, i.e. the 'money followed the child'.

Andrew Davies emphasised that the pupils had to be kept informed of progress once the decision was made. This, he felt, would make the process exciting for them.

IB stressed the importance of the children working with familiar faces along the way.

Val Redgrave was concerned that Clunbury had been viewed as the 'demons' so far. No-one wanted to upset the children.

Andrew Davies stressed the need to ensure that the children were looked after and protected from the other issues surrounding an amalgamation. Clunbury had always had good working relationships with colleagues at Lydbury North, although, understandably, this had changed slightly since the amalgamation issue was first raised in January. Previous head teachers of both schools had worked collaboratively with each other and this had continued. It was important to work with the Lydbury community.

JB stressed that the Authority had an excellent track record of working with both schools in such instances to ensure that the children were not adversely affected.

IB added that Grafton and Bicton schools had concerns during the reorganisation process, but were now very loyal to the new school.

Barney Bell stated that he considered the new site option to be the most costly. Both communities had other facilities to complement the schools. He also said that other factors, such as housing, needed to be considered for the whole area, and questioned how many of the 24% of Clunbury pupils living out of the catchment area and 41% of those at Lydbury would want to come to Clunbury if amalgamation went ahead.

IB explained that the Authority had a good track record of projecting numbers and working with the planning authorities.

JB added that known children data was used, however there was an unknown factor in the level of children lost by town schools to rural village schools. Section 106 (of the Town and Country Planning Act) agreements were used to help provide capital for expanding schools. Latest regional government guidance suggested that investment in housing would take place in larger settlements but the Authority was keeping in touch with developments.

Andrew Davies explained that housing was not producing schoolchildren like it used to.

JB added that this even applied to social housing.

Barney Bell said that it appeared that most housing locally was being occupied by retired couples.

Val Redgrave asked about the surplus places problem that could occur if the amalgamation were to produce a 120-place school at Clunbury with around 90 places taken.

JB explained that the surplus gave flexibility and aided parental preference. There was a need to strike a balance between providing sufficient places without over-provision.

Barney Bell noted that establishing a slightly larger vibrant school in the area might secure the future of educational provision.

Ann Hartley emphasised that the proposal relating to the possible closure of 22 primary schools was off the table and not simply on hold. The policy had been approved by Cabinet but it had decided not to pursue but to engage a policy commission study to look into the issue. The type of chair (external) for this commission had been agreed upon and a cross-party committee would now be formed. It was important not to bring politics into the lives of Shropshire children. There was no time frame for the study, but there was a real problem to overcome and it was important that everyone involved in education had a steer on the way forward.

Andrew Davies asked if the safety of the School would be protected into the future if the amalgamation went through.

IB explained that the process was all about producing sustainable schools for a long time into the future.

Helen Spreadborough asked about the Admission Number and if it would remain the same.

JB explained that there would be a new calculation based on the accommodation available. The Authority was flexible on the matter, as long as there was no detrimental effect on surrounding schools. There was a policy on admissions to school and, whilst the School was its own admissions authority, aided and community schools worked very much the same way on admissions.

Ian Terry stated that Hereford Diocese would work with colleagues in education to help the school continue to do what it was set up to do.

JB added that the Authority would work closely with the Diocese and other partners, and would expect the local children to be able to attend their local school.

IB invited those present to submit comments to officers at the Shirehall, and offered to leave contact details at the School.

The meeting closed at 6:45pm