

School Organisation Meeting – Notes of the Meeting

Date: 09 November 2012

Venue: Offley Primary School

Attendees:

Julie Mills (JM)	Admissions & Appeals – Minute taker
Ken White (KW)	Capital Implementation Manager
Rob Hyde (RH)	Organisation and Capital Strategy Manager
Barbara Dale (BD)	Admissions & Appeals Manager
Karen Samples(KS)	Head Teacher, Elworth CE School
Jenny Davies (JD)	Head Teacher, Offley School
Ben Cox (BC)	Head Teacher, The Dingle School
Jo Dyson (JD)	Head Teacher, Wheelock School
Lynn Treadway (LT)	Head Teacher, Sandbach School
Di Morrison (DM)	Governor, Sandbach Primary School
Rob Whittle (RW)	Head Teacher, St John's CE Sandbach Heath
Chris Holmes (CH)	Chair of Governors, Elworth Hall
Margaret Blease- Bourne (MB)	Head Teacher, Elworth Hall school
Danielle Doubleday (DD)	Governor, Offley School
Edwin Leigh (EL)	Chair of Governors, Elworth CE Primary School
Nova Harvey (NH)	Bursar, Wheelock school
Steve Noble (SN)	Vice Chair or Governors, Wheelock School

Introductions.

RH – welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the format of the meeting confirming the aims which were to listen, collect, record, capture views from attendees in order to provide feedback to the Portfolio Holder.

There was acknowledgement by all present in respect of increased pressure on school places in the Sandbach area now and in the future and that future capital allocations were not known.

Question raised - Wheelock development, is this a done deal?

The LA responded advising that at this stage Cheshire East Council has recommended the enlargement of Wheelock; a statutory consultation process is to be followed, which includes a recommendation to the Portfolio holder. All feedback received will be presented to the Portfolio Holder. If determined a notice will be published allowing a further 4 weeks for representations. If objections are raised during representation, then a Council Committee will consider and make the decision.

It was clarified that the Local Authority had analysed a variety of data available to identify options. The priority was to ensure that there are sufficient places for

children in the area in the future. The process implemented did consider sustainability of schools in the area and was mindful of the presumption in favour of the expansion of popular and successful schools.

It was highlighted that there is a Statutory process that must be followed when proposing significant enlargements to a school.

Concerns were raised about previous years when places were removed by Cheshire County Council – this was driven by surplus places – information at that time indicated less children and the process to remove surplus places was driven by government to ensure an efficient use of resources by reducing unused places.

Looking ahead due to changing demographics/birth rates and increased housing it is likely that there will be further proposals/options in future years.

It was reported that current information available now shows that the birth rate has been increasing since 2001. Officers provided reassurance that there is ongoing analysis of data and forecasting methodology is currently under reviewed to measure its reliability and make changes as necessary.

The LA advised that for the September 2013 intake, November 2012 figures indicate that there will be an issue again this year as 65% of the data is recorded and this already indicates a shortage of school places across Cheshire East.

A question was asked as to whether the LA could guarantee a full intake for some schools. BD advised that there can be no assurances for a full intake for any school – this is determined by parental preference and availability of school places in preferred schools.

JD advised that the PAN was exceeded for local children for September 2012 and that, in her view, this was the best decision for children in the local area.

Based on available information forecasts for 2013 indicate only 31 spaces across all schools in Sandbach area in year groups Reception – Year 6.

There was a view that the statutory period is too long, a question was asked as to who sits on the School Organisation Sub Committee and how representations can be made.

Suggestions on how matters of this nature could be handled in a better way included:-

- Not comprising confidentiality by lateness, by being honest from the outset
- Earlier notice to schools – Heads and Deputy Heads
- More accurate data – schools have information on children in their nurseries and pre-schools – why doesn't the LA?
- Suitability / net capacities / undertake visits to schools
- Better feedback mechanism
- Up-to-date information on buildings, staffing and strategies
- Undertake EIA for each school
- Extend consultation period as it is not long enough

BD advised that EIAs have been produced for the proposals and that these are published on the Council's website. It was accepted that schools must be involved earlier in the process and apologies were reiterated. KW confirmed that LA has statutory duty to review net capacities in schools and this process is undertaken. BD confirmed that the consultation period recommended by the DfE is 4 weeks for an expansion and we have provided 5 weeks. Forecasting data is a recognised priority and process therefore involves it being reviewed to ensure it is 'fit for purpose'.

Reference was made to limited resources; there are cost implications when undertaking feasibility studies. LA recognises and accepts that abortive costs can be incurred.

Reference was made to the Role of Appeal Panels and school adjudicator and the potential for admission through this process if panels conclude that new accommodation is sufficient to remove prejudice. BD confirmed that accommodation is not in itself sufficient to remove prejudice and staffing, class organisation and budgets are critical factors when taking decisions on admission.

A question was raised as to why considering there were only 14 places short at Wheelock in 2012, were the LA proposing 105 places. BD confirmed that proposal was to meet future demand informed by School census data forecasts.

The role of Councillors was questioned, timings and the best people to be involved in future decisions.

It was noted that there increased housing will impact on provision at Elworth CE. It was confirmed that the process for funding such additional demand was met (at least in part) through Section 106 developer contributions.

Challenges were raised that the proposal was wrong for the area of Sandbach and that this had the potential to be detrimental to nearby schools in the earlier years following completion of the expansion, if it was approved. Alternative solutions were offered around the table.

Elworth Hall (MB)

- Issues re school building – difficult to expand
- Catchment – need to review (impacting on PAN)
- Process – requires local decision, allowing representation to cabinet.
- For future – strategic way,
- Equality Impact Assessments should be undertaken for all schools
- Set up Committee of Heads and Local Authority (eg FB/AG)
- Forecasts feed in local knowledge.
- Undertake desktop exercise – then go to schools
- School Development Plan - include schools

St John's CE, Sandbach (RW)

- Review catchment areas in Sandbach area
- 41 school places available currently
- September 13 ideal is to fill to PAN of 25, however could admit 30 if required,
- Concerns are if PAN not reached; cuts will be required
- Aim for 1FE

The Dingle, Haslington (BC)

- Alternative – short term could take 10 more pupils per year group
- Long term -Staffing and building issues (13 classrooms)

Elworth CE (KS)

- Catchment area review needed
- Need for transparency
- Feasibility
- School has capacity in Key Stage 2 only
- Increase to 45 PAN would require 1 additional classroom

Wheelock (JD)

- Issues with local families – school is not large enough to serve it's community at present
- Ettiley Heath area is in catchment currently, issues for school if this changed
- Sept 12 intake 44 in catchment, 3 out of area admitted following successful appeal

Offley (JD)

- School Organisation Plan indicates schools of 1FE / 2FE; this needs to be looked at
- More pupils admitted in reception for September 2012 (57)
- implications for building identified at the time
- Previous PAN was 60 PAN now 45
- Future increases dependant on CEC conducting building work on the site
- September 2013 – KS1 okay, issues are in KS2 due to lack of space
- Minimum 2 additional classrooms required to admit to 60 per year
- Issues re: staffing
- Could increase school to 2FE

Sandbach PS (LT)

- PAN 15 – working okay – organised into split year groups
- Huge site – space to expand if required

BD highlighted to the meeting that if catchment areas were to be reviewed, this would be a) the responsibility of the relevant admission authority and b) would require consultation with parents and key stakeholders. BD also explained that decisions on admission arrangements can be referred as objections to the Schools Adjudicator, who must ensure that admission arrangements are fair and reasonable and have regard to the presumption in favour of the expansion of

popular and successful schools. Historical arrangements/patterns of intakes can be taken into account in this process. The final decision may not rest with the admission authority.

BD advised that the Draft School Organisation Framework sets out the importance of effective working relationships with schools when planning school places

RH re-emphasised the need to complete and submit the feedback forms

It was reported that the Portfolio Holder was now Rachael Bailey and not Hilda Gadum

Actions:

BD - to confirm that consultation responses are also reported at the representation period.

BD – to share NEG/LAP analysis data with attendees re: Sandbach.

JD stated that admission over PAN in 2012 had been agreed with the LA on the understanding that accommodation would be available for future years. BD explained that the decision to admit further pupils was on the basis that the school could accommodate in existing accommodation.

BD check agreement re: Offley intake increase in September 2012

RH – to provide names of all School Organisation Sub Committee members and process.