

MINUTES of the meeting of Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Tuesday, 25th September, 2007 at 9.30 a.m.

Present:	Councillor	SJ Robertson (Chairman)
	Councillor	WU Attfield (Vice Chairman)
	Councillors	ME Cooper, PGH Cutter, JHR Goodwin, R Mills, JE Pemberton, JK Swinburne, AM Toon, WJ Walling and JD Woodward
	Parent Governor Members	Mr R Stevenson and Mr A Wood
	Headteacher Representatives	Mrs. D. Strutt (Secondary Schools)

In attendance: Councillors WLS Bowen, PJ Edwards and JA Hyde (Cabinet Member – Children's Services).

Persons specifically invited

Prior to the meeting the Chairman had agreed that the following persons be specifically invited to attend the meeting:

Rev Mark Johnson – Acting Team Rector of South Wye;
Mr Ian Main – Assistant Project Manager for the Academy (Navigant Consulting)
Mr Christopher Whitmey – Chairman of the Stakeholder Group of the Academy Project Steering Group;
Mr J Sheppard – Head, Wyebridge Sports College;
Mr J Godfrey – Principal, Hereford 6th Form College;
Mrs Wendy Jones – Chair, Redhill Community Association.

14. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor P Jones CBE, Councillor G Lucas, Councillor RV Stockton and Rev I Terry.

15. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor PGH Cutter substituted for Councillor G Lucas;
Councillor JHR Goodwin substituted for Councillor P Jones CBE;
Councillor R Mills substituted for Councillor RV Stockton.

16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor WU Attfield declared a personal interest as a governor of Wyebridge Sports College.

Mrs D Strutt declared a personal interest as Chair of the College of Art and Design. Prior to the meeting Rev I Terry had declared a prejudicial Interest as Director of Education, Hereford Diocesan Board of Education, and therefore did not attend.

17. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 25th June 2007 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

18. SUGGESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ON ISSUES FOR FUTURE SCRUTINY

No suggestions were made by members of the public.

19. CALL IN OF CABINET DECISION ON WYEBRIDGE SPORTS COLLEGE: ACADEMY PROJECT

The Committee considered the Cabinet decision on the Wyebridge Sports College Academy project, which had been called-in, by three Members of the Committee: Councillors JD Woodward; AM Toon and WU Attfield.

The stated reasons for the call-in were set out in the agenda report. The draft decision notice (Ref 2007.CAB.072KEY) together with the report to Cabinet on 6th September 2007 were included in the agenda.

The Director of Children's Services gave an overview of the project and acknowledged that Members may not have been kept as well informed on the issues prior to the Cabinet decision as she would have wished. She reported that the Academy was a Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) driven project as part of the government agenda to improve schools and raise attainment. The project presented the authority with an exciting opportunity to further work with partners to create a positive future for young people in the County

The Cabinet Member (Children's Services) commented that this was an opportunity for not just the school but the whole county and that this funding opportunity was the only way to make significant improvements to the school.

Responding to the question, 'what role and added value will this make to the school, pupils and parents' and added comment that little was known about the project by parents, the Head of Wyebridge Sports College commented that while great improvements had been made in recent years to the school's academic performance and culture, the school needed further support to achieve success. The academy project presented a way forward and would provide the best environment for learning in the South Wye area. The academy project would show teachers that they were valued; meet the requirements of the school and utilise resources to the best effect for pupils and partners.

The Head of Commissioning and Improvement highlighted that Cabinet had approved in principle the three recommendations contained in the report to Cabinet dated 6th September and set out in the agenda papers. He then outlined the course of events leading up to the report to Cabinet namely: the application to become a 'City Academy' and the Government's negative response; the change in the role of the 'City Academy' programme; the change in Local Authority role from provider to commissioner; the continued lobbying of government for investment in the County and the government's subsequent invitation to join the new programme, which had included their suggestion of project sponsor. He reported that the government held a list of national sponsors and they had suggested that in view of the existing good working relationship between authority and Hereford Diocese that the Diocese be the sponsor for the project.

He reported that an 'expression of interest' in the project had been signed; the project would provide a major level of investment that the authority was unable to provide and the Diocesan Authority and Council already had a good established working relationship. The project was currently at the feasibility stage and as such a number of concerns still needed to be addressed namely: post 16 provision and third party use of facilities.

The Committee then turned to the financial implications for the project and were informed by the Head of Financial Services that in relation to the project capital budget, £20.18m had been allocated by government to the project with a further £252,000 available under a separate bid to support the Authority's cost in design work to contract stage. Partnerships for Schools had indicated that the bid would be approved, less costs of ICT advice, which would be funded by the DCSF from other funding. Lessons learned from other capital projects concerning overspend due to delay or inflation had been noted. On completion the asset of land and building would be transferred under 125 year lease to the Sponsor. In revenue terms the academy would be funded by the DCSF and the transfer of Dedicated Schools Grant would be equal to that the authority would have calculated through its local formula. In common with other schools funding would therefore be based on the number of pupils attending.

In response to whether the total project funding included provision for Extended School or Learning Centre facilities the Committee were informed that the project funding would only provide for the statutory school age provision. Other provision was not included in the capital grant. Any Community facility on site would need to be properly managed e.g. under a Service Level Agreement (SLA).

The Committee appreciated the academic improvements at the school and the good community work being undertaken. A view was expressed that, while the financial limitations were understood, the local community provision must also be progressed.

Mr Whitmey reported that the project was guided by the DCSF and the first opportunity to inform the public had been a public meeting at the Kindle Centre on 4th July. He admitted that while The Diocese had initially been surprised to be invited to be part of the project they welcomed the opportunity to work with the Council. He further reported that an anonymous donor had come forward via the Charity Aid Foundation to provide £1.5m to support the project. The Sponsor's legal representatives had verified that it was an unconditional donation.

He further reported that the Church was very interested in furthering the community aspect of the project, particularly through the South Wye Community Learning Centre, but in the end, it came down to finance. To comply with the DCSF project there had to be a sponsor and the Diocese was pleased to undertake that roll. While there may be common factors between a faith school and the academy he refuted a suggestion that the academy would be a faith school. The governors appointed to run the academy would guide the teaching and ethos of the school.

Mr Main commented that the sponsors hoped that the academy would be at the forefront of the community e.g. lifelong learning and community learning, and that the buildings would be utilised as much as possible. However, they were constrained by the rules on capital funding.

Responding to a comment that the community required dedicated, rather than timetabled use of the facilities throughout the day, for example for senior citizens lunches, the Director of Children's Services reported that a number of schools had arrangements for wider use and it was part of the future agenda to plan where possible for both today and tomorrow's needs. In this instance there were technical

issues over the wider use, which may be capable of being addressed in the feasibility study. The Head of Commissioning and Improvement undertook to investigate issues regarding the current community use lease arrangements at Wyebriidge.

Responding to a question concerning the control and structure of the academy the Committee noted that, similar to local authority schools, a governing body would be formed that would include representatives from the authority, parents, staff and the Trust body. They would oversee the curriculum provision. As with other schools an Improvement Partner would be appointed to report to the authority on the school's performance.

Turning to the question of 6th Form provision Mr Godfrey reported that the three Hereford Colleges had been working with the Sponsors and authority and were 100 percent behind the project. He commented that prior to the 'expressions of interest' stage a number of concerns had been raised, especially around the 6th Form provision, but these had either now been taken account of or would be addressed again in the feasibility stage. It was appreciated that the inclusion of 6th Form provision was driven by the government agenda. He further commented that as a consequence of the falling number of pupils in the County there would be a similar fall in 6th form attendance. The financial viability of existing 6th Form provision was already tight. He warned that even allowing for any increased take up through further government initiatives, the overall decline in numbers, when spread over an increased number of providers (the new Minster College anticipated enhanced 6th Form provision) would further erode the financial viability of 6th Forms with consequential effects on the breadth and quality of curriculum provision.

Mr Sheppard commented that each pupil's needs were different and while many benefited from the move to a 6th Form College some needed the extra support that a school based 6th Form could provide. The South Wye area needed upskilling and the Sponsors intended to work in partnership to meet the needs of the students and were possible the wider community.

At this point Mrs Strutt declared a personal interest as Chair of the College of Art and Design, and commented that the Herefordshire Association of Head Teachers (HASH) were in support of the project.

At 11.07am the Committee adjourned and resumed at 11.20am

Continuing the theme of falling pupil numbers (falling rolls) the Committee questioned how the academy justified 200 6th Form places, and what type of education would be provided.

In response the Director of Children's Services reported that a review of the future provision of school places was already under way involving all schools in the County. Local authorities were changing their role away from being direct providers in response to Government initiatives etc relating to Colleges, academies and federated schools. New build opportunities should not be rejected. Within these confines the authority had to try to ensure a sensible and flexible matrix of provision. Strategic work and consultation was already ongoing with partners in 14 – 19 provision over what the provision would look like in the future.

Responding to questions on likely pupil numbers in the South Wye area and the general use of statistics, the Director of Children's Services and the Head of Commissioning and Improvement acknowledged that while predicting pupil numbers for the County was not an exact science every effort would be made to obtain the best possible data. Current data indicated that pupil numbers in the South Wye area

were not predicted to fall.

The Committee noted that discussions had been held with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), who were responsible for post 16 provision, concerning their involvement in Lifelong or Community learning.

Responding to concerns regarding arrangements for admissions, appeals, rights of parents and exclusions, the Committee was informed that these arrangements would be on the same basis as other schools in the County. It was emphasised that there would be no 'church places'. The Committee was further informed that the academy would be set up under a charitable trust and be run by a governing body. The expectation was that the academy would have a 'Christian ethos' rather than be run on 'religious beliefs'.

In response to a concern that the academy would introduce 'banding according to ability' the Committee noted that this was not intended and that the local authority would object if this became a proposal.

Turning to the prioritisation of investment in Herefordshire schools, and in particular under the Scheme Selection and Prioritisation process in the Herefordshire Council Asset Management Plan 2006, the Head of Commissioning and Improvement reported that there was a clear need for investment in all Herefordshire schools and that unsuccessful bids had been made to the Building Schools for the Future fund. Wyebriidge College ranked highly in the list of schools requiring investment. As touched on earlier this project had evolved from earlier grant bids and the government now presented the County with an opportunity to improve the learning environment in the South Wye area of the City.

The Committee noted that various stages of project consultation were underway and in response to a comment that governors at the college had not seen the 'vision agreement' Mr Sheppard, Head of the school confirmed that the governors had discussed the issue on a number of occasions and a number of concerns raised by them had been passed to the Stakeholder Group.

Responding to questions on the location of the new academy the Head of Commissioning and Improvement reported that while other sites had been considered they had been ruled out on planning grounds. The existing site would be used, as it was owned by the authority and was central to the catchment area.

RESOLVED

That the Committee accepts the Cabinet decision namely:

That Cabinet approve in principle:

- a) Wyebriidge Sports College becoming an academy to serve 900 11-16 students with up to an additional 200 post -16 places;**
- b) Granting a 125 year lease to the sponsors on terms to be agreed, if the current feasibility stage concludes with an outcome satisfactory to DCSF, Sponsors and Local Authority, and**
- b) Issuing the necessary public notices to close Wyebriidge Sports College and create an Academy at the appropriate time, if the feasibility study concludes with an outcome satisfactorily to DCSF, Sponsors and Local Authority.**

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE TUESDAY, 25TH SEPTEMBER, 2007

The Chairman thanked the invited guests for attending and assisting the Committee in its deliberations.

The meeting ended at 12.15 p.m.
<LAYOUT_SECTION>

CHAIRMAN