

MINUTES of the meeting of Cabinet held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday 12 July 2010 at 2.00 pm

Present: Councillor RJ Phillips (Chairman)

Councillors: LO Barnett, AJM Blackshaw, H Bramer, JP French, JA Hyde, JG Jarvis, PD Price and DB Wilcox

In attendance: Councillors PA Andrews, WLS Bowen, TM James, RI Matthews, WU Atfield and MAF Hubbard

40. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr PJ Edwards, Chairman Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

41. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Declarations of interest were received from:

Cllr AJM Blackshaw, Governor Canon Pyon Primary School, part of the Weobley schools cluster group.

Cllr RJ Phillips, Governor Pembridge Primary School.

CJ Bull, Chief Executive, resident in Dilwyn Village.

42. THE FUTURE OF DILWYN CHURCH OF ENGLAND (C OF E) PRIMARY SCHOOL

The Chairman welcomed Brigadier Spackman, Chairman of Governors for Dilwyn School and the headteacher Mr Prestage. He stated that the proposals for closure of Dilwyn School were in line with the existing small schools policy of the Council, which had been in place for 6 years and had not been challenged educationally or politically during that time.

The Cabinet Member ICT, Education and Achievement, spoke about Dilwyn School and referred to:

- Herefordshire Schools Task Group (HSTG) which had met earlier in the year and had not put forward any proposals to change the Small Schools Policy regarding the numbers that needed to be on roll to prevent a school coming within the Small Schools Policy.
- The availability of school places in the area now and in the future, and also being able to offer Church of England places to those parents who would wish their child to have one.
- The average funding for a Dilwyn School pupil is £5,849 compared with £3,666 for an average Herefordshire primary school.
- The proposed federation St Mary's RC High School does not address the concerns in terms of pupil numbers, which was 31, and the sustainability of the school.
- The local authority had consulted on four options: to remain a standalone school; to federate with another school(s); amalgamation or closure of the school.

- Dilwyn School has strong community support and is seen to be important in maintaining the character of the village.
- The alternative options considered did not provide any evidence to alter the view of the local authority, the Hereford Diocese and the Archdiocese of Cardiff that the federating proposals would not adequately address the educational and financial concerns highlighted in the review of Dilwyn School.
- There has been fewer than 36 on the roll in all but one of the last four years, with 53 children resident in the catchment area and only 19 of those attending Dilwyn School. Therefore the school did not provide education for the majority of children in the catchment.

The Chairman invited Brigadier Spackman to speak on behalf of the school. The Brigadier stated:

- He felt the report was not objective and that an appeal would be lodged should the Council proceed with the statutory process for closure.
- Plans for federating with St Mary's RC High School had moved on considerably and federating would provide a secure and sustainable future for the school.
- That staff and governors for both schools felt that there would be a significant increase in pupil intake following federation.
- Children at the school are well taught, happy and secure and the school provided the right environment for faith families to send their children.
- Already have children attending the school from outside the catchment area.
- Will be exploring the possibility of nursery provision within the school.
- Proposals for federating are strongly supported by the local MP for North Herefordshire.
- Only a few extra children are needed for the federation proposals to work, therefore, ask that the proposals are given a chance.
- Propose to approach local businesses to raise funds locally so that the school stays within budget.
- Agree that there had been problems with the previous headteacher but the school has improved substantially under the new head and believe that the Ofsted report will be an overall good rating.
- Currently there are schools smaller than Dilwyn.
- Surprised by the comments in the report that the Archdiocese of Cardiff did not support the federation as advised by the headteacher of St Mary's that they were in agreement.
- The school is important to the life of the village and church and there is concern locally about the proposals for closure, therefore, believe the school should be given the opportunity to federate with St Mary's.

The Director of Children's Services advised that he had discussed with the Cardiff Archdiocese the closure recommendations and the response by the headteacher of St Mary's RC School and noted that the representative for the Archdiocese did not see St Mary's proposals as being viable and felt there would not be a significant increase in pupil numbers as a result of federation. He added that he had had a similar response from the Director of Education of the Hereford Diocese and that both representatives from the Diocese and the Archdiocese had seen the final report and approved its contents prior to circulation.

Cabinet noted the following points from Members:

- Other local schools including both Weobley and Canon Pyon schools had been contacted with regards to federating but had declined to consider it.
- The existing arrangements within the Weobley cluster were examined and the take up by Dilwyn Primary School.
- The report was based on the choices that parents had made i.e. by sending their children to other schools. Although residents wanted to keep the school open only 19 children out of 53 in the catchment attended the school.
- There was a distance of 15 miles between Dilwyn and St Mary's school. If an emergency occurred this was a considerable distance between the two schools.
- It was felt that Appendix 1 to the report, the proposals for federation, were aspirational and lacked detail regarding costs.
- Councillor RI Matthews, the Leader of Herefordshire Independent Group asked if the decision was delayed 12 months then the possibilities of extra housing being built in Dilwyn could be explored.
- Councillor RI Matthews further commented that both Credenhill and Canon Pyon schools were growing in numbers; therefore, the Council needs to look at developing rural areas to keep them all viable.
- Must look at the projected future of a school and what it will be able to provide educationally for the children.
- The school has received significant support from School Improvement Services over the last 18 months to improve their standing with Ofsted with support provided in curriculum development.
- Concerned at how small the year groups are with more than one peer group class of two children only.

Cabinet noted the comments of the Headteacher:

- Safeguarding had been an issue for the school in the 2007 Ofsted report but was not an issue now in 2010.
- An arrangement was in place with Weobley High School for emergency staff cover but had not proved necessary as yet.
- Indications were for the next Ofsted report that the school would get a good rating and Ofsted had no concerns regarding safeguarding arrangements.
- With the business manager for Weobley High School ways had been explored in which assistance could be provided with the school budget. This would be on a temporary basis until the school could be federated with St Mary's High School.
- Because of the small number of pupils the children are used to working and growing up with younger and older children and looking after one another.
- Parents had moved children to Dilwyn School because of the help and assistance the school provided.

The Chairman commended the headteacher for his commitment to the quality of education provided at the school. He added that with regard to the recommendations of the report there was over 12 months to consider any new measures within education brought about by the new coalition government and for the closure proposals to be considered by the adjudicator.

RESOLVED

THAT Cabinet:

- a) **considered the information presented in the report; and**

- b) **agreed that the Local Authority initiate the statutory process concerning the closure of Dilwyn Church of England Primary School with effect from 31 August 2011.**

The meeting ended at 3.20 pm

CHAIRMAN