

MINUTES of the meeting of School Organisation Committee held at Committee Room 1, Shirehall, Hereford. on Monday, 5th December, 2005 at 3.30 p.m.

Present: Councillor J.P. Thomas (Chairman)
Rev. I. Terry (Vice Chairman)

Mr. C. Jones, Mrs. K. Rooke and Councillor J. Stone

In attendance: Councillor D.W. Rule MBE (Cabinet Member – Children’s Services)

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

It was proposed and seconded that Councillor J.P. Thomas be reappointed as Chairman.

Councillor J.P. Thomas took the Chair.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

It was proposed and seconded that Rev. I. Terry be appointed Chairman.

Rev. I. Terry accepted the Vice-Chairmanship.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Mr. A. Curless, Mrs. C. Woolley and Councillor Mrs. M.D. Lloyd-Hayes.

4. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no named substitutes.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

6. MINUTES

It was noted that Mr. C. Jones’s apologies for the last meeting had not been recorded.

RESOLVED: That, subject to inclusion of Mr. C. Jones’ apologies, the minutes of the last meeting held on 24th November 2004 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

7. ADJUSTMENTS TO CATCHMENT AREAS

The Committee was informed of requests received to change the provided primary school arrangements for the hamlets of Bearwood and Covender.

The Head of Policy and Resources reported that this issue had been brought to the

attention of the Committee due to the lack of a consensus being reached between the particular schools involved.

The Admissions and Transport Manager informed the Committee about each of the proposals in turn.

Bearwood

The Head of Policy and Resources informed the Committee that the proposal for Bearwood a part of Pembridge Parish to become apart of the catchment area for Pembridge Primary School, which was 2.0 miles away, rather than Dilwyn Primary School, which was 2.8 miles away, was the more significant of the two proposals. He stated that Dilwyn Primary School was anxious that it may come under review if it were to lose any future pupils as there were currently only 34 children on its roll.

The views of the local Members had been sought and it was reported that Councillor R.J. Phillips supported the proposal whereas Councillor J.H.R. Goodwin was in favour of retaining the status quo.

The Admissions and Transport Manager informed the Committee that Bearwood consisted of 49 properties. In October 2005 each address in Bearwood was sent a consultation document from which 28 responses were received 27 of which were in favour of Pembridge becoming the catchment primary school for Bearwood. Currently in Bearwood there were six children of primary school age and two children below primary school age whose parents have stated a preference for Pembridge.

The issue was further complicated by High School provision. Currently, the provided high school for Bearwood is Weobley High School whereas that Pembridge Primary School is Kington Lady Hawkins High School. The Admissions and Transport Manager stated that any change to the catchment area at primary school level should also be made at high school level to maintain simplicity in organisational terms he also stated that the majority of children from Bearwood attended Lady Hawkins.

Mark Chamberlain informed the Committee that, although he did not have the details to hand, that he envisaged that at one time there would have been a school in Bearwood which closed and that the decision was then taken for primary school provision for Bearwood children to take place at Dilwyn even though Bearwood was in the Pembridge Parish.

The Committee noted the information provided and felt that the proposals were logical and backed up by the results of a consultation. However the potential impact the proposal could have on Dilwyn Primary School and the request of one of the local Members to retain the status quo resulted in the Committee asking for a decision to be deferred pending a minor review of the catchment areas in the area. If after preliminary investigations it was revealed that a Review was not necessary the issue would be referred back to the Committee in time for a decision to impact on the 2007/08 school transfers

Covender

The Admissions and Transport informed the Committee that Yarkhill Parish Council had requested that Ashperton, which is 2.4 miles away, rather than Withington, which is 4.1 miles away, become the provided Primary School for this small hamlet. If this change was to go ahead a total of five houses would be affected. There was already one child from the hamlet attending Ashperton with one child aged two

whose parents had informed the Council that they would state a preference for Ashperton when they applied for a primary school place.

The Head of Policy and Resources stated that the Governors of Withington Primary School did not support the proposed change unless it is a result of a comprehensive review of catchment areas across the County. There were currently no plans at present to undertake such a review.

Councillor R.M. Manning, the local Member, supported the proposals to include Covender in the catchment area for Ashperton Primary School.

The Committee was informed that catchment areas were still relevant as they were significant in terms of entitlement to school transport and with transfer applications as catchment children received a high priority for admission.

The Committee noted the views of the parish, the respective schools, the views of parents, the small number of people that would be affected by the changes and the views of the local Member so decided to support the proposal to include Covender in the catchment area for Ashperton Primary School.

RESOLVED:

That (a) a minor review regarding primary school provision for the hamlet of Bearwood be undertaken prior to June 2006 when if a review is still pending the matter be referred back to the School Organisation Committee;

and;

(b) Ashperton Primary School to become the provided primary school for the hamlet of Covender.

8. UPDATE ON SCHOOL ORGANISATIONAL ISSUES IN HEREFORDSHIRE

The Committee was informed on pupil and student numbers in Herefordshire in September 2005 and of projected pupil numbers in the short and medium term.

The Head of Policy and Resources informed the Committee that primary and secondary schools in Herefordshire were currently experiencing falling rolls. A general overview of entry figures for primary and secondary schools and sixth forms could be found in the report along with details of the 13 smallest primary schools in the County.

The Committee was updated on the latest situation regarding the feasibility of the Steiner School at Much Dewchurch becoming an Academy.

The Head of Policy and Resources informed the Committee that the feasibility study was scheduled to be completed by June 2006 with a decision then being taken by the DfES on whether the Academy should be created from September 2007 onwards.

There were a number of issues which needed resolving. Testing and ICT were not areas that Steiner Schools particularly focused on and the DfES would also require the school to come under the auspices of the Local Admissions Forum, and the Schools Adjudicator, which would require it to publish its admissions and over-subscription policies, with the Local Authority becoming the co-ordinating admission

body. The Steiner Council had requested more information on this process.

The Committee was informed that currently the Steiner School had approximately 270 pupils on its roll. If the proposed Academy was to be approved then a figure of 26 pupils per year had been discussed. Discussions had also taken place regarding the addition of a Sixth Form at the proposed Academy.

With regard to the issue of whether or not the proposed Steiner Academy should serve the local area or the whole County the Committee believed that the proposed Academy should serve the whole County, as it did currently, as they felt it would be undesirable for the proposed Academy to essentially be in competition with the local primary and secondary schools.

The Committee noted that the proposed Academy would be open to applicants from the Forest of Dean area who have the same priority for places as Herefordshire children. Attached at Appendix 1 to the report was a map which detailed the locations of the pupils currently on role at the Steiner School.

Members of the Committee were critical of the idea of establishing the Academy in the light of the falling rolls situation in the County and the need for replacement buildings for existing schools. The view was expressed that the proposed Academy was not actually needed.

The Head of Policy and Resources reported that the Targeted Capital Scheme bid to fund the amalgamation of Hunderton Junior and Infant Schools had failed. The amalgamation was still going to go ahead using the Council's own resources. However, this could only be done if there was little new work done elsewhere.

The Committee was informed of the programme to create six additional Children's Centres in the County in the north of Hereford City, Bromyard, Ledbury, Ross, Peterchurch and Kington. Four of the centres could be on or adjacent to primary school sites. This would bring a total of nine Children's Centres to Herefordshire.

The Cabinet Member (Children's Services) informed the Committee that the level of funding gained for the six new Children's Centres was less than the total funding received to establish the 3 existing Centres.

RESOLVED:

That (a) the report be noted;

and;

(b) the proposed Steiner Academy should serve the whole County if and when it is established.

9. DFES GUIDANCE ON SCHOOL ORGANISATION COMMITTEES AND THE EDUCATION WHITE PAPER

The Committee was informed of various proposals from the DfES.

Mark Chamberlain explained to Members that a copy of the Committee's Constitution and the DfES's non-statutory guidance had been sent to them for information purposes and that the current nominated Officer in the Children's Services Directorate was Mr. George Salmon, Head of Policy and Resources.

He explained that a factual error had been made in the report being that the

Committee had already appointed a sixth group to its Membership. He stated that consideration could be given to reviewing the Committees Standing Orders but the opinion was that the Committees Constitution could stand without breaching any law.

It was noted that the Education White Paper, which had been sent out separately to Members, suggested the abolition of the Committee. It was anticipated that the required legislation to abolish the Committee was still some time away and Members would be informed of any developments.

The Committee was informed that they do need to be consulted over the Children's and Young Peoples Plan which was a requirement of the Children Act 2004. The Plan needed to be with the DfES by April 2006 and was currently delayed due the significant amount of work which had been required during the recent Joint Area Review.

The Change Manager explained to the Committee that the Plan needed to describe the Vision, Principles and Analysis of Needs for Children and Young People in Herefordshire. A draft was to be ready for consultation in January and copies would be circulated to the Committee before they met to discuss it.

RESOLVED:

That (a) no changes be made to the constitution of the School Organisation Committee until the enactment of the Education Bill;

(b) the School Organisation Committee be involved in any statutory proposals prior to its abolition if implemented;

and;

(c) the School Organisation Committee meet on 7th February 2006 to discuss the Children's and Young Peoples Plan.

The meeting ended at 4.48 p.m.

CHAIRMAN