

Council – 7 January 2013

Notice of motion – School Buildings

I set out below a notice of motion to Council on 7 January 2013 from Councillors Oliver, James, Burley, Cassidy and Sarohi:

This Council notes:

- *The significant concerns raised through a range of condition surveys of the need for major refurbishment and re-build of many of our school buildings across the borough, with the consequent impact on the quality and educational achievement of our young people – and the potential creation of significant regeneration and local employment opportunities.*
- *That six Walsall secondary schools were scheduled for re-build and/or major refurbishment under the Building Schools for the Future Wave 6a, which was controversially scrapped by the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, on coming into office (Alumwell BEC, Frank F. Harrison, Joseph Leckie, Pool Hayes Arts and Community School, Shire Oak, the Streetly School). Furthermore that the subsequent waves under both BSF and the Primary Capital Programme would also have continued to deliver major projects and benefit to Walsall schools.*
- *Walsall Council subsequently made a bid under the new government Priority School Building Programme PFI scheme, to a total of £60.2 million, which was turned down by the Secretary of State in April 2012 (Frank F. Harrison, Joseph Leckie, Pool Hayes Arts and Community School, Willenhall School, Hatherton Primary, Rushall JMI).*
- *The public statement by the Walsall cabinet portfolio holder, Councillor Rachel Walker in June 2012 that “We remain confident we can satisfy our ambition for making all Walsall school buildings the envy of the UK”.*

Background information

Over the last 10 years or so, Walsall schools have benefited from unprecedented levels of funding on school buildings. This funding has been used to address the most urgent condition items across the Borough, along with replacing buildings that were beyond repair or completely unsuitable for their intended use. Improvements to school buildings are not the fundamental reason for improving standards across the Borough but it is clear that they are a contributing factor.

Since the global financial crisis the levels of funding available to continue the replacement, renovation or upgrade of the schools has been significantly reduced.

Members will be fully aware of the impact that the cancellation of the Building Schools for the Future has had, not only from a building perspective, but also on the morale of staff and pupils of schools affected by that decision.

Outcomes/impact of Capital expenditure at Walsall Schools

It is important, at a time of reducing budgets, to reflect on some of the really significant successes in relation to our school buildings and to understand the huge improvements that have been delivered;

Some of these success stories can be listed as follows;

- Walsall Council committing £7Million of its own Capital resources towards reducing the Priority 1 backlog on school buildings [from 2005/06 – 2007/08]. Most schools in Walsall benefitted in some way from this significant investment.
- The fair and transparent allocation of funds from the Education Capital Programme has also reduced the priority 1 backlog
- Some of the worst primary schools in the Borough have been rebuilt or have received major refurbishment through the Education Capital Programme [e.g. Barcroft, Birchills, Caldmore, Christ Church, Croft, Chuckery, Fibbersley Park, Moorcroft Wood, New Invention Junior and The Radleys], .
- The rebuilding of Mary Elliott School providing our most vulnerable children with an excellent learning environment including a state of the art hydrotherapy pool.
- Additional accommodation has been provided in Walsall Primary schools to meet the increasing demands for Primary school places.
- The most urgent schemes of work are taken forward to minimise the amount of school days lost as a result of significant building issues.
- Reduced the number of pupils in mainstream schools being taught in mobile classrooms by replacing these with new traditionally built classrooms etc
- Obtained Capital funding to totally rebuild Grace Academy and the rebuilding and remodelling of Shelfield Academy

Challenges & the way forward

Although the level of funding available has reduced significantly in recent times we continue to use the Education Capital Maintenance grant to resolve the highest priority schemes in Walsall and will continue to work in partnership with schools to deliver these schemes successfully.

In addition to this we continue to target Basic Need funding to areas of the Borough where we have challenges in meeting our statutory duties to provide sufficient local pupil places.

Children's Services will also continue to take any opportunity to bid for Capital funding for school buildings.

Walsall only had 5 schools [Hatherton Primary was below the threshold for a bid and was only submitted as a joint bid with Frank F Harrison as these schools were in the process of becoming "The Mirus Academy"] out of our entire education estate of some 118 schools that met the criteria for bidding for inclusion onto the Priority School Building Programme is a sign that Walsall schools have been maintained to a good standard over recent years.

Of the schools where a bid was submitted to the Department for Education [DfE] for inclusion onto the programme, Walsall Council only retain the responsibility for the school buildings at Pool Hayes Arts & Community School and Rushall JMI. The remaining schools that formed part of both BSF wave 6a and the PSBP bids have all chosen to change status to become Academy schools.

Rushall JMI

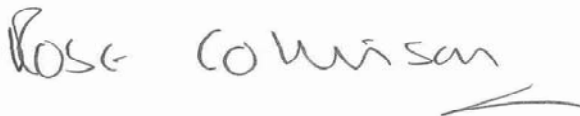
Members will be aware of proposals to rebuild Rushall JMI as part of the wider regeneration of the Pelsall Lane site using capital receipts from the sale of previously closed school sites. This will provide high quality learning environments for the pupils of this school.

Pool Hayes Arts & Community School

A detailed assessment has been carried out on the major building elements at this school. Significant investment will be required over coming years to raise the quality of the accommodation. Members will be aware that Cabinet [at their meeting on 12 December 2012] approved an allocation of £250,000 towards the first phase of a complete rewire of the building. It is envisaged that further works will be required during the next financial year to support the required improvements. Detailed proposals will be included in a future Cabinet report.

Conclusion

Whilst it is accepted that these are difficult times, and the level of funding has reduced significantly, Walsall is well placed to continue the good work that has been done over the last few years to improve school buildings and facilities for pupils in Walsall maintained schools. Assuming Walsall receives a fair allocation of Capital funding there should be no reason why we cannot ensure our children are taught in good quality school buildings.



Rose Collinson
Interim Director for Children's Services