


FORM S & PP 3

 Walsall Council	REPORT OF THE CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE PERFORMANCE AND SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL	DATE: 24 JULY 2009 REF.NO:
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**TITLE OF THE MATTER CALLED-IN: THE FUTURE OF SNEYD COMMUNITY
– A SPECIALIST MATHS & COMPUTING COLLEGE**

DATE CONSIDERED BY CABINET: 15 July 2009

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CABINET PORTFOLIO HOLDER: COUNCILLOR WALKER

DATE OF SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL MEETING: 23 JULY 2009

Grounds under which the matter was called in for scrutiny:

These were stated in the Call-in as follows:

We wish to call-in the Cabinet decision on The Future of Sneyd Community – A Specialist Maths and Computing College taken on 15 July 2009 for the following reasons:

We believe that the decision was taken using information that was out-of-date. For example much of the information regarding admissions across the borough fails to take the economic climate into account, the recession will see a reduction in children attending private schools putting increased pressure on the state sector.

We believe the decision was taken without looking holistically at impacts other than education, for example Sneyd is the largest employer in the area but the increase in unemployment and its ramifications were not taken into account.

We believe around 600 responders to the consultation had their views ignored as there was no option for an 11-19 Academy on the consultation. Many people therefore did not choose one of the options which led to a council officer to describe parents as not supporting the school.

We would like to see a full and proper consultation with an 11-19 Academy option being included.

At no point has anyone been able to satisfactorily explain why an 11-19 Academy run by a Trust is not a viable option.

Record here the Scrutiny and Performance Panel's conclusions and proposals:

The Chair explained that he determined the Call-in an urgent item as to ensure that it could be responded to in a timely manner. The Portfolio Holder explained the reasons for the Cabinet decision on 15 July. The Panel then considered the reasons for the call-in.

The call-in signatories explained the reasons for the Call-in:

- the decision to close Sneyd was based on performance. However, other poorly performing schools have not been closed;
- Serco state that Sneyd School is being closed as a result of surplus school places in the borough, in part as a consequence of the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme. Of a total of 1,600 surplus places closing Sneyd School reduces this figure by 768. However, 832 surplus places would still exist meaning another school would also have to be closed;
- As a consequence of the current economic climate large numbers of children previously educated privately will be moved to the state sector meaning more places will be required;
- The Call-in signatories accept that the School can not continue in its current form. However, there was still a case for 14-19 education at the School so consideration should also be given to an 11 – 19 academy.

The Chair invited the Executive Director of Children's and Young Peoples Services to respond to the reasons provide for the Call-in and other issues also raised by the signatories and other Panel members:

- In respect of the viability of the school as an 11-19 academy, discussions had been undertaken between the OSC and the Headteacher and Chair of Governor's where it was explained that the capital and revenue support that would be required from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to transform the School into an 11 – 19 Academy would not be provided as this was not considered to be a realistic solution to achieving sustainable improvement in attainment. Particularly as attainment was not improving, pupil numbers were falling and the school was continuing to fall into a budget deficit. Creating an Academy to manage the school would require the agreement of three partners, the DCSF, the Council and a sponsor to run the school. However there would be nothing to gain from discussions with Orminston Trust (as a potential sponsor) in this regard as the DCSF were not willing to support this option. The DCSF are satisfied that all viable options have been considered in respect of the future of the school;
- In terms of the BSF programme it was necessary to remove surplus places. However, it was appropriate to remove surplus places from unpopular rather than popular schools. Sneyd was an unpopular school whose pupil numbers had been declining for the last 5 years.
- There are a total of 1,355 places at Sneyd School and following closure necessary places will be provided by other schools in the borough who have a corresponding surplus of places;
- A number of other schools within Walsall are recording 30% or fewer pupils achieving five good GCSEs. However, they are part of the Black Country Challenge which includes partnerships with successful schools. This includes the development of plans and monitoring of progress to improve attainment;
- Children from Sneyd will be transferred to other schools within the borough.

Parents will be given the opportunity to select a school where, for example, and will be able to express a preference to remain with siblings and friendship groups;

- In respect of alternative local schools being fully or over subscribed consideration was being given to providing support for the transport costs for children commuting to other schools. Consideration would also be given to providing support for parents required to travel to school, for example, for out-of-hours activities including parent evenings.

The Panel debated the reasons for the call-in and the response to it. The following are the principle points of the ensuing discussion:

- Members were sympathetic to the situation at Sneyd and the current difficulties that were being experienced through falling pupil numbers and budgetary problems.
- After further exploring the reasons why the OSC was not prepared to consider an 11-19 Academy, Members felt that Cabinet should review the outcome of the discussions regarding an 11-19 Academy to ensure that all possible options of pursuing an 11-19 Academy had been addressed. If there was scope to explore this issue in further detail Members requested that Officers undertake informal discussions with the Orminston Trust on creating an 11-19 Academy on the Sneyd site.
- The Panel were concerned about the impact the proposed closure would have on pupils who were required to transfer to alternative schools. Members discussed the possibility of financial support being provided to parents to assist them in the transitional costs that would be required in changing schools. Concern was also expressed about children travelling outside of their local area to go to school.

Record here the specific recommendations of the Scrutiny and Performance Panel:

That:

1. Cabinet review the outcome of the 11-19 Academy discussions that took place with the Office for the Schools Commission, the Headteacher of Sneyd Community School, Council Officers and the Deputy Leader, and if appropriate ask that Officers have informal discussions with the Orminston Trust, with the view to progressing an 11-19 Academy at Sneyd Community School;

and;

2. in the event that Cabinet decides to close Sneyd Community School financial assistance with the transitional costs of pupil transfers be provided to parents.

Recommendation 1 was passed with a majority of 6 Members for and 1 against. Councillor E. Pitt asked for it to be recorded that she voted against recommendation 1.

Explain here how the proposals/recommendations of the Scrutiny and Performance Panel differ from those of Cabinet:

Recommendation 1 is asking Cabinet to review the reasons why the option of an 11-19 Academy for Sneyd was previously dismissed

Whilst recommendation 2 is not different to any decision that Cabinet has made it is important that the budgetary implications of this recommendation are considered as part of Cabinet final decision on the future of Sneyd.

This form provides an accurate record of the meeting of the above named Scrutiny and Performance Panel.

Chair of Scrutiny and Performance Panel (name)

Councillor E. Hughes



Signature: **Date:** 24 July 2009

Approved by Council 24 April 2006

Implemented 30 August 2006