

BRIEFING NOTE

TO: Children's Services Scrutiny Panel
DATE: 15th June 2010

RE: Building Schools for the Future – Transforming Learning in Walsall

Purpose

Scrutiny Panel has requested a regular update on the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme from an education transformation perspective.

SfC2 and OBC

The final Strategy for Change part 2 (SfC2) document was signed off by Cabinet on the 28th of May 2010 and has been subsequently submitted to Partnership for Schools (PfS) on the 2nd of June 2010. This has enabled Walsall to achieve this important milestone in its BSF programme on time. It however has been submitted with a background of uncertainty over the future of the BSF programme. At this time we have no clear position from the new Department for Education (DfE) over the BSF programme nationally and in particular our programme. However we are still developing our Outline Business case (OBC) until told otherwise by PfS for submission in November 2010. We understand that Her Majesty's Treasury (HMT) is still accepting OBC proposals at this time from other Local Authorities.

BSF Programme briefing

The Government is currently reviewing all capital programmes as part of its deficit reduction programme. Officers from Walsall's BSF team are in regular contact with PfS to establish what the current position is and at present no decisions have been taken with regard to the BSF programme. Speculation in the media suggests that only those programmes that have got beyond preferred bidder status will be allowed to proceed and the rest are frozen pending review. This has not been officially confirmed by the DfE or PfS.

More information may become available during the period up to the emergency budget on the 22nd of June 2010 on how this may impact investment in schools and in particular the BSF programme. This will be followed by a Comprehensive Spending Review in the autumn which will set out in more detail where savings and investment will be made across all Government departments. At this time we are unable to provide any more clarity than the following statement:-

Department for Education (DfS) statement on BSF

28th May 2010

"The Department for Education has not taken any decisions on BSF. Any future rollout decisions will be announced in due course."

Given these circumstances we have submitted our Strategy for Change 2 to PfS on the 2nd June 2010 as the next key milestone in our BSF programme. However, it may become necessary to suspend future activity beyond this stage and minimise the council's financial commitments. Preparations are currently under way to do so, should this be required. But in the meantime we are continuing to work with our Wave 6a schools to develop their design solutions and OBC proposals.

Councillor Andrew has written personally to Michael Gove to express concerns over any termination of the BSF programme in Walsall and its effect on our young people and the communities in Walsall. This has been supported by a letter from our Wave 6a Head Teachers.

Despite negative press comments locally and nationally we have no official information on the potential closure or redirection of the BSF programme.

Walsall official statement on BSF

17th May 2010

"There have been no decisions made about the Building Schools for the Future programme.

Government ministers will shortly be considering their spending priorities in advance of a full comprehensive spending review to be carried out in the autumn.

This will include all areas of spending, including school capital projects.

We would hope that the Government recognises the need for investment in school buildings, particularly in Walsall and we will continue to make progress towards agreed timescales for our BSF programme." - Councillor R Andrew

We are also considering the implications of the Pupil Premium and the following statement in the forward of the Coalition Policy Document.

Forward to Coalition document

20th May 2010

We both want a Britain where social mobility is unlocked; where everyone, regardless of background, has the chance to rise as high as their talents and ambition allow them. To pave the way, we have both agreed to sweeping reform of welfare, taxes and, most of all, our schools – with a breaking open of the state monopoly and extra money following the poorest pupils so that they, at last, get to go to the best schools, not the worst.

We will therefore be starting to work on preparing a business case based on a change to the funding profile around levels of education attainment and deprivation.

Conclusion

With our SfC2 submitted we are continuing to develop our OBC proposals at least till the end of June 2010 and the emergency budget. We have agreed with Cabinet on the 28th of May 2010 that Walsall would not take a unilateral decision to stop our BSF programme until we are instructed to do so by PfS and we will report back to them on any outcomes from the budget at the end of June 2010.

Despite the lack of certainty around the future of the BSF programme Head Teachers at the Wave 6a schools have given their commitment to supporting the Local Authority and wish to continue to work together in partnership to deliver the improvements to the buildings and transformation in learning that our young people deserve.

As soon as a clear direction of travel is provided by the DfE or PfS we will inform all those involved or affected by any changes, on their implications to our BSF programme.

Author

Kevin Reader
Interim Project Director – Transforming Learning in Walsall Programme
☎ 655 813
✉ readerk@walsall.gov.uk