

CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

5 March 2009 at 6.00 p.m.

Panel Members present E. Hughes (Chair)
M. Bird
B. Cassidy
K. Chambers
H. Khan
R. Martin
E. Pitt
C. Towe

Non-Elected Voting Members

Evelyn Chawira Parent Governor
Alan McDevitt Parent Governor
Ken Yeates Church of England Schools representative

Non-Elected Non-Voting Members

Bob Grainger Secondary School Teacher Representative
Dave Jones Primary School Teacher Representative

Portfolio Holders present

Z. Ali – Children's Services

Other Elected Members present

P. Hughes
I. Shires

Officers present

Pauline Pilkington Interim Executive Director – Children's Services
Louise Hughes Assistant Director – Universal Services
Sue Wedgwood Assistant Managing Director – Walsall Children's Services - Serco
Susan Lupton Head of Planning & Development Services - Walsall Children's Services -Serco
Dan Mortiboys Corporate Finance Manager
Karen Adderley
Barry Fielding
Craig Goodall Scrutiny Officer
Angela Walker Scrutiny Officer

83/08 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies submitted for the duration of the meeting.

84/08 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

85/08 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

<u>COUNCILLOR</u>	<u>INTEREST</u>	<u>ITEM</u>
E. Pitt	Personal	7 'Review of Secondary Schools: the Future of Sneyd Community – A Specialist Maths and Computing College' and 8 'Building Schools for the Future'
R. Martin	Personal	8 'Building Schools for the Future'
M. Bird	Personal	8 'Building Schools for the Future'

86/08 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2009, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

87/08 FORWARD PLAN

RESOLVED:

That:

The forward plan dated 9 February 2009 be noted

88/08 TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Members noted the available training opportunity, "The Future of Corporate Parenting".

89/08 REVIEW OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS: THE FUTURE OF SNEYD COMMUNITY – A SPECIALIST MATHS AND COMPUTING COLLEGE

The Chair welcomed the members of the public in attendance and explained that the purpose of this item was not to revisit the Sneyd working group's discussions, but to hear their conclusions and recommendations. He thanked Dr Sweeney for his report and explained that this had been tabled for Members reference (annexed). The Panel would move to a recommendation to Cabinet at the end of the item and it would be Cabinet who would make the final decision on the future of Sneyd Community School (Sneyd). Any decision made by Cabinet that would materially alter the current education arrangements at Sneyd would be consulted upon following statutory processes.

The Panel considered progress to date and the terms of reference for the Sneyd Working Group. The Chair asked the Lead Member of the Sneyd working group, Councillor C. Towe, to update the Panel on the working group's findings.

The Lead Member thanked Councillors E Pitt and B Cassidy for their participation in the working group. He also thanked Martin Cain (Headteacher of Frank F Harrison), Dr Sean Sweeney (Headteacher of Sneyd Community School), officers of Walsall Council

Children's Services and Walsall Children's Services – Serco for their support to the working group. The working group had been a vehicle for Members, officers and key stakeholders to explore the options for Sneyd in detail.

The Lead Member proceeded to outline the discussions that had taken place during the working group meetings and the conclusions drawn on each of the options.

Option A – National Challenge Trust

The working group had received information on this, a relatively new model of trust school. This model would attract £750,000 funding over three years on top of the school's delegated budget. The advantage of a National Challenge Trust would be that it could open during 2009, whereas an Academy would open, at the earliest, in September 2010. A strong partner would need to be identified in this option, which would be challenging in this instance. However, the criteria and provision for National Challenge Trust schools were evolving and the working group felt that new legislation may increase the viability of this option for Sneyd.

Option B – Establish an Academy on the site – 11-19 years

The Lead Member explained that the working group were informed that the Department for Children's Schools and Families (DCSF) had clarified that a small Academy of 3 forms of entry would not be feasible at the Sneyd site. A large, 6 forms of entry Academy may be considered by the DCSF but would need to fit within the wider context of education provision for the borough and the strategy for change. The working group felt that an Academy could provide good opportunities for young people in the area. However, the financial viability and the impact of a large Academy on neighbouring schools as well as the education provision for the borough overall would need to be carefully considered before this option could be taken further.

Option C – Close the school; significantly enlarge another school; establish a 14-19 specialist Academy alongside 14-19 or 16-19 provision so that learning continues on the Sneyd site

The Lead Member explained that the working group had received a lot of detailed information on this, the most complex of all of the options. Any of the sub-options detailed within the working group's report would ensure the continuation of education provision on the Sneyd site and would ensure viable post 16 provision. The working group had felt that this was an interesting and potentially exciting option. However, further investigation into the viability of this option would be required to enable a suitable model to be presented to the DCSF and the Office of the Schools Commissioner (OSC) should this option be pursued.

Option D – Co-operative Trust Model

The working group had been presented with information on Reddish Vale in Stockport which was the only school in the country operating as a co-operative trust. Members felt that this seemed a good option, however concerns were raised that the model was very new and had not been fully developed or embedded elsewhere. Further investigation into the viability of this option would be required but based on current evidence, it may be the weaker option for Sneyd.

Working Group Comments

The Lead Member asked other Members of the working group for their comments. Working group Members stated that they had explored all four options in great depth and that working towards finding a solution had been challenging. All of the options had

implications for Sneyd and for education provision across the borough. This was not the end of the line and further work would need to be done by officers to enable Cabinet to make a decision. Members recognised that funding was an issue but they wanted to see a form of education provision retained on the Sneyd site. Whichever option was pursued by Cabinet, it must be in the best interests of the school's pupils.

Panel Members Comments

Members thanked the Sneyd working group for their work in investigating the options for the future of Sneyd.

A Member stated that the working group had come to some firm recommendations which would help to inform Cabinet's decision. A positive resolution could be taken from the working group's report that education provision should remain on the Sneyd site.

The Lead Member of the Sneyd working group proposed the following recommendations:

That:

- a) Cabinet pursue a solution that ensures the continuation of education provision on the site of Sneyd Community School, supported by further investigation into viable solutions between Council Officers, representatives of Walsall Children's Services Serco, the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) and the Office of the Schools Commissioner (OSC)
- b) This solution for the continuation of education provision on the site of Sneyd Community School must:
 1. be financially viable
 2. be devised with particular attention paid to its impact on all schools within the north west area of Walsall
 3. meet the needs of the local community

The recommendation was put to the vote and was passed unanimously.

RESOLVED

That:

- a) **Cabinet pursue a solution that ensures the continuation of education provision on the site of Sneyd Community School, supported by further investigation into viable solutions between Council Officers, representatives of Walsall Children's Services Serco, the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) and the Office of the Schools Commissioner (OSC)**
- b) **This solution for the continuation of education provision on the site of Sneyd Community School must:**
 1. **be financially viable**

2. be devised with particular attention paid to its impact on all schools within the north west area of Walsall
3. meet the needs of the local community

The meeting adjourned at 6.22pm

The meeting reconvened at 6.29pm

90/08 BUILDING SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE (BSF)

In response to the Panel's recommendation of 20 January 2009, Barry Fielding provided an update to Members on Building Schools for the Future (BSF) Wave 6a and clarification on the criteria used to select the schools receiving funding.

Barry Fielding explained that on Monday 2 March, a pre-engagement meeting with Partnership for Schools (PFS) had taken place. The Panel were informed that PFS were an agency of the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). At this meeting, PFS signed off Walsall's progress to date with the BSF programme. It was also agreed that the remit date would be in May but the exact date could not be confirmed until Walsall's Strategy for Change had been finalised. The Office of the Schools Commissioner (OSC) had stated that they would like to see more National Challenge Schools addressed through BSF. Discussions had taken place around the potential of including a 6th project within Walsall's Wave 6a allocation, although it had not yet been determined what the 6th project would be.

The Panel heard that announcements on BSF Wave 7 had been made during the week and that Walsall had been successful in its bid for Wave 7 funding. Walsall was placed 4th out of 84 schools nationally in order of priority to receive Wave 7. This additional funding would mean that potentially another 5 or 6 schools could be improved or rebuilt and that through both waves, all National Challenge Schools in the borough could be addressed. If DCSF were satisfied that Walsall could successfully deliver the two waves together there may be the possibility of doing so.

A spreadsheet showing the scoring criteria for selecting schools for BSF Wave 6a was displayed for the Panel's reference. Barry Fielding explained that the criteria had been designed by Walsall with the purpose of removing the subjectivity from the selection process. The criteria had different weightings which would give some criteria greater significance than others. The criteria were as follows:

- Building Condition
- Educational Attainment Needs
- Links to other Facilities
- Links to Regeneration
- Sufficiency Needs
- Deprivation

A total score was calculated for each school based on each of the weighted criteria and the schools with the lowest scores were identified as those with the highest need. In response to a Member's question, Barry Fielding stated that Kevin Kendall had scored the building condition criteria for each school.

Members expressed concerns over the condition of schools that had not been selected for this wave of BSF. For example there was a problem with asbestos at Willenhall Sports College, Councillor E Pitt requested that officers contact her outside of the meeting to discuss this issue. Barry Fielding stated that Willenhall would be a high priority but the asbestos problem would not be the single most important criteria for the school to receive BSF.

Members were also very disappointed that a written report on this item had not been made available to them with the agenda papers. Members requested a copy of the spreadsheet that had been displayed and it was agreed that this would be circulated to Members outside of the meeting. Members also asked for detail on how the scores for each criteria were arrived at for each school. The Chair apologised regarding the format of this item and that in future, a written report would be provided to enable the Panel time for full consideration of an item.

In response to a Member's question, Barry Fielding explained that the condition survey of each school building had been done approximately 4 years ago. Pauline Pilkington added that Kevin Kendall had used the information available including the condition surveys to make his judgement on the condition of each school. New condition surveys would be carried out as part of a future phase of BSF. Members requested a breakdown of the criteria for assessing building condition to ensure that this process was transparent. Members asked that the criteria broken down by school be provided. A Member added that it was important to update the condition surveys as soon as possible to ensure funding is based on the latest information. A co-opted Member felt that the subjectivity of scores given on building condition should be questioned.

A Member enquired about whether Brownhills school would be included in the next wave of BSF. Barry Fielding confirmed that as it was a National Challenge School, Brownhills would be considered a priority for the next wave.

In response to a Member's question regarding when the work on the selected schools would commence, Barry Fielding confirmed that Walsall was close to having its wave 6a funds allocated. He explained that the remit date (the date where everything would be in place including funds and Cabinet sign off) was key to this process. Karen Adderley stated that it was likely to be 2011 before the first construction work started and 2013 for the first completed project.

A co-opted member stated that it was very pleasing to see Walsall school's benefiting from BSF and that it was important to get all school buildings up to standard as quickly as possible.

In response to a Member's question, Barry Fielding explained that funding had been split as closely as possible to 50% for new builds, 35% for major refurbishment and 15% for minor refurbishment. If the percentage of funding for new builds or major refurbishments was significantly higher than these figures, the project would not be affordable. Therefore, a range of projects had been selected for wave 6a, some which required a full rebuild, others requiring a major or minor refurbishment.

A co-opted member stated that this information would allay the concerns of head teachers as it demonstrates the logic used to select the schools who would receive BSF funding.

Members were concerned that Joseph Leckie had been identified as one of the schools selected for Wave 6a, but had already received targeted capital funding for a phase 1 rebuild. As the condition survey had been carried out prior to this partial rebuild, it would not take into account the improvements that had already been made. Susan Lupton responded that Joseph Leckie had the worst accommodation of all schools in the borough. Three Private Finance Initiative (PFI) bids for the school had been unsuccessful. However, in the latest round of targeted capital bids, £15 million was unlocked which enabled investment into three schools – Mary Elliott, Daw End and Joseph Leckie. Pupils at Joseph Leckie were being taught in unsatisfactory conditions, the 1st phase rebuild funded by the targeted capital would improve part of the building, and this would be completed by 22 June 2009. However, the rest of the building was in need of improvement and outline planning consent had been granted for development of the building.

In response to Member's concerns regarding the criteria used to select the schools, Pauline Pilkington gave assurances that the best possible criteria were used and applied consistently throughout the assessment process. A Member stated that although this was the case, they would still need the background on how the scores were calculated to enable robust challenge and scrutiny.

In response to a co-opted Member's question regarding when Wave 7 would be likely to start, Barry Fielding confirmed that discussions were already underway with Partnership for Schools (PFS) on the possibility of pulling Waves 6a and 7 together so that there would not be a gap in between. The Council would have to prove it had the capacity to deliver both waves in this manner before they commenced.

The Chair concluded that the Panel would receive a further update on BSF on 16 April 2009. This would include the provision of a breakdown of each criteria and how the scores were determined. Kevin Kendall and other appropriate officers would be invited to the meeting to provide background on the scoring process and reports and supporting spreadsheets would be provided to all Members of the Panel with the agenda papers to enable full consideration of the item.

RESOLVED:

That:

- a) Officers contact Councillor E Pitt outside of the meeting to discuss the asbestos the issue of asbestos at Willenhall Sports College**
- b) a copy of the spreadsheet containing the scoring matrix for BSF be circulated to all Members of the Panel following the meeting;**
- c) the Panel will receive a further update on BSF on 16 April 2009 to include the provision of a breakdown of each criteria and how the scores were determined and a full written report on the process along with supporting spreadsheets to be provided with the agenda papers to enable full consideration of the item;**

and;

- d) Kevin Kendall and other appropriate officers should be invited to the meeting to provide background on the scoring and selection process for the schools chosen for BSF Wave 6a**

91/08 CHILDREN'S TRUST ARRANGEMENTS

Louise Hughes explained the context of this presentation was that a national audit report had identified some authorities had not embedded their Children's Trust arrangements. Members of the Panel had previously asked whether Walsall had robust arrangements in place and this presentation would provide detail on Walsall's children's trust arrangements.

Louise Hughes explained that new legislation governing Children's Trust arrangements in light of the Baby P case at Haringey Council, was imminent. The Children's Act 2004 places a duty to co-operate on statutory partners and this was expected to be strengthened in the new legislation. The latest Joint Area Review (JAR) inspection on Walsall commended aspects of its Children's Trust and highlighted excellent partnership working as a strength. As part of the Children's Act 2004, there was a statutory requirement for authorities to publish a Children and Young People's plan and Members were informed that a full review of Walsall's Children's plan was underway.

Louise Hughes provided detail on the Children's Trust arrangements and governance at Walsall. The Children's Trust was in a good position for any new legislation as it already had strong governance and partnership forums in place.

In response to a Member's question, Louise Hughes stated that there was a difference between measuring outputs and outcomes and that a focus on outcomes, in particular improving provision for the most vulnerable was a priority. The challenge was in allocating resources at the preventative level.

Members expressed concerns over children who were taken out of school for periods of time. A co-opted Member stated that further support from Walsall Children's Services – Serco was required to deal with parents of children who are taken out of school for long periods of time. Sue Wedgwood explained that a policy had been designed between teachers and officers, to which schools and governors were expected to sign up. Sue Wedgwood agreed to investigate the application of the policy and bring back to Members via the Chair outside of the meeting. Members agreed that the long term unauthorised absence policy should be brought to Scrutiny to enable full exploration of this subject. The Portfolio Holder stated that he would welcome Scrutiny's support on this topic. He highlighted concerns over pupils from ethnic minorities who were taken abroad to attend marriage ceremonies. Another concern was the likely rise in pupils being taken abroad on holidays during school term time, which would be more attractive to parents in the current economic climate. A Member stated that he would bring the policy in place at Croft School to the next meeting and added that the head teacher of Croft School should also be invited to feedback on their experience of the policy.

A Member stated that it was important to increase early years prevention work to address anti-social behaviour and teenage pregnancy. The Member asked whether there would be a presence of social workers in schools, GP surgeries and community centres to facilitate this work. Pauline Pilkington responded that there was a national shortage of social workers and therefore recruiting was a problem. Existing social workers were allocated to priority children, for example those on the child protection

register. There was therefore not enough resource to provide the community social workers the Member referred to.

A Member stated that through partnership working and prevention, teenage pregnancies in Walsall had decreased significantly. Louise Hughes added that the decrease of 18.9% was the second greatest reduction reported in the West Midlands.

RESOLVED:

That

a) the long term unauthorised absence policy be brought to the 16 April meeting of the Children's and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel;

and;

b) the head teacher of Croft School be invited to the 16 April meeting to feedback on their experience of the unauthorised absence policy

The meeting terminated at 8.05 p.m.

Chair:

Date:

DRAFT