



Leicester
City Council

MINUTE EXTRACT

Minutes of the Meeting of the
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
Held: THURSDAY, 7 MAY 2009 at 5.30pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Mugglestone – Chair

Councillor Corral	Councillor Hall
Councillor Naylor	Councillor Potter (for Cllr Joshi)
Councillor Newcombe (for Cllr J.Blackmore)	Councillor Russell
Councillor Suleman	

Co-opted Members

Mr Michael Asquith – Church of England Diocese

Also In Attendance

Councillor Dempster	Cabinet Lead Member for Children, and Schools.
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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Blackmore, Follett, Joshi, and Westley, Jess Evans, Rebecca Barrow and Michael Asquith, Church of England Diocese.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to declare any interests they may have in the business on the agenda, and/or indicate that Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 applies to them.

Councillor Naylor declared a non-prejudicial interest in Appendix C 'Options Review: Riverside Business and Enterprise College' as he was part of an organisation which used land at the college for its activities.

8. OPTIONS REVIEW: RIVERSIDE BUSINESS AND ENTERPRISE COLLEGE

The Interim Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services submitted a report that summarised conclusions drawn from the options review and recommended an immediate course of action to address the situation.

The Director of Planning and Commissioning introduced a report and stated that the review had concluded that there were strong educational, financial and business reasons to consider closure of the school.

Six options for change had been reviewed as follows:

- 1) Maintain status quo.
- 2) Provide continued increased financial and other support to the School to ensure it remains viable and achieves sufficient improvements.
- 3) Federate with a school that is judged to be good or better on the basis of an OfSTED inspection and pupil performance and implement revised governance, leadership and management arrangements.
- 4) Establish flexible collaborative arrangements amongst other local authority maintained schools.
- 5) Continue to explore the option of Riverside becoming part of a collaborative Academy and other potential Academies in the City.
- 6) Consult upon phased school closure.

Further to these, it was explained that alternative suggestions made by the governing body, school staff and the NUT had also been considered within the business case at Appendix A.

In reviewing the position at Riverside consideration had been given to educational outcomes, resources deployed and the levels of additional funding to secure these outcomes and indeed the continued operation of the school.

It was reported that in 2007/08 the school had required an additional £250k and in 2008/09 an additional £300k to operate. In September 2009 only 29 pupils had expressed a wish to enter year 7. In 2009/10 and 2010/11 the school is therefore projected to require an additional £815k in each year to continue to operate at its current level.

The Director of Planning and Commissioning reported that it is judged that the school does not offer value for money and that the Dedicated Schools Grant cannot continue to provide this level of additional support.

In evaluating options it was stressed that it been determined that the key determining factor must be securing a position that is financially viable, practicable and be in the best long term interests of learners.

The Director of Planning and Commissioning stated that a report of this nature deals with difficult issues and naturally generates alternative views. Although the governing body do not dispute the basic demographic or financial facts within this report it was reported

that the Department had received representations that it now wished to bring before OSMB for its consideration. A separate summary document reproducing these in full was circulated to members.

The Chair invited Geoff Over, Chair of Governors, to speak on this matter. He stated that although the admission numbers and financial costs could not be disputed, he felt that some of performance data within the report could be contested, and that a decision on the future of the school should only be taken when accurate position was available. He felt that the evidence included in the report painted an inaccurate picture of the school.

Peter Flack, NUT and Gary Garner, UNISON were also invited to speak.

Peter Flack stated that the inception of the Samworth Academy had taken away some pupils who may have attended Riverside. He explained that he had previously been advised that this would not have a detrimental effect on Riverside. He also raised concerns with the speed of the process, and felt that a re-evaluation of the school catchment areas could have helped to avoid the current situation. Peter Flack was of the view that the current projected results were good despite challenging circumstances. He felt that Option 4 should be looked at in greater detail, and felt that more of a creative solution was required.

Gary Garner stated strong opposition to the threat of closure. In particular, he stated that the effect on staff would be damaging, as employees based at schools were not entitled to the same redeployment opportunities as all other Council employees.

A Member of the Board asked for clarity on the ratio between the number of pupils and staff, including all non-teachers. The Director of Planning and Commissioning stated that he did not have such a figure available as the ratio had been calculated in terms of qualified teaching staff (the most expensive component) but that the ratio would inevitably be significantly different than all other schools in Leicester if calculated on this basis.

A further question was asked around whether there had been improvements in results in the past two years. Jenny Vickers explained that Riverside had been listed as a National Challenge School due to its performance, but acknowledged that there had been a slight improvement in results. The meeting heard that 22% of pupils achieved 5 A* - C Grades last year, and that the Key Stage 3 results did not indicate sufficient progress.

The option of split sites for the school was briefly discussed. One Member felt that such moves between school sites disrupted the

education of children and that the two sites also had difficult physical barriers between them, such as Narborough Road.

A Member questioned whether the letters sent to parents stated that the school was likely to close. The Director, Planning and Commissioning reported that the letters were delivered to the school on the evening of 28 April and distributed on 30 April 2009 to all parents via pupil post. Letters to all prospective parents for the September 2009 intake were sent on the 28 April 2009 via Royal Mail. The letter informed parents that an options review was taking place and stated the recommendation before OSMB. The Director, Planning & Commissioning also stated that a further letter had been distributed by Royal Mail on 7 May 2009 assuring parents that they would be kept informed of developments. This letter explained that pupils who stated a preference to attend Riverside would continue to be admitted, and that funds were available to support the school in the 2009/10 and 2010/11. The letter also indicated a willingness to support and retain staff to deliver education outcomes throughout any consultation process or following period. It was reported that a five-stage consultation process had been proposed, and due to this, there would be no plan to immediately close Riverside, but that, if agreed by Cabinet, it would close in a phased fashion.

A Member of the Board asked whether the option of Riverside becoming part of a collaborative academy was viable. In response, Jenny Vickers reported that the option had been explored with possible lead sponsors, but that all had indicated that it would not be viable due to the current admission numbers.

In response to an additional question around the decrease in admission numbers, it was stated that although officers had been aware of the decrease in numbers, the collapse in parental support was not apparent until earlier this year and had not been predicted. Members heard that efforts had been made to address the situation as Riverside had been presented as an option to parents across the city seeking a school place, but that the ultimate factor was parental preference. It was made clear that Riverside had not been mitigated against in any way by the Admissions Service. Furthermore, the meeting heard that the school itself and its energetic Acting Headteacher had worked tirelessly to increase the uptake in admission numbers.

A number of points were made in connection to the financial situation at the school. The Director, Planning and Commissioning informed Members that all schools were funded by the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), and that the level of grant provided was determined by pupil numbers. It was explained that Riverside's base budget and additional monies required could be sufficiently funded from the Dedicated Schools Grant until 2011. However pupil numbers across the city are predicted to fall prior to rising once again and consequently, Riverside's

MINUTE EXTRACT

additional requirements would no longer be able to be funded from the DSG at this point.

Whilst discussing the subject of catchment areas, the Director, Planning and Commissioning made it clear that there was no strict correlation between living in a particular area and the absolute right to attend a school in that area. It was explained that widening catchment areas would not necessarily solve the issue of apportioning pupils to particular schools as parents were entitled to express a preference for any school in the city.

A Member of the Board asked what the fundamental difference was between the current situation at Riverside and that of New College several years ago. It was stated that New College had experienced a significant increase in parental preference during recent years, and that there were many reasons behind parental choice. One Member of the Board felt that one reason that had led to a fall in parental support for Riverside was the previous proposal to house infant and junior schools on the same site of the college. Another Member of the Board was of the view that efforts made to transform New College had not been similarly replicated with Riverside.

Councillor Suleman seconded by Councillor Mugglestone proposed that options 4 and 5 as well as other creative options, in consultation with elected members, trade unions, senior officers and the senior management of the school be considered as a way forward to address the situation at Riverside, and that Cabinet be recommended to not consider the option of closure. Upon being put to the vote, the motion was lost.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted, and that the comments of the Board be passed to the Cabinet.