

**Leicester City Council
Children and Young People's Services**

Riverside Business and Enterprise College Consultation

Minutes of meeting with Riverside Governing Body

Held on 11th June 2009

Present:

Trevor Pringle..... (Divisional Director, Planning & Commissioning)
Margaret Libreri..... (Divisional Director, Learning Services)
Helen Ryan (Divisional Director, Transforming the Learning Environment)
Jenny Vickers..... (Learning Services)

Members of the School Governing Body

Purpose of the meeting

Trevor Pringle opened the meeting by clarifying the purpose of the meeting. "Following an officer review of the School and analysis of a range of options it has been recommended that there are strong educational, financial and business reasons to move to close Riverside Business and Enterprise College as soon as practicably possible." Governors were aware from an earlier meeting and correspondence (letters to chair 19.05.09 and letter to all governors 29.05.09) that this recommendation is based upon a Business Case.

Trevor Pringle advised that the Cabinet have agreed that a consultation exercise be conducted upon this and views sought on this matter.

Trevor Pringle advised that this meeting provided an opportunity to raise issues with colleagues in Children's Services and determine their personal and collective responses to the consultation.

Four key points were drawn to the attention of the Governing Body:

1. No decision has been taken to close the school at this point in time.
2. Until such a decision is taken the City Council will continue to admit pupils to the School where parents express a preference for Riverside. (Letter to parents, 19.5.09)
3. The City Council has, in conjunction with Schools Forum, made additional financial provision to support the continued operation of the School in 2009/10 and 2010/11 (Letter 19.5.09) – this is a significant commitment of £800k in each of these years.
4. There is no intent to close Riverside immediately and, if closure should ultimately be agreed by Cabinet, then closure would only occur in a *planned and phased fashion*. In this event, the City Council would work with staff and trade unions to secure the best outcomes for pupils and staff at the School (Letter of 18 May 2009 to parents)

Format of the meeting

Following a brief discussion the Governing Body agreed the format of the meeting as follows:

1. Provision of information on the *process* being followed and business case
2. An opportunity for further discussion and consideration of issues within the business case and associated questionnaire
3. Final summary of process and how responses may be made

Explanation of process being followed

Trevor Pringle reminded the meeting that on 11th May 2009, Cabinet had agreed an officer recommendation that the City Council begin a formal consultation upon the possible closure of Riverside Business and Enterprise College.

This action is being taken at this point following receipt and consideration of a business case from officers that concluded that there are clear educational, financial and business reasons to move to close this School as soon as practicably possible.

The process being followed is that detailed in previous correspondence.

- Letters to governing body chair and all governors dated 19.05.09 and 29.05.09
- Letters to parents dated 07.05.09, 18.05.09 and 29.05.09
- Letters to staff dated 28.04.09, 19.05.09 and 29.05.09
- Letters to all other consultees and all City Councillors dated 29.05.09

Governors were advised that all letters and questionnaires to parents have been sent via Royal Mail to registered home addresses.

All letters and questionnaires to staff were hand delivered to the School for distribution. Governors were advised that Copies of all letters to parents and staff, questionnaires and background materials are available at www.leicester.gov.uk/riversideconsultation Copies of the business case are available in School, public libraries and for download at www.leicester.gov.uk/riversideconsultation

The consultation process being followed reflects guidance issued by the DCSF.

Trevor Pringle advised that this consultation is the first stage of a formal 5 stage process that the City Council must follow if it determines to close Riverside Business and Enterprise College.

Stage 1 = Consultation runs from 01.06.09 – 10.07.09

Governors noted that the City Council were consulting widely on this matter and that details could be found in their letter of 29th May 2009

Governors were advised that publication of consultation outcomes will occur in the early autumn – likely September 2009

At this point a report will be prepared for Cabinet on these outcomes and next steps.

This report will also be subject to Scrutiny arrangements within the Council.

Following a question from the Governor about the nature and role of the Scrutiny Committee Trevor Pringle expanded on this matter.

The Governing Body was informed that the Scrutiny Committee has a duty to challenge and explore reports being presented to Cabinet and the decisions being recommended to Cabinet. The meeting noted that whereas Cabinet, the decision-taking body is comprised solely of members of the majority party, Scrutiny has quite a diverse membership. Membership of Scrutiny involves both elected representatives from all political parties in the Council and other statutory partners such as the Diocesan Directors of Education, school governors and young people themselves. The intention is to inform the discussion process and ensure that there is engagement across the Council on key issues.

The meeting was advised that a new Children's Services Scrutiny had been established to allow greater time for consideration of Children's Services and education matters and that it is this Committee that issues in connection with Riverside will be brought following the end of the consultation.

In response to the question about who will take decisions with respect to Riverside, Trevor Pringle stated that this would be undertaken by Cabinet. A brief discussion followed thereafter on the nature of the decision process and timetable that was likely to be followed. Trevor Pringle explained that the first opportunity available to officers to analyse and take a report to Cabinet was such that Scrutiny could receive a report in August with a report going to Cabinet on the 1 September 2009. He explained however that it was not thought helpful to do this and, therefore, the report would go to a later meeting. The scheduling of the report to a later meeting would allow individuals to ask questions at Scrutiny and avoid a situation whereby Scrutiny is considering the matter when teaching and other members of staff are on their summer holidays.

The Governing Body agreed that this was a sensible approach to take.

Trevor Pringle expanded further upon the consultation process.

At their meeting in the early Autumn Cabinet will need to take a decision on whether or not to proceed to Stage 2 of this process i.e.

Stage 2 = Decision to publish Statutory Notice & Detailed Proposal

OR consider an alternative course of action

If a Statutory Notice and Detailed Proposal is published then there will be a further 6 week period to receive representations.

Governors were advised that this **representation period is the 3rd stage** in the 5 stage process and that this representation period would be the final opportunity for people and organisations to express their views for consideration.

The Statutory Notice and Detailed Proposal would provide detail re the nature of any closure and alternative provision for pupils etc.

Upon completion of the six week period (**Stage 3**) for representations a further report would go to Cabinet seeking a final **decision** upon this matter (**Stage 4**).

Implementation would follow thereafter (**Stage 5**)

Exploration of the business case

Review of educational, financial and business reasons to move to close the School:
summary overview from City Council officers.

Trevor Pringle stated that the City Council is aware of the Governing Body's previous response to this Business Case and has already drawn this to the attention of both Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet prior to the decision on 11 May 2009 to consult upon possible school closure.

Representations from the Governing Body are included in full, unedited on the City Council consultation web site for download.

Governors were advised that as part of the current consultation process Officers have met with staff at the School on 9 June 2009 and received their views upon this matter.

Governors were advised that the City Council wished to draw a number of key aspects of the Business case to their attention and invite any further comment upon these.

A Governor enquired where pupils will go if the school should be closed and stressed that this was a really important practical consideration for both the Governing Body and parents. Officers were asked to provide an assurance that there were sufficient places within the City. Trevor Pringle responded that the City Council would not have embarked on this consultation if it could not meet its statutory duty to accommodate pupils but declined to provide an answer as to what schools would be available to pupils. Trevor Pringle stressed that this was a matter for any Statutory Notice and Detailed Proposal that might be published should a decision by Cabinet be taken to proceed with the proposed closure of the school. The Governing Body were reminded that parents would retain their right to express a preference and be considered for any school in the City and that applications for all City schools would continue to be considered in accordance with published Admission criteria. The Governing Body's attention was drawn to the question within the questionnaire about any possible changes to the Admission systems that might prove helpful for parents in this event. In the discussion that followed it was noted that the City Council has the technical ability to overfill places in all its schools up to 5% of the admission number subject to practical operational requirements. Governors were once again reminded however that there is a need for these issues to be considered within a detailed proposal and that discussion of this level of detail at this stage in a consultation process would be premature. Governors recognised the nature of the consultation process and the position that presented itself to officers but felt that this was an important issue that would need to be presented more clearly to parents.

Trevor Pringle expanded upon the nature of any "Detailed Proposal" required by law to assist Governors in their understanding of this matter.

Any "Detailed Proposal" to discontinue a school is required to address:

- Contact details.
- Implementation – details of when any planned proposals would be implemented or proposals would have to be implemented in stages – information about each stage and the date when which each stage is planned to be implemented.
- Consultation - details of the consultation undertaken.
- Objectives.
- Standards and diversity in the quality of education.
- The need for places – a statement addressing the need for places in the area including where there is sufficient capacity to accommodate displaced pupils.
- Current school information.

APPENDIX B

- Section on displaced pupils and any interim arrangements for such pupils.
- A section on the impact on the community.
- Details in connection with travel and length and journeys to alternative provision.
- Any other related proposals.
- Details in connection with the provision for pupils with Special Educational Needs.

With regard to the current questionnaire, Governors expressed the view that the questions used were difficult to understand and that many parents would have difficulties with these. Trevor Pringle responded that the questions had been prepared following consultation with colleagues and Legal Services within the Council. It is important that the Council receive informed responses to specific issues within the Business Case and that these inform Members' decisions about the school. For this reason a number of the questions were directed specifically towards the Business Case with three further more open-ended questions. These were intended to allow parents and other stakeholders to respond detailing issues and matters of concern to them and things that they felt the Council needs to take into account in reaching any decision. The inclusion of this question set was felt to provide an adequate opportunity for people to raise issues of concern.

Questions were raised about the failure of the Council to provide information in translation for other parties, including parents.

Trevor Pringle responded that the guidance within the DCSF publications did not require translation and indeed the thrust in Modern Government and guidance from the Home Office has directed Local Authorities to move to conduct their English in business.

Governors responded that this did not seem to accord with the City Council's current stance and Trevor Pringle responded that he understood this view and that if this proved to be a material factor then consideration would be given to addressing this. It was important for Governors and stakeholders to realise however that the nature of the current consultation provides not only an opportunity for comment upon written materials but also the opportunity to attend meetings and hear and express views first-hand and enquire about the meaning of particular aspects. Again, it was judged that this is a balanced view and a reasonable one. Governors were informed that similar questions had been raised at the Children's Services Scrutiny meeting on the 10 June 2009 where Trevor Pringle had presented an update on the consultation process itself. Governors were assured, however, that no further information beyond that in the public arena had been provided at this meeting.

Following completion of the above discussion, Trevor Pringle invited Margaret Libreri to draw Governors' attention to some of the educational judgements within the Business Case and seek comments from Governors on this matter.

Mr Geoff Over made clear that Governors were familiar with the Business Case and had already expressed their views to the Interim Executive Strategic Director, Bob Clark. A presentation of the Governors' views had also taken place at the Scrutiny Committee prior to Cabinet on the 11 May 2009. Governors did not, therefore, feel it was a good use of time to re-visit these issues once again.

Trevor Pringle responded that from the meeting with staff earlier in the week, it was apparent that there was a broad understanding and acceptance of the relationship between low numbers and the financial predicament presenting itself to the School.

It seemed that the key area of concern for staff appeared to relate to the educational commentary and issues in connection with the effectiveness of leadership and management

in the School. Governors agreed that this was an accurate summary of the position. Trevor Pringle responded that while he and colleagues were aware of the alternative views expressed in connection with educational outcomes, it was the judgement of the officers that the summary judgements with respect to outcomes were evidenced by a wide range of data and evidence from independent and external sources.

A discussion followed on the referencing of information from a number of reports and the view of the Governing Body that this led to a misleading picture in the school. Margaret Libreri responded on this matter and acknowledged that where an attempt had been made to underline the positives in the school, this clearly had not been fully successful. In response to Governors' concerns about this matter, Trevor Pringle assured the meeting that an accurate record of the matter would be kept and their concerns will be recorded in any report presented to Members following the conclusion of the consultation.

Trevor Pringle advised the Governing Body that at the Staff meeting a number of staff and Jane Rudon from the NUT had specifically asked that the Department gives some consideration to amending a number of issues within the Business Case in connection with the effectiveness of education management to ensure that this was a more balanced presentation of the issue and that officers had agreed to reflect upon this in advance of the presentation of issues to parents on the evening of Monday, 15 June 2009.

Governors were advised that the Local Authority has invited the Acting Head to chair this meeting and Mr Dunmore has agreed to do this. Mr Dunmore has also agreed to review draft records of the Staff meetings and Trevor Pringle extended this offer to Geoff Over, Chair of Governors, with respect to the present meeting. This offer was accepted. In response to questions raised by Governors about whether the Local Authority was intending to run a similar series of meetings during any Statutory Notice period when representations were being sought on the Detailed Proposal Trevor Pringle responded that there were no such plans to do so.

Summary of process and how responses may be made

Trevor Pringle concluded the meeting by thanking governors for the opportunity to address them and reminding governors how they could respond formally to the consultation exercise.

- Record of views expressed at this present meeting
- By individual or collective submission of written questionnaires
- By submission of on line questionnaire via the City Council web site.

All submissions were requested by 10.07.09