



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the
EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Held: TUESDAY, 22 MARCH 2005 at 5.30pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Johnson - Chair
Councillor Fitch - Liberal Democrat Spokesperson
Councillor Sood – Labour Spokesperson

Councillor R Blackmore	Councillor Nurse
Councillor Hall	Councillor Panchbaya
Councillor Henry	Councillor Thompson
Councillor Hunt	Councillor Vincent (for Cllr Renold)
Councillor Lloyd-Harris	Councillor Westley

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86. A CITY ACADEMY TO REPLACE NEW COLLEGE

Councillor Coley, who attended the meeting, declared a personal interest as a governor of New College.

The Service Director (Policy & Resources), Education, submitted a report seeking the Committee's view on whether the Council should support the submission of an Expression of Interest to secure a second academy for the City to replace New College.

The Committee noted that the Governing Body had asked the LEA to withdraw delegation and the Secretary of State's approval was being sought to establish an Interim Executive Board to address the problems being experienced by the school. This, however, was not a permanent solution and the governors wished to submit an Expression of Interest to the Secretary of State in replacing the school with a City Academy. The governors had asked the LEA if they would be a co-signatory to the Expression of Interest. A report was to be submitted to Cabinet on 4 April and the Committee's views were sought for submission to Cabinet.

The Committee discussed the proposal fully and were very concerned that the problems at New College were addressed as a matter of urgency. It was noted that any proposal for a City Academy would not take effect until 2008 and that even if a City Academy was ultimately the best solution for the school, something needed to be done in the interim.

The Corporate Director of Education acknowledged this and explained that there was a current action plan in place aimed at addressing failings in the school. However, this report related to the longer term strategy and whether Members considered the establishment of a City Academy may ultimately be the best solution. It would not mean however, that no improvement work would take place in the meantime.

The report outlined the perceived benefits of a City Academy and the Corporate Director advised that this was potentially the best way forward for the school. However, there were no guarantees and it was a question of Members' judgement based on advice given.

A number of Members of the Committee strongly expressed the crucial need for any such proposal to be done in full consultation and co-operation with all the relevant stakeholders so that this was not seen as an 'imposed' solution but one which was owned and supported by the community. The Corporate Director took this on board and explained to Members that if the Secretary of State approved the Expression of Interest, then one of the outcomes would be that funding would be provided for a full feasibility study which would include provision for full consultation.

Some Members of the Committee also expressed concern at the size of any future school as they considered that one of the problems with New College was that it was too big.

In addition, views were expressed about the configuration of any new school. It was considered that some of the current problems experienced at New College were exacerbated by the 'geography' of the school and the distance that teachers needed to cover between bases.

The Corporate Director responded that one of the reasons that the governors had gone for a possible City Academy solution rather than being part of 'Building Schools for the Future', was that City Academy status offered greater levels of investment and also offered a step by step 'funded' thinking process. The design of the school would be carefully considered and it was intended that there would be purpose built buildings on a new part of the campus. Some Members however considered that some of the existing buildings should be used and incorporated.

Some concern was also expressed in terms of monitoring performance of the school both now and in the future if it became a City Academy. The Corporate Director explained that if the school was a City Academy, it would not be an LEA school and it would therefore be regulated and monitored by the government. Members were concerned that standards and performance were effectively monitored both in the near future and if the school was no longer part of the LEA. The Corporate Director assured Members that standards were monitored now by the LEA Inspectors and this would continue. It was also stated that the new Academy may want this monitoring by LEA inspectors to continue as part of the New Relationships with Schools legislation.

Although the Committee had expressed a number of misgivings and concerns about the process and potential effects of a City Academy in place of New College, the general view was that what Members of the Committee wanted to see was the 'best solution' for New College, which was well thought through and supported by the community and which may or may not be a City Academy. In the meantime, however, the Committee was very concerned about the present and ensuring that effective action was being taken to tackle the issues at the school. The Corporate Director suggested therefore that the Committee receive the current action plan for the school for consideration.

The Cabinet Lead for Education and Lifelong Learning was present at the meeting and invited to respond to the Committee's deliberations. Councillor Waddington welcomed the full debate that had been conducted by the Committee and agreed that consultation was crucially important and that the methodology for consultation had to be considered very carefully to ensure full and effective engagement. She asked that the Committee look at methods of consultation and offer any advice on this.

Councillor Waddington also acknowledged the Committee's concern about the current position at New College and was pleased that the Committee was to receive a report on the action plan.

The Cabinet Lead also agreed that the future of New College should be carefully and fully planned.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) that Cabinet be advised that the Education and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee will support the proposal for the Council being a co-signatory to an Expression of Interest to the Secretary of State for New College to become a City Academy, subject to the following:-
 - a) full and meaningful consultation being carried out with the local community:
 - b) that the size of any school be not larger than 1000 pupils
 - c) that Cabinet enquire whether it is absolutely necessary to have a complete new build and consider whether the use of some of the existing buildings could be feasible
 - d) that the 'octagon' design concept put forward previously be considered
 - (e) that the Scrutiny spokespersons be consulted on the consultation methodology

- (2) that the Committee receive a report at its next meeting on the current action plan for the school.

