

Children & Young People's Services Select Committee: Task and Finish Group to Review Small Schools

24 October 2019 – At a meeting of the Task & Finish Group held at 13.30pm at County Hall, Chichester.

Members present:

Mrs Flynn
Mrs Hall
Ms Lord (arrived at 13.50)
Ms Sudan
Maria Roberts (Parent Governor Representative)

Apologies for absence: Stephen Hillier

Election of Chairman

As the previous Chairman, Mr Jupp, had moved to the Cabinet, a new Chairman of the Task & Finish Group (TFG) was required. Mrs Flynn was elected as Chairman.

Notes of the previous meeting

Mrs Flynn pointed out that the TFG had not received the split of numbers of children who had been at the same school since they started education and those who had transferred from other schools.

Resolved – that the Task & Finish Group agrees the notes of the previous meeting.

Response to Recommendations

Resolved – that the Task & Finish Group notes the response from the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills.

Declarations of Interest:

- Ms Sudan declared an interest as her husband is Chair of Governors at Langley Green Primary School
- Mrs Flynn declared an interest as Ingfield Manor School Governing Body

Project Plan

Resolved – that the Task & Finish Group agrees the project plan for the Task and Finish Group.

Consultation Process

James Richardson, Programme Manager, updated the TFG on the consultations responses as at 17 October 2019 with a presentation: -

- There had been 189 responses up to 17 October 2019
- Some people may have entered responses for more than one school
- Responses up to 17 October showed the following: -
 - Clapham and Patching – respondents mainly support no change, feel the school is centred on the needs of the children and learners but are more split on the financial viability of the school
 - Compton and Up Marden – respondents mainly support no change, feel the school is centred on the needs of the children and learners and is financially viable
 - Rumboldswyke – respondents mainly support academisation and are fairly split over whether the school is centred on the needs of the children and learners and financially viable
 - Stedham - respondents mainly support no change, feel the school is centred on the needs of the children and learners and is financially viable
 - Warninglid – respondents almost evenly split between no change and relocation, feel the school is centred on the needs of the children and learners but more split on the financial viability of the school

Paul Wagstaff, Director of Education & Skills told the TFG that: -

- The question was asked as to whether responses could be broken down by those who were parents and those who were not to show possible differences in views between parents and other members of the community
- Two meetings had been held with parents with just under 100 attending the one at Angmering and around 60 at Warninglid
- Parents had often chosen to send their children to these schools after bad experiences at other schools
- The schools recognised that change was needed
- At the Warninglid Warninglid meeting, which was positive, there had been questions about federation and relocation
- There were challenges around how admissions were planned
- The meetings had provided a good opportunity to get the views of parents and other members of the community

Stakeholder Representations

The TFG heard from representatives from the schools involved in the consultation process.

David Longmore - Clapham & Patching Church of England Primary School: -

- The school had the following grievances with the process
 - A lack of openness and transparency with the data and timescales
 - No chance to see information before it was made public
 - No warning information would be made public despite the letter of 12 July from the Director of Education & Skills saying it might be
- The school answered the 12 questions on the School Effectiveness Strategy in October 2018 then met the Director of Education & Skills on 2

May 2019 when it learned that there might be a consultation on options that would include possible closure of the school – the school had already been considering federation. The school kept this discussion confidential as requested

- At a meeting on 26 June 2019 the school warned that if consultation included possible closure it would impact on admissions – six expected admissions did not materialise as a result
- The school was angry and shocked to receive the letter on 12 July 2019 saying the school could possibly close
- There was disappointment at the way the Children & Young People's Services Select Committee dealt with the matter on 11 September 2019
- There was little notice given to arrange a public meeting
- Communications had been badly handled

David Ewers - Clapham & Patching Church of England Primary School: -

- There were issues with the disclosure of information and the financial implications that have impacted on admission numbers
- The financial data was hard to reconcile – there was no rationale for the figures produced
- The school challenges the viability of the financial data and questions why it was put in the public domain

David Barty – Rumboldswyke Church of England Infant School

Mr Barty began by stating that he had been Chairman of the governing body of Rumboldswyke school until mid-September when an Interim Executive Board, of which he was a member, was formed to replace the governing body. Mr Barty also stated that he had made regrettably already found it necessary to make a formal complaint against the Chairman of the Interim Executive Board which had yet to be resolved. Mr Barty told the TFG: -

- The options for the school were restricted due to its inadequate judgement by OFSTED which also impacted on the school roll
- The judgement was based on technical safeguarding issues that had been resolved and the school wanted to be inspected again
- When parents hear that a school may close, they look for other options
- The school had lost pupils as it fed into Central School which had had problems for some time
- The process had been handled badly

Ed Platt - Compton & Up Marden Church of England Primary School

- The school would resubmit its answers to the 12 questions asked in July with a fuller response
- Data about the school from OFSTED reached by the 'Have Your Say' website was incorrect
- The engagement process had been poor
- There had not been any constructive discussions with the Council
- The Council had provided information at the last minute which had been put on the Internet and picked-up by the press saying the school would close

- The Director of Education & Skills and the Head of School Organisation & Transport had accepted an invitation to speak to the school's governing body, but this was a bit late in the process

Celia Billington - Stedham Primary School

- The school was rated 'Good' by OFSTED with a good head teacher, engaged governors and all pupils had individual education plans
- There were 88 pupils on roll (84% capacity), which was above the viability threshold and numbers were stable with plans to increase over the next three years
- The school disagreed with the suggestion that pupil numbers would fall
- As a result of the Cabinet Member decision to consult on the future of the school, the parents of 10 children no longer chose it as their first choice
- The school was disappointed that the consultation had been imposed on it by the body that was supposed to support it
- The process was harming the community with misleading, inaccurate information and a lack of engagement
- The questions in the consultation were both leading and misleading and the consultation should be stopped to allow the Council to engage with schools before the process went further
- There was disappointment at the way the Children & Young People's Services Select Committee dealt with the matter on 11 September 2019 and the fact that the first meeting of the TFG had been held in private

Bob Clark - Warninglid Primary School

- The school knew four years ago that it was under threat due to dwindling numbers and engaged with the Local Education Authority over this looking at academisation, amalgamation and federation – no possibilities came forward, probably as the school was not strong financially
- The school has now considered relocating to Pease Pottage where a new school will be opening in 2021
- This may save the school as its current roll of 39 is barely financially or educationally viable and has been adversely affected by the consultation

Deborah Urquhart – County Councillor for Angmering & Findon

- The issue of accuracy of data needed to be looked at by Council officers and governing bodies
- Over 90% of pupils at the Clapham & Patching school come from outside the area, including from Chichester, Southwick and Shoreham, because the school put its pupils first
- Special support centres in schools were welcomed and should be expanded as quickly as possible
- The Council had a duty of care to its staff including teachers who worked long hours often planning lessons for different age groups in small schools

Response by the Paul Wagstaff, Director of Education & Skills, and Graham Olway, Head of School Organisation & Transport.

Paul Wagstaff made the following points: -

- The aim was for the consultation to be done quickly so that the information about future possibilities for the schools affected would be in the public domain for as short a time as possible, as it was realised that an extended period of consultation would increase anxiety for people
- The OFSTED information for Compton & Up Marden Church of England Primary School reached by the 'Have Your Say' had been updated following actions arising from the previous TFG and checked during the meeting confirming the updated versions were all there
- The financial information was based on a particular point in time and may have changed since – roll numbers may also have changed
- The Council wanted the consultation completed by November so that parents knew the final options available to them before applying for school places in September 2020
- Rumboldswyke school's situation was different to the others as it had been judged as 'Inadequate' by OFSTED on grounds of falling standards and teaching that did not challenge pupils – this meant its options were determined by law. It was unlikely that the school would be given an academisation order due to its small size
- There would be more talks with schools
- The consultation had to take into account the fact that many pupils at the schools came from outside their catchment areas and many children who lived in the schools' catchment areas chose not to attend their local school but go to other schools
- The consultation was needed as the future viability of these schools was an issue as they present themselves at the current time
- Discussions were taking place with other schools as well
- The Council was aware that staff and governors of all schools were committed to having successful schools

Graham Olway made the following points: -

- After publication of the School Effectiveness Strategy the Council had discussions with all schools and individual discussions with past chairs of governors, former head teachers and diocesan representatives
- The Council had benefitted from the meeting with Compton & Up Marden school
- The Council had spoken to Stedham school governors about the possibility of federation
- Other schools had been spoken to about issues in the School Effectiveness Strategy and how to encourage discussion and understanding of the 12 questions

Answers to points made during discussion

- The financial information came from the Council's financial team
- The Council was confident in the governance of the process
- The consultation was planned to begin in September, but was not launched till October
- Public meetings would be part of the consultation process
- Additional comments could be added to the survey in free text boxes

- The School Effectiveness Strategy states that 'We (the Council) will analyse schools in DfE area localities against the criteria listed below (the 12 questions issued in July) for all schools including looking at the numbers who attend from each local catchment and community – early work showed concern from schools not admitting enough pupils from their own catchment areas but from further afield
- Projected pupil numbers for 2022 were based on the number of children in the area, trends for choices and housing development and discussed with head teachers
- In most of the areas affected there was minimal housing development planned so projected increase in pupil numbers was low
- School rolls had been declining in most areas
- It was difficult to predict parental preferences as these could change frequently
- The Council worked with an organisation that also worked with the Office for National Statistics to produce projected figures for school places
- The 'No change' option was predicated on schools being financially and educationally viable with pupils being admitted from their catchment areas
- The Council would like to see governing bodies' plans for attracting extra pupils from their schools' catchment areas

The TFG and Cabinet Member thanked the school representatives for their valued contributions to the discussion.

Resolved – that: -

- i. Members of the Task & Finish Group receive a breakdown of data by respondent type at their next meeting
- ii. Officers, as a matter of urgency, check all data on the consultation website to ensure accuracy and make sure the source and date of the data is supplied
- iii. The consultation be altered to make it clear that respondents can provide comments outside of the specific questions

Future Work

The Task & Finish Group discussed who to invite to its next meeting

Resolved – that representatives from the Executive Heads, Schools Forum, Governors Association and Diocese of Chichester be invited to the next meeting of the Task & Finish Group.

Date of the next meeting

The next meeting will take place in December and will be confirmed once arranged.

The meeting ended at 15.09pm