

Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee

14 April 2020 – At a meeting of the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee held at 2.00 pm at Virtual meeting with restricted public access.

Present: Cllr Barling (Chairman)

Cllr Lord	Cllr Hall	Cllr Wickremaratchi
Cllr Baldwin	Cllr Hillier	Mr Lozzi
Cllr Bridges	Cllr A Jones	Mrs Roberts
Cllr Burgess	Clr Lea	Mrs Ryan
Cllr Flynn	Cllr Sudan	Mr Cristin

Also in attendance: Cllr Fitzjohn, Cllr N Jupp, Cllr Magill, Cllr Marshall, Cllr O'Kelly and Cllr Russell

1. Declarations of Interests

1.1 No interests were declared.

2. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

2.1 Resolved – that the minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2020 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

3. Small Schools Proposals

3.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Education and Skills. The report was introduced by Councillor Nigel Jupp, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills and Paul Wagstaff, Director of Education and Skills who highlighted the following points:

- The process began 18 months ago with the revised School Effectiveness Strategy 2018-22, which was approved by full council and endorsed by the Committee.
- The Education and Skills directorate commenced consultations with schools, staff, parents, governors and supporters of the five schools concerned. Discussion had also taken place with MPs, local members and the CYPSSC Task and Finish Group (TFG).
- The proposals for each school varied based upon their circumstances and were as follows:
 - Progress the federation plan for Stedham Primary school with Harting C of E Primary School
 - Progress proposals to secure a federation of Compton and Up Marden CE Primary school with one or more schools
 - Warninglid Primary School to relocate to Pease Pottage, Crawley by 2021
 - Issue closure notices for Clapham and Patching C of E Primary school

- Issue closure notices for Rumboldswyke C of E Primary school.
- A consultation period for the above proposals ceased on 16 March 2020. 711 responses were received, with additional input from traffic surveys, community risk assessments and a peer review.
- Whilst there had been calls to delay the closure decisions for Rumboldswyke and Clapham and Patching schools in view of the current Covid-19 situation, this would serve to extend anxiety, see declining enrolment and reductions in staff.
- The Education and Skills directorate and Cabinet Member recognised the difficulties faced by these prospective changes, particularly in respect of proposed closure and would work hard to ensure a smooth transition. The service would work carefully with parents to identify alternative schools for children and ensure that any choices were made in a measured way.
- For schools facing possible closure, there was a possibility of keeping school buildings open for children with complex needs to both minimize disruption and ease the process of transition to a new school.
- Interest had been shown towards Rumboldswyke and Clapham and Patching schools by trusts to academise. The County Council had the statutory responsibility for school place planning, ensuring adequate pupil places, avoiding surplus provision and negative impacts on existing schools.
- The offer for Rumboldswyke was to academise with Bishop Luffa school creating a new Primary school. This however would create surplus places at Key Stage 2 (KS2) which were not required.
- For Clapham and Patching, an offer had been made to academise the school by the South Downs Education Trust, however the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) would not accept a proposal to academise or issue an academy order until WSCC had completed its review of whether the school was viable or not.
- Schools causing concern guidance identified that Clapham and Patching CE Primary was unable to fill from the local community owing to few primary school age children in the area and costly house prices.

3.2 The Committee considered a verbal statement by the lead petitioner of the 'Keep West Sussex Small Schools open' campaign. The Committee heard the following from the petitioner:

- Closing schools was not in the interest of children.
- Closing schools during a major public health crisis was both non-essential and controversial causing undue added stress. This included the transition from isolation due to the Covid-19 situation to a new school, which would already be unsettling for children.
- Opportunities to academise should be further explored.
- It did not appear lessons had been learnt from the Commissioner's report and it did not feel that the Council was putting children first.
- The Council should be defending schools and defending children.

3.3 The Committee heard the following points from Councillor Deborah Urquhart on Clapham and Patching C of E Primary School:

- Clapham and Patching was a unique school with a significant caring and nurturing ethos, attracting pupils from a wide area, including those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP) and different needs.
- The most recent Ofsted inspection had rated the school as good. It was unclear why a good school was recommended for closure.
- Parents should not be forced to choose a new school for their child based only on a website, and therefore the proposal to maintain the building open for some SEND pupils in the Autumn term following closure was gratefully received, however a delay of the closure decision or an academy proposal were more favourable options. Concerns were raised about the impact of the school closure on the village community, including deterring families moving to the area and increased social isolation of young and elderly people.

3.4 The Director of Education and Skills responded to points raised by the petitioner and members as summarised below:

- There were a number of other caring and nurturing schools with provision for SEND/EHCP children, not only smaller schools were accommodating in this respect.
- Although Clapham and Patching was rated good by Ofsted, data outcomes had indicated that progress was below average, particularly in writing standards. Clapham and Patching also had problems with persistent absence.
- The academy proposals had been explored, however there were significant causes of concern in terms of approaches to leadership and head teacher roles, and general volatility of children moving in and out of the school. The Council was not convinced based on discussions with the Trust that academisation was the best route, particularly when considering the availability of other adequate places within the county.
- Members were concerned about the destabilisation and disruption to children, particularly in the context of Covid-19. The Special Educational Needs Assessment Team (SENAT) had been and would continue to work with parents and children to choose a new school, and support would be offered to manage the transition. The service was acutely aware of the sensitive and difficult nature of this. The Assistant Director for SEND and Inclusion added that transitions back to school would be supported after the lockdown period and there was a wellbeing curriculum in place.
- Community Impact Assessment responses had been significantly mixed, other schools in the area were happy to take over the community engagement work currently undertaken by Clapham and Patching.

3.5 The Committee heard the following points from Councillor Jamie Fitzjohn in respect of Rumboldswyke C of E Infant School:

- The report demonstrated a negative picture of Rumboldswyke school which was disappointing. Rumboldswyke had a positive environment and small schools nurtured children to flourish and build confidence.

- The School Effectiveness Strategy indicated a suitable distance for pupils under 8 to travel to school was two miles. This eliminated a number of schools for children in the Chichester area which did not appear to leave ample places if Rumboldswyke was closed.
- The proposals felt pre-determined with influence and persuasion used to achieve the desired outcomes and consultation results ignored.
- Bishop Luffa school had offered an academy proposal as an all-through Primary school for Rumboldswyke. Bishop Luffa should be permitted to adopt Rumboldswyke as an all-through Primary school.

3.6 The Director of Education and Skills responded to points raised by Councillor Jamie Fitzjohn and members as summarised below:

- Government guidance indicated that for Primary age children, travel from home to school should not exceed 45 minutes. Within Chichester City there were surplus places at both Lancastrian Infants School and Kingsham Primary School, and some children were currently passing Rumboldswyke to attend those schools.
- Rumboldswyke had an inadequate Ofsted rating. The Council had been working with the school for three years in a resource intensive way. The school could not sustain the improvement required without the support from the local authority.
- At a meeting, it was made clear to parents that the chances of finding a Trust to academise the school were slim.
- There had been no pre-determination in respect of Rumboldswyke, there was a very narrow range of options for the school due to the Ofsted outcome.
- The academy proposal from Bishop Luffa was for an all-through Primary model only, there was no need for additional spaces at Key Stage 2. The local authority had a statutory duty for school place planning and to ensure that any change of character to a school was not detrimental to surrounding schools.
- The RSC would not consider academising the school without the permission of the local authority. The Council could only agree to a like for like academisation which was not the offer from Bishop Luffa.

3.7 The Committee heard from Councillor Kate O'Kelly for Stedham Primary School, and Councillor Mike Magill for Compton and Up Marden C of E Primary school who were supportive of the proposals for the respective schools. The Committee was also supportive of the proposals concerning Stedham, Compton and Up Marden and Warninglid C of E Primary School.

3.8 The Committee considered the proposal for Clapham and Patching C of E Primary School as set out in the draft decision report. A revised recommendation was put forward as follows:

- The Committee does not believe that the DfE threshold for closure of rural schools is met for Clapham and Patching C of E Primary School and that the Covid-19 crisis is placing unprecedented

pressure on the County Council, schools, teachers, parents and children. It therefore recommends that:

- Cabinet rejects the proposal to close Clapham and Patching C of E Primary School, Clapham, Worthing
- The Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) is asked to explore the academisation option with SDET as soon as is practical given the Covid-19 Crisis.

3.9 The proposed revised recommendation was carried based on a majority vote, with 9 members voting for, 4 against and 2 abstentions.

3.10 The Committee considered the proposal for Rumboldswyke C of E Infant School as set out in the draft decision report. A revised recommendation was put forward as follows:

- The Committee considers that as closure of **Rumboldswyke C of E Infant School, Chichester**, would make subsequent academisation impossible, and in light of the Covid-19 crisis, that now is not the time to close the school. The Committee recommends that the Cabinet should therefore decline the closure of Rumboldswyke C of E Infant School, Chichester.

3.11 The proposed revised recommendation was carried based on a majority vote, with 7 voting for, 5 against and 1 abstention.

3.12 Resolved – that the Committee:

1. Does not believe that the DfE threshold for closure of rural schools is met for **Clapham and Patching C of E Primary School** and that the Covid-19 crisis is placing unprecedented pressure on the County Council, schools, teachers, parents and children. It therefore recommends that:
 - Cabinet rejects the proposal to close Clapham and Patching C of E Primary School, Clapham, Worthing
 - The Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) is asked to explore the academisation option with SDET as soon as is practical given the Covid-19 Crisis.
2. The Committee considers that as closure of **Rumboldswyke C of E Infant School, Chichester**, would make subsequent academisation impossible, and in light of the Covid-19 crisis, that now is not the time to close the school. The Committee recommends that the Cabinet should therefore decline the closure of Rumboldswyke C of E Infant School, Chichester.
3. The Committee supports the recommendation to request County Council Officers to continue to work with Governors of **Stedham Primary School** and Harting CE Primary School to progress the Federation Action Plan towards a hard federation by January 2021. The Committee commented that there may be need for some flexibility in timing given the current Covid-19 crisis.

4. The Committee supports the recommendation to request County Council officers continue to work with governors to progress proposals for the federation of **Compton and Up Marden CE Primary School, Compton** with an appropriate partner.
5. The Committee supports the recommendation to issue prescribed alteration notices for the relocation of **Warninglid Primary School, Warninglid, Haywards Heath** to a new site in Pease Pottage Crawley, by September 2021 (subject to developers completing in June 2021) and implement the proposals submitted by Warninglid Primary School and at least one other partner to Federate.

4. Forward Plan of Key Decisions

4.1 The Committee considered an extract of the Forward Plan dated 1 April.

4.2 Resolved that the Committee notes the Forward Plan.

5. Possible Items for Future Scrutiny

5.1 The following issues were put forward by the Committee for consideration for the Business Planning Group:

- The establishment of a Children's Trust.
- The support for care leavers in the context of Covid-19
- Care Leavers Strategy
- Help for school governors.

5.2 Jacquie Russell, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People advised the Committee the establishment of a Memorandum of Understanding in respect of the Children's Trust would be brought to the Committee at the appropriate time. The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People also advised the service were working on a revised Children Looked After Strategy and this would include the introduction of a care leavers covenant. She added that the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) were dealing with the distribution of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to children's homes and other settings, and the executive team and Cabinet colleagues were lobbying for additional supplies of PPE.

5.3 Resolved that the items identified above be scheduled where necessary for consideration by the Committee's Business Planning Group.

6. Date of Next Meeting

6.1 The next meeting of the Committee would be held on 4 June 2020.

The meeting ended at 5.02 pm

Chairman