

Appendix 6

Deputations

Two deputations were received. The first, from Ms Donna Fine, made to the Cabinet meeting of 2 September 2013, sought the extension of the consultation period. The Cabinet listened to Ms Fine's concerns but was unable to accede to the request.

The second deputation was received on Thursday 12 September 2013 requesting that the Select Committee suspend the consultation. At the Select Committee meeting on 17 September, the deputation was put forward by Rosie Wait, Chair of Governors of Sullivan Primary School and Dr Philip Cross, Headteacher of Hurlingham & Chelsea Secondary School. The Chairman noted that there was not a report before the Committee for that meeting and no decision as yet to scrutinise, but it was resolved that: the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and the Cabinet Member for Education would discuss the comments made and send a joint response within seven days and the minutes of the meeting be submitted as part of the consultation. The minutes follow.

EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

17 SEPTEMBER 2013

EXTRACT OF MINUTES - DEPUTATION

The Chairman welcomed the large turnout of members of the public to the meeting who were attending for the deputation. The deputation was received on 12 September which related to the proposals for the amalgamation of New King's Primary and Sullivan Primary Schools. The Chairman agreed to accept the deputation. He noted that there was not a report before the Committee for that meeting and no decision as yet to scrutinise. However the minutes of the meeting would be sent in as part of the consultation.

The lead organiser of the deputation, Rosie Wait, Chair of Sullivan Primary School, put forward the deputation as follows:

"We request the Select Committee suspend the current consultation on the closure of Sullivan School and the transfer of pupils to New King's School

- (1) New King's, ahead of its publication, were unfairly able to influence the key aspects and conditions of the proposal
- (2) consultation mixes up a series of issues which warrant a separate consultation
- (3) information is inadequate, misleading and lacking in transparency."

For the remaining time allocated to the delivery of her deputation, Rosie Wait requested that Dr Phil Cross, Headteacher of Hurlingham and Chelsea School, address the Committee, which was agreed by the Chairman. As part of his speech, Dr Cross made the following points:

- he was concerned that this had become a much wider issue than one affecting the immediate community of Sullivan Primary School.
- the three key problems set out in the deputation were a barrier to address the question what needed to be done in the best interests of primary school children of Sullivan and Fulham.
- having addressed that question it would be reasonable for the Council to think of further opportunities to help deliver the Council's policies.
- the parents and staff of the school were concerned about the future of the children in their care and staff were concerned about their careers and jobs in the future.
- many headteachers and their staff across the borough were concerned about the implications and the manner in which the proposals had progressed. He noted that it was widely agreed that the closure was not on the basis of standards. At least 20 headteachers had written to the headteacher of Sullivan Primary School to express their concern, shock and support against the closure. It was unprecedented for professionals to come together in this way. So it had to be questioned why this was happening.
- It should be asked how this situation could be rectified and how solutions could be sought; there was a need to unite not divide.
- New King's Primary were able to contribute to the proposal sent out by the Council and set out its vision. The vision of Sullivan Primary and other schools were missing. He felt this was not the basis for encouraging a positive and informed consultation.
- He commented that the consultation invited people to vote for the closure because the Council would gain from it, in reference to the Fulham Boys Free School proposal. The community and Sullivan Primary had the right to take part in the consultation on this other proposal.
- Many staff and governors want to get together to look at other proposals for the Sullivan pupils and also to meet the needs of the schools of choice agenda.
- Implications to the other schools did not appear to be included in the Council proposal for Fulham.

In summing up, Dr Cross asked for more time and further opportunity to work together to agree a way forward to benefit the children, which was a key part in what they did. He asked for an opportunity to do this in a calmer environment where everyone could be heard without one group having an advantage.

The Chairman commented that the Committee's remit was also looking at the best interests of the children. He invited questions from Members of the Committee to be put to the deputation organisers.

Councillor Phibbs commented that it was right to be concerned that the proposals benefited all children and had to benefit children at Sullivan Primary. In reference to the proposal of New King's converting to academy status in partnership with

Thomas' Day Schools, he asked whether the deputation organisers had spoken to Thomas' Day Schools about the proposed new arrangements and whether they knew the details. The Chair of Sullivan Primary School Governing Body responded that she was familiar with Thomas' Day Schools and had listened to the speeches made at the consultation open meetings. However what was lacking was how the vision would benefit New King's and Sullivan; Thomas' did not have the experience as the schools had with their own pupils.

Dr Cross also commented that it had been reported that parents have been lobbied for New King's to become a feeder school to the new free school. The Chairman responded that as the Committee did not have a report before it that it could analyse, it needed facts in order to discuss the issues, and that the free school was not part of the consultation. Rosie Wait replied that the free school was part of the consultation.

In respect of the consultation, Councillor Needham asked what they thought the main gaps were in the consultation document. Rosie Wait responded that the document was full of gaps; in order to understand the proposals the school had to ask through Freedom of the Information (FOI) requests for information. There was no other information other than the consultation document. The Executive Director disputed the comments made that the local authority lacked vision towards schools in Fulham. He reiterated the vision outlined in the school organisation report, which was developed before the proposals were brought forward and looked at the calculation and prediction for likely demand going forward for school places. The calculation was based on birth rates, the demand for places and analysis of the places available. The projection of demand was set out in the consultation document up to the year 2016; there was a prediction of the need for 134 additional places and already 120 places have been put in place. For this year, the demand for places had been met and there was also a small surplus. Therefore it was disputed that the Council had not done work on the demand for places.

Councillor Binmore noted that there have been over 900 responses received already in respect of the consultation; the consultation met the Department for Education (DfE) guidelines and the format of the consultation was one that had previously been used. In response to the question from the Chairman whether the number of responses was a number to be expected, it was noted that this was a high level of response for this type of consultation. Councillor Cooney reported that the "Frequently Asked Questions" (FAQs) on the consultation website were constantly updated; the more questions asked, the more FAQs were added.

A member of the public, who was a parent in the borough and also a governor at the Fulham Boys School (FBS), commented that hundreds of parents have come forward asking for more choice for secondary schooling and for a single sex secondary school. He noted this consultation was independent of the FBS proposal.

The FBS were collecting support for the FBS proposal which had nothing to do with the primary school merger.

Sue Fennimore responded to these comments noting that the consultation document referred that if a site became available then it would be given to FBS. She also asked why governors of Sullivan were not informed of the proposals and asked where this left other school governors across the borough in respect of making strategic decisions. Andrew Christie referred to the FAQs which indicated that officers sought conversations with the school's governors; they were approached on three occasions over the past few years. Officers met with the New King's governing body on 2 July and then returned on 8 July to explain the proposal, having already made arrangements to meet with Sullivan's governing body on 9 July.

Councillor Binmore reported that the FBS had been given permission to go ahead with establishing a free school. The FBS free school did not have a site and should the proposals go ahead then a site would be made available. She emphasised that they were still in the middle of a 12 week consultation so these were proposals. She also noted that the DfE had indicated the availability of £13.5 million funding should the site become available. She thought it was open and transparent to include this information in the consultation document. Councillor Binmore also stressed that there were over 30% of school places empty and as a result of the proposed amalgamation only 15 places would go. A member of the public asked why the consultation was included on the FBS website and the Chairman responded that he did not know why.

In relation to the Thomas' Day School proposal, Councillor Phibbs asked if someone from Thomas' could attend a meeting to discuss whether children at Sullivan Primary would get a better education as result of the proposal. Rosie Wait responded that Thomas' was not part of the consultation so they should not be concerned about that now – she was concerned about the school closing.

Councillor Binmore commented that the Council was concerned about the overall interest of children in the borough. She noted that now over 70% of residents chose and got places for their children at schools in the Borough.

The Chairman concluded that it was not within the Committee's remit to suspend the consultation but it could refer the request to the Cabinet Member to consider the issues put forward and would ask for a response. Councillor Binmore responded that as Cabinet Member for Children's Services, which had overall statutory responsibility for children's services which included education, she would discuss with Councillor Cooney and send a joint response within seven days.

RESOLVED THAT:

- (1) the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and the Cabinet Member for Education to discuss the comments made and send a joint response within seven days; and
- (2) the minutes of the meeting be submitted as part of the consultation.