

EDUCATION, CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY PANEL

MINUTES OF A MEETING of the Education, Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel held on Thursday, 15 September 2011 at 6:00pm in the Civic Offices, Portsmouth.

(NB These minutes should be read in conjunction with the agenda for the meeting)

Present

Councillors: Steve Wemyss (Chair)
Paula Riches (Vice Chair)
Margaret Adair
Lee Mason
Caroline Scott

Sion Reynolds, Teachers Liaison Panel

Also present

Mike Smith, Head teacher, City of Portsmouth Boys' School
Julian Wooster, Strategic Director, Children's Services
Di Mitchell, Head of Education
Mike Stoneman, 16-19 Strategy and Commissioning Manager
Stewart Agland, Local Democracy Manager
Neil Stevenson, Admissions, Exclusions & Reintegration Manager
Helen Handley, Information & Development Manager
André Merel, Information Services, Children, Families & Learning

37 Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 1)

Councillor Steve Wemyss declared a personal and non-prejudicial interest in that three years ago he had unsuccessfully applied for a place for his son at Springfield School.

Councillor Paula Riches declared a personal and non-prejudicial interest as she is an appointed governor of Highbury College.

Mike Stoneman declared a personal interest in that he has two children attending Springfield School and two younger children attending feeder schools.

André Merel declared a personal interest having one child at a feeder school to Springfield.

The above officers having declared their interests were advised to leave after providing information and answering questions in connection with the report on the High Level Review of Pupil Places presented to the panel and

before consideration of the item at minute number 41.

38 Apologies for Absence (AI 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Peter Eddis.

39 Minutes of the meetings held on 8 July 2011(AI 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 July be approved as a correct record.

40 High level review of pupil places in Portsmouth (secondary and primary) (AI 5)

Mike Stoneman, 16-19 Strategy and Commissioning Manager, introduced his report which contained information on current and predicted demand for primary and secondary school places in Portsmouth.

Mike explained that there was currently 11.5% surplus capacity in the primary sector. The surplus was predicted to reduce to 4.6% by 2015/16 and rise to 6% by 2021/22. The current year R is facing significant pressure with 30 schools full and limited available school places concentrated in the north and south of the city. Current capacity might not be sufficient to meet projected numbers.

In the secondary sector the surplus capacity was expected to remain high and increase from a current level of 13.5% to 17.4% in 2013/14 but to fall to 6% by 2020/21. Surplus capacity is particularly high at the Charter Academy, City of Portsmouth Boys', King Richard and Mayfield Schools. For the foreseeable future, only a limited number of surplus places were predicted at Miltoncross, Priory and St Edmund's Catholic Schools. Springfield and Admiral Lord Nelson Schools were forecast to remain full.

Surplus capacity in both sectors is unevenly distributed due to the popularity of some schools compared to others.

In response to questions from the panel, the following points were discussed and clarified:

It was explained that the surplus secondary places at the northern end of the city in the City of Portsmouth Boys' School, King Richard and Mayfield were not due to a lower housing density but were more to do with the popularity of particular schools.

Regarding the numbers of pupils living in the city but attending schools outside the city, the question was asked whether significant numbers of Roman Catholic pupils opted to go to Oaklands RC School rather than St Edmund's. Mike Stoneman explained that a Catholic primary school in the north of the city was a feeder school to Oaklands and some children from there may transfer to Oaklands. However, the surplus at St Edmund's was not large compared to other schools.

Mike Stoneman referred to the fact that a number of Portsmouth pupils attended Hampshire schools, e.g. Purbrook Park, Cowplain Community School and Crookhorn College of Technology and pointed out that there was increasing pressure on Hampshire Schools. Therefore, in future, it was likely that the option for Portsmouth pupils to attend these schools would not continue to be available and this could exacerbate pressure on Portsmouth schools.

Julian Wooster, Strategic Director, Children's Services, reminded the panel of the plans for education provision in the north of the city. He advised that there were plans for City Boys' to become a University Technical College (UTA) and a bid had been made for funding in cooperation with Portsmouth University. He also reminded the panel that a bid had also been prepared for the re-building of King Richard School and it was expected that the result of the bid application would be known by the end of December.

Regarding potential future housing developments in the north of the city, the question was asked about the reliability of the predicted pupil numbers in the city in future years. André Merel, Information Services, Children, Families & Learning, explained that the figures were only a prediction. Smaller housing developments happened more quickly and yielded fewer pupils.

In reply to Councillor Wemyss's comment about some differences between predicted pupil places given by the Planning Officer and figures given by Children's Services, André explained that essentially the figures come from the same source but Children's Services take account of the type of housing in order to predict the likely numbers of pupils.

At this point at 6:30pm, the following officers left the meeting: Mike Stoneman, André Merel, Helen Handley and Neil Stevenson.

41 Evidence from the Head Teacher of the City of Portsmouth Boys' School (AI 4)

Mike Smith, Head Teacher City of Portsmouth Boys' School, explained that the capital bid for City Boys' to become a University Technical Academy (UTA) had been prepared and that if the bid was successful the school was very likely to become a co-educational school. However, it would not become a catchment area school. If the bid did not turn out to be successful, he believed that the school had a long term future as a sustainable single sex school.

The head teacher then went on to explain the recent achievements of the school. In the past, the school had not demonstrated any good reason to parents for choosing the school apart from the fact that they wanted single sex education. Therefore, more recently, the need to persuade parents to make an active choice to send their boys to the school had been recognised. The school now had the third best examination results in the city and the results were better than the majority of co-educational schools in the city. The last Ofsted report had judged the school to be “good”.

The current year 7 cohort was 120 and was the highest number of new entrants. It was anticipated that over the next 4-5 years year 7 cohorts would increase and reach figures closer to the Planned Admission Number (PAN).

The possibility of the school becoming co-educational was suggested to the Local Authority (LA) some years ago but this did not happen because the idea was rejected by the LA. The school governors currently took the view that the school should remain a single sex boys’ school.

In response to questions from the panel the following points were discussed and clarified.

Councillor Riches asked if it would be possible for the school to remain a single sex school if the bid to become a UTA were successful. Mr Smith explained that it was unlikely that the University would accept that suggestion. He also stated that co-education was not the direction in which the majority of the school governors wished to go.

Councillor Riches commented that if City Boys’ were to become co-educational, then City Girls’ would be the only single sex school in the city and therefore a re-appraisal of education provision in the city would be necessary.

Julian Wooster referred to the need to take account of Government policy to promote more diverse education provision and therefore more choice, hence the commitment to free schools and academies etc. The role of the LA was expected to be more strategic and less directional. Julian also warned that the current economic environment and the resultant capital constraints should also be taken into consideration.

In reply to a question regarding the number of parents choosing the school because they prefer single sex education, Mr Smith commented that he believed that parents choose City Boys’ because they want the best education for their children.

Councillor Mason commented that parents of boys living on the Highbury estate can opt for City Boys' if they are not successful in gaining a place at Springfield but parents of girls do not have this option. Therefore, if the City Boys' bid to become a co-educational UTA is not successful this could have a negative impact on the problem of excess demand for places at Springfield. He further commented that south Cosham and Tipner were areas which were more remote from secondary schools.

The head teacher concurred with this analysis. However, he pointed out that many parents put City Boys' as their first preference school, especially parents living on the Highbury estate and that City Boys' is closer in terms of distance.

He added that many parents all over the city were now choosing City Boy's school because the exam results had improved significantly. He pointed out that if City Boys' were to become co-educational the option of single sex education for boys would be removed for the whole city. In his view, the best solution would be to improve the quality of education in the other schools in the north of the city and that would relieve pressure on Springfield.

There was a discussion on the type of education to be provided at UTAs. Julian Wooster explained that whilst the school would be focussing on maths, science and technology, it would still have to provide the full range of national curriculum subjects up to the age of 16.

Sion Reynolds asked for clarification on ownership if the school were to become a UTA. It was explained that in that case ownership would pass from the LA to the academy sponsor and the University of Portsmouth.

Councillor Wemyss commented that the City of Portsmouth Boys' School becoming a co-educational UTA would go some way towards alleviating the problems with excess demand for places at Springfield. However, if the bid failed, then the City Council would have to consider alternatives. Mike Smith commented that he believed the bid had a 20% chance of success, as this was in a competitive bidding environment.

Councillor Wemyss further commented that if the UTA bid was not successful, the panel might consider referring the matter to the Cabinet Member for Children and Education for decision with the suggestion that, in the light of the improving results at the City of Portsmouth Boys' School changing its status to co-educational could alleviate the pressure for places at Springfield.

Finally, the head teacher reminded the panel that the admissions process for the academic year 2012/13 was under way and that the closing date for parents to submit applications for secondary school places expressing their preferences was 31 October. He was concerned that discussions about the future of the city's schools in advance of that date might compromise the admissions process. This was agreed by the panel.

RESOLVED that the presentation of the panel’s review of admissions to Springfield School be deferred to the Council meeting on 15 November 2011, so that publication, once concluded, does not potentially compromise this year’s secondary schools admission process, the application deadline for which is 31 October 2011.

42 Date of Next Meeting (AI 6)

RESOLVED that the next meeting be held in October at a date to be arranged.

The meeting closed at 7:35pm.

Chairman