

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL
CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS COMMITTEE

5.00PM – 6 NOVEMBER 2006

BRIGHTON TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Hawkes (Chair); Councillors McCaffery (Deputy Chair), Brown (OS), Bennett, Hazelgrove, Hyde, John, Kemble, Mallender and Norman.

PART ONE

ACTION

23. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

23A. Declarations of Substitutes

23.1 There were no declarations of Substitute Members.

23B. Declarations of Interest

23.2 There were none.

23C. Exclusion of Press and Public

23.3 The Committee considered whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of any items contained in the agenda, having regard to the nature of the business to be transacted and the nature of the proceedings and the likelihood as to whether, if members of the press and public were present, there would be disclosure to them of confidential or exempt information as defined in Section 100A(3) or 100 I of the Local Government Act 1972.

23.4 **RESOLVED** - That the press and public be not excluded from the meeting during consideration of any of the items on the agenda.

24. MINUTES

24.1 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2006 be approved and signed by the Chair.

25. CALLOVER

25.1 **RESOLVED** - That, with the exception of the items reserved (and marked with an asterisk), the recommendations and resolutions contained therein be approved and adopted without debate excepting Notices of Motion, Deputations, Petitions and Letters which are reserved automatically.

26. CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

- 26.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the procedure for the meeting. She noted that there was one public question in relation to Item No.28 and that Councillors Allen and Theobald had asked to address the committee. She intended to call them after the introduction of the Secondary Admissions Review report by the Assistant Director as she felt this would enable the ensuing debate to take account of the various points raised.

The Chair then called on Mr Craggs to put his question.

27. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

- 27.1 Mr Craggs thanked the committee for enabling him to put his question and asked the following in relation to the secondary admissions proposals:

“The proposals have as one of their key objectives that children should attend their local schools. Under the proposed system there is a possibility that, in the event of over-subscription of the nearest school, the catchment area-wide ballot could result in some children being sent to a school on the other side of the catchment areas (e.g. Patcham to Falmer). Surely, this would be a perverse outcome that must be avoided. Can the proposals therefore be amended to guarantee that this does not happen?”

- 27.2 The Chair thanked Mr Craggs for his question and responded by stating that parents had a right to express three preferences for their child's secondary school. This was a variable that no secondary admissions process could predict. Consequently there would always be a possibility that any secondary school could be oversubscribed. In the event of oversubscription some parents would be unsuccessful in their first choice, which would result in their child attending another school, often further away than the first choice. This made it impossible to guarantee that no child would be required to travel to the other school in their catchment area.

- 27.3 The proposals included a request for the council to ask the secondary schools for some flexibility should oversubscription be less than 15 students per school. This request was based on the desired intention to reduce the need for oversubscription criteria to be used. This may not reduce the possibility of children having to attend the second school within their catchment area, but should reduce the number of children having to travel further distances, as happened now across the city.

- 27.4 Mr Craggs noted the response and took the opportunity to ask a supplementary question:

“The report before you today states that an alternative ‘Nodal’ system was rejected because, while offering improvements for certain areas of the city, this was only at the direct expense of others. To what extent has the Working Group tested the current proposals against the criterion to systematically ensure that the proposed system is not similarly at the expense of other areas, and in seeking ways of avoiding such inequalities did the Working Group consider alternative pairings of schools for catchment areas and what role did existing relationships between schools (such as

those fostered through the Excellence in Cities initiative), play in their decisions?”

- 27.5 The Chair thanked Mr Craggs for the question and stated that she had not been a part of the Working Group, but hoped that consideration had been given to the points raised. She was confident that in introducing the report, the Assistant Director would be able to show that the points had been considered and what the conclusions had been e.g. in respect of the ‘nodal’ system. She therefore suggested that it would be appropriate to move to the consideration of the report.

***28. SECONDARY ADMISSIONS REVIEW**

- 28.1 The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children’s Services seeking agreement to the Secondary Admissions Policy for determining the allocation of places at Secondary Schools in September 2008 (for copy see minute book).

- 28.2 The Assistant Director introduced the report and stated that the local education authority had a duty to ensure its admissions arrangements took account of parents’ right to state their preferred school, whilst balancing that preference with the number of places available at popular schools. The system used to fulfil this duty needed to be easily understood and as consistent as it could be in the light of fluctuating circumstances each year. As a result of parental concern over the distance measurement system used for secondary schools, a working group was established in July 2005 to review the arrangements for the city. The Working Group reported back to the Children, Families & Schools (CFS) Committee in January 2006 and it was agreed that further work should be undertaken in conjunction with the parent stakeholder group, with a view to recommending any changes to the admission arrangements to take effect in September 2008.

- 28.3 The new working group and strengthened parent stakeholder group began meeting in March 2006 and reviewed the existing evidence and during April, May and June considered a range of possible approaches to the admissions arrangements. In addition a number of public meetings were held throughout the city and officers attended various schools and group meetings to present the various models that were being considered. Three focus groups were also created and consulted on the models and the results of all of the consultations were fed back to the working group and parent stakeholder group.

- 28.4 Six key factors were taken into account when considering the various models, these being:

- Access to preferred schools
- Travelling distance
- Links between schools and communities
- Importance of meeting parental preference
- Increased opportunity for Year 6 children to transfer to a secondary school with their peers
- A better balance in the spread of children from deprived wards attending secondary schools.

- 28.5 The two groups then looked at the distribution of the schools across the city, taking into account the key factors for each school and its respective community, whilst recognising that some secondary schools would be over-subscribed. The various

models for admissions arrangements were then considered and the pros and cons for these weighed up in relation to the key factors. Having undertaken this exercise the groups concluded that fixed catchment areas based on larger areas other than school boundaries offered the most effective means of meeting the key factors. The catchment areas identified took account of the geography of the city and the fact that certain areas could be regarded as single catchment areas and led to the following proposals:

- 28.6 Longhill as a single catchment area with Whitehawk being included;
Portslade Community College as a single catchment area;
Blatchington Mill and Hove Park as a dual catchment area;
Varndean and Dorothy Stringer as a dual catchment area; with the remainder of the BN25 post code area included;
Patcham High and Falmer as a dual catchment area; with the proviso that should Falmer become an academy the catchment area would be reviewed.
- 28.7 In identifying the catchment areas the working groups recognised that there were three main variables that would impact on these, i.e. the number of children who would gain a place at Cardinal Newman; the number of children who would transfer to different schools on the sibling link; and the right of parents to express a preference for any three schools within the city. In having regard to these variables the working groups felt that the sibling link should be kept initially but that from 2013 onwards it should only relate to the schools in the catchment areas. In terms of the preference system, it was felt that an equal preference system, as supported by the DfES, should be adopted for Brighton and Hove.
- 28.8 The groups were also keen to maintain the balance of free school meals across the schools, which was a factor in recommending the split of the BN25 post code area. The issue of over-subscription was also considered and it was agreed that in such circumstances an electronic ballot rather than distance measurement should be used for each catchment area. Similarly, an electronic ballot would be used in the event of over-subscription from outside the catchment area.
- 28.9 The Assistant Director stated that having considered a number of alternative models and taking into account that no one model would provide for 100% satisfaction, the working groups had brought forward their recommendations based on specific catchment areas. The recommendations sought to reduce travelling distances for children, provide for transfer with peer groups, enable parents to know the likely school their children would attend and provide a greater balance of provision in terms of those children in receipt of free school meals across all schools in the city. There was recognition of the possibility of Falmer becoming an academy and changes that could result. Overall he believed that the a great deal of work and effort had been put into bringing forward the proposals for a new secondary selection process for Brighton and Hove to be effective from September 2008 and wished to thank the members of the working groups for their time and commitment.
- 28.10 The Chair thanked the Assistant Director for his presentation of the report and before taking questions, stated that she wished to ask the two councillors who had requested the opportunity to address the committee to speak. She therefore called on Councillor Allen to address the committee.

- 28.11 Councillor Allen thanked the Chair for enabling him to attend the meeting and speak to the committee. He felt that there was a need to put forward the view of a number of parents in the Prestonville community who felt that the boundary for the catchment area was out of context and should relate to the actual ward boundary, i.e. along Dyke Road rather than the railway line. It was felt that the decision to use the railway line took no account of the distinct community that existed and the effect this had on that community which had strong links with Dorothy Stringer school. It was likely to result in children being separated from their peer groups, something which went against one of the key objectives, and could mean severe difficulties for children in having to get to Hove Park school. He stated that this was an unacceptable change with no choice being provided for those parents affected. He therefore asked that further consideration be given to the catchment boundary and that further consultation is undertaken before a final decision is taken.
- 28.12 The Chair thanked Councillor Allen for attending the meeting and noted the comments and then asked Councillor Theobald to address the committee.
- 28.13 Councillor Theobald thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the committee and stated that he wished to thank the Assistant Director for attending the recent meeting at Patcham High School. He stated that he and a number of parents were concerned about the consultation process and lack of notification about the public meetings, which had resulted in them having to attend meetings across the city rather than in Patcham. He had also been asked to raise the question as to why the two best performing schools and the two worst performing schools had been placed together in the same catchment areas. It was felt that the dual catchment area for Patcham High and Falmer was inappropriate and that there was more of a connection between Varndean and Patcham High should there be a need for a dual catchment area. It was also felt that children living outside of Varndean and Dorothy Stringer would have to travel across to Falmer, which had no direct transport link and would result in a journey of 4.5 miles. This would prevent children from being able to walk to school and would not provide the continuity of primary to secondary. He pointed out that the number of first preferences for Patcham High, Varndean and Dorothy Stringer were far higher than those for Falmer, and this meant people would not know which was going to be the likely school for their children to move onto and would also mean less chance of moving up with peer groups. He therefore asked that a further review be undertaken in respect of Patcham High and the possibility of having a single catchment area and the re-alignment of the catchment boundary.
- 28.14 The Chair thanked Councillor Theobald for attending the meeting and noted the comments. She noted that Councillor Mrs. Brown would be moving an amendment to the recommendations contained in the report and therefore wished to formally move the report and take any questions before calling on Councillor Mrs. Brown.
- 28.15 Councillor John noted that it was intended to hold a consultation period with the Secondary Schools and asked how long this would last and whether parents would have the opportunity to be involved in that process.
- 28.16 The Assistant Director stated that should the committee approve the recommendations, it was intended to hold a 6 week consultation period on the

proposals with the Secondary Schools. This would effectively end during the first full week of the Spring Term and would enable schools and governing bodies to meet and discuss matters. A further report would then be brought back to the committee in the New Year with a view to a final decision being reached by the 15 April 2007 for implementation in the Autumn of 2008.

- 28.17 Councillor Mallender queried how the waiting criteria and distance measurement would be change under the new proposals.
- 28.18 The Assistant Director informed the committee that the waiting list criteria remained the same and that the distance measurement would be replaced by a ballot.
- 28.19 The Chair noted that there were no further questions and therefore wished to record the committee's thanks to the Working Group and the Parent Stakeholder Group for their work and commitment to the review process, which she felt had been undertaken with understanding and integrity and was an excellent example of collaborative working. She then called on Councillor Mrs. Brown to move her amendment.
- 28.20 Councillor Mrs. Brown stated that she wished to support the Chair in her thanks to the Working Group and the Parent Stakeholder Group. She also wished to thank the Assistant Director for his work in supporting both groups and in enabling the review process and consultation exercise to work so successfully. It had been one of the largest consultation exercises undertaken and would hopefully be taken forward to the secondary schools as the next stage. It did mean that today's decision was not the end of the line for the review, and that both feedback from the schools and the points raised today would be considered and any fine tuning to the proposals brought back to the committee in the new year. She stated that the Conservative Group had some concerns with regard to the proposed catchment areas and their boundaries and would be raising these with the Assistant Director accordingly. For example, the Group did not believe there was a need fro a dual catchment area for Patcham High and Falmer, and there were concerns about the results of a ballot leading to children having to travel across to Falmer.
- 28.21 However, she welcomed the report and wished to formally move the following amendment to the recommendations contained in the report;

"That the recommendations under paragraph 2 of the report be amended to include an additional two recommendations listed as 2.1 and 2.2 and the existing recommendations be renumbered accordingly 2.3 to 2.10 as detailed below.

In addition, recommendation 2.2. in the report be amended so that the words "recommended" and "will then" are removed and the recommendation becomes 2.3 as detailed below:

2.1 That the Committee approves the proposed admissions policy set out in paragraphs 2.2 to 2.10 below in principle;

2.2 That a statutory consultation be undertaken with schools on the basis of those proposals for admissions arrangements from 2008 put forward by the

Working Group, including the fixed catchment areas set out in the appendices, recognising that these proposals may be amended in the light of that consultation, particularly in relation to the catchment area for Patcham High School;

2.3 That if Falmer becomes an academy, its catchment area be reviewed;

2.4 That the sibling link is changed to only apply within the designated fixed catchment areas from September 2013. After 2013 should families move out of a catchment area then the sibling link will cease. Should families be directed out of their catchment area then any sibling link, established by that move, will be retained;

2.5 That Brighton and Hove adopt an equal preference system as part of the oversubscription criteria from September 2008;

2.6 That an electronic ballot is used in the event of oversubscription within catchment areas, rather than distance measurement;

2.7 That a subsequent ballot is used in the event of oversubscription from outside of the catchment areas;

2.8 That in the event of a ballot being required, twins and other same age sibling combinations will be treated as a single ballot entry should their parents or carers wish it;

2.9 That this system will be reviewed in 2012 or earlier *if* there is a substantial increase in the number of young people living in city requiring secondary school places, or there is a significant shift in numbers within catchment areas; and

2.10 That the CYPT should negotiate with secondary schools annually to ensure that limited oversubscription (up to 15 students per school) within any catchment area should be addressed by the addition of extra places, for that year, rather than necessitate local students having to leave their identified catchment area.

28.22 The Chair noted the proposed amendment and stated that she wished to formally second the amendment. She hoped that this would enable the Working Group and the Parent Stakeholder Group to consider the points raised as part of the consultation process with the secondary schools. She also stated that whilst she understood the desire for Patcham High to have a single catchment area, as things stood she believed the dual catchment area with Falmer was appropriate. She was committed to Falmer becoming an Academy and was hopeful that this was more likely to become a reality and therefore the issue of the catchment areas would need to be reviewed.

28.23 Councillor Mallender stated that he supported the amendment and having received a significant number of emails in last few days on the issue was hopeful that a suitable resolution to the matter would be found.

28.24 Councillor McCaffery stated that she favoured the amendment and wished to recognise the work of the Working Group and the Parent stakeholder Group. She believed that the recommendations in relation to school admissions offered a way forward and would be an improvement on the admissions process that currently

operated. She hoped that following the next consultation process, the recommendations would take account of the points raised at the present meeting and that consideration would be given to the issue of travel for those children having to attend schools across the city.

- 28.25 Councillor Kemble stated that he wished to thank the officers involved and the Assistant Director in particular for his work and commitment over the last year in facilitating the review and enabling the recommendations to come forward. He hoped that the next stage of the process would see some further changes but noted that a final decision and admission scheme that was approved in the new year would not meet everyone's desires. However, he believed that everyone involved to date and the committee were working consensually with the benefit of education in the city in mind.
- 28.26 Councillor Norman also wished to offer his thanks to the officers and members of the Working Group and Parent Stakeholder Group. He was aware that a number of differences had existed at the beginning of the process but that everyone had worked to resolve those differences and to bring forward a set of proposals that benefited the vast majority of people in the city.
- 28.27 The Chair noted the comments and stated that she fully concurred with the sentiments.
- 28.28 Councillor Mrs. Hyde stated that she was concerned about the proposed split of the BN25 post code and the Whitehawk pupils at Longhill School, bearing in mind the recent results at the school when compared to Varndean and Dorothy Stringer. She felt that there had to be a concern as to the ability of Longhill to deliver an educational programme and educational environment suitable to enable pupils from a deprived area to succeed. She therefore hoped that this concern would be looked at during the next stage of the review process.
- 28.29 Councillor Hazelgrove stated that he wished to pay tribute to the members of the Working Group and the Parent Stakeholder Group, as a member of the Working Group he had been able to see the commitment to finding a solution first hand. He noted that the opportunity for the Academy to be brought on-line earlier than had been anticipated was something to be taken into account and welcomed and could alter the question of catchment areas for Patcham and Falmer.
- 28.30 The Chair noted the comments and having confirmed the amendment; put the revised recommendations to the committee for approval.
- 28.31 **RESOLVED –**
- (1) That the Committee approves the proposed admissions policy set out in paragraphs 2.2 to 2.10 below in principle;
 - (2) That a statutory consultation be undertaken with schools on the basis of those proposals for admissions arrangements from 2008 put forward by the Working Group, including the fixed catchment areas set out in the appendices, recognising that these proposals may be amended in the light of that consultation, particularly in relation to the catchment area for Patcham High

School;

- (3) That if Falmer becomes an academy, its catchment area be reviewed;
- (4) That the sibling link is changed to only apply within the designated fixed catchment areas from September 2013. After 2013 should families move out of a catchment area then the sibling link will cease. Should families be directed out of their catchment area then any sibling link, established by that move, will be retained;
- (5) That Brighton and Hove adopt an equal preference system as part of the oversubscription criteria from September 2008;
- (6) That an electronic ballot is used in the event of oversubscription within catchment areas, rather than distance measurement;
- (7) That a subsequent ballot is used in the event of oversubscription from outside of the catchment areas;
- (8) That in the event of a ballot being required, twins and other same age sibling combinations will be treated as a single ballot entry should their parents or carers wish it;
- (9) That this system will be reviewed in 2012 or earlier *if* there is a substantial increase in the number of young people living in city requiring secondary school places, or there is a significant shift in numbers within catchment areas; and
- (10) That the CYPT should negotiate with secondary schools annually to ensure that limited oversubscription (up to 15 students per school) within any catchment area should be addressed by the addition of extra places, for that year, rather than necessitate local students having to leave their identified catchment area.

29. TARGETED CAPITAL FUND 2008-2009

29.1 The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children's Services seeking approval to progress a bid to the DfES Targeted Capital Fund in respect of extensions at Blatchington Mill School and Hove Park School (for copy see minute book).

29.2 RESOLVED –

- (1) That the Director of Children's Services be authorised to submit a bid to the 2007 round of the Target Capital Fund (TCF) in respect of work at Blatchington Mill School and Hove Park Upper School; and
- (2) That a further report, dealing with affordability issues, be put to the Policy & Resources Committee in the event of the bid to the TCF being successful prior to acceptance of the funding.

30. SCHOOL GOVERNANCE ISSUES

30.1 The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children’s Services setting out the decisions of the consultative meeting for the appointment of LA governors which met on Thursday, 11 May 2006 and reporting on governor recruitment and retention (for copy see minute book).

30.2 RESOLVED –

(1) That the decisions made at the consultative meeting for the appointment of LA governors on the 11 May 2006 by the Director of Children, Families & Schools in consultation with the Chair, Deputy Chair and Opposition Spokesperson as set out in Appendix B to the report be noted; and

(2) That the resultant changes to governing bodies be noted.

31. ITEMS TO GO FORWARD TO COUNCIL

31.1 No items were identified under this item.

The meeting concluded at 6.25pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

2007