

## **Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 10 May 2011**

### **Present:-**

<b>Members of the Committee</b>	Councillor Peter Balaam “ Robin Hazelton “ Julie Jackson “ Tilly May “ Mike Perry “ Clive Rickhards “ Carolyn Robbins “ John Ross “ June Tandy (Chair)
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<b>Invited Representatives</b>	Diana Turner (Governor Representative) Max Hyde (Teacher Representative)
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<b>Invited Guests:</b>	Andrew Clay (Headteacher, Ash Green School)
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<b>Other County Councillors</b>	Councillor Richard Chattaway Councillor Heather Timms (Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Families)
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<b>Officers</b>	Mark Gore, Head of Service – Learning and Achievement Yvonne Rose, Service Manager – Learning and Achievement Jane Pollard, Democratic Services Manager Richard Maybey, Assistant to Political Group
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### **1. General**

#### **(1) Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Carol Fox, Councillor Bob Hicks (signatory to the call-in), Joseph Cannon, Rex Pogson and Chris Smart

#### **(2) Members Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests**

Councillor Julie Jackson declared a personal interest as a Governor of Oakwood Special Schools and as her daughter currently uses post-16 transport.

Councillor Carolyn Robbins declared a personal interest as her grandson currently uses post-16 transport.

### **2. Statutory Proposal to Establish Post 16 Provision of Ash Green School from September 2011**

The Chair introduced the item under discussion and confirmed the options available to the Committee under the Council's Call-in procedure.

2.1 Mark Gore summarised the position of the authority and the rationale for its recommendations to Cabinet. Key points included:

- (a) Officers do recognise that Ash Green School (AGS) is a good school that has rapidly improved and delivered outstanding results.
- (b) However, they have to take a wider view and ensure that decisions regarding 6<sup>th</sup> form provision are made in the best interests of the area, not just the individual school.
- (c) Given the existing local 6<sup>th</sup> form provision, officers do not believe there is an objective case for further provision at AGS.
- (d) There is a risk that AGS will not achieve the outcomes desired for young people because the curriculum offer is relatively limited.
- (e) The funding available from the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) for post-16 provision is decreasing, and a small 6<sup>th</sup> form such as AGS will find it hard to benefit from economies of scale.
- (f) The capital investment proposals of AGS are very small in comparison to the investments made at Etone Community School and St Thomas More School, which calls into question if AGS can provide the best possible facilities.
- (g) National and local evidence suggests that small 6<sup>th</sup> forms (those with fewer than 300 pupils) are less successful.
- (h) Teaching the post-16 curriculum is very different from teaching Key Stage 3 and 4, so there is no guarantee that the school's current teaching standards will transition through to the 6<sup>th</sup> form.
- (i) Warwickshire needs strong and viable post-16 provision. If a 6<sup>th</sup> form was granted at AGS, it would prompt similar applications from other schools. Increasing the number of post-16 providers would weaken the system as a whole and lessen the curriculum choices available to students.

2.2 Councillor Heather Timms, Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Families, stated that Cabinet had taken a strategic area-based view of post-16 provision and judged that it was currently sufficient. She confirmed that the Schools Adjudicator will be asked to review this provision to ensure it meets the needs of local people.

2.3 Mr Andrew Clay, headteacher of AGS, presented his arguments in favour of the proposal, which included the following points:

- i. AGS is a rapidly improving school, and many pupils want to continue their education there.
- ii. Nuneaton and Bedworth are separate towns that should not be viewed as one area; the officer report places the needs of neighbouring institutions above those of the local community in South Bedworth.
- iii. The school was not given sufficient time to respond to the officers' concerns regarding the AGS proposal.
- iv. The proposal is fully costed to deliver a capacity of over 1000 places.
- v. The current curriculum at AGS is being changed following the launch of the English Baccalaureate to provide a wider choice of learning options for its more gifted students.

- vi. The school's 4-year budget plan shows that the 6th form will not draw resources away from the rest of the school.
- vii. The provision of a local 6<sup>th</sup> form will cut down student travel time and enable them to work part-time jobs, which is increasingly important given the removal of Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA).
- viii. The officer report is based on a premise that King Edward VI Sixth Form College will suffer if the AGS proposal goes ahead. However, this contradicts one of the authority's own commissioning principles, which states the needs of one institution should not be placed above those of young people.
- ix. The Audit Commission reports that larger 6<sup>th</sup> forms do better "on average" than smaller 6<sup>th</sup> forms. However, it also acknowledges that strong accountability plays a major factor in a school's success, so it can not be judged purely on pupil numbers.
- x. Although the curriculum choice at AGS would be fairly limited, it would still offer all but one of the subjects listed as entry requirements by the Russell Group of universities. The exception to this is French, which would be reviewed.
- xi. Bedworth has suffered too long with poor provision and should not be made to wait a further 12-18 months for a review.
- xii. As part of the consultation process, 348 families expressed their desire for a 6<sup>th</sup> form at AGS.

In response to specific questions from Members, Mr Clay confirmed that:

- xiii. AGS would aim to pool resources with the neighbouring President Kennedy School to offer specialist subjects such as politics and economics. There is an agreed process regarding the sharing of teaching resources and blocking of timetables to ensure no conflicts between the schools.
- xiv. The travel implications will be minimal, as President Kennedy School is less than 1 mile away and the AGS proposal makes provision for a minibus and a driver.
- xv. The consultation process was comprehensive, with parents, pupils and staff all having opportunity to respond. In total, 348 positive response cards were received in the first stage of the consultation, followed by 32 formal responses.
- xvi. The proposed admissions include a notional limit of 20 external students, which would prevent excessive numbers entering from other schools.

2.4 During the ensuing debate the following points were made

- (a) Cabinet has not explained how the AGS proposal failed to meet its own principles for commissioning post-16 education.
- (b) Cabinet has not fully taken into account the evidence and arguments that support the 9 commissioning principles, such as:
  - i. The overwhelming support from parents and students, which is acknowledged within the officer report.
  - ii. The widening of choice for young people in the local area, many of whom have to travel in order to access post-16 education.
  - iii. The opportunity for increased take-up of post-16 education in Bedworth.

- iv. The outstanding performance of the school, which has the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest CVA score in Warwickshire and which is placed in the top 1% of schools nationally by the Fisher Family trust.
  - v. The benefits of continuity for pupils from deprived backgrounds as they progress from year 9 through to year 13.
  - vi. The AGS proposal supports sustainable transport, which is acknowledged within the officer report.
  - vii. There is no evidence that AGS will not offer value for money. Cabinet needs to be consistent in its decision-making – if Nuneaton schools are able to have their 6<sup>th</sup> forms, Bedworth should be able to as well.
  - viii. AGS believes it will be able to attract and retain high-quality teachers, thereby improving the local skill base.
  - ix. Local institutions have expressed their interest in exploring partnership and collaborative arrangements with AGS.
- (c) The perceived negative impact on King Edward VI Sixth Form College is more likely to be caused by the new 6<sup>th</sup> forms opening at Etone School, St Thomas More and the Nuneaton Academy.
  - (d) It is unfair on the pupils of AGS that the authority's aim of stopping the fragmentation of post-16 education should start with them.
  - (e) The response to the consultation indicates that there is strong local demand for a 6<sup>th</sup> form at AGS.
  - (f) There is a clear commitment to make 6<sup>th</sup> form provision a success at AGS, evidenced by the proposals and the headteacher's contribution to the meeting.
  - (g) Warwickshire County Council employs professional officers to guide Elected Members down the right path for such decisions, and their advice is to reject the proposal.
  - (h) There is a limit on the number of 6<sup>th</sup> forms that can viably serve the number of pupils who wish to attend; the more fragmented and diluted the system becomes, the weaker it becomes.
  - (i) The school's performance should be judged after 3 years, not 1.
  - (j) Accepting the AGS proposal could set a precedent, resulting in similar applications from other schools, which could further fragment the system.
  - (k) The AGS proposal indicates that there is limited demand for even the core curriculum subjects, so it would need to consider federated provision for more than just the specialist subjects in order to make class sizes viable.
  - (l) AGS would have not just a "small" 6<sup>th</sup> form, but a "tiny" 6<sup>th</sup> form, which would risk setting children back 2 years in their educational development.
  - (m) Provision may be feasible in future years, but with the current planned admission numbers, there is a risk that the 6<sup>th</sup> form would fail.

**Councillor Julie Jackson, seconded by Councillor June Tandy, moved that the matter be referred to Full Council.**

With 4 votes in favour and 5 against, the motion was **lost**.

**Councillor John Ross, seconded by Councillor Carolyn Robbins, moved that the matter be referred back to Cabinet with the advice that the Committee supports the decisions made by the Cabinet.**

With 5 votes in favour and 4 against, the motion was **carried**.

The Chair thanked members, representatives and officers for their contributions.

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Chair

The Committee rose at 16.00