

A special meeting of the Stratford East Joint Committee was held at the Grange Hall, Coventry Street, Southam on the 23 January 2009.

Present:

Councillors

John Appleton (Chair)
Alan Akeister
David Booth
Simon Jackson
Beverley Mann
Nigel Rock
Bob Stevens
Roger Wright

Other Councillors

Izzi Seccombe – County Council Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families.

Officers

Mark Gore, Head of Education Service - Education Partnerships & School Development Division
Nick Williams Assistant Head of Service (Pupil and Student Services), Education Partnerships and School Development
Victoria Gould, Young People Legal Services Manager
Martin Gibbins, Area Manager
Pete Keeley, Member Services
Amanda Wilson-Patterson, Localities and Communities Officer

20 members of the public attended

1. Apologies for Absence

were received from Councillors David Close, Susan Main, Christopher Mills, Andrew Patrick, Chris Williams, David Wise and Susan Wixey

2. Disclosure of Interests

The following Councillor declared personal interests as School Governors for the schools indicated.

Councillor John Appleton as a Governor of Southam Primary School.
Councillor David Booth as a Governor Kineton High School.
Councillor Bob Stevens as a Governor of Long Itchington Primary School and Southam College.

Councillor Izzi Seccombe as a Governor of Kineton High School.

3. Admissions to Rugby Grammar Schools

The Joint Committee considered a report about proposed changes to admission arrangements to Grammar Schools in Rugby following a ruling by the Schools Adjudicator and which set out a proposal for admissions to those schools in September 2010. The Joint Committee were asked for their views on the proposals.

The Committee was addressed by four members of the Public as follows:

Gill Freeman expressed concern about the impact of the proposals on the long term education opportunities in the area and on the level of success of village schools. She expressed her support for the representations made by village schools on this matter.

Tammy Heap expressed concern that the proposed admission arrangements could result in one of her children not being permitted to attend the same school as older siblings. She also advised the Committee that she felt that the proposals would have an adverse impact on the viability of school transport arrangements in the area.

Louise Bowman-Shaw advised Members that she had two boys at Southam College who would be deprived of sixth form choice under the proposed arrangements. Mark Gore indicated that the admission arrangements under discussion related only to admissions in Year's 7 to 11.

She made representations on behalf of other parents who could not be present at the meeting. In particular she indicated:

- the need for continuity in the provision of sports facilities for those children who wished to develop their sporting abilities.
- The proposed arrangements would create difficulties for many local children in their choice of sixth form school because of transport difficulties that would result from the new admission arrangements.

Helena Knight of Napton advised the Committee that the future schooling of her children was an important aspect of her decision to move to the area and that it was unlikely that she would have moved if the proposed admission arrangements were in place at that time. She highlighted difficulties in transport arrangements that could result from the new arrangements.

Bransby Thomas of the Southam Town Council and a Governor of Southam College and Ashlawn Bilateral School, reported that the County Council's Rugby Area Committee supported the proposal. He also indicated that the Greenwich decision puts pressure on many schools. He stressed that Southam College was a good high performing school and that Members should be encouraging parents to send children there.

Mark Gore, Head of the Education Service, presented the report and outlined the difficulties facing the County Council resulting from the School Adjudicator's decision and the Greenwich decision, as detailed in the report. He drew attention to the need for admission arrangements to be agreed by the Council for Ashlawn School and the admission authorities of the Lawrence Sheriff and Rugby High Schools. He added that there would be no changes to the choice of sixth form under the proposed arrangements.

Members discussed several aspect of the proposal. The following points were noted during the debate.

- The Committee were being asked for their views in response to the consultation and no decision on whether or not to proceed with the arrangements was to be made by the Committee. The decision would be taken by the County Council's Cabinet who had asked for comments on whether the priority area proposed in the report was the right one to be adopted. The Cabinet would take a decision in respect of Ashlawn School on the 19 March having considered all of the information obtained from the consultation process which will end on the 6 March 2009. The admission authorities for the other two schools would make decisions following their consultations also.
- Originally, the Schools Adjudicator had wanted the new arrangements to be in place for September 2009 but the Council had persuaded him to delay implementation on the basis of the timetable that would be involved, any proposals should be from September 2010.
- In response to the concerns of some Members relating to the interpretation of the School Adjudicator's decision, the Committee were advised of the full legal reasoning that had lead to the conclusion that there was no alternative but to review the admission arrangements. Leading Counsel had advised that a challenge by the County Council to the Adjudicator's decision would be unlikely to be successful.
- Full discussions would be held with the schools on the outcomes of the consultations.
- Members expressed concern that not all of the Parishes within the current admissions area had been consulted on the proposals. They were advised of the extent of the consultation that was still in progress and informed that it exceeded statutory requirements.
- A specific boundary for the consultation should be drawn and this should include both Parish Councils and Parish meetings in areas affected.
- Admission arrangements settled upon following the consultation must be justifiable objectively and not be in breach of the law. It would be difficult to justify the inclusion of Warwickshire villages but not Northamptonshire villages for example.

Councillor Bob Stevens, seconded by Councillor Nigel Rock, moved and Resolved unanimously:

- (1) That the Committee notes the report on the Rugby Grammar Schools consultation and expresses concern at the interpretation of the adjudicator's judgement.
- (2) That the Committee objects to the omission of Warwickshire Parishes already covered by the existing admissions policy for these schools.
- (3) That the Committee agrees that the following parishes within the Feldon Division should also be included in the proposed new Catchment areas:

Bishops Itchington, Chapel Ascote, Chesterton & Kingston, Harbury (including Deppers Bridge), Hodnell and Wills Pastures, Ladbroke, Long Itchington, Napton, Priors Hardwick, Priors Marston, Radbourne, Upper and Lower Shuckburgh, Southam, Stockton, Stoneton, Ufton, Watergall and Wormleighton
- (4) That the comments made by the Committee be included in the Committee's formal response to the consultation.

The Committee rose at 11:25 p.m.

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Chair