

**Meeting of the Executive (Special)**  
**Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2007 at 7.00 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Lorber (Chair), Councillor Blackman (Vice Chair), and Councillors Allie, D Brown, V Brown, Castle, Colwill, O'Sullivan and Wharton.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Van Colle.

Councillors Beswick, Dunwell and Moher also attended the meeting.

**1. Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests**

There were none.

**2. Deputations - Sponsor for the Wembley Academy**

Hank Roberts and Herbert Bukari, representing Brent Teachers' Panel, addressed the meeting regarding the proposal to appoint a new sponsor for a new Wembley Academy, to be built on Bridge Road, Wembley Park. Mr Roberts questioned the suitability of the sponsors making reference to their financial background, political affiliation and policy support. He also questioned the suitability of the Wembley Park site given concerns over transport accessibility, its location in the north of the borough given that evidence was said to exist that there was a greater need for a school in the south. Mr Roberts referred to evidence that had recently been produced which proved that a new school could be located on the current Stonebridge School site. Mr Bukari also expressed support for a school in the south of the borough suggesting that half of the funds available could be spent on a School on the Stonebridge School site, and which would be under LEA control. He asserted that children in this area were at a disadvantage as they had to travel long distances to schools either across the borough or outside the borough boundaries. Mr Bukari also put forward that this could also be viewed as racial discrimination as the majority of pupils in the area were from ethnic backgrounds and should the Council proceed with a decision to build a new school in Wembley, a letter would be sent to the Commission for Racial Equality requesting an investigation.

Mr Lantos (Headteacher, Preston Manor School) addressed the meeting and raised specific questions regarding the sponsor including the reasons for the original sponsor's withdrawal and the speed at which a new sponsor had been identified with no alternatives being considered. He also submitted a petition opposing the building of a new academy on the Wembley Park Sports Ground site. Mr Lantos felt it would be preferable to make the right choice on a sponsor and then set an appropriate timetable. He asserted, on anecdotal evidence, that the proposed sponsors did not have a proven track record of success in delivering academies in this country and emphasised that his concern was for the best interests of the children.

### 3. Sponsor for the Wembley Academy

On 16<sup>th</sup> April 2007, the Executive received a report confirming that the original sponsor for the Wembley Academy, Andrew Rosenfeld, had withdrawn his sponsorship of the Wembley Academy and that the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) had recommended the ARK (Absolute Return for Kids) Children's Charitable Trust to be the new sponsor for the Academy in partnership with the Council. The Executive had agreed to defer consideration to this meeting where a more comprehensive report on the proposed sponsors would be considered.

The Lead Member for Children and Families responded to deputations received earlier in the meeting. He stressed that there was a need for the Council to move quickly in making a decision on the sponsor given the number of children currently on special projects and, with the level of house building taking place in the area, the situation was likely to worsen. There was already a significant number of children who were without a school place next year. Councillor Wharton advised that ARK were currently sponsoring five academies all of which were scheduled to be in operation by the time the Wembley academy would be completed. He dismissed concerns over the business background as irrelevant and advised that it was for the Executive to decide who to appoint and not to hold a competition. Councillor Wharton accepted the need for an additional school as set out in the Strategy for the Development of schools agreed in November 2006, however, all the sites identified in the south of the borough would require land assembly and agreement with other partners and as such needed longer term planning.

Members congratulated officers on the report presented which provided all the relevant information. Councillor Blackman (Deputy Leader) however, expressed concerns over the principle of academies which he felt gave responsibility for education to an organisation external to the LEA and over which the Council would have little control. Councillor O'Sullivan supported this view.

The Director of Children and Families assured the Executive that an extensive vetting process had been carried out by the DFES and he was satisfied that ARK were in agreement with the aims and objectives set out in the previously approved expression of interest. References had been taken from both officers and members and he was assured that the organisation was sound. The Director said that all the facts had been presented to the Executive on the site options and these had been subject to detailed prior scrutiny; he stressed that the Council had a duty to provide school places and it was vital that the Executive proceed. John Christie also stated that ARK were currently in partnership with the Council in a couple of projects both of which were excellent ventures. He expected arrangements regarding community representation on the governing body to be similar to those for the Capital City Academy and had received assurances from ARK. The Borough Solicitor confirmed that a 'letter before action' had been

received after the report had been published, but this was in relation to the location of the Academy.

Councillor Lorber, in conclusion, reminded the Executive that the borough already had one academy, which was making good progress. There was a need to ensure an adequate level of school places and consequently the Council had dual strategy of building new schools and expanding existing premises. Additional resources had already been received for Preston Manor and the Council would continue to lobby central government for further funds for successful schools that were willing and able to expand.

The recommendations in the report were approved.

RESOLVED:-

that the ARK Educational Charitable Trust be approved, in partnership with the Council, as the new sponsor of the Wembley Academy, with specialisms in citizenship and mathematics.

*(In accordance with the provisions of Standing Orders Councillor Blackman asked that his dissent from the decision be recorded).*

The meeting ended at 7.30 pm

P LORBER  
Chair