

**MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (SPECIAL)  
Wednesday, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2006 at 7.30 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Motley (Chair), Councillor Arnold (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Ahmed, Dunwell, Eniola, Mrs Fernandes, C J Patel, Tullett, and co-opted member Dr Levison. The following observers were also present: Lesley Gouldbourne, Gill Reed and Tony Vaughan.

Also Present: Councillor Wharton (Lead Member for Children and Families) and Councillors Butt, Castle, Farrell (Part), Jones, J Long and Powney.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mistry, Reverend Phil Stone and Mrs Bondzi-Simpson.

**1. Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests**

There were none.

**2. Call-In Procedure**

Councillor Dunwell expressed concern about the constitutional basis for the meeting. He provided the Committee with details relating to the timescales as regards the Democratic Services receiving notice of requests for call in and giving notice for the Special meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He suggested that the timescales coincided and expressed the view that this indicated a flaw in the procedure. The Democratic Services Officer responded by explaining that a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee was called in anticipation that the decision could be called in, it was noted that factors such as the practicality of calling a meeting were considered. An agenda was issued in time to give five days notice of the meeting. It was further explained that by the deadline for call in the Democratic Services Manager had received seven requests for call in by email, thus exceeding the threshold as provided for by the Constitution. Committee Members voted on the motion for the meeting to be abandoned due to its unconstitutional nature, the motion was LOST.

**3. Call-In of Executive Decisions from the Meeting of the Executive on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> November 2006**

**A Strategy for the Development of Primary and Secondary Schools – Options for Delivering Additional School Places**

The Executive considered the above report at its meeting on Monday, 13<sup>th</sup> November 2006. The report set out a summary review of the case for additional primary and secondary school places, and invited

members to agree to consult on a strategy for developing schools particularly with the aim of increasing the supply of school places in the longer term while recommending that for the short to medium term the negotiations with the DfES continue on the development and siting of a proposed second Academy in Brent. The deadline for call-in was Monday, 20<sup>th</sup> November 2006. Upon the deadline the total number of requests received to call-in the decisions exceeded the number required under the provisions of the Council's constitution. As an education item this matter was to be considered by the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Wharton (Lead Member, Children and Families) provided the Committee with some background information relating to the Executive's decision. It was explained that there was evidence to suggest an existing shortage of school places. This could be addressed by expanding existing schools, building new schools or both. He noted that there had been considerable debate and consultation about establishing a second Academy in Brent and where it could be sited. The Chair enquired whether the shortage in school places could be met solely by expanding existing schools. In response Councillor Wharton suggested that the shortfall could be satisfied over the short term by expanding schools. However after five years it was likely the shortfall would resurface. It had also been suggested that it would be desirable to increase the number of secondary school places in the south of the borough.

With regard to an Academy, Councillor Wharton explained that the Executive had still not reached agreement on where it could be sited. It was further explained that having noted possible discrepancies, the Executive also wanted a clearer view with regard to the forecasts and the profile for demand. As a result the Executive had asked for a demographer to be commissioned to assess the current issue and provide an expert view on the forecasts. It was hoped that this could be reported back to the Executive for their consideration at which point there would also be a further look at where a school could be sited.

There followed questions from Members of the Committee. In response to further questions about forecasting, Councillor Wharton explained that the forecasts would have a five year time horizon. The forecasts would be kept under review and possible future developments would be kept in mind.

It was suggested that employing a demographer would cause delay to the decision making. On expressing the view that the need for school places was both clear and present especially in the south of the borough the Member asked about the vision for education provision and the opportunities to be offered. Reference was made to the need for increased capacity. In response to these concerns, Councillor Wharton suggested that the need to increase capacity would be addressed in the revised report being prepared for the Executive. He

also explained that the work on demographics was not causing delay as there was additional work that needed to be done which could be carried out in parallel. Councillor Wharton re-emphasised the importance of the demographic study, noting that there needed to be a clear view with regard to forecasts in order to assist with effective future planning. With regard to vision, Councillor Wharton suggested that a new school was needed in order to achieve the vision for quality education provision in the borough.

In response to further questions on the demographic study, Councillor Wharton explained that the issue of catchment areas would not have affected the need for more accurate forecasts. He also explained that the original forecasts were provided by the greater London Authority (GLA) who provided such information for many other London Boroughs. Lesley Gouldbourne (Teachers' Panel) also expressed the view that it was important to have accurate information before any decisions were made. In relation to this John Christie (Director, Children and Families) explained that other London Boroughs had concerns about the robustness of the statistics provided by the GLA and Directors from several London Boroughs had begun discussions about whether a forecasting body should be established for them. In relation to commissioning the demographic study, it was explained that it was estimated to be around £12,000.

The Chair acknowledged that it was evident there was a school places issue and asked for further information about the extent of the demand for primary and secondary school places. In response John Christie explained that despite revisions to the figures provided by the GLA he felt confident there was an underlying need for at least 7 Forms of Entry (FE) at primary level by 2010. Referring to a table distributed to Committee Members, he further discussed the present situation. He explained that there were 3005 children on roll and the capacity was for 3210. It was noted that there were a lot of vacancies in church schools. It was also noted that there were more vacancies in the south of the borough. In contrast, schools in the north of the borough were mostly full, places could be offered to these children but these were in the south. John Christie also suggested that due to the large number of homes being built as part of the Quintain development in Wembley there would be an additional pressure on school places in the north in the future. In light of these factors, Mr Christie explained that an extra 2 FE was being proposed as part of the Academy.

With regard to secondary places, John Christie explained that forecasts also demonstrated an underlying need. He referred to a letter he had written to the Chair of the Brent Teachers Panel, copies of which were provided for the Committee. He explained that statistics already demonstrated that secondary schools were full to capacity. Cardinal Hinsley Roman Catholic (RC) High School was the only school with vacancies, however being an all boys' faith school some children without places would either not be able to or want to go there. The

Director added that regarding capacity there was currently no margin for error. Noting that there was also a duty to promote choice, John Christie expressed the view that there was a case for establishing a secondary school now.

John Christie also explained to the Committee that there was no money available from the Department for Skills and Education (DfES) for building new schools until 2011. Thus although there was a need now there was no money available to build a school, making the Academy an attractive option.

There followed further questions from Members. Referring to the new homes being built in Wembley a Member of the Committee asked whether a distinction had been made between the number of units to be built and the perceived number of children that would be living there. In response John Christie explained that this would be difficult to estimate and adjustments would be made to any forecasts in accordance with how the situation develops.

John Christie proceeded to discuss with the Committee potential sites for an Academy. Before hearing the presentation on this the Chair suggested that the Committee look in particular at the following three sites: Gwenneth Rickus Building, Chalkhill Road (Health Centre) and Wembley Park (Bridge Road) Site. The Chair explained that these sites would be scrutinised on the basis that they were the main sites being considered by the Executive. John Christie, assisted by Nitin Parshotam (Head of Asset Management) and Ken Hullock (Team Manager, Planning Service), continued by discussing the advantages and disadvantages of each site.

The Committee were informed that the Executive had asked for further investigation into the possible use of this site. John Christie informed Committee Members that the suggestion was for staff from this site to be relocated to the Bridge Park Complex. Nitin Parshotam explained that there were issues with regard to the size of the building. He informed the Committee that for the site to be both viable and accessible, land adjacent to it would need to be acquired. It was further explained that this land was owned by the Swaminarayan Hindu Mission who were actually interested in purchasing land from Brent Council for use by the Swaminarayan school.

With regard to the possibility of relocating staff from the Gwenneth Rickus building to Bridge Park, it was explained that there was not sufficient space there. It was noted that there was 1400 m<sup>2</sup> of office space available at Bridge Park, however to relocate the staff from Gwenneth Rickus 4000 m<sup>2</sup> was needed. In addition it would have to be investigated whether this would incur a penalty due to possible conditions of the grant provided to the Council to develop Bridge Park for community use. Nitin Parshotam explained that these factors would be further considered before more information is presented to the Executive in January.

Members expressed concern about restructuring the Bridge Park site after the Council had substantially invested in it so as to improve community usage.

In response to a question about public transport links and accessibility in relation to the Gwenneth Rickus site Ken Hullock informed the Committee that the site had a Public Transport accessibility rating of 1. This was on a scale of 1 to 6 with 1 being the lowest. Councillor Long also commented that there had been issues relating to the disabled access at Bridge Park and it was noted that this should be considered in the further review.

Ken Hullock informed Committee members that the land currently used for the temporary health centre at Chalkhill Road was designated as public open space under the Unitary Development Plan. He explained that under the Chalkhill regeneration scheme masterplan this site would be converted to green space once the housing had been built. With regard to size Mr Hullock suggested that the site could possibly be large enough for a school, however the playing fields would have to be located remotely. On the issue of transport, it was noted that the Public Transport Accessibility Rating was 3. The Committee was informed that the site would not be available until 2008. In response to questions about where the playing fields could be situated, Ken Hullock suggested they could go on the Wembley Park site. It was also noted that some residential properties might need to be purchased for accessibility reasons. Councillor Long and Councillor Farrell expressed concern about the possible loss of residential housing. Councillor Farrell also expressed concern that the site lay within a flood plain. Councillor Farrell expressed the view that the Council had to show accountability with regard to the environment and suggested that the site chosen should be the one creating the least damage to the environment.

Nitin Parshotam informed the Committee that the Wembley Park (Bridge Road) site was of a sufficient size and would accommodate good recreational facilities. It was added that community access could be facilitated and much of the green space could be retained. It was noted that the sponsor identified for the Academy had indicated that they wanted the school to be a community facility. It was further explained that the site was also acquirable, it was owned by Transport for London (TfL) but it had been declared as surplus. It was also noted that negotiations were taking place about price but it was likely to be affordable. Should the site be chosen, a school could be completed there by 2010. Ken Hullock also informed the Committee that the site had been identified by the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) as an area designated for development and regeneration. As a result were it not to be developed as a school it was a likely location for residential or commercial development sometime in the future.

There followed discussion about the disadvantages. John Christie explained that concerns had been expressed about possible traffic issues.

However he noted that this would also be an issue with the Chalkhill Road site. Members of the Committee expressed the view that local residents were opposed to having a school on that site and re-iterated concerns about traffic conditions. Committee Members also enquired whether any displacement would ensue as a result of using the site. John Christie explained that the playing fields were used by London Underground sports groups. However it was noted that such sports groups could potentially use the site following development in line with community access. It was also noted that the new facilities would be of higher quality.

Gill Reed (Special Schools Teachers) expressed the view that siting the school at Wembley Park could exacerbate the divide between schools in the north and south. She explained that parents were often concerned about the travel time to school and it was noted that approximately 1000 children travelled from the south to the north of the borough to go to school. Noting the limited choice available to children in the south of the borough and the possible impact of this on education provision, Ms Reed enquired whether the Council would be minded to carry out a racial impact assessment to see if the circumstances created a bias in particular with regard to children of Afro-Caribbean heritage. The Chair acknowledged these points noting that this issue should be explored further by the Committee at a future meeting. A Member of the Committee added that it could be disruptive to a community when children had to go to schools a distance away. Councillor Wharton also explained that the Council had attempted to find a suitable site for a school in the south of the borough but one had not been identified. However the Committee were informed that possible sites could arise in depending on plans for land developments in the future.

Dr Levison (co-opted member) expressed the view that the Council had a moral duty to address the issue of transport in order to make the site chosen accessible to children in the south of the borough. In response, John Christie explained that the issue of transport provision was one that would be addressed. Acknowledging the issues around transport and the impact on children in the south, John Christie expressed the view that given the constraints it was felt that children were still being offered a choice.

Following the debate, Councillor Arnold put forward a motion outlining the views of the Committee to be considered by the Executive. Each element of the motion was voted on as follows:

- (i) That the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee was in agreement that in addition to expanding existing schools there was a need for a new school in Brent. This motion was CARRIED.
- (ii) That based on the evidence before them, the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee ask that the Executive give greater consideration to the Wembley Park (Bridge Road) Site as a

location for the academy as the Committee held the view that this was the preferred site. This motion was CARRIED. Councillors Dunwell and Mrs Fernandes requested that their dissent to this decision be recorded.

- (iii) That the Executive should give consideration to providing a safeguard with regard to school capacity with the effect that all Brent children should be provided with the choice of going to a Brent school. This motion was CARRIED.

Councillor Arnold also asked for the decision to be considered at full Council. Members were asked to note that there was provision in the constitution relating to the procedure for the decision to be called in to full council and they should refer to this if they wished to pursue this option.

Councillor Arnold also proposed that the Executive should give further consideration to the need to provide adequate transport when choosing a site. Members of the Committee acknowledged this and agreed that this was already being addressed in the reports being presented to the Executive.

RESOLVED: -

that the following views of the Panel be fed back to the meeting of the Executive on Monday, 11<sup>th</sup> December 2006:-

- That the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee was in agreement that in addition to expanding existing schools there was a need for a new school in Brent.
- That based on the evidence before them the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee asked that the Executive give greater consideration to the Wembley Park (Bridge Road) site for the academy as the Committee held the view that this was the preferred site.
- That the Executive should give consideration to providing a safeguard with regard to school capacity with the effect that all Brent children should be provided with the choice of going to a Brent school.

## 7. **Date of Next Meeting**

RESOLVED:-

that the next ordinary meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee take place on Thursday, 11<sup>th</sup> January 2007.

8. **Any Other Urgent Business**

There was none.

The meeting ended at 10.00 pm

W MOTLEY  
Chair