

**MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY PANEL
(SPECIAL)
Thursday, 8th December 2005 at 7.30 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs Fernandes (Chair), Councillor Gladbaum (Vice-Chair) and Councillors N Colwill, Crane, Dromey (part), Lemmon (part), J Moher, Rands, Sattar-Butt (part) and Wharton and Dr Levison (non voting co-opted member) and Reverend Phil Stone (voting co-opted member).

Also present was Councillor Michael Lyon (Lead Member for Children and Families) and Councillor Farrell (part).

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Lorenzato (voting co-opted member).

1. Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

There were none.

2. Deputations

Mr Dunwell (Queensbury Residents Association) referred to the expression of interest and the four proposed site options and commented on the potential impact on the future Local Development Framework (LDF). In referring to the Council's choice of site, Mr Dunwell expressed concerns about additional traffic congestion in the Wembley Park area. He also queried where staff, parents and visitors to the school would park and suggested that there would be a detrimental impact on the Barn Hill area. Commenting on tube provision and transport links into the Wembley Park, Mr Dunwell expressed concerns that neither the Metropolitan or Jubilee lines served the proposed catchment area in the south of the borough. It was suggested that the Council should focus on expanding existing provision in local schools. With reference to the site option for the development of a second academy, Mr Dunwell stressed that since 30% of the intake to the proposed site would come from the south of the borough the Guinness site was a more suitable site for development. A sports field was already in existence at this site and transport links could be more suitably upgraded as part of the development. Mr Dunwell commented on the lack of clarity between earlier decisions taken by the Planning Committee and those of the Executive regarding suitable site options for the school development.

Hank Roberts (Teachers' Panel representative, NASUWT) expressed concerns about the decision taken by the Executive to place a school on the Wembley Park site. Mr Roberts advised Members that there was a considerable amount of national and local interest in the matter and that local residents strongly opposed the development of a second academy in the Wembley Park area. He referred to the first city

academy in Willesden and commented on its failure to perform as anticipated. Mr Roberts expressed concerns regarding how the sponsor was selected and stressed that opposition to the development would continue if the proposal was progressed.

Councillor Blackman advised those present that he was a governor at Preston Manor School and then went on to address the Panel. Councillor Blackman referred to the proposed site for the development of the second academy which would fall on the tip of the proposed catchment area. Councillor Blackman expressed serious concerns regarding the impact on young children who would be expected to travel long distances to school. Whilst acknowledging the need for additional school places within Brent he stressed that such a school should be located within the proposed catchment area. Councillor Blackman explained that traffic problems already existed at key times during the day around Wembley Park and suggested that these would worsen as a result of the proposed development, particularly as the majority of children would not be able to use existing tube services to get to school. At this point Councillor Blackman stressed the need to focus on expanding existing schools like Preston Manor and Queens Park in a gradual process to ensure that there was not a crisis issue regarding the provision of school places. Councillor Blackman explained that there was considerable opposition to the proposal and stressed the need for the Executive to identify another suitable location on which to progress with the development of a second academy.

3. ***Call-in of Executive Decisions from the Meeting of the Executive on Monday, 14th November 2005***

At the meeting of the Forward Plan Select Committee on 27th October 2005, Members asked that this item be referred to the Children and Families Scrutiny Panel meeting on Thursday, 10th November 2005 for further consideration. The Director of Children and Families provided a verbal update for the Panel and Members considered the report that was to be considered by the Executive on 14th November 2005. The outcome of the Panel's discussions was presented to the Executive at its meeting. The deadline for call-in was Monday, 21st November 2005. 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 referred to the Children and Families Scrutiny Panel for further consideration.

In discussion Councillor Kansagra explained that a paper concerning population growth and new school requirements in the borough had been considered by the Planning Committee (Policy) at its meeting on 16th November 2005. He explained that the Planning Committee had recommended that a site in the Guinness Masterplan be added to the list of site options. It was also proposed that the Guinness site should include provision for a secondary school. Councillor R Blackman explained that this site included sports provision and, due to its size,

could be used for a number of different development opportunities. At this point Councillor Lyon, the Lead Member for Children and Families provided Members with a written paper responding to each of the points raised as requests for the Executive decision to be called in. Councillor Lyon explained that the new school would extend educational opportunities for children in Brent, and the admissions policy would have no selection on ability. Commenting on the anticipated shortfall of secondary school places within the borough he explained that a new school of six-form entry size was necessary both now and in the foreseeable future.

Councillor Rands referred to the reasons specified for the call-in and expressed concerns about the apparent lack of joined up thinking in Council policy with regard to planning and school places demand in the local area following the Wembley Development. He suggested that the Wembley Park site was not the most suitable option since it would result in the loss of an existing sports ground and open space. Councillor Rands expressed concerns about the lack of consultation that had been undertaken by the Executive and referred to the potential traffic implications caused by the development. Commenting on the proposed catchment area, Councillor Rands expressed concern about the number of children that would have to travel long distances to school and stressed that the existing tube provision to Wembley Park did not compliment the proposed catchment area. At this point Councillor Rands circulated a copy of his proposed motion.

Councillor Wharton highlighted concerns about the implications for traffic congestion in the Wembley Park area following a development at the proposed site and expressed his opposition about the loss of a sports ground in the Wembley Park area. He suggested that the proposed site option did not reflect school places demand within the borough. Commenting on the draft School Organisation Plan, he explained that there were obvious shortages of places in the Stonebridge area and that whilst there were already problems with regard to places in the north west of the borough, there were likely to be future problems regarding primary school provision in the south of the borough in the future. Councillor Wharton suggested that the proposal put forward by the Executive did not address the problem of the shortages in these areas. He queried whether the primary school could be set aside from the secondary school and stressed the need for the Executive to choose a different site option in order to achieve this. He suggested that there could be some functional linkage between the primary and secondary schools even if they were developed on different sites. At this point Councillor Wharton queried who had advised on the valuation of the sites and whether it was possible to secure land from Quintain as part of the Council's Section 106 agreements. Councillor Crane queried the need for expanding school provision in the borough and queried how the development would match the requirements for school places both now and in the future.

Responding to the question as to the source of the valuation advice on one alternative suggested site, namely the Palace of Arts and Industry, Councillor Lyon explained that this advice had the authority of the Director of Planning. With regard to Section 106 funding from Quintain, those present were advised that the Education Department had been involved in the agreement that was reached with Quintain, who owned the Wembley Park site. Responding to suggestions that the Palace of Arts and Industry site be an alternative site option, the Panel was advised that as a prime site the financial implications for the Council would be significant and it was unlikely to be affordable. Commenting on the proposed catchment area those present were advised that both Stonebridge and Harlesden fell within the proposed catchment areas and that there was a shortage of school places in these areas. Councillor Lyon advised Members that there were now far greater pressures on the local authority to meet changing demands since the School Organisation Plan had been developed in 2003. Consequently, there had been a significant change in the Council's expectations of Brent pupil numbers. Councillor Lyon explained that the Brent School Organisation Committee had met the previous evening to discuss the latest analysis of Brent pupil projections.

John Christie (Director of Children and Families) explained that the academy could be used to meet demand for places and that the chosen site within the Wembley Park area would serve new housing needs especially at the primary school level where there was an increasing demand. John Christie explained that the catchment area would serve both this area and also areas in the south of the borough. He explained that a large number of children already travelled significant distances to school. Members were advised however that there were a number of proposals to deal with the travel issue particularly for primary school children. Given that the catchment area was subject to consultation and approval, there remained flexibility in the proposals. John Christie explained that a number of site options had been considered. Referring to the Guinness site he explained that this site was also located on the edge of the catchment area with limited transport links consequently the planners' had not deemed this to be a viable option. Referring to the sports ground at Wembley Park site, John Christie explained that the playing fields would not be affected by the development but better used through the proposals.

Nitin Parshotam (Head of Asset Management) commented on the capacity issue and explained that an analysis had been undertaken on the figures from January 2004 to September 2005. Consequently five schools were already oversubscribed by September 2005. He explained the capacity would be reached by 2009/2010 and stressed that this did not allow for parental choice so consequently there could be an additional 5% pressure in capacity in future years. Commenting on pressures on school places in the borough, Nitam Parshottam

explained that there was now an equalisation of pressure on places in the north and the south of the borough.

Commenting on the specified reasons for the call-in, Councillor Crane explained that there was an urgent need to address the school places issue in Brent and suggested that whilst the city academy presented a longer term solution, the extension of smaller scale schools could also be a viable shorter term solution. Whilst acknowledging concerns about the proposed site in Wembley Park, Councillor Crane stressed that the Planning Committee would be responsible for determining whether the proposed site was viable for such a development. Councillor J Moher highlighted the need for a debate regarding new school provision and explained that exhaustive consultation would take place once the DfES had considered the expression of interest. Whilst acknowledging the opposition to the proposed development on this site, he referred to the pressures caused by existing and future school provision needs and the financial implications for the Council.

The Reverend Phil Stone referred to the catchment area and the proposed site for development and expressed concerns about the distance that some children would have to travel to attend the new school. He explained that a primary school covering such a large catchment area was detrimental as this negated the development of community spirit. Councillor Lyon responded that whilst the primary element would probably be drawn from relatively closer to the new school such as from the new housing developments within the Wembley Park area, the secondary element would generally be met by children from across the catchment area. At this point Councillor Rands expressed further concerns about the proposed catchment areas and queried whether there were different catchment areas for both secondary and primary schools.

John Christie explained that there was now an extra demand on school places that had not been visible two years earlier. He explained that an external consultant had been appointed to consider the forecast of school places. Referring to the choice of site, John Christie explained that this had been done internally following advice from the Planning Department but that the proposal would be tested by the DfES. He stressed that the Executive had considered a number of sites but that no viable site options had been identified. John Christie acknowledged comments made regarding primary, secondary and all through school options and explained that further consideration was necessary. Members were advised that it had been envisaged that whilst new housing in the area would generate places for primary education the existing demands for secondary places would come from children across the borough, particularly in the south. He explained that the type of provision to be met by the new school could be amended following further discussion. In response to a query from Dr Levison as to whether a consultant could be commissioned to provide independent advice about the potential site options, John Christie explained that an

independent consultant would be appointed by the DfES if the proposal was accepted.

Councillor Lyon explained that the Palace of Arts and Industry site was not a viable option for a variety of reasons including the potential cost implications and the lack of existing playing fields at the site. He referred to a number of specific alternative proposed sites maintaining that in each case there were serious problems either of availability, affordability, size or suitability. He stressed that the Executive had considered alternative sites in considerable detail and that conversely, the proposed site at Wembley sports and Social Club was an impressive location and offered considerable advantages of size and public transport accessibility. Responding to a query from Councillor Rands regarding the proposed catchment area, Councillor Lyon accepted that greater clarity was necessary regarding the proposals for primary and secondary admissions. He explained that whilst the catchment area was to ensure priority to children living in it, it was not intended to exclude children living outside it. At this point Councillor Rands stressed therefore that due to different catchment needs, two schools should be developed rather than an all through school.

In response to queries regarding the proposed sponsor, Councillor Lyon explained that the proposed sponsor was on the DfES list and had been chosen for a number of reasons including his support for children's issues through his involvement with the NSPCC. He explained that the proposed sponsor supported the ethos behind the development of an all-through city academy in Brent as set out in the Expression of Interest and was keen to promote the Council's Wembley regeneration vision. Councillor Lyon then went on to comment on the advantages of developing an all through school. In response to a question the Lead Member confirmed that the Executive would not submit the proposed Expression of Interest to the DfES until it had considered the Panel's position at the next meeting of the Executive. Councillor Rands then put forward his motion which, when put to the vote, was LOST. Councillor Wharton then put forward a motion which, when to the vote, was LOST. Councillor Crane then put forward his motion to the Panel which requested that the Executive reconsider the site options and the proposed catchment areas. This motion when put to the vote was CARRIED.

RESOLVED:-

that the following view of the Panel be fed back to the meeting of the Executive on Monday, 12th December 2005:-

"That the Executive be asked to note that whilst the Children and Families Scrutiny Panel agrees in principle with the need for the development of an additional City Academy within the Borough, it is the Panel's view that the current site proposal might not be the preferred option. The Panel therefore recommends that the Executive

reconsider the site options available for the development of a second City Academy and review the proposed catchment area for such a school.”

4. ***Date of Next Meeting***

RESOLVED:-

that the next scheduled meeting of the Children and Families Scrutiny Panel take place on Thursday, 2nd February 2006.

5. ***Any Other Urgent Business***

There was none.

The meeting ended at 9.30 pm

MRS U FERNANDES
Chair

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