

SCHOOL ORGANISATION ADVISORY BOARD

MINUTES of a meeting of the School Organisation Advisory Board held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 19 March 2008.

PRESENT: Mrs V J Dagger (Chairman), Mr R B Burgess (Vice-Chairman), Mrs C Angell, Mr C J Capon, Mr A D Crowther, Mr M J Northey, Mr A R Poole, Mr M J Vye, Mr R Bristow and Mr M C Dance

IN ATTENDANCE: Dr I Craig (Director Strategy Policy & Performance); Mrs A Osborne (Area Education Officer Canterbury & Swale); and Mr G K Mills (Legal and Democratic Services).

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 7 February 2008
(Item. 3)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 7 February 2008 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

2. Repton Park (also known as Templar Barracks), Ashford - Proposed New Primary School Provision - Outcome of Consultation
(Item. 4)

(1) This report set out the results of the public consultation on the need for a new primary school in Ashford and sought the views of the Advisory Board on the issuing of a competition notice. Before the commencement of discussion, a letter from a local Member, Mrs Elizabeth Tweed, was read to the meeting in which she expressed the view that if children were educated where they lived, that not only promoted better community cohesion, but had wider implications (e.g no more having to jump in the car to get to school). The Repton Park Development could well be an example of how things can be done – already a mini high street was planned, plus a surgery, fitness centre etc. To rule out a primary school would definitely be a retrograde step.

(2) Dr Craig said that the Education and Inspections Act 2006 now required local authorities to undertake a competition to find a promoter for any new primary school. However, before such a competition was undertaken, the local authority was required by statutory guidance to undertake consultation. As part of this consultation the question had to be asked whether or not the community considered that a new school was in fact needed. Full details of the competition process was set out in a report on New Schools Competitions presented to the Board at its meeting on 14 November 2007 but Dr Craig said that he would arrange for Members to receive a copy of the Regulations themselves. During the course of discussion, Members of the Advisory Board raised a number of questions to which officers responded as appropriate.

(3) The Advisory Board agreed unanimously that a competition notice should be issued and noted that there would be a further report following the closing period for the submission of formal representations.

3. Education on the Isle of Sheppey - Outcome of Further Consultation on Proposed Changes to the School System
(Item. 5)

(The Chairman declared consideration of this item to be urgent for the following reasons. Following a judicial review challenge on the proposal to introduce a two tier system, including an Academy on the Isle of Sheppey, KCC following legal advice under took further consultation. The proposal envisaged a September 2008 change for the primary phase, and September 2009 for the secondary. The last day for responses was 17 March 2008 and therefore the bulk of the report was published prior to the end of the consultation period but without the 5 working days notice. A final analysis of responses was detailed in a separate Appendix which was circulated at the meeting).

(1) Before the commencement of discussion on this item, a further appendix was circulated setting out a summary of the original responses to the public consultation exercise. Members of the Advisory Board had also received a letter from Ms Angela Harrison as one of the local County Members in which she expressed her wholehearted support for the proposal to move from a three tier system of education to a two tier system. In her letter, Ms Harrison also said that she had come to the conclusion that an Academy would give the impetus needed for first class secondary education on Sheppey.

(2) Alison Osborne said that the report which Members had before them was the culmination of a very lengthy consultation process which was why the report was so detailed. Public consultation on the primary phase included 7 public meetings on the detail of the proposals and these were held during March 2007 with the results reported to the School Organisation Advisory Board at its meeting on 16 May 2007. Permission to issue a public notice was given and this was issued on 6 September 2007. There was one letter in response to the public notice and the 4 week statutory appeals period brought no statutory objections and arrangements were made to implement.

(3) Consultation on the proposed for the secondary phase of education for an establishment of an Academy on Isle of Sheppey had been carried out by consultants who were appointed by the Department for Children, Schools and Families. At its meetings on 17 October and 14 November 2007, the School Organisation Advisory Board supported a proposal to issue a public notice to close Minster College, Cheyne Middle School and Danley Middle School and to replace them with an Academy conditional upon the School's Minster signing a funding agreement.

(4) However, because there was a legal uncertainty the County Council decided to quash the primary phase notice and to consult further on the proposals for the two-tier system in order to ensure that consultees were fully informed of the proposals for both the primary and secondary phases of education. As a result, two further consultation documents were distributed and the full outcomes of these

consultations were detailed in the report which Members of the Advisory Board had before them.

(5) During the course of a wide and very detailed discussion, Members of the Advisory Board raised a number of detailed questions. Mr Vye said that at one stage he was against going out to consultation because at that time, there was no clear view as to the exact provisions of the secondary phase. Members of the Advisory Board now had before them a comprehensive report and he was now able on the basis of the information now available to support the proposals as detailed in the report. Mr Crowther said that he fully supported the proposals and spoke about their importance in relation to the future of Sheppey. He said that the proposals were supported by the majority of the teaching staff and governors and it was relevant to note that whilst there may appear to be a slight of number of residents against the proposals, they had to be seen in the context of the very low number of responses which had been received. Indeed some 92½% of those who had a right to express a view had chosen not to. Mr Crowther also said that both local Members supported the proposals and both were against the establishment of one large school. He was therefore pleased with what was now being proposed.

(7) Mr Bristow said that he believed that community cohesion was a key element of these proposals and he believed that establishing an academy would provide the best opportunity to achieve that objective in the longer term. He said he believed that the Academy would be in safe hands and that the momentum was in favour of its establishment. Mr Burgess spoke in support of the proposals and thought it was right that KCC should be closely involved in the day-to-day running of the school.

(8) Mrs Angell said that she supported the changes proposed in the report to go to two tiers of education. She said that in recognising the views in respect of an academy, it was important to consider and take into account the views of everybody and to establish the reasons why some 49.6% of those who responded to consultation wanted to retain the existing system. She also said there were a number of staffing issues which needed to be considered carefully in taking these proposals forward.

(9) Mrs Osborne said that the 3 middle schools had made it clear that they wish to maintain the status quo but that that could not be achieved and also implement a two tier system. She said she believed that the rationale for not wanting change was in part about not wanting change itself. She said she also believed that part of the support was based on the fact that some people were fond of the schools and wished to see them retained as they were. However, the overwhelming message was that a two tier system of education should be established and that secondary provision should be way of an academy as described in the report.

(10) As to staff, Mrs Osborne said that informal meetings had already been held and would continue to take place with involvement of professional associations and the Trade Unions. The County Council had already sought co-operation from governing bodies to ensure that transition arrangements operated smoothly. The Schools' Personnel Service had drawn up a Code of Practice for the recruitment of staff and professional development needs had been identified and training and development days arranged. Also the proposals meant that staff could benefit from career development opportunities arising from these changes. In addition, the Academy Project Group had set up meetings at the Middle Schools and Minster College with the agreement of Headteachers, so they could have the opportunity to

meet and consult staff. Mrs Osborne said that TUPE Regulations would apply but it had to be recognised that staff may not get offered exactly the same job that they currently had but their employment was protected.

(11) Following further debate the Advisory Board agreed :-

(a) to the issuing of linked public notices to establish the primary and secondary phases of education on the Isle of Sheppey-

- The change of age range for the first schools and St George's CE Middle School
- The addition of provision for Eastchurch CE Primary School to be located at Warden Bay
- The closure of Minster College, Cheyne Middle School and Danley Middle School to be replaced by an Academy on the Minster College and Cheyne Middle School sites, subject to the funding agreement; and

(b) subject to approval of the proposals following the end of the representation period, the resources necessary to implement the scheme be provided on the basis identified in the report.