

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SCHOOL ORGANISATION ADVISORY BOARD

MINUTES of a meeting of the School Organisation Advisory Board held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 7 February 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 M J Vye and Mrs E Green (Substitute for Mr A R Poole)

ALSO PRESENT: Mr M C Dance, Cabinet Member for Operations, Resources and Skills (CFE).

IN ATTENDANCE: Dr I Craig (Director Strategy Policy & Performance), Mr M Doole (Area Education Officer Thanet & Dover) and Mr S Webb (Area Education Officer for Dartford & Gravesham)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2008
(Item. 3)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2008 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

2. Proposal to Relocate and Enlarge Rowhill Special School and to Relocate the West Kent Health Needs Education Service and the Phoenix Centre Pupil Referral Unit
(Item. 4)

(1) This report presented the results of a public consultation on the proposal to relocate Rowhill Special School onto the old West Kent Hospital School site on Main Road, Longfield, enlarge Rowhill Special School to 120 places and relocate the West Kent Health Needs Education Service the Phoenix Centre onto the old Rowhill Site and Stock Lane, Wilmington.

(2) During the course of discussion, both Mr Crowther and Mrs Angell raised questions relating to the consultation process and the level of responses. Dr Craig said that usually, it would be expected that the response to proposals relating to special schools would be higher than had been so in this particular case. On a general point he said he would be happy to discuss outside of the meeting any views Members may have on how the consultation processes might be improved.

(3) Following further discussion, the Advisory Board agreed to the issuing of a public notice relating to the relocation and enlargement of Rowhill Special School, the relocation of the West Kent Health Needs Education Service and the relocation of the Phoenix Centre Pupil Referral Unit. The Advisory Board also agreed that subject to approval of the proposal following the end of the objection

period, the resources necessary to implement the scheme be provided on the basis identified in the report.

3. Proposed Closure of Axton Chase School and its Replacement with a Government Funded Academy, subject to Ministerial Approval
(Item. 5)

(The Chairman declared consideration of this item to be urgent because although it had been intended to report on this matter to the meeting of the Advisory Board in March 2008, the DCSF, under the direction of the Minister, had requested the County Council's consultation to be moved ahead as expeditiously as possible, to ensure funding was made available for the benefit of the school and community).

(1) Axton Chase School is an 11-19 mixed (non-selected foundation) high school which serves both rural and urban communities located in the Dartford area. In Axton Chase School, the socio-economic profile of the student intake is below national and Kent average overall. The proportion of students with a Statement of Special Educational Needs is 6%, above the Kent (2.8%) and the National average (2.2%). The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is 10%, which is below the national average of 13.6% and the Kent average of 7.9%.

(2) The vision for the Axtane Academy is that it will develop new first class approaches to education. The Academy will have a particular focus on vocational education, creating a mix of academic and vocational experiences. The Academy will also specialise in science and the creative and expressive arts with a bias to technology based programmes. It would also have a specialist centre for students in the Autistic Spectrum. The Academy would also form part of a hard federation with the Leigh Technology Academy which is the lead sponsor, with the County Council being a co-sponsor together with the University of Kent.

(3) During the course of discussion, Mrs Angell expressed strong concerns about the way the consultation relating to the establishment of this Academy had been handled to date. She said there had been little timely information made available to either the school, parents or elected Members. She said she understood that there were circumstances that needed to be taken into account when considering when information should be made public but that elected Members ought to be given relevant information even if for a period of time that had to be on a confidential basis.

(4) Dr Craig said that the County Council was totally constrained in these matters by Government rules and procedures and that timely information had been provided as soon as the County Council had been told by the Minister that the consultation process could begin. However, he understood the point being made about the position of elected Members and he said that he would speak to the Department on that particular point and advise Members of its response.

(5) During the course of further discussion, Members of the Advisory Board raised a number of points relating to a range of matters including seeking confirmation that when the Academy comes into place, there would be one Governing Body which would oversee both the Axtane Academy and the Leigh Technology Academy. Officers also confirmed that although the admission

arrangements to the two schools would be set by the Governing Body, it would nonetheless have to comply with the Admissions Code. It was also said that the new Academy should not draw any more numbers than the current school was now but that did not effect where those numbers may actually come from. Officers also confirmed that the staff at the school had been informed of these proposals as had the Unions and that there would be further consultations with these groups during the course of the formal consultation process.

(6) The Advisory Board unanimously agreed that a public consultation exercise should be undertaken in conjunction with the Governing Body on the proposal for the closure of the Axton Chase School and its replacement with a Government funded Academy.

4. Proposed Change of Age Range for Green Park Community Primary School, Dover (Item. 6)

(1) This report explained the need to bring forward a proposal to change the age range of Green Park Community School, Dover and to close the maintained nursery unit with effect from 19 October 2008.

(2) Mr Newman said that these proposals raised a number of important issues for local people. He said he believed that the proposals being put forward were the best option available to keep nursery provision in the Buckland area so he was generally in support of the recommendations. He did however, seek assurances regarding the future of the staff and on a general point said that as one of the local Members he had been given insufficient time in which to submit his views in advance of the meeting of the Advisory Board. Mr Cowan said that his main concern was also about the fact that he had only been advised of these proposals some eight days before the meeting of the Advisory Board. Therefore, whilst he supported the general principles of these proposals he felt local Members should have been given more time in which to submit a response.

(3) Mr Doole said he accepted the point made about the lack of time in which to respond to this report, but this was the start of what would be a full and detailed consultation process following which there would be a further detailed report to the Advisory Board.

(4) Following further discussion, the Advisory Board agreed to the proposals that there should be a public consultation on the possible change of age range of Green Park Community School, Dover and the closure of the existing maintained nursery unit on the former Melbourne Site with effect from 19 October 2008.

5. Schools Applying for Foundation/Trust Status (Item. 7)

This report informed Members of the Advisory Board of the current situation regarding Foundation/Trust proposals. During discussion, Mr Crowther said that in relation to the proposals to establish an Academy on the Isle of Sheppey, local Members other than those immediately affected should be included in the

consultation process. Dr Craig said that he understood the point that was being made but when undertaking consultations there had to be some discretion and flexibility as to how wide in terms of area the consultation process went.