

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 19 November 2019.

PRESENT: Mr A Booth (Chairman), Mr A M Ridgers (Vice-Chairman), Mr M A C Balfour, Mr P V Barrington-King, Mrs P M Beresford, Mrs R Binks, Mr R H Bird, Mr I S Chittenden (Substitute for Mrs T Dean, MBE), Mr G Cooke, Mr R C Love, OBE, Dr L Sullivan and Mr J Wright

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P B Carter, CBE, Mr R W Gough, Mr R L H Long, TD, Ms K Greig and Mr P Luxmoore

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs A Taylor (Scrutiny Research Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

11. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item A2)

Apologies had been received from Mrs Dean, Mr Farrell, Mr Garsed (Parent Governor) and Mr Roper (Church Representative). Mr Chittenden substituted for Mrs Dean and Ms Paterson substituted for Mr Roper.

The Chairman noted the absence, without apologies, of two of the Church Representatives and asked that a note be sent to them asking whether they wish to remain on the Scrutiny Committee.

12. Declarations of Interests by Members in items on the Agenda for this Meeting

(Item A3)

Dr Sullivan declared an interest, as her husband was employed by the County Council in the Early Help and Prevention Team.

13. Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 26 July 2019

(Item A4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 26 July 2019 were a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

14. Minutes of the reconvened meeting of the Pupil Premium Select Committee held on 2 September 2019

(Item A5)

The Chairman noted that the information requested on 2 September had not been received and asked that this be provided to the Scrutiny Research Officer, for circulation to the Scrutiny Committee before the next meeting on 18 December 2019.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the reconvened meeting of the Pupil Premium Select Committee held on 2 September be noted.

15. Review of the Planned Provision of School Places within the Thanet Area
(Item C1)

Mr R Gough, Leader of the Council, Mr R Long, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, Mr P Carter, Kate Greig, Chair of Thanet Secondary Schools and Headteacher at King Ethelbert School and Paul Luxmoore, CEO Coastal Academies Trust were present for this item.

1. The Chairman welcomed the guests and invited them to introduce themselves and to explain why they were present. He explained that the Scrutiny Committee had no facility to overturn or change the decision made but that there was the ability to make comments back to the Executive for consideration.

2. The Chairman referred to the supporting exempt information supplied via email and confirmed that this should be dealt with appropriately and not passed on to any third party.

3. Mr Carter, as the Executive Member who signed the decision explained the background to his decision, including the necessity for more education provision in Thanet, projected and delivered housing numbers and the projection of future rolls in schools. Mr Carter had met with the Thanet Headteachers to explore their views around alternatives to building the Royal School for the Deaf and it was considered that there was a better solution for young people in Thanet and the ability to make better use of public money in expanding existing schools. He confirmed that there were proposed highway improvement works catering for increased pupils at King Ethelbert and Ursuline Schools. Mr Carter commented on the impressive team of Headteachers in Thanet who were educating some of the most difficult and challenging young people in Kent, but the schools were on a positive trajectory.

4. Mr Carter considered that less capital could be spent resulting in a better solution, the schools in question in Thanet were not running at net capacity and where schools ran an overprovision there was a detrimental effect on school budgets.

5. The projected numbers had not been as anticipated and it was considered that this was the right option, Mr Carter wished to find a way of finishing the Hartsdown School renovation and ensuring that vocational education was accessible for young people who were struggling academically in years 10 and 11.

6. The Leader clarified the process in terms of assessing numbers of pupils coming into schools in Thanet. In 2014 there were rising rolls in primary and since then there had been a shortfall in housing and double counting within the data provided by the NHS. There was also a shift in migration figures with net inward migration; this was less than previously and less than projected. KCC's process in relation to this had been robust; however there had been a major change from the data presented by the NHS.

7. Ms Greig explained her work with the Thanet Skills Studio, this needed to be collaborative and ensure that all schools were involved. Funding was needed to improve the facilities at Hartsdown. The school was rated by Ofsted as Requires

Improvement but with good leadership. The Headteachers wanted to use the available money to improve the current schools and to allow work with Thanet Skills Studio.

8. Paul Luxmoore spoke briefly about the popularity of schools which was complicated and was affected by reputation and Ofsted judgements; the latter were in turn affected by the ability of young people entering secondary schools. There was a correlation between Progress 8 and Ofsted and schools in Kent with the least able children had a lower Ofsted rating; this was a significant problem across Kent.

9. School leadership in Thanet was very strong, there were two National Leaders of Education, two Kent Leaders of Education and the direct involvement of three multi-academy trusts.

10. Members clarified that the Regional Schools Commissioner reported to the National Schools Commissioner who answered to the Minister, this matter had gone to Lord Agnew for his decision.

11. Mr Bird suggested that the Scrutiny Committee should consider a proposal that the Cabinet Member and Chairman of CYPE Cabinet Committee look at the pros and cons of Through Schools so that Members were better placed to judge their merits in future.

POST MEETING NOTE: This proposal was withdrawn at the end of the meeting.

12. Following a question about the Commissioning Plan and its lead times the Leader explained that there had not been an issue with the Commissioning Plan but with the process following the plan. The Commissioning Plan identified rising demand in 2014 and this was sought to be addressed in a variety of ways. It was not considered that the Commissioning Plan was at fault, but there were discrepancies with the NHS data, highlighted within a quality assurance audit, and in addition temporary moves to expand some schools and changes in patterns of migration.

13. One of the local members commented on the short notice of the notification of the decision, and that her comment was not included in the decision paperwork. The Member did agree with the reasoning behind the proposal however it was noted that the highways information was not available in the paperwork accompanying the notification and it would have been useful to know that the highways plan was ready. Mr Carter, as the decision taker, apologised for the late notice in consulting local members, he explained he was trying to ensure that they would support the decision and that the Regional Schools Commissioner would endorse it. Mr Carter confirmed that Sir Roger Gale MP had supported the Thanet Headteachers and his own opinion throughout the discussions.

14. In response to a Member raising concerns about Royal Harbour and whilst accepting Ofsted showed progress there were concerns that not enough progress had yet been made. It was considered that careful thought should be given around supporting a school taking on extra children, Mr Luxmoore and Ms Greig both offered an invitation to all Members to visit Royal Harbour, they reiterated that it had a strong team with a committed Headteacher and that progress over the two years had been

positive. Thanet was in a unique position with high calibre Headteachers wanting to work together on the basis that no school will fail.

15. One Member commented on the pattern of expanding schools and overcrowded schools, she asked whether there was capacity at the schools in question. Mr Luxmoore confirmed that they were only looking to expand schools that would be strengthened by expansion rather than undermined by it.

16. Members expressed disappointment that the Corporate Director was not present, however the focus of the meeting was on political decision-making on this matter.

17. In response to a query about whether the sponsor of the proposed new free school shared the concerns about viability when the application was made, the Leader explained that he didn't recall this being raised; however, he couldn't speak for the sponsor.

18. Ms Greig confirmed that the schools had a good track record of managing building works on site and this would certainly not affect the education of the young people.

19. A Member referred to the comment in the decision paperwork about Thanet District Council's housing projections being questioned and whether there were concerns in any other district? The Leader explained that an enormous amount of work was done with districts and borough councils and they were reasonably confident with the assumptions.

20. The Chairman asked Members if they wished to refer to the information set out in the exempt appendix to the report and hear the additional information provided by the witnesses and hence if they wished to pass a motion to exclude the press and public from the meeting. Members confirmed that they did wish to do this and, accordingly, the Chairman read out the motion to exclude the press and public from the meeting.

MOTION TO EXCLUDE THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

(Open Minute of Exempt Discussion)

21. Members heard further confidential information from Mr Luxmoore and Ms Greig and then thanked them for attending and both guests left the room.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee note the information they had been provided with and thank the guests for attending the meeting.