

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

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, 2 April 2008.

PRESENT: Mrs V J Dagger (Chairman), Mrs C Angell, Mr C J Capon, Mr A D Crowther, Mr M J Northey, Mr A R Poole, Mr M J Vye and Mr F Wood-Brignall (Substitute for Mr R B Burgess)

IN ATTENDANCE: Dr I Craig (Director Strategy Policy & Performance); Mr D Hart, Education Support Officer, Dartford and Gravesham; and Mr G K Mills (Legal and Democratic Services).

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Proposed Closure of Axton Chase School and its Replacement with a Government Funded Academy
(Item. 3)

(1) Prior to discussion of this item the Director of Operations circulated a paper which updated Members of the Advisory Board on the summary of written responses.

(2) He also circulated a paper which replaced paragraph 14.1 of the published report. The amended paper confirmed that there were no capital costs to KCC connected with the closure of Axton Chase School. Part of the site was due to be sold with the subsequent receipt being used to support the Academies and Building Schools for the Future Programme. The Academy would take on the rest of the site. Running cost for the Academies would be paid for by the Government and the sponsors with the Academy also formulating its own staffing strategy. Should there be any redundancies then these costs would be borne by the Local Authority.

(3) During the course of a wide ranging and detailed debate Members of the Advisory Board asked officers a range of questions related to these proposals. Dr Craig confirmed that the Capital Receipt could only be used for a purpose related to the Academy. Dr Craig also said that whilst it was standard procedure to invite the teaching unions to attend consultation meetings, it did appear that on this particular occasion, they had not receive such an invitation. Mr Hart said that the Headteacher of Axton Chase School had confirmed there had been on site meetings with Union representatives and that the appointed Consultants had arranged a meeting with the unions and this would be taking place on 23 April 2008.

(4) Dr Craig said that should the recommendation before the Advisory Board be agreed then the formal consultation process would commence and the Unions would be consulted as to their views as part of that process. In answer to other questions raised by Members, Dr Craig said that until the work of the consultants had been completed, it would not be possible to say what exactly would be

provided in terms of facilities on the site. Dr Craig also said that although KCC was a sponsor of the Academy proposal, it could not itself decide how the school should be organised. In relation to the timing of the planning application, Dr Craig said that its determination did not in his view pre-judge the Academy proposals and that nonetheless the school was in urgent need of re-building. Also, it was acknowledged that Axton Chase was at the heart of the community and a range of extra curricular activity took place within the surroundings of the school. The Academy would be able to build and enhance those uses and continue to act as community hub. In answer to a question relating to the costs to local people of using the school facilities, Dr Craig said that, that would be a matter for the Governing Body as it was for them to determine the charging policies relating to extra curricular uses.

(5) With regard to issues relating to staffing, Dr Craig said that the new Academy will be federated with the Leigh Technology Academy. The two schools would be operated separately in terms of staff but would have one overarching Governing Body which would be responsible for determining all staffing issues. In response to further concerns expressed about the availability of the school facilities for community uses and the affordability of those uses, Dr Craig said that KCC as a sponsor of the Academy proposals would be in a position to influence the Governing Body in the way that the school was operated. However, it had to be recognised that at the end of the day it was for the Governing Body to run the school. Having said that he fully understood the views which Members were expressing on this issue and said he would forward these on to the Consultees.

(6) Following further discussions, the Advisory Board agreed to the proposal to close Axton Chase school and for it to be re-opened as a Government funded Academy and that a public notice be issued accordingly. Mrs Angell asked for it to be recorded that in agreeing to these recommendations, it was important to ensure that the teaching unions were fully consulted on these proposals. This was agreed

2. Schools Applying for Foundation/Trust Status *(Item. 4)*

For information and noted