

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 Wednesday, 5 November 2008.

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

ALSO PRESENT: Mr L B Ridings and Rev N Genders

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr D Adams, Area Children's Services Officer for Ashford & Shepway; Ms C Lay, Area Children's Services Officer for Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells; Mr I Turner, Area Children's Services Officer and Mr G Mills, Democratic Services.

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Minutes - 11 September 2008
(Item 3)

RESOLVED that, subject to the inclusion of Mr A Poole to the list of those present, the Minutes for the meeting held on 11 September 2008 were agreed as a true record.

2. Dates of Meetings - 2009
(Item 4)

The Advisory Board noted its meeting dates for 2009 as follows:-

Thursday, 8 January – 10.30 am
Thursday, 5 February – 10.30 am
Thursday, 12 March – 2.00 pm
Thursday, 23 April – 10.30 am
Thursday, 21 May – 10.30 am
Thursday, 16 July - 2.00 pm
Thursday, 10 September – 2.00 pm
Thursday, 8 October – 10.30 am
Wednesday, 4 November – 10.30 am
Wednesday, 9 December – 2.00 pm

3. Proposed Closure of Park Farm (Foundation) Primary School and its replacement as a Primary School within the Folkestone Academy
(Item 5 – Report by Director, Operations)

(1) This report sought the views of the Advisory Board on a proposal to undertake a public consultation in conjunction with the Governing Body, on the closure of Park Farm (Foundation) Primary School. The school would be replaced by a new primary school within the Folkestone Academy.

(2) During the course of discussion, Members of the Advisory Board raised a number of concerns. These included the arrangements for the Headship of the Primary School; the potential loss of playing fields; the admission arrangements; special needs provision; the need for Members to receive legal advice on the establishment of schools under this process; the need to see evidence that the Academy was prepared to engage with other primary schools in the area and the adequacy of the map provided with the report.

(3) In response, officers advised Members that it was likely that the new all through school would have an Executive Head with the Primary School having a "Head of School". The current Head teacher of Park Farm was aware of the situation and, it would be the responsibility of the Governing Body to decide whether to have a Head teacher to oversee the primary element of the school. As to the playing fields these were considered to be adequate to serve all needs and only land which was surplus would be disposed of. However, Sport England would be asked for its views as part of the consultation exercise.

(4) As to the admission arrangements the Folkestone Academy would become an "all age" school admitting some 60 pupils per year group in its primary phase and 240 pupils in the secondary phase. The Academy would also have some 250 post 16 places. In 2010 entering the Academy would be subject to the statutory admissions arrangements and officers said it was clear that no-one would want to have a situation where children were being disadvantaged. If the proposal to go out to consultation was approved, then officers said they would provide more detailed information about the admission arrangements and also provide advice on the legal position regarding the establishment of schools under this process. With regard to special needs, the current special needs provisions provided at Foxwood and High Hill would be relocated to the Brockhill site in new buildings with integrated provision. Officers also said that they would ensure that any future reports included a more detailed site map.

(5) Following further discussion, officers said they acknowledged the concerns which Members had raised and if approval was given for the proposal to go out to consultation then they would ensure that in their next report they would deal in more detail with the points which had been raised during the course of the debate.

(6) The Advisory Board then agreed unanimously that a public consultation exercise should be undertaken in conjunction with the Governing Body on the proposal for the closure of Park Farm Primary School, Folkestone and its replacement as part of the Folkestone Academy.

4. Proposed Closure of Tunbridge Wells (Community) High School to replace with a Government Funded Academy *(Item 6 – Report by Director, Operations)*

(1) This report sought the views of the Advisory Board on a proposal to undertake a public consultation on the closure of Tunbridge Wells High School, in order that it may be replaced with a Government Funded Academy.

(2) During discussion, Members of the Board raised some issues around the size of the new Academy and whether it could be filled with pupils without damaging the

school rolls of other schools in the area. Members also raised questions around the timescale to get the new Academy open; what the costs would be and the funding arrangements, and would these arrangements mean that the construction of the Academy would mean the rules relating to the Building Schools for the Future Programme being circumvented. In reply officers agreed that the proposed opening of the new Academy in September 2009 would be a challenge but they believed this was achievable. The new Academy would provide enhanced secondary provision for the Tunbridge Wells area and provide students and parents/carers with a local school of choice for all aptitudes and abilities. It was said that the investment in facilities and curriculum development together with the funding flexibility that the Academy would bring would have a positive impact on current standards of attainment and bring about improved life opportunities for the local community. On the funding issues, officers said that the Academy programme and the BSF programme were separate so building the Academy would not have an adverse impact on the improvements to be undertaken to other schools, under the BSF programme. The funding opportunity to build this Academy should therefore be seized now so that local students could be taught in a modern and well funded school.

(3) Following further discussions, Members of the Advisory Board considered the recommendations set out in the report. Mrs Dean said that she was not convinced by the proposal nor the arguments for building the Academy which had been put forward. She therefore decided to abstain from voting. Mr Poole said that he had reservations about the proposal but agreed to support the recommendation to undertake a consultation in order to gauge public opinion. The other Members of the Advisory Board supported the recommendation.

(4) It was therefore agreed that a public consultation be undertaken, in conjunction with the Governing Body on the proposal to close the Tunbridge Wells High School in order for it to be replaced with a Government funded Academy.

5. Schools Applying for Foundation/Trust Status *(Item 7 – Report by Director, Operations)*

Members of the Advisory Board noted this report which informed them of the current situation regarding Foundation/Trust proposals.