

Appendix 2

PUBLIC FIRST STAGE CONSULTATION MEETING HELD AT HYLTON RED HOUSE PRIMARY SCHOOL

A Local Authority School Place Planning Consultation was held on Tuesday 11th September 2012 at 6.00 pm.

Those present were:-

(a) Governors

Mrs S Humble (Vice Chair), Mr S Williamson (Headteacher)

(b) Clerk to the Governing Body

Lisa Hutchinson (Specialist Minute Taking)

(c) In Attendance

Val Thompson, Business Relationship and Information Governance Manager
Beverley Scanlon, Head of Commissioning and Change Management
Gary Robinson, Governor Support Manager
Stuart Bain, Chair of Education Board - Diocese
Jeremy Fitt, Diocesan Director of Education

42F/12 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs A Hodgson.

Governors agreed to accept to accept the apologies.

43F/12 Declaration of Interest

No governors declared an interest in any agenda item.

44F/12 LA School Place Planning Consultation

Welcome and Introductions

Mr Williamson welcomed Parents to the LA School Place Planning Consultation and recapped on the Soft Federation arrangement between Hylton Red House Primary School and Bishop Harland COE VA School.

Mr Williamson discussed anxieties and stated that the consultation was for Parents to find out more information regarding the future of Hylton Red House Primary School. Mr Williamson thanked Parents for attending and confirmed that the decision around options Mrs Thompson would discuss were still under negotiation and no decisions had been made.

Mr Williamson introduced Mrs Thompson and Mrs Scanlon from the LA, Mr Fitt and Mr Bain from the Diocese highlighted to parents that they would be able to answer questions relating to the LA and Church of England.

Mr Williamson introduced Mrs Humble, Vice Chair of Governors, Mr Robinson who was supporting the LA presentation and the Clerk who would record a minute of the meeting.

Presentation

Mrs Thompson told parents/carers that there would be a power point presentation (See Annex 1) and that parents/carers would be welcome to comment and ask questions when the presentation concluded. The points covered were:

Explanation of the legal differences between the status of Maintained and Church of England Schools with regards to building, staffing and budgets.

Maintained Schools buildings were owned by the LA, staff employed by the LA and budgets set via the LA. Church of England Schools buildings were owned by the Church, the playing fields owned by the LA, staff employed by the Governing Body and budgets set by the LA.

The impact the Soft Federation and the Executive Headteacher had made in improvements for both Schools.

The surplus place position of both schools and the estimated percentage of surplus places currently and by 2015 indications are that there will be a surplus of 20%. The data used to project the numbers is live births within each ward.

Three options were presented for managing the position in terms of sustaining improvement at both schools and addressing the surplus place positions.

In terms of buildings, for both Schools, Option 1 would remain as they are. Bishop Harland owned by the Church and Hylton Red House by the LA.

Option 2 would incorporate a transfer of the building at Hylton Red House site from LA to Diocese and a possible transfer of the site at Bishop Harland to be owned by the LA. Neither option 1 or Option 2 would include a nursery class.

Mrs Thompson referred to the difficulties of managing budgets effectively to ensure a stable staffing structure when operating with significant surplus places. If a school could be established which operates with a minimum number of surplus places it would enable a stable staffing structure to be maintained and provide effective education for the community.

Parents/carers were aware of recent Ofsted inspections and that unless a local solution can be found, the school would possibly become an enforced Academy in the future. Mrs Thompson discussed the difficulties of managing budgets with significant surplus places and the impact on being able to offer the best education for the children. The LA was looking at what was best for the community in terms of maintaining and building on the excellent progress achieved so far.

Mrs Thompson informed parents/carers that the budget was based on pupil roll and that surplus places make it more challenging to manage budgets effectively. Both schools had successfully managed their finances well to date, but this would be difficult to maintain in the future.

Mrs Thompson explained that a preferred option would be looked at by Cabinet in October with a final decision by December. Cabinet consisted of elected members of the Council including the Leader of the Council and various portfolio holders.

The final decision would be made by The School Organisation Committee of Cabinet in December but there would be further consultation before that stage.

HR Information

Mrs Dobrianski confirmed that under Option 1 the Governing Body would declare all posts redundant. Governors at Hylton Red House Primary School would then be approached to consider the Bishop Harland Staff for additional posts on a non competitive basis. The LA would continue their duty to support the redeployment of staff.

Option 2 would declare all posts redundant within Bishop Harland and Hylton Red House Schools. The temporary Governing Body would devise a new staffing structure for the new school. Staff would be ring fenced to positions and if displaced would be supported by the LA in finding a new post through redeployment if possible.

Mrs Dobrianski noted that Option 3 would mean no staffing changes.

Diocese/Church of England

Mr Fitt set out the history of Church of England schools and spoke of the diversity that they can bring to a community.

Mr Fitt explained that the Church of England was interested in keeping a presence in the area to maintain a Church School. Mr Fitt highlighted that there were only 2 Church of England Primary Schools within the City at present and 1 secondary school.

Mr Fitt reiterated that it was in the interest of the Community to have a local solution rather than an imposed solution to the current position.

Response Forms

Mrs Thompson informed parents/carers that Response Forms were available and that all comments and feedback would need to be submitted by 28th September 2012.

Mrs Thompson drew attention to the fact that one of the questions asked for respondents to tick which is their preferred option but stressed that this was not a vote on options.

Questions

The following questions were asked by Parents:

- Q: Will Option 2 have more classes or more pupils per class?
- A: Mr Williamson discussed that his preferred option was to have more classes.
Classrooms within Hylton Red House are currently empty due to the falling roll number and are being used for other resources and interventions and would be reinstated as classrooms if there was a new school. .
- Q: Mrs Lock asked about the Nursery and if Hylton Red House Nursery would be part of the new School? Mrs Lock stated she was worried about her 2 year old and if there would be enough spaces for her child.
- A: Mrs Thompson confirmed the nursery was completely separate from the school and that they manage admissions themselves. However, the local authority would look at the nursery and do some remodelling if necessary to meet demand.
- Q What if my child has an older sibling in the School, would this be taken into account?
- A Mr Fitt stated that the Diocese work closely with the LA regarding admissions and that their admissions policies, overseen by the Dioceses are generally similar to local authority admissions policy.

Mrs Thompson stated that a sibling is one of the highest criteria in terms of allocation of places.
- Q: What are the time frames as parents need to consider new uniforms and places?
- A: Mrs Thompson advised that a report would be taken to Cabinet in October and there would be further consultation on a form proposal if Cabinet agreed. A final decision would then be made in December. If there was to be new school it would be effective from September 2013.

Uniforms will be discussed with the Governing Body as costs would be involved and would not want this to affect parents.

Mr Bain confirmed that funding will also be discussed via the Dioceses with regards to uniforms.
- Q: Will the children meet their classmates prior to the new school academic year and will they be put in classes with people they know?
- A: Mr Williamson recapped on the years 3 and 6 working together across the soft federation and that he planned to have parents work with the schools for children to meet one another if there was to be a new school.

Mr Bain confirmed that there could be an event arranged for the children to be brought together. This would also see the community coming together.

Q: Miss Willis asked about Bishop Harland Nursery and the current places and if they would transfer to Hylton Red House Nursery School?

A: Mr Williamson stated that the children completing 3 terms would automatically be ready for reception class within the new school. Other children ready for Nursery would go to Hylton Red House Nursery School. Mr Williamson reiterated that the nursery would remain as a separate identity.

Q: Miss Hedley asked about capacity of the Nursery?

A: Mrs Thompson stated that this was taken into account. If there was to be a new school surveyors would be working with both the new school and the nursery to discuss remodelling if necessary.

Mr Fitt said that he thought the Hylton Red House site had a lot of potential compared to Bishop Harland's site. This site had a lot more to offer in terms of size and potential.

Mr Bain discussed Collective worship in assemblies and that RE Studies help children prepare for the future; however the Diocese does not force this upon people. The intention was for the best school and education for this community.

Q: Mrs Lock asked about Bishop Harland's Ofsted report and asked what plans were in place to maintain the levels at Hylton Red House so that standards don't drop.

A: Mr Williamson stated that the children were already being taught across the schools. Miss Watson confirmed and gave some examples of the joint working.

Mr Williamson discussed Bishop Harland COE VA School and their progress made to date. Hylton Red House Primary School is a bit further on in the journey and has improved much more since the Ofsted inspection.

Mr Bain stated that delivery would be easier having one building and the consistent approach and expectations of staff would continue.

Miss Watson discussed the consistency of working together across the schools and highlighted that they were one team working together to make sure the children receive the best education.

Miss Bulmer agreed with Miss Watson's statement and confirmed she was in full support.

Q: Miss Hedley asked about the day to day running of a Church of England School and what is the difference from maintained?

A: Mr Williamson confirmed that there would not be much of a difference as the School are working already on the lines of a Church of England School. The children visit the local Church at intervals throughout the year.

Mr Williamson discussed Rev Jennifer Bradshaw and how her visits are regular to both of the Schools.

Mr Bain briefed on RE studies and confirmed that the 6 major faiths are taught. Miss Watson confirmed that the children were taught this already in school as a requirement by law.

Q: If the new School became outstanding would the children in the community be guaranteed a place or will you be letting other children from other catchment areas in?

A: Mrs Thompson discussed admissions criteria and that as the final tiebreaker for places for admission is distance, children in the community would be in a strong position to get places. Mrs Humble discussed the Options and stated that as part of the Finance Committee and with consideration of the reduced budget, Option 3 would not be viable as there would be insufficient budget provision to meet the needs longer term.

Mrs Humble stated that she thought Option 2 was the best option for the children and their needs and to offer them the best academic start in life.

Miss Hedley stated she attended Church at the weekend as she wanted to understand the faith aspects more in case her child asked questions relating to RE. Miss Hedley stated as part of the Governing Body, she also favoured Option 2 as this option was fair for all the children in the community not just her own and she wanted the best for everyone.

Mrs Partridge informed fellow parents that she was a past pupil of Bishop Harland COE VA School and that the day to day running of the School was no different to a maintained School.

A discussion around Bishop Harland COE VA School and the children living in that area took place. Mr Williamson stated that a good school was what mattered and that people would travel to get their children into a good school.

Mr Williamson stated he would organise a coffee morning/afternoon at the School for parents who wished to discuss the options provided by the LA with other parents before submitting their response form.

Mrs Thompson thanked parents for their participation and their challenging questions. Mrs Thompson reminded parents about the response forms that they could collect on their departure.

PUBLIC FIRST STAGE CONSULTATION MEETING HELD AT BISHOP HARLAND CHURCH OF ENGLAND VOLUNTARY AIDED SCHOOL

A Local Authority School Place Planning Consultation was held on Wednesday 12th September 2012 at 6.00 pm.

Those present were:-

(c) Governors

Mr R Thorndyke (Chair), Mrs E Watson, Mr S Williamson (Headteacher)

(d) Clerk to the Governing Body

Lisa Hutchinson (Representing Children's Services)

(c) In Attendance

Val Thompson, Business Relationship and Information Governance Manager
Beverley Scanlon, Head of Commissioning and Change Management
Gary Robinson, Governor Support Manager
Jeremy Fitt, Diocesan Director of Education

46F/12 Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

47F/12 Declaration of Interest

No governors declared an interest in any agenda item.

48F/12 LA School Place Planning Consultation

Welcome and Introductions

Mr Williamson welcomed Parents to the LA School Place Planning Consultation and recapped on the Soft Federation arrangement between Bishop Harland COE VA School and Hylton Red House Primary School.

Mr Williamson thanked parents for attending and discussed how a lot of conversation had already taken place regarding the School and its future and stated that this was something parents and staff were passionate about.

Mr Williamson confirmed to parents that this was a consultation by the LA and not the school or Dioceses.

Mr Williamson introduced Mrs Thompson and Mrs Scanlon from the LA and Mr Fitt from the Dioceses and advised parents that they would be able to answer questions relating to the LA and Church of England.

Mr Williamson introduced Mr Thorndyke, Chair of Governors and Rev Jennifer Bradshaw the new Vicar at St Cuthbert's. Mr Robinson was in

attendance supporting the presentation and Mr Williamson introduced the Clerk to the Governing Body who would provide a minute of the meeting.

Mr Williamson also welcomed Mrs Trotter, former Deputy Head of the School.

Presentation

Mrs Thompson told parents/carers that there would be a power point presentation (See Annex 1) and that parents/carers would be welcome to comment and ask questions when the presentation concluded. The points covered were:

Explanation of the legal differences between the status of Maintained and Church of England Schools with regards to building, staffing and budgets.

Maintained Schools buildings were owned by the LA, staff employed by the LA and budgets set via the LA. Church of England Schools buildings were owned by the Church, the playing fields owned by the LA, staff employed by the Governing Body and budgets set by the LA.

The impact the Soft Federation and the Executive Headteacher had made in improvements for both Schools.

The surplus place position of both schools and the estimated percentage of surplus places currently and by 2015 indications are that there will be a surplus of 20%. The data used to project the numbers is live births within each ward.

Three options were presented for managing the position in terms of sustaining improvement at both schools and addressing the surplus place positions.

In terms of buildings, for both Schools, Option 1 would remain as they are. Bishop Harland owned by the Church and Hylton Red House by the LA.

Option 2 would incorporate a transfer of the building at Hylton Red House site from LA to Diocese and a possible transfer of the site at Bishop Harland to be owned by the LA. Neither option 1 or Option 2 would include a nursery class.

Mrs Thompson referred to the difficulties of managing budgets effectively to ensure a stable staffing structure when operating with significant surplus places. If a school could be established which operates with a minimum number of surplus places it would enable a stable staffing structure to be maintained and provide effective education for the community.

Parents/carers were aware of recent Ofsted inspections and that unless a local solution can be found, the school would possibly become an enforced Academy in the future. Mrs Thompson discussed the difficulties of managing budgets with significant surplus places and the impact on being able to offer the best education for the children. The LA was looking at what was best for the community in terms of maintaining and building on the excellent progress achieved so far.

Mrs Thompson informed parents/carers that the budget was based on pupil roll and that surplus places make it more challenging to manage budgets effectively. Both schools had successfully managed their finances well to date, but this would be difficult to maintain in the future.

Mrs Thompson explained that a preferred option would be looked at by Cabinet in October with a final decision by December. Cabinet consisted of elected members of the Council including the Leader of the Council and various portfolio holders.

The final decision would be made by The School Organisation Committee of Cabinet in December but there would be further consultation before that stage.

HR Information

Mrs Dobrianski confirmed that under Option 1 the Governing Body would declare all posts redundant. Governors at Hylton Red House Primary School would then be approached to consider the Bishop Harland Staff for additional posts on a non competitive basis. The LA would continue their duty to support the redeployment of staff.

Option 2 would declare all posts redundant within Bishop Harland and Hylton Red House Schools. The temporary Governing Body would devise a new staffing structure for the new school. Staff would be ring fenced to positions and if displaced would be supported by the LA in finding a new post through redeployment if possible.

Mrs Dobrianski noted that Option 3 would mean no staffing changes.

Diocese/Church of England

Mr Fitt set out the history of Church of England schools and spoke of the diversity that they can bring to a community.

Mr Fitt explained that the Church of England was interested in keeping a presence in the area to maintain a Church School. Mr Fitt highlighted that there were only 2 Church of England Primary Schools within the City at present and 1 secondary school.

Mr Fitt reiterated that it was in the interest of the Community to have a local solution rather than an imposed solution to the current position.

Response Forms

Mrs Thompson informed parents/carers that Response Forms were available and that all comments and feedback would need to be submitted by 28th September 2012.

Mrs Thompson drew attention to the fact that one of the questions asked for respondents to tick which is their preferred option but stressed that this was not a vote on options.

Questions

The following questions were asked by Parents:

Q: Would teachers already employed at the school automatically get the jobs at the new School.

A: Mrs Thompson stated that the LA would be looking to redeploy the staff.

Q: Is Town End Farm School Closing?

A: Mrs Thompson stated that Town End was not closing and was an Academy now.

Q: Can I clarify will staff from both schools be redeployed at the new school.

A: If there was a new school, the temporary governing body would establish a new staffing structure and staff would be ring fenced to posts. The LA would support redeployment for staff that were displaced.

Q: If both schools closed and new school would open, is there a new name etc.

A: Mrs Thompson confirmed that this would be a new school with a new name and that it would be in the current building on the site which would have some remodelling done to it.

Q: Would the new school be an academy?

A: No it would be a Church of England School, to offer diversity for parents.
The 1st option would mean no option for a Church of England School on the North side of the City.

Q: A discussion over spare places at Hylton Red House and Bishop Harland took place. How are you going to accommodate all the pupils in the new School?

A: Hylton Red House is a much bigger building and will accommodate the children from both Schools.

Q: Can you guarantee my child gets a place.

A: Yes all pupils currently attending the school currently would be offered a place at a new school.

Q: What about the Nursery? What if Hylton Red House Nursery was full, where do we take our Children?

A: LA have looked at available places and will do some remodelling to the building if necessary to meet the demand for places.

Q: Is the main reason for this consultation around the budget?

A: Mrs Thompson stated that a local solution is needed rather than having an external solution imposed. The budgetary position is a significant factor in ensuring a sustainable school for the community.

Ms Scanlon discussed the Church of England Schools and how the Diocese would like to sustain this presence in this community.

Mrs Thompson discussed the new funding formula to be introduced to schools which would mean that small schools would potentially receive less funding.

Q: Will there be more children in each class?

A: Mr Williamson discussed pupil teacher ratios and explained the flexibility afforded in a bigger school.

Mrs Trotter confirmed that in her previous role at the School as Deputy Headteacher she had 53 children per class when she taught in the School.

Q: Would the teacher be able to get to know the children well if there were bigger classes?

A: Mr Williamson confirmed that all staff knew all of the children no matter how big the class.

Q: How can you guarantee success with Ofsted?

A: The two schools work together now and we are in the top 18 Schools in Sunderland.

Q: Smaller class sizes provide more engagement with teacher; surely the potential grades are better due to this.

A: Mr Williamson stated that it's the way the children are taught in the class that is important.

and that there would be no more than 30 children per class. There would also be the option to do intervention and support with identified individuals.

Q: Year 5 and Year 6 are currently in mixed classes. What would the plans be for a new school?

A: A new school would have 75 children in one year group, equalling 5 classes for the year group including one mixed class. There are no indications that children in mixed classes do less well.

Mr Fitt discussed how this was not about saving money regarding teachers. A lot more children would be there but in effect the two budgets would be put together and the budget would allow more flexibility and greater economies of scale.

Mr Fitt recapped on the close working with the City Council regarding options for the schools and that the Dioceses view is that the only option they could support would be Option 2.

Option 1 would mean the closure of a Church of England School, there would not be a presence in this part of the City. Hylton Red House Primary School in lots of ways operated like a Church of England School at present.

Mr Fitt discussed Option 3 and doing nothing. The Dioceses view is that there would be advantages in bringing two schools together. It would be maintaining diversity for the community.

Hylton Red House Primary was in a lot of trouble regarding standards and Ofsted. The school now is measured as a good school. Bishop Harland was also in trouble for a few years and had difficulty recruiting a suitable headteacher. Under the leadership of Mr Williamson the school is now technically satisfactory and building towards good. However, we still need to find a local solution to ensure that education in this part of the City is secure.

The Minister for Education has the power to make the School into an Academy and impose a sponsor of his choice. A local solution would be better and we need to make it sustainable.

Q What are the plans of safety for children travelling further to school.

A: As part of any plans for a new school, pedestrian and vehicle access, would be considered and addressed..

Q: Would there be a pupil bus?

A: Mrs Thompson stated that the LA cannot say for certain at present. There are 106 children with less than a mile to travel. Plans may not include a bus.

Q: What about uniforms.

A: Mr Williamson stated he would negotiate with the temporary governing body for a new uniform to be provided for each pupil.

Mrs Thompson discussed the time frames and that a decision would be made in December 2012. If the decision was that a new school was to be opened it would be in September 2013. .

Q: Can we have a new building?

A: Mrs Thompson stated that the LA does not have the finances for a new building.

Q: What if it costs too much to do any repairs can we have a new building.

A: Mrs Thompson confirmed the building had been looked at by surveyors and it is structurally sound.

Q: Parents at Hylton Red House School think it's their School.

A: Mr Williamson discussed the positive feedback from the parent's consultation at Hylton Red School. Parents expressed they were concerned for parents from Bishop Harland being isolated and wanted the best for all of the children. A lot of them want to support all of the children in the Community and that's why they were happy for me to come to this school as headteacher.

The Church wanted the community to do well, save as many staff as possible and get the best for the children. Outward bound activities were discussed and how this would be retained in a new School.

Staff had worked incredibly hard and school did not want to lose them. However, both schools were struggling with finances and could not sustain the current position.

Mr Williamson stated that he believed Option 2 presented the right way forward. The most important part of an outstanding school was all about the children, staff and parents, not about the building or where it was located.

Q: We have some signatures for you in terms of support regarding the school. Can we hand this over to you?

A: Yes, thank you. Mrs Thompson accepted the document.

Mrs Trotter stood up to speak to the parents and stated her heart sank when she had heard the news. Mrs Trotter recapped on her time at the School from 1964 – 1994 and stated within the 30 years of working at the School she had loved every minute of it and that it was important to her for the School to continue as a Church School and to continue the ethos.

Mrs Trotter discussed how things changed and improved and in her opinion, Option 2 was the very best for the children. Mrs Trotter stated she endorsed what Mr Williamson said and what we feel about our children is so important. Mrs Trotter acknowledged and understood parents concerns.

The children would get used to a new building especially with the same headteacher and staff who would provide security and continuity for them.

Q: Under Option 2 will staff who transfer get to know children.

A: Miss Jarvis confirmed that the staff from both schools were already working together which included staff meetings and working together in the classrooms. A lot of the children know the staff already.

Miss Jarvis highlighted that staff were fully behind Option 2 and stated they were not considering their own jobs and that their priority was an outstanding school for the children.

Mr Williamson briefed parents on the Outward bound work that was shared across both schools.

Q: Are the options on the response forms. Will the decision be made anyway and does our opinion matter?

A: Mrs Thompson confirmed that the options are valid and that Cabinet will make their decision after considering all the feedback and responses from the consultation.

Q: Hylton Red House Nursery was discussed. Is it separate under a different Governing Body.

A: Yes

Q: I've applied for a place in Bishop Harland Nursery will need to apply to Hylton Red House now?

A: Mrs Thompson confirmed that the LA will arrange the transfer of admissions to nursery applications .

Q: Are they guaranteed a place in the nursery.

A: Mrs Thompson stated that the nursery would be expanded if necessary to meet demand from the local area. However there is never a guarantee of a place in reception but the planned admission number of 75 should be sufficient places to meet demand.

Q: Is there a priority for allocating reception places, if they have attended the nursery do they get a place in reception?

A: No there is no automatic transfer. Parents have to apply for reception places.

Mr Thorndyke reminded parents that Mr Williamson was on loan to Bishop Harland and that if the schools stay as they are the governing body would have the same issues as previously in terms of having to find a suitable headteacher.

Q: Mrs Rodgers asked if things stay as they are would Mr Williamson have to stop working in Bishop Harland. .

A: Mr Williamson said if things stay as they he could not sustain managing both schools.

Mr Thorndyke stated he felt this was a big issue as appointing a new headteacher would be difficult..

Mr Thorndyke discussed the proposals for working together and felt that Option 2 would enable a strong school to be established to serve this community and that. governors were in favour of option 2.

Mr Williamson stated that he had arranged a coffee morning from 9.00 – 10.30am on Tuesday 18th September 2012 so that parents could discuss the options. Mr Williamson stated that he and Miss Jarvis would be available for this event to answer any questions.

Parents stated they thought this was helpful.

Q: Has anyone asked what the kids want.

A: Mr Williamson said that the staff would be discussing it with children in a sensitive and encouraging way.

Mrs Thompson thanked parents for the helpful debate and confirmed that it was important to know what parents think.

Mrs Thompson closed meeting.

PUBLIC FIRST STAGE CONSULTATION MEETING HELD AT HYLTON RED HOUSE PRIMARY SCHOOL ON WEDNESDAY 19TH SEPTEMBER 2012 AT 6.00 P.M.

Those present: -

Local Authority Officers

Beverley Scanlon – Head of Commissioning & Change Management
Val Thompson – Business Relationships & Governance Manager
Gary Robinson – Governor Support Manager

Local Authority Councillors

Cllr R Bell
Cllr R Copeland
Cllr V Davison
Cllr P Smith

Others

Mr P DeVere –UNISON representative
Mr J Fitt – Diocesan Director of Schools – Diocese of Durham
Mrs A Hodgson – Chair of Governors -
Mrs L Watson – Acting Headteacher, Hylton Red House Primary School
Mr S Williamson – Executive Headteacher – Bishop Harland CE Primary School and Hylton Red House Primary School

Together with 34 members of the public (including some school staff, parents and governors)

School Place Planning - Consultation on the future of Bishop Harland CE Primary School and Hylton Red House Primary School

Beverley Scanlon welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the officers present. Beverley explained that the purpose of the meeting was to explain options regarding the future of the two schools and to seek the views of the community as part of this consultation exercise. Similar meetings had already taken place with employees, parents and governors of both schools.

In undertaking this exercise the Local Authority had been working closely with the Diocese to secure the best possible educational provision for children in the area.

Val Thompson highlighted the differences between Bishop Harland CE Primary School (a maintained Voluntary Aided school) and Hylton Red House School (a maintained community school). Val set out the background to this exercise, drawing attention to the pressure that both schools had been under in the past and the falling pupil rolls. The progress that both schools had made as part of a federation was highlighted. Projected pupil numbers up to 2015 were illustrated.

Three options were being consulted upon: -

- Option 1 - Close Bishop Harland and transfer all pupils to Hylton Red House Primary School
- Option 2 - Close Bishop Harland Primary School and Hylton Red House Primary School and open a new Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School on the Hylton Red House site

- Option 3 - Keep things as they are, but this would mean further changes in the future

The implications in terms of buildings, finance and staffing were set out for each option. Val made it clear that option 2 did not mean that a new school building would be provided. Instead the existing Hylton Red House Primary School building would be remodelled and upgraded to accommodate the pupils from Bishop Harland.

It was also pointed out that under option 1 or option 2 the nursery class currently at Bishop Harland would not transfer, as Hylton Red House Nursery School (located on the same site as Hylton Red House Primary School) would remain a separate school and would accommodate the nursery pupils.

It was pointed out that option 3 could eventually lead to an enforced academy in the area, rather than a local solution.

The next steps in the process were outlined, which included consideration by the Council's Cabinet, further consultation and consideration by the School Organisation Committee of the Cabinet. Any closure or establishment of a school was a statutory process.

Everyone was invited to submit their views regarding the options available and it was explained that comments could be submitted using the response form, by letter or by e-mail. It was stressed, however, that whilst respondents could indicate a preference for one of the available options, this exercise was not a ballot. The purpose of the consultation was to find out people's views.

Questions and comments were invited: -

Question – What is the capacity of the Hylton Red House Primary building?

Mr Williamson - The building could accommodate 525 pupils. It had been constructed for more pupils than it currently held. There were 20 classroom spaces but some were not currently used as classrooms. If proposals were to proceed to the next stage there would be consideration of what needed to be done to the building to bring it up to the required standard.

Question – Would there be enough space to accommodate all Bishop Harland children at Hylton Red House Primary School?

Mr Williamson – It was confirmed that there was sufficient space.

Question (Mrs Hodgson, Chair of Governors – Hylton Red House Primary School) – What was the response of the trade unions to the options?

Val Thompson – The official view of the trade unions could not be anticipated, as consultation was still ongoing. However, initial views seemed positive. One member of school staff present at the meeting (who was also a GMB representative) confirmed that the views of unions were being taken on board.

Question – What will happen to the Bishop Harland site if this was closed? The closure of Downhill Primary School in 2001 was commented upon.

Val Thompson – Nothing had yet been decided about the future of the Bishop Harland site but, if it did close, options were already being looked at.

Jeremy Fitt assured those present that the church was keen to keep a presence in the area, both in the provision of education and in the community. One idea was that the building could house some community facilities (e.g. for use by young people or young mums). A land/building swap between the Diocese and the Local Authority could be arranged to facilitate this.

Question – The DFE were promoting academies as providing the best education. Why would it be so bad if an academy was established?

Val Thompson – The difference between those schools that had chosen to convert to academy status and those who were forced to become academies was highlighted. It was felt important to find a local solution rather than to have something imposed on the schools.

Jeremy Fitt added that the Diocese was not opposed to academies and there were many CE academies in existence. However this was different to enforced takeovers of schools. Jeremy also commented upon the economies of scale that could be achieved by bringing the two schools together.

Comment – In relation to possible community use of the Bishop Harland site, why was it not used for this purpose already? Also, was it affordable to provide community facilities?

Question - Would a combined school mean smaller classes?

Jeremy Fitt answered that it was important to distinguish between the size of the school building and the size of classes. There were economies of scale by having a larger single school and there was no reason why classes would be any larger than at present.

Mr Williamson pointed out that there had been cutbacks in staff in both schools due to financial pressures which had led to larger classes and mixed-age classes. Class sizes in both schools were around 25-28 but these would grow if the schools remained open in their current forms. By combining resources there had already been benefits but if no action was taken there would be difficulties for both schools.

Question – if the Bishop Harland site was used for community facilities, would the caretaker remain on site?

Mr Williamson said that it was not possible to discuss what was likely to happen to individual members of staff such as caretakers at this stage.

Comment – the former Downhill Primary School site was constantly vandalised since it had ceased to be used as a school.

Val Thompson – It would be a matter for the Diocese and the Local Authority to discuss security implications if the Bishop Harland site was no longer used as a school. This would not be disregarded and the Local Authority had a lot of experience around closing buildings. This would be part of further consultation.

Comment – In relation to possible community use it was already difficult to maintain the nearby St Cuthbert's church hall. This needed to be carefully considered.

Val Thompson - More consultation would be needed if community use was being considered for the Bishop Harland site. These discussions would include security issues.

Comment – The closure of the Southwick Primary School site had resulted in regular vandalism. The same would happen to the Bishop Harland site if it were not used as a school. The affordability of community facilities needed more consideration.

Val Thompson – Community use was just one option.

Comment – in response to the comments about future use of the Bishop Harland building, one member of the audience reminded those present that the consultation was about providing an excellent education and was not just about buildings.

There was strong audience support for this comment. A member of school staff said that the schools could not go on as they were and the decision should not be based on what would happen to a building. A union representative from one school commented that staff were prepared to risk their jobs in order to bring about the best education in the area.

Question – If the Hylton Red House Primary site was retained as the single school would there be resources to develop improved dining or sporting facilities?

Val Thompson – The site would be refurbished and improved.

Question – If provision was all on the Hylton Red House Primary site, what could be done to improve safety in terms of traffic on and around the site?

Val Thompson – This would be something that would be carefully looked at during the process of planning the new site. Some preliminary work had already been undertaken.

Question (Mrs A Hodgson – Chair of Governors) – Bearing in mind the desirability of schools remaining in local control what is the relationship between the Local Authority and the Diocese?

Jeremy Fitt - There were around 5,000 Church of England schools in the country. The relationship between the Diocese and the Local Authority was strong because both parties wanted the best possible education. It was noted that Church of England schools often performed better than other schools and also added a spiritual dimension to a child's education.

Jeremy drew a distinction between Church of England schools and Roman Catholic schools. CE schools were not just for those children who attended church. Instead they served the whole community. The religious ethos was certainly never forced on to pupils.

Question – With regard to the employment status of staff in a church school, was there any variation in the terms and conditions? Also, it would cause disruption by re-organising the schools.

Mr Williamson explained that he had been Headteacher of a CE school in the past. Whilst there were some light differences in the contracts of staff the schools followed the same terms and conditions as community schools. The policies and pay were similar and there was no reason to change this.

There would be as little disruption as possible for children, and it was noted that children were very adaptable. Transitional arrangements would be put in place to make this easier.

Question – How has the uncertainty affected staff morale?

This question was answered by members of staff in the audience. They indicated that all staff wanted option 2.

Question – Why was the new school proposed to be a church school?

Mr Williamson – If the new school had not been proposed as a church school it was likely that it would be subject to competition rules. There was an exception to this in the case of proposed church schools.

Comment – There had been many questions focussing on church school provision. This exercise should not be concentrating on whether the new school was a church school or a Local Authority school. The most important aspect of this consultation was the education of children.

This comment was answered by a member of the audience who was a volunteer at Bishop Harland. She assured everyone that religion was not forced on children.

Comment – If option 1 was chosen this would mean that there was no Church of England provision in Sunderland North. This would remove parental choice.

This point was answered by a member of Hylton Red House Primary School staff in the audience. It was explained that, whilst Hylton Red House Primary was not a faith school but still covered a Christian syllabus.

Cllr Bell drew attention to the decline in pupil roll at Downhill Primary School before it closed. It reached the point that the school became unviable and for this reason he believed that option 3 was not workable. Whether it was a community or a voluntary aided school the best option was to bring the schools together to safeguard its future. The Church of England option was a safe option.

Question – Where is the nearest church primary school if Bishop Harland did close?

Val Thompson – There were two CE schools in the south of Sunderland. There were RC schools nearby at English Martyrs RC Primary School and St John Bosco RC Primary School. It was noted that it would remove parental choice if there were no CE school in the north of Sunderland.

Jeremy Fitt said that the Diocese would oppose option 1 because it would mean the loss of a church school in the area.

Mr Williamson – Church schools were good schools which worked hard to deliver provision to the local community. Mr Williamson was passionate about school provision in the area. Despite the position that both schools had been in the past they had both made progress. This was a chance to secure even better provision. Both schools already had high quality staff and Mr Williamson did not want to see a local community devastated by loss of jobs at the schools. Mr Williamson made it clear that he could not take the schools any further forward if they remained as they

were. This was why he was supporting option 2 and this was also the view of both Governing Bodies. Option 2 would bring the very best provision to the area.

Cllr Bell recalled that Hylton Red House Primary School had been in special measures and he highlighted the efforts of everyone to keep the school open. The school had now recovered from this position and was in a better position.

Question – If option 2 were chosen what would the school be called?

Jeremy Fitt – it would be a new school with a new name.

Question – What would happen to the Nursery provision currently at Bishop Harland CE Primary School?

Val Thompson reiterated that the nursery class would not transfer to the new school if option 2 was chosen. Nursery pupils would instead attend Hylton Red House Nursery School, which would remain separate.

Comment – To avoid any misunderstanding it needed to be made clear that no new build was available.

Val Thompson explained that this had been made clear at earlier consultation meetings. She confirmed that there would be investment in the building if option 1 or option 2 were chosen.

Mr Williamson acknowledged that there was some confusion around what was meant by a new school and this would be made even clearer in all subsequent discussions.

Question – If a new school was opened as a church school as proposed by option 2, did the unions have a view on this?

The GMB representative from one of the schools was in the audience repeated that staff at both schools were willing to put their jobs at risk in order to ensure the best education was provided. Staff wanted option 2.

Peter DeVere (UNISON) pointed out that church schools followed nationally agreed terms and conditions. The Diocese supported this. The only deterioration in terms and conditions was if the school became an academy.

Question – How had it been decided who would be invited to this public consultation meeting?

Beverley Scanlon – Leaflets had been distributed in the area.

Some members of the audience indicated that they had not received the leaflet and questioned whether it had been selective who had been invited. Beverley Scanlon said that there had been around 600 leaflets printed and delivered.

It was explained that, should any proposals be taken forward to close or establish a school, statutory public notices would be issued in local public buildings, post offices and in the local press. The Local Authority would try to reach as many people as possible.

Question (Councillor Davison) – Can we inform future parents of any further stages of consultation?

Val Thompson confirmed that there had been liaison with Hylton Red House Nursery School but, nevertheless, it was acknowledged that this was an important consideration and the Local Authority would try to ensure that all parents of young children in the area were informed of the next stage of consultation.

Beverley Scanlon confirmed that all of the comments and questions had been recorded and would be considered. Beverley thanked everyone for their attendance at the meeting.

The meeting closed at 7.25 p.m.

