

School Organisation Stakeholder Group Meeting

Monday 26 February 2017

Ground Floor Meeting Room 3, County Hall, Oxford

1.00 pm – 3.00 pm

Notes

Attendees:

Barbara Chillman, OCC School Organisation and Planning (BC)
Neil Darlington, OCC School Organisation and Planning (ND)
Roy Leach, OCC School Organisation and Planning (RL)
Allyson Milward, OCC School Organisation and Planning (AM)
Justine Miniken, OCC School Organisation and Planning (JM)
Lucy Mills, OCC School Organisation and Planning (LM)
Janet Johnson, OCC, Children with SEN (JJ)
Cllr Hilary Hibbert -Biles, Cabinet Member for Education & Public Health
Cllr Michael Waine, (Chair) OCC (Conservative, Bicester Town)
Cllr Anda Fitzgerald O'Connor, OCC (Conservative, Kingston and Cumnor)
Cllr Jeanette Matelot, OCC (Conservative, Thame and Chinnor) & South Oxfordshire District Council
Cllr John Howson, OCC (Liberal Democrat, St Margaret's)
Cllr Jenny Hannaby, OCC, Liberal Democrat, Grove and Wantage
Cllr Liz Brighthouse, OCC (Labour, Churchill & Lye Valley)
Cllr Neil Owen, WODC (Conservative, Burford & Carterton North)
Cllr Elizabeth Gillespie, SODC, (Conservative, Garsington)
Christine Jones, Diocese of Oxford
Jonathan Hopkins, Oxfordshire Governors Association
Brenda Williams, Oxfordshire Governors Association
Carole Thomson, Oxfordshire Governors Association
Peter Cansell, Oxfordshire Primary Head Teacher Association
Stephen Passey, Oxfordshire Association of Special School Head Teachers

Apologies:

Malcolm Wright, Oxfordshire Governors Association
Marie Tidball, Oxford City Council, Labour, Hinksey Park
Toni Guest, Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham
Sarah Brinkley, Oxfordshire Secondary School Head Teachers Association
Pat Kennedy, Oxford City Council,
Kevin Griffin, OCC School Organisation and Planning (KG)

1. Notes of the last meeting

Action

The notes of the last meeting were agreed to be an accurate record.

Introductions were given around the table for the benefit of those who had not attended the meeting previously.

2. Matters Arising, including:

- **Boarding places at Burford School. Barbara Chillman(BC)**

BC responded to the question raised at the last meeting which was to look

at the possibility of making use of the boarding places at Burford School for Looked After Children (LAC). Having spoken to the Virtual school, they don't feel there is currently any need. This has however highlighted a further issue, that currently Burford School's admission criteria for the boarding school is not compliant with regulations which states that they must give priority to LAC first followed by forces children. Cllr Waine suggested that a letter should be sent to the school outlining that they are not currently compliant. Christine Jones questioned whether a letter was sufficient in this case as it's not lawful. BC confirmed that ND will be addressing this with the school. It was suggested that it could be an oversight and that a letter asking that the school correct this oversight would be the preferred initial course of action. It was also suggested that the Virtual School may not be aware that these places are available. Janet Johnson confirmed she would email the Virtual School to highlight this.

ND

JJ

- **In year admissions and departures for the studio schools and UTC. Neil Darlington (ND)**

In response to the issue raised on in year admissions and departures for the Studio School and UTC, ND responded that firstly the aim is to ensure that the process is fair for all. The in-year admissions for the Studio School and UTC are quite small. UTC has several difficult students who will be joining the school. The Space Studio is most at risk as they have very few in year admissions which only come from Banbury Academy. The question of sustainability was raised in light of this. Cllr Howson commented on the recently published figures from the DfE which looked at retention rates of schools from year 11 to year 12. UTC has a good retention rate, in comparison to the Studio School which loses over 70% of their pupils post 16. Is this the same for the Space Studio? In reply, Roy Leach suggested that census data could be shared with the group to show comparisons.

BC

- **Letters re St Gregory the Great and Banbury Academy, and response to Schools Forum**

Concerns regarding St Gregory the Great were raised with the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) at a meeting on 15th December 2017 which superseded the need to send a letter. There is a team around the school in place which involves a range of agencies to provide support to the school. Brenda Williams noted that the larger issue is The Dominic Barberi Trust, as there are primary schools in the trust who are also struggling. It was noted that this issue is to be looked at by the Education Scrutiny Committee.

ND has raised the issue of Banbury Academy's application form being in breach of the admission policy with the school and so would expect to see this changed for next year's intake. A note will be made for this to be looked at next year to ensure they have complied.

ND

- **The impact of the national funding formula on smaller schools**

It was agreed that the impact of the national funding formula on smaller schools would be looked at in greater detail at the next meeting, as it's still

too early to discuss fully now. Christine Jones commented that the figures currently show a substantial number of smaller schools that are undersubscribed. Cllr Howson also raised the issue that these schools have low reserves. Cllr Hibbert-Biles commented that she is meeting with the DfE next week regarding funding.

3. Report 1 (ND): School Admissions update:

- **Secondary allocations for 2018 (tabled)**

The allocation data for secondary schools was circulated to the group. In essence it's good news as all applications have a place and the vast majority have their first preference. The absolute number who have received their first preference is higher than last year. The letters are ready to go so that parents are notified on 1st March. It was noted that there are variables from area to area. The rise in birth rate is having an impact as large cohorts move from primary to secondary school.

Christine Jones raised the issue of numbers for some of the schools. It was clarified that the "total preferences included second and third preferences; "first preferences" gives a more accurate indication of demand. There are spare places in some areas but not all, for example in Bicester there aren't any spare places. However, in general higher numbers are coming through from the primary sector. Cllr Hannaby commented that Faringdon is full and asked what happens to those children? Travel is an issue in that area. It was confirmed that Faringdon are expanding, so the admission number is expected to go up next year. Cllr Howson commented that King Alfred and Aureus have some surplus places. King Alfred's had agreed to increase their admission number to help with places before the new school at Grove is ready to open, but it was noted that their number has been impacted by Aureus School opening. Cllr Matelot commented on the large numbers that had been refused places at Lord Williams and asked if these were out of county? ND responded that yes, all those in catchment got a place.

Cllr Howson asked what is the position of the proposed Swan School? RL responded that the LA is still very hopeful that it will open, and that planning permission will be granted in September. There are three possible ideas for temporary accommodation for the school until the building opens. Parents will need to apply through the normal route for other schools in case the Swan does not open, but will need to apply to the Swan School direct once it is confirmed. It was noted that there are implications for other schools, in particular St Gregory the Great who currently have spare capacity in year but who are generally unpopular with parents. There is also some concern about opening the Swan school in temporary accommodation as this tends to be a less popular option. The PAN is planned to be 120 for 2019 – 2020, raising to 180 in 2021.

Cllr Waine summarised that there are places this year and asked what is forecast for next year – will expansion and new school plans keep up with demand? BC to provide an update at the next meeting.

BC

- **Primary applications for 2018 – initial data**

The primary allocations process is not as far ahead as secondary. Applications have been received and allocations will be in March.

Cllr Waine noted some worrying figures for very small schools. Cllr Howson suggested that it's not just small schools, for example Rosehill School, notwithstanding the complicated circumstances. It was noted that there are some schools that are unpopular and some will be struggling to be viable if the local pupil population is in decline. This Issue will be raised with Heads and Chairs of Governors meetings in terms of using some available space for SEND. Carol Thompson suggested the need for strategic work on small schools by area, as the viability of small schools is a concern even with the sparsity allocation. It was agreed that there would be future discussion on the funding formula impact to consider this issue once more information is available. Cllr Hannaby commented that small children travelling on buses to schools is still a concern.

4. Report 2 (BC): Forward planning of new schools

This report looks at proposed new schools. The schools that have sponsors identified are covered in report 3 which follows. The next proposed schools requiring sponsors are all primary and are located in Bicester, Witney and Wantage. In Bicester there are two potential primary schools which could open at the same time so a decision needs to be reached as to which school is needed first. South west Bicester is already served by St Edburghs, whereas Graven Hill is in a more isolated position. All three locations are direct delivery by developers which will be the first time this has happened, although it has been an option before. The West Witney development has commenced, and the new school is currently due to be ready ahead of a 2020 opening. S106 triggers would be in line with a 2020 opening in Wantage.

Cllr Hannaby noted that there are no sponsors yet. BC confirmed that this sponsor process will be a competitive process and will start next month. However, there is still a possibility that if the free school process is restarted by the DfE, that bids through that could pre-empt this presumption. Cllr Howson asked what happens to land when the project is developer lead, does the developer get the freehold? BC responded, no the LA gets the freehold and issues a lease.

5. Report 3: Academies update. Allyson Milward (AM)

- **Appendix 1: 2017 Annual report of academies activity in Oxfordshire**

There has only been one school converting to an academy since the last meeting. This was Northbourne CE Primary School who joined ODST in November. The conversion date for Rosehill has changed since the report was circulated prior to the meeting and the school will now convert on 1st September not 1st August and are joining River Learning Trust. We have now received formal confirmation that Maiden Erlegh will be the trust to sponsor Chiltern Edge School and their conversion date is 1st August. St John's Catholic Primary School conversion is now deferred until 1st May. This delay is due to changes to the Catholic articles of association and not to do with any part that the council is involved in. Middle Barton have been granted an academy order and will join RLT on 1st September. Gagle Brook School is due to open in September. Faringdon Academy of Schools and Eynsham Partnership Academy Trust which were considering

options to merge have been unable to reach an agreement on a leadership structure and governance, so will no longer be merging, but will continue to work together. The Marlborough Church of England School a single academy trust, will join River Learning Trust on 1st April.

The Academies Programme Annual Report 2017 was circulated with the meeting papers and the group are asked for any comments before it goes to Education Scrutiny Committee in March. AM highlighted some general points. MAT's are merging to form larger entities. There is some concern about the amount of time taken for sponsors to be found for schools with a Directive Academy Order (dAO) and the ability of the DfE to rescind such orders if there are any slight improvements.

Cllr Hannaby suggested that talks with maintained schools should be expanded. It would be helpful to identify services that maintained schools currently receive from the LA and the cost, so that schools can make a comparison with what a MAT is offering. It was agreed that clarification of what it means to be a maintained school is needed and the point at which it becomes no longer viable for the LA should be considered, as the current 'pick and mix' approach to services is not sustainable. Work is underway on creating a new offer with the view to be implemented in 2019. Discussions are taking place with schools at various meetings scheduled starting with the Heads and Chairs of Governors meeting.

It was agreed that it's important for schools that have not sought to convert that they have the security of services and contracts and that the LA also needs that security.

Cllr Howson raised the concern that some MATs with headquarters outside of Oxfordshire offer less value for money than those with headquarters in Oxfordshire.

Cllr Fitzgerald-O'Connor commented as a governor at Watchfield Primary School that the proposed merger of Faringdon and Eynsham academy trusts was a very time-consuming process.

6. Report 4: Special Provision Fund. Barbara Chillman(BC)

The special provision fund grant is additional funding to the usual capital funding received from the Government. There has been a rise of SEND pupils due to population growth, and the type of provision that children are placed in has changed. There has also been a rise in independent and non-maintained special school placements, which has an impact on the spend of the high needs block. This is a key issue to look at in terms of provision, meeting the needs of SEND pupils and keeping within budget.

The LA will receive just under £2.5m of the £215 million of capital funding the Government has committed to help local authorities improve existing facilities and create new places for SEND. The allocation is based on population growth and the LA were required to complete several steps to qualify. A consultation was held with parents and carers of children and young people with SEND. The report and subsequent plan of how the funding will be invested is to be published by 14th March once it has been approved for publication by Cllr Hibbert-Biles.

There are two projects proposed for this funding; Bardwell School, Bicester and John Watson School, Wheatley and the points of the consultation are outlined in report 4. Both projects were largely agreed by those who

responded to the consultation.

There has not been the capacity in our local schools so we have been using the independent sector. The Capital investment to improve schools comes from the LA budget. There are not always the resources in mainstream primary schools, and parents are now choosing to send their children to a specialist provision school rather than keeping them in a maintained school. Janet Johnson clarified that the number of children in primary schools that are supported has increased and although there are more children, there has not been an increase in resources. Cllr Waive suggested that the amount of money that goes into the high needs block can be challenged. Cllr Hannaby speaking as governor of a school said that schools try to keep children with a disability in school but the issue is often that this comes at some considerable cost to the school.

Stephen Passey commented that some children require complexity of need that cannot be provided by maintained provision. Many schools do not have the necessary infrastructure in place for children who require a wheelchair for example. Brenda Williams commented that integration should continue where possible. Janet Johnson commented that the Gallery Trust, the approved sponsors for the planned new Bloxham Grove free school, are doing lots of work with Banbury schools in the area to clarify local needs. In addition, a new school is planned in Didcot, for which we would hope to get free school funding once the free school waves reopen. Cllr Waive commented that he is pleased that the work is taking place on those two schools.

7. Schools Forum questions /discussion points – could members please send issues in advance to Cllr Waive

No questions

8. Report 5 (BC): Forward Plan

As detailed in report.

9. Report 6 (BC): Future SOSG meeting schedule

It was suggested that the meetings move from being held four times per year, to termly which would be three per year. They would be held to coincide with the times in each term when most information is available to report. It was agreed that an additional date could be added if it was considered necessary. There was some concern among attendees that it can be disruptive when dates are moved, however it was noted that there are occasions when this is unavoidable. It was agreed that the next meeting would be held during the week beginning the 25th June. JM will look at room availability in that week and circulate a meeting request. Further meeting dates will also be fixed.

JM

10. Date of next meeting

During week beginning 25th June – To be confirmed.