

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CREATING OPPORTUNITIES AND TACKLING
INEQUALITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT THE BOURGES/VIERSEN ROOM -
TOWN HALL ON 15 JANUARY 2010**

Present: Councillors Thacker MBE (Chairman) Wilkinson, Allen, Lowndes, Saltmarsh and Khan

Also present

Cllr Holdich	Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and University
Cllr M Dalton	Ward Member for West Ward
Cllr Lamb	Governor of Kings School
Cllr Peach	Ward Member for Park Ward
Cllr Kreling	Ward Member for Park Ward
Gary Longman	Head Teacher of Kings School

Officers in Attendance:

Helen Edwards	Solicitor to the Council
Isabel Clark	Planning & Development Manager & Interim Head of Admissions
Paulina Ford	Scrutiny, Performance and Research Officer

1. Apologies for absence

No apologies were received.

2. Declarations of Interest and Whipping Declarations

Councillor M Dalton declared a personal interest in that his sister in law worked as a teacher at the Peterborough High school (PHS). It was noted that this would not be a conflict of interest in this instance.

3. Request for call-in of a Key Decision - The King's School - Proposed change of age range from 11 - 18 to 7 - 18

On 6 January 2010, the Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and University made an executive decision relating to The King's School – proposed change of age range from 11-18 to 7-18. In accordance with the Constitution this decision was published on 7 January 2010. On 12 January 2010, Councillors Gilbert and Fazal submitted a request to call-in this decision on the grounds that the decision was contrary to the policy framework.

Councillors Gilbert and Fazal were not in attendance at the meeting and Councillor Dalton attended as their representative to present their reasons for the call-in. Councillor Khan advised that he felt that it was unacceptable that the councillors who had submitted the request for call-in were not present at this meeting.

In support of the request to call-in Councillor Dalton made the following points:

- The current proposal for expansion of The King's School was not in the best interests of the Cathedral Choristers as the standard of education and support they would receive within the new primary section of King's would be significantly lower than that currently enjoyed at Peterborough High School (PHS).

- The CMDN (Cabinet Member Decision Notice) was therefore against the Council's policy of offering the best possible education to local children.
- There were very few responses to the consultation; while there were a small number of objections/concerns to the proposal. The lack of support was telling and one of the two responses in support of the proposal appeared to have come from the Council.
- If the transition took place with all choristers moving in September 2011, the new PHS intake of choristers would have joined in September 2010 and would be required to move school again in July 2011. Choristers entering their final primary year, in Year 6 would be forced to move in the year that they sat their KS2 SATS regardless of parental opinion.
- PHS had not been approached to expand the chorister provision to educate girl choristers. Had they been approached before the decision to go to public consultation had been made rather than afterwards the understanding was that PHS would have entered into a meaningful discussion as to how this could have been achieved. PHS was not afforded any opportunity to do so.
- The proposal should not be based on ease for music staff at the Cathedral; rather what is best for the children.
- The education of primary children was fundamentally different to that of secondary. Was it appropriate to educate 60 children in a school of nearly 1200 pupils?
- Moreover and perhaps more importantly, how could it possibly be in the best interests of the children to educate them in classes made up of two year groups with children almost two years apart learning together.
- The proposed class sizes of 30 were comparable with other Local Authority schools (significantly higher than at PHS); what had been overlooked was the intensive workload of the choristers and the extensive support that these children, in demanding positions required. It was also noted that the previous proposal in 2004, which was rejected had proposed class sizes of 24 pupils. This new proposal appeared to be less favourable and yet had received Council approval.
- Were the transition to be more staggered, the class sizes smaller and the years taught entirely separately then the proposal for expansion would be far more acceptable. In its current form Councillors Fazal and Gilbert could not support the proposal and would urge the Cabinet Member to strongly reconsider his initial decision.

In response to Councillor Dalton's points the following comments were made:

The Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and University made a few comments and requested that the remainder of his allotted time for speaking be given to the Head Teacher of King's School. The Committee agreed to this request. Councillor Holdich questioned why Councillors Fazal and Gilbert were not in attendance to present their call-in and that it was being presented by Councillor Dalton.

- The scheme met the criteria and helped the Authority with the shortage of primary school places.
- It gave everyone, including girls, an equal opportunity as no fees were required.
- The Decision had been taken in the interests of good education.

The Head Teacher of King's School made the following comments:

- The King's School Governing Body could not accept the statement that the Choristers would receive a standard of education which would be significantly lower than currently enjoyed at PHS.
- The last Ofsted inspection had deemed King's School as outstanding and over the years it had enjoyed an excellent reputation for the quality of education that it provided.
- The school would be appointing two Key Stage 2 specialists.
- There would be cross-phase teaching so that members of staff who had subject specialism would be able to share their knowledge, expertise and enthusiasm for their subject with the Key Stage 2 youngsters.

- All pupils including the Choristers would benefit from having two full-time specialist music teachers and 14 peripatetic teachers who could support them.
- The Key Stage 2 Department would be located alongside the Music Department and so Key Stage 2 pupils would have music facilities close by. Many of the choir practices, which currently took place in the Cathedral, would take place in the School. This would significantly reduce the amount of travelling the Choristers currently had to do between the School and the Cathedral and contact between the Cathedral and school staff would become a daily occurrence.
- It should be noted that the mean percentage over the last four years of pupils achieving 5+ A* to C GCSE grades, including English and Mathematics was higher at The King's School than at PHS.
- The Governors believed that they would be offering the best possible education to local Key Stage 2 children as they currently did for pupils in Key Stages 3, 4 and 5. The Governors were adamant that they were supporting the Council's policy to offer the best possible education to local children.
- Of the seven responses received to the consultation two were in favour and although four raised concerns they were not actively against the proposal. Limited response to a consultation was often taken as an indication of support.
- Before embarking on public consultation informal meetings had been held between the Head teacher, Dean of Peterborough, senior officers of the Authority and the Cabinet Member of Children's Services. In addition a similar meeting was held with senior representatives from the Diocese of Peterborough and there was overwhelming support from these parties. A letter of support had also been received from Stewart Jackson MP.
- The Governors accepted that the period of transition was not ideal, however phasing would result in smaller numbers in the transition years which would result in a poorer educational experience for the pupils. In addition the diminishing numbers of choristers remaining at PHS would become increasingly isolated. The Governors believed it was the right educational model and the challenge to the School was to manage this transition with particular care for the pupils affected, and they would undertake this duty of care for the nine pupils involved.
- The current arrangement between the Cathedral and PHS had been in place for approximately ten years and had to an extent always been viewed as a transitional arrangement by the Cathedral. It was introduced in an attempt to increase the number of Choristers by lowering the age range for boys. Prior to this Choristers could not join the Cathedral Choir until age 11 and, therefore, with puberty occurring at an increasingly younger age, the life of a Cathedral Chorister was very short. It was therefore decided that Choristers needed to be recruited at a younger age. Because it was not possible to educate the Choristers at The King's School at that stage the arrangement with PHS was initiated. At no stage during this period had PHS approached the Cathedral to explore the provision for Girl Choristers.
- Unless PHS could offer additional places without cost the Cathedral would not have been able to expand the number of places available to Choristers because no more funding was available. The Chorister places were currently only available to parents who had the finances to pay subsidised fees. PHS fees, in line with most independent schools, had increased beyond inflation over a number of years.
- Current and prospective Chorister parents had been kept fully informed throughout the consultation process. No objections had been received from Chorister parents and the most common comment was to express relief that many would no longer be required to pay fees.
- There was an incompatibility of the respective term dates between the two schools. This year there were over 20 days when one or other group of boys was not in school therefore this was 20 days when all of the Choristers could not rehearse together therefore limiting the development of the boys.
- The proposal was based on what was best for the youngsters. With Cathedral staff working with staff of just one school the pupils would benefit greatly from this closer collaboration.

- It was believed that it was entirely appropriate to educate 60 young children in a school of over 1000 and the younger pupils would gain hugely from the mentoring and buddying which would occur as a result of the involvement of Post 16 pupils in the Key Stage 2 Department.
- It was very common for pupils in primary schools to be taught in mixed age groups. Children entering King's School in a typical year arrived from over 50 feeder schools and a number of these pupils would have been taught in classes which comprised of more than one year group. King's School were fully aware of the extensive workload of Choristers and expertise in supporting Choristers had evolved over many centuries. Each pupil, not only the Choristers, would receive support from their class teacher, a dedicated pupil support officer, teaching assistants, a senior leadership team member, sixth form students and music specialists – this list was not definitive. In addition, the Choristers would continue to gain support from Cathedral Staff.
- The class sizes of 30 would mean that with 60 pupils as opposed to 48 in the Key Stage 2 department the youngsters would gain a better overall educational experience in terms of social interaction and the school would be able to provide the range of curricular and extra-curricular opportunities that one would expect an excellent school to provide. One of the criticisms of the previous model was that it was too small.
- Governors believed that this was an excellent opportunity to provide a first class educational experience for 60 youngsters. King's School would be able to educate all of the Cathedral Choristers, enhancing the camaraderie and helping to ensure that in the future the City's Cathedral and its music were highly regarded alongside the very best in the Country. The opportunity to become a Chorister would be open to every youngster in the City regardless of gender and parental means.
- This was also an opportunity to provide much needed additional primary places in Peterborough and the cost to the Authority of providing these places would be £30,000.

Additional comments in response to Councillor Dalton were made by the following people:

Councillor Lamb advised the Committee that she was a Governor at The King's School. She gave a background to the history of King's School and how it had started to recruit Choristers and advised that there was currently an inequality of opportunity as only parents who would be able to pay a percentage of the fees to PHS were able to send their children there. The proposal was an ideal opportunity for youngsters from primary school age upwards to go through one school.

Councillor Peach advised the Committee that he did not have an interest in The King's School but it was located in his ward. Peterborough had a problem with primary school places and this would provide part of the solution to this. This school was one of the schools in Peterborough that was preferred by parents. Councillor Peach had put the details of the proposal in the local ward newsletter and had received no objections.

Councillor Kreling told the Committee that this proposal would provide a great advantage for junior Choristers to go to the King's School from an early age to provide them with continuity through their education. Primary school places were in short supply and this would help to rectify the situation.

Questions/Comments and Observations:

- Members asked for clarification as to what the consequences would be if they agreed to call-in the decision. The Solicitor to the Council stated that the decision had to be taken by 19 January, after which it would have to be referred to the Schools Adjudicator, and the Council would lose the power to exercise the power of local democracy.
- Members asked what benefit there would be to the constituents of the ward in which The King's School was located. The Head Teacher of King's School advised that not all places would be taken by Choristers and it would also help with the shortage of places in

Peterborough overall. Church of England and Methodist families would be offered places first.

- Members asked what the response was to the accusation that The King's School would provide a lesser education to children. The Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and University responded that the King's School was equal in reputation to that of PHS.
- Councillor Dalton clarified that the point he made was not about generic education at The King's School but specifically to the Choristers.

A proposal was put forward by Councillor Lowndes, seconded by Councillor Wilkinson that the decision should not be called in. On being put to the vote all six members responded that they were in favour.

RESOLVED

That the decision relating to The King's School would not be called-in.

CHAIRMAN
3.05 - 3.55 pm