

CABINET

Thursday, 15 January 2009

Present:

Councillor	S Foulkes (Chair)	
Councillors	S Holbrook	M McLaughlin
	G Davies	R Moon
	P Davies	J Quinn
	G Gardiner	J Stapleton
	S Kelly	

323 MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting were printed and published.

Resolved - That the minutes be approved and adopted.

324 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The members of the Cabinet were asked to consider whether they had a personal or prejudicial interest in connection with any of the items on the agenda and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of such interest.

The following declarations were made:

Councillor Steve Foulkes declared a personal interest in Minute 325 (Transforming Wirral – Strategic Asset Review) on behalf of all Cabinet Members due to their memberships of Joint Management Committees and as users of services;

Councillor Jean Quinn declared a personal interest in Minute 327 (Disposal of land at The Warrens – main depot site) as she had discussed the matter with Wirral PCT and GP's in the area.

Councillor Simon Holbrook declared a prejudicial interest in Minute 341 (West Kirby Marine Lake Reconstruction – Award of Contract) due to his employment.

Councillor Phil Davies declared a personal interest in Minutes 328 (Multi-systemic therapy programme development) and 327 (Disposal of land at The Warrens – main depot site) as a non-executive director of Wirral PCT.

325 TRANSFORMING WIRRAL - STRATEGIC ASSET REVIEW

At its meeting on 27 November 2008, Cabinet considered a report on the Strategic Asset Review which set out options for the future of the authority's asset portfolio. Cabinet resolved to approve in principle the option for strategic consolidation of the Council's asset base and requested that this be subjected to public and staff

- (4) **call-in on this matter be waived and the Council be informed accordingly.**

328 MULTI-SYSTEMIC THERAPY PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

The Director of Children's Services reported further on a report submitted to Cabinet on the 4th October 2007. At that time approval was granted for an application to the Department of Health for grant funding to set up a pilot project, as one of the 6 pilot sites the Department of Health was looking to support. That application was unsuccessful. Locally, professionals across agencies had remained interested in the potential of Multi-Systemic Therapy as a successful intervention with adolescents who presented with conduct and anti-social difficulties. Wirral Children & Young People's Department(CYPD), Youth Offending Service(YOS), Primary Care Trust(PCT) and the Cheshire & Wirral Foundation (NHS) Trust believed this evidenced- based method of intervening with young people (age 11-17yrs) who were at risk of care or custody would make a positive contribution to improving the lives of individual children and their families, reduce anti-social behaviour and make a contribution in reducing high cost placements outside of Wirral. Using funding from the PCT, YOS and CYPD a project plan had been developed that would enable an MST programme to be delivered on Wirral. The Director therefore sought Cabinet approval for the development of a Multi-Systemic Therapy programme on Wirral.

Resolved - That

- (1) **the setting up of an MST Programme be formally approved;**
- (2) **the report be referred to Employment & Appointments Committee; and**
- (3) **the bid for funding to the Council's Efficiency Investment fund be approved.**

329 PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH AN ACADEMY AT BIRKENHEAD HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

Cabinet was informed that the proposal to establish an Academy at the current Independent Birkenhead High School for Girls was now nearing the end of the formal feasibility stage. The steering group for the project had consulted with various stakeholders regarding the scheme. A letter from the Cabinet member to the steering group was attached as Appendix A to the report. The Council had now to decide formally whether it supported the establishment of the project, despite some of the reservations which had been expressed previously by officers and reiterated in the Cabinet member's letter. The Secretary of State would then make a decision on whether to proceed with the proposal or not. The "Expression of Interest" which set out the vision and rationale for the Academy was attached at Annexe B. The Director of Children's Services' initial response to that was given at Annexe C. The proposed Academy's admission arrangements were enclosed at Annex (D). The balance of the report set out the issues for the Cabinet to consider.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services moved a motion, duly seconded, as follows:

“(1) Cabinet welcomes the principle of an independent school choosing to enter the Local Authority’s mainstream school provision for Wirral children and young people.

(2) If the Academy is approved, members would wish to see that the Academy works closely with other Wirral schools, including further investigation of the possibility of close partnership working with Prenton High School for Girls;

(3) Cabinet requests that the Secretary of State consider amending the age range of the proposed Academy to 11 to 18 to reduce the impact on primary school provision, since there is already a precedent at the Belvedere Academy in Liverpool.

Cabinet wishes to reiterate the Director’s concerns on the following areas:

- The implications of this development against the background of surplus places and falling rolls
- The Academy’s impact on the gender imbalance in other schools due to the overprovision of girls places, compounded by the absence of an equivalent single sex boys school in Birkenhead
- The Academy’s likely compliance with Local Authority policies such as the Admissions Code, SEN and inclusion and 14 to 19 strategy
- The proposed admission policy for the Academy, which does not appear to meet the core function for the Academy, which does not appear to meet the core function of an Academy in serving disadvantaged young people from deprived areas.”

The Deputy Leader of the Council moved an amendment, duly seconded, as follows:

“In considering its response to the proposal for Birkenhead School for Girls to become an Academy, Cabinet expresses its concerns that:

- the admissions policy of the proposed school will be inconsistent with the principles underlying the Academy Programme, i.e. a tackling of long-term problems of under-achievement in areas of high deprivation, despite being geographically well-located to carry out such a roll.
- the proposal would increase the number of places available in secondary schools at a time of falling rolls and have the potential to further distort the gender balance in schools in the Birkenhead area.

Both these impact adversely on the ability of the Council to plan for secondary education in the Borough.

Whilst Cabinet would be minded to support the establishment of an academy where this would be demonstrated to raise standards and aspirations in historic areas of low attainment, Cabinet believes that, in the specific circumstances that pertain to this application, the case for an academy has not been made.