

CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held in Conference Room 1a, County Hall, Ruthin on Tuesday, 29 October 2013 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Hugh Evans (Chair), Julian Thompson-Hill, Eryl Williams, Bobby Feeley, Hugh Irving, Huw Jones, Barbara Smith and David Smith

Observers: Councillors Brian Blakeley, Joan Butterfield, Jeanette Chamberlain-Jones, Bill Cowie, Meirick Lloyd Davies, Richard Davies, Pat Jones, Gwyneth Kensler, Margaret McCarroll, Jason McLellan, Merfyn Parry, David Simmons and Cheryl Williams

ALSO PRESENT

Chief Executive (MM), Corporate Director: Economic & Community Ambition (RM), Corporate Director: Modernisation and Wellbeing (SE), Head of Legal & Democratic Services (GW), Head of Education (KE), Head of Customers & Education Support (JW), Head of Finance & Assets (PMc), Programme Manager (JC) and Committee Administrator (SLW)

The Bishop of Wrexham, the Rt. Revd. Monsignor Peter Brignall and Rita Price, Director of Education, Catholic Diocese of Wrexham

The Bishop of St. Asaph, the Rt. Revd. Dr. Gregory Cameron and Michael Carding, Secondary School Advisor to the Diocese of St. Asaph, were also in attendance for the item on Faith Based Provision (Agenda No. 5).

WELCOME

The Leader extended a warm welcome to members of the public present to hear the debate on proposals for faith based provision.

The Leader also welcomed the Bishop of St. Asaph and the Bishop of Wrexham together with their supporting officers, Michael Carding and Rita Price to the meeting.

The Leader explained questions from Cabinet members would be allowed in the first instance. Councillors attending as observers would then be invited to ask questions. Members of the public would not be able to ask questions. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services confirmed the Cabinet procedure rules within the constitution.

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from the Corporate Director: Customers.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declaration of personal or prejudicial interest had been raised.

3 URGENT MATTERS

No urgent matters had been raised.

PETITION

At this juncture, Councillor Richard Davies handed the Leader a petition he had received from St. Brigid's School.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 24 September 2013 were submitted.

***RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 24 September, 2013 be approved as a correct record.*

5 FAITH BASED PROVISION

Councillor Eryl Williams, Lead Member for Education presented the report, circulated previously, which provided the findings of the formal consultation on the faith review and for Cabinet Members to consider whether to proceed to the publication of the proposal by way of a statutory notice.

Councillor Williams provided background to the situation and highlighted the need for a strategic and cohesive approach.

The Leader invited both the Bishop of St. Asaph and the Bishop of Wrexham for their views regarding the Faith Based Provision.

The Bishop of St. Asaph, the Right Reverend Dr Gregory K Cameron, expressed his gratitude for being given the opportunity for the Diocese of St. Asaph to become a promoter for a new single faith based school in Denbighshire. The vision would be for one school of shared faith provision for the citizens of Denbighshire. The Bishop reiterated he believed in excellence in education and the scheme would be an opportunity to build something excellent and to answer all the needs of the community. The Bishop of St. Asaph urged Cabinet members to accept the report.

The Bishop of Wrexham, the Right Reverend Monsignor Peter Brignall, also expressed his gratitude to be given the opportunity to present and endorse the provision put before the Cabinet members. For 50 years the Diocese of Wrexham had been providers of secondary education in Denbighshire. The Bishop reported upon the success of the transition of St. Joseph's School in Wrexham to a joint faith school. The joint faith school would be an opportunity to provide the best for those families and parents who chose faith education for their children regardless of their religion. As an existing provider, it would be hoped that faith education continued to be provided not only in part of the county but for the whole of the catchment of the schools within Denbighshire. The Bishop of Wrexham fully endorsed the Bishop of St. Asaph's support and total commitment to faith based education for the young people for this generation and generations in the future.

During discussion it had been clarified that Phase 1 of the scheme had been intended as an interim phase. Consultation had raised concerns as there had been very little support for Phase 1 from key stakeholders. Phase 1 could potentially have been progressed but there could have been a negative impact on standards. It was imperative standards did not regress. As this had been a matter of operational delivery, in the face of the outcome of the consultation, it had been decided energy would be best directed to deliver one school of Christian context on one site. Denbighshire County Council guaranteed continued support to each school in the interim.

Blessed Edward Jones High School accommodated students from the age of 11 – 16. St. Brigid's school accommodated students from the age of 3 – 19. It had been clarified during the meeting that the age range of the new school would be given more consideration during Phase 2 of the scheme. Primary provision and also post 16 provision would be considered.

A business case was to be drawn up whereby options would be set out and costed. Funding of £28million had been agreed in principle. To provide two facilities would not be the best use of facilities going forward as this would be significantly more expensive. This would be demonstrated within the business case. If the business case put forward was to cost more than the bid, then officers would have to come back to members for a decision within the available finances.

During Phase 2 of the scheme working with co-promoters, the initial focus on discussions would be to confirm the proposed age range, size and location of the new school. The discussions would also include full consideration of options as to how the demand for primary age faith education would fit with the Secondary provision. Six potential sites were to be considered. Nothing was noted in or out. The initial plans would be developed to enable parents to see the vision of what the new faith based school could potentially look like.

Blessed Edward Jones High School came under the jurisdiction of the Wrexham Catholic Diocese and delivered a Catholic education including receiving Section 50 Inspections which report on religious education, collective worship, the spiritual, moral, social and cultural education of the children and the school's ethos. St. Brigid's was designated as a school whose religious character was Roman Catholic. However, the school was under the control of the St. Brigid's Trust and was not formally recognised by the Catholic Diocesan Authority nor was it subject to Section 50 Inspections. The designation of a religious character did not determine whether or not the school was a Roman Catholic Church School according to canon law.

The Bishop of Wrexham clarified that the original foundation of Blessed Edward Jones school was for the county of Denbighshire and not as a Rhyl Catholic school.

Councillor Brian Blakely read a press release on behalf of the Rhyl councillors and concluded by expressing their support of the scheme for a new school but expressed the preference for it to be built within close proximity of Rhyl.

The Chief Executive summed up the discussions which had taken place.

The Leader thanked the Right Reverend Dr Gregory K Cameron, Bishop of St. Asaph and the Right Reverend Monsignor Peter Brignall, Bishop of Wrexham for taking the time to attend the Cabinet meeting and assisting in creating a vision for the future.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- (i) Note the findings of the formal consultation for the closure of Blessed Edward Jones Catholic High School and St. Brigid's School and the opening of a new school;*
- (ii) Confirm the commitment towards working in partnership with the Catholic and Church in Wales Diocesan Authorities to deliver a new faith based school;*
- (iii) Agree to develop a proposal to enable formal consultation for the building of a new faith based school to replace the existing Blessed Edward Jones Catholic High School and St. Brigid's provision.*

At this juncture (11.30 a.m.) there was a 15 minute break.

Meeting reconvened at 11.45 a.m.

6 FORMAL CONSULTATION - YSGOL LLANBEDR

The Leader explained questions from Cabinet members would be allowed in the first instance. Councillors attending as observers would then be invited to ask questions. Members of the public would not be able to ask questions. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services confirmed the Cabinet procedure rules within the constitution.

Councillor Eryl Williams presented the report, circulated previously, which updated Cabinet Members of the discussions with the Church in Wales Diocesan Authority regarding the Ruthin Primary review and the proposal to close Ysgol Llanbedr.

A meeting had been held on 25 September 2013 with Education Officers from the Diocesan Authority to discuss the proposal and the wider issues impacting upon Ysgol Llanfair and Ysgol Borthyn.

In respect of the specific proposal, the outcome was that no agreement had been reached between Denbighshire County Council and the Diocese of St. Asaph regarding the closure of Ysgol Llanbedr. Should the proposal go forward, the Director, on behalf of the Diocese, would make a formal response, having consulted again with the Board of Education.

It was anticipated that the Consultation on the proposal to close Ysgol Llanbedr would take place between 11 November 2013 and 23 December 2013. The consultation process would give parents, pupils, governors and staff, the opportunity to comment upon the proposals before a decision would be made by Cabinet whether to proceed and formally publish proposals for change.

Councillor Huw Williams put forward several questions on behalf of Ysgol Llanbedr. Intense discussion took place and the following responses given:

- At the time of finalising the report, the authority had processed 4 applications for reception and 5 applications for nursery provision. The deadline for applications to nursery and reception were 29 November 2013 and 21 February 2014 respectively.
- The capacity for the permanent school building had previously been recorded as 77. This had included 54 permanent places and 23 places within mobile accommodation. The Governing Body had made representations for the mobile provision to be removed from the school and, therefore, the capacity had been calculated at 54 full time pupil places.
- Although pupil projections showed an increase in pupil numbers over the coming years that could potentially reduce surplus places at the school, the fact remained Ysgol Llanbedr would remain a “small school” and issues would still remain regarding the sustainability and viability of Ysgol Llanbedr and standards of education and attainment in the future.
- Small school provision provided mixed age classes across the range. There was a potential that years 4, 5 and 6 could be educated in one class. The authority reviewed whether a school of this size provided suitable learning.
- There were currently 21 pupils attending Ysgol Llanbedr who could be re-schooled at Ysgol Borthyn as they had additional capacity for 31 pupils.
- The transport policy for the primary sector was if a child lived more than 2 miles from their closest school or on an unsafe route then the Council would pay for school transport. If parents chose a school which was not their closest then the parents would be required to pay for the transport.
- Within the Local Development Plan (LDP), were plans for a development of 80 new homes in Llanbedr. There were constraints within the admissions policy at Ysgol Llanbedr as the maximum capacity was 54 pupils.
- All schools within Denbighshire with a capacity of less than 80 pupils would come under review in the future. This model had been provided by Estyn to look at whether schools of less than 80 pupils were viable.
- Discussions were also to take place as to whether the privately run nursery would remain at Ysgol Llanbedr.

Councillor Huw Williams requested the discussions regarding Ysgol Llanbedr be adjourned and that Federation be considered.

The Head of Customers and Education Support stated that Federation would not address the issue of too many schools and surplus places.

The Chief Executive summed up discussions which had taken place and confirmed Cabinet were not to make a decision, at its meeting today, to close Ysgol Llanbedr but to make a decision whether to approve formal consultation for proposals to close Ysgol Llanbedr.

RESOLVED that Cabinet agreed to approve formal consultation for proposals to close Ysgol Llanbedr on the 31st August 2014 with existing pupils transferring to

Ysgol Borthyn, subject to parental preference, subject to the findings of the discussion with the Church in Wales.

At this juncture (1.00 p.m.) there was a 5 minute break.

Meeting reconvened at 1.05 p.m.

7 FINANCE REPORT UPDATE

Councillor J. Thompson Hill presented the report, circulated previously, which provided an update on the Council's current financial position and progress against the agreed budget strategy.

RESOLVED that Cabinet members note the progress against the agreed budget strategy.

8 GIFT TENDER EXEMPTION

Councillor Bobby Feeley presented the report, circulated previously, which sought Cabinet approval to the GIFT Tender Exemption and to award the contract.

RESOLVED that Cabinet members approve the GIFT tender exemption and to award the contract to the Wallich, the existing provider.

9 CABINET FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Councillor H. H. Evans presented the Cabinet Forward Work Programme.

Cabinet agreed:

- the Procurement Business Case for a combined Denbighshire and Flintshire Service which was scheduled for November, be added to 14th January 2013 meeting
- Vibrant and Viable Places – Funding Bid for Rhyl Town Centre Projects be taken off the November 2013 meeting

RESOLVED that Cabinet receive the Forward Work Programme, subject to the agreed amendments.

The meeting concluded at 1.35 p.m.