



Report to Cabinet Member for Achievement and Learning

Decision to be taken on or after 30 July 2007

Decision can normally be implemented at least 3 working days after decision has been signed.

Cabinet Member Report No. AL12.07

Title: Outcome of public consultation and publication of Statutory Notice on future organisation of Primary Education at Elmhurst Infant and Junior Schools

Date: 13 July 2007

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Electoral Divisions Affected: Aylesbury North and Aylesbury East

Relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

Children's Services

Summary

Elmhurst Infant School was placed in Special Measures by Ofsted just prior to Christmas 2006. After extensive negotiations and in line with the requirement placed on Local Authorities (LAs) by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to act decisively in such situations the decision was taken to undertake a public consultation on a proposal for reorganising primary education at the school.

The consultation was on a proposal that Elmhurst Infant School should be closed on 31 August 2007 and the Elmhurst Junior School be enlarged from 1 September 2007 to become a combined school.

Recommendation:

That the Cabinet Member for Achievement and Learning agrees to the closure of Elmhurst Infant School on the 31 August 2007 and the opening of a Combined School, Elmhurst School on 1 September on the current Elmhurst Junior site

A. Narrative setting out the reasons for the decision

Elmhurst Infant and Junior Schools were both inspected by Ofsted before Christmas 2006 but whereas the Junior School was considered to be satisfactory, the Infant School was placed in a category of concern by Ofsted as

requiring Special Measures. The Local Authority, under guidance published by the DfES, was required to take action to urgently to address the issues identified by Ofsted.

The Local Authority secured funding of £350k from the housing developers at Weedon Hill, Taylor Woodrow so that the County Council could make some immediate enhancements to the campus at Elmhurst before the new school on Weedon Hill is completed. Children from Weedon Hill will have Elmhurst School as their catchment school until the school at Weedon Hill opens in 2009.

Elmhurst School will be a 315 place school and would have an initial admission number of 45. Early indications are that 260 children would start at the school in September. The organisation and layout of the proposed school is such that if there were additional children coming into the school then they could be accommodated fairly easily because of the layout of the enlarged school.

The Autistic Spectrum Disorder Department would continue although it would be slightly reduced in size over the next couple of years. The LA would work to support the continued development of the Department and the support it provides to children and their parents/carers. Those responding to the consultation raised a number of issues about the department and these were addressed in detail at the two public meetings that were held.

It is current Local Authority policy to amalgamate infant and junior schools where this is reasonable as there is evidence that levels of achievement can be higher when children do not have to move schools at the end of KSII. After discussions with the governing bodies of both schools it was proposed to close the Infant School and to enlarge the Junior School to create a combined school on the campus. Elmhurst Combined School would open on 1 September 2007.

Two public meetings were held. Over 70 members of the public attended the first and a smaller number the second. A consultation document was produced and this was distributed to parents at both schools, governors, local members and other interested parties.

The Local Authority listened to the issues raised by parents at the two public meetings about the ASD departments and worked hard with the schools to address those concerns. Consistency of staffing has been achieved for September 2007 and the budget has been maintained for the department from September 2007, which with the overall reduction in the number of children in the department will enable resources to be developed. The playground has been designed with the support of the Local Authority's ASD specialist. On-going support and advice will be provided to ensure that the transition is as smooth as possible for children.

The proposal would also enable a Children's Centre to be created on the campus to provide access to a range of additional services for under fives and their parents/carers. Adult Learning and METAS would continue to have units based on the site and a number of other organisations would continue to be able to use the site.

The option of closing Elmhurst Infant School and enlarging Elmhurst Junior School to create a combined school, Elmhurst School, would enable the issues highlighted by Ofsted to be addressed, the needs of the local community and parents to be met and for improvements to be made to the site to give the best life chances to the children from the community.

B. Other options available, and their pros and cons

DfES legislation requires a Local Authority to take urgent action to address the issues highlighted by Ofsted when a school is designated as requiring Special Measures.

An alternative would have been to seek to close both schools but that would not have proved practical as there are not sufficient school places in the area to accommodate the children and would have meant that there would not be a school for the Elmhurst community.

The option of keeping Elmhurst Infant School open was also considered but this was rejected as it was agreed that creating a combined school at the former Elmhurst junior site would enable the issues addressed by Ofsted to be better met, remove surplus school capacity and also enable improvements to be made to the site and campus

C. Resource implications

A business case was developed in line with the Capital Strategy recommended at the Business Investment group.

A budget has been set for the project and there is no risk that additional financial liability will come to BCC from the work. Funding totalling £674k for the necessary work has been secured from a number of sources.

Tenders have been placed for the planned building work and if, when these are received, the costs are over the allocated budget for the whole project some of the planned building work will have to be postponed until alternative sources of funding can be secured. As a "floor authority" the County Council's capital budget has been severely restricted and there are no alternative sources of funding available if the tenders received are over the budget for the project.

The budget share for the enlarged school will be calculated by the local funding formula. The formula contains a factor which allows for some additional costs over the transition period where there is significant change to the structure of a school and this factor will be applied to Elmhurst School.

D. Value for Money (VFM) Self Assessment

Effectiveness C. The proposal if agreed would mean the BCC had taken action that would improve the outcomes for the local community

Efficiency C. The LA would be seen to have acted in line with DfES and Ofsted guidelines for addressing the situation where a school is deemed to require Special Measures

Economy E. The information is not available to ascertain how this proposal would impact on our unit costs nationally

E. Legal implications

Advice has been sought from the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and they agreed to the wording of the Statutory Notice.

F. Property implications

Advice has been sought from the Head of Property Services and the School Commissioning Team have worked closely with colleagues in Property Services to draw up plans for the improvements to the site.

G. Other implications/issues

The proposal has HR implications for the staff at both schools. Colleagues from the Achievement and Learning Division have worked closely with HR colleagues and the school staff and governing bodies to address these issues and to ensure that relevant employment legislation is followed.

H. Feedback from consultation and Local Member views

Appendix B gives a detailed summary of the responses to the consultation exercise. Over 400 copies of the consultation document were sent out. 47 responses were received and of these 41 or 87% were in favour of the proposal and 6 or 13% were against. There was therefore overwhelming support for the proposal from those who responded.

Two public meetings were also held. Over 70 people attended the first meeting and a smaller number the next one. Local members attended both meetings and have also had separate briefings/meetings with officers.

A Statutory Notice was published (appendix C) and no objections were received to the notice.

I. Communication issues

Parents will be informed of the outcome of the consultation and of the Cabinet Member decision.

J. Progress Monitoring

The progress of Elmhurst School will be closely monitored by the School Improvement Service and the school's, School Improvement Partner will work closely with the Headteacher, staff and governing body

Background Papers

- Appendix A: Consultation document
- Appendix B: Analysis of responses to the public consultation
- Appendix C: Copy of the Statutory Notice

Your questions and views

If you have any questions about the matters contained in this paper please get in touch with the Contact Officer whose telephone number is given at the head of the paper.

If you have any views on this paper that you would like the Cabinet Member to consider, or if you wish to object to the proposed decision, please inform the Democratic Services Team by 5.00pm on 27 July 2007 This can be done by telephone (to 01296 383610), Fax (to 01296 382538), or e-mail to cabinet@buckscc.gov.uk

CABINET MEMBER REPORT NO.

DECISION TAKEN:

I have taken into account any representations received concerning the contents of this report.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

DECISION NOT TAKEN:

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Reason: _____

For Reference

(Officers should sign below once the report has been finalised for printing and return to Democratic Services, Room 124, Old County Offices)

Professional advice supporting the decision was provided by the following Officers

Name	Signed	Date
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