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**REPORT OF CABINET**


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**MEETING HELD ON 17 JANUARY 2008**


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Chairman: \* Councillor Chris Mote

<p>Councillors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* David Ashton</li> <li>* Marilyn Ashton</li> <li>* Mrs Camilla Bath</li> <li>* Miss Christine Bednell</li> <li>* Susan Hall</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Janet Mote</li> <li>* Paul Osborn</li> <li>* Mrs Anjana Patel</li> <li>* Eric Silver</li> </ul>
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\* Denotes Member present

352. **Amalgamation of First and Middle Schools:**

Prior to the consideration of the report, the Leader of the Council/Chairman clarified that Cabinet was not being asked to take a decision on the amalgamation of the schools, as had been incorrectly reported in the local press. He referred to the communications received from parents, teachers and governors of the schools, particularly in relation to West Lodge First and West Lodge Middle schools, details of which had been made available to all Members of Cabinet. Additionally, a letter from the West Lodge Middle School Governing Body, sent to all Members of Cabinet by the Chair of Governors, had also been circulated at the meeting to Members of Cabinet.

The Director of Schools and Children's Development introduced the report, which outlined the processes undertaken by the Governing Bodies of West Lodge First and West Lodge Middle Schools and Belmont First and Belmont Middle Schools' Governing Bodies to investigate and consult with parents on amalgamation and the outcome of the Governing Bodies' decisions. She drew attention to the recommendations set out in the report and outlined the reasons for making those recommendations to Cabinet.

The Portfolio Holder for Schools and Children's Development stated that the education and the welfare of the children in the schools referred to in the report was of paramount importance. She was confident that all those present at the meeting would agree with her, and that, in taking the decision, this point should be at the forefront of everyone's mind.

The Portfolio Holder added that Members were aware of the dissatisfaction and the differing views in relation to West Lodge First and Middle Schools. The number of letters received in relation to these schools was unprecedented. She took this opportunity to respond to public questions by way of a summary response rather than respond to individual questions because of the similarity in the questions and to avoid delay in dealing with the questions individually. She stressed that everyone's concerns ought to be taken seriously.

***The following summary response was read out by the Portfolio Holder for Schools and Children's Development in relation to the public questions received:-***

1. "A number of issues have been raised through questions and I propose to respond to these collectively.

The Local Authority is the authority vested in this Cabinet and in this Council and the Local Authority has been asked what support it would provide for the amalgamation process. If the amalgamation were to proceed the Local Authority and the schools would establish a working group that would address key issues to move from two separate schools to a combined school. These areas include:-

- School Finance - establishing a single school budget.
- School Workforce - developing a staffing structure based on the needs of the combined school and a process to make appointments in good time and this is the whole workforce, not just teaching staff.
- Teaching and Learning – they would identify and address school management issues including curriculum and pastoral needs of pupils.

- Site Issues – the working group would review and develop proposals to address the site issues, identifying and prioritising areas for capital investment within available resources.

The level of support would be determined through discussion with the Governing Bodies and Headteachers, in particular the substantive Headteacher.

2. The Local Authority has sought advice from the DCSF about how they or parents can act when they believe that governors are not acting in the best interests of the school community and their advice is that the Local Authority cannot intervene unless governors act outside the law. Parents can only bring about change by making their views known to governors or by becoming members of the governing body themselves.
5. We have been asked two questions relating to the issue of why we have chosen not to honour our commitment to allow Governing Bodies to make the decision. It is the Council's policy to delegate the responsibility to make a decision to governors and this remains our policy. However, the duty of the Council is to ensure that this process has been done in a fair and transparent way according to its policy and further to ensure that the views of parents and stakeholders have been taken into account. As set out in the Cabinet papers, we do not believe this is the case in this instance.

The Council have not undertaken this intervention lightly. If there is a strong weight of opinion against amalgamation then Cabinet will take due consideration of that, and I might point out that another school mentioned in the papers, namely Belmont First and Belmont Middle Schools decided against amalgamation and that has been accepted.

6. Cabinet will decide whether to undertake a consultation in response to parental representations in favour of amalgamation, and report the outcomes to April Cabinet. Should the outcome of the consultation favour amalgamation, the approach being considered for West Lodge First and Middle Schools is to publish statutory notices to close the Middle School and to extend the age range of the First School. This is in order to achieve a speedy resolution to the issues for the schools.

An important consideration in taking forward this approach will be to achieve a newly constituted governing body for the school. This is under active consideration, and will require the cooperation of governors to ensure appropriate representation is established on the governing body. The existing governing body is not required to resign in part or in full or to reconstitute, but the Local Authority would encourage a measured approach to creating a new governing body as a way of facilitating the amalgamation process. In this case there would be an opportunity for parents of the combined school to stand for election. Open and transparent processes and opportunities for elections will be sought.

7. Another question was will the local authority carry out a full ballot of all stakeholders?

Depending on the decision of Cabinet this evening we will begin a consultation that will allow every parent and all other stakeholders including staff and governors to express their views.

9. If the amalgamation were to be implemented the working group would be tasked to consider, within the context of the Schools Asset Management Plan, what the priority site and accommodation investments are to support the successful organisation and identity of a combined school. For example, the focus on the entrance to the newly amalgamated school.

The funding available for investment will come from a range of sources including the (DCSF) Primary Capital Strategy, which commences with effect from April 2009 and one of the priorities that the local authority will seek to address are temporary classrooms. Other sources of funding are the Schools Devolved Formula Capital and Modernisation Funds from the Council's Capital programme. At this stage it is not possible to quantify the level of capital investment, as the priorities for the possible new combined schools have not been assessed or agreed.

10. Harrow's Amalgamation Policy says:

In preparation for a change in the age of transfer, Harrow has an amalgamation policy. This will establish combined schools. Combined First and Middle schools are more aligned with National Curriculum Key Stages and the impact of the change in age of transfer will be reduced. It also enables the processes to be undertaken within current school development planning and funding opportunities.

At the point of implementation of a change in the age of transfer to High School, any schools that are still separate First and Middle schools will become separate infant schools (that would be Reception to Year 2) and junior schools (Year 3 to Year 6).

This policy, that is the Council's amalgamation policy, sets out how the change towards more combined First and Middle Schools in Harrow is to be implemented.

Thus it is intended to align the schools to the majority of local authorities nationally and in particular with our neighbouring authorities, to National Curriculum Key Stages, to minimise the impact of the Change of Age of Transfer and reduce the points of transition.

11. What are the implications of the change of age of transfer on staffing?

The implications are that there will be one year group or three classes fewer in the first school. This will mean reduced funding for the school since the Age Weighted Pupil Unit pays for the cost of teachers, teaching assistants, resources plus school running costs. This will impact on the school's budget and will need to be managed through reductions in staffing and other costs.

Wherever possible we will support the redeployment of staff from first schools to middle schools and from middle to secondary schools but clearly this will be very challenging.

12. If a vacancy in either Headship occurs in the future, the new amalgamation policy would come into force."

In relation to Belmont First and Middle Schools, the Portfolio Holder stated that the Council had accepted the decision against the amalgamation. The Belmont First School was now in the process of appointing a Headteacher and that process was required to be completed by April 2008.

With regard to West Lodge First and West Lodge Middle Schools, the conclusion drawn from the large number of communications received was that not all stakeholders had accepted the decision/consultation process. She added that should Cabinet approve the recommendations set out in the report, the consultation would be taken forward in an open and transparent manner and a Steering Group would be established. This Group would be made up of representatives from both Schools and independent members who had no links to the Schools. The Steering Group would be expected to examine the original feasibility study, examine the scope and decide if further information was required. The Group would then consult all stakeholders, examine the responses received and submit its proposal to Cabinet in April 2008. It was essential that all those consulted responded, as the decision would affect children who attended the schools now and in the future.

Prior to responding to any public questions that remained unanswered and any supplemental questions relating to the summary response provided, the Portfolio Holder thanked all stakeholders for their submissions on the proposals in relation to the Schools. She stated that, in relation to West Lodge First and Middle Schools, it was for the stakeholders to make the decision and for that decision to be made in a clear and transparent manner. The Portfolio Holder for Schools and Children's Services and, where appropriate, the Director of Schools and Children's Services provided responses to supplemental questions from public questioners 1, 2, 5, 8, 11 and 12 (Minute 346 refers).

**RESOLVED:** That (1) the outcome of the decisions of the Governing Bodies of West Lodge First and West Lodge Middle Schools be noted;

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(2) in relation to West Lodge First and West Lodge Middle Schools, the Local Authority, in response to parental representations, undertake a consultation and report the outcomes to Cabinet;

(3) the outcome of the decisions of the Governing Bodies of Belmont First and Belmont Middle Schools in respect of amalgamation be noted;

(4) if a substantive Headteacher to Belmont First School was not appointed by April 2008, the Governing Body be requested to apply the Amalgamation Policy October 2007.

**Reason for Decision:** To decide on/confirm the decisions of Governing Bodies, as required by the revised Amalgamation Policy agreed by Cabinet in October 2007 to contribute to raising standards of achievement in Harrow and to establish a foundation for the implementation of a change in the age of transfer.

(See also Minutes 345(1) and 346).