

EDUCATION CONSULTATIVE FORUM

11 SEPTEMBER 2008

- Chairman: * Councillor Mrs Anjana Patel
- Councillors: * Mrs Camilla Bath * Janet Mote
 * Miss Christine Bednell * Raj Ray
 * B E Gate * Bill Stephenson
- Teachers' Constituency: Mrs D Cawthorne Ms J Lang
 * Ms C Gembala * Ms L Money
 * Ms J Howkins * Ms L Snowdon
- Governors' Constituency: Ms H Solanki
 * Mrs C Millard
- Elected Parent Governor * Mr R Chauhan * Mrs D Speel
 Representatives:
- Denominational Representatives: Mrs J Rammelt Reverend P Reece

* Denotes Member present

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL

PART II - MINUTES

104. **Attendance by Reserve Members:**

RESOLVED: To note that there were no Reserve Members in attendance at this meeting.

105. **Apologies for Absence:**

RESOLVED: To note that no apologies for absence had been received.

106. **Declarations of Interest:**

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:

<u>Agenda Item</u>	<u>Member</u>	<u>Nature of Interest</u>
10. References from Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub Committee – 15 July 2008 – Best Value Performance Plan 2008-09.	Councillor Brian Gate	Personal interest in that Councillor Gate was the Vice Chairman of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub Committee which had made the reference to the Education Consultative Forum. Councillor Gate remained in the room and took part in the discussion and decision making on this item.
	Councillor Janet Mote	Personal interest in that Councillor Mote was a Member of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub Committee which had made the reference to the Education Consultative Forum. Councillor Mote remained in the room and took part in the discussion and decision making on this item.

107. **Arrangement of Agenda:**

The Chairman informed the Forum that item 13 – Information Report Phase 3 Children's Centre be considered before Item 10 – References from Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED: That all items be considered with the press and public present.

108. **Minutes:**
RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2008, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.
109. **Matters Arising:**
RESOLVED: To note that there were no matters arising that did not appear on the agenda.
110. **Public Questions:**
RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were received at this meeting under the provisions of Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 16 (Part 4E of the Constitution).
111. **Petitions:**
RESOLVED: To note that no petitions were received at this meeting under the provisions of the Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 14 (Part 4E of the Constitution).
112. **Deputations:**
RESOLVED: To note that no deputations were received at this meeting under the provisions of Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 15 (Part 4E of the Constitution).
113. **References from Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub Committee - 15 July 2008 - Best Value Performance Plan 2008-09:**
A Member of the Forum explained that the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee had requested that the Forum investigate whether there were measures to improve the reporting of performance indicators relating to schools. The Member explained that the current reporting methods did not identify those pupils who were achieving well beyond what was expected. Further training might be required by Members generally to ensure that they were able to analyse and understand the information being presented to them.
RESOLVED: That (1) the issue of the reporting of the Performance Indicator relating to schools be referred to the Director of Schools and Children's Development and the Performance Team to consider how the information could be better reported;
(2) the report be presented to a future meeting of the Forum.
114. **School Term Dates 2010 - 2011:**
The Director of Schools and Children's Development introduced the report which presented a Harrow proposal for school term dates for 2010 - 2011. The proposal was in line with the model provided by the Local Government Association. The Council were prepared to consider whether 2 days should be taken out of the holiday entitlement for schools, for them to determine when this should be allocated to coincide with the religious festivals which most impact upon them.
The Director explained that this issue had been raised by representatives from schools as different religious events could affect pupil attendance figures and staff attendance.
Members raised a number of issues during the discussion on this item which included:
- That Easter was scheduled to take place later than usual in 2009. If two weeks' leave was granted over the Easter period, the second term would be longer than usual.
 - It was important to take into account the views of teachers and parents on the proposed dates for school terms, especially over the Easter period.
 - Easter was not a fixed festival in terms of the date on which it was celebrated. This caused difficulties when trying to establish school term dates.
 - It was important to compare the proposed school dates with those of neighbouring boroughs to Harrow. However neighbouring boroughs usually prepared their proposed school term dates relatively late.

Members of the Forum were requested to consider the models provided and consult with their constituent groups and provide feedback to the Director of Schools and Children's Development by 4 December 2008.

The Forum were further informed that they would receive a report at a meeting in January 2009 to make a recommendation to the Portfolio Holder for Schools and Children's Development for the adoption of school term dates for 2010 - 2011.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

115. **Amalgamation Policy:**

The Forum received a report which presented a draft revised amalgamation policy and supporting documents for their consideration and comments as part of the consultation process.

The Director for Schools and Children's Development explained that the Council's Amalgamation Policy, was developed in 2005 and updated in autumn last year in response to legislation. This further revision had focused on providing greater clarity about the process and provided supporting guidance for its implementation. The revised documentation also confirmed that the decision as to whether schools could amalgamate or not was a decision made by Cabinet. This responsibility could not be delegated to any other authority.

The Director explained that within the revised policy the circumstances when amalgamation was triggered had not been changed. Amalgamation would normally be triggered by the resignation of the headteacher in one school. In that instance the preferred route was to close the school without a substantive headteacher and extend the age range and size of the remaining school. This would not lead to any implications that one school was better than the other and was an objective criteria.

Alternative routes for amalgamation included closing both schools and opening a new school. New schools could be established by holding a competition where a provider would bid for the school or seek, from the Secretary of State, a waiver for the competition. The Government had indicated, however, that in circumstances where both schools were closed, their preference was for competition.

During the discussion on this item, Members of the Forum raised a number of issues, which officers responded to as follows:

- If it was felt it was in the best interests of schools to amalgamate, but it was apparent that the triggers would not occur for a number of years, the Council would have discussions with the governing bodies and the schools to see how they wished to go forward. The governing bodies could work more closely through a soft federation arrangement or could hard federate to establish one governing body. Both options would retain two schools and two headteachers. When a vacancy arose in either school, amalgamation could then proceed.
- That there was a desirable route and a legal route relating to the constitution of a new governing body once the school amalgamated. Legally, the governors of the school which remained open were the governors of the amalgamated school. The desirable route of the Council was for the governing bodies to form a steering group, with representatives from both schools, to implement the amalgamation process. As part of this process, the governing body would reconstitute to ensure that it was appropriate for the age range and size of the combined school. If this was difficult to achieve then the legal route would have to be followed.
- It was important to highlight to the Director of Schools and Children's Development areas where the document could be improved.
- The underlying principle of the Amalgamation Policy was that it led to improvements in educational outcomes. Additionally, there was evidence that schools which had problems with low standards, improved when amalgamated with a school which was performing to relatively higher standards.
- That the term 'joining together' could be used in addition to the term 'Amalgamation' when stated in the document. This could provide clarity for members of the public.
- There were limited rights of appeal once Cabinet had determined notices. Appeals were made to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator.

RESOLVED: That the comments of the Forum on the Amalgamation Policy be considered as part of the consultation process.

Reason for Recommendation: To engage stakeholder representatives in the consultation process of the revised amalgamation policy and supporting guidance documents.

116. **INFORMATION REPORT - Phase 3 Children's Centres:**

The Forum received an information report of the Director of Schools and Children's Development which summarised the work that the Council had performed to develop nine phase 2 Children Centres and the principles applied to underpin the strategy for phase 3 Children Centres.

An officer reported that the Council were on target to deliver the nine phase 2 Children Centres and that they had been given a further target by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to develop seven Phase 3 Children Centres.

The officer explained that the Council aimed to develop sustainable models for children centres which would have long term targets and which were responsive to the community's needs. The phase 3 children centres would also focus on developing high quality outreach services.

The officer referred to a map in the report indicating the proposed sites for the Children Centres and explained that it was the Council's intention to provide coverage for the whole of the borough.

During the discussion on this item, Members of the Forum raised a number of issues, which officers responded to as follows:

- Extra funding would be provided by the Government for Phase 3 Children Centres. The money would also be spent to develop existing members of staff and to provide leadership.
- The lack of certainty as to whether funding would continue to be provided by the government after 2010 was an issue that the Council had considered carefully. The Council would be addressing this by ensuring that the model of delivery was sustainable. This would be achieved by working with the voluntary sector and other partners including schools, the Primary Care Trust and the North West London Hospital Trust.
- There would be new buildings accommodating the Cedars Children Centre and the Kenmore Park Children Centre. Additionally, Home Housing had donated a building to use for the Rayners Lane Children Centre.
- The Council had engaged in a wide range of projects to look at the demographics of Harrow and the needs to the Afghan and Somali Communities. As a result, members of these communities had received training to develop their childcare skills. The Council were aware of the need to ensure that adults from different communities had the opportunity to work in childcare.
- Where the Council was providing access to Midwifery services, the midwife would provide a drop in service at the Children's Centre to ensure that expectant mothers' needs were addressed. Ante-natal midwifery services will be provided at those Children's Centres that are located in areas where there are high number of births, a higher number of low birth weight babies and higher rates of Infant mortality.
- The Council was engaging with the Primary Care Trust and Local General Practitioners to define how the Children Centres could work with them in delivering services.
- All centres would be fully inclusive for children from different backgrounds. Staff would be trained to ensure that service users felt welcome.
- Some children centres would have sensory rooms for children with disabilities and outreach workers. The centres would have places for children with complex needs. Additionally, the Council had partnerships with playgroups who catered for those with special needs.

The Chairman commended officers for their work on this project. The Chairman also advised that she would be visiting the Pinner Wood Children Centre on 18 September 2008 and that Members of the Forum were welcome to join her.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

117. **Date of Next Meeting:**

RESOLVED: That the next meeting of the Forum take place on Wednesday 28 January 2009.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 9.14 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR ANJANA PATEL
Chairman