

Subject: Deputations
Date of Meeting: 13 November 2017
Report of: Monitoring Officer
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Wards Affected: Various

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

DEPUTATIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

A period of not more than fifteen minutes shall be allowed at each ordinary meeting of the Council for the hearing of deputations from members of the public. Each deputation may be heard for a maximum of five minutes.

Deputations received:

1. (i) Benfield Primary School

Our school is a wonderful caring environment

We are so fortunate to have a brilliant team of staff who truly value each child that walks into the classrooms. Under these proposals, staff jobs would be lost, these wonderful educators would be lost to the children of Portslade.

If, for example you look at Benfield's SATs results you will see they are in the top 25% of the country for pupil progress. That means, that from whatever starting point a child arrives at school on their first day, pupils leave Benfield having achieved the absolute best for them, this is a true measure of a schools success.

How can it be right that the council want to deny children access to this fantastic education, by reducing its intake by 50% ?

Reducing Benfield's intake by 50% will leave just one 2 form entry school in Portslade, severely limiting a parents choice when choosing a school for their child. This 2 form entry school is also a faith school with a faith selection criteria, so what are you supposed to do if you are opposed to a faith education, or indeed that particular faith but would like a larger than one form entry school.

Benfield has seen its number of first choice preferences increasing, if this trend continues, it will become oversubscribed, meaning parents would not get their first choice of school.

Money is important, however, reducing Benfield by 50% will not actually save the council anything. Each child carries a pot of money with them, whichever school they attend. Benfield has forecasted itself to remain on budget for the next 3 years, indeed it has no budget deficit, it manages finances based on what it has. The school if numbers are reduced would see a reduction in funding, but other local schools would see an increase as pupils that would have chosen Benfield are forced to go elsewhere. There is also a question about how viable one form entry schools are long term. We can't help but wonder the longer term game plan is here.

It feels short sighted of the council to be reducing primary schools when set against the number of houses due to be built in the next few years as per the city plan.

We are also concerned that the council has not properly looked at all the options, for example reducing one of the local 3 or 4 form entry schools by a form instead, this would undoubtedly have a lesser impact on those schools than on ours.

Benfield recently became a national teaching school, based on a 2 form entry intake. This is a highly prestigious status and the council should be supporting the school with this, not making it harder for them, this status would come under threat if the numbers are reduced.

The council themselves said of this status

"We have just heard that Benfield Primary School has been awarded national teaching school status. This is excellent news for the school and a recognition of the huge improvements that have taken place in the school in recent years. It is also good news for the city as it provides us with a second teaching school partnership, greater opportunity to access national school improvement resources and more support available for our schools locally". This quote is from the Children Young People and Skills committee meeting on June 19th 2017, the very committee who now are targeting our school.

If they recognise the clear benefits to both the school and the city as a whole that this teaching school status brings, why would they put that status under threat.

This council is making decisions based on statistics. What it is not seeing is the school community, the true diversity of its families and the wide range of abilities that it caters for every day. It feels a little bit like the council are targeting those families, we have asked them to conduct an equalities impact assessment to properly examine how the local community as a whole would be affected by this decision but as yet we have had no response.

The school are actively opposed to this decision, not because they are worried about jobs or funding but because they can see that it would be a truly terrible thing to happen to those and all our children, both currently in the school and those yet to arrive in years to come.

Supported by:

Ms P Rayner
Mr S Fitzsimons
Ms J Prior
Ms E Newman
Mr S Theobald
Ms N Donnelly
Ms S Scerri

1. (ii) Secondary School Catchment Areas

We believe these proposals will not solve the problem of catchments failing to catch in 2019/20 for a number of reasons. Our opposition is not about the quality of one school over another. We recognise that all the city's schools are striving to offer the best education they can. We also recognise that these are difficult issues and the Council's power to act is constrained by national policy.

However, in the short time we have had to study and understand the situation, it is clear that there are alternative changes that might have had more impact on the problem and less impact on families. This process has not given us the option of putting forward or considering these more palatable alternatives. We would be happy to provide details on these different options if asked.

The desire to make so-called 'light touch' changes has resulted in proposals that pick off small numbers of pupils from multiple locations around the edges of the central catchment areas and herein lies the core of opposition. The actual numbers of children moving catchment in each area is tiny, evidenced by the small numbers attending the consultation events. Affected families feel targeted, isolated, split from their historic communities and out on a limb. As a result, the impact on those families and children is huge but the benefit to the overall catchment issue is questionable.

To give just one example, Council data says 30 children currently in Y5 at Elm Grove Primary School will move into the Longhill catchment. However, rather than relying on data projections and spreadsheets, we surveyed one Elm Grove Y5 class and found that, taking into account existing sibling links, there are only 4 children who would actually have to move catchment.

The number of children actually moving catchment are too few to make an impact on the catchment problem, too few to become a cohort that moves confidently together and too few to be given the kind of bespoke transport that would be required for a journey to school that cannot be made on foot. Distances to travel and transport options for those families slated to move

catchment is another major cause of opposition to these proposals and goes against Council policy to encourage walking to school.

We want a decent secondary catchment system that works for the whole city, and agree that something needs to be done, but this is not the right solution. Changes must be made after the situation with the new school is resolved and a long-term, permanent change can be made. For the affected families, the temporary nature of these proposals compounds the anxiety and uncertainty, especially for those with siblings going to secondary school after 2019/20.

We urge the Working Group to consider the offer from head teachers to increase admission numbers at the oversubscribed schools. We appreciate the offer would have been better made before the proposals were formed but we beg you to put aside any frustration with the timing and consider what is best for the children of the city. Children and families are not political or administrative footballs.

We understand that the Council is fearful of legal challenge if it does not move to improve the problem with catchment areas. We regret that should these proposals be recommended, we will be forced to consider all options available including the possibility of a legal challenge.

Finally, we would like it formally noted as part of the consultation response that are two petitions open (from the North of Elm Grove area and in West Hove). Requests have been lodged to present both to full Council on December 14th.

Supported by:

Mr D Boyle

Ms J Ryan

Ms S Lillis

Dr C Packham

Ms B Escorihuela