

# **CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE CABINET MEMBER MEETING**

## **Agenda Item 23**

Brighton & Hove City Council

The following questions have been received from Councillors and will be taken as read along with the written answer to be circulated at the meeting. The Councillor asking the question may then ask one relevant supplementary question, which shall be put and answered without discussion.

### **a) Councillor Davis**

“Could the Cabinet Member update us on the progress the administration is making to find more primary school places for BN3 residents in the short, medium and long term?”

### **Response from Councillor Brown, Cabinet Member for Children & Young People**

The Council is investigating options to increase the number of primary school places in Hove and parts of Brighton in response to an unprecedented increase in the number of school age children. This increase is particularly evident in Hove, and Councillor Davis will be aware of the moves already made to permanently increase the size of the Davigdor and Somerhill schools, and the provision of additional places at West Blatchington Primary School. Further options of both new build and the extension of existing schools have been evaluated with the aim of providing two additional forms of entry in Hove beyond the permanent additional places already proposed.

We have GP registration data showing the numbers of children resident in different parts of the city, but at best that provides us with 3½ years notice of likely primary school numbers. From this data we recognised the growing numbers in Hove, and reacted more than a year ago by starting the process to expand Davigdor and Somerhill schools. At the same time additional places were provided at West Blatchington on a shorter term basis. Since that time we have been examining both the likely longer term need for school places in Hove and the options for providing places. In the first place we must be satisfied that the upward population trend in the area is likely to be sustained. It would be wrong to commit the Council's limited capital resources to build places that will not be needed in the longer term. However, the recently available GP data for the 2007/8 birth year suggests a continuing trend and that we will need another five forms of entry in the longer term. The options for a new school in Hove are limited, although the few possibilities that are there have been considered. Options for expanding existing schools have also been considered. The outcome of these options are being formally presented at this Cabinet Member meeting in order to confirm which of the options will be the Council's preferred solution.

The Council unfortunately does not have readily available uncommitted capital for school buildings, the capital strategy which includes our PCP allocation is

fully committed, and any new build or school expansion not yet included will require an imaginative re-working of the capital plan.

I do understand the frustration of parents who want to be able to send their children to a local school. The Council is actively planning to meet the need for places in Hove, and will work to deliver them in the shortest possible time scale. However we must be sure that within the limited options we have to create those places we are making effective use of our resources and building the places where they will best meet the need.

**b) Councillor Davis**

“Could the Cabinet Member tell us what aspirations the BHCC has for increasing the number and the quality of free school meals to school children, and how the expansion of Davigdor and Somerhill schools and the new shared catering facilities will achieve these?”

**Response from Councillor Brown, Cabinet Member for Children & Young People**

A report was prepared for the CYPOSC meeting held on 16 September 2009 which set out in some detail the barriers to the take up of both paid and free school meals, and the Council’s actions to increase the numbers of children taking free and paid school meals. The report also sets out the work undertaken to provide healthy menus and to encourage children to eat healthily and improve their appreciation of a wider range of foodstuffs. Action has already been taken to streamline the free meals claims process, and more will be done including working towards an online free meals claims system. The introduction of an online payment system is expected to increase meals take up for those who pay, and will offer a range of other benefits to schools and the Council, including detailed analysis of children’s eating habits. This will assist the development of menus that are both popular and healthy, and will provide useful data to support the CYPT’s anti-obesity work. The Council is committed to work towards the national target of 43.5% for meals take up.

With specific reference to Somerhill and Davigdor, a recent visit by officers indicated that the lunchtime experience for all pupils could be improved; to facilitate this BHCC would suggest adopting a “Lunchtime Improvement Plan” This would include:

1. Fostering partnership working and identify all relevant stakeholders – pupils through student council, teaching staff, head/SMT, lunch time staff and kitchen staff, BHCC – School Meals Team – how does each of these groups view lunch time?
2. View service and layout of items ,customer flow, how are free meal entitled children recorded, is the system in place in line with recommendations of non identification for free meals pupils.

3. Develop action plan from feedback, discuss and agree its implementation. Options include:

Fixed lunch sittings to utilise the hall space efficiently, reduce queuing time and enable pupils to sit in peer groups rather than by lunch choice

Taster sessions for pupils to introduce dishes that pupils are not sure of and to sample new dishes prior to them appearing on the menu

Parent taster sessions to show quality of meals served

Implementation of changes to the dining layout and introduction of new equipment as required e.g. Salad Bar, plates, bowls etc

4. Implement changes in manageable stages with clear roles and responsibilities identified
5. Upgrade equipment in the shared kitchen to cope with the increase in food production.