

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 following which one Member of the Council, nominated by the Mayor, may speak in response. It shall then be moved by the Mayor and voted on without discussion that the deputation be thanked for attending and its subject matter noted.

Notification of one Deputation has been received. The spokesperson is entitled to speak for 5 minutes.

- (a) Deputation in support of the proposed expansion of the Dorothy Stringer / Varndean Catchment Area

Ms Justine Sylvester (Spokesperson)

“You may remember us. We presented a petition showing overwhelming support from our local community for this sensible boundary change at the last council meeting. We were touched by the warm reception we received and encouraged by the cross-party support to reconsider this issue. Thank you.

We are delighted that the boundary change for Map 1 is being recommended to council today. You will be able to change lives for the better with a simple ‘yes’ vote. This straightforward, popular decision will transform our local community and deliver benefits citywide.

Let’s look at the problem.

Stanford is the only junior school in the affected area, slap-bang on the catchment boundary. Torn apart by the current system, it has 96 children split between 11 different schools. It’s tough on children, sent miles from home. Even if they are lucky and get the school they want, it’s rare for them to go with the friends they’ve grown up with. In the past, the school has dealt with up to 20 appeals in one year.

Kids need certainty and support when they move to secondary school. Our children face division, disappointment and distress. Some families can’t stand the uncertainty. They choose ‘knees’ or ‘fees’ – either faking a faith to get into Cardinal Newman or reluctantly going private; not options open or attractive to everyone.

Sending children to their fifth and sixth closest schools makes no sense. Blatchington Mill and Hove Park are simply NOT our local schools. Children don’t walk or cycle; they take crowded buses. They can’t participate in after-school clubs because there is no bus service to bring them home. They join classes dominated by feeder schools in unfamiliar neighbourhoods.

Today, you can send our children back to their closest inclusive schools – Stringer and Varndean. You will transform our community. It’s a better, fairer, and more sustainable solution.

Here's why. It means more children will:

- walk and cycle on safe routes to schools they can see from home
- help the council meet sustainable travel targets
- attend after-school clubs
- remain part of their local community
- go on to secondary school with friends

It means:

- less pollution and improved fitness
- less pressure on Hove secondary school places
- less time, money and resource spent on appeals and further consultation
- less uncertainty and anxiety for families.

No one action will solve the citywide school place issue. But this change is a quick and effective way of addressing Hove's ticking timebomb **and** solving our community's problem.

Let's tackle some concerns head on.

Will there be enough places in the Stringer/ Varndean catchment? Frankly, there's no point making a change unless there are.

Yes, the numbers stack up.

- after all, this boundary shift was originally proposed by the council!
- places at Stringer have been increased to 330
- Varndean placed 54 children out of catchment this year
- Cardinal Newman will continue to attract pupils
- the removal of out of catchment sibling link frees up more places
- honouring sibling link in the boundary change area, to help families with children already in Hove schools, also creates space.

Meanwhile, primary schools in Hove have been expanded to take an additional 270 children this year. These children will need secondary school places. They need to access **their** local schools too. Soon, Hove secondary schools simply won't have enough space. Inaction is not an option.

Has there been opposition to this boundary shift?

Residents in our area support this change passionately. We represent the majority view. You have seen the evidence: a (TBC)-strong petition, a committed action group and a steady stream of emails.

Of course, you can't please all the people all the time. However, opposition has been minimal. A dozen parents on the other side of Dyke Road in Hove want our children to keep theirs company as they travel to Hove and Hangleton. We ask them to consider the bigger picture. We urge people focused on protecting places for

themselves at Stringer/ Varndean to find reassurance in the figures. We advise anyone keen to push our kids to another faraway school to think again.

Are there lessons to learn from the consultation?

In short, yes. It is difficult to get consultations right. Five years ago, our community campaigned fiercely to keep our local schools. We were ignored. Commitment to return our children to Stringer and Varndean is undiminished. So why didn't the original consultation reflect this? Many interpreted the consultation wording incorrectly – they thought it was a done deal. Two information sessions were nowhere near the affected area and information was not distributed reliably.

But the community stepped in. We have worked hard to inform residents by:

- including information about the consultation in school newsletters
- holding four community meetings
- ensuring links to the online petitions (both for and against) were sent by text to all parents at Stanford Juniors
- going door-to-door asking people to consider the boundary change, contact their councillors and sign petitions.

You can be confident that people have been effectively engaged.

Let's not meet again next year and rehash the same arguments. We will have failed another year group, Hove schools will be fit to burst and frankly, we know the city needs to focus on the pressing issues of creating new schools and improving school performance.

This decision is easy. We want our children to walk to their local school, participate in after-school clubs and go to secondary school with friends. You need to alleviate pressure on Hove schools, cut pollution, reduce appeals and respond to local communities. The numbers stack up and the outcome would be a greener, fairer, better, popular solution. So, what are we waiting for?

I implore you to vote for this change. We hope that we can count on your support.”

Councillor Shanks, Cabinet Member for Children & Young People, will respond.

