

CABINET – Special Meeting held on Tuesday, 4th January, 2005.

Present:- Councillors Stokes (Chair), Cryer, Haines, Howard, L Khan, Munkley and Smith.

Apologies for Absence:- Councillors Edwards and Wright.

Also Present under Procedure Rule 29:- Councillors Key, Maclsaac and Plimmer.

PART I

135. Asian Tsunami – Minute’s Silence

The Cabinet stood for a minute’s silence as a mark of respect to the victims of the Asian Tsunami.

136. Declarations of Interest

None were declared.

137. Proposed Amalgamation of Lea Infant, Junior and Nursery Schools – Consideration of Scrutiny Recommendation

The Cabinet on 14th December, 2004 had considered a post-decision scrutiny call-in submitted by Councillor Maclsaac on its decision of 29th November to amalgamate the Lea Infant, Junior and Nursery Schools and had resolved to defer implementation of its earlier decision to enable scrutiny to take place. A special meeting of the Young People and Community Scrutiny Sub-Committee had been held immediately prior to this meeting and the Chair invited the Chair of the Sub-Committee, Councillor Key, to formally advise the Cabinet of the Sub-Committee’s recommendation on this matter and the reasoning behind it. She advised that the Sub-Committee had recommended that the Cabinet proceed with the proposed amalgamation of the Infant and Junior Schools but that the Nursery School remain separate. She outlined the arguments made for and against this proposal and the Sub-Committee’s view that this was in the best interests of the children.

The Strategic Director of Education and Children’s Services updated the Cabinet on developments which had taken place since it had previously considered the issue on 29th November. She acknowledged that the timetable to achieve the proposed amalgamation by September, 2005 was extremely tight and that Officers had concerns about its achievability. In addition, the situation with regard to the Headship of the Junior School was now clearer with an Acting Head in place who was able to offer a measure of stability. Furthermore, it was now anticipated that the results of the proposed feasibility study of the Lea campus should be available by about mid-February. Whilst there had been interest in a proposal to establish a Muslim School on this site, no promoters had yet come forward formally to start such a process. Accordingly, there was considerable uncertainty which led her to the conclusion that a target of September, 2005 was now virtually impossible. She suggested that it may be

preferable to defer any amalgamation by one year so as to enable a more considered and structured approach to be taken, taking into account all of the above issues.

The Commissioner for Education proposed that, although there were strong arguments both for and against the amalgamation of all three schools, on balance, he took the view that it would be preferable to proceed with the amalgamation of the Infant and Junior Schools only in 2006. His proposal was seconded and supported unanimously by other Members of the Cabinet.

One Member of the Cabinet expressed the view that any future consultation should be undertaken on an issue by issue basis so that it was as uncomplicated for parents and others as possible.

Officers clarified with Members that the required statutory notices about the amalgamation should not be issued until the Cabinet had considered a further report on this issue following receipt of the feasibility report on the site and details of any firm proposals for a faith school. In this regard, Members indicated that the Council should now formally invite proposals for a faith school to come forward at the earliest opportunity.

Resolved -

- (a) That Lea Infant School, having a Published Admission Number (PAN) of 120, be closed from August, 2006.
- (b) That Lea Junior School, having a PAN of 120, be closed from August, 2006.
- (c) That a new Lea Community Primary School, having a PAN of 90, be opened from September, 2006.
- (d) That further feasibility investigations regarding the potential disposal of part of the site and/or the provision of a new building on part of the site be approved.
- (e) That Officers proceed with options (a) to (d) for 2006 and invite groups of promoters for faith schools to come forward as soon as possible and support further consultation by promoters on the school becoming a faith school from 2006 or later.
- (f) That statutory notices in respect of the proposed amalgamation be not published until the Cabinet has considered a further report on the feasibility study and any proposals for the creation of a faith school on the site.

Chair.

(Note: The meeting opened at 8.05 p.m. and closed at 8.40 p.m.)