

Notes of All Public / Parents meetings

PLANNING 11-16 EDUCATION IN BARROW - THE POTENTIAL ACADEMY: ONE SITE OR TWO?

NOTES OF PARENTS / PUBLIC MEETING HELD ON 15 OCTOBER 2008 AT THORNCLIFFE SCHOOL

Introduction

Anne Burns, County Councillor and Cabinet Member with responsibility for Children's Services chaired the meeting. A panel of County Council officers was present to respond to questions and comments raised from the members of the public present. There were 55 – 60 people of which 53 signed in to the meeting. The public were asked if they wished to join a series of discussion groups looking at the issues surrounding whether or not the proposed Academy should be permanently situated on one or two sites followed by a question and answer session, thus allowing everyone the opportunity to make their points without feeling intimidated by the larger meeting. The alternative was to hold a single question and answer session. The members of the public made it clear that they preferred the alternative option.

Jim Mitchell opened proceedings by referring to the consultation document, emphasising that the main purpose of the meeting was to discuss whether or not the proposed Academy should be permanently based on one or two sites requesting that this should be the initial focus. If time allowed there would be an opportunity to explore other issues. He explained that the officers would try to answer any questions raised. He stated that the Cabinet, who will make the decision on whether the Academy should be permanently on one or two sites, would be influenced by what was said in the meetings and responses to the consultation document. The Government had indicated that they would support whichever option is determined as the appropriate way forward. He then invited comments and questions from the members of the public.

Questions and Answers

Answers to written questions

The first questioner claimed that he had written to the Authority on a number of occasions and was unable to obtain answers to any question so why should they expect answers now? In response it was explained that if they were able to answer the questions raised at the time, the Authority would have done so and provided that information which was available. However, the responsibility for the planning of the Academy was that of the sponsors and the management company appointed for that purpose. They would be looking at the details of how the Academy would work, including issues such as the admissions criteria, the curriculum and a wide range of similar issues. The written responses had indicated that the management company and not the County Council were responsible for such issues and clearly it would have been inappropriate for the County Council to have pre-empted decisions that were yet to be taken in responding to his questions.

Timing of the Opening of the Proposed Academy

The question was posed early in the meeting 'Why can we not hold off opening the Academy until September 2010 when answers to all of the outstanding questions would be known'? This was a theme that was returned to on a number of occasions throughout the meeting.

In response it was explained that the County Council had in its original decision planned to open the Academy in September 2009 and that remained the target date. Some of the reasons given for taking that line were:

- Shortening the lead-in time reduced the period of uncertainty and was better for the education of the students currently attending the three predecessor schools.
- The County Council were keen to improve education across the town as soon as possible.
- In the current financial climate it may be that there was a better chance of resources being available now than in 2010.
- The Government wanted action now, particularly in relation to the Alfred Barrow School.
- It reduced the risk of teachers leaving and seeking jobs elsewhere. In a period of uncertainty recruitment was difficult.

This consultation was therefore concentrating on whether the Academy should be permanently situated on one site or two. Those planning the Academy were confident that an effective Academy could be opened in September 2009 and were working to that deadline. It was noted that references to Academies running behind scheduled in the press referred to building projects and not to the opening of new Academies which was in line with Government targets.

Staff Appointments

The question 'Who is going to be Principal and when would s/he be appointed was posed'? It was explained that the aim was to appoint the Principal before the end of the year with the expectation that s/he would be in post permanently from 1 April 2009. From early in the new year it was hoped s/he would be released on a part-time basis from whatever post s/he currently held. It was explained that this was part of the process of planning for the Academy which is currently being undertaken. This planning started as soon as the Expression of Interest was approved by the Secretary of State in May 2008 and is now proceeding much more rapidly following the appointment of the management company, Mouchel. However, they were not yet in a position to undertake their consultations on the details of the Academy. These were planned to take place with stakeholders early in the spring term. In the interim, as that issue had not been covered in the original consultation in 2007, the Authority was required to consult on whether the Academy should be situated permanently on one or two sites.

Admissions in September 2009

A statement was made that any person that applied for one of the three existing schools would be guaranteed a place in the Academy. It was explained that this was not strictly true. What has been said is that the admissions process to existing schools would apply for admission in September 2009. The over subscription criteria to the three schools would be applied, each of which will be held to their published admission number. Any child **allocated** a place at one of the three schools will be guaranteed a place at the Academy, assuming it opens in September 2009.

Once offered a place through the normal allocations process, it is an internal decision of the Academy as to which site children will attend. Sponsors have indicated that, as far as possible, that decision will be in line with parental preference though other criteria, such as the educational well-being of the children may also be considered. It was not, however, possible to guarantee at this point that any particular child living at any particular address that is allocated a place at the Academy would go to a specific site for their education.

Later in the meeting it was explained that the amount of movement of students between the two sites is likely to be limited. In particular, there is very little likelihood of students in Years 7, 8 and the early part of Year 9 moving between sites as the curriculum is essentially prescribed and will be taught on an equal basis on both sites. For the later Years, 10 and 11, there is already likely to be considerable movement, not only between the two sites proposed for the Academy but also to access courses, such as the new Diplomas in other schools and other educational establishments, such as Furness College.

Curriculum and Academy organisation issues

One parent of Year 9 child was concerned at the effect the changes next year would have on her child, asking questions, such as, Who will he be taught by? How will GCSEs be allocated? Who will be making the decision with regard to what choices are available to him? How can you guarantee that it will not affect his chances of obtaining good grades? It was explained that the heads of all the secondary schools in Barrow had been involved in developing what were known as 'personalised curriculum' for students across the town. This led them on to looking at, for example, how the new Diplomas may be delivered, which options for GCSE could be offered and where. Clearly it was important to know whether the proposed Academy was going to be eventually on one or two sites as this affected staffing deployment, recruitment and the development of the curriculum. However, the group were working on the basis that for the first three years this will need to be delivered on two sites, and that had allowed a fair degree of certainty in their early deliberations.

Sponsors of the Academy

The question was asked 'were Brian Scowcroft and Andrew Tinkler still sponsors of the proposed Barrow Academy?' It was explained that the Expression of Interest was signed by the lead sponsors, namely Barrow Sixth Form College, Furness College and The University of Cumbria. The financial sponsors are currently BAE Systems with £¹/₂m and the County Council with up to £1m. The aspiration was for other local sponsors to make up the requirement of £2m of endowment funding over a ten year period. There was no need for all of that funding to be in place at the opening of the Academy. As the lead sponsors are

from an educational background, who the financial sponsors are is not fundamental to its governance. It was accepted that the Expression of Interest had referred to the possibility of Brian Scowcroft and Andrew Tinkler sponsoring the Academy. This possibility had now been overtaken with the Authority agreeing to put up to £1m in the endowment fund. In response to a question as to how the sponsors were chosen, it was stated that there was no requirement for a competition or adverts to be placed and that potential sponsors had been approached. Barrow was unique in the country in having three local community education sponsors.

Concern was expressed as to what would happen if the financial sponsors became bankrupt and how accountable they were to the community.

Assimilation of Existing Students

The question was asked 'Where will the children from Alfred Barrow site be placed when the Academy opens'? It was explained that all three existing schools, Alfred Barrow, Parkview and Thorncliffe would close at the end of the summer term 2009 to be replaced by the Academy from September 2009. There were sufficient places in the existing Parkview and Thorncliffe buildings to accommodate the existing students in Years 7 – 10 in the three schools, plus the projected intake for September 2009 into Year 7. No decisions had yet been taken as to which children would attend which site. As far as possible that would be in line with parental preferences and in the best educational interest of the students. For example, keeping exam classes together as far as possible with their existing teachers is a likely possibility.

Consultation Process

It was explained that a copy of the consultation document had been sent to the home address of every child attending special, nursery, primary and secondary schools in Barrow with a letter informing them of the dates of the meetings. In addition, this information had been given in the local North West Evening Mail on a number of occasions. Schools had also been given details of the meetings and were asked to circulate them to their parents. A statement was made that teachers were advised not to attend the meetings. It was denied that such a directive had been issued by the Authority and teachers were free to attend the public meetings if they so wished.

A question was posed that were 12 County Councillors opposed to the creation of an Academy elected in next year's elections (in May or June) would that be too late to stop the Academy in Barrow? It was stated that while the County Council is likely to have made a decision on the closure of the three schools, it is possible that the funding agreement for the Academy may not have been signed and technically before that happens it is possible to stop the Academy.

Parents of a child with special needs currently in Year 6 were anxious to know whether the Academy would be on one site or two, as they believed it would be difficult for their child to be assimilated in a larger one site school. Their preference would be for a small school for all five secondary school years for their child.

Votes

The chair was asked that a show of hands be given as to whether those present were in favour of delaying a decision on the opening of the proposed Academy until September 2010. A large majority of those present voted in favour of delaying. When asked whether they were prepared to indicate whether they preferred one site or two sites for the Academy that was declined with claims that there was not enough information to make that decision and anyway we don't want an Academy in Barrow.

An officer was asked to comment on the collaboration that has taken place between the secondary schools and others within the Furness Education Consortium during the last two or three years. He outlined how they had worked together to produce the school organisation change options, to develop the delivery of the 14-19 diplomas and the plans for further cooperation between the schools.

Towards the end of the meeting, Mr Wilson, Head of Thorncliffe School explained how the process of delivering the Academy was being led by the Barrow Secondary school teachers and how the staff were feeding their ideas through to the management company who were collating the ideas. These were considered by those developing the Academy to be well thought through. The hope was that the good practices in the existing schools, with the good teachers that are in place would be carried on into the Academy. They were looking forward to having new buildings and outstanding facilities to enable the progress of improvement that had already started to continue and accelerate

Summary

Anne Burns thanked all those that had attended the meeting for their contributions and asked that they make their views known in response to the consultation document by completing and returning the questionnaire.

PLANNING 11-16 EDUCATION IN BARROW - THE POTENTIAL ACADEMY : ONE SITE OR TWO?

NOTES OF PARENTS / PUBLIC MEETING HELD ON 16 OCTOBER 2008 AT ALFRED BARROW SCHOOL

Introduction

Anne Burns, County Councillor and Cabinet Member with responsibility for Children's Services chaired the meeting. A panel of County Council officers was present to respond to questions and comments raised from the members of the public present. There were about 30 people at the meeting.

Jim Mitchell opened proceedings by referring to the consultation document, emphasising that the main purpose of the meeting was to discuss whether or not the proposed Academy should be permanently based on one or two sites. He requested that this should be the initial focus and if time allowed there would be an opportunity to explore other issues. He explained that the panel would try to answer any questions raised. He stated that the Cabinet, who will make the decision on whether the Academy should be permanently on one or two sites, would be influenced by what was said in the meeting and that the Government had indicated that they would support whichever option is determined as the appropriate way forward. He then invited comments and questions from the members of the public.

Questions and Answers

Purposes of the consultation

The first question was 'why were we not asking the question do we want an Academy'? as she considered it privatisation by the back door and not in the best interests of the students in Barrow. It was explained that the County Council had already made the decision that they should proceed to develop an Academy. The purpose of this consultation was to determine whether that Academy should be situated permanently on one or two campuses.

Which site will which pupils attend

It was suggested that before parents could answer the question whether they wanted the Academy to be situated on one campus or two, they would need to know where their child was going in September 2009 as the one campus option would mean their children having to move schools twice with two lots of disruption during their secondary education. It was felt that the two site option was the best of a bad deal. There would be an inevitable time to settle, with friction between the schools and the students during their integration and that would be repeated three years later were a one site option followed. The follow-up question was 'what was the plan for the Alfred Barrow students'? It was explained that the County Council is not taking the decisions and that it was not possible to indicate which site which pupils were likely to attend from next September as those decisions had yet to be taken by the management company and the sponsors of the Academy.

The questioner asked if the County Council is not making the decisions why did it produce a planning document back in April 2008 giving details of key decisions that needed to be taken, such as the development of the admission policy by July 2008? Many of those dates have now been passed and there were still no answers to the questions or an admission plan in place. There was a belief that they were rushing too much to get it into place now for September 2009 and the decision should be delayed for at least a year.

Current Year 10 Issues

One parent was concerned that her child who was doing GCSEs was missing important lessons because both teachers and he were attending meetings planning the Academy and asked how many more lessons he would miss for this reason? She then went on to ask when the schools are merged will you mix the classes or will they stay the same? There was a need for the people planning the transition to recognise that many of the pupils were vulnerable and it would help their education to keep their existing teachers with them. In addition she asked will current Year 10 pupils going to be allowed to finish their GCSE courses in Alfred Barrow School or will they be forced to be moved during their crucial examination year to a new environment? In response, it was said that the points that were made would be relayed back to those considering the issues so that they were aware of the concerns and give them an opportunity to consider more fully the implications of each course of action.

Standards

One speaker said that the concept of the Academy was to raise standards across the secondary sector in Barrow. Standards were supposedly low. They have now risen and the principle reason was because of the head, staff and community working with the school to improve things, there was therefore no need for new buildings. She believed what was required was more investment in the education process. It was explained that the Government made judgements across the country based on pupil performance with a range of attainment indicators and also on achievement, i.e. the progress that they make within a school. In Barrow, the attainment indicators are below that expected in a number of the secondary schools. Whereas in some of the schools the progress that pupils make are generally satisfactory. However, to improve further, which is what everybody wishes for you need to provide teachers and students with the optimum conditions for them to learn. That means new buildings and new facilities to match the modern curriculum and that needs to be linked to good leadership and teachers.

Admissions

Concern was expressed that the intention of creating an Academy when first suggested was to assist pupils from the most deprived areas as well as to raise standards generally. Given that the proposed Academy was restricted to 1200 places, the very children that it was being developed for were unlikely to obtain a place in the Academy and be expected instead to cross from the town centre to attend Walney School. It was suggested that to avoid this happening the Academy should be developed on two sites but to allow more pupils to attend than the planned 600 on each. It was

explained that when the options were developed for the first consultation it was felt that each of the schools in the area should be of a similar size so that children would not be disadvantaged in their education. The plan saw four schools in the area with capacities of between 900 – 1200 places.

Concern was expressed by a parent of a Year 6 pupil that because they had no answers to the questions on which site each child would attend and whether or not the Academy would be in place next September it was not possible for them to complete the admissions form by 24 October and could that date be delayed until answers were known? It was explained that the dates were set by a national schedule which will end with allocations being made on a set date in March. Were parents to apply for one or the three schools, Alfred Barrow, Parkview and Thorncliffe and be allocated a place at those schools, then they would be guaranteed a place in the Academy. It was suggested that as the core curriculum is the same in every school and for the first three years there is very little difference between schools, it should not be a major factor when deciding which school to express a preference for.

It was stated that the establishment of an Academy would be limiting parental choice and with the Academy developing its own admission policy that choice could be limited further. It was explained that an Academy needs to adhere to the national code of practice for admissions. In the Expression of Interest, signed by the sponsors, they had made it very clear that the Academy saw itself as very much a part of the local community of secondary schools and wished to participate as much as possible in collaborating with other schools in the best interests of all students.

Use of sites after closure

In direct response to a question it was stated categorically that the reason the Authority was pursuing an Academy was not to sell the Alfred Barrow School site to a property developer. In addition, if the Thorncliffe site were to be vacated most of it could not be used for housing as it is a recreation facility and Hoops have a long lease. There would be no wish on the part of the County Council to terminate that arrangement, whether or not an education facility remained on the Thorncliffe site.

A taxi driver asked how are we going to get the children to school given that during the morning and evening school run times the town is almost gridlocked and the existing infrastructure will not take any additional journeys? It was explained that the intention would be for the Authority to discuss with Stagecoach whether more buses could be provided to get children to wherever the schools will be situated in the future. Concern was expressed that making up to 300 children go from the town centre to Walney would increase carbon emissions and congestion in the town.

Timing of opening of the Academy

Concern was expressed that there was insufficient time to put in place all the transition arrangements necessary for opening in September 2009. There was a need to have a proper plan and looking at the dates in the original plan for the Authority were already six months behind. As a result, serious consideration should be given to delaying the opening of the

Academy until September 2010. In response it was explained that the Authority was concerned that the period of uncertainty wasn't in the best interests of students and staff and believed this should be reduced to the minimum. Retention of good staff becomes more of a problem if the change is delayed for a further year. This had been recognised by the governing body of Alfred Barrow, who agreed it was better to open the Academy in September 2009. In addition, the management company appointed by the DCSF to undertake the feasibility were very confident that they could deliver a good and effective Academy by September 2009. This was not accepted by one speaker who, like everybody, wanted to improve education in the town but wanted a proper well thought out scheme and not the one being offered.

Movement of Students

In response to a question, it was explained that the core curriculum provision would be delivered on both sites. This would mean that the movement of students from one site to another would be virtually nil for Years 7, 8 and 9. For those in Years 10 and 11, as the entitlement to a wide range of choice including GCSEs and the new Diplomas, it is likely that whether or not the Academy is established that all children of those age groups are likely to be involved in travelling between educational establishments to access the courses that they wish to take. This would include courses at the Colleges and other schools, as well as on either campus of the Academy. One parent was concerned at this as the control and safety of children was important and she wanted to know that when her child was delivered to school he would remain in it and not be moving between sites.

One site or two?

One speaker, with experience of a two site school, believed that a two campus option would be a disaster as there were considerable difficulties in maintaining discipline and the quality of operation between two sites. Another suggested that equity would be easier to maintain if the two sites were split on an upper and lower scenario with each of the key stages being taught in one of the campuses. This would be much better for the integration of the Alfred Barrow children, as all children doing the same curriculum would be on one site and that was preferable to two 11-16 campuses. That point was noted but it was explained that the sponsors intended that there be two 11-16 campuses, at least for the first three years, and beyond were the decision taken that the Academy be permanently based on two campuses. It was explained in response to a question that the sponsors could not change a decision on one campus or two once it had been made. It was understood that the sponsors have agreed that were a two campus Academy be decided by the County Council that they would do everything possible to make that work.

Walney School

Concern was expressed that Walney School was planning to become a Foundation School and that the purpose of that was to enable it to control its admission policy. In response it was stated that even if that was the intention, which was highly unlikely, all schools have to admit up to their published admission number which was set based on its capacity. As the

intention was to increase the capacity of Walney School it is unlikely that there would be sufficient applicants to exceed that number and therefore any over subscription criteria would not need to be applied.

Concern was expressed at having large numbers of children cross the only bridge to Walney in the event of a nuclear accident and therefore being separated from their homes. It was said that the Authority had emergency planners who consider any changes in the pattern of school accommodation.

The Consultation Process

Concern was expressed at the low turn out and the questioner asked, what had been done to advertise the events? The meeting was informed that well over 8,000 copies of the consultation document were sent to parents of children in the Barrow area along with a letter inviting them to attend one of the four parents and public meetings. In addition, each school was sent a leaflet outlining the times and venues for the parents meetings and asking them to either to copy this on to the back of letters to parents or to include the information in their communications with parents. In addition, the local press (Northwest Evening Mail) had advertised the times and venues on a number of occasions. For this particular meeting the head of Alfred Barrow School had sent out letters to all her parents reminding them of it. Concern was expressed that some heads had refused to accept leaflets from the group OSANFS advertising the times and venues of the meetings.

The Decision

Concern was expressed that there would only be five members of the Cabinet, only one of which would come from Barrow, making the final decision on the outcome of the consultations on whether or not the Academy would be situated permanently on one campus or two. It was suggested by the speaker that like last time, the Cabinet would not listen to the majority view expressed in response to the consultations. In response Anne Burns stated that the original decision to proceed to establish an Academy in Barrow had not been taken on political lines but had cross-party agreement. In coming to a decision on the current consultation, the Cabinet will take into account all the views expressed during the consultations, at these meetings and through the written responses to it.

Summary

It was clear throughout the meeting that answers were expected to a large number of issues surrounding the establishment of the Academy and a clear request was made that the management company and sponsors engage to respond to those questions as soon as possible. In the interim, it was considered difficult for parents and others to come to a firm conclusion on whether one site or two sites for an Academy should be the preferred way forward. Many felt that the decision on the opening of the Academy should be delayed until September 2010 to enable all the necessary planning to be undertaken and answers provided.

PLANNING 11-16 EDUCATION IN BARROW - THE POTENTIAL ACADEMY: ONE SITE OR TWO?

NOTES OF PARENTS / PUBLIC MEETING HELD ON 20 OCTOBER 2008 AT PARKVIEW SCHOOL

Introduction

Anne Burns, County Councillor and Cabinet Member with responsibility for Children's Services chaired the meeting. A panel of County Council officers was present to respond to questions and comments raised from the members of the public present. There were around 75 members of the public present at the meeting.

After introductions of the officers present, Jim Mitchell opened proceedings by referring to the consultation document. He emphasised that the main purpose of the meeting was to discuss whether or not the proposed Academy should be permanently based on one or two sites. While that was the main focus of the meeting other views relating to the Academy and the reorganisation of 11-16 education in Barrow would be noted and if possible a response given. He stated that the response to the consultation will influence the outcome on whether the Academy be established on one site or two.

Questions and Answers

Project Management Team

It was explained that the Project Management Team for the establishment of the Academy, Mouchel, did not believe it appropriate for them to attend these public meetings. As this was suggested at an earlier public meeting, they also felt it was not fair for them to attend one or two meetings having not attended those in the previous week. They were, however, continuing to work on the establishment of the Academy and will meet the members of the Project Steering Group at a meeting to be held in early November. This meeting would involve the sponsors and others involved in developing the Academy.

It was confirmed that Mouchel were a different management company from those that had developed the Carlisle Academies and that they were appointed by the DCSF.

Robert Swales, head of Parkview School, who was involved in discussions on the development of the Academy, stated that the education plan is not yet ready to be distributed and shared with a wider audience. All the issues need to be carefully thought through and put in place before that happens. That said, he is hoping to obtain the first widely distributed copy of the draft education brief on 18 November. He stated his intention to invite parents of students at Parkview School to attend a meeting on the 19 November to discuss the content.

Student Numbers

A question was asked 'where would the other students who would normally expect to obtain a place in the three existing schools go'? Currently the Academy is planned for 1200 students with up to 240 in each age group. Usually 200 students are admitted to Parkview each year which means that 80 would need to go elsewhere if the numbers were reduced to 120 on this site. The questioner made the point that the opening of the Academy should be delayed for a year until answers to questions like that were available. It was explained that if there were to be a change in the numbers admitted to the Academy, the Local Authority would need to agree that change. With regard to the potential delay to the opening of the Academy to September 2010, it was stated that this point had previously been made at other meetings and this would be reported back to the Cabinet when they make their decision on the outcome of the consultation on whether the Academy should be permanently based on one site or two.

Carlisle Academies

A member of the public stated that he had heard that the Academy in Carlisle was a total disaster and a number of horror stories were circulating. The Authority should learn from the lessons that have arisen from rushing the Academy's opening date. It was explained that there were some teething problems with the Richard Rose Central Academy. However, the two other Academies that opened on the same date in Cumbria were working very successfully with very few problems.

One speaker asked 'why invest money in buildings when it should be investment in the education of the students'? He believed it was not the building that matters it was the teachers. Concern was expressed that the meeting Robert Swales referred to would be for a closed audience of his parents and also that the leaflet he distributed, inviting parents to tonight's meeting, was supporting a one-site Academy. This assertion was disputed by another parent who had also received the letter, who felt it was reasonably balanced. The head explained that he had sent out the leaflet to encourage people to attend tonight's meeting, as the decision whether or not the Academy would permanently be based on one site or two really mattered.

Movement of children

In response to a question it was explained that the design of the curriculum, particularly for Key Stage 3 pupils, was planned in a way that movement of students between sites was kept to the absolute minimum. In some areas of the Key Stage 4 curriculum (Years 10 and 11) they already need to travel to undertake particular courses, for example, some of the new Diplomas are currently being delivered at the Furness College. In future to enable students' access to a wider range of options, there is going to be greater movement between schools and other education providers. It was accepted that students could lose valuable time and that is why such movement needed to be kept to a minimum. The students, at a meeting earlier in the day, had suggested the possibility of the Academy providing its own transport for students moving between the two parts of the Academy, even if that was just for the first three years prior to coming onto a single campus on the Parkview site.

One parent of a child with special needs was concerned that he may have to travel at all between sites. In response it was stated that the heads were already putting together a plan that recognised specific very vulnerable children and how to cater for their needs while providing the very best education for them. It was explained that the new Diplomas were just one option of children's education from Year 10 onwards, GCSEs would still be available. However, there was a national trend towards personalised learning with the thinking that it is necessary to ensure every learner be able to fulfil their potential. A lot of thought is going into the planning of the timetables to ensure that possibility is available without significant travelling between education establishments. Part of that thinking is to provide parallel provision for the 11-16 age range on both sites as far as possible. However, there will be some courses with a high level of specialism which may require movement of children to another site for say one or two days each week.

Academies

One speaker was concerned that the whole issue of Academies is divisive and whether it is on one campus or two its success can only be achieved by real planning over a longer period than is currently available for a September 2009 opening. It was stated that the management company were confident that a successful Academy could be delivered by that date. In response to a question it was said that some Academies that had been established were successful and some were not. Many of the less successful Academies were those developed in the earlier stages of the process. That said, there is evidence that overall Academies are making a real difference in most cases. In contrast it is generally accepted that currently the secondary schools in Barrow are not providing as good an education as they should and that issue needs to be addressed.

Sponsors

It was confirmed that the three lead sponsors for the proposed Academy were the Barrow Sixth Form College, Furness College and the University of Cumbria. It was believed that having three local education sponsors was unique in the country. As they were involved daily in education they understood the needs of students and were working hard to create an education vision that will provide the best education possible for the students. That plan is currently being prepared and is intended to transform the educational provision for the students. With such a high level of investment into the Academy infrastructure it is believed that Ofsted will try to ensure that the best standards are achieved. The three main sponsors have considerable experience in the education of young adults and that will be harnessed for the benefit of all the students attending the Academy.

Outcome of the Consultation

One speaker asserted that there was little evidence that the County Council listened to the people when it decided to press forward with the establishment of an Academy. Why should the public accept that they will listen this time? It was explained that the Government and the County Council were open-minded about the outcome as to whether or not the Academy should be established on one or two campuses.

Summary

There were mixed views on the prospects for an Academy in Barrow with very few references as to whether it should be established on one site or two. Many present suggested that the opening should be delayed until September 2010. This they suggested would allow more time to plan and provide answers to the outstanding issues, without which it was claimed it was not possible to decide whether one or two sites should be the way forward.

PLANNING 11-16 EDUCATION IN BARROW – THE POTENTIAL ACADEMY: ONE SITE OR TWO

NOTES OF PARENTS / PUBLIC MEETING HELD ON 23 OCTOBER 2008 AT WALNEY SCHOOL

Introduction

Jeff Garnett, County Councillor for Walney South, chaired the meeting. A number of officers of the County Council were present to respond to questions and comments raised from the members of the public. There were around 30 parents and other members of the public present at this meeting.

After the initial introductions Jim Mitchell referred to the consultation document which had been distributed and he stated that the main purpose of the meeting was to discuss whether or not the proposed Academy should be permanently based on one or two sites. The chairman then invited comments and questions from those present.

Questions and Answers

Student numbers

The first questioner asked that if the Academy goes ahead at its currently proposed size, where are all the children going to be educated as it only has room for around 40% of the pupils in the area? It was explained that the need for additional places at St Bernard's and Walney School had been recognised during the last consultation, and that plans were in hand to increase the capacity of Walney School to 900 places (currently around 720) and St Bernard's to around 1000 places (currently around 900).

New buildings at Walney School

Plans were underway to develop the building project as part of the expansion plans for Walney School. This involves the provision of a new sports hall and new specialist facilities, as well as improvements to existing accommodation. The County Council have already earmarked the necessary capital to enable this project to take place. Discussions were currently taking place with the planners to determine where precisely on the Walney School site the additional facilities should be built. Concern was expressed that Walney School might lose out and become second to the bright new shiny buildings of an Academy. It was explained that considerable thought was being put in to the design of the Walney project to ensure that the building could be reshaped to meet future needs. The quality of the provision is the key and much thought is occurring in order to identify future requirements and what is possible given the existing buildings.

The thinking behind the expansion of Walney School was explained in that the proposed three schools in Barrow were planned to be of a broadly similar size, with the Academy having 1200 places, St Bernard's 1050 places, and Walney 900 places. It has been nationally recognised, that generally speaking, schools with student populations between 800 and 1200 are the most likely to provide a good education. Once numbers rise much above, or go much below those numbers, then there is a greater likelihood that they will not be successful. At

the last consultation the people of Barrow stated that they did not want a large school. Now that the funding is available, the opportunity is being offered for the Academy to be situated in two smaller campuses of 600 students on separate sites if that is the wish locally.

Admissions and effect on Walney School

Concern was expressed that the Academy would be able to set its own admissions criteria and be able to take the best students. This would mean that Walney would be the only choice for the remaining students. It was explained that the Academy needed to follow the national Code of Practice on admissions, and would be unable to choose their students on the basis of ability. The proposed sponsors of the Academy already work closely together with the other education providers in Barrow and are keen to be part of the collaborate that is working together to improve education throughout Barrow. It is unlikely that those involved with the Academy would wish to act in a way that would upset the trust that is currently being developed between schools and other educational establishments to the benefit of all the students in Barrow.

Reasons for these consultations

The question was asked, "Why are we consulting again and why should we believe that the views would not be ignored"? It was explained that at the last consultation the decision was taken by the County Council to pursue an option which involves an Academy to replace the three schools. During the further development of that way forward the Government suggested it was prepared to fund an option that would see the Academy permanently situated on two campuses, namely at Parkview and Thorncliffe. As that option was not available during the last consultation the Authority agreed to consult further on that specific issue. As the decision had already been taken to establish an Academy there was no need to consult again on whether or not there should be one.

Funding for academies

One person claimed that academies cost more per pupil than other secondary schools, quoting from a Government document that claimed that academies cost £21,000 per student compared with £14,000 per student in other secondary schools. Without the details it was not possible for anybody to comment on the figures quoted. However, the Government have stated on a number of occasions that funding for Academy students will be broadly in line with that for other maintained schools in the area.

Academies elsewhere in Cumbria

It was suggested that a recent press item had stated that the Authority were not moving forward on a plan for an Academy to replace Whitehaven School, where they want one, why not move forward there and forget an Academy for Barrow? It was explained that no consultation had taken place in West Cumbria and a bid was currently being developed for BSF funding in the area. The funding for an Academy to replace Whitehaven School referred to is claimed to be available by the local MP. Talks in the area are at a very early stage, and there is a need to look at the whole area before moving on to consult on an individual school. While there is only a limited chance of success in advancing the BSF funding, consideration of another Academy needs to be taken in the context of the whole area. In contrast, Barrow is

much further down the line. The Authority has already consulted and agreed to move forward with the development of an Academy, and an Expression of Interest has been written and signed up to by the Government. The project management company has been appointed by the DCSF, and the intention is to open in September 2009.

One speaker expressed the opinion that Barrow should not have been grouped with South Lakeland at the time that the original BSF submissions were made, as that diluted the chances of success. It was explained that it was not possible to group them with West Cumbria, as the submission needed at that time to be geographically coherent areas and the packages suggested be of a certain value. It wasn't possible at that time to combine Allerdale with Barrow. The only resource the Authority is certain to get at the moment for Barrow is the Academy route. It remains to be seen whether or not BSF will come along.

Management company

It was explained that the DCSF had appointed Mouchel as the management company to work with the sponsors of the proposed Academy for Barrow. They had worked on the development of a number of academies around the country, and had a wide range of expertise in developing them.

Student movement between sites

One parent was concerned about the possible movement of students between the two sites were that the option adopted for the Academy. It was explained that plans were already in place to restrict movement to a minimum in the first three years. In Years 10 and 11 there are already a number of students who move to access particular courses, for example, some already go to Furness College from Walney School to undertake the new Diploma courses. The consortium of secondary schools in Barrow is very strong, and they are already working to ensure that educational resources are shared so that students have equality of access as far as possible.

Board of Governors

Concern was expressed that the Board of Governors for an Academy could be very different in its composition compared with other secondary schools. It was accepted that generally the Board of Governors of Academies are smaller than those in other secondary schools. However, there are often parent advisory groups to the Board. The Board also tend to act more strategically and are less involved in the fine details of running a school. That said, the sponsors of the proposed Academy for Barrow are from the existing education community, and staff, students and local people will be involved in the governance of the Academy. As providers of education for students aged 16+ the three lead sponsors are anxious that the students of Barrow receive the best possible education prior to moving on to their establishments. The Governing Body is accountable in any school, and that is no different in an Academy as in any other maintained school.

Personal view

One speaker believed it would be helpful to give a summary of where we had reached in the process so far. Everyone in the room wanted to see equity of provision and equality across the area. While he had misgivings about the

Academy system, it was the best bet at the present time, and the young people would be the losers if the opportunity was not grasped now to improve the facilities in Barrow. The size of the establishment was irrelevant as there can be good large and small schools. The demographic trend in the area shows that the numbers of students are continuing to fall and none of the remaining schools may be as large as suggested. He was very concerned that two 11–16 campuses would be difficult to manage, and suggested that if there were to be two sites, they should be split on a lower and upper school basis. He believed that the Holy Grail of parental choice had prompted the present consultations on a two site option, and what was needed was the whole town to work together for the best solution. At first glance it seemed very sensible to slow the process down, however, concerns with regard to the loss of good teachers, and possibly the funding, prompted him to support action being taken now. The key thing he believed was to grasp the opportunity now.

Academy sponsors

One speaker asked, “What is to stop the sponsors changing their mind, and not pursuing the promises made now to reassure parents? For example, Furness College, one of the sponsors is closing their nursery without consulting with the users” It was explained that the education brief that is currently being developed sets out the expectation of what the Academy will provide. It sets out the core provision, which like education generally, has to enable change through time and cannot be set in concrete. However, while accepting an Academy will have more powers than some other schools, that freedom to change things is generally available for the Governors of all schools. There is no business lead sponsor of the proposed Academy for Barrow, and the lead sponsors are keen to establish an Academy which is in the best interest of its students.

Responding to the question of the nursery at Furness College, it was explained that plans were in preparation for new education facilities at the College, and that did not allow room for a nursery. Currently only 12% of the children attending the nursery have parents who are students at the College, and the others do not. They instead drive their children to attend that nursery from other areas in Barrow.

Walney School

One parent was concerned that the expansion of Walney School would not be in the best interests of her children, and didn't feel confident that it was going to be okay. It was suggested that children are much more resilient than parents believe, and adapt quickly to changed circumstances.

Concern was expressed that Walney was planning on becoming a foundation school with its own admissions system which will allow them to reject students it did not wish to admit. It was suggested that the reality was that this was not possible. The school is likely to have a catchment area which would enable any child from the Walney area to obtain a place if parents wished, and it will also have more places available for children from other parts of the town. It was suggested that there could be an admissions policy for the whole of Barrow. It was stated that there was a legal requirement that each individual school must have its own admissions policy;

however, there was nothing to stop the adoption of plan an admission policy that is common across the town.

Timing of change

A recurring theme throughout the meeting was that everything is being rushed, and that people were being railroaded into a process. It was stated again, that the depth of feeling on this issue will be fed back to the County Council Cabinet when they meet to discuss the outcome of the consultation. At the moment planning is continuing for a September 2009 opening. However, when the report is presented to Cabinet it will also refer to the concerns of people at the schools that good staff could be lost through delay, and it would increase, to the possible detriment of student's education, the period of uncertainty for staff. Concern was expressed that if the Academy was organised on two sites there may be a wish to expand it to, say, 1500 pupils which could be detrimental to Walney School.

Consultation process

Concern was expressed that the consultation questionnaire form without the background information had been given out to all Year 11 students, and that if submitted this might skew the outcome of the consultation were a large number directed to respond in a particular way. Similar experiences with primary school children were also referred to. It was stated clearly that it would not be appropriate for teachers to sway pupils in one particular way or another, and not to provide students with the full information. Were the Authority to receive a large number of responses from young pupil in any particular school these would need to be carefully considered, although their receipt would be reported to Cabinet. That said, the Authority were encouraged by DCSF to seek the views of young people, and meetings had been held in each of the five secondary schools with the students to obtain their views. A session had also taken place for primary aged children to enable their views to be presented.

Final speakers

The last speaker presented a view that this is a very big decision for the town of Barrow and not just on the education process. It impacted on traffic and the economic well being of the area. He was concerned that very few County Councillors had attended the meetings and was anxious that the message be clear that time should be taken to come to a decision and not be rushed. Parents were making decisions now as to which school their children should attend without knowledge of whether an Academy will be in place, what it will teach, and where they are going to be taught. He was anxious that the voice of the public should not be ignored on this occasion.

Summary

It was clear that most of those present were anxious about the potential impact of the Academy may have on Walney School. A number of speakers spoke about the possibility of delaying the opening of an Academy, or indeed, deciding not to have an Academy. The issue of whether or not the Academy should be organised on one site or two, was rarely touched upon.