

Improving Choice in Education

In accordance with Part 4 A15 of the Constitution, the 24 November 2016 Cabinet decision relating to the item 'Improving Choice in Education' has been called in for review by this Panel.

Reasons given for Call-in

Relevant information not considered.

Viable alternative not considered.

Justification for decision open to challenge on the basis of evidence considered.

Undue influence on O&S Panel by Cabinet Members.

The decision has been taken without due consideration of available information. Available information not presented within the paper.

All available options to improve choice not presented with detailed strengths & weaknesses as recommended by education professionals.

Strengths and weaknesses of singular policy presented nit detailed within the paper.

No discussion on consultation took place.

Options

Having considered the Call-in, Members may:-

if satisfied with the decision, resolve

a) to take no further action,

if still concerned about the decision, resolve

b) to refer the decision back to Cabinet for reconsideration, setting out the nature of the Panel's concerns; or

c) to refer the matter to Council for consideration.

A copy of the Cabinet decision is attached at Appendix 1 and a copy of the Cabinet report is attached at Appendix 2.

CABINET - 24 NOVEMBER 2016

IMPROVING CHOICE IN EDUCATION

Cabinet considered the borough's response to the government consultation 'Schools that work for everyone' that confirmed the council's commitment to excellent education for all pupils who lived in the borough, particularly for those living with financial disadvantage.

Cabinet was addressed by Rachel Cooke, who spoke on behalf of Excellent Education for Everyone, a group founded by borough parents to promote positive discussions about ways to deliver a fair and inclusive education for all in the borough. The Overview and Scrutiny Panel had already heard the group's evidence that selective education would lead to fewer children attaining their potential and the attainment gap between rich and poor growing wider. The council's motto was 'residents first', so the council should ask residents first if they wanted their existing schools to become selective. Should schools like Furze Platt shut their doors to 80% of nearby children? Grammar schools further shut their doors to disadvantaged students. Newlands was the top academically achieving comprehensive with comparable results to William Borlase Grammar. It was also an inclusive school with an ever-6 pupil population of 13.7% compared to 1.7% at William Borlase.

Ms Cooke highlighted that there was no mention in at the last election of encouraging existing schools to take up selective education. A selective school meant that all Maidenhead parents would lose the automatic choice of sending a child to the school. There had been no evaluation of the consequences to residents of any school becoming selective. The Prime Minister had stated that new grammar schools should be built in areas with no outstanding or good schools and be trialled in areas of high deprivation. It was against the law to create new selective schools; the council was urged to respect the rule of law and withdraw the report before wasting taxpayer resources. Instead, build a brand new comprehensive or college open to all children no matter their background or academic ability.

The Deputy Lead Member for School Improvement highlighted the issue in the light of the national debate. The government's green paper opened with wording about making the country work for everyone not just the privileged few. He hoped all could agree with that statement. The Deputy Lead Member referred to research by the Sutton Trust that showed independent schools were disproportionately represented in many professions. Selective education was not a magic bullet but he believed it had a part to play in redressing the balance. At Full Council in December 2014 the council had voted in favour of promoting selective education. The council had made a commitment in its manifesto to promote more choice, including selective education within the legal framework. There was no intention to move ahead with any proposal that would be outside the law. The report proposed responding to the government consultation and indicating support. The proposals were not going backwards; there was no intention to force every child to sit an examination. The intention was to offer more choice to parents. In the old grammar system there had been two different

curricula; this would not be the case going forward. Selection already occurred in the borough at sixth form level. 15% of parents chose to send their child across the border to a grammar school. There was therefore already evidence that there would not be a negative impact on borough schools. Borough schools could thrive alongside selective education.

The Deputy Lead Member stated he was happy to accept the amendment proposed by the Children's Takeover Day Special Overview & Scrutiny Panel, with a further amendment.

Councillor Jones commented that over the last two weeks she had been trying to understand exactly what the paper was trying to achieve. All speeches and conversation around the paper said that the focus of the paper was to be ready to quickly implement the outcome of central government's initiative (as indicated in the narrative of the Autumn Statement and in high level statements) regarding the expansion of grammar schools. As yet it was not clear what this would look like but the council was looking to explore the options. Councillor Mrs Jones stated that she was not against this, as she believed all options should be explored. She was slightly concerned that the focus seemed to only be regarding academic selection whereas she would like to see the council exploring other forms of selection, for example partial selection for aptitude in Performing Arts or in Technology.

Councillor Mrs Jones stated that her overriding concern was that recommendation i asked Cabinet to 'endorse the development of selective or partially selective education'. She had been told that the administration had been elected on a mandate for developing grammar schools. The administration was also elected on a mandate for protecting the Green Belt but as seen in the draft Borough Local Plan, keeping to a mandate was not always possible and sometimes not in the best interest of the borough.

Overview and Scrutiny had been asked this despite not knowing what would be coming forward from central government in legislation and without having the information to know whether or not the development of selective education, in whatever form, would have a negative effect on the borough. Councillor Mrs Jones felt that the paper did not give the depth of analysis or the detail on how selective education would impact on the current system to allow debate or scrutiny. The only risk identified within the paper was at point 6 and was not identified in detail. At 9.1 the report referenced the strategic objective 'to make sure every pupil can access excellent education' but did not explain how the paper contributed. Councillor Mrs Jones commented that surely the council was doing this anyway by working to ensure all schools were good or outstanding?

The Sutton Trust said 'pupils in Grammar schools do a little better than similar pupils in other schools, with the difference being between zero and 3/4 of a GCSE grade per subject.' It also stated that 'these same pupils were already making good progress from KS1 to KS2' and 'to be cautious in describing this as a grammar school effect'. The Educational Policy institute (Sept 16) was very cautious as to what the impact was of selective education nationally, if any, but highlighted the fact that in fully selective areas only 30.1% of pupils on free school meals achieved 5 A*- C (including English & Maths) compared to 33.3% in non-selective areas and that in

most selective areas there was a small negative effect of not accessing grammar schools. It went on to say that 'At national level, more grammar schools would likely lead to small gains in attainment for the minority of children attending such schools, including the number from low income backgrounds. But, additional grammar schools would be likely to lead to increases in the aggregate attainment gaps between rich and poor children. It would be very challenging to significantly improve grammar school access for poor children given that 60% of the attainment gap arises by the time grammar school entry takes place.'

As Leader of the Opposition Councillor Mrs Jones did not see her role as opposing the administration but to challenge and hold the administration to account. This was also the role of all Members in Overview and Scrutiny so she had been very concerned that Members that supported the recommendations in the paper did not challenge, comment or scrutinise the responses to the consultation whatsoever. She supported the amendment put forward by the special Overview and Scrutiny meeting that took place on 18 November 2016 and suggested a further amendment to recommendation i, to replace the words 'development of' with 'investigation into the options regarding'. This would acknowledge the fact that there was a consultation regarding the future of selective education and reflect the purpose of the paper as verbalised by the Lead Member and officers, and would give Members an opportunity to scrutinise the evidence on whether to develop selection once the council had all the facts and impacts in detail.

The Chairman responded that approximately 15% of pupils had received free school meals in the preceding 6 years, amounting to 3000 pupils. Analysis of those struggling suggested the figure was in the region of 30%. He agreed that the free school meal figure at William Borlase school was a disgrace. The borough proposal was for a multi-producer model. The council was already investing way beyond its obligations in schools to ensure every child could achieve its potential. He was not happy with the fact that less than 10 pupils from the borough went to Oxbridge each year. He highlighted the success of free schools in the borough. The proposals in the paper were just another part of the mix.

The Lead Member for Highways and Transport commented that parents and children had already made the choice to go over the border to a grammar school, which involved significant travelling time.

The Lead Member for Finance stated that, although he had not expected to do so, he supported the proposals. He had started his education in Northern Ireland. His wife and older sister had both attended grammar school, however he had attended a comprehensive. His secondary education had been a tough experience and he would probably have been more suited to a grammar school. He had been inspired by the aims to provide more opportunities for children to have a variety of choices. There was a clear commitment that whatever the model, there must be no losers.

The Deputy Lead Member proposed an amendment to recommendation to take into account the proposal from the Children's Takeover Day Special Overview and Scrutiny Panel with additional wording to refer to families struggling to get by.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That Cabinet:

- i. Endorse the development of selective or partially selective education within the education provision of the Royal Borough to further improve the choice of education available to pupils and the families. This council will support any proposal that considers full or partial selective education only where the proposal includes a detailed commitment to raise the academic achievement of young people eligible for the pupil premium and young people from families struggling to get by.**
- ii. Authorise the Managing Director & Strategic Director of Adult, Children and Health Services with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services to finalise and respond to the "Schools that work for everyone" consultation by the Department for Education as set out in appendix A.**
- iii. Authorise the Managing Director & Strategic Director of Adult, Children and Health Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services to write to all secondary schools in the borough inviting expressions of interest in allowing some or all admissions through a selective stream, and to follow up on the responses to secure a range of options for residents.**
- iv. Authorise the Managing Director & Strategic Director of Adult, Children and Health Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services to write to selective schools across the country inviting them to actively pursue the establishment of a new wholly selective school or a school with a selective stream in the borough.**