

## **EDUCATIONAL PROVISION IN GAMLINGAY**

### **NOTES OF: Gamlingay Parish Council-hosted meeting for the Community - 19 May 2011**

#### **Gamlingay Parish Council representatives:**

Chair of the Parish Council – Nick Telford-Reed

Clerk of the Parish Council – Leanne Bacon

Mr Telford-Reed indicated that the purpose of the meeting was to enable people who might not have had an opportunity to contribute at previous meetings to give their views and ask questions. The structure of the meeting would involve a brief presentation, then a question and answer session. The aim would be to finish the meeting by 8.30 pm.

#### **Cambridgeshire County Council Officer Representatives:**

Hazel Belchamber – Head of Infrastructure

Guy Dickens – Head of Standards and Effectiveness 11-19

Sue Eagle – Social and Education Transport Manager

Gayle Gorman – Service Director: Learning

Sian Phillips – Education Officer (note taker)

Richard Preston – Head of Road Safety and Parking Services

Hazel Belchamber gave a brief presentation which set out:

- the background to the consultation process;
- information about the options being proposed;
- the key issues in relation to community provision, transport and demography;
- the next steps in the decision-making process.

She emphasised that a community impact assessment would be undertaken to accompany the report to the 14 June meeting of the County Council's Cabinet, at which the decision on the way forward would be made. The consultation deadline for the receipt of written comments was 25 May 2011.

The meeting was then opened for questions and comments. These are summarised below, together with the answer provided, where appropriate.

#### **1. Question (Q)**

Gamlingay's natural links are with Biggleswade; it has none with Bassingbourn or Cambourne. The public transport routes to Biggleswade recognise this, as does Option 1. Options 2 and 3 go against the existing social network.

#### **Answer (A)**

The current links are recognised in Option 1. However, Gamlingay First School has close working links with the headteachers of the cluster group of primary schools whose students attend Bassingbourn Village College at secondary age.

2. **Q:**  
Providing secondary education anywhere other than at Stratton Upper School would mean that after-school extra-curricular activity would be virtually impossible, as there is no public transport route to anywhere except Biggleswade.

**A:**  
This concern is recognised. However, it is the Local Authority's policy to provide free transport to school only at the beginning and end of the school day. This is the position for all schools in Cambridgeshire.

3. **Q:**  
There is no sixth form at Bassingbourn; accessing sixth form provision in Cambridge would, therefore, be even more difficult.

**A:**  
Children attending Bassingbourn Village College would have access to two sixth form systems – the institutions in the Cambridge Area Partnership, Stratton Upper School and Bedford College. Subsidised transport is provided by Cambridgeshire County Council to the nearest appropriate post-16 centre.

4. **Q:**  
The local authority has chosen to emphasise only the bad judgements in the Ofsted report; no emphasis is placed on the fact that Ofsted found that behaviour was good, that children were happy and that the school had a very good choir.

**A:**  
The balance is strongly in favour of the inadequate judgements. These were summarised by the Director of Learning. This is why the school was placed in special measures by Ofsted. This is not an action taken lightly by Ofsted.

5. **Q:**  
Why did the Local Authority allow this to happen? Has the Authority been placed in special measures?

**A:**  
A detailed answer was provided by the Director of Learning about the action that had been taken by the Local Authority leading up to the issuing of an early warning notice to the school at the end of 2010. This had to be done because the Head and Chair of Governors were not acting on any of the advice and support provided, and not informing the rest of the governing body of the Local Authority's concerns. Such a notice has to be copied to the Secretary of State for Education and Ofsted, and triggers an Ofsted inspection. The Local Authority acted within the appropriate statutory processes.

6. **Q:**  
Why has no cost-benefit analysis been undertaken of the options, to include items such as the cost of hiring coaches, parents' transport to after-school activities, car insurance, and increased traffic in Bassingbourn?
- A:**  
The exact cost of providing contract coaches could not be provided at this stage, as it was not known how many children would be travelling, and where they lived. Formal tender arrangements for the agreed route would also be required under EU regulations.
7. **Q:**  
Another Cambridgeshire school – Millfield Primary – had recently become the subject of special measures. Why was closure not being proposed in that case?
- A:**  
Each case of special measures has different features, and is assessed on its own merits. It is not appropriate to discuss this issue in a public meeting.
8. **Q:**  
Why have neither of the St Neots secondary schools been put forward as possible options, as they both have sixth forms and are marginally nearer than Bassingbourn?
- A:**  
There is significant housing development planned for St Neots, and any spare capacity in those schools is earmarked to meet this need. Also, no parental preference has, so far, been expressed for admission to these schools. If there were a strong view in favour of this, it could be considered as part of Option 2.
9. **Q:**  
A Year 7 student at Gamlingay Village College asked whether Local Education officers were aware of recent achievements at the Village College in Maths, Science and Music?
- A:**  
A number of monitoring visits had been undertaken by the School Improvement Adviser. Monitoring data would be presented to the Ofsted Action Plan Implementation Group at a meeting taking place in the following week.
10. **Q:**  
If things were so bad at the Village College, why did it take so long for the Local Authority and its advisers to do anything about it? Why was it now possible to address these issues?

**A:**

The blockage at the leadership and management level had been removed. It was, therefore, possible for advisers' support and guidance to be acted on.

11. **Q:**

The college is already turning itself around and communication between the three schools has improved significantly. Why is the school not being given the time to improve further before closure is proposed? (A number of people asked this question.)

**A:**

There are two concurrent processes that are necessary: the Ofsted action plan and the consultation on structural options. It is imperative that action is taken to proceed with both simultaneously.

12. **Q:**

What is the specific context of this instance of special measures which makes the closure option necessary? Why is it different to others, for example Millfield School, referred to earlier.

**Answer**

The specific context is as follows:

- the very significant inadequacies identified by Ofsted;
- the fact that Gamlingay Village College is a small middle school, which bring particular challenges in terms of securing improvement, in particular headteacher recruitment;
- it is part of a three-tier education system, which involves more transition points – a time when it is more difficult for children to make progress – and a change of school in the middle of Key Stage 2;
- the fact that Gamlingay has the only first and middle schools in a County where all of the other schools are primary or secondary;
- the small size of the Village College and the future demography of Gamlingay.

13. **Q:**

Would transport still be provided when post-16 education became compulsory?

**A:**

It was clarified that full-time school-based post-16 education would not be compulsory; this could be undertaken in conjunction with employment. However, Cambridgeshire County Council's policy relating to post-16 transport for Cambridgeshire residents would not change.

14. **Q:**  
Why was the Local Authority proposing a transport route to Bassingbourn Village College, down Croydon Hill, which was so dangerous?
- A:**  
The County Council's Head of Road Safety provided a detailed answer on this issue, which emphasised that a local assessment had shown that this route was not a cause for concern for the Local Authority. More information about this would be provided to accompany the report to the County Council's Cabinet.
15. **Q:**  
If the route is not dangerous, why is a lower speed limit being proposed?
- A:**  
There is now a local appetite for such measures. These are, therefore, introduced where it is considered appropriate.
16. **Q:**  
Stratton Upper School has a very good sixth form, but the 250 places are prioritised for children who attend the school aged 13-16. It would be a long and dangerous route to Bassingbourn Village College and to the Cambridge sixth forms, so why were these being proposed?
- A:**  
The estimated duration of the route to Bassingbourn Village College from Gamlingay was 40 minutes. No journey would be over 1 hour 15 minutes for school-aged children. The relevant route and bus contract would always be reviewed to ensure that this took less than the Local Authority's maximum journey time of 1 hour 15 minutes. (The safety question had already been answered.)
17. **Q:**  
At the Ofsted-related parents' meeting on 23 March, the Local Authority had admitted that they should take some of the blame for not taking action earlier in relation to Gamlingay Village College's performance, and apologised for this. The emphasis now seemed to be different, with no recognition of this apology?
- A:**  
The Director of Learning emphasised that no Local Authority wanted one of their schools to become the subject of special measures, and felt this very strongly when it happened. The Local Authority had apologised and continued to do so, but it was very important to look forward, in order to secure improvements in children's education.

18. **Q:**  
It was asserted that Maths performance at Gamlingay Village College was now good.
- A:**  
The Village College's Maths results were, in fact, below the national floor standards.
19. **Q:**  
What was being done relating to the recruitment of a new headteacher?
- A:**  
This matter was under review at present, but it was emphasised that it was generally difficult to recruit headteachers nationally, even more so for small middle schools, especially those in special measures.
20. **Q:**  
After-school clubs and activities are an essential part of a rounded education; without them half a child's education is lost. It is not just a question of Maths and English. Why is there such an emphasis on these two subjects?
- A:**  
The Ofsted action plan does not only concentrate on Maths and English; a whole range of subjects are addressed.
21. A parent of a child at the First School indicated her concern that no speaker had spoken in favour of education – the focus appeared to be exclusively social. As a teacher in a local secondary school which had been trying for nine years to move from the Ofsted category of 'good' to 'outstanding', she urged people not to underestimate the task of moving between Ofsted categories – particularly coming out of special measures.
22. A parent of a child with significant needs expressed the opinion that Gamlingay Village College was a good school, which had saved her child.
23. A parent expressed his view that Gamlingay Village College should be given the time to improve; that Stratton Upper School was a better school than Bassingbourn Village College; and that Gamlingay looked to Bedfordshire and Biggleswade for all of its services, including health.
24. **Q:**  
Would the County Council gain financially from the disposal of either of the Gamlingay school sites?
- A:**  
If proposals for significant structural change were agreed, the County Council would consider whether the existing sites were surplus to

educational or other broader service requirements. If it was agreed that the sites should be disposed of, the receipts would be invested back in the community.

25. A representative of the Gamlingay Environmental Action Group expressed his view that:

- the village was overwhelmingly in favour of retaining the village college;
- no real evidence had been provided in the consultation document in support of the preferred option, and if one of his students had presented the consultation document as an assignment, it would have failed.

26. **Q:**

The same person also asked why County Council Members had judged it environmentally inappropriate to transport children from Cambourne to an expanded village college in Gamlingay, when they were now proposing to transport Gamlingay children a similar distance to Bassingbourn? Should an environmental assessment of this issue not be made?

**A:**

The Cambourne/Gamlingay transport issue was a question of scale. 750 children overall would require transportation to Gamlingay from Cambourne. The number of Cambridgeshire children who would require transport to Bassingbourn would be approximately 200.

27. A parent expressed the opinion that the consultation document contained no SMART objectives.

28. **Q:**

It was indicated that Stratton Upper School were currently consulting on a change to transport arrangements relating to their school. How would this affect these proposals?

**A:**

It was emphasised that all the answers that had been provided on transport related to Cambridgeshire County Council transport policy. This had been reviewed recently and confirmed. It was a Local Authority's responsibility to provide transport for school-aged children, who lived within its Local Authority boundary, in line with statutory requirements and its agreed policies. It was confirmed that this requirement to provide home-to-school transport applied to all state schools, whatever their status – community, foundation or academy.

29. **Q:**

Why was the Local Authority giving the message to children at the Village College that they must give in?

**A:**

This is not the case - there is a real focus on improvement in all of the Authority's actions.

30.

**Q:**

What will happen to Charlie's tree if the Village College closes?

**A:**

Appropriate measures would be taken to retain the tree if there were changes in the use of the site.