

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

17 December 2008

STATEMENT OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES PORTFOLIO HOLDER (Early Years education and all school related education issues and advisory services)

COUNTY COUNCILLOR JOHN WATSON OBE

New School for the Benthams

We have been looking at a site for a new school for the Benthams for three years. After looking at around 15 sites, a detailed report has been prepared which analyses four sites. Further local consultations have been undertaken this term with the Governing Body and the Town Council. There have also been discussions with a local landowner about the sale of land. The current plan is to present the report to the Executive on 20 January 2009.

Northallerton College/Risedale Sports & Community College – Proposed Federation

Consultation is currently undertaken on a proposal for a Federation between Northallerton College and Risedale Sports & Community College with effect from the beginning of the Summer Term 2009.

The proposal is the next step in the working arrangements which currently exist between the two Colleges to provide support to Risedale College following the OFSTED inspection of May 2008 which put the College into Special Measures and also it being declared as a National Challenge School. National Challenge is the government initiative which involves 638 schools which do not currently achieve 30% of pupils gaining 5 A* to C (including English and Maths) at GCSE level.

If the Federation goes ahead, it is likely that up to £250,000 a year for three years will be released by central government to support improvements.

Consultation started around 8 December and will be completed on 23 January. Parents' meetings have been arranged at both schools. Northallerton College Governing Body and the Risedale Interim Executive Board are expected to take the final decision in February 2009.

Harrogate Adjudication (BJ)

On 29 September 2008 the Schools Adjudicator made a Determination regarding admission arrangements in Harrogate Town and Rural, following an objection by a group of 58 parents. The Determination permitted the arrangements for 2009 to remain in place and required the County Council to consult on revised arrangements for 2010 but effectively ruled out the present arrangements as an option.

Counsel's advice was taken on the Adjudicator's Determination. At the same time considerable work was undertaken on the implications of alternative options such as catchment areas, pro rata systems and banding. All operate by giving priority to some children over others. We have also looked at the possibility of a lottery/ballot which is a random allocation system.

Following receipt of Counsel's advice, on 24 October the Corporate Director - Children and Young People's Service advised by the Executive Member asked the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Democratic Services) to consider a challenge to the Adjudicator's decision by way of Judicial Review. On 30 October, following consideration by the Assistant

Chief Executive (Legal and Democratic Services), a pre-action letter was issued to the Treasury Solicitor (TSol) who acts on behalf of the Schools Adjudicator.

On 12 November, TSol wrote to say that they conceded that the Adjudicator had arguably acted outside her powers but did not accept that the decision was irrational. In a further letter TSol on behalf of the Adjudicator agreed to pay the County Council's reasonable legal costs in pursuance of a consent order.

On 17 November, the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Democratic Services), took the Key Decision in relation to the Judicial Review and on 24 November this decision was called in by a group of Members.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee will consider the call in at a meeting in Harrogate on Tuesday 9 December.

Richmond School – Building Schools for the Future

The contract for construction works was signed with Shepherd Construction and sealed on 11 November 2008. Phase 1 of the construction is on site with the new six-court Sports Hall and Sixth Form Centre on programme for completion and handover in Spring 2009. Following a significant affordability gap the design of the new build element has been revised and a planning application has been submitted which will be considered in January 2009. The project is now within budget, subject to the agreement of an acceptable price for Phase 2 due in January 2009.

The scheme is programmed to complete late in 2011 with a phased handover of new accommodation as each building is completed. A preferred supplier has recently been selected from the BECTA framework to deliver the £2.5M ICT infrastructure and equipment. The procurement of £1.5M of new furniture and equipment is also under way.

Manfield CE VA Primary School

Pupil numbers at Manfield School have fallen to 9 with no realistic prospect of a significant improvement over time. The governing body of the school have recognised that the provision of a high quality educational experience for this small group of children is not sustainable in the long term. Having exhausted other measures to support the school they have asked the Local Authority to consult on proposals to close the school with effect from 31 August 2009.

The consultation period will run until 12 January and the Executive will then be asked for approval to publish a statutory notice for closure. Following a six week period when further representations may be made, the Executive will take a decision on the closure proposal on March 2009.

Officers will work with the parents of current pupils to allocate alternative school places. It is proposed that Eppleby Forcett Primary School will become the school which will serve the area currently served by Manfield School.

Catering Service Annual Report

The Catering Service Annual Report demonstrated the challenging year experienced as a result of the dramatic increase in costs following job evaluation in April 2007. The Council helpfully agreed to cover the financial shortfall (£907K) in that year whilst the service developed a strategy to reduce the shortfall. However, in the meantime, additional cost pressures have arisen from the need to promote healthy eating, the dramatic increase in the cost of food and the loss of the Yorkshire Purchasing Organisation (YPO) dividend. Despite

the above inflation increases in school meal prices the service has managed to increase the take-up from 41.9% in 2006/07 to 42.3% for primary school catering in 2007/08.

The requirement to provide healthy meals has been given further emphasis by not only the introduction of Minimum Nutritional Standards but also the setting of a national target to increase take-up to 52.5% in 2008/09. The service currently provides school meals to virtually all primary schools but the contract, under which these meals are provided, ends in March 2009. In order to ensure schools have a greater “stake” in the meals service discussions are currently taking place with schools to develop a Service Level Agreement where the school receives some financial benefit if take-up has increased to above present levels (and extra costs if take-up falls). This approach was taking forward one of the main recommendations from the work of the Scrutiny Committee earlier in the year.

It is anticipated that the proposed sharing of financial responsibility between schools and the Council as from April 2009 will reduce the current shortfall. This, however, will depend crucially on the future level of take-up achieved.

Current indications are that, bearing in mind the large number of small primary schools and the particular challenges for schools in the highest areas of greater deprivation, an ongoing support of the order of £500K will be required in future years.

County Councillor John Watson OBE
Executive Member for Education