

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2006 at County Hall, Northallerton.

PRESENT:-

County Councillor Heather Garnett in the Chair.

County Councillors Michelle Andrew, John Blackburn, Eric Broadbent (as substitute for Jim Snowball) Tony Hall, David Heather, Christopher Pearson, Caroline Seymour, Herbert Tindall (as substitute for Andrew Backhouse) and Melva Steckles.

Members other than County Councillors:- Mrs Helen Suckling (Parent Governor).

In attendance – County Councillors Bill Barton, Robert Heseltine and John Wren.

Executive Members County Councillors:- Caroline Patmore and John Watson.

Officers:- Stephanie Bratcher (Scrutiny Support Officer), Catriona Gattrell (Legal Services) Jane Wilkinson. (Committee Services), Carolyn Bird (Children and Young People's Service) and Cynthia Wellbourn (Children and Young People's Service).

Seven members of the public.

COPIES OF ALL DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED ARE IN THE MINUTE BOOK

68. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2006, having been printed and circulated be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

69. PUBLIC QUESTIONS OR STATEMENTS

No formal notification had been received in advance of the meeting.

RESOLVED –

That any member of the public present at the meeting wanting to make a statement or ask a question in respect of the location of the children's centre at Skipton would be able to do so during consideration of that item.

70. CALL IN OF THE DECISION RELATING TO THE LOCATION OF A CHILDREN'S CENTRE IN SKIPTON

County Councillor Robert Heseltine declared a personal interest in the following item as the Chairman of Governors at Greatwood Primary School. County Councillor Heather Garnett declared a personal interest in the following item as two of her grandchildren attend school in Skipton. County Councillor David Heather declared a personal interest in the following item as a Member

of the Planning Committee at Craven District Council. County Councillors John Blackburn, Heather Garnet, Herbert Tindall and John Wren declared a personal interest in the following item as a Member of the County Council's Planning and Regulatory Functions Committee.

CONSIDERED –

The report of the Head of Committee Services seeking the agreement of the Committee on whether to refer the decision taken by the Executive Member relating to the location of the Children's Centre at Skipton, back to the Executive Member or to full Council for reconsideration and, if so, stating the reason or reasons for the referral.

The Chairman drew the Committee's attention to the tabled proposed order of meeting, as recommended in the County Council's Scrutiny Protocols and to five additional pieces of correspondence received by Committee Services for circulation at the meeting. Copies of the correspondence were also tabled at the meeting. The Chairman stated that some of the points made in the tabled correspondence and one of the reasons on the call-in notice concerned the suitability of Brougham Street as the site for the Children's Centre in Skipton. Consideration of site suitability issues would be discussed as part of the planning process which was entirely separate and different from the role of the scrutiny committee that day. As several Members of the Committee were also Members of the County Council's Planning and Regulatory Functions Committee who could later find themselves in a position of making a decision on a related planning application, she warned Members to be vigilant and exercise caution around any discussion of site suitability issues. At the invitation of the Chairman, Catriona Gattrell advised the Committee with special emphasis to those Members who were also Members of the Planning and Regulatory Functions Committee, that they should avoid making any suggestion during the meeting that they had "pre-determined" or formed a fixed view on planning matters as, should that happen, they may then be precluded later from participating in a planning decision.

The Chairman then invited the Executive Member and Corporate Director to outline the reasons that had led to the decision to site the Children's Centre at Brougham Street, Skipton.

County Councillor John Watson reminded the Committee that the decision to locate a Children's Centre in Skipton and the associated capital investment this would bring to the local community was very good news regardless of site location. He confirmed that when considering the location of the Children's Centre, great care was taken to ensure that the residents of all deprived areas in Skipton would have access to the Children's Centre. He did not dispute that the Greatwood Estate and Broughton Road communities were the most disadvantaged in Skipton but stressed that pockets of deprivation were spread throughout all of Skipton. Siting the new facility away from the town centre would result in access problems for many families and might result in it not being used to its full potential and the County Council would then have failed its social responsibilities.

Carolyn Bird described the various support services provided by a Children's Centre and the rationale for making Brougham Street the hub for the whole town. Provided demand could be demonstrated outreach services in satellite bases at other sites would be established. She stated that the consultation undertaken by the County Council whilst time consuming had been extensive but was constrained by the timing of grants over which the County Council had no control. The decision to consult on two options based at Brougham Street was because the location of the site had the potential to create the biggest improvement for all Skipton children. She described the shortcomings of the present Brougham Street buildings and confirmed that the proposals complied with Government guidance and met the needs of parents for

after school and holiday child care provision. At present there was very limited baby and toddler provision available and it was these services that would make the Centre financially viable. The proposals were for 9 baby places and 16 places for 2/3 year olds. These numbers would not threaten any existing alternative provision that was currently available. She confirmed that the overwhelming response of parents was in favour of the chosen option.

On behalf of the signatories to the call-in, County Councillor Robert Heseltine referred to the reasons for the call-in set out in the report and, in addition, made the following comments. He stressed that the determination of a site for a Children's Centre in Skipton was a local issue and that he did not seek a referral of the decision to full Council. The early start time of the call-in meeting did little to encourage public attendance and he confirmed that he would have preferred the meeting to have been held in Skipton. He urged Members of the Committee to consider the future implications for Skipton residents when deciding upon a site for the Children's Centre. He believed that other sites in Skipton were more suitable than Brougham Street. The two options consulted on were both variations of Brougham Street and he believed that if the public had been given the choice of a third option, such as Greatwood, then 80% of them would have voted in favour of this. If the development of a Children's Centre had taken place at Greatwood, then the amount of capital expenditure would be a lot less than £3.5m. The Brougham Street location had very limited access for residents of Greatwood and The Ings. Many of the Heads of local schools believed that other sites in Skipton were more suitable than Brougham Street. He urged Members to think carefully about the location of the site and the affect on future generations. The Brougham Street site had very limited playground facilities and children would be unable to run around freely. The Local Development Framework of Craven District Council contained proposals for an extensive development of residential housing at the Greatwood Estate. Greatwood School had spare capacity, had more space available and would cost less to develop. Neither Ings or Greatwood were on the periphery of town – both estates were well-served by public transport which was not true of Brougham Street. He requested that the Committee give consideration to referring the decision back to the Executive member with a recommendation that the public be consulted on a third option for the location of the Children's Centre at Skipton.

County Councillor John Wren referred to the recently published Government White Paper that contained proposals to strengthen decisions being made locally and drew Members' attention to the opposing views expressed by local people within the report. He believed local people were best placed to make decisions of this type as they had extensive knowledge of their local community.

County Councillor David Heather was concerned that the site at Brougham Street was not well-served by public transport and that this would impinge on the take-up of children's services.

Carolyn Bird stated that the capital investment of £3.5m at Skipton was very significant and that it was crucial that the Children's Centre was fully used, as otherwise it would not be successful. The buildings at the existing Brougham Street school were in urgent need of repair and modernisation. Unless the Children's Centre went ahead, monies for the improvement works would not be found elsewhere.

The Chairman then invited members of the public to comment/ask questions. Craven District Councillor Andrew Solloway stated that he was the parent of two children who currently attended the Parish Church School. He was extremely concerned at the lack of local accountability in the decision-making process relating to the siting of a Children's Centre in Skipton. The call-in meeting was being held 45 miles away from Skipton at a time which made it very difficult for people to attend.

He considered that the Local Area Committee should have had more involvement with the decision and that the consultation process was flawed. The public had only 1½ weeks in which to respond to the two options, both of which were located on the same site. Whilst he fully supported the establishment of a Children's Centre in Skipton, he did not follow why it had to be centralised. The services offered by the new Children's Centre should be community-based. People living on the periphery of Skipton would have great difficulty in accessing Brougham Street as it was not well-served by public transport and had very little car parking available. Lots of children in Skipton were educated in very old buildings and the capital investment of £3.5m would be better spread across several sites. The building works at Brougham Street would disrupt the education of those children who attended the nursery there and ultimately the centre would have reduced playground facilities. He urged Members to give consideration to there being a more equitable distribution of services, detailed, wide-ranging consultation for the planning of those services and for decisions to be taken locally.

The Chairman acknowledged Mr Solloway's comments regarding the time and location of the call-in meeting. She stated that due consideration had been given to holding the meeting in Skipton. The time constraints of a call-in, however, together with officer and Member availability, had made this impossible.

Mr Collins, the Head of Greatwood Community School, stated that he had worked in the Skipton area for 20 years. The Greatwood Estate currently had no community services and the people who lived there often felt overlooked. The guidance issued by Social Services was littered with references to locating children's centres close to the most disadvantaged and those in greatest need. In his opinion, this was at Greatwood or Ings and not Brougham Street.

The Chairman then invited Members of the Committee to comment/ask questions. County Councillor John Blackburn referred to the location of the Children's Centre at Barrowcliff in Scarborough which was not central and asked if this had been successful. Carolyn Bird advised that the Children's Centre in Scarborough was not centrally located as at the time it was built there was no suitable site available in the centre of town. She confirmed that the poor take-up of childcare facilities offered at the centre meant that the centre was not financially viable. The County Council was currently in discussion with Government Office about this situation. At Scarborough there was a bus stop just outside the door of the Children's Centre but this had not increased take up. Parents used the support activities the centre provided but not the childcare provision.

County Councillor David Heather was concerned that the main driver for the Children's Centre being at Brougham Street was the improvement works to the buildings at the site. When these works were completed, the public would still have great difficulty in accessing the Centre as it offered very limited parking facilities.

The Chairman referred Members to pages 33 and 34 of the report which contained a breakdown of the numbers of children on the roll at Brougham Street Nursery School based on catchment areas.

County Councillor Tony Hall stated that key was the provision of fully-integrated services. He believed the model of a hub centre, with satellite spokes at other sites, was the preferred model.

County Councillor Eric Broadbent stated that Skipton should look to improve its public transport system. Investment in a children's centre on the outskirts of town was, in his opinion, a mistake as it would not be accessible by all residents.

County Councillor Caroline Seymour stated that the views of local people were important and that she would have liked to have seen the public presented with a third option. Improvements to school buildings were the driving force behind the proposals. She believed that the journey time to the Children's Centre was key and not its location. It was often easier to access locations on the periphery of towns as town centres were often congested. The majority of people were car users and there was very limited parking at Brougham Street. She referred to an e-mail sent by County Councillor Polly English that requested Executive Members to visit Skipton at peak times and view for themselves the traffic congestion.

Carolyn Bird confirmed that stakeholder groups had been consulted and were comfortable with the model of a hub in the centre of Skipton and satellite bases on other sites.

Sally Newlands, the Head of Brougham Street School, referred to the results of a recently completed Travel Plan for the school that had revealed that 75% of parents with children at the school walked to school. She believed that the centre of Skipton was the right location for a children's centre.

The Chairman stated that in preparation for the meeting, she had visited Parish Church School Skipton the previous Friday at 3.15pm. The traffic at that time was busy, but the area was coping with the volume. She had also visited Greatwood, Ings, and Otley Street schools. The town of Skipton was culturally diverse and it was important that all members of the community had a central point of access to services. If the Children's Centre was located at Greatwood, this would not be the case. Brougham Street would act as a central location and as a hub to outreach services.

The Chairman then invited the Corporate Director and Executive member, followed by the signatories, to sum up their respective arguments. The Chairman thanked everyone for their contributions to what had been an open, frank and comprehensive discussion that had provided everyone with an opportunity to express their personal views.

RESOLVED –

That the Committee does not wish to refer back the decision related to the location of a Children's Centre in Skipton to the decision maker or refer the matter to full Council.