



PARENT COUNCIL MEETING WITH GCC EDUCATION

Date: Wednesday 14th January 2015

Place: Hillhead Primary School

Parent Council Attendees: Ruth Downes (Chair), Susie Haigh (Secretary), Senga Minto, Astrid Azurdia, Emma Benzie, Kirsty Mathieson, Amanda Buchanan, M. Mitchell, Rachel Lowther, Anne Hanson, Colin Tsang, Agnieska Lampart

Other Attendees: Maureen McKenna (Executive Director of Education GCC), Stephen Curran (Executive Member for Education and Young People, GCC)

AGENDA

1. Welcome
2. Consultation response and next steps

MINUTES

Ruth thanked Maureen McKenna (MM) and Stephen Curran (SC) for attending the meeting.

Ruth outlined the reasons the parent council had asked for the meeting and the questions they would like answered:

- Asked for meeting because of serious concerns about response. Majority of PC plus many parents contacting PC site concerned about outcome, at time of meeting the PC had received 8 emails broadly supporting the response and 44 emails against. Also had letter representing issues of children with additional needs as well as an open letter with 70 signatures which had been sent to SNP and Green Councillors expressing concerns. Acknowledge too that there are parents, including in PC, who are supportive of response proposal.
- Range of concerns including problems with the consultation process and subsequent analysis of data as well as questions about how GCC will hold proposed cap which crucial for return of space. However main concern is that response suggested will not address problems at school, certainly not in the short term and in all likelihood not in the medium to longer term.

- Many consider that GCC's original proposal to use KPEYC space remains a solution which will provide immediate answer to overcrowding for the children now (who have faced lack of space for three years already) and also in the longer term. Even with cap of 90, use of this space gives immediate access to media suite (only meant to be used for a year) and small GP room together with infrastructure which alleviates pressure in other areas as well as break out space. Frees up outside classroom and gives extra playground. Use of this space, together with properly monitored and controlled P1 intakes, gives the school a longer term infrastructure provision which should provide flexibility and be closer to the Scottish Government recommendations for GP space in a school of this size.
- Council themselves clearly thought this was the best solution when proposal first suggested and David McEwan said at public meeting that this was only outcome which genuinely extended infrastructure of school and with minimal disruption.
- PC continuing to ask for swift and immediate solution to problem which currently affecting children and staff. Asking MM/SC:
 - For how the proposal response was arrived at given that underground car park not part of the consultation
 - For details of proposal as currently very sketchy and how they envisage this will solve problems?
 - Why releasing KPEYC space was taken off the table?

DISCUSSION (Questions and comments from PC members in italics/blue text)

Please be aware these are notes taken from our meeting, not official minutes. The responses given by Stephen Curran and Maureen Mckenna and the questions posed by the PC are not necessarily verbatim, but summarised or paraphrased from longer discussions.

Question: How do GCC plan to maintain the cap of 75 when already known that new catchment area will include more children than that? How can this be maintained over coming years as this necessary in order to regain space and for school to operate as originally intended three stream school?

SC: Offered thanks to PC for input during consultation period and hard work. To address the catchment question first – this was the main focus of the consultation, as statutory requirement to consult on catchment change. Added KPEYC option as though didn't need a statutory consultation it affects same families / community. Main focus was always the catchment.

Recognise that the consultation included different strands and important all nuances should be recognised. Wasn't a simple yes or no response, and therefore solution not based on number of votes but about looking at whole picture and the effect on education of all children involved. Not a referendum or plebiscite. Our aim is to address best interest of all children, not just those in the primary school. Flexible

space for the school is not the complete answer or the only answer but part of the answer.

As for the cap, yes they can be open to legal challenges and can be difficult. This is what has made it difficult to protect GP spaces. Parents will have the right to challenge and their arguments are strong enough they will be able to enter the school. But we are committed to upholding the cap and up to GCC to present the best counter-arguments. Feel confident about this.

Question: Way catchment changes have turned out is also causing concern – why have the park-side streets all be returned to the catchment in Park Circus, but other streets that border the park have not?

SC : Catchments difficult, and line has to be drawn somewhere. Aware any solution is not ideal.

Question: Why set yourselves up for the difficult and on-going fight to maintain a cap of 75 – wouldn't increasing the floor space of the school be easier? Why not add to the infrastructure of the school so can operate a more flexible intake model?

MM: GCC was in court recently to uphold decision to deny a placing request to the school and it was upheld by the sheriff. So precedents have been set. There is a more robust framework around it now, we hope to be able to stick to the 75 cap and provide a robust defence and consultation process should also back this up.

Question: But already as of this morning 116 registrations for 2015 for Hillhead Primary!

MM: Those registrations are from the existing catchment and if proposal goes ahead that will reduce. Belief that numbers within the new catchment are below 75 and siblings of children already in the school (and therefore treated as catchment) are taking it over.

Question: How can we work on a model that keeps us just over capacity?

MM: Numbers in the new catchment are less than 75, so signs are good.

(Comment: PC understanding of situation is that numbers are higher than 75)

Of course there are siblings that will come from the old catchment, and that will take numbers up. But not all children registered will actually be intending to come to Hillhead.

SC: We have to balance the needs of all the children – high school children, primary children and EYC.

Relocation didn't have wide support from the high school pupils, they didn't express a view on that.

(Comment: High school children not likely to comment on EYC and weren't asked about it on the alternative response form)

We considered relocation actively but have commitment to early years and new legislation for early years means changing dynamic. Also the location suggested at Anderston has two existing providers close by.

*Question: What is timescale on feasibility and completion of car park GP space?
Details of how it would work*

MM: Dance studio will be 120 sq/m and all health / safety requirements will of course be addressed and consider it likely to be completed by August 2015.

Question: What about other options – like covering the piazza?

MM: David Mckeown investigated all options and he believes this one best. But could still be an option, not ruling anything out.

Question: Will there be scope for input into the design from the PC?

SC: Yes. We would encourage that. And other proposals could happen, could actively consider other options, we aware the situation is not 100% resolved. What we are looking at now and what we are putting to the Executive Committee is a start.

MM: Piazza idea interesting one, always happy to consider options and keep ideas on table. We have consulted with Head Teacher on dance studio intend to keep all in loop as progresses.

Question: What about the time scale? We are concerned that with lead in time, planning permissions etc the work may not be completed until well past August 2015. What about the exits? Will children have to go outside to access the building and if no toilet, will they have to return to the main building to use one?

Also, Exec Comtte being asked to green light something that they essentially have very little detail on, that might not even work and something that nobody from the community has had a chance to scrutinise or offer an opinion on. So after months of consultation, they are being presented with a solution that nobody has even discussed.

I would also like to say before we continue I absolutely refute that you have consulted with the Head Teacher about this plan, he was made aware of the dance studio option only once the report was published at the end of December. Over this whole process I have been appalled by the degree with which you do not consult with the head teacher. Indeed when a GCC official came to do a site visit on the car park and make an initial assessment, they did not have the decency to go and speak to the Head Teacher.

MM: I don't have the answers to those questions (on time scale and details of the dance studio). David McEwan is the person to ask and I will ask him to forward the details to you.

SC: The planning issues are debatable. Executive Committee often asked to make decision based on proposals, rather than having full report or feasibility study done, this is common practice.

The planning issues are not a barrier to progress.

Question: But a barrier to timely progress?

MM: Yes, true.

Question: Will PC be consulted before put out to planning?

MM: Yes, happy to keep PC updated and involved in process.

Question: what about mobility issues?

MM: Of course will comply with Disability Discrimination act and all health and safety legislation.

Question: Could the dance studio be appropriated for use as a classroom, like the media suite?

MM: No, too big.

Response: That didn't stop you using the media suite as a classroom!!

MM: It is a flexible space, and could be used for other subjects and activities like art or drama.

Question: Will it have sinks? Because you need those for art.

MM: Well, no, but I don't think you need to have sinks for it to be used for art.

Question: How does GCC intend to tackle the use of media suite for at least one more year as double classroom? We are in a crisis situation. This was supposed to be a temporary measure and it looks set to continue.

MM: Alternative IT provision has been provided. The situation is not ideal and is challenging. But don't believe having adverse impact on children. But not ideal and of course takes a resource away, but this is just the start of the process where it will be managed. Recognise don't hold all the answers, but this is starting point.

Response: It is affecting the children in the school and especially some of the most vulnerable. We have examples. (Statement from Fionnuala Featherstone given to MM)

It is unacceptable, and for many children in the school it will be the situation for their entire primary education.

Question: We were told by Jim Wilson and David McEwan when we started this process over a year ago that a 2 pronged approach would be needed – more space and a catchment change.

SC: The catchment was always the primary point of the consultation.

Question: If the cap is blown what happens?

We capping across the city, and making it higher visibility. It is a big problem not just in this school. We are committed to addressing it and defending caps robustly.

Question: have you taken legal advice?

Yes. We are trying to defend policy from our own perspective and also taking advice from other authorities.

Question: If you fail to defend a legal challenge and you go just one child over 75, what are the contingency plans for our school?

MM: We'll cross that bridge when we come to it. Extra accommodation would have to be sought.

Question: Given the cap caused problems and is open to challenge, catchment changes are similarly difficult and contentious and the P7 decant was overwhelming rejected and building a new EYC would involve cost and time – why not opt for the original plan of using the EYC space for the school, and increasing places in local nurseries and private partnership funding. The school gets the space it needs, and local nursery provision is increased. Surely that offers a benefit for all children?

SC: We have commitment to increasing places for 2 yr olds and 3-5 increasing hours. Didn't stack up as being the best answer.

Question: You will understand how intensely frustrating this process has been. A few people around this table have been involved with talks with the Council about the space issues for nearly 18 months with option after option shut down. In that time, Willowbank was available (although we were told it was sold) and would have been an ideal location not just for the EYC but also to help solve the massive after school problem which also faces this area. It was sold only in September last year. Kelvinhaugh has now also been sold and very ironically already has a private nursery operating on its site. All of this undermines our belief in your commitment to provide a solution for all the children – 2 year olds as well! There is a huge waiting list for KPEYC, so you are not only letting down the children in the school but all of those who aren't lucky enough to secure a place at the EYC.

I think it is important you understand that the sheer scale of the school affects the situation and massively limits the use of the small amount of non-classroom space we do have. The capacity of the school is 651, 666, 669 depending on which figure you hear – current roll is 682 so over 100 percent capacity. Roll never likely to drop much below 650 – this scale has to be taken into account in assessing what infrastructure is adequate.

SC : Willowbank sold as part of pre-12 strategy, and receipts factored in to merging of schools and new buildings. Part of finance for new schools.

Willowbank was on the market when told it was sold, it was a changeable situation. It was under offer a couple of times and fell through. Private nursery at Kelvinhaugh nursery will operate with significantly lower costs than a council nursery – staff and training costs are lower. KPEYC is performing well and performing well in a particular location.

MM: Many issues at Napiershall st and didn't have the timescale to develop that option.

Response: This is an exceptional school, but one that could be better – constrained by building and lack of space.

Question: Will you continue to investigate a new site for an EYC in the west end?

SC: We can continue to do that, we can look at options. But dependent on resources and demand. It is a tight balance and not easy situation, but we think we have the best solution for the moment.

Response: Yes school great, and we all at pains to point out how great staff are. But I think my children's education is being degraded and they are missing out on significant areas of the curriculum, especially in creative and expressive arts.

MM: I absolutely don't accept that.

Response: I support the new proposals.

Response: I support them too, you have read the responses and therefore have the knowledge of what to do for the best, taking into account everyone's views. I trust your conclusions.

MM: Thank-you.

Conclusion

Ruth drew meeting to conclusion and asked SC and MM what would happen next.

SC: On Friday the agenda will be published on-line for anyone interested to read. The Executive Committee will meet on Thursday 22nd January. I will highlight some of the concerns raised here to members. PC members welcome to attend.

MM: Briefings from education department are offered to all members of the Executive Committee should they require it.

Question: Will the labour councillors vote as a block and automatically vote to approve?

MM/ SC: No, they read the report and make own decision, they don't vote politically.

Response: James Adams, who is Labour whip, told us he had whipped votes.

MM / SC: No, James Adams has a vote, but doesn't whip votes.

Ruth drew meeting to a close. Confirmed with Maureen McKenna that, if the report is approved, the PC would like to remain involved in discussing the cap, on-going space issues and any future contingency plans. Also got assurance that PC and Head Teacher would be involved in plans for the car park space and that would have a chance to input before anything was submitted for planning permission.

Thanked all for coming.

Appendix 1

Extract from Scottish Government Website

Early Learning and Childcare

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/early-years/parenting-early-learning/childcare>

From August 2014, the following children will be eligible for 600 hours/ year (around 16 hours/ week) early learning and childcare:

- 3 and 4 year olds, starting from the first term after their third birthday
- 2 year olds from the point that they are looked after, under a kinship care order, or with a parent appointed guardian.

2 year olds, starting from the first term after their second birthday, (where their 2nd birthday falls on or after 1 March 2014) with a parent in receipt of qualifying benefits; or, the first term after their parent starts receiving qualifying benefits.

Those benefits are: