



Lowbrook Academy Extraordinary Meeting Minutes

Tuesday 19th June 2017 at 4.00pm at Lowbrook Academy

Present: Dave Rooney (DR), Dominique Du Pre (DdP), Bianca Iasi (BI), Pauline Reid (PR)

Visitor: Kevin McDaniel (KM), RBWM and Anne Pfeiffer (AP), RBWM

Clerk: Kate Bailey (KB)

Item		Action
1.	Apologies for Absence	
	Paul Harrison, James Spiteri, Guy Van Der Knaap, Christine Phelps and Mary Gallop (work commitments)	
2.	Notification of Any Other Business (AOB)	
	There was no other business to discuss.	
3.	Lowbrook Expansion Project 2017-18	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DR opened the meeting by thanking KM and AP for agreeing to meet with the governing body as the whole expansion process was now in a ‘mess’. DR then asked KM and AP what there was left to do to try to achieve a positive outcome. • KM replied that the political steer for the past 4 to 5 weeks had been how the LA could deliver the unequivocal guarantee that the school required. • KM indicated that the LA had last week worked up a budget that had come in at £3.35 million and that was the figure that was included in the paper that AP had brought to the school on the 15th June. It was considered that this would struggle to gain sufficient support at Council. • DR commented that in the past, budgets for school projects (e.g. Dedworth Middle) had been set and then reviewed if necessary when tenders had come in - with no need to agree the full project or significantly engineer - and couldn’t understand why this was not the case with this project. • KM went on to say that the new paper, sent to the school earlier that day and distributed at the meeting, was designed to encourage a more positive vote at the Full Council meeting on the 27th June as it now included a lower total figure for the project which had been based on more recent tenders. • DdP commented that she had just seen the presentation that was given at the Conservative Group meeting on the 19th June and was disappointed to see that it contained many inaccuracies and still focused on the hall size issue which was irrelevant. • KM confirmed that he had put this section and other sections in in response to questions from a number of Councillors. 	

- DR replied that it was not fairly presented as the school had been clear from the start that without a meeting space for the whole school being included in the scheme it would never have progressed at all. DR went on to say that he felt that the school had been misrepresented throughout the process and that the governing body had worked extremely hard over the past 13 years to build an outstanding school and had not been repaid for those efforts, nor had they received any thanks from the LA for achieving outstanding results in 2015/16 and for funding its own expansion thus far.
- DR then commented that KM and AP knew that it was unlikely the governing body would agree to the conditions in the new paper, including the one that stated that the hall could be used by the general public out of school hours.
- DR confirmed that there was already a school policy in place for this and that the school would operate in accordance with this policy. However, the governing body would not agree to unnecessary LA over-ruling of Academy business and would under no circumstances enter into any agreements where the LA would be in a position to direct usage of the Academy Trust's facilities. KM confirmed that there was no intention for the council to direct usage, simply to be assured that the local community could access the facility when the school did not use it.
- DR stated that the biggest concern was that should the tenders come in above the estimates provided in the paper, then the project itself would again be in jeopardy as it would need to go back to Council for approval. This would not be acceptable.
- KM stated that it was Councillors, named on the report, who had requested the conditions and that this was their position at the current time but that minds were being changed all the time.
- DdP stated that the Lowbrook expansion should not be the victim of political spin, it should be a policy decision.
- DR reiterated how KM had worked on the scheme with Lowbrook Academy from the outset and had always made the commitment to seek extra funding.
- KM confirmed this and stated that he didn't know what had happened in March but that something in the political instructions had changed.
- DR re-iterated that this decision should never have been a free vote it should have been a policy decision. Free vote was open to manipulation, e.g. Windsor versus Maidenhead.
- KM then asked whether anyone would be speaking at the Full Council meeting on the 27th June as there was 20 minutes set aside for this.
- DR confirmed that the parent group would speak, he would speak as Executive Principal and that a representative of the governing body would speak. DR also confirmed that there may be a representation from the Parish Council.
- KM confirmed that he would take this information back to the LA.
- DR asked KM to send him a protocol for questions.
- KM stated that he felt that it would be best for these groups to make sure that the Council members understood that they were representing their community and that they should try to focus the LA on past decisions. He advised that rhetoric should be kept to a minimum.

- DR asked KM about the position of the Windsor Councillors and KM confirmed that whilst he knew that some councillors were not supportive, others were.
- KM then went on to say that in his opinion the paper that has been published was the best opportunity to achieve a 'yes' vote.
- DR replied that he felt that the argument was no longer just about money.
- AP commented that she felt that the paper would be extremely important to those who were still undecided on the matter.
- DR confirmed that the school just wanted to know the strategy so that it could start making future plans. DR confirmed that the governors were happy to put the agreed scheme forward and try to achieve it as cheaply as possible but that they would not agree to all the conditions included in the paper and the points of re-agreement.
- DR then confirmed the school's input into the paper:
 - Item 2, re-word to indemnify the tender process so that there is no need for re-agreement on any extra funding that may be required.
 - Item 3, have an Executive Architect in place to oversee the project, which would be a much more professional approach than having a Councillor with the deciding vote. This could then be overseen by the Key Sponsor, i.e. Cllr. M. J. Saunders.
 - Item 5, regarding hall use, to be removed and refer to the school's existing policy for this separately.
- KM confirmed that he would take this back to the LA.
- DR asked what the process would be if the tenders came in over budget.
- KM confirmed that if after attempts to negotiate the costs, small overspends could be accommodated within existing budgets but any increase over £100k would need to go to Cabinet and over £500k the scheme would have to go back to Council or be adjusted or re-engineered.
- DdP commented that this made her feel extremely nervous.
- DR agreed and stated that there was a huge risk with a design and build project that the school would just end up with a building that did not work and cited some examples of this. DR reiterated that value engineering of the hall size, sub-standard groundwork and lack of soundproofing (e.g. Oldfield new build) or omission of infrastructure like a sound-system wiring would not be options post agreement.
- KM agreed that the inclusion of the recommendations in the paper meant that it did not give the school the certainty that it had asked for.
- DR advised it would be very difficult to enter into a trust agreement with the LA again and that protocols must be agreed as soon as possible.
- KM stated that if this paper got enough Councillors on board to keep the scheme alive would this be seen as a win.
- DR confirmed that even if the vote was a positive one, there was still a lot to be agreed between the school and the LA as well as the planning and tender process to get through. He advised that he could not offer places until this had been achieved. DR stated that he would like this completed within the next 12 weeks.
- DR then stated that he wanted to find the common ground the day after the vote with negotiations to finish at this point with no further negotiations or significant value engineering. He re-iterated that the price

	<p>increase was due to council delays and market forces.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KM indicated that the approach set out in the paper would give the required level of certainty by the end of 2017 and asked what the implications were for the school. • DR confirmed that certainty would be required to allow the school to take additional children in January 2018, which he deemed in the best interest of this year's cohort and parent group. • KM asked the school to consider aligning the future offer of spaces in the September 2017 cohort to a school year boundary to minimise turbulence in all schools. • DR reiterated that he believed the school taking additional children in January 2018 is in the best interest of this year's cohort and parent group. • DR asked KM if the paper would be amended to reflect the school's position. • KM confirmed that the paper was now in the public domain so it would not be amended before the 27th June meeting. • KM suggested that DR meet with Cllr Saunders and agreed to try and facilitate this the next day. DR was very receptive towards this. • AP also commented that what was said on the night of the meeting would also be very important. • DR concluded with requesting that common ground on the paper be found following the input provided by the school and thanked KM and AP for their time. • KM apologised for not being able to promise a positive resolution to this issue without this Council decision. • It was agreed by all that these minutes would serve as the formal response to the paper. 	
	<p>The meeting closed at 5.15pm</p>	

Signed.....Dominique Du Pre (Chair)