

Children's Services Committee

**Minutes of the Meeting Held on Tuesday 12 September 2017
10am, Edwards Room, County Hall, Norwich**

Present:

Mrs P Carpenter – Chairman

Mr D Collis
Ms E Corlett
Mr S Dark (Vice-Chairman)
Mr J Fisher
Mr R Hanton
Mr E Maxfield

Mr G Middleton
Mr R Price
Mr B Stone
Mr V Thomson
Mrs S Young
Mrs C Walker

The Chairman received a petition containing over 2000 signatures from Mr J Simmons, Chair of Governors of Alderman Swindell School objecting to the proposed closure of the school.

1 Apologies and substitutions

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Mr M Smith-Clare (Mrs C Walker substituted); Mrs H Bates and Mr P Dunning (Co-Opted Church Representatives).

2 Minutes

- 2.1 The minutes of the Children's Services Committee meeting held on Monday 26 June 2017 were agreed as an accurate record by the Committee and signed by the Chairman, subject to the insertion of the following paragraph after paragraph 8.1.3.

Mr M Smith-Clare asked for it to be recorded that, with the proposed closure of Alderman Swindell School, he would like the Committee to receive an assurance that if the site was sold, it would not be used for housing.

3 Declarations of Interest

Mr V Thomson declared an other interest as his son was subject to an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) administered by Norfolk County Council.

Mr R Hanton declared an other interest as his daughter-in-law was a teacher.

Mr S Dark declared an other interest as his sister was a Headteacher at Swaffham.

Mr R Price declared an other interest as some members of his family were teachers.

4 Items of Urgent Business

- 4.1 The Chairman agreed to take the following item of urgent business raised by Ms E Corlett. The reason for taking the urgent business was that, following the return of children to schools last week, it had transpired that a policy was in place in at least one high school which put young people at risk of having a policy applied to them which was at odds with the law, therefore putting them at risk of an unlawful exclusion. It was therefore considered that this was something the Committee needed to act on as soon as they became aware of the situation.
- 4.2 “The chair will be well aware of the shockingly high levels of schools exclusions in Norfolk last academic year. The Department for Education guidance states "The law does not allow for extending a fixed-period exclusion, or for 'converting' a fixed period exclusion in to a permanent exclusion" other than in exceptional circumstances where further evidence has come to light.

The Inspiration Trust Charter School policy states "If the Principal wishes to extend a fixed period exclusion or convert a fixed period exclusion into a permanent exclusion the Principal will again write to the Parents / Carers explaining the reasons and other points above. Where an exclusion is attended there may be a new right for parents to state their case to the Discipline Committee"

It appears that this policy is not consistent with DfE guidance on implementation of the law

Will the chair agree to

A) investigate this as a matter of urgency

B) notify committee members of findings at the earliest opportunity

C) raise any relevant findings directly with the Regional Schools Commissioner and Department for Education to ensure that all schools in Norfolk are operating within the law in respect of exclusions?

Elected members need to reassure ourselves that the rights of Norfolk children and young people are upheld, that exclusion is only used as an absolute last resort and that the life-chances of Norfolk children and young people do not continue to be damaged by the poor inclusive practice that currently blights Norfolk.”

- 4.2.1 The Committee agreed that this was a serious issue that needed further investigation and asked the Assistant Director Education to investigate and provide the Committee with a written response.

5 Public Question Time

- 5.1 The public questions received and the responses are attached at Appendix A.

- 5.2 As a supplementary question, Mr John Simmons, Chair of Governors asked for an explanation of the criteria used in making the decision.

The Executive Director of Children’s Services explained that he had made the decision after carefully considering the case and weighing up a number of factors, including demographics, use of council resources Ofsted inspection results and best use of the available space. The Executive Director’s deliberations had led him to the conclusion that it was right to proceed to the formal notice of intent to proceed.

The Executive Director added that he recognised that such decisions were difficult as the staff who worked in the schools and the local communities found the prospect upsetting and worrying. The Executive Director acknowledged that many Alderman Swindell school staff and parents had expressed the view that they did not want the merger to go ahead, but he needed to take an unsentimental look at all the available information and when an opportunity had presented itself to invest significant amounts of money for educational gains, challenges needed to be made. The Executive Director continued that, in his opinion, the educational advantages weighted in favour of the argument for carrying out the publication of statutory notices. If the final decision was to proceed with the merger, considerable work would be done with both school communities to make the transition as smooth as possible.

The Assistant Director for Education added that the amount of thought that went into considering the impact of such a decision on the local community could never be under-estimated and that such a decision would only be made if it was considered to be in the best interests of the children concerned.

6 Local Member Issues/Member Questions

6.1 The Local Member question received, together with the response, is attached at Appendix B.

6.2 As a supplementary question, Ms E Corlett asked, on behalf of Mr M Smith-Clare, why the school provision could not be on the North Denes site and what specialised provision meant.

In response the Executive Director of Children's Services advised that the SEN provision had not yet been determined, although it was recognised that there was insufficient provision locally at the present time. As the process progressed, the SEN requirements would become clear and whatever provision was secured would be connected to the mainstream school. If Alderman Swindell site offered sufficient accommodation to meet the SEN provision, the preferred option would be to use the site for that purpose.

6.3 In response to a question about the details of the consultation and the results, the Assistant Director Education advised that an informal consultation had been carried out to gather the views and opinions of the local community. Public meetings had been held, which had helped to form part of the evidence base to evaluate whether or not the County Council should proceed and in the decision-making process, a range of factors had been considered including views and opinions both in favour and not in favour.

The consultation had been sent to approximately 3,000 people and had been available on the website. A summary report of the results was available on the website (<https://norfolk.citizenspace.com/childrens-services/north-yarmouth/>). The Assistant Director Education agreed to meet with Mrs Walker to discuss the summary of results which had formed the overall decision made to publish the notice of intent.

7 Integrated Performance and Finance Monitoring 2017-18.

7.1 The Committee received the report by the Interim Executive Director of Children's Services setting out the performance data, information and analysis presented in the vital sign report cards. The Committee was asked to review and comment on the performance data and determine whether the recommended actions identified were appropriate or whether another course of action was required.

7.2 During the presentation of the report the Assistant Director Performance & Challenge asked Members to note that the Early Help report had been incorporated into the Performance Report which was an important step towards integrated reporting.

7.3 Education – Verbal Update

7.3.1 The Assistant Director Education gave a verbal update on the results of the new exam testing process, with the caveat that the results had not yet been validated. The Committee would receive a full report at its next meeting.

- 5-year-olds - outcomes were looking similar to the national average.
- KS1, 7-year olds - outcomes were at or around national average.
- KS2, 11 year olds. - Although a significant improvement had been made in some subjects, Norfolk remained approximately 3% below the national average.
- KS4 – the results in this category were very provisional as a new set of measures had been introduced. English and Maths may be similar to the national average.
- KS5, post-16. Results were also very provisional and not yet validated but appeared to be similar to the national average.

7.3.2 The number of exclusions at the end of the last academic year had shown a welcome drop of 10%, although the number remained too high. The Assistant Director Education considered that the new strategy introduced in partnership with schools was beginning to produce results in this area.

7.3.3 In response to questions about how many children were still without a permanent school place at the start of this term, how many required a special school for Norfolk place and what Norfolk County Council was doing to address and support his cohort, the Assistant Director for Education said that this was a complex issue and agreed the numbers were unacceptable. Work was being undertaken with partners to address the problem, with a number of initiatives being put in place. Real evidence of the impact of different ways of working to address the problem was now starting to show, with a plan of actions in place to address the issues. The number of excluded children had dropped from 296 to 270 out of 118,000 Norfolk schoolchildren, although this figure remained higher than desired.

7.3.4 At the end of the last term there were 270 pupils excluded from school, with 118 waiting for full-time placements. At the beginning of the September 2017 term, there were 25 pupils waiting for a full-time school place and it was hoped they would all have full-time provision by the end of half-term 2017. All of the young people were receiving e-learning, home-tutoring or both and this would remain in place. Many of the 25 pupils were year 11 or KS2 age. The Assistant Director Education would provide a written response to the query about the division between primary and high school exclusion ages.

- 7.3.5 The reported figures included children from academies as well as local authority maintained schools.

The following points were noted in response to questions by the Committee:

7.4 Early Help

- 7.4.1 The reasons for re-referral into the early help and family focus teams were in the main due to positive reasons, such as re-referral due to a different issue to that which had led to their previous referral, although concern remained about the high number of re-referrals due to non-engagement of families.
- 7.4.2 The audits carried out on re-referral cases had shown that some cases had been closed too early and some re-referrals had been received because the family had been supported within the wider sector and then been referred back to Norfolk County Council. The Assistant Director Social Work said that, although more work needed to be done, having clear data meant that re-referrals could be analysed to ascertain the reasons for re-referral which was a positive step. The Assistant Director Performance and Challenge reassured the Committee that small numbers of re-referrals could create quite large fluctuations in the data, therefore analysis was needed as the data could relate to just two or three families.
- 7.4.3 Locality data was starting to be analysed to understand the performance around the rate of children subject to child protection plans. It was too early yet to identify any particular impact but the data could now be used to concentrate resources on areas where there was a higher demand.
- 7.4.4 A breakdown of early help referrals per school was now available which enabled further analysis to be carried out.
- 7.4.5 The Committee was pleased to note that, following the submission of the Payment by Results (PBR) claims, the Department for Communities & Local Government (DCLG) had inspected all the claims made by Norfolk County Council and had confirmed that every claim submitted had met the criteria. The money would be received in October 2017.
- 7.4.6 Norfolk remained higher than its statistical neighbours with regard to the number of Section 47 assessments carried out. It was recognised that further work needed to be done, but progress was being made. The narrative in future performance reports would separate out the Section 47 assessment data.
- 7.4.7 With regard to the number of looked after children with an up to date health assessment, the Committee was advised that the five Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) had identified a single CCG lead to focus on the initiative. The Norfolk Children's Services Improvement Board had received a report at its meeting on 5 September about how the CCG's were planning to improve the service. It was hoped that the plan to improve would be backed up by future results.

7.5 Finance

- 7.5.1 The Assistant Director Early Help and Prevention agreed to circulate the most up to date figures about the Troubled Families Grant.

- 7.5.2 All the vacancies held in the team ready for the New Direction service under the remit of Barnardos had now been filled.
- 7.5.3 There was no concern about the substantial drop in the level of PS balances which was mainly due to academisation. Schools tended to predict they would spend more than they actually did which increased their balances. The School finance services rated schools using the RAG (Red, Amber Green) ratings to determine whether they remained on budget.
- 7.5.4 With regard to Staying-put fostering, although there were no benchmarking figures available, it was now quite common for young people to continue to be supported by their foster carers when they reached 18 years of age. Support continued to be given in these cases until the young person reached the age of 21 or until they left full-time education.
- 7.5.5 The Committee was reassured that the reserves and provisions figures were as expected at this point in the financial year and that any changes would be reported to Committee as necessary.
- 7.5.6 The Executive Director explained that a report would be considered by the Policy & Resources Committee about a transformational demand management programme. The report would set out the need to build a service below the level of statutory intervention as this service was not yet available. The programme would require specialist provision and the need to work in a different way. The proposal was to utilise a one-off investment, with a high level of scrutiny, in return for significant investment to build the service needed. At the end of the three year period, demand should start to reduce and therefore the required spend would reduce. It was hoped this would reduce demand safely without placing additional demand on services. Once Policy & Resources Committee had considered the report it would be brought to Children's Services Committee for consideration.
- 7.6 The Committee unanimously **RESOLVED** to:
- Review and comment on the performance data, information and analysis presented in the vital sign report cards and determine whether the recommended actions identified are appropriate or whether another course of action is required.

8 Norfolk County Council Adoption Agency Annual Review

- 8.1 The Committee received the report by the Interim Executive Director of Children's Services detailing the performance of the adoption service.
- 8.2 In response to a question from the Committee, it was noted that, although this year's data was not yet available, it was anticipated that Norfolk County Council would be in the upper quartile of children being adopted by foster carers when the data was compared with other foster-to-adopt authorities.
- 8.3 The Committee **RESOLVED** to:
- Recommend approval of the Statement of Purpose to full Council and provide scrutiny and challenge to the adoption service.

9 Statement of Purpose of Norfolk's Fostering Services Annual Review

- 9.1 The Committee received the report by the Interim Executive Director of Children's Services detailing the performance of the Norfolk Fostering Service.
- 9.2 In response to questions by the Committee, the following points were noted:
- 9.2.1 Every foster carer received a supervision visit every six weeks in their own home. Children were seen monthly, often in the foster home. Guidelines stated that every fostering household should receive one unannounced visit per year and where these had not yet been completed, which was often due to no-one being at home when the foster service visited, they would be followed up.
- 9.2.2 The Head of Social Work Resources agreed to provide a written response into how many young adults did not remain in foster placements after they reached the age of 18 and whether they had been handed to the care of Adult Social Care.
- 9.2.3 Of the 71 young adults who remained in their foster placement after their 18th birthday, Children's Services continued to pick up financial responsibility for them if they met the required criteria. If the young person went to university, the foster carer would receive a financial retainer to ensure the young person had somewhere to stay during holiday periods.
- 9.2.4 The Head of Social Work Resources reassured the Committee that every child that went missing was reported. He added that all foster carers received a leaflet produced by Children's Services containing information about what to do if a child goes missing. There was also child sexual exploitation (CSE) training provided for foster carers and it was anticipated that this training would soon become compulsory as part of the CPD.
- 9.2.5 The Head of Social Work Resources also reassured the Committee that there were no missing children at the present time. He added that the central point of contact for raising the alarm early was the Police. Every child that went missing was risk assessed and a return home interview completed.
- 9.3 The Committee unanimously **RESOLVED** to
- Recommend the approval of the Statement of Purpose to full Council and provide scrutiny and challenge to the fostering service.

10 Annual Review of Norfolk Residential Service

- 10.1 The Committee received the report by the Interim Executive Director of Children's Services detailing the performance and outcomes achieved by the Norfolk Residential Service.
- 10.2 The following points were noted in response to questions by the Committee:
- 10.2.1 The Head of Social Work Resources agreed to look into whether the Statement of Purpose for each residential children's home could be more uniform in style. He added that they needed to be individual but would ask the question and also include the date the review was completed as well as the date of the next review.

- 10.2.2 The Head of Social Work Resources advised that the use of phone apps had not been considered at the moment to offer a 24/7 contact service. The service was about to invest in a platform called “momo” which was a location-based service and instant messaging application for smartphones and tablets to communicate with looked after children and this would be linked to the 24/7 on-call system.
- 10.2.3 It was difficult for emergency accommodation to be maintained to Ofsted standards due to the nature of their use. The last inspection narrative for the Lodge which had received a “requires improvement” judgement had stated that as each unit should have a regular manager and the manager had been off sick when the inspection took place, the inspector considered he could not give a “good” rating in that instance. It was expected that the Lodge would receive a “good” rating at its next inspection.
- 10.2.4 The employment of a psychologist would be useful to assist those children with very complex and difficult to manage behaviours. At the present time Compass provided a psychologist to assist those children that needed such a service.
- 10.2.5 The Head of Social Work Resources would provide a written response to the number (58) of children and young people who had been absent from children’s homes overnight.
- 10.3 The Committee **RESOLVED** to
- Scrutinise the information within the report.
 - Challenge the service on the performance and outcomes achieved.
 - Recommend the approval of the Statements of Purpose and Functions for all the Local Authority children’s homes to full Council to comply with the Care Standards Act 2000.

11 Norfolk Youth Justice Plan 2017-18

- 11.1 The Committee received the report by the Interim Executive Director of Children’s Services, asking it to comment on the annual update to Members on the work of Norfolk Youth Offending Team before the Youth Justice Plan was submitted to the Youth Justice Board, part of the Ministry of Justice.
- 11.2 The following points were noted in response to questions by the Committee:
- 11.2.1 The Committee **agreed** that the Chairman should write to the Chief Constable and Police & Crime Commissioner, advising them of the Committee’s concerns over the difficulties of resourcing police officers to the Youth Offending Team. It was understood that the shortfall was due to the police force being unable to fill vacancies within the force.
- 11.2.2 The Health Liaison and Diversion Scheme was not a 24/7 service
- 11.2.3 The Committee was reassured that the Youth Offending Team telephoned the police station every day between 8-8.30am to ascertain if any young people were in custody and what action the police were taking. The Youth Offending Team did not offer a 24/7 service as its role came into effect when the young person had been charged with a crime, or when it was known how the police were dealing with the individual. Equal Lives offered a service to support any young person who needed someone to sit in on a police interview.

11.2.4 The Police Officers seconded to the Youth Offending Team had direct access to all police systems and they were able to check each morning if any young people had been arrested. Close liaison with police also occurred over operations involving young people such as “Operation Gravity”.

11.3 The Committee unanimously **RESOLVED** to:

- **Note** the details contained in the Norfolk Youth Justice Plan 2017-18 and recommend them to full Council.
- The Chairman would write to the Chief Constable and Police & Crime Commissioner on behalf of the Committee, raising the concerns of the Committee about the lack of police resource to the Youth Offending Team.

The meeting adjourned at 12noon and reconvened at 12.15pm.

12 Strategic and Financial Planning 2018-19 to 2021-22

12.1 The Committee received the report by the Interim Executive Director of Children’s Services setting out Policy & Resources Committee’s guidance to the Committee on the actions required to support preparation of a balanced budget for 2018-19. This included an overview of the Council’s budget planning process, the principles for this year’s budget-setting activity and the latest forecast gap for budget planning purposes for the period 2018-19 to 2021-22.

12.2 The Committee asked for some reassurance that post-16 transport would be protected under the next budget review. In response, the Executive Director of Children’s Services said that this reassurance would not be possible as there were some elements of post-16 transport which were discretionary and in the context of the savings required, savings would need to be considered in this area. The Executive Director added that the issue of post-16 transport was complex due to the rural area and vulnerable young people needing to travel to urban areas for training.

12.3 The Executive Director informed the Committee he would not be bringing specific savings proposals until later in the year.

12.4 The Assistant Director Social Work advised that the number of agency workers employed at the County Council had reduced slightly. 40-45 newly qualified social workers would be commencing work with Norfolk County Council in October 2017 which would reduce agency social workers further, once they had completed their initial bedding-in period. In partnership with the University of Suffolk and the University of East Anglia, work was being undertaken to provide 60 statutory social work placements per year and this initiative was progressing well.

12.5 The Committee unanimously **RESOLVED** to:

- 1) Note the budget planning guidance for 2018-19 agreed by Policy and Resources Committee and in particular note:
 - a. the budget assumptions set out in this report;
 - b. the budget planning principles for 2018-19;
 - c. the forecast budget gap of £100.000m reflected in the Council’s latest financial planning;

- d. the allocation of saving targets for the MTFs period 2018-19 to 2021-22 to Departments and Committees, noting the existing savings for 2018-19 and beyond which were agreed as part of the 2017-18 budget round;
- 2) Consider and agree the service-specific budgeting issues for 2018-19 as set out in section 3,
- 3) Consider whether any planned 2018-19 savings could be implemented during 2017-18 to provide an in-year saving; and
- 4) In order to help close the forecast 2018-19 budget gap (as defined in recommendation 1)c, commission officers to report to the October Committee cycle:
 - a. whether any savings identified for 2019-20 have the capacity to be brought forward to 2018-19;
 - b. to identify alternative new savings for 2018-19;
 - c. to identify further savings for the future years 2019-20 to 2021-22 to close the budget gap identified in those years.

13 Report from Corporate Parenting Board to Children's Services Committee

- 13.1 The Committee received the report by the Interim Executive Director of Children's Services setting out how the Corporate Parenting Board had a lead role in ensuring that the Council acted as a good parent to the children and young people who were in, or leaving, its care.
- 13.2 The following points were noted in response to questions from the Committee:
 - 13.2.1 The Committee agreed that the Council needed to look at alternative provision and alternative ways of working to provide a service of accommodation and support for young people and care leavers. It was now understood what had gone wrong in relation to individual complaints and the Committee welcomed the establishment of a Task and Finish Group.

Mr D Collis left the meeting at 12.50pm.

- 13.2.2 The Committee expressed its wish that the views of children and young people be included as part of the work of the Task and Finish Group.
- 13.2.3 The Committee supported the establishment of a Task and Finish Group on accommodation and support for young people and care leavers so that the Committee is able to monitor progress. The following membership of the Task and Finish Group was agreed:
 - Mr S Dark
 - Ms E Corlett
 - Mr E Maxwell
 - Mr G Middleton
 - Mr J Fisher
- 13.2.4 The terms of reference would be drawn up and agreed by the Committee at a future meeting.

13.3 The Committee **RESOLVED** to:

- Note the update report from the Corporate Parenting Board.
- Agree to receive a future report from the CPB Task And Finish Group on accommodation and support for young people and care leavers so that Committee is able to monitor progress.

The meeting closed at 1pm

Chairman



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Public Questions for Children's Services Committee 12 September 2017

5. Public Question Time

- **Question from Maria Aickin re Norfolk Youth Justice Plan:**

How is the Norfolk Youth Offenders Team addressing and discovering the perpetrators that are within Norwich and ensuring that less anti-social behaviour is occurring? Take the Cromer 'lockdown' case, is the NYOT working in more collaboration with the police to ensure this kind of behaviour doesn't happen again?

Reply: *Norfolk YOT works closely with the Police in many aspects of its work especially early intervention. Referrals for interventions to prevent crime and anti-social behaviour are received through the MASH and the countywide system of partnership Help Hubs and following assessment may be dealt with by early help workers from Children's Services, Norfolk YOT or other partners in the integrated system.*

Re: Alderman Swindell School.

- **Question received from John Simmons, Chair of Governors.**

Please could this committee provide the criteria or framework by which the decision to close Alderman Swindell Primary was taken, including copies of any impact assessments carried out?

Reply by the Chairman:

The criteria for a proposal to close a maintained school is set out in DfE statutory guidance for proposers and decision-makers, 'Opening and closing maintained schools', April 2016. The process for school organisation proposals in North Yarmouth has been undertaken in accordance with this. The impact of proposed changes has been assessed in a range of ways, in accordance with our duty to ensure that the best educational outcomes for children are at heart of our decision making.

- **Question 1 from Mrs Howard:**

Could the money not be better spent improving and expanding the current schools? Plans had already been drawn up and costed to expand Alderman Swindell to accommodate it's move to become a primary. This was a fraction of the £7m. Why could the £7m not be shared between both schools to make the necessary changes

Reply by the Chairman:

Both schools are in old buildings, which are not equipped for a modern curriculum. Extending the schools will not address the issues with the current buildings. A new

school would give children 21st century facilities and would be more cost effective. Additionally, we know that schools with two-form entry generally achieve better results for children. They have a greater pool of teaching experience, find it easier to recruit and are more sustainable.

- **Question 2 from Mrs Howard:**

A poor Ofsted report has been used as a reason for proposing to close Alderman Swindell over North Denes. Why could both schools not have a new Ofsted check before a final decision is made? North Denes is a coasting school and is overdue a visit.

Reply by the Chairman:

Schools are inspected according to a schedule determined by Ofsted, not by the Local Authority. We are confident in our assessment of the schools' strengths and weaknesses using a wide range of published data.

- **Question 1 from Mr Howard**

If the closure happens, as proposed, why could the children not be kept at Alderman Swindell whilst the building work is undertaken? This would prevent them being moved twice, once into a building site for at least two years, and then again into the new school, causing much upset and distress.

Reply by the Chairman:

We recognise that this proposal will cause some inconvenience to schools, parents and children. We always work proactively with both contractors and school leaders to minimise the disruption. The proposed new school will be within the grounds of North Denes Primary School. Building works will be self-contained and children will continue to learn within the existing school building until the new school is ready.

- **Question 2 from Mr Howard**

Why was the initial consultation only six weeks long, the shortest mandatory consultation period? It feels to all affiliated to Alderman Swindell that this was intentional in order to make it impossible to gain sufficient signatures on petitions and general support to help our cause.

Reply by the Chairman:

The process for school organisation changes has been carefully designed to take account of statutory requirements and provide sufficient opportunity for stakeholders to contribute. It has been approved by elected members and contains two stages of consultation. On previous occasions the process was judged to be very robust by the schools adjudicator.

- **Question 1 from Mrs J Holloway:**

My child is currently in Year 4 at Alderman Swindell. I was given the choice of whether to move her to North Denes at the end of year 2 or to keep her at Alderman Swindell and I chose to keep her where she was. There is well documented evidence that students academic performance dips when they move schools, moving her now makes a mockery of a choice that I was given two years ago. How are you going to ensure that if our children have to move that their academic performance is not adversely affected?

Reply by the Chairman:

The transition between schools is the responsibility of the schools involved who are required to ensure the smooth transition of pupils. The role of the LA is to support schools and we will engage fully with both schools in this process. The LA has provided this form of support to Norfolk schools on many occasions through similar changes.

- **Question 1 from Mrs Stephanie Pulham:**

Why are you closing a school with no exclusions the only one in the area and never closes in bad weather?

Reply by the Chairman:

Our proposal to close Alderman Swindell as opposed to North Denes is based on;

- The funding allocation for the improvements to both school buildings could be pooled to build a new primary school building on the North Denes site. We believe this will provide a modern school fit for 21st century learning.
- Of the two sites, Alderman Swindell is constrained and could not accommodate a 420 place primary school, which would be capable of further expansion to provide sufficient pupil places for the future.
- Of the two schools, Alderman Swindell has been judged as 'Requiring Improvement' in both of its most recent Ofsted inspections. We are supporting both schools to further improve but believe that a 21st century school will support our ambition to ensure that children locally receive the very best education.

- **Question 2 from Mrs Stephanie Pulham**

Why close a school that has a playing field when there are 3 schools in the south end that doesn't

Reply by the Chairman:

We also agree that playing fields are an important part of education. The decision to close Alderman Swindell is not based on the playing fields and sufficient playing fields at the new site will be provided.

Our proposal to close Alderman Swindell as opposed to North Denes is based on;

- The funding allocation for the improvements to both school buildings could be pooled to build a new primary school building on the North Denes site. We believe this will provide a modern school fit for 21st century learning.
- Of the two sites, Alderman Swindell is constrained and could not accommodate a 420 place primary school, which would be capable of further expansion to provide sufficient pupil places for the future.
- Of the two schools, Alderman Swindell has been judged as 'Requiring Improvement' in both of its most recent Ofsted inspections. We are supporting both schools to further improve but believe that a 21st century school will support our ambition to ensure that children locally receive the very best education.

- **Question 1 from Ms Sharon Watling**

In the light of the 2015 Great Yarmouth Primary School reorganisation plan change, to the current proposal to close Alderman Swindell School, how can the committee justify the total public spend? This includes any meetings involving Children's Services staff, surveys, property / planning reports and indeed repeated reports, for the original plan from inception to date.

Reply

All proposals are considered through Capital Priorities Group, which carefully considers costs and funding implications for a range of programmes. The group is chaired by the Assistant Director and includes elected members, governors and school leaders. Plans are modified on the basis of evidence and available funding. Scrutiny of public sector expenditure is undertaken by Norfolk County Council through the relevant committees, in this case Children's Services Committee, as well as the Policy & Resources Committee and the full meeting of Norfolk County Council.

- **Question 2 from Ms Sharon Watling**

Who is responsible for monitoring the best value as well as amount of this spend of public money?

Reply by the Chairman:

Scrutiny of best value for capital expenditure is undertaken by the County Council's Capital Priorities Group, who make recommendations to the Executive Director of Children's Services, with delegated powers from the Children's Services Committee. The Children's Services Committee scrutinises the Capital Programme and Policy and Resources approve it on an annual basis and receive reports, three times a year.

- **Question 1 from Belinda O'Brien, Deputy Head, Alderman Swindell Primary School.**

How can the Children's Services Committee evidence that the DfE requirements relating to the discontinuance of maintained nursery provision at Alderman Swindell Primary School have been met?

Reference: DFE-00106-2016 - Maintained nursery schools

Where proposals relate to the discontinuance of a maintained nursery school, a statement setting out— d) the local authority's assessment of the quality and quantity of the alternative provision compared to the school proposed to be discontinued and the proposed arrangements to ensure the expertise and specialism continues to be available; and e) the accessibility and convenience of replacement provision for local parents.

Reply by the Chairman:

The capital programme at North Denes Primary School will re-provide nursery places discontinued as a result of a decision to proceed after the Public Notice period. The Local Authority's sufficiency duty will be met by the provision of places on an alternative site.

- **Question 2 from Belinda O'Brien, Deputy Head, Alderman Swindell Primary School.**

How will the impact on community statement with supporting evidence as required in the DfE publication "Opening and closing maintained schools" – April 2016 – Annex mitigate any adverse impact on the local community of Alderman Swindell Primary School if the school is closed?

Reply by the Chairman:

We recognise from the informal consultation that Alderman Swindell and North Denes are both much loved schools in the local community. We also understand that there are many in the Alderman Swindell School Community, who will be significantly affected by this proposed change. We will work pro-actively with all stakeholders to mitigate the impact and support staff, pupils and parents as best we can. Our priority is to make a decision that is best for the children's education both now and in the future. There is statutory guidance from the Department for Education regarding the information required as part of this process. The information that supports the Public Notice is available on the County Council website; <https://norfolk.citizenspace.com/childrens-services/north-yarmouth/>

- **Question from Ms S Whil, Extended School Coordinator at Alderman Swindell Primary School and Nursery**

Please can the Councilors Carpenter and Dark, in light of the data below, provide the "Educational reasons" that led to the Decision- makers deciding on 14th August 2017 to proceed to the Publication of the statutory notice and proposal to close Alderman Swindell Primary school?

Educational Achievement 2015-17

Alderman Swindell Primary	EYFS	Y1 Phonics Check	KS1 SATs	KS2 SATs	Attendance	Exclusions	Ofsted Grading
2014-15	58%	85%	N/A	N/A	95.1%	0	

2015-16	66%	76%	86%	N/A	96.4%	0	RI
2016-17	76%	90%	79%	N/A	96.5%	0	
North Denes Primary	EYFS	Y1 Phonics Check	KS1 SATs	KS2 SATs	Attendance	Exclusions	Ofsted Grading
2014-15	N/A						
2015-16	N/A						Coasting
2016-17							

Reply by the Chairman

The decision maker for moving to public notice is the Executive Director of Children's Services.

Our proposal to close Alderman Swindell as opposed to North Denes is based on;

- Of the two schools, Alderman Swindell has been judged as 'Requiring Improvement' in both of its most recent Ofsted inspections. We are supporting both schools to further improve but believe that a 21st century school will support our ambition to ensure that children locally receive the very best education.

Furthermore

- The funding allocation for the improvements to both school buildings could be pooled to build a new primary school building on the North Denes site. We believe this will provide a modern school fit for 21st century learning.
- Of the two sites, Alderman Swindell is constrained and could not accommodate a 420 place primary school, which would be capable of further expansion to provide sufficient pupil places for the future.

• Question 1 from Mr M Pulham

What is happening to the staff at this school, if it is a merger then staff from both schools should have to apply for all vacancy including the head. Mr Castle has on numerous occasions stated it is a merger.

Reply by the Chairman

The Public Notice is to close Alderman Swindell Primary School and change the age range of North Denes Primary School. It is not proposed to merge the two schools. If the proposal goes ahead, North Denes would be expanding and therefore will need more staff. Any vacancies would be held for first consideration for those staff affected by the closure of Alderman Swindell. We will be offering support to all staff affected and will try to avoid redundancies wherever possible.

• Question 2 from Mr M Pulham

What is the reasoning for closing so early when the other school will not be ready, why not run down Alderman Swindell year by year till they all have left.

Reply by the Chairman

Transition arrangements are always considered very carefully and in the light of previous experience. We will seek to organise any change with the continuity of

education for children in mind and work pro-actively with the schools concerned to minimise disruption to learning.

- **Question 1 from Ms T Lacey**

The 2015 School Reorganisation in Great Yarmouth plan is being redefined because of a fundamental failure to provide the required school places in the right location. The LA childcare sufficiency report published in Dec 2016 stated that there were sufficient places in Great Yarmouth. Currently the demand is declining due to increased provision and fewer children. How does the Children's Services Committee account for the investment of public money (around £1.7 million) committed to provide childcare provision at North Denes Primary School when there is no identified demand and children would have to come from existing provision notably the Private, Voluntary and Independent sector with the subsequent negative impact on the local economy and employment?

Reply by the Chairman

The cost of the modular nursery unit being provided at North Denes Primary is in the order of £725,000, not the figure quoted. The vast majority of this funding has been in the approved capital budget for some years to support additional early years places in Great Yarmouth and will not impact on other budgets available for reorganisation in Great Yarmouth. The school is in the Caister Children's Centre Reach Area. The NCC Childcare Sufficiency Report, December 2016, shows that there are insufficient numbers of 2, 3 and 4 year old places in this area.

- **Question 2 from Ms T Lacey**

Is Norfolk County Council ensuring compliance with the principles of best value for money or repeating a mistake highlighted above?

Reply by the Chairman

Scrutiny of best value for capital expenditure is undertaken by the County Council's Capital Priorities Group, who make recommendations to the Executive Director of Children's Services, with delegated powers from the Children's Services Committee. The Children's Services Committee scrutinises the Capital Programme and Policy and Resources approve it on an annual basis and receive reports, three times a year.

- **Question from Joel Heys – Parent - Alderman Swindell Primary School and Nursery**

The informal consultation meeting held at Alderman Swindell Infant School prior to the 2015 School Reorganisation in Great Yarmouth was well attended by a cross section of the local community. They highlighted the facts that provision was sufficient in North Yarmouth and that the need for extra school places was in the centre and south of the town. If the consultation had been used to best effect the

mistakes of school place over sufficiency in North Yarmouth and the associated public cost would not have arisen. The recent informal consultation evidenced a majority voice for keeping Alderman Swindell Primary School open; why have the considered views of the community been ignored?

Reply by the Chairman

The consultation was aimed at seeking people's opinions and was not a formal vote on the proposal. Consultation views were raised at consultation events, online, by email and post. All the views raised from the consultation were considered before a decision to proceed to Public Notice was made. The consultation report is available on the County Council website; <https://norfolk.citizenspace.com/childrens-services/north-yarmouth/>

- **Question from Adam Lawrence**

I am one of many parents that did not want my child to go to North Denes school and in the future if this proposal goes ahead will not send my children to this school. What provision do you have in place to ensure that my children, and many others, can be guaranteed a suitable place in alternative schools in the area?

Reply by the Chairman

If the proposal goes ahead, all parents of children at Alderman Swindell Primary School will be invited to express their preference. All parental preference will be considered, in accordance with each school's published admission arrangements.

- **Question 1 from Mrs Amanda Pulham**

How is it possible to provide a state-of-the-art, 2-form entry educational facility for 2-11 year olds with community facilities and provision to extend to 3-form for £7,000,000; as published in the NCC Public Information Notice - New £7m school for Great Yarmouth moves a step closer, issued on 05.09.17?

Reply by the Chairman

The consultation document explained that we will provide capital investment on one site, by providing a new school building on the North Denes site. This would be using the County Council's budget in the most cost effective way, as the funding allocated for improvements in both schools, which amounts to £6.4m, could be pooled to use for a new primary school building on the North Denes site. The shortfall is available in the approved Children's Services Capital budget.

- **Question 2 from Mrs Amanda Pulham**

Why will a skills audit of ALL staff not being completed so the students get the best education in a 'state of the art' school?

Reply by the Chairman

The process of identifying the staffing for the expanded school has yet to be agreed. We will follow the most up to date HR guidance to ensure that interest of children's education and staff job security are considered.

- **Question from Ms Rebecca Clark**

A meeting held at AS school proved that the majority of the community did not agree with the closure of this school and many questions were presented by parents and residents that are still unanswered, all of which are relevant. A lot of local residents did not receive a letter regarding the proposal and this was mentioned but no action was taken to rectify this. The meetings were held at inappropriate times - this was also mentioned but again no action taken to make them more accessible. So, can you explain to me why these points, questions and views have been completely ignored?

Reply by the Chairman

The consultation, which ran for 6 weeks, was aimed at seeking people's opinions and was not a formal vote on the proposal. Over 3200 consultation documents were distributed in accordance with the DfE guidance on statutory school organisation changes. The level of responses supports the view that consultation was widely known in the community.

Consultation views were raised at consultation events, online, by email and post. There was a balance of views in relation to both schools concerned and a wide range of responses and suggestions. All the views raised from the consultation were considered before a decision to proceed to Public Notice was made.

- **Question from Mrs Willimott**

How will ***the impact on community statement with supporting evidence as required in the DfE publication "Opening and closing maintained schools" – April 2016 – Annex*** mitigate any adverse impact on the local community of Alderman Swindell Primary School if the school is closed?

Reply by the Chairman

We recognise from the informal consultation that Alderman Swindell and North Denes are both much loved schools in the local community. We also understand that there are many in the Alderman Swindell School Community, who will be significantly affected by this proposed change. We will work pro-actively with all stakeholders to mitigate the impact and support staff, pupils and parents as best we can. Our priority is to make a decision that is best for the children's education both now and in the future. There is statutory guidance from the Department for Education regarding the information required as part of this process. The

information that supports the Public Notice is available on the County Council website; <https://norfolk.citizenspace.com/childrens-services/north-yarmouth/>

- **Question from Mrs King**

How can the Children's Services Committee evidence that the DfE requirements relating to the discontinuance of maintained nursery provision at Alderman Swindell Primary School have been met?

Reference: DFE-00106-2016

Maintained nursery schools

Where proposals relate to the discontinuance of a maintained nursery school, a statement setting out— d) the local authority's assessment of the quality and quantity of the alternative provision compared to the school proposed to be discontinued and the proposed arrangements to ensure the expertise and specialism continues to be available; and e) the accessibility and convenience of replacement provision for local parents.

Reply by the Chairman

The capital programme at North Denes Primary School will re-provide nursery places discontinued as a result of a decision to proceed after the Public Notice period. The Local Authority's sufficiency duty will be met by the provision of places on an alternative site.

6. Local Member Issues/Questions

- Question 1 from Mr M Smith-Clare

With the proposed closure of the Alderman Swindell School, please can the committee be assured that if sold then the site will not be used for housing?

Reply by the Chairman

Sale for housing is not the County Council's preferred option. The County Council's agreed policies for the future use of school sites will be followed. The first stage is for Children's Services to establish whether there is any educational need which can be met through use or adaptation of the premises. In this case, during the consultation, views were sought on the possibility of alternative provision and this could, for instance be provision for children with Social, Emotional and Mental health needs.

- Question 2 from Mr M Smith-Clare

Please can it be explained why £1.3m of public money has been spent to provide EYFS provision on the North Denes Primary site, when the Norfolk County Council Childcare Sufficiency Report for December 2016 showed that no additional provision was required?

Reply by the Chairman

The cost of the modular nursery unit being provided at North Denes Primary is in the order of £725,000, not the figure quoted. The vast majority of this funding has been in the approved capital budget for some years to support additional early years places in Great Yarmouth and will not impact on other budgets available for reorganisation in great Yarmouth. The school is in the Caister Children's Centre Reach Area. The NCC Childcare Sufficiency Report, December 2016, shows that there are insufficient numbers of 2, 3 and 4 year old places in this area.