

Meeting on 29th June 2011
Harpenden Parents Group, HCC Officers and Bernard Lloyd
Card Room, Royal British Legion, Harpenden.

Present:

██████████ (Chair/parent)	██████████
Bernard Lloyd (County Councillor)	BL
Pauline Davies (County School Planning Manager)	PD
██████████ (Senior School Planning Officer)	██████████
Marc Boucherat (Head of Primary School Effectiveness)	MBO
██████████ (parent)	██████████
██████████ (parent)	██████████
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██████████ (parent and minutes)	██████████

The group reviewed the objectives from the previous meeting.

- Harpenden parents Group (HPG) handed BL a list of members.
- HPG handed BL an advance copy of the petition supporting extra school places
- ██████████ and ██████████ reported that they had met and discussed planning issues for Harpenden Schools. ██████████ had not been able to visit the Schools.
- PD reported that she had not provided the findings of the School's Effectiveness Team, however that was the reason that MBO was in attendance since it was his team that are responsible for this work.

BL said that the list of members was helpful and that he would tell people contacting him about Schools about the group.

HCC outlined the reasons why they believed that September 2011 is too ambitious a timescale.

Although ██████████ and ██████████ had met the review of plans still led HCC to believe there are issues around expansions which cannot be guaranteed as long term solutions.
Funding for 2011/12 has already been allocated.

Schools have already prepared, places have been allocated.

It is a big job to reallocate places administratively.

Places cannot be withdrawn by law.

There is no agreement of alternative schools.

██████████ pointed out that last year an additional 15 places were made available very late but HCC managed to do this.

██████████ said that there was a lot of work behind this decision, the number of NRA's had fallen to a level where Grove could take the extra numbers, and also this was done as part of a continuing interest round. ██████████ said that this had not been a knee jerk response; there had been lots of discussion with Heads.

There was some disagreement about when this had been put into place.

ACTION: ██████████ to check when the allocation was done and let HPG know.

██████████ advised that he had not had access to the Schools.

HCC had taken advice that ██████████ and ██████████ should meet as a first step.

█ pointed out that many people this year had accepted places at the Lea begrudgingly.

PD said that even if places were allocated at another School it might not be those allocated to the Lea that get them.

█ confirmed that the group were aware that this would be the case.

█ gave a recap of the current situation:

HPG will become a formal group covering nursery, primary and secondary education provision in Harpenden. HPG will work with HCC to develop long term, sustainable solutions.

HPG's view was that:

- For several years there have been a surprising number of applicants for the number of available places leading to lack of choice, lack of fair access to local community schooling and the position is worsening. There is no fair chance of a good quality education for a large proportion of children in Harpenden.
- The current solution is positive and there are places for all, but it does not provide fair access to local community schooling;
 - it does not meet the educational and emotional needs of children in Harpenden
 - places the education of a number of existing and new children in schools at serious risk
 - leaves The Lea school at serious risk of failure, HPG wants The Lea to do well, the objective should be to improve the school
 - forces people to accept places they do not want in private education, St Dominic and The Lea
 - the press and the free School people are very interested in HPG
 - over 940 people have signed the petition to date
 - HPG is gathering support from Campaign for Rural England, Harpenden Society, and Friends of the Earth
 - Councillors have been seeking to develop local community solutions for years and have been constrained by planning and other interdepartmental complications
 - HPG wants to work with Peter Lilley, Theresa Heritage and Bernard Lloyd as well as HCC to find a solution for September 2011 and medium/long term.
- The issues they are not insurmountable.
 - HPG has been in contact with Peter Lilley and █ is acting as the contact point for the group there.
 - A petition of this type would normally attract between 300-500 signatures, HPG's petition has 940+ with minimal effort.

PD said that she questioned that a significant proportion of parents in Harpenden were unhappy.

█ said that there were now only 35 NRA's after CI rounds.

█ said that people had been realistic about what choices they had and changed choices to reflect that. These parents would still prefer to have accessed to their local school. The only real assessment of satisfaction is to base it on the first round of

choices. People apply for what they feel they might realistically get, therefore the picture is actually a lot worse than HCC might think.

■ said this was useful information and HCC could back track data to identify these parents.

PD questioned whether ■ was asserting that more than one school was at risk of failure.

■ clarified that he was referring to children being at risk by having to go to schools where they did not know anyone etc.

■ presented his summary of his report in relation to various schools.

The Lea has no site capacity for expansion but does not need extra buildings this year due to the school being under capacity. The School has a number of classrooms, only one of which would be big enough to take a class of over 30 if an adjustment was made to it. ■ had suggested that the School will manage this; the School has referred him back to HCC.

■ said that she had had a lengthy meeting with the governors, the school viewed this as an opportunity to make a fresh start and grow, she is surprised by the School's reaction to ■'s request but suggested that this could be because the School feels that they have experienced a negative reaction.

The current average class size is 17 with the largest at 22; the school has a transient population as children move to other schools as places become available.

BL suggested that the reception class could be split into two smaller groups

MBO said that this would be normal. He could see that the perception was that the Lea did not have a lot of support but that HCC provide the school with robust and rigorous support. The School Effectiveness Team has regular contact with the School. There are legal issues surrounding permitted ratios at primary level. All these issues will be addressed.

Herts have retained the School improvement network and the school has strong support relative to need. There is an option to buy in extra support should schools need it.

■ said he understood that more funding was available to the School because of extra children but questioned whether investment funding and support to improve standards would be forthcoming.

MBO indicated that his team's role was to support improving standards. It would be a possibility to split the large year group in some way.

ACTION: ■ will take this point back to the School and report back how The Lea will manage the physical space.

MBO said he wanted to reassure the group of the educational standards at The Lea and that there is evidence of educational progress. It is not appropriate to say that there is a risk of failure at The Lea. His team have investigated and reviewed the School and this shows an improving school. The key focus is now on the leadership and management of the school and ensuring that they have the capacity to develop and improve.

HPG pointed out that the parents they represent need to see evidence of this as much of what they have seen and heard from the Head and governors does not support MBO's assertions. HPG stated that the need for urgent provision of information that is specific to support that will be provided to The Lea was required to reassure parents whose children are allocated there.

ACTION: HCC to urgently share this evidence in relation to The Lea

St Dominic

The position of HPG is that the denominational nature of the school means it does not serve central Harpenden. Of the additional 30 places this year, only 5 children live within 1km of the school. Due to the late introduction of places at the School and that parents who had got their first choice were not made aware the solution had had minimal impact on the situation. The additional places were taken by one child from the Grove, several from The Lea and other places to children from outside Harpenden. The lack of information to parents who had been allocated their 1st ranked school, meant that there was virtually no movement to free up spaces at central and north Harpenden schools where space is needed. HPG questioned whether the additional places in future years would help the situation in central Harpenden as the St Dominic admission criteria requires it to take children from Wheathampstead and Redbourn in proportion to the number of applications from these places.

North Harpenden - Wood End

HPG suggest that Wood End is a possible solution for 2011 due to Roundwood's issues relating to Green Belt and Highways. Wood End presents a good, holistic solution for the town. Alternative solutions involve building on green belt and extra traffic. The School would require extra accommodation and longer term the playground at the north of the site could be annexed for playing field space.

BL indicated that there were already highways issues at the site and was not sure that the school would welcome extra classes. However he did accept that this might be the easiest solution for north Harpenden.

Central Harpenden - Crabtree

HPG have considered a number of options in the centre of Harpenden, in the short term Crabtree is the most practical solution. With a mobile classroom and MUGA (Multi Use Games Area) Crabtree can take more pupils.

It is a strong school with a large catchment and is popular, there is no sibling issue.

■ said that she was not dismissing Crabtree as a solution for the future, HCC would look to see if it fulfilled their requirements, the Governors would need to form a view. They have not previously expressed any interest in expansion. There are significant highways issues.

HPG were asked to note that the responsibility of the Governors is to existing pupils. HCC's position is that the ideal schools to expand are those that are popular and in the geographical area where the need exists, however these schools sometimes have technical risks. From this perspective Grove is good, St Dominic Ok and Wood End is a possibility from a capacity perspective. There are big issues around Roundwood. Harpenden schools have very limited capacity to expand (this is also at secondary level). For next year the plan needs review since all capacity in the system has now been used.

HPG expressed concern that there is little support at the highest levels in HCC to address these issues which spanned departments (i.e. highways). Blanket permission should be sought to put extra capacity in a number of Harpenden schools, if Governors do not then agree the permission will lapse.

BL pointed out that only 7/8 years ago land reserved for Schooling next to High Beeches was released to build a nursing home, only 4 years ago there was a suggestion that one primary school should close. Now the district council were considering sites for new schools but there was not much talk of expanding existing schools. In spite of the potential difficulties BL agreed that the expansion of Wood End should be explored; a tangible solution needs to be found.

PD said that at this stage it would not be possible to develop solutions for September 2011. Now is the time to plan for 2012/13 round as plans need to be in place by December. Even if work was started now a long term plan could not be developed next year but a temporary solution with a long term plan could be developed. The first half of autumn term could be used for technical planning and the second half for gaining the political go ahead.

■■■ indicated that all Schools in Harpenden should be reviewed to determine the best solution.

There had been a view until recently that this was a short term blip, planning had been approved on this basis.

■■■ confirmed he had received a letter from Peter Lilley indicating that he believed this is now a long term issue.

It was agreed that HCC would go away and take forward the next round of work and will keep in touch.

■■■ will convene a multi-disciplinary group to review and decide which additional studies and research needs to be done. By September this will be decided.

■■■ to share forecast data for 2012/13 entry with HPG, HPG to make ■■■ aware of differences with their figures

PD said that whilst she had sympathy for HPG parents nothing could be done for September, January does not resonate with their planning round and Schools would not be happy about doing this. Time was needed to win round the Heads and Governors.

■■■ requested that HCC approach the Schools to get feedback about whether they would take an additional September/January intake with guarantees of a long term solution.

■■■ agreed she would get feedback from the Heads at their next meeting on 30 June 2011 (subsequently confirm that there would be no change).

PD announced that ■■■ will be on leave and all contact should be made directly with her (01992 555865)

The meeting was closed.