

**POLICY REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT PANEL  
3 NOVEMBER 2008**

*Present :-* Councillor Julie Young (Chairman)  
Councillors Nick Barlow, Beverly Davies, Mike Hardy  
and Justin Knight

*Also in Attendance :-* Dave Harris  
Gerard Oxford  
Kim Naish  
Lyn Barton  
Mike Hogg  
Nigel Offen  
Tim Young  
Tina Dopson

*Substitute Member :-* Councillor Pauline Hazell for Councillor Kevin Bentley

## **17. Minutes**

The minutes of the meetings of the Policy Review and Development Panel held on 30 September 2008 were confirmed as a correct record.

**Councillor Pauline Hazell (in respect of her governorship of Gosbecks Primary School) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)**

**Councillor Julie Young (in respect of her membership of Essex County Council and her governorship of Greenstead St Andrew's Nursery and Infants School) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)**

**Tim Young (in respect of his spouse being a member of Essex County Council) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)**

## **18. Essex County Council Consultation on Secondary Education in Colchester**

The Chairman explained the circumstances behind the consideration of the substantive item of business at the meeting in that Councillor Tina Dopson, the Portfolio Holder for Performance and Partnerships, had requested that the Panel considered the Essex County Council Consultation on Secondary Education in Colchester and provide recommendations to support the Portfolio Holder's response to the consultation on behalf of the Council.

It was explained that the Borough Council was a consultee in the process and therefore

did not have any decision making powers

The intention was for the Panel to invite contributions on the consultation from any interested parties, whether they be headteachers, school governors, teachers, parents, students or councillors. It was anticipated that these views would be used to inform the Portfolio Holder in determining her final response to the consultation.

Councillor Dopson attended the meeting and, with the consent of the Chairman, addressed the Panel. She thanked the Panel for giving the consultation paper sufficient level of priority to allow for the meeting to be dedicated to its consideration and to gather opinions. Councillor Dopson explained that the Council's responsibilities as a District Authority did not extend to the provision of education in Colchester but that it did include the powers of wellbeing of young people. She went on to confirm that the Cabinet would discuss this matter at its meeting on 3 December 2008 and she anticipated that it was likely that the matter would also be referred to the Council meeting on 11 December 2008 prior to a formal response being prepared in the form of a Portfolio Holder report. The portfolio holder took the opportunity to remind and encourage those present to also respond to the consultation on an individual basis if they wished to do so.

Finally Councillor Dopson confirmed to the meeting the three options set out in the consultation document, which were:

- To close Thomas, Lord Audley and Alderman Blaxill schools and offer places to pupils living in their priority admission areas at the five schools that ring those areas and to redevelop Sir Charles Lucas Arts College as an academy;
- To progress the closure of Alderman Blaxill School and consider the development of a number of federative and trust arrangements in Colchester without the opening of an academy or academies;
- To re-organise all the non-selective and non-denominational secondary schools in Colchester town and re-open them in new or existing premises, in new or existing locations (using Building Schools for the Future funding), in some cases with new names.

The first was Essex County Council's stated preferred option.

To assist the Panel in its deliberations, Mr Jonathan Tippett, in his capacity as both an Executive Headteacher of the Thomas Lord Audley School and Language College and Alderman Blaxill School and as Chair of the North East Association of Secondary Heads in Essex and Jude Hanner in her capacity as Headteacher of Sir Charles Lucas Arts College, were invited to make presentations.

Also in attendance, in order to clarify any issues raised, were the following officers from Essex County Council:

- Graham Tombs, Executive Director for schools, Children and Families;
- Graham Ranby, Head of School Access Services and
- Helen Russell, Policy Analyst.

On being invited to address the Panel, Jonathan Tippett made two separate

presentations.

Firstly, in his capacity as Chair of the North East Association of Secondary Heads in Essex, he set out the following issues and arguments:

- How well the secondary schools and, in particular the Headteachers, in the Borough were currently working together;
- People should not overlook the contributions made by the selective schools and St Benedict's School, in particular in terms of their ability to access central government funding;
- Had the review been undertaken in 2002 it would have been Stanway School which was facing closure as, in November of that year, Stanway School was the only school in the Borough with unused capacity;
- In November 2005 both Sir Charles Lucas and Thomas Lord Audley had been put into special measures by OFSTED but by November 2007 Sir Charles Lucas had emerged from special measures whilst in May 2007 Alderman Blaxill had been put into special measures and it was due to be announced that in October 2008 Thomas Lord Audley had come out of special measures;
- The targets set by the Government in terms of the percentage of pupils achieving five GCSE A – C grades with English and Maths (currently 30%) and the associated goal of ensuring all schools achieve and well exceed this target by 2011 would be easier in circumstances where pupils at lower performing schools are placed in larger and relatively higher performing schools and by placing pupils in an Academy which are not managed by Education Authorities and their performance is therefore not counted towards Government targets.

In his capacity as both an Executive Headteacher of the Thomas Lord Audley School and Language College and Alderman Blaxill School, Jonathan Tippett then set out the following issues and arguments:

- The importance of grasping the potential opportunity, whatever the outcome of the consultation process, to access Building Schools for the Future funding in the order of £100 million earlier than the existing time-frame of 2018 for the benefit of all schools in Colchester;
- The implication of the potential closure of two schools in the Borough is the need for the remaining five schools between them to 'grow' by an estimated 180 pupils;
- It had been intended that the existing 'soft' federation between Thomas Lord Audley and Stanway would, in the future, officially include Alderman Blaxill, however a federation approach with separate governing bodies would not provide a mechanism to aggregate the GCSE A – C grades for the federated schools;
- He had therefore formulated an alternative proposal, the details of which would be published on 4 November 2008, having taken into account the following factors:  
Demand for Secondary Education in the catchment areas of the three schools,  
Need to raise standards,  
Need to reduce surplus places,  
Need to secure £100 million investment for all Colchester schools,  
Local Authority requirement that GCSE results meet national standards,  
Undesirability of pupils travelling across town,  
Insufficient space at Stanway to accommodate for more students,  
Recognition that schools with greater than eight forms of entry are difficult to manage,

Need to maximize continuity of pupils' education.

- The alternative proposal would involve the setting up of one single school operating on three sites, the merged school would publish pupil admission numbers corresponding to eight forms of entry at Stanway, six forms of entry at Thomas Lord Audley and two forms of entry at Alderman Blaxill, the catchment areas and admission policies would remain unchanged.

In her capacity as Headteacher of Sir Charles Lucas Arts College, Jude Hanner was invited to make a presentation to the Panel and she set out the following issues and arguments:

- The opportunity, in accordance with option 1 in the consultation, for Sir Charles Lucas Arts College to be redeveloped as an Academy, to strengthen the position of the existing school and enable it to continue to serve the Greenstead community on its existing site;
- She felt redevelopment of the school as an Academy would provide for a continuation of the existing leadership team, including the headteacher and staff which would provide the opportunity to cater for the needs of young people;
- Sir Charles Lucas' performance in terms of GCSE A – C grades had improved by 13% and the Government's floor target of 30% had been achieved, she did not therefore feel that this option meant securing the future of a failing school but of increasing their chances of sustained success and an endorsement of the hard work undertaken by the existing staff;
- She hoped to see a further 7% increase in GCSE performance in the current year but some of Sir Charles Lucas' pupils needed extra vocational opportunities which would require a high degree of input in terms of specialist facilities and buildings;
- She welcomed the opportunity for the school to become an extended facility for the use of the wider community as a whole such as in terms of adult education;
- The existing Sir Charles Lucas building was not fit for purpose, being expensive to maintain, with accommodation on four floors, no wheelchair access and generally not conducive to a positive learning environment;
- She welcomed having an opportunity to help with the shape and design of a new purpose-built school building;
- One of her main aspirations was that she had high aspirations for all students and she considered this was reflected in the ethos and concept of Academies;
- In terms of location for any new building, there was ample room on the existing site for redevelopment and this would be her preference;
- She was aware of concerns expressed regarding Academies generally, but she had been reassured that the consultation proposals would address these concerns in terms of an academy continuing to serve Greenstead and its existing catchment area, an admission policy not based on academic standards and she welcomed the opportunity to work and form a positive relationship with the sponsor of the Academy.

In response to the three presentations members of the Panel sought clarification on a number of matters including:

- The efficiency of managing one very large school on one site as opposed to two (or more) schools on separate sites;
- The intentions regarding reducing spare capacity and the corresponding opportunities

for spare school capacity to be used to allow community groups to access the school facilities;

- The potential impact of the proposals not just on secondary schools but also on local primary schools as these proposals would take at least five years to implement;
- The desirability of strong local involvement, in terms of community and parental representation, on Boards of Governors and the make-up of Governing Bodies of Academies which would be determined by the sponsor;
- The potential benefits of Sir Charles Lucas going into partnership with the University of Essex and Colchester Institute which, it was considered, to be of great benefit in raising pupils' higher education aspirations;
- The ability of an Academy to determine its own salary structure and terms and conditions of employment for staff although staff transferred to an Academy would be protected by statutory TUPE arrangements.

Pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1), the following contributors addressed the Panel, details of their representations being set out in the Appendix to these minutes:

- Miles Bacon, Headteacher, Thurstable School, Tiptree in support of Option 1 and the opportunity for all schools to benefit from Building Schools for the Future funding;
- Mrs Cowans, Headteacher, Philip Morant School Colchester on her concerns about the narrowness and divisiveness of the proposals;
- Mrs Shepherd, resident of Fitzwalter Road, Colchester on the impact of school closures in terms of the effect on pupils attending the remaining schools and associated increased traffic movements;
- Mrs Robb, resident of Straight Road, Colchester on the ability of schools to absorb additional capacity caused by school closures and the implications for current Year 6 pupils;
- Mr Wiggins, Chairman of Thurstable School Governing Body in favour of the consultation process and the proposals and supportive of a traffic management policy to deal with pupil movements;
- George Beeken, resident of Lethe Grove, Colchester in support of local community schools with concern school closures and its impact on transport and family life;
- Essex County Councillor Jeremy Lucas, Drury Division in support of proposals to bring forward Building Schools for the Future funding and the potential for redevelopment;
- Kevin Prince, Headteacher, St Helena School, Colchester in support of the vibrant, social community at St Helena and the opportunities for it to be redeveloped and expand;
- Jean Quinn, National Union of Teachers expressing opposition to the principle of Academies on grounds including teachers' pay and conditions, admission policies and make up of governing bodies;
- Juliette Keay, teacher, Thomas Lord Audley School in support of that school's recent achievements;
- Roger Buston, of Asher, Prior Bates Solicitors in support of Alderman Blaxill, welcoming proposal put forward by Jonathan Tippett and advocating opportunity to improve the education of those pupils whose parents are based at Colchester Garrison ;

- Ian McNaughton, Principal, Colchester Sixth Form College voicing concern about the narrowness of the proposals, the need for consensus, his expectation that Colchester would see an improvement in national terms in its 16 year attainment in the current year and that no absolute assurance could be given in terms of the availability of Building Schools for the Future funding ;
- Tim Oxtan, resident of Colchester on his concerns about the management of schools larger than 1,000 pupils and the traffic implications associated with all three proposals in the consultation;
- Clare Dillen, resident of Mersea Road, Colchester in support of Alderman Blaxill School in terms of its size, its ethos and the support it provides to its pupils;
- Essex County Councillor Richard Bourne against any option advocating the closure of Alderman Blaxill and Thomas Lord Audley, in support of the proposal for a foundation school on three sites;
- Sheena Clover, Headteacher, Parsons Heath Primary School in support of a variety of views being expressed;
- Robert Lunsden, student at Colchester Institute in support of the work already undertaken at Stanway, Alderman Blaxill and Thomas Lord Audley and the need for investment to be made in school building;
- Mrs Hearn, resident of Bricdel Avenue, Dovercourt whose daughter would be attending one of Colchester's Secondary schools in September 2009 and having attended six of the schools open evenings her preference was for Alderman Blaxill and Thomas Lord Audley;
- Reverend Andrew Fardoice of St Margaret's Church, Berechurch, Colchester on his concerns regarding the implications of Option 1 in the consultation and any potential closure of Thomas Lord Audley in terms of the effect on other schools and transport movements;
- Patrick Duggan, resident of Buckingham Drive, Colchester in opposition to all three options in the consultation which he considered to be divisive, expensive and unworkable.

The following Councillors attended and, with the consent of the Chairman, addressed the Panel:

Councillor Harris was very concerned at the prospect of the closure of Thomas Lord Audley and Alderman Blaxill Schools. He was passionately in favour of the fourth option put forward by Jonathan Tippett and he challenged Essex County officers and Councillors to visit Shrub End and Berechurch to talk to and listen to the views of local residents;

Councillor G. Oxford spoke from the perspective of the impact on Gilbert School. He was already concerned at the likely future growth for the school which would be greater, should the proposals in the consultation document be implemented. He believed that schools should be sited within the communities where their pupils lived and was opposed to students having to travel across town to attend school. He was of the opinion that Jonathan Tippett should be encouraged to continue the work he had already started at Thomas Lord Audley and Alderman Blaxill schools;

Councillor Offen stated his concern regarding the nature of the consultation process, given that a similar exercise had been commenced some months previously when outcomes were intended to be published in February 2008 but this had not happened.

He was opposed to the travelling of students to school across town and believed that the current consultation had omitted to take into account the impact of the forthcoming rise in school leaving age. His view was that greater consideration needed to be given to the students who would be affected by these proposals, in particular he was concerned at the implications for the children whose parents were stationed at the Garrison, who had already experienced difficult circumstances;

Councillor T. Young voiced his confidence in the leadership of Jude Hanner at Sir Charles Lucas school and he was wholeheartedly in support of the redevelopment of the school on the current site which he considered would become a hub and a magnet for excellence in the local community. He had been assured that there were no proposals to build a new school on land owned by the University of Essex. He was of the view that any redeveloped school would need strong local and parental representation on its governing body with potential for the school to also be used for adult education;

Councillor Naish was fully in support of the fourth option proposed by Jonathan Tippett as he believed that schools should form part of their local community with periods of under-capacity being used to increase use by other parts of the community. He was also concerned at the traffic implications for the town as a whole should the closure of schools take place and students are forced to travel further to attend school;

Councillor Hogg considered Sir Charles Lucas to be an excellent school and was in support of its redevelopment so long as this was on the existing site. He was concerned at the impact on the feeder primary schools and felt that any relocation of the school would have a very poor impact on the community. He understood the need to explore the implications in terms of Academy status, particularly in relation to the sponsor but he was hopeful that it would be possible for a consensus to be reached which would be beneficial to all;

Councillor Barton indicated her support for the fourth option proposed by Jonathan Tippett.

Following the representations the Panel sought clarification on a number of issues and the following information was provided by Graham Tombs on behalf of Essex County Council:

- All Primary feeder schools had been provided with copies of the consultation document and meetings were taking place with Primary school Headteachers;
- The tick boxes in the consultation document were in no way meant to prevent other options being put forward for consideration;
- The representations made in relation to children whose parents were stationed at the Garrison had been powerful ones and these issues would not be dismissed;
- The consultation was intended to be an open dialogue and it was feasible for other options which had been discounted to be revisited;
- The County Council welcomed any and all views on what people would like to see for the future;
- There was no assurance available in respect of Building Schools for the Future funding but preliminary discussions had indicated that a bid for additional funds from

Essex County Council would be welcomed if a workable proposal could be submitted reasonable promptly;

- The Building Schools for the Future Programme not only offered capital funding but also continued investment particularly in terms of enhanced IT provision and internet access;
- The wider implications of the fourth option proposed by Jonathan Tippet would need to be fully considered, in particular in relation to the status and management of the three schools involved.

RESOLVED that all the contributors be thanked for putting forward their views, the main points emerging from which included:

- Concerns over pupils travelling outside of their local communities and the resulting traffic congestion issues;
- Preference for Sir Charles Lucas to remain on its current site as there was sufficient room for development;
- The consultation proposals were too narrow and not sufficiently developed;
- Concerns regarding the composition of the Governing Bodies, pay and conditions of employment and admissions policies in an Academy model;
- The fourth option for a Federation of one school on three sites, involving Alderman Blaxill, Thomas Lord Audley and Stanway schools with aggregated GCSE results;
- Some schools were already at capacity with little scope for further development;
- The opportunity should be taken for school buildings to be used for the wider community;
- NUT was opposed to the Academy model;
- Thurstable School was in favour of Option 1;
- Concerns that options put forward contradict parental choice;
- Investment in new structural and IT facilities was welcomed;
- Colchester schools perform well compared to other towns when results are taken across the Borough;
- Children whose parents are based at the Garrison need to be shown special circumstances;
- Building Schools for the Future funding was not assured.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet that the views expressed at this meeting by all the contributors, as set out in these minutes and in the Appendix to the minutes, be considered and used to inform the Portfolio Holder for Performance and Partnerships in determining her final response to the consultation.

## **ADDITIONAL DETAILED INFORMATION**

### *APPENDIX TO MINUTES OF THE POLICY REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT MEETING HELD ON 3 NOVEMBER 2008*

#### *18. Essex County Council Consultation on Secondary Education in Colchester*

*Details of contributions made Pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1):*



*Miles Bacon, Headteacher, Thurstable School, Tiptree*

*Speaking in support of Option 1, although he was aware that this might not be a popular view.*

*This was because it resolved, on a long term basis, the problem of children from 'deprived' backgrounds being concentrated in one or more schools which in turn made it virtually impossible for those schools to succeed in those circumstances. Secondly it put together a coalition at local and national level that made it possible to bring forward Building Schools for the Future funding. He was concerned that, if this opportunity was not grasped now, then it would not happen at all for Colchester. He had huge sympathy for those schools particularly affected by the proposals. He had previously worked at Chantry School which had experienced very similar circumstances. He now considered that schools within the heart of communities did the people within the community and the young people no favours. The cycle of economic and educational deprivation needed to be broken by balancing the intake and catchment areas of all the schools in the area. He considered Colchester to be fortunate as the geography made that balancing process possible.*

*Mrs Cowans, Headteacher, Philip Morant School, Colchester*

*She believed the proposals in the document were already too narrow and had been drawn up rather quickly.*

*She was surprised that primary education was not being given more consideration. A lot of issues in the town needed to be considered across the whole range of educational provision but she felt scant regard had been given to social issues which, in her opinion, needed huge support. She felt all pupils needed buildings which were fit for their education and although her own school was considered to be performing well currently she felt that this was a miracle at some times, given the quality of the buildings in which the pupils were being educated.*

*She was also surprised that the document appeared to be divisive in that three schools had been effectively singled out and not included in the debate. Philip Morant was already a large school and was resourced accordingly but both she and the Governing Body questioned whether the size of the school should be increased further.*

*The government agenda of parental choice did not seem to be taken into account within the proposals in the document. There needed to be an investigation as to the effect of introducing greater parental choice in the town and what it would continue to do.*

*She was concerned to note from recent reports in the local paper that Education was becoming a political football and she considered this to be extremely damaging to pupils and parents alike.*

*Mrs Shepherd, resident of Fitzwalter Road, Colchester*

*Speaking as a parent, she felt people were being asked to pick one of the three options set out in the consultation paper, without sufficient explanation being provided, particularly in terms of the implications for those children already at*

*secondary school. Her son attended Philip Morant, a school which was already oversubscribed and she did not understand how any additional numbers could be accommodated. She had concerns regarding the impact on catchment areas and the transfer of young people in a town which already suffered badly with congestion at peak times.*

*Mrs Robb, resident of Straight Road, Colchester*

*A parent with a daughter in Year 6 at Gosbecks Primary School, currently in the process of applying for a place at Secondary School. She was concerned at the timing of the consultation, given the potential impact on the choices that parents were currently making.*

*She did not consider that parents were being given sufficient access to the document or that the document made it clear as to its purpose.*

*She felt that the impact on things like catchment areas and capacity of schools to absorb additional pupils was significant.*

*She felt the work undertaken at Thomas Lord Audley needed to be supported and for it to continue.*

*Mr Wiggins, Chairman of Thurstable School Governing Body*

*He interpreted the document as an outline proposal to answer the many questions which needed to be answered.*

*He felt it was important to consider what would be put in place within communities, should schools be closed but that this was not an education issue.*

*In terms of education, he considered that any successful proposal needed to benefit not just some but all the pupils in Colchester. He considered that the proposals in the document did this as they provided for the possible access to Building Schools for the Future funding in the order of £100 million. This, in turn, would provide buildings fit to educate all pupils in Colchester in the 21st century.*

*He considered a large number of pupils were already transported around Colchester to school, some of whom travelled by school bus, others were driven by parents or had other piecemeal arrangements. He felt a cohesive transport policy, incorporating the transfer of school pupils, may even make the current transport situation better.*

*His own pupils had attended Thurstable School although they were not in its catchment area prior to his joining the Governing Body. He didn't believe it was necessary for schools to be within a community for pupils and parents to feel part of a wider community.*

*He was convinced that the proposals set out in the document were the best for all the people of Colchester.*

*George Beeken, resident of Lethe Grove, Colchester*

*He believed education was all about the community. He was worried about potential problems when young people missed their bus home, or walked home from school because of detentions. Not all families were multiple car owners with the ability to collect children from locations many miles away from home. Also he was concerned*

*about the potential for pupils choosing not to attend school and the problems for parents and services looking for them. He considered that the proposals would have a detrimental effect on family life and was also concerned about the financial and environmental cost of additional vehicle journeys.*

*Essex County Councillor Jeremy Lucas, Drury Division*

*He wished to emphasise how much the County Council wanted this exercise to be a full consultation process and alternative ideas were very much welcomed.*

*He felt it to be vitally important to bring forward, if possible, Building Schools for the Future funding. At the moment, Colchester was at the end of the queue and there were no provisions in the Government's plans to allow any funds to come to Colchester before 2018 at the earliest. He felt to turn away this opportunity would deprive more than a generation of secondary school pupils of satisfactory buildings within which to be educated.*

*He felt better buildings would help to attract good teachers, make it easier for pupils to learn and to improve the community and education generally.*

*Competition between schools in terms of results has been going on for some time but the situation needed to change and schools need to be improved.*

*Kevin Prince, Headteacher, St Helena School, Colchester*

*He wished to alleviate fears in terms of pupils travelling distances to school. At St Helena School, all pupils travelled in as there is no surrounding housing at the school. He considered it to be a vibrant, social community which was not adversely affected by pupils not living close at hand.*

*St Helena was built in 1938 and he felt it needed redevelopment. The school was, however, oversubscribed with an admission of around 1,000 pupils. GCSE results had improved from 41% to 57% but the school was not fit for purpose with no vocational facilities whatsoever.*

*The location of the school, adjacent to Colchester Institute, provided a fantastic opportunity to increase school numbers to 1,200 and to link with the Institute to become the hub in terms of vocational education in Colchester.*

*His preferred option would be relocate to a site owned by the Institute on Hilly Fields but this would require additional investment from Essex County Council.*

*Jean Quinn, National Union of Teachers*

*She represented the National Union of Teachers for Colchester. Whichever option was adopted the NUT were veremently opposed to Academies because the pay and conditions of employment for teachers and other workers was not guaranteed to be the same as in other state schools. Teachers who transferred were protected but new teachers would not have the same level of protection.*

*Also Academies had higher rates of exclusion than other state schools because the right of appeal mechanism if a child was excluded was different. She was concerned about their admissions policies and the effect of this on numbers of pupils with special needs. She felt that academies could cherry-pick their pupils and*

were undemocratic as the number of parent governors was often limited in number. She believed that academic achievements of Academies were no better than comparable state schools.

She wanted to see a good local school for every child, with no school closures in Colchester.

She requested Essex County Council to give their support to small schools which were popular with parents and pupils. She sited Eton as being a small school of 600 which chose not to expand.

She wanted Colchester schools to be given time to improve with more investment. She was reluctant to support any of the proposals in the consultation but, if pushed, she would favour Option 2.

*Juliette Keay, teacher, Thomas Lord Audley School*

She had been at Thomas Lord Audley since 2006 as a school counsellor.

She felt Jonathan Tippett had turned the school around. It now had a positive and friendly atmosphere and had benefitted from some refurbishment. The schools' results had recently improved and it had come out of special measures.

She felt pupils preferred the smaller class sizes at Thomas Lord Audley and the way the school was run. Additionally at the recent Open Day twice as many parents attended than in previous years.

She had personally heard compliments from visiting firemen and also bus drivers as to how pleasant and well behaved the pupils were.

*Roger Buston, of Asher, Prior Bates Solicitors*

He had represented Shrub End and Colchester Garrison as a Borough Councillor for four years.

He was pleased that this matter was receiving wide publicity.

Alderman Blaxill school, and all the other schools for that matter, served Colchester as whole and did not operate in a vacuum. He always advocated the best life chances for all pupils whatever their background. He was concerned that the matter was beginning to become a political football and the people of Colchester deserved better.

He had previously and continued to declare his support for Alderman Blaxill's principles and for the raising of educational life chances.

He had been pleased to witness the drive injected by Jonathan Tippett when Alderman Blaxill had been dying on its feet and he felt Mr Tippett was owed a debt of gratitude.

However he believed Colchester's educational needs must be developed and doing nothing is not an option.

He was also heartened at the prospect of the process providing for a Garrison centric facility. The circumstances of children whose parents were based in a Garrison often made them particularly difficult to cater for and he felt it would be highly appropriate, in a town with a newly developed Garrison, for this process to become a pathfinder as to how to address these particular educational challenges.

*Ian McNaughton, Principal, Colchester Sixth Form College*

*He wished to endorse the point made by Sue Cowan, in terms of the proposals being narrow and having been developed too quickly.*

*He welcomed the meeting as the Borough Council, with Essex County Council and the local communities, should work together to forge a way forward in terms of a consensus view to suit the majority of interested parties.*

*His advice was that the matter needed leadership to take it forward.*

*He was of the view that there had been significant improvement in 16 year old attainment in Colchester. He believed that the 2008 data for Colchester regarding GCSE A – C grades including English and maths when published in January 2009 would come out very well. Far from having an element of failure in terms of 11 to 16 education, he believed the reality was that Colchester had done very well by national standards, particularly so since 2004.*

*He felt it was important not to jump at solutions on the back of suggestions regarding additional funds which may not actually be made available and bearing in mind the fact that the Building Schools for the Future Programme was due to be reviewed nationally in any event.*

*Tim Oxtan, resident of Colchester*

*He was speaking as a local resident, tax payer, local tax payer and grand parent of two children, one in Year 6 and one in Year 9 at the largest secondary school in Colchester.*

*He considered it a generally known fact that schools which grew beyond the optimum size, suffered a decrease in the quality of education provided. The consensus in terms of optimum size of a school was between 800 and 1,000. He believed the management problems associated with schools over 1,000 pupils contributed to the decline in educational achievement.*

*The government was said to be offering £100 million, although there was no guarantee. However he doubted whether this would come to fruition, given the fact that the nation's soldiers were claiming to be currently acutely under funded.*

*The options on offer all involved the increased movement of vehicles at peak hours. Colchester had no policy regarding transport, or indeed public transport, the result of which, he considered would be more congestion, disruption and a lower quality of life for all residents of Colchester.*

*Clare Dillen, resident of Mersea Road, Colchester*

*She was speaking as a parent of two children at Alderman Blaxill school who lived outside the catchment area for the school and paid £750 per year for transport in order to attend. They selected the school because they liked it.*

*The options contained in the consultation paper did not provide for a small school and therefore she believed that the process was too narrow.*

*She recollected that in the course of the previous consultation process people had been made to feel misguided or stupid if they did not agree with the proposals presented. But in the event these proposals were all rejected.*

*She referred to the Government agenda regarding parental choice but she felt that the three options presented in the consultation did not allow for her parental choice. She did not consider Alderman Blaxill to be a failing school and she wondered whether Lord Hanningfield had visited the school to find out whether it was indeed a failing school.*

*She explained that her eldest daughter had been Head Girl at Alderman Blaxill in 2004 and she was currently studying at Berkeley University, having won a scholarship for the third year of her Honours degree in Dramatic and Performing Arts. She had been supported in this by Alderman Blaxill school and for this reason she wanted it to remain open.*

*Essex County Councillor Richard Bourne*

*He was totally against any option which proposed the closure of Alderman Blaxill or Thomas Lord Audley Schools as nothing would convince him that closure would be in the best interests of children within those communities.*

*He was a member of the Interim Executive Board at Alderman Blaxill and he felt that the school was currently performing well such that it was providing a good education to all the pupils who attended the school.*

*The current approach had been in terms of a partnership with other schools and the three schools in the area were working well together. The schools had developed a proposal around having a single school operating over three sites, as a foundation school, still within the local authority family. He believed it was a very well worked out and sustainable proposal which could deliver the necessary improvements in the longer term. In addition, it would not adversely affect any other proposals affecting other schools in the town.*

*He agreed with the need for additional schools infrastructure in the area and he did not believe that this alternative proposal would prejudice the bid for additional funds for other schools.*

*He was of the view that moves should be made quickly as there were some urgent issues that needed to be addressed and this alternative proposal could be implemented in the short timescale required.*

*He felt, however, that it would be extremely unwise and detrimental to the young people in the area for Alderman Blaxill and Thomas Lord Audley to close.*

*Sheena Clover, Headteacher, Parsons Heath Primary School*

*She felt it was important to consult with everyone as, what was at stake, was the future of all pupils currently attending primary schools in Colchester. She felt that all primary school headteachers worked well together and she hoped that they would all participate in joint discussions on this issue.*

*Robert Lunsden, student at Colchester Institute*

*He was attending as a former pupil of Thomas Lord Audley School and an active campaigner against the closure of that school.*

*He believed that any changes to educational provision would have massive effects*

*across Colchester. He felt the federation between Stanway, Thomas Lord Audley and Alderman Blaxill schools had been extremely beneficial for Thomas Lord Audley. He explained that he had personally benefitted from this partnership and, with time, these benefits would be far more wide reaching.*

*He felt that the resources already available should be investigated in preference to schools being closed or redeveloped.*

*He currently attended Colchester Institute and had experience of pupils from St Helena school travelling across town in school buses which had been over crowded and had not been able to accommodate all those pupils who wished to travel.*

*Mrs Hearn, resident of Briardale Avenue, Dovercourt*

*She lived in Dovercourt, had a 10 year daughter moving to secondary school in September 2009 and was intending to move to Colchester next summer.*

*Her daughter had certain medical conditions, including diabetes, which meant that she had attended a number of the schools' open evenings in order to adequately assess the merits of each school, bearing in mind her daughter's requirements.*

*She had visited four schools in Colchester, the Gilberd, Alderman Blaxill, Thomas Lord Audley and Sir Charles Lucas against which she had allocated a points system based on various criteria, including size of school and number of pupils. Alderman Blaxill had scored highest, with Thomas Lord Audley a close second.*

*Both schools had demonstrated that they were prepared to give her daughter the close support and medical supervision that she required.*

*She was concerned that the consultation exercise would mean that the schools affected would not be accepting pupils for the 2009 Year 7 intake and she felt the timing of the consultation was unacceptable given the choices needed to be made for current Year 6 pupils.*

*Reverend Andrew Fordoice of St Margaret's Church, Berechurch, Colchester*

*He explained that he had five schools in his Parish, including Thomas Lord Audley. He had grave concerns regarding Option 1.*

*He considered the closure of Thomas Lord Audley would be sad day for the people of Berechurch. The school had received a good OFSTED report recently but, nevertheless was faced with the threat of closure.*

*He was concerned at the prospect of a very large school with over 2,000 pupils. He had experience of teaching at a school of this size and personal responsibility for 550 pupils over a two week timetable. He did not consider that this experience was a good one. The standards dropped as the numbers increased. The issue of school transport on this scale would be a real issue for staff and bus drivers.*

*He proposed the scrapping of Option 1 in order to save Thomas Lord Audley school.*

*Patrick Duggan, resident of Buckingham Drive, Colchester*

*He was against all of the options set out in the consultation paper. He considered them to be unworkable, expensive and unwanted. He believed them to be Essex County Council's solutions to a problem which it had created over the years.*

*He was concerned that only three options had been presented and it was difficult to pick any one as a preference. He felt that the options had been deliberately selected to divide the people of Colchester over which schools should close and which schools should stay open.*

*He felt the people of Colchester should stand together and fight for all of Colchester's schools to remain open on their existing sites but redeveloped using public funds rather than the more expensive public finance initiatives and for them to remain under local control.*

*He believed that the alleged problems had not happened overnight. If the schools were failing and were in such poor states of repair that they were in that way because of Essex County Council's failure to maintain the schools in a proper and timely fashion over the years.*

*He was concerned at the remarks reportedly made by Lord Hanningfield, that Colchester was in danger of failing. If this was the case it was because of the interference of Essex County Council in the business of Colchester which was driving Colchester into the ground.*

*He asked people to support a fourth option advocating the rejection of the proposals in the consultation paper and for Colchester to break away from Essex County Council and take control of its own education system.*

## **19. Work Programme 2008/09**

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Corporate Management giving details of the work programme for 2008/09 which had been updated to reflect the need to reschedule items deferred from this meeting to accommodate the item on Education and for the Waste and Recycling Options Appraisal to be submitted to the meeting on 19 January 2009.

In terms of Task and Finish Groups, Beverley Jones, the Council's Environmental Services Manager, had been appointed to lead the Night Time Economy Group and it was reported that political group membership of the Groups had yet to be finally determined.

RESOLVED that the revised Work Programme for 2008/09 be noted.