

## **Minutes of the Parents' Council Meeting**

**Held on Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2009**

**At 7.00pm in the LRC Longfield Academy**

**Present:** Alaric Bonthron (AB) - Chair, Neil Willis (NW) - Principal, Cllr J Kite (JK) Leader of Dartford Council, Roger Purfleet (RP), Penny Wiltshire (PW), Joanne Sharpe (JS), Sue Day (SD), Jane Legge (JL), Stephanie Turner (ST), Melanie Tomkins (MT) – Secretary

**Apologies:** Sue Lawday

### **1. Minutes of the last meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> April were agreed.

### **2. Update on Actions set**

Action for the parents to discuss the school uniform – see minutes.

Action JL to liaise with regard to the information evening – JL said she is waiting for replies to e-mails to be able to move forward as she cannot speak with Gail Peters until she receives a reply - JL said she would chase this.

Action NW to give the parents an update on the Planning decision – see minutes.

### **3. Cllr Jeremy Kite – Leader of Dartford Council**

AB opened the meeting and explained the reasons for inviting Cllr Kite, these being the discussions we have held to date regarding the transport issue for the Academy, including Fastrack as previously mentioned by Mr Frank Green (FG) and the Freedom Pass Scheme.

JK thinks it is very unlikely that we will be able to get a Fastrack service to Longfield because what Fastrack requires in order to work best is its own dedicated lane and it is highly unlikely to be able to do this in rural villages and the chances of acquiring the land to produce the dedicated lanes would be almost impossible. When the dedicated lane is taken away, Fastrack is nothing special – it is just a bus that gets caught in traffic along with everything else. However, what is certainly possible is

to work out a way with Arriva perhaps by having a Fastrack satellite service in the form of “Hopper” buses which would enable people who live in the villages to be able to get onto Fastrack outside their homes and be taken to the nearest stop. The Parents Council agreed this would be a good idea. He went on to say that the aim is to make public transport so reliable that people will be able to leave their cars at home and use it more often AB agreed there is the community aspect but also said there is a push for the schools to be greener and for parents who do the short journey to school everyday. If you live outside the immediate area of the villages, there is no real direct bus route and no train options. Having a good bus service will lead to independence and it will be a pattern students will pick up for the rest of their lives. It was felt that a good idea would be to model on the old post bus system for the schools, which is a little yellow school hopper bus, which could connect into Fastrack and then pick up another yellow school bus that can take students to their destination school. AB asked how we could get a system like that and JK said that with the two Councils and support from the local schools, a group could be formed stating the things that would work. Some schools are already on the Fastrack route but there are lots of schools that can work together to say that they would support the idea of a hopper bus system, which would feed into the Freedom Pass. He feels this is the way forward and through NW, FG and the consortium he thinks it would be the best place to start. He said as a Councillor he can offer whatever technical facilities they have available to develop it through their transport system to find out whether it is viable or not.

### **Freedom Pass**

NW said that you can sign up now and get 15 months for the price of 12 months and this starts in June – JK said that it is a great service but it is only a great deal if we have the buses to meet it – the parents agreed with this point. JK said it was not intended to be the passport to great school transport - the intention was to offer freedom for young people to travel around Kent. It was an independent initiative for children in rural areas who have to pay high bus fares, which in turn affected their socialising and was meant as a way of achieving transport freedom. What has been helpful is that school routes have been acquired and fed into the Freedom Pass – NW confirmed this. JK said that one of the things we must look forward to be that the Freedom Pass will hopefully expand the market as it gains the momentum. We have to be realistic and Arriva will not schedule buses on routes that are not popular, but the Freedom Pass will

have the potential of driving up business and making those routes more viable and we have to encourage people to use the Freedom Pass, (not just for school) and get them to sign up for the pass and the concept. Once they have done this, we can then make the case for proper routing and timetabling which will be a benefit for school. NW said he has sent out surveys to parents and is hoping to receive them, as the more surveys they get back will enable them to estimate the market for September. SD, JL and MT pointed out that New Ash Green was not mentioned in that survey but NW pointed out that there is a bus that comes from there in the morning. JL said it is not a reliable bus and does not feel that it is the right system to get the children to school, which is why she thinks a lot of New Ash Green parents drive. JK said the reason he has so much hope on the Freedom Pass is that it means for the first time we have the potential of having a quantifiable demand of young people using public transport and we can demonstrate that. AB felt if the service was not available from New Ash Green then people would not pay £50 for the Freedom Pass. It was felt we would be able to see from the surveys if this was a problem particularly if that part of Kent has not applied. It was suggested that people living in that area should complete the survey but point out there is no viable bus route from there. PW said that she phoned Arriva and they said they would put on more buses if there were a need for them. JK said that with students taking advantage of the Freedom Pass, NW and he would be able to see where the students are based, who is interested in taking the bus and hopefully get the bus service up and working better for that area. The whole point about doing this is to get across that we need a bus service where there isn't one. At this point it was agreed the Parents Council would put together a questionnaire for their views and this would be distributed by the Academy. AB said we should look to include the primary schools in the surveys also, which would give an idea of how many more would like to use the service.

**Action: Parents Council to put together a Transport questionnaire to be sent to parents.**

JK said the way forward is to take a campaign edge from this meeting and encourage everyone to campaign for future public transport detailing that we need information about future demand and make it clear that we are talking about potential rather than real use. He then went on to say

that cycle routes should also be included in the survey that the parents want to send out, as well as other forms of transport i.e. car sharing.

**Cllr Kite left the meeting at this point.**

#### **4. Neil Willis – Principal Update**

NW said that he attended a meeting at the KCC with FG. There were two people who objected to the plans for the new building, but after discussion, the County Council approved the plans for the new Academy. These have now gone to the Government of the South East because of the Greenbelt issue. NW pointed out when they went there five years ago the turnaround was two weeks and people are very happy and confident with the process so far. The money has been received by Kent to begin the process, not just for us but for other Academies as well. NW said he is anticipating that next week an archaeological dig will take place on the rugby pitch and after that there is a process of six weeks where they will set up the compounds, create the entrances and then start building the foundations. He said he anticipates the foundations will start being built around the middle of July and are hoping the building will be finished around Christmas 2010. We are actually one month behind where we were at the beginning and the new build will probably not be finished until January 2011 but we should be able to move in by December maybe leaving the car parks having to be finished. PW said that when they moved into the new build at the Leigh the students had to have 4 weeks off. It was asked if that will happen here. NW said that he can't guarantee that but they will take into account exams etc. He said he thinks things are very encouraging at this stage and feels they are very positive and doesn't see why it will not happen in that time frame. NW said he has information to send to parents but cannot send it out until the Government Minister officially agrees the project and stated they have to reply within 28 days.

NW went on to explain they are in the process of making a larger teaching space at the top of the current Lower School building in order to try out some IT, so when the move into the new spaces is made, staff and students are prepared for this.

#### **5. Uniform**

AB opened the discussion and mentioned that one drawback might be the expense; if we do specialise, the price will rise. The Parents Council

agreed that it is important to be able to purchase the school blazer anywhere as this would keep the cost down. NW asked if parents still wanted students to wear blazers and it was agreed the students look smart in them. The possibility of having different colour shirts for each house was discussed and the parents felt that this would not be a good idea - having the same badge shirt and tie makes the students look smarter. AB pointed out that the Grammar Schools have a flash at the top of the badge to differentiate the house colour and suggested this could be put across the top of the badge. ST said she likes the idea of the badge, which you can iron on and NW said the design of the school badge is to stay the same. It was then discussed about the possibility of putting the house colours on the school ties – it was felt this would be a good idea as they easily purchased.

AB asked NW if there is any money for the change of uniform for parents and NW confirmed there is for parents with students that already attend the Academy, which is approximately £50 per student. NW said in his view he would like a uniform that is smart but still easy for parents to purchase, is affordable and does not discriminate between young people that can afford things and those that cannot. AB pointed out that he did not feel that the students should be given the option of whether or not school uniform should be worn and the parents agreed. JL said we have to be practical in this and thinks the less we change the better it will be. AB said they need to decide on what the house colours will be. SD asked about the metal badges that were discussed previously and AB said these would not be a good idea as the students will either lose them or collect them.

NW felt a need to expand this discussion further and it was agreed the Parents Council would put a questionnaire out to parents for their views.

**Action: Parents Council to do a uniform questionnaire to be sent to parents.**

## **6. AOB**

PW raised the issue of the after school detentions and said that she would be in favour of this but it all comes back the transport issue and having buses available to get the students home afterwards. AB said that there will be notification sent to parents so arrangements can be made and NW said that they have always held a detention once a week and a letter is

sent out on the Friday for the following Tuesday so there is a considerable amount of time for plans to be made. NW said he would like to point out that the number of detentions being sent out is actually really low approximately two or three per week. Lunchtime detentions are part of the stepping up to After School Detentions and they are part of the process. The whole point of these is to engage in dialogue with parents to make sure they know the reason for their child being kept after school and for the child to know why they are being kept and that it is being reinforced at home and we are working together.

As there was no other business the meeting finished at 8.50pm.

**Date of next meeting**

**Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> July 2009  
7.00pm in the LRC  
Longfield Academy**