

		AGENDA ITEM 4
		PAF/07/13
Committee:	People and Families Scrutiny Committee	
Date:	12 September 2013	
<u>Terms of Reference</u>		
Enquiries to:	Robert Fox Governance Officer Corporate Law & Governance 01245 430526 robert.fox@essex.gov.uk	

Purpose of the Paper:

To receive and formally ratify the Report of the The Deanes School Consultation Task & Finish Group, as sent to Councillor Gooding on 2 September 2013.

This paper comprises four documents:

- a) The Report of the Task & Finish Group
- b) An Appendix to the Report, containing Supplementary Materials
- c) A covering letter, addressed to Councillor Gooding, Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning
- d) Response from Cllr Gooding, dated 29 August, to draft Report (includes Appendices A & B).



THE DEANES SCHOOL CONSULTATION

A Review by a Task and Finish Group of the
People & Families Scrutiny Committee

August 2013



Essex County Council

C O N T E N T S

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
BACKGROUND	5
ISSUES, EVIDENCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS	
Key Evidence	7
Essex County Council	11
The Deanes School, Community and Parent Groups	14
Essex County Council local Members and Rebecca Harris MP for Castle Point	19
Castle Point Borough Council	22
Essex County Council – Second session	24
Written Evidence	28
CONCLUDING REMARKS	39
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	43

Executive Summary

In July 2013 a Task and Finish Group of the People and Families Scrutiny Committee embarked upon this scrutiny review of the proposed Cabinet Member decision to consult upon the closure of The Deanes School at Thundersley given the significance of the subject matter.

During its investigation the Group received and considered carefully evidence from a wide range of interested parties on the historical background to the original proposal to rebuild the school and at the same co-locate Glenwood School at the site; and the latest Cabinet proposal to consult upon the closure of The Deanes. This scrutiny report sets out in detail the evidence examined by the Group.

Ultimately the Group was united in its conclusion that there was not sufficient evidence to justify support for the closure of The Deanes School, and agreed the following recommendation:

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCILLOR GOODING AS THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING:

That the Task and Finish Group, established by the People and Families Scrutiny Committee, has concluded that there is insufficient evidence to close The Deanes School on the basis of current evidence, and a repositioned school could be a success and offer an alternative to other schools in the area.

Before reaching any decisions on the future of the School the Cabinet Member is requested to review carefully his proposal to consult on its closure taking into account the following points that are drawn from the main body of the scrutiny report:

- Governance Arrangements

The Group is mindful that the decisions it has scrutinised are in fact Executive matters and as such the Cabinet Members have exercised the authority that they have been delegated by the Council. However, during its scrutiny review of this proposal the Group wished to examine the documentation leading to the very recent decision to invest in the rebuilding of The Deanes School but such documentation was not available. This is seen as a serious flaw and is something which should be noted as a lesson to be learned for major projects in the future.

- Housing Demand and Pupil Forecasting Data

The forecasting of pupil numbers for The Deanes has focused on housing demand projected for the Castle Point Borough and not the broader area that traditionally the School has served in the south east of the county, and it has failed to take account of the potential impact that economic regeneration projects underway could have upon the demand for school places. Furthermore the Group was concerned about the reliability of the data on projected housing demand provided locally that has been used to forecast demand and shape current proposals.

- Other Local Schools

A part of the case for closing The Deanes School relies on the assumption that there will be sufficient school places available at other local schools and in particular the King John and Appleton Schools were cited. However, currently there are no formal agreements or planning permissions in place to support the argument beyond doubt that those Schools would be able to expand their facilities to accommodate any additional pupils that could be displaced from The Deanes.

- School's Business Case

The Group noted that there was general agreement that The Deanes had put forward a robust business plan that it could operate successfully on a reduced total number of 600 pupils on roll. However, there was a difference in view between the County Council and the School in so far as the Council forecasted that The Deanes would not attract a sufficient number of pupils to implement that plan. The Group was of the opinion that for reasons set out in more detail elsewhere in this report there is evidence to support the view that enough parents across the wider community will prefer The Deanes for their children's secondary education. Despite the fact that the School's accommodation has been neglected pending implementation of the original decision to rebuild the school, it is nevertheless categorised as a 'good school with outstanding features' by Ofsted and therefore comparisons with other new build schools that have been classed as failing and unpopular in the community are misplaced.

- Glenwood School

There is universal agreement that new provision is required for Glenwood School, which is a popular and successful special school. There is community support for its co-location with a mainstream school, and the Council's Cabinet has demonstrated its support for Glenwood's relocation to The Deanes School site by the executive decisions made including the purchase of additional property to support this objective. It was apparent that since the original rebuild proposals were agreed, the two schools have been working together successfully in practice to make the project work.

- Community Role

There are strong overtures made in the Council's corporate literature and Government policy around listening to local communities. In the case of The Deanes there is much evidence of the important role that the School actually fulfils in the wider community not only through its positive engagement with other local schools and groups, but also the facilities that it makes available for instance to sports clubs. The staging of the Olympic Mountain Bike Event in Castle Point and local community aspirations for an Olympic Legacy were also contributory factors in the original decision to rebuild the school's accommodation, and the provision of sports facilities. While school provision issues may be the primary concern in any closure proposals, the Group considered that the wider consequences of such decisions upon the community should be taken into account by the County Council before a decision to close The Deanes is taken.

Background to the Scrutiny

The decision to consult on the closure of The Deanes School was based upon a number of factors including falling admission numbers, the need to consider the best use of the Authority's budget, and the need to ensure sufficient high quality school places in the area. The school was previously impacted by the cessation of the Building Schools for the Future Programme. A decision to invest a sum of £23 million was made in 2011 to co-locate Glenwood Special School and The Deanes School.

At its meeting on Thursday, 4 July (a meeting moved forward from 11 July to ensure adequate time to commence the Scrutiny prior to the end of the school summer term), the People & Families Scrutiny Committee agreed to the establishment of a Task and Finish Group to scrutinise the consultation on the closure of The Deanes School. The Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning had invited the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee to consider scrutinising the consultation and to make a recommendation to him prior to any decision on the future of the school following the consultation period.

The initial timetable for the evidence sessions was agreed as:

- 10 July: County Council puts forward its case
- 17 July: School puts forward its case (venue, the school itself)
- 29 July: input from local Essex County Council Members
- 30 July: evidence from Castle Point BC, and possibly other affected Local Authorities
- 6 August: further evidence from the County Council

Witnesses were asked to provide bullet point summaries of their case before relevant meetings and all Committee Members should receive a copy of these. It was agreed that all meetings for evidence gathering be held in public to assure transparency and full minutes should be taken of each.

It was agreed that local Members should not be members of the Group itself, but would have the opportunity to give their input to the process. In response to a suggestion that perhaps local members would be well placed to be part of the Group, the Chairman pointed that any local Member sitting on the Group could be put in a difficult position, serving both as judge and advocate. He reiterated the importance of public perception of impartiality.

The Membership of the Task and Finish Group was agreed as:

- Councillor Graham Butland (Chairman)
- Richard Carson (independent co-opted Member)
- Councillor Jenny Chandler
- Councillor Theresa Higgins
- Councillor Norman Hume
- Councillor Andy Wood

Evidence base of the Scrutiny

Five formal oral evidence sessions, all in the public domain, were held, where a range of witnesses were able to provide evidence to the Task and Finish Group. These were:

- Councillor Ray Gooding, the Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning, Tim Coulson, the Director of Education at Essex County Council, and Dave Hill, Executive Director for Schools, children and Families
- the Headteacher, Chair of Governors, senior staff and members of the Governing Body of The Deanes School
- community groups who use the sport and leisure facilities at The Deanes School
- Headteachers and Principals of other local schools and colleges
- parent representatives from The Deanes School
- Essex County Council Members from Castle Point
- the MP for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris MP)
- Castle Point Borough Councillors

Written representations from a Castle Point Borough Councillor and an Essex County Councillor were submitted, as were written submissions from Basildon Borough Council, Rochford District Council and Southend-on-Sea Borough Council. Written submissions were also received from local residents.

The Task and Finish Group was content that it received a range of views and collected evidence from a number of different people and community groups. The Task and Finish Group did contact both the Appleton and King John Schools requesting written representations and these responses are still awaited.

Issues, Evidence and Recommendations

Key Evidence

The high level points raised prior to, and tested at, the first Task and Finish Group meeting by Councillor Gooding and Dr Tim Coulson related to current and future pupil numbers, finances, student performance and standards and housing projections.

Current and Future Pupil Numbers

The number on roll at the school on the January 2013 census was 793, broken down thus:

Year 7	119
Year 8	117
Year 9	165
Year 10	175
Year 11	217
Total	793

At the commencement of the consultation the intake for Year 7 in September 2013 was expected to be 74; so with 217 leaving in July 2013 the total roll from September 2013 would drop by 143 pupils to 650.

Predictions for intakes at the school in future years give school rolls of:

2014/15	569
2015/16	509
2016/17	464
2017/18	474
2018/19	476
2019/20	534
2020/21	466
2021/22	477
2022/23	473

The projected annual number of local primary school children entering secondary school would remain fairly static between 2008-2019 with a range of 165-225.

The school challenged these figures at the second evidence session. Firstly the school stated that the figures prepared by ECC for The Deanes School did not take into consideration the increase in admissions expected from new housing, and, therefore, some of the additional school places needed in the area would be met by The Deanes School. With regard to the static primary school children numbers the school argued that a range of 165-225 (a difference of two forms of entry) could not be termed static.

The school modelled four different admissions scenarios for Castle Point up to 2023:

- no change to admissions with a Published Admission Number of 180 for The Deanes School. This scenario showed there would be a surplus of places in Castle Point in most years, but 2019 and 2022 would only have a surplus of places at just over 3%
- the closure of The Deanes School. This scenario, the school argued, would be catastrophic for the local community as there would be a shortage of school places throughout Castle Point, ranging from 15 pupil places in 2020 to a deficit of 142 places in 2022
- The Deanes School closes and Appleton and King John Schools increase their admissions by 30 places each. This scenario is the one put forward by ECC and was argued as unfeasible by the school. The school stated that in the period up to 2023 there will be a shortage of local school places in Castle Point for five different years, while the remaining years show the 'slack' in places being below the recommended level of a 5% surplus
- The Deanes School reduces its number to a Published Admission Number of 120. This scenario would be the schools preferred option. It did acknowledge that in 2019 and 2022 there would be issues in terms of the available Year 7 places in Castle Point. The schools modelling showing a deficit of around 20 pupil places in the Borough in those two years

The school stated that the County Council had not modelled any predictions based on the assumption that a new building would attract more pupils. The school stated that it is confident a new school building would attract more pupils, and partially based this on the experience of the nearby Belfairs School in the Southend-on-Sea Borough Council area to confirm this belief. Since work began on the rebuild of Belfairs School admissions from catchment area Year 7's have seen a significant rise, from 95 prior to the rebuild to 163 as at 1 March 2013, with a range of 130-167 in intervening years.

There were at the time of the commencement of the consultation 234 pupils at the school from the Southend-on-Sea Borough, 79 in Year 11 and 32 in Year 7. Essex County Council contended that data from Southend-on-Sea Borough Council suggests that it is not looking to additional provision in Essex to meet its needs.

The written submission from Executive Member for Education at Southend-on-Sea Borough Council stated that whilst the number of pupils attending The Deanes School from the borough is falling, the number attending the King John School is consistent and any closure of The Deanes School would reduce the spaces available for Southend parents at the King John School. Southend-on-Sea Borough Council are predicting a shortage of provision of Year 7 places in the borough in 2017 and the closure of The Deanes School would make this problem more acute. The Executive Member acknowledged this to be a 'Southend problem', but the pressure on Year 7 places would likely see an increase in applications to schools outside the borough. The written submission also raised concern over the forecast potential numbers for The Deanes School taking into account birth rates, primary populations and housing projections.

The Save The Deanes parental group argued that parents from Basildon and Southend-on-Sea send their children to Castle Point schools due to the level of education and that any decision to close the school would leave on average 47 pupils a year facing a level of education below their expectations, thus removing the concept of parental preference.

Finances

Schools receive funding based on student numbers. Therefore, a fall in numbers reduces revenue streams and, consequently, creates issues with day-to-day running costs and salaries. The Deanes School reported an extremely high budget deficit which looked set to increase. The situation was precarious and is dependent on the school meeting future forecasts which are based on year groups of 120, whereas only 74 pupils are expected to enter the school in September 2013. The budget forecasts assume a reduction in teaching staff in each financial year up to 2016/17, together with reductions in support staff. The overall pupil roll falls by 143 in September 2013 and has a significant and immediate reduction of the budget from April 2014 in excess of £500,000. Additional funding from central government has been looked at but it is doubtful this can offer much help to The Deanes School.

The school challenged the finance forecasts by producing revised figures. The school contended the County Council was being disingenuous in using the figures it had produced and that normally the school and Essex Finance Monitoring worked together on budget figures since there had been a deficit situation around six years ago, which had taken three years to clear. The latest figures produced by the County Council were a first draft of the likely budget which had been sent to County as a starting point for dialogue. The draft budget figures were based upon a 120 intake and not re-worked to the revised intake numbers. Therefore, the figures were provisional and not intended for public scrutiny.

Student Achievement

At its most recent inspection (February 2012) The Deanes School was judged to be a good school. Both the Appleton and King John Schools at their most recent inspections, prior to the consultation period, were judged to be good or outstanding schools. Glenwood School is an outstanding popular and oversubscribed New Model Special School for children with severe and lifelong difficulties.

It is widely accepted that when the size of a secondary school falls below four forms of entry (120 pupils) it can face significant financial and educational challenges.

The school circulated a document dated 28 November 2012 from Essex County Council outlining the scope of works for the co-location of The Deanes and Glenwood Schools which states the co-location is “considered to be a visionary and pioneering way to integrate mainstream and special needs education, and will be one of the first to adopt this approach in Essex.” The paper goes on to outline the importance of the scheme and its benefits to learners and the wider community with “the provision of a secondary and special school within the Benfleet area plays a pivotal role, especially with the opportunities for community use of the school premises outside hours, thereby facilitating community regeneration and greater social cohesion.”

It was raised by a parent group that at least one other secondary school in Essex has an entry into Year 7 of less than four forms and questioned why there are no plans for that school to close.

Housing

The County Council stated that Castle Point Borough Council agreed in December 2012 to a suite of strategic sites to meet the requirements for a five-year housing supply to

cover 2014-19, creating a potential 550 dwellings – much of which is for one and two bedroom properties. This was used to predict future secondary school numbers with a factor of 10% used for one and two bedroom dwellings and 20% for family homes.

Evidence from the Leader of Castle Point Borough Council showed this to be an underestimate. Castle Point Borough Council contended that they were surprised by this statement and that the Council is planning for at least 200 homes per annum, plus an additional 20% to make up for previous shortfalls (as required by the National Planning Policy Framework), making a total of 1,200 units over the next five years. Furthermore, apart from two sites in Hadleigh Town Centre and one site on London Road Thundersley, the majority of this new development will be in the form of family housing. The Borough Council provided the Task and Finish Group with supplementary written evidence to support this statement.

Summary of the Evidence Sessions

Essex County Council

Councillor Ray Gooding, Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning, and Dr Tim Coulson, Director of Education provided evidence to the Task and Finish Group on Wednesday, 10 July 2013 at County Hall.

The complexities of the case were highlighted. The Deanes School is not a failing school, however, admission numbers are falling significantly with projected numbers showing a further fall in the school roll. If the falling roll were to persist in the near future the school will have difficulty in maintaining the appropriate quality in terms of the breadth and depth of its teaching, due to the contemporaneous reduction in funding. Therefore, the witnesses stated that the two major factors in the consultation are the future viability of the school and continuing to commit to significant capital expenditure in the face of a falling school roll.

The witnesses acknowledged the emotion attached to the proposal but confirmed that any decision would not be budget related and that monies have been ring-fenced, were it decided that the school remain open and have the Glenwood Special School relocate on the site.

With regard to the school roll the Task and Finish Group were provided with predicted numbers for the next 10 years. These showed that there are 650 pupils this year in a school built for 1,000. Over the next few years, a significant drop in numbers is expected, taking the school roll down to 500. Even if the new school was built for a reduced number of 750, the 500 students would represent 67% of total capacity. The methodology for predicting future school numbers was explained and is outlined in the minutes of the first evidence session at Appendix B. Concern was expressed, by the Chairman of the Task and Finish Group, that these numbers were, presumably, the same as those available to the previous Cabinet Member when the decision to fund the work at the school were made.

Additional demographic information suggests that any rise in student numbers as a result of a new building would be insufficient. On top of that it is presumed that many parents would avoid sending their children to a school undergoing major rebuilding work, so that, in turn, might lead to a further short-term decrease, perhaps of 5%. Once the rebuilding was finished, even if the numbers were pushed back up by the attractiveness of a new building, perhaps by 10%, this would still not bring the roll up to a sufficient number. It was stated that historic parental preference does not show strong support for The Deanes School over other schools in the area.

It was stated that the original decision to fund the rebuild was a marginal decision; and that since then the school roll has declined more markedly than anticipated. The Cabinet Member was asked to look into the original decision with regard to the school rebuild further and glean as much information as possible about the process.

To do nothing was not an option, therefore, formal consultation was the correct way forward contended Councillor Gooding. A refurbishment programme, which had been estimated as costing £4 million, was not thought to be a viable option.

The impact on the quality of: (i) the education of those having to move from The Deanes School, and (ii), the education being provided by the other schools, as they have to expand to cope with the new intake was raised, to which Dr Coulson pointed out that both the Appleton and King John Schools are looking into the matter. Both have indicated their intention to take extra students, but are consulting relevant parties about it; and they will not compromise on quality just to oblige the County Council.

The Deanes have suggested that previously they had been persuaded not to pursue Academy status, because of the promised £22m funding from Essex; Dr Coulson conceded that the school might feel let down by this. However, given the figures presented by Essex County Council, the school was faced with a deficit of £220,000, with a projected tenfold increase over the next few years, which made their position weak with regard financial viability. Dr Coulson did point out that they have produced revised figures that do balance, and work with the school is continuing, to verify these figures.

Regarding the position of Glenwood, Councillor Gooding reiterated the intention of rebuilding the school on the existing site of The Deanes. He noted that the site itself is actually owned by the Governors of The Deanes, as it is a Foundation School, so any redevelopment would require the Governors' permission.

With regard to the school selection process for prospective parents preferences should be included as if the school were to remain open; but if the decision is made to close the school, those who have made The Deanes their first choice will have this choice discarded, so they would not be disadvantaged. The Chairman asked for further details of the schools selection in this area, to see how those currently at The Deanes made their initial choices.

POST EVIDENCE SESSION POINTS OF CLARIFICATION PROVIDED: 16 JULY 2013

A number of additional pieces of information were requested by members of the Task and Finish Group when it met on 10 July and are provided below.

The numbers of pupils attending The Appleton School and King John School from The Deanes Priority Admission Areas are as follows (*Source – School Census January 2013*)

School: The Appleton	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Total
The Deanes paa	1	1	2	1	1	6
The Deanes/ King John shared paa	1	0	1	0	0	2
Total	2	1	3	1	1	8

School: King John	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Total
The Deanes paa	40	34	32	43	41	190
The Deanes/ King John shared paa	2	3	2	0	2	9
Total	42	37	34	43	43	199

The number of pupils on roll at all of the Castle Point secondary schools for the past five years, including Furtherwick Park School which closed in August 2011 were supplied.

The forecasts for Year 7 intakes for all current secondary schools in Castle Point were supplied.

1. Preference Numbers for The Deanes

There are, as of the 9th July, 500 children in total that expressed a preference for The Deanes for the September 2013 intake.

Of those 500 children, 441 are either Essex resident or are not Essex resident but have been offered an Essex secondary school; this total may also include children that have withdrawn from the process for various circumstances. The 59 children that we cannot give destinations for are not Essex resident children and are not being allocated an Essex secondary school.

The Task and Finish Group was asked to note that ECC does not hold complete preference data for other Local Authority residents, so, for example, where a Southend resident applied for Southend schools as well as The Deanes, we do not hold that data, which will explain some of the missing information.

2. Pupil Numbers used for budget calculations

Schools Block funding for 2013-14 uses pupil number from the October 2012 census. The Deanes are funded for 408 pupils at Key Stage 3 (KS3) and 393 pupils at Key Stage 4 (KS4), 801 in total. The funding totals were released to schools in February, so the school budget for 2013-14 uses the actual funding total.

For 2012-13, the pupil numbers used were from January 2012 census. The Deanes were funded for 448 pupils at KS3 and 438 pupils at KS4. 886 in total.

The school used the following pupil number forecasts.

<u>1) KS3&4 Pupil Number Forecast</u>		2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
KS3	Year 7	121	80	110	117	76
	Year 8	120	119	80	110	117
	Year 9	167	121	119	80	110
	KS3 Total	408	320	309	307	303
KS4	Year 10	177	170	121	119	80
	Year 11	216	177	170	121	119
	KS4 Total	393	347	291	240	199
<u>Plus</u>	Reception Uplift					
<u>Less</u>	KS3 Special Unit / Enhanced Provision Places	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Less</u>	KS4 Special Unit / Enhanced Provision Places	0	0	0	0	0

Funded Schools Block KS3 Total	408	320	309	307	303
Funded Schools Block KS4 Total	393	347	291	240	199
Funded Schools Block Total	801	667	600	547	502

3. Deanes / Glenwood Proposed Development

The Task and Finish Group received a high level plan that was produced for The Deanes and Glenwood BSF project and was granted outline planning permission. We do not have a plan of what the site would look like if the current colocation proposals were to go ahead as the detailed design stage has not yet been reached.

4. Capital Budget

The capital budget including the colocation of The Deanes and Glenwood was agreed by the County Council in February 2012 as part of the 2012/13 – 2016/17 capital budget.

5. Commissioning School Places in Essex 2012/17 sets out the requirement for places in maintained primary and secondary schools until 2017, and identified the areas where providers will need to match supply with demand. The document is reviewed and updated annually and can be accessed at:

<http://www.essex.gov.uk/Education-Schools/Schools/Delivering-Education-Essex/School-Organisation-Planning/Pages/Essex-School-Organisation-Plan.aspx>

The Deanes School

Jan Atkinson, Headteacher, Ian Rudd, Chair of Governors, Tosca Boothman, Vice-Chairman of Governors, Desi McKeown, Assistant Headteacher, Lesley Smith, School Business Manager, Lisa Stroud, Assistant Headteacher, Ann Willsdon, Sims Manager, Neil Lark, Parent Governor and Simon Harbrow, Community Governor/Headteacher, Westwood Primary Academy, provided evidence to the Task and Finish Group on the morning of Wednesday, 17 July at The Deanes School. Supporting evidence was provided by Nick Spenceley, Principal, SEEVIC, John Revill, Vice-Principal, SEEVIC, Judith Salter, Headteacher, Glenwood School, Dan Woodman, Assistant Headteacher, Glenwood School, Karen Cavalla, Bursar, Glenwood School, Brenda Dalley, Headteacher, Hadleigh Infant School and Steve Bish, Partnership Development Manager, Deanes School.

Prior to the evidence session the Task and Finish Group were taken on a tour of the school and the adjacent nursery. The Group found the school to be in need of considerable repair and decoration. The Group would wish to thank the two Year 8 students from the school who conducted the tour and the nursery manager for the time she gave up to show the Group around the premises.

The initial evidence from the school related to the calculations Essex County Council have used as a basis for the consultation. These calculations cover a ten-year period.

The Deanes did not contest the ECC figures relating to current pupil numbers and District forecasts. However, the way the forecast numbers for Deanes are calculated is

by filling both the Appleton and the King John schools to their capacity, and making slight adjustments to the Canvey schools, based on historical trends. The remaining numbers give the figures for The Deanes. Therefore this gives an allocation based on historical popularity, which, the school believes, is not a good method for future calculations.

The school presented four different scenarios in terms of future pupil numbers in Castle Point, namely: no change to current admissions numbers; the closure of The Deanes School; the closure of the school with Appleton and King John Schools both increasing admissions into Year 7 by 30; and, finally, The Deanes School lowering its Published Admission Number to 120. Each of these scenarios was based upon County Council forecasts and did not take account of any potential new housing. The school argued the reduction to 120, outlined in the final scenario, fits the number of available pupil places in the borough well, also giving some flexibility in terms of admission from outside the borough. The school's unique selling point has been its size – parents choosing The Deanes have done so because it is smaller than its nearest alternatives. The school itself has underestimated this as a strength in the past and intends to market this aspect more strongly in future

Jan Atkinson, Headteacher, described the relevant history. The school had a strong vision for SEN/inclusion and was due to receive £30m Building Schools for the Future funding for a rebuild for a 1,000 place school. When this was withdrawn, Essex County Council offered £23m for a reduced size (900), plus 150 for Glenwood School. The other aspect to consider was the Olympic legacy for the area, with the School as the hub. There are 42 schools already signed up to use the school sport and leisure facilities for the next two years; and the school has signed up to a trust of 16 primary schools. The school received strong support for this from the County Council. It was a different approach – a vision for inclusivity, bringing in Glenwood as well – building on Olympic and paralympic values. This was seen as a pioneering approach. Dialogue was conducted with several senior officers at County Hall, right up to May 2013. The only change was that the numbers were reduced to 750. The school was even encouraged to retain a larger leadership team than she required, with this in view.

In response to a question from the Chairman on what the school's response to a large increase in applications would be, Mrs Atkinson confirmed that they would like to retain the unique selling point of the smaller school ethos, although she might look to increasing numbers, perhaps to 750. Mrs Atkinson added that there are a number of smaller schools in Essex who have expressed the wish to form a smaller schools group, to share ideas. They have asked her to assist in this process and dialogue is already ongoing.

The school presented revised budget figures. These required a reduction in staffing level, but this reflected the reduced anticipated intake figures. It was acknowledged the figures were very different to the figures presented as part of the original consultation. It was explained that The Deanes School had been in a deficit situation a few years ago, and had come out of it, after which the school worked with Essex Finance Monitoring, holding meetings at least termly. The school had prepared figures based on a 120 intake, but had been asked to rework these, based on ECC's intake figures, which they did. A meeting with Essex Finance Monitoring had been scheduled for 22 April to consider these figures, but this had been cancelled. So the figures quoted by ECC were provisional ones, which were never intended for public scrutiny.

The Chair of Governors, Mr Rudd confirmed his belief that the County Council were being disingenuous in using these figures. Mrs Atkinson explained that normally, the school and Essex Finance Monitoring would work together on these figures. This had been the process for the past six years. However, in this case, there was no dialogue, until the consultation was announced.

Nick Spenceley, Principal of SEEVIC made three points, that in his view:

- i. The proposals have not been considered holistically. SEEVIC is linked closely with local schools and takes about 130 pupils each year from The Deanes. He was surprised not to have been consulted;
- ii. The Special Needs Provision in relation to the capital building project has not been thought out;
- iii. The School has a major interest in sport – this is an area that could have been worked on and developed.

If The Deanes were to close, SEEVIC would expect to lose a significant number of those pupils who would have gone there. It would represent about 9-10%. This would compound the existing problem of falling rolls at the moment. The overall impact might amount to the present total roll of 2,700 dropping to 2,000 in a few years' time.

Judith Salter, Head of Glenwood, added that there is a strong feeling of “can do” and “can I help you?” that is quite unique. There is a very strong feeling of the community of schools. She added that many parents were unaware of the work carried out at The Deanes. Over the last four years Glenwood School has developed a strong relationship with The Deanes, which has had a significant impact on the pupils, and this has had a knock-on effect on the parents as well. The two schools have already started looking at ways of interchanging staff and Deanes pupils have come to see another area of potential job opportunities through their contact with Glenwood. The biggest current concern for Glenwood is the new building, but the next priority would be to co-locate with The Deanes, so they could develop the work they have already set out to do.

Mrs Atkinson confirmed that, in the wake of the good Ofsted report, with outstanding elements, the School had considered changing to Academy status. In fact, it was the first of the schools in the area to take this forward. However, ECC asked the School not to, because they wanted to give them the money for the rebuild. The Academy paperwork was drawn up in February 2011, at which point The Deanes withdrew from the process, as they had been assured of the ECC's support.

In the afternoon the Task and Finish Group heard evidence from Councillor Colin Riley, Castle Point Borough Council, David Franklin, Headteacher, Chelmer Valley High School, David Smith, Manager of The Sports Centre at The Deanes School, John Wilson, Rayleigh Archery Club, Lisa Burgoyne, Youth Sport Trust, Ashlie Smith, Cartwheels Gymnastics Club, John Pitts, Eastwood Netball Club, Eddie Moss, Deanes Tennis Club, and several parental representatives of the Save The Deanes Group (Linda Allport-Hodge, Rebecca Howard, Andy Johnson, Russell Pagan, Sarah Raven and Kerry Skinner)

Councillor Colin Riley (CPBC) drew Members' attention to a note he had prepared, setting out his questions and those he felt the County Council needed to answer. In summary, he asked:

- Can the King John and Appleton schools accommodate these extra pupils? (Some Green Belt restrictions apply.)
- Will they be able to provide similar sporting facilities?
- Will they be able to provide the links to the special educational needs as provided by Glenwood?
- If the closure goes ahead, this will delay the rebuild of Glenwood by 18 months; how will this affect the provision of Special Educational Needs?
- Is there a Plan B, for a rebuild on another site?
- If The Deanes is successful in becoming an academy/free school, is there a further plan?

The closure of The Deanes would limit parental choice, as it provides a genuine alternative option to the other schools in the area.

David Smith, Manager of the Sports Centre at The Deanes, drew Members' attention to the strong involvement in the community. John Wilson of Rayleigh Archery Club acknowledged the long term support of The Deanes. Lisa Burgoyne of Youth Sport Trust spoke and told the Task and Finish Group that the Trust was set up as part of the creation of specialist sports colleges – of which The Deanes was one, and she listed the School's involvement with the Trust: Ashlie Smith of Cartwheels Gymnastics Club pointed out that it would be hard to find another suitable location for the club to meet if The Deanes were to close. The School not only makes a lot of time available to the club, but it discounts hire fees as well. John Pitts, of Eastwood Netball Club, drew attention to the letter he had provided for Members, providing background on the club and reasons for the importance of The Deanes; but he asked the Committee to note one particular fact – that, because of its size, the club needs to use both the sports hall and the floodlit area for their training sessions, and the floodlit area for evening matches. He is unaware of any comparable facilities in the area, from Southend to Basildon to Chelmsford. He believes that if the facilities were to become unavailable, the club would have to close. Finally, Eddie Moss of The Deanes Tennis Club, set out a few facts:

- 300 members (100 adult, 200 junior)
- Much coaching provision at all levels
- Very inclusive attitude – all standards play
- Open all year
- Very inexpensive - £30 per annum for adults; £20 per annum for children.

Parental representatives addressed the Task and Finish Group and the full copy of the response to the ECC Consultation by the Save The Deanes Group was tabled and received by the Group.

Linda Allport-Hodge voiced the Save The Deanes Group's concern over two particular issues:

- The actual capacity of the King John and Appleton schools to take up The Deanes pupils (King John had at least planning permission for 6th Form accommodation, but Appleton had nothing.)

- The Deanes has an Ofsted “Good school with outstanding features” – so it is not failing school. It also has excellent sports facilities, which are part of the school too. The other two schools simply do not have such facilities.

Mrs Allport-Hodge indicated the reasons for sending her son to The Deanes:

- Good education
- Good general ethos
- Rising standards – has shown a percentage improvement on a par with the best in the country
- Friendly atmosphere
- Small
- Good at engaging children – often using sport as a positive activity
- Inclusive.

Russell Pagan pointed out that the children themselves have a very positive attitude toward the school. It may not be “shiny and new”, unlike King John School, but it is seen as a part of the community, and removing it would be felt as a loss to the community. Furthermore, this community element feeds back to the school itself – the pupils themselves benefit from this state of affairs. The other schools are just that – but do not hold an equivalent position in the community.

Rebecca Howard pointed out that:

- Personal choice would be lessened if it was closed
- The School has a very positive attitude toward other schools, providing equipment, for example
- The School uses pre-term sports holiday clubs to encourage new Year 7’s to get to know each other before starting at the School
- The education is not just about exam results – although these are good; there is an education in community involvement
- Her daughter is happy there.

Andy Johnson pointed out that The Deanes had not been their first choice of school for their eldest child, but now she is there, she is thriving, and now his other children do not want to go anywhere else.

Kerry Skinner pointed out that her son is an elite gymnast, who requires a lot of time away from school to support his sport. He has a designated mentor who understands his sport needs as well as his studies, and The Deanes has reallocated his timetable to enable him to keep up with his homework.

All the parents present were strongly in favour of the link with Glenwood School and commented that the bringing together of the two schools onto one site would be revolutionary, providing a unique educational opportunity and that the attitude of the children themselves is very good – they find any poor attitude toward people with disabilities offensive.

The parents felt there is an element of “constructive closure” about the way the consultation process has been undertaken. Parents are uncertain about whether the School will be open, and so may not list it in their choices; so afterwards the County

Council might look at the figures, see that they are low and so be able to justify the closure – on the grounds that nobody wanted to go there. There is also the impact on the parents of those children from Basildon and Southend – and on those schools themselves. There will be huge pressure put on the schools there.

Essex County Council Castle Point Members

Councillors Jamie Huntman, Alan Bayley and Ray Howard provided evidence to the Task and Finish Group on Monday, 29 July 2013 at Castle Point Borough Council. In addition a written submission was received from Councillor Jillian Reeves. A request to give evidence from Castle Point Borough Councillor Andrew Sheldon was also granted.

Councillor Huntman

The affiliation the school has with sport and the Olympic legacy was raised; with the question posed whether the legacy ends at the M25. It was stated that it would not be correct to renege on the initial decision to rebuild the school and co-locate with Glenwood School.

Reference was made to the East of England draft plan which states that 4,000 houses are needed in Castle Point in next 20 years. At a minimum this would mean that one whole school's worth of new houses are required in Castle Point. On questioning it was stated that there is no great support in Castle Point for new housing but there is unquestionably a need for it. The school is an emotive subject and most people do not want development on green fields, however, there are certain areas that are not areas of beauty and we need to look at facts and we more housing is needed it was stated.

When asked why the school is comparatively unpopular and parents are not choosing the school as a preferred option, Councillor Huntman responded that a promise was made for a rebuild and that the school should 'hold its nerve'. We need schools that suit all abilities and interests and if the school was rebuilt people would be queuing up to go there. He also stated that the school has been 'in limbo' since the announcement that there would be a rebuild.

With regard to the integration of Glenwood School Councillor Huntman stated that many parents have come to him to say they are keen that the school is integrated at The Deanes School.

In terms of community involvement Councillor Huntman said the school plays a significant role in the community and that he has never seen such public support for a school.

Councillor Alan Bayley

Councillor Bayley stated that when the Glenwood School is moved its present site will be available for housing. However, he stated that local residents were concerned about social housing.

Councillor Bayley mentioned significant housing developments in Rayleigh and Wickford and the children living in these homes will need a school in a few years' time and it therefore made no sense to close The Deanes School.

Councillor Ray Howard

Councillor Howard stated that he wished to be associated with the comments from colleagues within Castle Point in respect of the consultation to close The Deanes School. Councillor Howard said he did have concerns about the falling school roll and the potential budgetary deficit, and that it was right and proper these were brought to the attention of the Task and Finish Group. However, he had been taken aback when it was announced that the consultation process would be about to start.

Councillor Howard mentioned that Castle Point Borough Council has been criticised for not building enough houses and that it must find housing numbers in the borough.

Glenwood School has served the needs of those with disabilities for a considerable time and it is recognised the School needs to be rebuilt. Councillor Howard stated that CPBC Planning Department had expressed previous concerns about any expansion of the King John School site.

It was Councillor Howard's opinion that falling numbers at the school are a short-term blip and would rise rapidly in the next ten years. He stated he would hate it in ten years' time for the County Council to be forced to spend considerable money on building a new school after closing The Deanes School.

Councillor Andrew Sheldon

Councillor Sheldon initially declared an interest as a Governor of King John School. However, he has voluntarily suspended his governorship during the consultation period as he is receiving correspondence from residents.

Councillor Sheldon stated it is hard to reconcile how there was such a change of policy by the County Council almost overnight, unless there was a statistical revelation and there must have been a concern about falling rolls that was not addressed when the initial decision to rebuild the school was made. At no point were concerns raised with The Deanes by ECC and if there had they could have been asked to convene a special group of governors to look at the issue. He said the school was not asked for revised budget figures prior to the closure announcement.

With regard to students at the school from outside the immediate area Councillor Sheldon stated that you would be hard pressed to find a secondary school in Castle Point that does not have students from Southend-on-Sea and Basildon. What is the problem of parents sending their children to Castle Point from Southend and Basildon? It seems The Deanes are shouldering the blame for parents in Basildon not choosing to send their children to local schools there with ECC forcing aspirant parents in Basildon to send their children to local Basildon schools. He stated he was not sure why this aspect is raised so significantly in the consultation document, whereas the sporting facilities are not highlighted within it.

Councillor Sheldon referred to a Freedom of Information request regarding the potential rebuild of the school with a net capacity of 750. He stated the response indicated that ECC would expect 750 to be reached if the rebuild were to occur.

Councillor Sheldon also stated that too much emphasis in the consultation is being placed on Castle Point housing numbers and that account should also be taken of developments in Basildon and Southend-on-Sea.

Rebecca Harris MP

Rebecca Harris MP provided evidence to the Task and Finish Group on Monday, 29 July 2013 at Castle Point Borough Council.

Mrs Harris stated that The Deanes School had been promised monies for rebuild and had been asked not to apply for Academy status. Therefore, the school has not redecorated as it did not wish to waste taxpayers' money. Tenders were issued in March 2013 for the rebuild. Mrs Harris questioned what had happened in the ECC Education Department to have such a dramatic shift of policy.

There is a national blip in secondary school places. This is temporary and should be recognised. The decision to close The Deanes School would be a short-term decision based on short-term factors thus leaving the county vulnerable in future years.

Mrs Harris stated that as the school has always served out-of-borough students she could not understand why such a play is made of this in the consultation documentation, which is, in her opinion, absurd, unbalanced and biased in terms of out-of-borough students. There is a clear assumption in the consultation document that the two other schools in Benfleet will remain popular. How can this assumption be made but no assumption that The Deanes won't become popular?

There is statutory guidance on the closure of a maintained school, and the standard of education is something ECC must consider. Out of 73 schools in Essex The Deanes is ranked 44th highest on five A*-C GCSEs, and 28th on value-added. This is an extraordinary and unprecedented case of a County Council closing a good school. It is a perverse decision on a range of factors including taking something out of the system that is unique in terms of its outreach to the 48 primary schools in the area. The knowledge and relationships that have been built up will be a loss to the wider community. Mrs Harris stated we should not be talking about the current economic climate but the education of children. It will be catastrophic and she urged the County Council to approach central government for capital funding.

On questioning Mrs Harris stated that Castle Point is lucky to have such great schools in the borough. She said small schools offer something different and unique. There is a desire for that and many children and parents feel more comfortable in the smaller environment. The implication in the consultation document is why would you want anything more than two outstanding schools in Benfleet. Meaningful choices for parents should be encouraged and there is vast potential for the co-location of The Deanes and Glenwood Schools. The two schools have tired buildings compared to the other schools in the area.

Following a question relating to whether a third school is needed in Benfleet if the other two schools can cope with the additional numbers Mrs Harris contended that while she would not want the County Council to waste public funds it is quite wrong that capital

spend be saved. She requested the Task and Finish Group look again at the projected numbers and they would show that it is quite likely a new school would be needed in five years' time if The Deanes School were to be closed. She also stated that it is not acceptable to squeeze children into other schools they did not want to go to.

Castle Point Borough Council

Councillor Pam Challis OBE, Leader of Castle Point Borough Council, plus Councillors Cliff Brunt, Peter Burch, Bill Dick, Simon Hart and Norman Ladzrie, Castle Point Borough Council; and Steve Rogers, Head of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods, Castle Point Borough Council, provided evidence to the Task and Finish Group on Tuesday, 30 July 2013 at Castle Point Borough Council. In addition a written submission was received from Councillor James Courtenay, Executive Councillor, Children and Learning, Southend-on-Sea Borough Council.

Councillor Challis stated the contribution of The Deanes School to education in the area does just not rest with secondary education but also to the contribution the school makes to local primary schools, particularly in the sporting sphere. Primary schools in the area would be left in difficulty if The Deanes were to close. Councillor Burch stated that the school also supports primary school children in subjects other than sport – this is something, in his opinion, that King John and Appleton do not necessarily do. The school also hosts public sport and leisure facilities, and being an Olympic Borough, this is something the Borough Council would wish to support. Councillor Ladzrie mentioned the close links The Deanes School has with Hadleigh Junior School including providing the junior school with accommodation when it had subsidence issues.

Councillor Brunt referred to the housing numbers provided by ECC. He contended the number of houses to be built in Castle Point is more than that provided by the County Council. Councillor Brunt also questioned whether the Appleton and King John schools would be able to take the additional numbers from any closure of The Deanes School in future years.

Councillor Dick referred to a recent planning application from King John School which was successful despite CPBC Planning Officers' refusal notice. Steve Rogers stated that the King John is situated within green belt and is quite extensively developed and any applications are tested against national and local green belt guidelines. Further work needs to be done at King John with regard to car parking following the planning approval by the Committee. The school is at the limit in terms of on-site playing field provision. The Appleton School is not within green belt, but further building at the school brings difficulties in terms of playing field provision. Appleton School is served by a residential street so difficulties would be expected at opening and closing times in terms of additional traffic. On questioning it was confirmed that any additional students would have to be accommodated within existing buildings.

With regard to housing developments Cllr Dick mentioned developments in the Basildon Borough and Rochford District Council areas close to the A127. Additionally, there is a pre-application for 450 new homes very close to The Deanes School on the relief road from Stadium Way to Daws Heath Road. There is also a planning appeal for 130 homes close by. The Planning Inspectorate says that Castle Point Borough Council is 1,000

houses behind need and is required to build at least 200 new homes a year. Following questioning on the number of houses CPBC will build in the next two years Councillor Dick responded that in addition to those previously mentioned there would be 170 new homes on Felsted Road, plus 160 on Kiln Road and around 50-60 at other locations in the borough. Councillor Ladzrie stated the school owns land in Scrub Lane which will be sold off to Essex County Council and 150 new homes will be located there.

Councillor Challis stated the Thames Gateway and Lakeside Basin developments will have a huge impact on the area in the next five to ten years. As these plans come out in the public arena there will likely be huge pressures on the borough. Councillor Burch mentioned the consultation on the third Thames crossing, with one of the preferred options being close to the borough. If this were to happen a significant number of people will be displaced and some of these will come to the borough and introduce additional pressures.

Steve Rogers stated that Castle Point Borough Council has nine strategic sites and will provide 1,200 dwellings and this is the five year plan. The Planning Inspectorate did not believe the council has a five year land supply. There is a risk developers will come forward and argue any developments be brought forward on that basis. The Council is looking at any adjustments in green belt policy, and is looking at all parts of the green belt and this might include the area around the King John School.

When questioned about how many of the new dwellings are single occupancy and flats, as contended by Essex County Council, Mr Rogers responded development viability work has shown that flats are not viable in the CPBC area, therefore 90% of all the plans going forward at the moment are for family houses. As a supplementary question Mr Rogers was asked about the contention from ECC that the new dwellings will, in the main, be one and two bedroom dwellings. He reiterated that developers say smaller units are simply not viable in Castle Point. He would provide the Task and Finish Group with a Council resolution from September 2012 which outlines the nine strategic sites in the borough, and the Strategic Land Availability Assessment which show that new units will, by-and-large, be family units. Councillor Challis, as Leader of CPBC, would also confirm this in writing to the Task and Finish Group (copy of letter attached as Appendix 1 to the Written Evidence). These documents were subsequently provided to the Task and Finish Group.

Councillor Hart noted that if a three-mile circle were drawn around the location of The Deanes School it would take in housing developments from other districts/boroughs.

Councillor Challis raised a concern around the admissions criteria of both the Appleton and King John schools in that the lead admission criterion is children with siblings at the school. As both schools take children from outside the borough this would impact upon local youngsters who will see children from outside the borough get priority over them.

Councillor Hart reiterated that The Deanes School takes many students from other adjacent boroughs, and that 18 months ago the school was at capacity. He stated that when Dr Tim Coulson was questioned, at one of the public consultation meetings, about the forecast numbers for a rebuilt Deanes he confirmed that the County Council would work on the basis that numbers would be at the capacity of 750.

In response to questions about parental preference which indicates local parents are choosing not to send their children to The Deanes School and the philosophy and ethos of the school, Councillor Challis stated there are children who are not happy in a larger school environment and The Deanes has a community feel to it. Councillor Brunt said the school is outward looking, undertaking significant outreach activity. Nothing has been done to the building and the school has been hanging on, due to promises of monies. Some parents will have seen the building and decided not to send children there on that basis. He also said that it was not clear how the £2million for the two other schools to accommodate The Deanes School students was to be used.

When questioned about the benefits of the integration of the special needs school Councillor Dick responded that Glenwood School has children with challenging needs. The Deanes have associated themselves with this school and wish to work with them. If Glenwood School was moved in isolation it would be no better than it currently is. The whole ethos of the integration was to provide pupils with disadvantage a chance. The Deanes School have always been outward looking and have, in the past, struggled for numbers. The promise of the rebuild and co-location with Glenwood School would have created an inclusive community. For the good of Castle Point the school should be retained. Councillor Burch said he was concerned that support and encouragement for disadvantaged youngsters would disappear if The Deanes were to close.

Castle Point Borough Council could not provide any guarantees to maintain or relocate the sports facilities at The Deanes School given budgetary constraints on Local Authorities.

In conclusion Councillor Dick stated it is wrong to go out to consultation to close The Deanes School rather than consulting on its future. People and parents think it is a *fait accompli*. The view of the public in Castle Point is not to close the school but to consider how to make it work.

Essex County Council (second evidence session)

Councillor Ray Gooding, Dave Hill, Executive Director for Schools, Children and Families and Dr Tim Coulson, Director of Education, Essex County Council, provided evidence to the Task and Finish Group on Tuesday, 6 August 2013 at County Hall, Chelmsford.

Dave Hill pointed out that when he arrived at the County Council in November 2010, the BSF programme had just been withdrawn. He took a view of capital use across the board; and one conclusion he reached was that special schools had been neglected and should be supported. He shared this view with Terry Reynolds, the Director of Education and Learning at the time. At the same time, Cllr Castle, the Cabinet Member for Education, made it clear that The Deanes was his first priority. Mr Hill noted that the original capital figure of £26 million had not included Glenwood but was simply a replacement for the BSF Plan for The Deanes. However, as it was considered a marginal decision at the time, discussion ensued, resulting in the idea of bringing the two schools together. The figure was also reduced to £22 million.

Mr Hill believes there is no correlation between rebuild and good education outcomes and he made this clear to Cllr Castle at the time. Mr Hill suggested that what has happened in the intervening period is that the numbers have not been maintained and so the school is not now viable, moving forward.

Regarding documentation, the capital programme would have come to the Council's Corporate Leadership Team, but it would not have been presented in great detail. Mr Hill had urged the Cabinet Member to be cautious, and he heard similar concerns voiced by Mr Reynolds. If there was to be a rebuild, it should be ensured that

- It would do what it was supposed to do
- It would seem a reasonable decision to other schools that had had their own BSF funding withdrawn.

In response to a question from the Chairman about whether Cllr Castle thought he should walk away from this decision, given the potential for a perceived conflict of interest, Mr Hill stated no, but he as SCF Director had made it clear to the Cabinet Member that he should be careful in general. Such conversations did take place.

The Chairman of the Task and Finish Group noted that Cllr Candy, the then Cabinet Member for Children's Services, did demonstrate the commitment for the rebuild with Glenwood by signing off £400k to purchase the property at the school entrance.

Mr Hill agreed that it may have been a close call, but it had not been a perverse decision. However he added that Cllr Castle would have received the same advice as Cllr Gooding, had he remained Cabinet Member in May of this year.

Mr Hill responded to a few questions from Members and outlined:

- The Deanes has not been considered in isolation – mobility in respect of the unitaries and other areas has been factored into the figures
- There seems to have been a sudden push for a different decision; but this is not so – the capital programme is reviewed annually and decisions made on the back of this. The change in administration provides an extra timing element here, with the addition of the pre-election period, during which time few changes are implemented
- Regarding the potential “chicken and egg” dilemma of prospective parents, who may be put off the school by its state of poor repair, because it has been promised capital expenditure, but also the prospect of a newbuild may also put them off – this may be so, but the prospect of a better school emerging is what parents have to take into consideration. No doubt it will put some off, but that is inevitable
- Although there is a difference in approach shown by The Deanes in comparison to the two other local schools, he did not accept the argument that this is an issue of choice for parents. In an ideal world, the ECC would provide the full range of schools in every area, but that is not possible. Closing The Deanes leaves two very good schools in the area; it certainly means less choice for parents, but not a lack of choice
- This is a harder choice to make, as The Deanes is not a bad school; but this does not make the decision wrong.

The Chairman of the Task and Finish Group reminded Members that certain questions had arisen from their initial scrutiny, which they had referred back to the Cabinet Member and Dr Coulson. Some of these had been answered already, but some remained.

The first concerned the £2 million funding for the Appleton and King John schools. Cllr Gooding explained the proposals. The money was for capital expenditure, to allow the development of facilities. Cllr Gooding confirmed he was confident that these schools would take the extra children. Each school has conducted its own consultation and nothing has come back indicating a significantly adverse reaction.

A further question arising from the first evidence session was whether the Council had a view of the integration of special schools with mainstream schools. Cllr Gooding believed there was no ECC policy or view. It may need to be looked at, but his own belief was that it should develop on a local basis. In this case, barriers had been broken down, but the way it has developed has been the result of convenience. The redevelopment of Glenwood is evidently required, but it should be considered as a separate issue.

With regard to potential housing developments Cllr Gooding acknowledged the apparent disparity between the different sets of figures. He quoted from the new Local Plan Proposed Policies document (dated May 2103), which Castle Point had shared on a confidential basis with the County Council (and so is not referred to in the documentation). Amongst other things this alludes to the need for more smaller dwellings to be built, to provide housing for entering the property ladder. This emphasis, which was reflected in the County Council's original document, seemed to contradict the view expressed by Borough Councillors at the 30 July meeting, which put the emphasis on the need for 3-bedroom family homes. With regard to this Dr Coulson made several points:

- Castle Point had confirmed that the details were right at the time of the review
- The Chief Executive of Essex County Council has written to the Chief Executive of Castle Point BC, seeking clarification of the figures, as these are important for the proposals
- The school itself agrees that 600 is the crucial number – the problem seems to be that parents have indicated that they do not want their children to go there. The school is also no longer seen as a school of escape, as the negative side of the schools in the surrounding area is changing. There is capacity in the Basildon schools, although they are not particularly popular. We need to see if the demographics will change sufficiently to ensure that the school will fill up in the medium, rather than the long term.

With regard to the opposition of Southend-on-Sea Borough Council to the potential closure of The Deanes School Councillor Gooding stated:

- At a meeting with parents from Southend whose children attend The Deanes, the response of these parents was to ask what Southend is doing, as they were unable to get local places in the Borough
- The approach is different in the Borough, where there are grammar schools. There is a trade-off, as ECC children attend their grammar schools, and children from the Borough attend ECC schools. All three of these Castle Point schools have children from Southend

- He acknowledged that closing The Deanes would affect the movement of children around the area – the wider area is relevant, but it is not as simple as it may sound at first.

With regard to the process on the consultation, the Task and Finish Group heard that should either the Appleton or King John Schools receive an *Ofsted* Report at a lower level than that of The Deanes School the County Council would still be able to use the schools to provide places for The Deanes pupils. In terms of the final decision the Group heard that the Cabinet Member would have to take a decision, based on two particular reports: 1, from County Council officers, which comprises a synthesis of the consultation, a working through of the argument and a recommendation; and 2, the report of the Task & Finish Group.

As a final statement, the Cabinet Member confirmed that he believed the school's case to be robust with a school roll of 600. However, the issue is whether that figure is truly achievable.

Written Evidence

1. Councillor Jillian Reeves, Essex County Council Member for Hadleigh

There seems to be a great deal of unease amongst the parents of The Deanes School and concerns that everything is a *fait accompli* and no matter what is said – will have no impact on the position.

It would be very helpful if the public could be reassured that this Task & Finish Group will be acting **independently** and **impartially** with regard to its deliberations.

There has been a great deal of irritation that meetings which have been arranged, have been for specific groups only – rather than making them open to a wider audience, which has resulted in some people being turned away as being ineligible to attend. I would hope that the Task & Finish Group will look into why this restriction or segregation was imposed, rather than the more open approach.

This is not the first time this sort of problem has arisen. A similar situation occurred in Harlow some years ago at Passmores School.....and look at them now..... they are thriving.

THE DEANES SCHOOL IS NOT A FAILING SCHOOL!

Questions from Councillor Reeves

1. What is the makeup of the pupils of the school between those who live in the catchment area and those outside?
- A. The school census of January 2013 indicated that 275 of the 793 pupils on roll at The Deanes lived in the priority admissions area for the School. This represented 35% of the total.

Of the 65% of pupils who lived outside the priority admissions area the main areas which they were drawn from were as follows:

Southend	30%	(234 pupils)
The Appleton and King John area	15%	(122 pupils)
Basildon area	12%	(95 pupils)
Canvey Island	5%	(43 pupils)
Other areas	3%	(24 pupils)

Whilst Southend provides the largest number of pupils from outside the School's priority admissions area numbers from this area have declined over the past 5 years. The numbers of pupils residing in Southend on roll at the school in each of the year groups in January 2013 were as follows:

Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11
32	26	43	54	79

The number of pupils residing in the Basildon area has increased over the past 3 years. The numbers of pupils residing in the Basildon area on roll at the school in each of the year groups in January 2013 is as follows:

Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11
22	25	26	6	16

The number of pupils from Canvey Island has declined over the past two years with only 5 pupils in Year 7 and 4 pupils in Year 8.

2. What action plans have the governors and headteacher taken to address the falling roll?
 - A. Our discussions with the school have been about building plans and possibilities for the site with a smaller roll.
3. What are the financial implications of the falling roll?
 - A. Student numbers fall by 140 in September 2013 as a cohort of 216 in Year 11 leaves and is replaced by an expected intake of 76 – this leads to a loss of income of £544,000 for 2014-15.
4. Are you assuming that there would need to be major investment in the other two schools to cope with the numbers?
 - A. We are allowing £2m expenditure in each school.
5. Why has the pupil roll fallen?
 - A. The fall in the pupil roll at The Deanes is largely attributable to its declining popularity in relation to other schools serving the area and beyond. The number of children that the School has been able to attract from within its own priority admissions area and the areas served by The Appleton and King John schools has declined. The numbers of children it has been able to attract from outside the area, particularly from Southend-on-Sea and Canvey Island has also declined. These declines have not been compensated for by the increased intake from the Basildon area.
This overall decline in popularity has continued for September 2013, with a planned intake of only 74 pupils. Of these only 21 pupils live within The Deanes catchment area, with 9 from the areas served by The Appleton and King John. With no significant increase in the numbers feeding through from primary schools in The Deanes area the situation is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future.
6. Is the headteacher a problem?
 - A. Ofsted reported that leadership of the school was good.
7. According to figures, it looks as though the Appleton and King John Schools have spare capacity of about 100, so what happens to the other 400 pupils who currently attend Deanes?
 - A. We expect to expand the Appleton and King John Schools by 150 (30 per year); we expect students from Year 9 upwards to stay at The Deanes for the rest of their time in school; we expect students in September in their first two years to spend two years at The Deanes and then three years at the Appleton and King John schools.

8. Who will pay for transportation to other schools for present and future pupils
A There will be a small number of pupils that the County Council will pay for transport.
9. The other two schools cannot provide extra accommodation, how will it be provided?
A. We are allowing £2m expenditure in each school.
10. ECC education officers & the school must have known about the falling roll over the projected years when Steve C was in post, why did they fail to stop Stephen telling the schools & me that the funding was secured & the rebuilds would definitely go ahead?
A. At the time of its most recent inspection in February 2012 there were 886 pupils on the school roll. At this time, the building programme was agreed. Unfortunately, by September 2013, it is estimated this will have fallen to 656 and in the next three years it is predicted that this will fall further to around 500.

2. Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council



From Councillor: James Courtenay
Ward: Blenheim Park
Home Address: 14 Eros Avenue, Southend on Sea Essex, SS2 5LP
Home Telephone: 01702 611669

Date: 22nd July 2013

Cllr. R. Gooding,
Cabinet Member for Education &
Lifelong Learning,
Essex County Council,
County Hall,
Market Road,
Chelmsford,
Essex.
CM1 1QH.

Dear Councillor Gooding,

Response by Southend-on-Sea Borough Council to the Essex County Council consultation on the proposal to discontinue The Deanes School.

Thank you for sending me the consultation document and for coming to Southend as part of the consultation process to meet with Southend-on-Sea Borough Council Members and local parents. These meetings gave me the opportunity to hear first hand the presentation by your team and the questions and concerns of parents and Members and your responses.

As was said at the meeting the boundary of Southend-on-Sea Borough Council and Essex County Council does not mean anything to parents or young people and there is a need to continue to offer a mixed provision of schools for residents in the South East of Essex, maximising choice. I have set out below a number of concerns that this Council has that would be contrary to this aim. These have been drawn from feedback from young people, parents, Members and officers.

Although the number of pupils attending The Deanes School from Southend is falling, the number of pupils from Southend attending King John School has remained fairly consistent and the closure of The Deanes School will reduce the spaces available for Southend parents at King John School. The wide variation in forecast figures year on year at The Deanes School means that 60 additional places at King John and Appleton Schools will not be sufficient and



so will further displace Southend pupils. Very few Southend pupils attend Appleton School and in recent years there have been no offers made to Southend pupils for the school.

The rising number of primary pupils in Southend will transfer through to the secondary sector. Based on the current pattern of admissions and current provision there will be a significant shortage of Year 7 places in Southend secondary schools by September 2017. The closing of The Deanes School and less availability at King John School will make this shortage of places more acute. Whilst this can rightly be said to be a Southend problem, and indeed we are actively planning to address it, there are significant numbers of Essex pupils attending Southend schools. Southend offers a wide range of opportunities for Essex pupils but if The Deanes School were to close the offer from Essex to Southend residents would significantly reduce and the overall range of provision across South East Essex will be reduced. In addition should the pattern of admissions change and fewer Essex pupils attend Southend grammar schools in the future there will be a need for additional Essex places.

The pressure on Year 7 places in Southend is likely to result in an increase in applications for schools outside of Essex and it is unclear if the forecasts for The Deanes School take account of this potential increase or indeed increases elsewhere in Essex. It was asked at the meeting what account has been taken of Southend pupils in the forecast of pupil numbers for The Deanes School and I am informed that your officers do not take account of Southend pupils specifically in the forecast for The Deanes School but use an overall number for all those outside of the area. This appears somewhat short sighted; joint planning and sharing of data with Southend officers would seem to me to have been essential prior to decision to consult. I am disappointed that this did not happen and suggest this takes place as a matter of urgency before any decisions are made.

There is concern as to the accuracy of the forecast potential numbers for The Deanes School taking into account the rising birth rate and primary population, the new housing figures and an allowance for the impact on applications of the originally proposed new build at The Deanes School. The answers given at the meeting here in Southend have not convinced me that the pupil number forecasting underpinning the consultation has been detailed enough to ensure we have sufficient long term capacity in the area.

The proposal to close the school has not taken into account the subsequent reduction in parental choice and the specific reasons why parents chose The Deanes School such as its sports specialism or its inclusive ethos regarding SEN. It would have been good to see alternative proposals as to how to promote the school and increase take up of places as well as a proposal to close.

Providing stability for pupils staying at the school until Year 11 is of serious concern should the school close. The questions as to how a full curriculum can be delivered, the GCSE choices of pupils met, experienced and familiar

staff retained and the quality of the learning experience maintained have not in my view been satisfactorily answered.

The additional places at King John and Appleton Schools, whilst mooted, do not yet seem to be secure in terms of school or planning authority agreement. Neither is it clear how current pupils at The Deanes School will be allocated between the two alternative schools, especially in light of the fact that Appleton School, mainly due to distance, is not a school of choice for Southend young people and their parents.

Based on the above issues and concerns, Southend-on-Sea Borough Council cannot support the closure of The Deanes School at this time. We are of course happy to continue to discuss the issues with you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Courtenay', with a stylized flourish at the end.

James Courtenay
Executive Councillor
Children and Learning

3. Basildon Borough Council

Basildon Borough Council

The Basildon Centre, St Martin's Square

Basildon, Essex SS14 1DL

Tel: 01268 533333

www.basildon.gov.uk

Date 9 August 2013

Please ask for Paul Burkinshaw

Department Policy, Performance and Review

Tel. No 01268 294422

E-Mail paul.burkinshaw@basildon.gov.uk

Essex County Council

School Organisations and Planning

PO Box 4261

County Hall

Chelmsford

Essex

CM1 1GS

Ref PB/JS

Dear Sir/Madam,

**THE FUTURE OF DEANES SCHOOL – RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION ON THE
PROPOSAL
TO DISCONTINUE THE SCHOOL WITH EFFECT FROM 31 AUGUST
2016**

I am writing to provide you with the borough council's response to the above matter. Firstly, I would like to express my disappointment that the borough council was not formally consulted on this matter, which meant we were unable to fully engage in the formal consultation process whilst it was being undertaken. The consultation document states that the proposals would be specifically distributed to all statutory consultees and that would include "*any local authority likely to be affected by the proposals, in particular neighbouring authorities where there may be significant crossborder movement of pupils*". In our view this merited the inclusion of Basildon Borough Council as a formal consultee as a large number of children from the borough attend The Deanes School. I am conscious that the consultation period closed on 22 July 2013, however I trust that in light of the fact that we were not formally consulted, the County Council will still consider our comments as part of the formal consultation exercise, which I understand will be the case.

In light of the issues I set out in this letter, Basildon Borough Council is not supportive of a decision to close The Deanes School. Parental choice with regards to which school a child attends and ensuring a mixed provision of local schools for parents to choose from, is vitally important and should be maintained. I understand there are 95 children living within the Basildon Borough area who currently attend The Deanes School and the intake levels of pupils from the borough to the school has remained consistently in the mid 20's each year for the last few years.

With regards to those existing pupils, the proposal that they would move to the King John or Appleton Schools in the event the school is to close seems to assume that this would be acceptable on the basis that the schools are both high performing and in fairly close proximity. However, this rationale does not take account of the parent's original choice regarding the preferred school for their child/children to attend. Parents may of course have chosen to send their children to The Deanes School because of the particular characteristics of the school and its specific specialism's i.e. sports and inclusive ethos regarding SEN as well as it being a 'Good' school. The two alternative schools, whilst also high performing, may not be suitable environments for individual children to fulfil their personal potential. It should be noted that the 95 pupils currently in attendance at the school come from across Basildon borough and it is not simply the case that The Deanes School is in close proximity to where they live. I attach a copy of a map which illustrates where pupils live in the borough who currently attend the school. This indicates that parents have made an informed choice to travel across the borough in order for their children to attend The Deanes School for specific reasons. It would be wrong to assume that they would wish to do so if their children were to be placed in the King John or Appleton schools.

With regard to future secondary school provision in the locality, it is suggested in your Question and Answer paper in relation to the consultation that additional capacity will be made available at both King John and Appleton schools for pupils who may otherwise have attended The Deanes School. Firstly, there is no certainty at present that additional capacity at the schools can be provided and it is suggested that there must be certainty in this matter before any decision to close The Deanes School is taken. Also, it would appear that this additional capacity will be in place to accommodate 'local' children requiring a school place and will therefore not be applicable for children travelling from outside the priority admission area, including those in the Basildon borough

"If The Deanes closes investment would be made at these schools to provide an extra 1 form of entry of 30 pupils at each school which (based on pupil forecasting) would be sufficient to accommodate those local children needing a school place in the future and provide more places for pupils at two of the County's more popular and oversubscribed schools."

Extract from Q and A paper regarding Deans School Consultation

This change in school provision will further limit the parental choice of the boroughs residents in regard to their ability for their child to access 'Good' schools. It will also place additional pressure on existing surrounding schools who will not receive additional resources in order to accommodate children who would otherwise have attended The Deanes School and are unable to attend either King John or Appleton schools, even if they had chosen to. Furthermore, the addition of one form of entry at both schools seems to be only be a short term solution to accommodate existing pupils. It is unclear whether the addition of 1 form of entry will be continued or be sufficient to meet local demand for these two schools, with both presently appearing to be oversubscribed. As both schools are Academies they are of course their own admissions authorities. It is quite likely that in the short term the schools may be able and willing to assist, however long term both schools may be unable to meet the demand for school places.

An assumption also seems to have been made that existing pupils will be willing to automatically transfer to King John or Appleton in the event that The Deanes School closes, which once again does not take account of parental choice in regard to where a

child attends school. It is quite possible that these children will seek to be accommodated in other schools.

The Council also has concerns, which I am sure are shared by the parents of existing children at Deanes School, that should closure be deemed an appropriate step, a significant number of children from the borough will be faced with either concluding their studies in a school that will be in transition to close or having to transfer to another school which would of course be unsettling. The learning experience of all these children will in many respects shape the basis of their future destination and this may be compromised by continuing their studies in a school that is scheduled for closure, specifically due to an inability for the school to retain familiar staff and provide consistency in teaching whilst also seeking to maintain an environment that is conducive to learning. I fear that this will be incredible difficult to manage and will be to the detriment of pupils learning.

With regards to future demand, I am aware that your calculated assumptions of the future admission numbers are based on existing estimates of development, however as you are aware Basildon, like all local authorities is under pressure from Central Government to allocate and provide sites for building of a significant number of houses over the next 10 years. The Council is shortly due to complete its Local Plan and whatever number of new residential development the council sets in this, it is of course going to create significant increased demand on school places. It might also be worth noting that whilst the Council has not yet considered the matter, it has recently received an outline application for 750 homes in the Pitsea area. It is essential that there is clarity and certainty regarding future intake levels and to be certain that the current reduction in intake levels at The Deanes School is not a shortterm issue as it would of course be unthinkable to close a high performing school at this time, only to be required to build a new school in the not too distant future to accommodate increased levels of demand. The view of The Deanes School that intake levels would increase if improvements were made to the school building also seems a very reasonable one.

As I stated at the beginning of this letter, in light of the issues referred to, Basildon Borough Council is not supportive of a decision to close The Deanes School.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Tony Ball
Leader of Basildon Borough Council

4. Appendix1 – POST EVIDENCE SESSION LETTER FROM COUNCILLOR PAM CHALLIS OBE, LEADER, CASTLE POINT BOROUGH COUNCIL

Councillor Mrs P.A. Challis OBE

Member for St Peter's Ward

Leader of the Council



8 Highview Road
Thundersley Benfleet
Essex SS7 3LF

Telephone: 01268 743252
Email: cllr.pchallis@castlepoint.gov.uk

Council Offices, Kiln Road,
Thundersley, Benfleet,
Essex. SS7 1TF

Telephone: 01268 882200
Fax: 01268 882394

30th July 2013

Dear Councillor Butland,

RE: Deanes School Consultation

Thank you for chairing your Task & Finish Scrutiny Group looking at The Deanes School consultation here at Castle Point Borough Council Offices both yesterday and today. My colleagues and I were most grateful to you and your Group for the opportunity to express our views and to answer your questions.

You were particularly interested in the Borough Council's view regarding the evidence you had received from Essex County Council regarding the likely development of new dwellings in our area over the course of the next five years, as set out below.

"Castle Point Borough Council agreed in December 2012 to a suite of strategic sites to meet the requirement for a 5 year housing supply to cover 2014-19. This would create a potential 550 dwellings. Much of the planned accommodation Castle Point is for one or two bedroom dwellings."

My colleagues and I were rather surprised by this statement. Your Group heard evidence from my Planning Officer today that the Council is planning for at least 200 homes per annum, plus an additional 20% to make up for previous shortfalls (as required by the National Planning Policy Framework), making a total of 1,200 units for the next five years. Furthermore, apart from two sites in Hadleigh Town Centre and one site on London Road Thundersley, the majority of this new development will be in the form of family housing.

My Planning Officer has agreed to provide your Group's Officer Robert Fox with the background information from the Council which supports this evidence, as well as the recent appeal decision letter concerning the site at Glebelands in Thundersley, but please let me know if you require any further assistance.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Pam Challis". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "P".

Councillor Pam Challis OBE
Leader of the Council

Concluding Remarks

The Task and Finish Group was impressed with the ethos of the school and the commitment to offering a different type of education within a smaller school environment, thus giving parental choice in the area. The Group was also thoroughly impressed with the integration of the special school within a mainstream school setting and the unique offering this gives, particularly in relation to the Olympic legacy within the borough.

In considering the initial decision by the previous Cabinet Member to rebuild the school the Task and Finish Group heard evidence that the decision had been a marginal one – not made any easier by the close involvement with the Olympic legacy, given the two Portfolios held by the Cabinet Member. The Task and Finish Group could understand the decision given Castle Point's status as an Olympic Borough and found the decision was not taken in the face of officer advice and, therefore, did not find any evidence that the initial decision was perverse.

The Task and Finish Group sought to ascertain what the step-change had been that made the initial 'marginal' decision become a compelling decision to close the school, were that to be the case. The Group found that some of the key issues emphasised to make the case for closure, such as future pupil patterns, housing developments and the lack of inclusion of developments in neighbouring boroughs and across the Thames Gateway gave cause for concern. In particular, the Group found that taking Castle Point in isolation in terms of projection of future pupil numbers and housing developments was ill-conceived, especially when considering The Deanes School has traditionally taken a significant number of out-of-borough pupils. The Task and Finish Group acknowledges that population increases are not going to happen immediately, but housing projections, added to significant growth in the local area associated with the Thames Gateway, are likely to see expansion in pupil numbers in the near future.

The Task and Finish Group was concerned that parental preferences will be significantly restricted were the school to close, and the admission policies of the other two schools in mainland Castle Point might favour the admission of children with siblings from outside the borough, thus reducing parental preference in Castle Point further. The Deanes School is a good school with outstanding features, as stated in its last Ofsted report, making it a better school than most other schools in the surrounding area. The evidence given by Rebecca Harris MP highlighted that the popularity of schools change and, therefore, the Task and Finish Group believes unreasonable assumptions have been made about the future popularity of The Deanes School. Indeed, the Group found that the school had good results and Ofsted reports despite its surroundings.

A part of the case for closing The Deanes School relies on the assumption that there will be sufficient school places available at other local schools and in particular the King John and Appleton Schools were cited. However, there are currently no formal agreements or planning permissions in place to support the argument beyond doubt that those schools would be able to expand their facilities to accommodate additional pupils who could be displaced from The Deanes. Another anomaly appeared to be that even though witnesses had indicated that Deanes pupils could be accommodated in the sixth form accommodation at the King John School, it was also acknowledged that physically any expansion of accommodation at that school was limited.

All evidence received showed that the Glenwood School needs to be repositioned. There was a strong feeling that linking a school for those with disabilities and learning difficulties to a mainstream school was a step in the right direction. Good work has already been undertaken between Glenwood and The Deanes School, and the initial decision to rebuild The Deanes School and reposition Glenwood School on the site was seen as a model that Essex could lead in. The Task and Finish Group noted the decision by the previous Cabinet Member for Children's Services to facilitate this.

The Task and Finish Group recognised the strong community spirit at the school with regard to its sports facilities and its community approach and outreach activity with local primary schools.

The Task and Finish Group found the school has been poorly advised by Essex County Council in the past, and was also a victim of the cessation of the Building Schools for the Future by central government. The school has been given every indication, in the past, that the rebuild would happen and has been advised to not redecorate the school and not to apply for academy status.

At the first evidence session the Task and Finish Group heard that the school was heading for a £2m deficit. The school confirmed at the second evidence session that its budget forecast had been revised, based upon it achieving a 600 pupil population. At the fifth evidence session when questioned Essex County Council confirmed that this business case was robust. However, the County stated it did not believe the school could achieve a population of 600. The Task and Finish Group was not convinced this would not be the case.

During the course of the investigation the Group became concerned about the transparency of the decision making processes and some of the general underlying governance arrangements around the initial decision and the consultation process. While the decisions being scrutinised were in fact executive matters for which the Cabinet Members have delegated authority to make, none of the witnesses had been able to provide any formal or written documentary evidence that could provide an audit trail to show how those decisions had been reached. Despite repeated requests for written information it appeared that given the turnover in the County Council's staffing and the absence of any formal documentation, the Group had to rely on oral evidence and officer recollection. Witnesses had also drawn attention to the County Council's advice given to The Deanes on such matters as not applying for academy status, and criticism about the way that consultation had been undertaken for instance it appeared that other educational establishments that could be affected by the School's closure had not been consulted.

In conclusion the Group agreed unanimously upon the following recommendation.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCILLOR GOODING AS THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING:

That the Task and Finish Group, acting on behalf of the People and Families Scrutiny Committee, has concluded that there is insufficient evidence to close The Deanes School on the basis of current evidence, and a repositioned

school could be a success and offer an alternative to other schools in the area.

Before reaching any decisions on the future of the School the Cabinet Member is requested to review carefully his proposal to consult on its closure taking into account the following points that are drawn from the main body of the scrutiny report:

- Governance Arrangements

The Group is mindful that the decisions it has scrutinised are in fact Executive matters and as such the Cabinet Members have exercised the authority that they have been delegated by the Council. However, during its scrutiny review of this proposal the Group wished to examine the documentation leading to the very recent decision to invest in the rebuilding of The Deanes School but such documentation was not available. This is seen as a serious flaw and is something which should be noted as a lesson to be learned for major projects in the future.

- Housing Demand and Pupil Forecasting Data

The forecasting of pupil numbers for The Deanes has focused on housing demand projected for the Castle Point Borough and not the broader area that traditionally the School has served in the south east of the county, and it has failed to take account of the potential impact that economic regeneration projects underway could have upon the demand for school places. Furthermore the Group was concerned about the reliability of the data on projected housing demand provided locally that has been used to forecast demand and shape current proposals.

- Other Local Schools

A part of the case for closing The Deanes School relies on the assumption that there will be sufficient school places available at other local schools and in particular the King John and Appleton Schools were cited. However, currently there are no formal agreements or planning permissions in place to support the argument beyond doubt that those Schools would be able to expand their facilities to accommodate any additional pupils who could be displaced from The Deanes.

- School's Business Case

The Group noted that there was general agreement that The Deanes had put forward a robust business plan that it could operate successfully on a reduced total number of 600 pupils on roll. However, there was a difference in view between the County Council and the School in so far as the Council forecasted that The Deanes would not attract a sufficient number of pupils to implement that plan. The Group was of the opinion that for reasons set out in more detail elsewhere in this report there is evidence to support the view that enough parents across the wider community will prefer The Deanes for their children's secondary education. Despite the fact that the School's accommodation has been neglected pending implementation of the original decision to rebuild the school, it is nevertheless categorised as a 'good school with outstanding features' by Ofsted and therefore comparisons with other new build schools that have been classed as failing and

unpopular in the community are misplaced.

- Glenwood School

There is universal agreement that new provision is required for Glenwood School, which is a popular and successful special school. There is community support for its co-location with a mainstream school, and the Council's Cabinet has demonstrated its support for its relocation to The Deanes School site by the executive decisions made including the purchase of additional property to support this objective. It was apparent that since the original rebuild proposals were agreed, the two schools have been working together successfully in practice to make the project work.

- Community Role

There are strong overtures made in the Council's corporate literature and Government policy around listening to local communities. In the case of The Deanes there is much evidence of the important role that the School actually fulfils in the wider community not only through its positive engagement with other local schools and groups, but also the facilities that it makes available for instance to sports clubs. The staging of the Olympic Mountain Bike Event in Castle Point and local community aspirations for an Olympic Legacy were also contributory factors in the original decision to rebuild the school's accommodation, and the provision of sports facilities. While school provision issues may be the primary concern in any closure proposals, the Group considered that the wider consequences of such decisions upon the community should be taken into account by the County Council before a decision to close The Deanes is taken.

Owner: Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning

Implementation Review Date: September 2014

Impact Review Date: August 2014

Acknowledgements

The Task and Finish Group would wish to thank the following for providing oral and written evidence across five meetings:

Linda Allport-Hodge, Jan Atkinson, Councillor Alan Bayley (ECC), Steve Bish, Tosca Boothman, Councillor Cliff Brunt (CPBC), Councillor Peter Burch (CPBC), Lisa Burgoyne, Karen Cavalla, Councillor Pam Challis OBE (CPBC), Dr Tim Coulson, Brenda Dalley, Councillor Bill Dick (CPBC), David Franklin, Councillor Ray Gooding (ECC), Simon Harbrow, Rebecca Harris MP, Councillor Simon Hart (CPBC), Dave Hill, Councillor Ray Howard (CPBC/ECC), Rebecca Howard, Councillor Jamie Huntman (ECC), Andy Johnson, Councillor Norman Ladzrie (CPBC), Neil Lark, Desi McKeown, Eddie Moss, Russell Pagan, John Pitts, Sarah Raven, John Revill, Councillor Colin Riley (CPBC), Steve Rogers, Ian Rudd, Judith Salter, Councillor Andrew Sheldon (CPBC), Kerry Skinner, Ashlie Smith, David Smith, Lesley Smith, Nick Spenceley, Lisa Stroud, Ann Willsdon, John Wilson and Dan Woodman.

Additionally, the Task and Finish Group would wish to thank Councillor Tony Ball, Leader of Basildon Borough Council, Councillor James Courtenay, Executive Councillor, Children and Learning, Southend-on-Sea Borough Council and Councillor Jillian Reeves (ECC) for their written submissions.

The Task and Finish Group has also received and considered the email submissions from Jeanette Anderson, Hayley Daly, Paul Daly, Tracey-Ann Edwards, Mrs S. Halsey, Ian Harp, Janice Harp, and Jeremy Wright in compiling evidence.

THIS REPORT IS ISSUED BY:

Essex County Council – Corporate Law and Governance

BY POST:

C328
County Hall
Chelmsford
Essex
CM1 1LX

BY TELEPHONE:

01245 430526

BY EMAIL:

scrutiny@essex.gov.uk

WEBSITE:

cmis.essex.gov.uk

