

DEPUTATIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Two deputations have been referred from Council on 21 October 2010 and are reported for information only. The Cabinet will note the deputations and responses.

- (a) Deputation concerning Connexions** – Ms Christina Summers (Spokesperson)
- (b) Deputation concerning Portslade Community College** – Ms Pip Tindall (Spokesperson)

(a) Deputation concerning Connexions – Ms Christina Summers (Spokesperson)

“There’s nothing much along this street: a cafe’ that shuts early, a convenience store, hairdresser...hardly a hub of youth activity and interest. Yet at Hollingdean Dip the flagship centre for Brighton & Hove Connexions services has never been busier. In the two years since its opening more than 140 13-19 year-olds receive careers and personal advice at their Tuesday drop-in facility per month. And that’s not all. The rest of the week is set aside for many other services for youngsters such as crime prevention, school inclusion, sexual health work and NEET engagement and prevention. It is labour intensive employing 14 regular staff alone in this deprived area of the city.

Two years is not long enough to see a young person through troubled times - particularly at school - and set them on the right tracks to a meaningful and fulfilling academic, work or social life; it’s not enough time to equip them and reassure them of their enormous value in society. The staff at Connexions committed to their work for the long haul and if the staff (who are modestly paid) are willing to do that so likewise should their employer.

Yet despite the overwhelming need, and proven success, of this centre the Administration has chosen to abort it. We understand the difficulties of this decision and we recognise the challenges for any local council in navigating through the current climate of reduced spending and imposed cuts. However, there are surely those times when an authority, such as this Administration, ought to make a stand for the city which it governs. It ought to protect the services that help the most vulnerable and it ought to make a case to central government for doing so.

There is a “To Let” sign outside the Connexions building in Hollingdean because the contract with the private owner expires in 10 days time, so we have to ask: what will happen to all the local young people on the 1st November? Where will they go? The nearest alternative is the Young People’s Centre in Ship Street; by no means within walking distance and an entirely different environment. And what about the staff in Hollingdean? Their jobs have now been secured until the New Year but where do they go next month? Some of them are here now and would very much like to know where they should turn up for work on Monday, 1st November and what work they will be expected to do. It’s the not knowing that is so upsetting and rightly so.

So why close the Hollingdean centre? Is it because the rent is unaffordable? At £8,000 per year this simply does not compare with Marmion Road in Hove, for example, where rent is three times this amount and not even for frontline services – it is purely for administrative support.

The Administration has made reference to evidence of outcomes from the money spent on the services being not as positive as they could be. We are curious to understand the nature of this evidence and what would be considered as positive outcomes by the Administration, when the staff and young people themselves continue to report good news. If, as was also stated, funding will continue for careers advice in schools, what happens to the young people who attend schools that don’t have a careers teacher? What happens to children from broken families who need advice that teachers simply are not trained to give? And what

happens to the really vulnerable older ones who are not in education, employment or training?

Many questions, not many answers, and one struggles to believe that the Conservative Cabinet has done its homework properly. Do they really appreciate the long-term effects on a struggling young generation of closing down any of the city's youth services let alone the busiest at Hollingdean Dip?

For the sake of the city's young people and the enormously dedicated staff that make such a difference to their lives we strongly urge the Administration to take the following actions:

1. rescind their decision to close down the centre in Hollingdean Dip,
2. commit to a full Equality Impact Assessment as required by law,
3. depending on the results that emerge, guarantee that the centre will remain open and continue to be fully staffed,
4. lobby central government for the return of their grant."

Response from Councillor Brown given at Council on 21 October 2010

"The Hollingdean Dip Connexions plus access point is not closing in 10 days' time nor does the lease expire at that point. This has never been our intention. By the terms of our lease, we are required to give 6 months' notice to the landlord. This is because of the need for good stewardship of public monies. We are anticipating going out to consultation with staff in November with regards to the redesign of Connexions Service. This consultation will cover the issue of location and delivery points throughout the city. Because of the possible changes, notice was given to the landlord. However, we have the ability to extend the lease of the Dip Plus Connexions location depending on the outcome of the consultation.

Staff presently based in the Dip have been informed of this and in the meantime Connexions staff will continue to be based there and to see young people just as at present. It's business as usual at the moment.

As with the Dip, all other Connexions access points across the city remain open.

An Equalities Impact Assessment in relation to the proposed changes to Connexions funding is currently underway. An initial EIA will have been completed by the time the options go out for consultation to all affected staff in November. As a matter of good practice, the EIA will be concluded following the consultation and so able to take into account issues that are raised during that process contributing to the ultimate service redesign."

Deputation concerning Portslade Community College – Ms Pip Tindall
(Spokesperson)

“Portslade Community College IS the heart of the community.

It is central not just to the education of our children but also hosts a whole range of extra curricular activities for children and a whole range of extra curricular activities for adults, including adult education classes.

It provides facilities for recreational events from the sporting and leisure to the celebratory and the entertaining.

Local charities rely on its facilities, such as Quad, the charity for those suffering from Downs Syndrome.

From very small children to those residents in their mature years, PCC provides a COMMUNITY service, responds to the needs of the community and is at the heart of the community.

All this is under threat, or certainly felt to be under threat by the proposal to transfer the school from the jurisdiction of the local authority to that of Mr Aldridge and his proposal to turn it into an academy.

From being an institution which is accountable to the community directly and politically through its status as a maintained school, it will pass into the hands of an unaccountable businessman (or some other party bidding for the sponsorship) with no links to the community, and quite frankly, with no interest in the educational welfare of our children; in fact he has conceded on previous occasions that he is not an educationalist.

The decision making will be concentrated in the hands of Mr Aldridge and his appointees, (or some other party bidding for the sponsorship) with no obligation in law for him to consult or even discuss what he does with the school once it passes into his hands.

What we do know from the meetings that we have had with him is that the curriculum will be concentrated on business objectives and particularly the idea of entrepreneurship which will run through the entire curriculum.

The record of Mr Aldridge’s involvement in the education system in our city does not inspire confidence if the academisation of Falmer High School is anything to go by. To give some idea of the problems at Falmer Mr Aldridge has given no commitment to recognise the Union, there has been a 50% turnover of staff since, which seriously disrupts children’s learning and there has been a very strict and vigorous dress code imposed with children being sent home because they’re not dressed properly.

The current Head of the Portslade Community College has overseen significant improvements in academic performance and we are alarmed that that progress will be severely disrupted by this development.

We, the concerned stakeholders in the school therefore urge the local authority to reconsider the whole proposal, and move away from any further consideration of Mr Aldridge's (or any other interested party's) involvement, and instead make a firm decision to keep the school under local authority jurisdiction, as a COMMUNITY school.

If the local authority is in any doubt about the strength of feeling regarding this issue, then at the very least they should organise a GENUINE consultation exercise, and ballot all those involved with the school: parents, staff, residents, those with a stake in the future of the school, and those who, at present, feel that the local authority is moving forward on this issue without taking their views and concerns into consideration."

Response from Councillor Brown given at Council on 21 October 2010

"The proposal for PCC to become an academy was submitted to Government in July 2010. This proposal was put on hold by the new government until the outcome of the CSR.

The council and the Aldridge Foundation, as lead sponsor and co-sponsor working together, have emphasised their wish and that expressed in the deputation that PCC continues to be the centre of its community.

The council is delighted that under the new Principal the college is now moving forward under strong leadership as evidenced by the recent rise in GCSE results.

The council and the Aldridge Foundation remain committed to their initial proposal and believe that this will bring about acceleration in the pace of change at the college and a continued improvement in the achievement of high academic standards. The council also believes that this change will help strengthen the relationships and increase the successes that you have highlighted.

Discussions continue with Government and we anticipate a decision being taken regarding the proposal for PCC to become an academy towards the end of the year. If sanctioned by Government the proposal can only go ahead with Cabinet approval following a formal consultation period with the school and the community carried out as part of the statutory process for closing the existing school."

