

Council: Tuesday, 16 July 2013

Non Executive Business Item: Councillor Alison Cornelius

Free Schools

Council notes the number of free schools already established in the Borough and considers the significant interest in future proposals to be a mark of their appeal to the pupils and parents of Barnet.

Council welcomes this Conservative administration's wholehearted support of free schools, noting the unique way they are able to contribute to the excellent educational offer in the Borough.

Free schools bring choice and unrivalled community engagement within our school system. Council therefore believes they constitute a vital part of the mix of schools in Barnet, which the Council is working hard to develop.

Council notes that Barnet already has a very varied offer and values the administration's continued support of academies; faith schools; local authority maintained schools and grammar schools.

Council once again notes that 91% of Barnet's schools are rated as 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by OFSTED – the second best ratio in the country – and that the Borough is ranked in the top ten local authorities for Oxbridge admissions. Council is committed to continuing to strive for excellence in our local education system.

Council therefore expresses its deep concern at the Shadow Education Secretary's recent announcement that a Labour Government would review planned free schools. Council believes the uncertainty the opposition's current policy would inevitably cause would be highly damaging to the educational offer in the Borough.

Council believes that we are likely to require the places being created by new free schools in order to meet the growing demand for both primary and secondary places. Council fears that were this policy to be enacted it would deter new proposals, jeopardising the Council's ability to ensure there are sufficient places for the future children of the Borough. Council also notes that Labour's policy would threaten those proposals on which a lot of time and money has already been spent.

Council further notes its confusion with Mr Twigg's position given his advocacy for schools referred to as 'parent sponsored academies'. Council must conclude that Labour's education policy is in disarray and that they would be likely to undo much of both the current Council and current Government's good work.

Council calls upon Cabinet to continue to its active support for free schools and reassure them of their importance to the local schools offer; and further assist proposed free schools to find suitable locations and develop sustainable logistical arrangements

Under Council Procedure Rule, Section 1, Standing Order 23.5: if my item is not dealt with by the end of the meeting I ask that it be voted upon at the Council meeting.