



Minutes

Name of meeting	CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Date and Time	TUESDAY 6 JUNE 2023 COMMENCING AT 5.00 PM
Venue	COUNCIL CHAMBER, COUNTY HALL, ISLE OF WIGHT
Present	Cllrs J Robertson (Chairman), D Adams, R Downer, W Drew, S Ellis, J Lever, K Love, R Quigley and C Quirk
Also Present	Cllrs I Stephens, D Andre, J Bacon and P Fuller Christopher Ashman, Sharon Betts, Debbie Downer, Laura Gaudion, Wendy Perera, Christopher Potter, Megan Tuckwell and Melanie White
Also Present (Virtual)	Cllrs J Jones-Evans, G Brodie, M Beston, C Jarman and A Garratt

1 Apologies and Changes in Membership (If Any)

Cllr David Adams was in attendance as a substitute for Cllr Peter Spink. It was advised that Cameron Palin (IWALC) had resigned from the committee and a nomination to fill the vacancy was being sought.

The chairman confirmed that he had been given notice of the Regulation 10 general exception notice regarding the marketing exercise for the former Yarmouth CE Primary School site.

2 Minutes

RESOLVED:

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 9 May 2023 be confirmed as a true record.

3 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Suzie Ellis declared an interest in Minute item 7, School Place Planning, as an associate school governor at Chillerton and Rookley Primary School and Godshill Primary School.

4 Public Question Time - 15 Minutes Maximum

A series of written questions had been submitted in relation to the report on School Place Planning, as follows; Oliver Tucker of Ryde (PQ 14/23), Rebecca Tucker of Ryde (PQ 15/23), Richard Cottell of Ryde (PQ 16/23), Jane Berry (PQ 17/23),

James Ranson of Ryde (PQ 18/23), Vicki Ranson of Ryde (PQ 19/23), Cathryn Grosvenor of Wootton (PQ 20/23), Lora Coombes of Ryde (PQ 21/23), Simon Coombes of Ryde (PQ 22/23), Michael Christopher of Ryde (PQ 23/23), Helen Smallwood of Ryde (PQ 24/23), Lizzie Christopher of Ryde (PQ 25/23), Roisin Mullins-Jacobs of Ryde (PQ 26/23), Jack Jacobs of Ryde (PQ 27/23), Sarah Cottell of Ryde (PQ 28/23), Vicki Humm (PQ 29/23) and Antonio Entrena Urquia (PQ 30/23). The chairman confirmed that a written response would be provided.

Sam Pickard asked an oral question in relation to the proposals to consult on the school closures and sought clarity around the process. The chairman advised that the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Lifelong Skills would be invited to address this matter at Minute item 7, School Place Planning.

5 Progress Update

The chairman presented the report which provided an overview of the progress against actions and outcomes from previous meetings. It was advised that work was underway to arrange an informal meeting in July 2023 between the committee, Southern Water, and the Environment Agency to discuss flood risk management. It was noted that the Cabinet had not yet responded to the formal request made by members of the committee in March 2023 to view the confidential Floating Bridge settlement. The Deputy Leader confirmed that a written response would be provided. The committee sought further clarity around the request of the committee in January 2023 that the Monitoring Officer determine a suitable solution to bring more awareness to the delegated decision and call-in processes.

RESOLVED:

THAT the progress report be noted.

6 Committee's Workplan:

6a Forward Plan

6b Committee's Work Programme 2022-25

The committee were invited to identify any items contained within the published forward plan that would benefit from early consideration within the committee's own workplan, or one of the policy and scrutiny committees. Consideration was given to the committee's work programme.

It was suggested that a task and finish group be established for councillors to scrutinise and aid in resolving the issues associated with the delivery of affordable housing. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Adult Services and Housing, Public Health, and Homelessness agreed to request that the Strategic Manager for Housing delivers a presentation to all councillors (to include details on affordable purchase, affordable rental, leasing, and mobile homes) in order for the scope of any potential task and finish group to be established.

RESOLVED:

THAT the forward plan and the Committee's work programme be noted.

7 School Place Planning

Consideration was given to the report which sought the Cabinet's approval to commence a public consultation on the closures of Cowes Primary School, St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School, and Wroxall Primary School; and to publish a Public Notice to amalgamate Chillerton and Rookley Primary School with Godshill Primary School.

It was advised that since publication of the agenda, the report would no longer be presented to the Cabinet on 8 June 2023. The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Lifelong Skills was in attendance to provide clarification around the statutory processes and decision-making which led to the decision to withdraw the report. Questions were raised in relation to the release of the report, and it was recommended that the approach to future school place planning proposals should ensure that all affected staff and parents are notified prior to the release of formal reports into the public domain.

Questions were raised in relation to the long-term vision of the council in addressing the challenges which schools face as a result of low pupil forecast numbers and surplus school places. It was agreed that the matter would be considered by the Policy and Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services, Education and Skills with the relevant members of staff in attendance. It was recommended that future reporting on school place planning should include objective detail and narrative which clearly outlined the rationale for shortlisting the chosen schools, in addition to alternative options which had been explored and the reasons as to why those alternatives were not recommended.

RESOLVED:

THAT the report and update be considered and noted.

8 Partnership Arrangements

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Climate Change and Biosphere was in attendance to present the report which detailed the council's approach to partnership arrangements, in order for the committee to be assured that effective outcomes were being delivered. The committee sought clarification around the definition and nature of informal partnerships, and it was suggested that strategic partnerships should be distinguished as part of the remit of the Leader.

Questions were raised around whether the review had led to the re-evaluation of any of the partnerships. Comments were made regarding the requirements for entering into a partnership; particularly with regards the councils interpretation of each type of agreement and why they were deemed suitable for each partnership. The chairman of the Audit and Governance Committee was in attendance and welcomed any thoughts of the committee on partnership arrangements as it related to risk and value for money.

RESOLVED:

THAT the report be considered and noted.

9 QPMR Q4 - 2022-23

Consideration was given to the report which provided a summary of progress against Corporate Plan activities for Quarter 4 of 2022-23 and detailed any issues which required attention (and the remedial action in place to deal with these).

Comments were made regarding the reduction of debt payments, borrowing, and capital expenditure. Questions were raised regarding the housing register, particularly in relation to the number of homeless individuals or those living in temporary accommodation. Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Adult Services and Housing, Public Health and Homelessness confirmed that a detailed written response would be provided and circulated to the committee.

Questions were raised regarding planning and enforcement, particularly around the measures in place to address the staffing capacity issues and the potential revaluation of the fees and charges. The committee sought details on the ways in which the council could incentivise landowners build housing in a timely manner once planning permission had been granted. The Cabinet Member for Planning, Coastal Protection and Flooding noted the national guidance and confirmed that this would be addressed in the revised Island Planning Strategy.

Discussion took place regarding the possibility of the committee receiving monthly finance reporting. The chairman confirmed that he would liaise with the Chief Executive and Cabinet Member to discuss the purpose, practicalities, and resourcing for this request.

RESOLVED:

THAT the report be considered and noted.

10 Members' Question Time

Cllr Joe Robertson asked a question on behalf of IWALC, in relation to any formal partnership arrangements for town, parish and community councils. The Cabinet Member for Planning, Coastal Protection and Flooding provided a verbal response.

Cllr Karl Love asked a question in relation to the financial settlement for the Floating Bridge, and whether the compensation would be used to replace the vessel. It was confirmed that a written response would be provided.

The chairman noted that a series of questions had been submitted to him regarding the School Place Planning report, and it was confirmed that those questions would be forwarded to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Lifelong Skills for a response.

CHAIRMAN



Public Question time

To view any public questions that were put to this committee, they will be listed as an additional PDF document below the public question time section within the online minutes, an example is displayed below:

32. [Public Question Time](#) PDF 87 KB

Questions must be delivered in writing
later than 5pm on Friday, 15 January 20

Additional documents:

- [PQ 11-21](#)  PDF 85 KB
- [PQ 12-21](#)  PDF 90 KB

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Corporate Scrutiny Committee – 6 June 2023**Written question from Oliver Tucker of Ryde to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee**

In point 6 of the school place planning document, we are told that “popular schools remain in full or close to full and this may mean that a large drop in numbers could significantly affect a small number of ‘less popular’ schools. When schools are disproportionately affected by falling rolls, those schools are at risk of spiralling decline. This means that we need to consider removing places.”

How exactly has St Mary’s school been identified by yourselves as less popular and deserving of closure when it has a rising roll and 28 children due to start in September
- Does this not qualify as being ‘close to full’?

Response

Thank you for your recent question submitted to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee about the primary school place planning paper that was due to be discussed at the Isle of Wight Cabinet on Thursday 8 June 2023.

The Isle of Wight Council’s Children’s Services Management Team were asked to draft this paper following a discussion on forecast pupil numbers at the September 2022 Policy and Scrutiny Committee for Children’s Services, Education and Skills.

However, as the Cabinet has decided that the paper will no longer be presented and therefore the recommendations will not be taken forward for public consultation, a response to your questions is no longer appropriate.

It is important to note that the questions submitted are exactly the type of queries we would have been seeking during the consultation, had the decision been made on 8 June for the consultation to begin. It was intended that officers would have attended public meetings to explore these issues in full. After the consultation the views of all those contributing to the debate would have been shared with Cabinet and fully considered before any final proposals were made for further consultation.

It is our experience that such consultations have been meaningful and have often led to better decision making with proposals being refined before further statutory consultation.

Should Cabinet decide to undertake a consultation in the future I would urge you to contribute with queries such as these to the discussions at that time.

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Corporate Scrutiny Committee – 6 June 2023**Written question from Rebecca Tucker of Ryde to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee**

Following the Equality Act of 2010, the council have a responsibility to “foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.” How is shutting the only Catholic primary school in Ryde and the surrounding areas fulfilling this obligation?

Response

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Corporate Scrutiny Committee – 6 June 2023**Written question from Richard Cottell of Ryde to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee**

Why were stakeholders (including the diocese, teachers, and parents) in St Mary's Catholic Primary School not informed of a possible closure prior to publication of the story in the local press - Does this not undermine the 10% of funding provided by non-governmental stakeholders (the diocese and parents)?

Response

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Corporate Scrutiny Committee – 6 June 2023**Written question from Jane Berry of Ryde to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee**

With climate change so high on the Government's agenda, how can you justify the mileage for Ryde parents wanting a Catholic school who will now need to travel to East Cowes, Totland or Carisbrooke in order for their child/ren to access such an education?

Response

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Corporate Scrutiny Committee – 6 June 2023**Written question from James Ranson of Ryde to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee**

With three housing developments planned for Ryde (Pennyfeathers, Puckpool and West Acre Park), have you considered where incoming families will send their children to school - With parents having the right to choose a faith-based education for their children, how will you ensure that you provide such a choice when you have targeted the one Catholic school in the area for closure?

Response

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Corporate Scrutiny Committee – 6 June 2023**Written question from Vicki Ranson of Ryde to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee**

According to the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019, 3 areas on the Isle of Wight, Ryde North-East, Pan A and B were ranked as among the most deprived in England. There is a strong link between deprivation and low educational attainment. In October 2021, the Isle of Wight Council were questioned over their commitment to tackling island poverty. From my understanding, the IW Council have approved plans to build 474 new houses on the West Acre site, which neighbours this deprivation area. The IW Council have approved closure of a local dairy farm, kept the local water park shut from the community and now threatened closure of a School.

With the announcements of the potential closure of St Mary's a well-attended, community focused school, how does the IW Council expect to support families and their children in breaking the cycle of deprivation?

Response

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Corporate Scrutiny Committee – 6 June 2023**Written question from Cathryn Grosvenor of Wootton to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee**

If you were to close and sell the St Mary's site (remembering that the diocese and parents have been responsible for 10% of the school's funding), then housing would be a seemingly obvious use for the land. Have you considered where incoming families will send their children to school, with parents having the right to choose a faith-based education for their children, how will you ensure that you provide such a choice when you have targeted the one Catholic school in the area for closure?

Response

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Corporate Scrutiny Committee – 6 June 2023**Written question from Lora Coombes of Ryde to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee**

Have you considered whether there are enough spaces at the three remaining Catholic primary schools for all of the families at St Mary's Catholic Primary School, as these families have all chosen a Catholic education for their children, should they not be provided with a like-for-like alternative if they are suddenly told that their chosen school must close - is any less not discrimination against Catholic education, particularly as alternative Catholic provisions are outside of the five-mile proximity promised to parents for school re-allocation?

Response

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Corporate Scrutiny Committee – 6 June 2023**Written question from Simon Coombes of Ryde to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee**

In St Mary Primary School's most recent OSTED report, it was said that "*the newly appointed senior leaders have a clear vision for the school. They understand the strengths of the school and are taking effective action to improve outcomes for pupils*". This is after they had been in post for less than a term. In your press release, Councillor Debbie Andre talks of "providing excellent education for our children." How then has the council selected St Mary's as a candidate for possible closure, a school that is on such a strong upward trajectory, led by "effective leaders" with a "clear vision"?

Response

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Corporate Scrutiny Committee – 6 June 2023**Written question from Michael Christopher of Ryde to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee**

Do the Council plan to build a new school in the Ryde area within the next 5 years as the huge increase in housing proposal would leave nowhere for incoming families to send their children to school?

Response

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Corporate Scrutiny Committee – 6 June 2023**Written question from Helen Smallwood of Ryde to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee**

In point 48 of the school place planning document, it is predicted that Ryde rural schools will have 36.2% of surplus places by September 2024. This is in contrast to 26.8% of surplus places in Ryde itself. Why take such radical steps as to close a school in Ryde Town when the projection for Ryde Rural is considerably worse in the longer term?

Response

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Corporate Scrutiny Committee – 6 June 2023**Written question from Lizzie Christopher of Ryde to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee**

The announcement of the potential closure of St Mary's Catholic primary school in the local press, prior to any consultation with the community, has now unduly influenced the public opinion that it is a failing school - which is untrue. How can the IW Council justify its conduct in this particular situation, considering this bias approach?

Response

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Corporate Scrutiny Committee – 6 June 2023**Written question from Roisin Mullins-Jacobs of Ryde to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee**

Was standard procedure followed? A lack of investigation/ planning preceded a half term press release on the closure of St. Mary's VA (Ofsted 'Requires Improvement', no closure criteria met), Roman Catholic (19% of UK and separate to CofE), Primary and Preschool, of 212 pupils, (SEN provision), before informing parents and full staff. Possibilities were disregarded; intake reduction, Academy status, relocation or rebuild of fully used site, within the Island's largest town, with the next RC alternative 8.6 miles away, close to developments Puckpool, West Acre Park, and Pennyfeathers, with a rising population and traffic. The faith school had 28/30 places, for Reception 2023, these actions caused distress, and damage to the popular school's reputation (online petition over 1,000) and stability, following return from Covid restrictions / baby boom. This action benefited unpopular / smaller Island schools, as a lack of available Ryde places exist to accommodate siblings and years.

Response

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Corporate Scrutiny Committee – 6 June 2023**Written question from Jack Jacobs of Ryde to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee**

Article 9 of the UN declaration of Human Rights continues to protect our absolute right to practice our religious beliefs without hindrance, whilst Religion and Belief are protected characteristics under Equality Act 2010. The Council is threatening to remove the ability of parents to educate their children within the Roman Catholic faith, by closing St. Mary's Catholic School, Ryde, with no equivalent Roman Catholic schools offered within reasonable distances. Whether intended or not, discriminating solely against Catholic pupils by removing their legal right to follow their belief, when non-discriminatory options were available, represents an intolerable and unlawful interference by the state, particularly when St. Mary's does not meet any of the criteria for closure. What measures is the Council taking to ensure that these rights are not breached for the hundreds of pupils and parents at St. Mary's Catholic School?

Response

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Corporate Scrutiny Committee – 6 June 2023**Written question from Sarah Cottell of Ryde to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee**

Why has St Mary's chosen to possibly be closed, considering its advantages below?

- A high intake, 29 in Preschool, 28 due to start Sept 2023
- The building is suitable to accommodate all children in separate classes
- The grounds and surrounding woodland to provide outside learning through forest school and other outside activities, reception/ preschool also have their own separate outdoor playground/ learning areas.
- Appropriate staffing levels and teaching assistants and can offer SEND provisions
- Breakfast club/after school clubs, enabling parents to work
- It is in walking distance for the majority of pupils, myself included, who with 4 children ages 7 and under, and a non-driver, would struggle to get much further
- Is the only Catholic school in Ryde and enables the opportunity for religious learning and expression
- Ofsted report requires improvement, which isn't low, new leadership can provide improvement as we have already seen.

Response

Thank you for your recent question submitted to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee about the primary school place planning paper that was due to be discussed at the Isle of Wight Cabinet on Thursday 8 June 2023.

The Isle of Wight Council's Children's Services Management Team were asked to draft this paper following a discussion on forecast pupil numbers at the September 2022 Policy and Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services, Education and Skills.

However, as the Cabinet has decided that the paper will no longer be presented and therefore the recommendations will not be taken forward for public consultation, a response to your questions is no longer appropriate.

It is important to note that the questions submitted are exactly the type of queries we would have been seeking during the consultation, had the decision been made on 8 June for the consultation to begin. It was intended that officers would have attended public meetings to explore these issues in full. After the consultation the views of all those contributing to the debate would have been shared with Cabinet and fully considered before any final proposals were made for further consultation.

It is our experience that such consultations have been meaningful and have often led to better decision making with proposals being refined before further statutory consultation.

Should Cabinet decide to undertake a consultation in the future I would urge you to contribute with queries such as these to the discussions at that time.

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Corporate Scrutiny Committee – 6 June 2023**Written question from Vicki Humm to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee**

Given all of the planning proposals for new housing in Ryde, do you think that you will be forced to build a new school further down the line, is it not short-sighted to close a Ryde school with this in mind?

Response

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Corporate Scrutiny Committee – 6 June 2023**Written question from Antonio Entrena Urquia to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee**

Why was the information released to the press before consultation with teachers and parents, has this information not created a bias and predetermined opinion of St Mary's reputation as a school?

Response

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