

Minutes of a Consultation Meeting at St. Martin-in-Meneage School held as part of the formal consultation period running from 4.5.17 to 22.6.17.

Meeting held on 19th June 2017 - 7pm at St Martin School.

Present: Mrs Pam Miller (Chair of Directors), Mrs Jan Halliday, Mrs Jane Dudley, Mrs Martha Mita, Rev Peter Sharpe (Directors)

Mrs Wendy Sherlock (Acting Head teacher)

Mrs Pat Nicholas (Minute taker)

Victoria Hatton (legal representative, Browne Jacobson solicitors)

Apologies were received from; Anthea France, Reverend Lesley Walker, Anne Hoskin, Matt Robinson, Stella West

Apologies also received from Christopher Woods, Nicholas Woods and Emily Woods, who asked that their strong opposition to the closure of the school be noted.

(A full list of attendees can be found at the end of the minutes)

Mrs Miller opened the meeting with a welcome to all, and an apology that the space available was not adequate for such a large turnout. Mrs Miller explained that the school had only received confirmation from 12 people that they were planning to attend. Mrs Miller offered thanks for all the responses to the consultation document received to date. Introductions were made, including Victoria Hatton, who was present to offer support to the meeting on legal matters.

The meeting heard that this was a very emotive situation, with a good deal of strong feeling from the local community who were passionate about the school, and that this was fully understood and shared by the MAT Board. However, abusive language or conduct would not be tolerated, and could result in expulsion from the meeting. Any failure to comply with these conditions would result in the meeting being stopped. In addition, recording equipment had not been authorised, and those present were asked to turn off their mobile phones or other recording equipment.

Mrs Sherlock would lead a presentation to outline the proposal and to respond to some queries already raised by the community action group, (all available on the front page of the school website). Following this presentation, Revd. Sharpe would Chair a Question and Answer session.

The main points of the presentation were as follows;

- The consultation document had been prepared to inform stakeholders of the MAT Board's proposal to request permission from the DfE to close St Martin-in-Meneage School at the end of July 2017.
- Of particular concern was the numbers of children in KS1 and the fact that there were no applications for places in Reception for September 2017.
- Recruitment of staff and governors was proving increasingly difficult.
- Despite a good Ofsted judgement, the very low class sizes limited opportunities for pupils to enjoy a good all-round educational experience.
- There had been a high level of financial support from the MAT since St Martin-in Meneage School had joined, which could not be sustained.
- The main school building needed considerable investment, which the Trelowarren Estate (as landlord) was not willing to provide.
- Marketing attempts to encourage enrolment at the preschool and school had proved unsuccessful. The MAT had offered one term of financial support to the newly re-opened Twinkling Stars Preschool in September 2016, but numbers had not grown sufficiently to allow it to remain open.

(Attendees expressed concern about the time taken for the presentation (45 minutes in total), especially given that the evening was exceptionally warm; Mrs Sherlock agreed to finish as quickly as possible, to allow the Q & A part of the meeting to begin. The necessity for the length of the presentation was explained by the Chair as being for the benefit of those present who hadn't seen the consultation document and its responses. Hard copies of these were available at the meeting).

- There was no evidence to show an increase in pupil numbers in the foreseeable future; a lack of local affordable housing, the school's location and the proximity of other local schools added to the challenge.
- The MAT Board members reiterated their commitment to keeping schools within their local communities. To this end four options were considered; keep the school open, mothball the school, split KS1 and KS2 across two sites, and closure.
- The consultation period would end at midnight on Thursday 22nd June; all responses need to be received in writing by then. The MAT Board will meet again on Monday 26th June to make their formal resolution; any submission to the DfE would include all responses to the consultation and the minutes of this meeting.
- The Community Action Group had provided detailed responses to all sections of the consultation document; these were available to see on the school website. (However, some of those present expressed concern that the document contained a number of contradictions, and some of the responses had lacked necessary detail).

(Attendees asked if it would not be more appropriate to have the action group respond themselves. It was raised that an independent minute taker had been asked for. The meeting was assured that the minutes were being taken by taken by someone from outside the MAT).

Question and Answer Session

Q: Why did the Action Group have no say in the way the meeting was conducted?

A: The procedure for the formal consultation had been carried out in line with due legal processes and with legal advice.

Q: Would the school be asset stripped if it was closed?

A: It would be for the Department of Education to decide whether all equipment and land belonging to the local authority would be returned to them. The MAT would like to retain the school playing fields and Elliott buildings for use as a residential or activity centre.

Q: Why was the preschool not developed in the way others had been?

A: The initial numbers had been too small to be self-financing. There was not the external funding available now for setting up a preschool, which had helped to turn the fortunes of other local schools.

Q: Why did the Board allow the preschool to be reopened by a parent who had already moved their children to another school?

A: The preschool was community run and so staff were not employed by the MAT.

Q: Would the 30 hours funding coming in September help to increase preschool numbers?

A: The MAT would be willing to support the setting up of a preschool, but, given the recent attempt to re-open, there may not be the community support needed for success. The recent attempt to re-open was not designed to be temporary, but a long term commitment; however it closed ultimately because of a lack of children.

Q: How accurate are the predictions for future numbers on roll, given that all Helston primary schools are at, or over, capacity?

A: The figures were only indicative at this stage but were obtained by the local authority.

Q: Is this a case of the MAT board operating like a business, and this merely a cost cutting exercise?

A: The numbers of pupil on roll (current and predicted), and the sustainability of effective education for pupils at the school, were the main considerations, not finance.

Q: Would it be useful to ask St Martin families why they have moved their children to other schools?

A: It was for parents to decide what school they chose to send their children to. The reasons given by parents at the last meeting for choosing St Martin had been varied.

Q: Would the MAT board agree that the timing of the leaflet drop (just before the Christmas break) was not appropriate?

A: The teachers had given up their own time to carry this out and were teaching during term time; (some of those present then stated that, had they known, they would have been willing to help or that or could have been done at a weekend during term time).

Q: Why was there no information about the school's marketing strategies in the local paper, The Meneage Messenger?

A: The MAT board members present agreed that the information could have been shared in this way. However, given the lack of any response to the marketing campaign, it is unlikely it would have made a significant difference.

Q: Are there not other schools in the MAT more eligible for closure? i.e. with lesser facilities and in more remote locations (Manaccan School was close to closure some years ago). What about the additional travel costs for local families?

A: The other schools in the MAT, while small, were still in a viable position, with relatively healthy pupil numbers. Those eligible will be able to have free school travel.

Comment: Where was the MAT board's strategic vision? Why did they not see the opportunities afforded by the scale of new housing in Helston? Without a local school, St Martin will have little chance of attracting families to live in the village.

Q: The Parish Council and the parents have put a lot of work into the school over the years. If our local schools are over capacity, where are the St Martin children to go?

A: It is unlikely that Helston families will travel so far out, but there were spaces available in the other MAT schools.

Comment: Some parents commented that there was a lack of trust in the MAT board. Staff present hoped that parents would once again put their trust in the schools.

Comment: Where was the evidence that the MAT board was acting in the best interest of pupils? There are no issues with the quality of the educational experience. Why were the solutions not being explored, instead of laying blame? The consultation was begun much too late. There was an opportunity to keep the school open for a further three years and explore all the options fully.

Q: Should the concerns about very small class sizes limiting the educational experiences of the children have been alleviated by the collaboration with other MAT schools?

A: Mrs Sherlock said that this was already happening, particularly for KS1 who now spent the majority of their time at other schools in the MAT. However, there was a concern that KS2 pupils could have made better progress within a larger group at their own school.

Q: Would it not benefit the school to return to having a full time head, and employing staff who enjoyed working with mixed age classes?

A: It was no longer financially viable to have a full time head in a small school. Recruitment of teachers for small schools was more difficult than ever before due to the substantial demands of the new curriculum. There was no longer a pool of young, dynamic teachers keen to work with mixed age groups.

Comment: A good preschool was essential to attract families from outside the immediate area, and would address the historical problem of varying numbers of pupils on roll. Parents at the school no longer have confidence in the MAT board.

Comment: A preschool was set up at another local school a few years ago when numbers at the school dropped dramatically. The community fought hard to get it up and running, and was helped with a Big Lottery grant. The school was now oversubscribed.

Q: Are there no financial support packages available to the MAT?

A: Victoria Hatton was asked to explain how MAT funding worked. Maintained schools had a top slice taken from their overall funding by the local authority to pay for certain services and, in many cases, subsidise small schools to keep them open. MATs receive their funding direct from central government but are also able to top-slice funding, as the Keskowethyans MAT had done to subsidise St Martin. To put it in context, however, the local authority used to support 300+ schools, where the Keskowethyans MAT has 5 schools. The external funding streams available to the local school mentioned earlier to establish a preschool no longer exist, or have decreased dramatically.

Rev Sharpe explained that whilst finance was not the overriding factor in this decision making process, there was no longer the financial leeway to ride out this storm, and it was harder to be resilient in the current financial climate. The MAT board wanted to have St Martin work more closely with Manaccan and pool their resources, but it was felt that there was little support for this at the first meeting with parents. **(Some of those present at the meeting disagreed with this statement).**

Comment: Board members appear to be very negative about the outcome.

Q: Why was Mr Harman not at the meeting?

A: Mr Harman had resigned at the end of the Spring Term.

Q: Why did the board only communicate with parents and not the wider community that the school was failing?

A: The school was only failing in pupil numbers; not in the quality of the education it provided. Parents had been informed and consulted on other options which would have impacted on their children. Parents were able to share this with community members.

Q: Was there a strong strategic action plan put in place to address falling rolls at St Martin? Was this plan evidenced with minutes?

A: Keeping all the schools in the MAT financially viable was a key Board priority. A vision meeting held in 2015 had included representatives from St Martin. **(Parents present who had attended that meeting stated that closure was not raised as the only option and that there was no action plan or follow up).**

Q: Why didn't the Board meeting minutes show that there were no vacancies on the Board?

A: At that time (2015), the governing board had a full quota. Unfortunately, a number of directors have resigned since then. **(Some of those present indicated that they would have rallied to help had they known).**

Q: Why was the preschool not made a part of the MAT?

A: The Board had not received a formal application. **(Some of those present disagreed; stating that an application was made to Mr Harman but never formalised).**

Comment: Why was the Parish Council not approached to help with recruitment to the Board of Directors? Why is no-one on the Board taking responsibility for what had happened?

Q: What are the qualifications of the current Finance Director?

A: While not a qualified accountant, Rev Sharpe had been a project fund manager dealing in millions of pounds before taking orders. Chris Sealy had been the finance director prior to that. The Trust business manager has the necessary qualifications and experience.

Comment: Board members have a moral obligation to keep the school open.

Q: Will Mr Harman be replaced?

A: At this time, the Keskowethyans MAT was exploring a possible move to another MAT in the local area. This was still in the early stages and a full consultation with stakeholders would be held at the appropriate time. Mrs Sherlock would continue as Acting Head with the full support of the Board.

Q: Could any savings as a larger MAT help to keep the school open?

A: Yes, but only if the school was viable, which it was not. The option to close the school had only been considered since the numbers dropped to their current level and it became clear that there was no realistic prospect of them increasing.

Q: Why are those families who drive past the school to Helston not attending St Martin? Is there any hope that the school may stay open?

A: It is for parents to decide what school they choose to send their child to. The Board will meet on Monday 26th June to discuss the responses to the consultation. While the Board has been impressed with the passion shown by parents and the local community, it needs to be convinced that the school can keep its educational standards high.

Q: What are the directors of the MAT paid?

A: The role is unpaid, although there are some minor expenses that can be claimed. Mrs Miller said that she had never claimed expenses.

Q: How much rent does the school pay?

A: £8,000 per annum is paid to the Trelowarren Estate.

Q: Will the school's landlord help with maintenance on the school buildings?

A: No. They have already been approached and have refused.

Q: How does the per pupil cost of £11,000 compare to other local schools?

A: Mrs Sherlock agreed to look into this and report back. Some of those present expressed a willingness to fundraise in the short term to keep the school open.

Comment: Board members should have informed parents earlier; it was not counterproductive or inappropriate to do so, it would have given parents the opportunity to offer their support when it could have made a difference.

Q: What will happen at the end of the consultation?

A: The Board will meet to consider all the responses; should they decide to close the school, an application would need to be made to the Secretary of State for Education. The Secretary's decision could take weeks or months, so St Martin may need to reopen in September 2017.

Q: Will parents be informed over the summer holidays that the school will close in September?

A: No

Q: Will there be a neutral presence at the decision meeting?

A: Even with a neutral presence the Board will make the final decision; the minutes of that meeting would be shared.

The meeting was brought to a close; Mrs Miller thanked everyone present for their significant contribution. All responses needed to be received by midnight on Thursday 22nd June.

The meeting concluded at 9.20pm.

Full List of Attendees (87)

?	? (name illegible)
?	? (name illegible)
Frances	Alston
Johnny	Alston
Jeanette	Angove
M	Armstrong
T	Armstrong
Paul	Armstrong
Ian	Armstrong
Zelda	Astley
Kerry	Beeslee
Carol	Beeslee
Chris	Blee
Glen	Bray
Martin	Bray
Suzanne	Bray
Julie	Bray
Andrew	Bray
Timothy	Bryant

Judith	Bryant
Bryan	Burton
Simon	Cade
Susanne	Carter
Sheila	Chandler
Emma	Churchill
Geoff	Freeman
Zoe	Freeman
Dave	Giddens
Rachel	Giddens
Alison	Goldsack
Alison	Grose
Vicky	Harford
Scott	Henwood
Mark	Hodgkinson
Frances	Hosken
Ray	Hoskin
Pat	Hosking
Brindley	Hosking
Ruth	Hosking
Rachael	Jenkin
Philip	Jenkin
Vikkie	Jenking
Louise	Jinks
Matthew	Jones
Susie	Lawrence
Jack	Lawrence
Rena	Lethfead-Currie
D	Lugg
Andrew	Martyn
Cindy	Martyn
Tegan	Martyn
David	Murray
Jane	Murray
T	Nicholson
Jeni	Osborne
Annabel	Phillips
Julian	Rand
Karen	Richards
Tal	Sanders
Helen	Sandle-Baker
Emily	Stanbury
Ian	Stanbury

Jenny	Stanbury
Eden	Stephens
Kath	Tinson
?	Trelawny
Alia	Trelawny
Sarah	Trewhella
Jan	Trewhella
Peter	Waterfield
Ann	Webb
David	Webb
Mike	West
Victoria	Whitehouse
Maria	Whyment
Daryl	Whyment
Geoffrey	Williams
Robert	Williams
Elizabeth	Williams
Maggie	Williams
Matthew	Williams
Barbara	Williams
Vicky	Woods
Diana	Worden
Kayley	Wright
Paul	Wright