

**Minutes of the extraordinary meeting of the FULL COUNCIL held in  
Bruton Community Hall at 7.30pm on Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> March, 2025**

**Councillors present:** Councillors Baker, Bateman, Dunn, Hood, Jones & Fradley.

**In the chair:** Councillor Hood.

**Officers present:** Deputy Clerk.

**Also present:** Somerset Councillor Trimmell

Chair of the East Somerset Federation

Chair of the Board of Governors of Sexey's School

Manager of Sunny Hill Nursery

**Other members of the public:** 6.

**MINUTES**

**24/166 Apologies for Absence (LGA 1972 s85(1)).**

Apologies were received from Councillors Anderton, Crawford and Robinson

The Chair explained that the reason for the extraordinary meeting was to consider whether the Council still accepted that the Bruton School for Girls Trust [the Trust] needed to sell the 'designated land' (i.e. land given to the Trust). This was not discussed at the Full Council meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> February because the meeting would have become inquorate (since a councillor who was an interested party would have had to leave the meeting), so the matter was deferred to this extraordinary meeting.

At 7.34pm the Chair suspended the Council so that interested members of the public could ask questions or bring matters to the attention of councillors.

The Chair of the East Somerset Federation (of schools) made several points:

- There is a crying need for a local school catering for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities [SEND]. Somerset has a shortfall of 600700 SEND places, and many children with special needs are obliged either to attend mainstream schools where their needs cannot be properly catered for, or else to spend up to two hours a day travelling to a SEND school. In desperation some parents take their children out of school and educate them at home, at great cost - financial, social and psychological - to the whole family.
- Last year the East Somerset Federation [the Federation], which includes Bruton, Upton Noble and Ditchat Primary Schools, put forward a plan to operate a SEND school on the land at Sunny Hill owned by the Trust.

- Government policy now prioritises local provision of SEND education, reasoning that the children benefit if the SEND provision comes to them rather than them having to travel to the provision, and the Government has made increased funding available for SEND provision.
- Somerset Council is fully supportive of this approach and is allocating substantial funding to capital works associated with SEND provision.
- This confirms the viability of the Federation's proposals to operate a SEND school on the designated land with the support of the Local Authority. The Federation has submitted revised, costed proposals to the Charity Commission.
- If these proposals are accepted, the charitable objects of the Trust could be amended in accordance with the provisions of the 2010 Equality Act, and the proposed SEND school would cater for boys and girls up to the age of 18. The scheme would also bring further benefit to the local community by making the Hobhouse Theatre and tennis courts (which are situated on the designated land) available for community use. The Federation would also work closely with the Sexey's School Foundation.
- The Federation would have access to sufficient capital funding to repair the dilapidated buildings, but to save further degradation it is essential to secure the Trust's future as soon as possible.

The Manager of Sunny Hill Nursery emphasised the urgency of finding a solution, not just to safeguard the physical assets of the site, but also, and even more importantly, to secure the welfare of the many children whose future could be affected by the outcome, for good or ill. The desperately sad news that Sunny Hill Nursery would be closing at the end of this school year illustrates how real decisions affect real lives.

The Chair of Governors of Sexey's School who is also a member of Sexey's School Trust made some further points:

- The future of the Bruton School for Girls Trust could be secured without having to sell the designated land.
- It does not matter that the Bruton School for Girls Trust does not have substantial funds. The landlord of Sexey's School is Sexey's School Trust, and it has little in the way of funds, but Sexey's School looks after the site and the relationship between the two bodies works fine.
- If a SEND school were established on the designated land it might be possible to make additional provision for other educational providers, like Sexey's School.

Somerset Councillor Lucy Trimnell asked questions about the number of pupils, class sizes and staffing envisaged by the Federation's proposals, and welcomed the support of the Local Authority which she sees as a very positive sign.

At 7.58pm The Chair reopened the Council meeting.

**24/167 Declarations of Interest.**

No interests were declared

**24/168 Bruton School for Girls Trust**

Councillor Jones explained that the Trust claimed it was obliged to sell the designated land so that it could maintain the Trust's viability, and in 2023 the Town Council had accepted this claim, but now the circumstances have changed. The experienced boards of Bruton's two state schools (Bruton Primary School and Sexey's School) have made a strong and convincing case that there was no need to sell the designated land because it could still be used for its original purpose, the delivery of education.

In response to a councillor's question, the Council was assured that the shortfall in SEND provision is substantial and, and this demand ensures the continuing viability of a SEND school.

Councillors expressed disappointment at the failure of Bruton School for Girls Trustees to engage with local people and other local educational providers, and the apparent lack of creative thinking about how the Trust could continue to serve local educational needs.

**It was RESOLVED [6-0-0] that:**

- i Bruton Town Council no longer accepts that the Bruton School for Girls Trust needed to sell the designated land since the Trust could achieve its charitable objects by working with local educational institutions like the East Somerset Federation and Sexey's School, and by supporting the establishing of a SEND school on its land;**
- ii The Town Council should respond to the questions posed by the Charity Commission in its letter (to the Council) of 28<sup>th</sup> January 2025 by sending the Commission a letter based on a previously circulated draft.**

The meeting ended at 8.12pm

**END OF MINUTES**