

**RISC CORRESPONDENCE WITH HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AT RICHMOND COUNCIL
TO END SEPTEMBER 2011**

----- Original Message -----

From: [Kathryn Thomas](#)
To: [jeremyrodell](#)
Sent: Friday, September 30, 2011 11:55 AM
Subject: Inclusive schools petition

Dear Mr Rodell,

Thank you for your email of 21 September 2011.

At present our Petition Scheme does not allow us to rule out petitions which reach the threshold to trigger a debate on a topic which has been previously heard.

The first debate on a petition was held in November 2010. It is therefore a relatively new procedure and one from which we continue to learn. Your point about duplicate petitions is well made and one which will be considered in a review of the Petition Scheme. I shall be raising your points with the leadership of the two political groups on the Council.

The minutes of the meeting of Council on 13 September have been published and are available for your supporters to read. They contain a summary of the debate on the petition and may be viewed via http://www.richmond.gov.uk/council_committees_list?mgl=ieListDocuments.aspx&CId=173&MId=2762&Ver=4

These minutes will be presented for approval at the Council meeting on 1 November 2011.

In terms of access to its meetings, this Council does not pursue an exclusive approach to entry to the public gallery.

As stated previously, I will contact you after the meeting on 1 November.

Kind regards,
Kathryn Thomas
Head of Democratic Services
London Borough of Richmond upon Thames
Tel: 020 8891 7860

----- Original Message -----

From: [jeremyrodell](#)
To: [Kathryn Thomas](#)
Sent: Wednesday, September 21, 2011 8:46 PM
Subject: Re: COUNCIL RESPONSE TO INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS PETITION & RELATED ISSUES

Dear Kathryn,

While I have great respect for the genuine efforts of you and your department to provide high quality and impartial democratic services, I am afraid we are not at all happy with what is proposed in your note.

Duplicate petitions: As you know, on 5th April there was a debate initiated by a petition stating: *"We, the undersigned declare our support for the establishment of a Catholic Secondary School in the London Borough of Richmond and call upon Richmond Councillors, of all political persuasions, and the Diocese authorities, immediately to take all necessary steps to secure this objective"*. The case for a Catholic secondary school was fully aired in that debate, and a number of the same points were repeated in the debate on 13th Sep.

Surely it is an abuse of the petition scheme to hold a second debate on 1st November on the basis of a petition ("*...to support the creation of a new Catholic Secondary School within the Borough*") which is more or less identical to the one in April, and presumably includes many of the same signatories.

The fact that the duplicate petition was received after the Clifden Road site purchase is irrelevant: its wording makes no reference to the site, and in fact the April debate was directly referred to by the Deputy Leader in the Cabinet discussion on 21st July when the decision to buy the site was made. The duplicate petition is simply a way of giving those in favour of a Catholic school a second chance in less than 7 months to put their case to a full Council meeting, and attract the associated publicity. It is disappointing that this abuse of what is in principle an enlightened democratic tool is being allowed to happen.

Response to our petition: As underlined in the debate (copy of my speech attached for reference), unlike the petition in April, and its current duplicate, both of which simply ask for a Catholic secondary school, our petition makes a simple request on a point of principle: "*to ensure that every state-funded school opening in the borough from now on is inclusive, so that no child can be denied a place in a good local school because of the religion or belief of their parents.*" This applies not only to the new secondary school proposed for Clifden Road, and does not even preclude a future Catholic school on that site or elsewhere, assuming it has inclusive admissions.

The response cannot therefore be determined by the outcome of a debate on the 1 November. And it is not reasonable to say that "*it would not be appropriate for the Council to provide a definitive response without hearing the views of the petitioners at the next meeting*", when their views have already been heard and debated in April. 1780 people have signed our petition so far. They are entitled to a reply.

A key issue for most of our supporters is fairness. They will therefore be extremely concerned if, on the one hand, they are not given a proper and timely reply to their petition, while on the other hand the abuse of the scheme represented by the duplicate petition is allowed to go ahead.

Public gallery: I fully appreciate the thinking behind the arrangements for the public gallery and the value of getting children interested in the Council. However - as no doubt you are aware - your good intentions were abused in this case by anti-Inclusive Schools Campaigners using children to help occupy the majority of places from two and a quarter hours before the start of the meeting. This was simply to create "presence" and prevent others getting in. Despite people arriving early, only seven supporters of the petition managed to squeeze in for a debate that - as a result of a lot of work - we had initiated.

The arrangement in the Salon was excellent, and much appreciated, as was the webcast. But they are not the same as being present in the public gallery. You may wish to consider some adjustment to the arrangements for access to the public gallery when a petition-triggered debate is involved.

Regards,

Jeremy Rodell
Morley Road
East Twickenham TW1 2HF

----- Original Message -----

From: [Kathryn Thomas](#)

To: [jeremyrodell](#)

Sent: Wednesday, September 21, 2011 5:13 PM

Subject: RE: COUNCIL RESPONSE TO INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS PETITION?

Dear Mr Rodell,

Thank you for your email below and the contribution which you made at the Council meeting on 13 September. Our webcast was an experiment on that evening and we have been very pleased with

the positive response which we have received. Our next live webcast is expected to be a planning committee in October.

In line with the Government guidance issued at the time, our Petition Scheme was adopted in May 2010. The Scheme as drafted envisaged that the Council would be asked to respond to petitions on 'one-off' topics. However the issue of future school provision and use of the Clifden Road site is generating interest from a range of concerned groups. The site was purchased in August 2011 and since then we have received your group's petition in favour of inclusive schools and a petition in favour of a Catholic School for Richmond. This second petition has received more than 1000 signatures to date and will be debated at the next Council meeting.

At this stage therefore it would not be appropriate for the Council to provide a definitive response without hearing the views of the petitioners at the next meeting.

I am happy to contact you again about the outcome of the next debate at the 1 November council meeting.

In terms of the presence of children in the public gallery, the council provides services for children and young people and welcomes their participation. In the case of a council meeting, we have to rely on the judgement of the parents themselves as to whether the debates are of interest to their children. The Mayor has powers to clear the gallery in the event of a disturbance, but this was not necessary on 13 September. You may not be aware, but we did provide room for people who were unable to enter the public gallery to view the webcast in the Salon and a large number of people took advantage of this offer.

Kind regards,
Kathryn Thomas
Head of Democratic Services
London Borough of Richmond upon Thames
Tel: 020 8891 7860

Kathryn.Thomas@richmond.gov.uk
www.richmond.gov.uk

From: jeremyrodell
Sent: 14 September 2011 15:41
To: Kathryn Thomas
Cc: Petitions
Subject: COUNCIL RESPONSE TO INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS PETITION?

Dear Kathryn,

Firstly, many thanks to your team for coping so patiently with the multiple demands of our petition (plus another one), the webcast (an excellent idea by the way), competition for places in the public gallery*, and lively activity outside the building.

As you will have observed in the debate on Inclusive Schools - which I have double-checked using the recording - while a number of points were made about the proposed Catholic school, its priority and overall plans for capacity and quality in the secondary system, **no-one gave a response to our petition.**

As a reminder, it simply states: *We, the undersigned, petition the council to ensure that every state-funded school opening in the borough from now on is inclusive, so that no child can be denied a place in a good local school because of the religion or belief of their parents.*

As I made clear - and should be clear from the wording - it does not preclude future faith schools, including Catholic schools.

According to the Council's Petitions Scheme:*The Council will decide how to respond to the petition at this meeting. It may decide to take the action the petition requests, not to take the action requested for reasons put forward in the debate, or to commission further investigation into the matter, for example by a relevant committee. Where the issue is one on which the Council Executive are required to make the final decision, the Council will decide whether to make recommendations to inform that decision. The petition organiser will receive written confirmation of the decision. This confirmation will also be published on the Council's website.*

Our supporters are therefore asking when we will receive the Council's formal response to our petition.

Your advice would be much appreciated.

Regards

Jeremy Rodell
Richmond Inclusive Schools Campaign

* I wonder about the desirability of quite young children - with little or no understanding of the issues under debate, and, no matter how good their behaviour, inevitably sometimes distracting others - occupying places that those with a real interest could have filled.