

Council 'in knots' over Catholic school plans

The High Court's decision to grant leave for a judicial review of Richmond Council's handling of the proposed new Catholic secondary school shows how badly it has handled the issue, Liberal Democrat opposition has said.

Liberal Democrat group leader Councillor Stephen Knight said the council "has wrapped itself in procedural knots" while trying to push through a Catholic school.

The argument that will be discussed is whether or not the council has interpreted the wording of the legislation correctly.

A judge will decide on whether the council's desire for a Catholic school to be established was actually

something it required rather than something it merely desired.

The council has said the school is not something it needed in the borough, but was something that Catholic parents wanted – and therefore was desired.

However, Coun Knight said the council had tried "to force through a school with an admission policy entirely restricted to pupils from Catholic families, when recent legislation suggests new Catholic schools should have at least 50 per cent of places open to all.

"The council could and should have avoided this mess by following the normal process for opening a new school, even if it wouldn't have achieved their preferred exclusive admissions policy."

But deputy leader of the council Councillor Geoffrey Samuel said Coun Knight had conned the Catholic community by previously suggesting the Lib Dems were in favour of a Catholic school, but was now forming an alliance with the British Humanist Association, which Coun Samuel was opposed to all faith schools.

Coun Samuel said: "He has shown contempt for the democratic process and his unwillingness to trust the people, in what was one of the largest responses to any consultation ever, where voters voted two to one for a Catholic school.

"He would prefer a single judge to take the decision affecting hundreds of innocent children."

The council's costs for the judicial review so far are £3,500, but this will go up significantly once the judicial review begins.



Speaking out: Councillor Stephen Knight

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