

Leicester
City Council

WARDS AFFECTED
Eyres Monsell
Saffron

FORWARD TIMETABLE OF CONSULTATION AND MEETINGS:

Cabinet
Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee

22nd April 2003
TBE

PRIMARY SCHOOLS REPORT

Report of the Corporate Director of Education and Lifelong Learning

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 This report advises Members on a number of key strategic issues facing the primary sector in the City. Members are briefed on a number of Governing Body amalgamation requests to become all-through Primary Schools. Recommendations are made with respect to the following four separate pairs of Infant and Junior Schools:

- Rolleston Infant and Junior Schools
- Southfields Infant and Newry Junior Schools
- Queensmead Infant and Junior Schools
- Braunstone Frith Infant and Junior Schools

1.2 The educational advantages accrued by the change of status process and formation of a new all-through Primary School are set out.

1.3 It is recommended to pursue a statutory consultation for achieving a change of status for Rolleston Infant and Junior Schools; and to defer a decision on Southfields Infant and Newry Junior Schools pending a decision on the Academy school. It is recommended also that further work be carried out on the proposals at Queensmead Infant and Junior Schools and at Braunstone Frith Infant and Junior Schools, including identifying sources of capital investment.

2. Summary

2.1 The need for a City-wide primary review has been acknowledged previously by Members. It was postponed to allow for a concentrated push on raising standards first. The review's key aims were to

- Contribute to the strategic aims of raising educational standards, and

make the best use of available resources.

- 2.2 Although the review is postponed it has been agreed that the Department continues to consider amalgamation requests. Such requests need to be assessed within the context of the key issues facing the primary sector, and the issues that any review would be expected to address.
- Creating all-through primary schools in pursuit of the raising of standards – the advantages are set out in the Supporting Information
 - Ensuring strong schools in local communities
 - Seeking to resist and reverse out-migration – currently there are falling rolls – from 26,482 in 2000, to 25,908 in 2003, to a projection of 25,515 in 2006 (based on 4+ admissions).
 - Reducing surplus primary school places – there are currently 4,817 such places across the City, being 16.2% of all places; 20.9% of primary schools have 25% or more surplus places – a key performance indicator
 - Addressing the financial difficulties being faced by smaller schools, leading to increasing sums being devoted to small schools protection (£185,000 in 2003/04 across 20 schools) and a consequent reduced capacity to raise standards
 - Creating high quality learning environments
 - Responding to governing body requests to consider amalgamations
- 2.3 It is considered that the amalgamation proposals from the four sets of schools do address these strategic issues.
- 2.4 The current Council policy is to consider the amalgamation of separate Infant and Junior Schools when Headship vacancies allow, or on a case by case basis when governing bodies make a formal request. Governing Bodies tend to seek amalgamation when viability is threatened by
- falls in pupil numbers and a consequent loss of revenue and staffing.
 - schools capacity to manage the curriculum effectively and provide sufficient breadth of curriculum expertise from a staffing establishment large enough to cover the ten subject national curriculum. An amalgamation of two smaller schools provides the foundation for appropriate curriculum coverage and consequent benefits to pupil attainment from improved provision.
- 2.5 The governing bodies of the Rolleston Schools and Southfields Infant and Newry Junior have formulated proposals for a change of status having acknowledged the combination of falling pupil numbers and the associated reduction in funding which is impacting on the viability of their schools.
- 2.6 There is a limited availability of capital funds to address amalgamation proposals. Options are set out in the report. The Schools Forum will need to be consulted regarding funding priorities City-wide.
- 2.7 The Department has been working with these schools to consider a possible change of status to be effected for September 2004.
- 2.8 This has been considered necessary and appropriate given the issues faced

by the schools and the current status of the Academy school proposal. However, given that a decision has not been taken on the Academy proposal, it is considered that this is not now appropriate. If members were to agree to progress to statutory consultation it would be necessary to terminate the process at some point should the Academy secure approval at a future date. Statutory consultation on the amalgamation would need to start mid-May. To delay, on the other hand, it is likely to present financial difficulties for the schools which would require sensitive handling and sympathetic consideration.

- 2.9 It is recommended that the Rolleston Infant and Junior amalgamation should progress to statutory consultation in May 2003.
- 2.10 Members will be mindful of the issues regarding relations with the schools and the local community depending on the preferred way forward.
- 2.11 Given an assessment of the current financial position, the limited availability of capital funds and the limited capacity in the Department, it is proposed to come back with options to members for the two other pairs of schools.

3. Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to consider whether it wishes to:

- 1) Address the pressing needs of amalgamation requests in the south of the city;
- 2) Note the principles under which this report has been prepared, as set out in paragraph 2.2 above;
- 3) Agree to progress to statutory consultation at Rolleston Infant and Juniors Schools in May 2003;
- 4) Agree in principle to the higher level of capital funding set out in the report subject to the views of the Schools Forum, with the final decision being taken by the Corporate Director of Education and Lifelong Learning in consultation with the Cabinet Lead for Education;
- 5) Agree to defer a decision on Southfields Infants and Newry Junior schools until a decision has been made on the Academy school, and implement statutory consultation in May 2004, or earlier if a decision is made not to proceed with an Academy;
- 6) Agree that officers should continue to assess the available options for Queensmead Infants and Juniors, and for Braunstone Frith Infants and Juniors; and
- 7) Note that where proposals are going forward, the Department will develop a range of options for possible remodelling or use of redundant buildings including wider community use, and potential advantages accruing to the Council of land sale.

4. Legal and Financial Implications

- 4.1 After undertaking a consultation process, the LEA is required to publish Statutory Notices if it wishes to close Infant and Junior Schools in order to open an all-through Primary School on an existing site. Prescribed Information and the Statutory Notice must be sent to the School Organisation Committee.
- 4.2 The Statutory Notice invites objections to the proposal within a period of two months of the publication date. The LEA will forward any objections received together with the LEA's comments on those objections to the School Organisation Committee within one month of the end of the objection period. If no objections are received the LEA can determine the proposals.
- 4.3 In the event of any objections, the School Organisation Committee will consider the proposals for approval, including possible modification, or rejection.
- 4.4 In the event of the School Organisation Committee being unable to reach a decision, an adjudicator will be appointed by the DfES to determine the future of the proposals.
- 4.5 All the legal issues in respect of this report have been covered by the author in paragraphs 4.1 to 4.4 above (Guy Goodman, Assistant Head of Legal Services – ext 7054).
- 4.6 Savings to the LEA may arise from a reduction in buffer allocations within the schools S52 budget statement. Savings could arise at school level following reductions in establishment costs. Dependent upon the organisation within the school this could be the cost of one Headteacher and some management and support posts.
- 4.7 Capital costs will arise from the need to meet minimum improvement requirements and provide central joint-use accommodation for the administration of a new all-through Primary School. The report sets out options for a higher level of investment.

5. Report Author/Officer to contact:

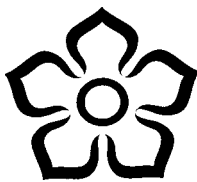
Adrian Paterson, Service Director Policy and Resources, ext: 7702

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DECISION STATUS

Key Decision	No
Reason	N/A
Appeared in Forward Plan	No
Executive or Council Decision	Executive (Cabinet)



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CHANGE OF STATUS PROPOSALS

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1. Report

a) Overview

- 1.1 On 21st May 2001 Cabinet resolved to defer the implementation of the Primary Review process and agreed that school Governing Bodies could make individual requests for amalgamation where they deemed circumstances warranted a change of status.
- 1.2 On 19th June 2001 the Scrutiny Committee supported Cabinet's decision.
- 1.3 The Department has in place a process for effecting a change of status to an all-through Primary School. The consultation process ensures the provision of information to the LEA and to the Governing Body on the local and employee response to the outline proposals.
- 1.4 The LEA has undertaken three consultations to date, at the Merrydale Infant and Junior Schools, the Uplands Infant and Junior Schools and Caldecote Infant and Junior Schools. Only at the Caldecote Schools, on the basis of local support, did the Governing Bodies agree to proceed to publish Statutory Notices.
- 1.5 The LEA has maintained a presumption in favour of all-through Primary Schools. They are considered to have the following advantages for children:
 - Experience suggests that a child's learning may be delayed on transfer to a new school.
 - An all-through Primary school can achieve more flexibility in how it spends its money. Generally classes are smaller in primary schools than in separate Infant and Junior Schools.
 - An all-through Primary school provides more learning opportunities for

both staff and pupils.

- It is easier for teachers and classroom staff to develop an understanding of pupils outside the age-range that they would normally teach.
- Older pupils can develop a sense of responsibility by spending time with, and helping younger children.
- Parents and children can have a stronger sense of belonging to one school and one Headteacher, which makes it easier to build longer-term relationships with the school.
- A common approach to learning and teaching can be facilitated in order to maximise a child's progress.

1.6 In December 2002, officers from the Department met DfES representatives, as part of an ongoing dialogue, to discuss how capital works to support Primary amalgamations might be funded. Prior to this meeting, officers had been advised that it would be appropriate to submit a Targeted Capital Fund (TCF) bid to the DfES. TCF is a competitive bidding process whereby all LEAs across the country are invited to submit bids for projects. The Government prioritises these bids depending on how well each project meets their policy priorities. Latterly, the Government's top priorities have changed to the 14-19 age range and officers were advised, at the meeting, that there was little prospect of a successful primary-based bid.

1.7 This has required the Department to consider an alternative approach to addressing the needs of all the four pairs of schools, drawing on resources currently available to the Council – see below. After a careful consideration by a Departmental working group of the respective issues being faced by all these schools, it was considered that the more urgent requirements of Rolleston Infant and Junior Schools and of Southfields Infant and Junior Schools needed to be prioritised; and that more time was needed to develop a strategy for funding the high capital spends implied by the remaining proposals for Queensmead Infant and Junior Schools, and for Braunstone Frith Infant and Junior Schools.

b) Capital Costs of Proposals

1.8 The Department has developed a 'minimum requirements model' for primary amalgamations. This is focussed primarily on staff workspaces and includes the following features:

- A common staff room.
- A common resources area.
- Common administrative accommodation.
- A single, common entrance to the school, controlled by reception.
- A headteacher's office suitably located.

1.9 Whilst there has been no formal consultation on this minimum model, it has been used in the case of the Caldecote Primary School amalgamation, and the proposals have been favourably received by staff and governors. The cost of the Caldecote proposals is estimated to be £300,000 and this gives a benchmark for such schemes.

1.10 In the case of Newry / Southfields, a scheme which incorporates the minimum

requirements above is estimated to cost around £260,000. This minimum scheme brings all staff workspaces and most of the teaching accommodation to the Newry site but relies on the continued use of foundation stage classrooms in temporary buildings on the Southfields site. The school, however, would like to see two new classrooms built on the Newry site to bring all of the teaching accommodation together. The estimated cost of this more extensive proposal is around £580,000.

- 1.11 In the case of Rolleston Infant / Junior, a scheme incorporating the minimum requirements is estimated to cost around £380,000. This minimum scheme brings together all staff workspaces and most of the teaching accommodation on the junior school site but relies on the continued use of two classrooms in the existing infant school building. The school, however, would like to see two new classrooms built on the junior site to bring all of the teaching accommodation together and a new lift installed to give disabled access to the first floor. The estimated cost of this more extensive proposal is around £890,000.
- 1.12 The government provides core funding by way of condition and modernisation grants and credit approvals. The total allocation to the City for 2003/04 is £5million. This funding is to meet the maintenance and modernisation needs of all LEA maintained schools. Other competing demands on these funds across the City include health and safety works such as glass and glazing improvements, additional foundation classrooms required to deliver the common admissions policy, the programme of mobile classroom replacements, funding for behaviour initiatives such as pupil referral units and others including general modernisation and improvement projects.
- 1.13 It would be possible to fund, say, two amalgamations per year at the minimum standard, or one at a higher level, identified without impacting significantly on the LEA's capacity to fund improvement works in other schools. The 'extra' works identified by both pairs of schools would address issues that many other schools face, i.e., remote classrooms and poor or non-existent disabled access. On the one hand there is a case for an extra injection of capital to support schools that have been in difficulty and create a real incentive for schools to amalgamate effectively. On the other hand, it may be argued that these schools would receive preferential treatment to address the sort of issues that many schools face.
- 1.14 It is recommended in principle that the higher level of investment should be pursued in order to secure an effective amalgamation in a pragmatic manner within a framework of principles and with a view to supporting the raising standards agenda.

c) Way Forward

- 1.15 The Departmental working group considered that the Braunstone Frith schools could remain viable within a short-term strategy of no longer than two years.
- 1.16 It is recommended, therefore, that the Department should continue to explore

alternative funding sources to meet the amalgamation requirements at Braunstone Frith and Queensmead and, in particular, the major capital requirement at Queensmead. A report will be brought back to a future meeting to propose a way forward. The Department will continue to monitor closely the financial, staffing and curriculum issues at these schools to ensure provision is maintained, particularly to ensure that Queensmead Junior school does address issues arising from its current OfSTED status requiring Special Measures.

- 1.17 The Departmental Working Group considered that at the Rolleston Schools and at Southfields/Newry, in view of the continuing fall in pupil numbers and five-year forecasts which indicates a continuation of this trend, the Department should, in the absence of a primary review and pending a decision on the Academy, draw up proposals with a view to achieving amalgamations for September 2004.
- 1.18 Consultations for the Rolleston Schools were completed in December 2001 and for the Southfields and Newry Schools in March 2003.
- 1.19 Analysis of the consultation returns from Southfields Infant and Newry Junior Schools indicates support for a proposal for amalgamation. However, this support is based on a low number of returns. Members are recommended, in the absence of a decision on the Academy, not to proceed with the statutory process for closure of the existing schools and the opening of a new all-through Primary School on the Newry Junior site at the present time. This issue would then be brought back to Members once a decision had been made on the Academy.
- 1.20 Rolleston Junior School has historically experienced a considerable drift of pupils prior to the completion of their Key Stage 2 programme of study to County Schools. This has affected this school's ability to maintain and improve standards. This is a unique feature of this amalgamation proposal and has a particular negative impact on the pupil-led financing of the Rolleston Junior School.
- 1.21 Members are recommended to proceed with the statutory process for closure of the existing schools and the opening of a new all-through Primary School on the Rolleston Junior site, to the following timeline.

Publication of statutory notices	Summer Term 2003
Financial Projections	Summer Term 2003
Identification of staffing profile	Summer Term 2003
Publication Period	2 months (May/June)
To School Organisation Committee	Summer 2003
Proposals determined	Late Summer 2003
Preparation – new governing body, Selection of Headteacher, staffing, capital works, etc	Autumn Term 2003
Implementation date	September 2004

2. Financial Implications

Addressed in paragraphs 4.6 to 4.7 of the main report.

3. Legal Implications

Addressed in paragraphs 4.1 to 4.5 of the main report.

4. Other Implications

OTHER IMPLICATIONS	YES/NO	Paragraph References within this report
School Improvement	Yes	Supporting Information 1.4 and 1.16
Equal Opportunities	Yes	Main Report 2.1
Policy	Yes	Main Report 2.1, 4.1 to 4.4 and Supporting Information 1.5 to 1.7 and 1.16
Sustainable and Environmental	Yes	Main Report 2.1
Crime and Disorder	No	
Human Rights Act	No	
Elderly/People on low income	No	

5. Background Papers – Local Government Act 1972

School Standards and Framework Act 1998
DfEE Circular 9/99 – Organisation of School Places
Education (School Organisation Proposals) (England) Regulations 1999
Leicester City Council Briefing for Schools Issue no 007/01 November 2001 – (Review of Primary Education)
Education Committee Report – Primary Review 9th November 1999

6. Consultation

- 6.1 Informal consultations at a school level between governors and staff since the Autumn Term 2000 have addressed the potential advantages and disadvantages presented by a proposal for amalgamation. A joint working group of governors and staff working in partnership with the Standards Inspector agreed a consultation instrument.
- 6.2 The formal consultations were completed for the Rolleston Schools in December 2001 and for the Southfields and Newry Schools in March 2003.
- 6.3 Respondents were asked to choose the statement which best reflected their views for the schools to become one all-through Primary School or stay as separate Infant and Junior Schools. Analysis of the formal consultations is attached as Appendix 1 and 2.

7. Report Author:

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