

CABINET	Paper No. 18
Meeting date: 08 January 2008	
From: Corporate Director – Children’s Services	

**SCHOOL ORGANISATION : A STRATEGIC APPROACH –
POTENTIAL IMPLEMENTATION OF STATUTORY PROPOSALS:
BELAH PRIMARY SCHOOL AND KINGMOOR INFANT SCHOOL**

**SECTION A:
RECOMMENDATION OF CORPORATE DIRECTOR – CHILDREN’S
SERVICES**

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This paper deals with statutory proposals to close Belah Primary School and extend the age-range of Kingmoor Infant School.**
- 1.2 The report explains the background to the publication of those proposals and the outcome of the subsequent period for representations. It then goes on to ask Members to consider the approval of the proposals in the light of the arguments for doing so which it sets out.**

**2.0 POLICY POSITION, BUDGETARY AND EQUALITY
IMPLICATIONS AND LINKS TO COUNCIL PLAN**

Policy Position

- 2.1 The potential variations to school provision which this report focuses on represent school organisation change.**
- 2.2 The policy position on school organisation matters is set out in the 7 September 2005 Cabinet paper ‘School Organisation – A Strategic Approach’.**
- 2.3 The document ‘Enhancing Lives Through Learning – A Vision for Schools in Cumbria’, which was approved by Cabinet on 28 February 2006, underpins and guides the Authority’s school organisation processes.**

Budgetary Implications

- 2.4** *There are no significant implications for the overall levels of revenue budgets. School organisation change can, however, free-up existing resources to be put to alternative use in or for other schools although there are often some transitional costs in the short-term.*
- 2.5** *Capital expenditure would be required to achieve the potential changes focused on in this paper. Provision for this is made in the Authority's Capital Plan.*

Links to the Council Plan

- 2.6** *The basic thrust of the strategic approach to school organisation is to safeguard and improve the education and other services to children and their families provided through schools in the county.*
- 2.7** *This is supportive of the Plan's themes, 'Improving Council Services' and 'Improving the Life Chances and Well-Being of Children and Young People'.*

3.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1** *Cabinet is invited to approve the statutory proposal to close Belah Primary School on 31 August 2008 and the linked proposal to extend the age-range of Kingmoor Infant School from 4-7 to 3-7 with effect from 1 September 2008.*

Moira Swann
Corporate Director – Children's Services

SECTION B: **ADVICE OF CORPORATE DIRECTOR – CHILDREN’S SERVICES**

4.0 BACKGROUND

General Background

- 4.1 In May 2007 the Government abolished School Organisation Committees and introduced new decision-making arrangements relating to statutory proposals for school organisation change. Decisions on whether or not to approve the vast majority of such proposals regarding Cumbria’s schools now fall on the County Council to make.
- 4.2 There is statutory DCSF guidance relating to the new arrangements which is aimed at proposers of school organisation change and decision-makers dealing with statutory proposals. The full documents concerned have been previously provided for Cabinet Members so that reference can be made to them when considering whether to publish statutory proposals or, as in the case of this paper, to approve them after their publication.
- 4.3 The DCSF guidance sets out a number of factors which need to be considered when decisions on school organisation changes are made. These are summarised in Appendix A. It is felt that those factors which are relevant to the situation covered in this report have been taken into account when preparing the consultation document, in writing this paper and in the specific recommendation now made to the Cabinet. Nevertheless, Members, as decision-makers, need to satisfy themselves that the relevant factors are considered when they are contemplating the decisions to be taken.
- 4.4 A decision on a proposal is required to be made within two months of the end of the period for representations which follows its publication otherwise the proposal has to be sent to a DCSF appointed adjudicator to take the decision. Given that, in making these changes in legislation the Government envisaged that the vast majority of the decisions on formal proposals would continue to be made locally, the Council has recently adjusted its call-in procedures to seek to ensure that this is what happens here in Cumbria.
- 4.5 There is a limited right of appeal against almost all local authority decisions on statutory school organisation proposals. The following bodies have such a right:-
- The local Church of England diocese
 - The Bishop of the local Roman Catholic diocese
 - The local LSC where the school involved provides education for pupils aged 14 and over

- The governors and trustees of foundation or voluntary schools involved where the local authority publishes the proposals.

General Considerations for Decision-Makers under the New Arrangements

- 4.6 This report concerns formal proposals which, if approved and implemented, would have the effect of closing a primary school and making replacement provision at two nearby schools.
- 4.7 The guidance referred to in paragraphs 4.2 and 4.3 requires decision-makers to consider whether:-
- all necessary information is available to them when taking a decision;
 - the formal proposals meet statutory requirements;
 - the statutory consultation was appropriately carried out before the formal proposals were published.
- 4.8 In relation to the formal proposals which are the subject of this report, the answer is yes. All relevant information is provided in this report and its appendices, the published notices were checked for compliance by the DCSF and the Authority's solicitors prior to their publication and the consultation exercises were undertaken in line with the relevant Government guidance.
- 4.9 The DCSF guidance also indicates that decision-makers should consider the views of those affected by statutory proposals for school organisation change.
- 4.10 The rest of this section of the report includes sub sections covering:-
- specific background relating to the proposals
 - the outcome of the initial consultation and the response to the publication of the statutory proposals processes
 - the case for the approval of the proposals
 - reasons for decisions

Specific Background to the Proposals

- 4.11 The Cabinet, at its meetings on 30 January and 13 March 2007, agreed that consultation should occur on options for changes to primary education provision in North Carlisle. A consultation document was issued on 4 June 2007 and the usual series of consultation meetings took place between 18 and 27 June.
- 4.12 Cabinet considered the outcome of the consultation exercise at its meeting on 9 October 2007. The Cabinet report considered (including appendices) is attached as Appendix B. Taking into account the response to the

consultation and a wide range of other factors, Members agreed to support changes to primary provision for the area.

4.13 Statutory proposals to achieve changes in line with the Cabinet's decision were published on 29 October 2007. In terms of details it was proposed to:

- Close Belah Primary School on 31 August 2008

and

- Extend the age-range of Kingmoor Infant School from 4-7 to 3-7 with effect from 1 September 2008

4.14 The main aims of the proposals are to:

- Safeguard and enhance the educational interests of pupils
- Remove excess school places

The Outcome of the Initial Consultation and the Responses to the Publication of the Statutory Proposals

4.15 The outcome of the consultation exercise undertaken in June and July this year is covered in Appendix B.

4.16 What was clear from the consultations was that there was an acceptance that change to primary education in the area needed to be made. There was less clarity from the responses about what kind of changes should occur.

4.17 After considering the analysis of the consultation outcome and advice on a possible way forward set out in the Cabinet paper, Members decided to publish statutory proposals to achieve the changes outlined in para 4.13 above.

4.18 During the period for representations which followed the publication of proposals, only a single response was received. This did not constitute an objection to the proposals but did raise some concerns which are being addressed in line with the Councils' responsibilities.

The Case for the Approval of the Proposals

General

4.19 The case for the proposed adjustment of primary education provision in North Carlisle is supported by the data contained in this report and in Appendix B. Set out in this sub-section are the main arguments and the case for the approval of the statutory proposals.

Belah School

Popularity and Pupil Numbers

4.20 Over the last decade pupil numbers at Belah School have fallen dramatically from over 320 to the current figure of around 45.

- 4.21 If the school was not to close, the pupil roll would be almost certain to further reduce considerably in proportionate terms. This is because by far the largest two year groups will go on to secondary education in the next three years and be replaced by very much smaller intakes.
- 4.22 Currently, well over 80% of primary-aged children in the school's catchment area attend other schools.
- 4.23 The pattern of parental choice over recent years has demonstrated the increasing relative unpopularity of the school with those parents faced with choosing a place in the reception year for their children. In addition, many parents have withdrawn children from the school to continue their primary education elsewhere.

Educational Standards

- 4.24 For a variety of reasons, including the fall in pupil numbers and the financial difficulties this has brought about, educational standards at the school have declined over the past few years. There has been a significantly negative impact on pupils' progress and achievement. Further details about standards are given throughout Appendix B.
- 4.25 At present the education of pupils is being protected by the input of considerable staffing and other resources way beyond what the school could afford via its own budget. This level of extra financial support is not justifiable or sustainable for the future.

Budgetary Issues

- 4.26 A budget deficit situation has existed for six years now. It is likely that the deficit will have risen to £220-£240k by the end of the current financial year. With the pupil roll set to fall even further, the prognosis for the future, were the school to stay, is even worse.
- 4.27 The pupil roll would not be much over 30 were the school to stay open. It is inconceivable that the school could eradicate the deficit over a small number of years, as it would have to do, whilst offering anything like decent educational provision and outcomes for its pupils.

Alternative Provision

- 4.28 If Belah School closes, its current reception to year five pupils will have the opportunity to take up a place, depending on their age, at Kingmoor Infant or Junior Schools. In relation to children who reach primary school age from next September onwards, Belah School's catchment area would be split between the Kingmoor Schools and Stanwix School.
- 4.29 These alternative schools are relatively close and offer good quality education.

Overall

- 4.30 The position outlined above regarding falling pupil numbers, unpopularity with parents, poor educational standards and financial difficulties combine to indicate that the situation facing Belah School is irretrievable.

Kingmoor Infant and Junior Schools

- 4.31 In order to cater for the current Belah School pupils as well as their own and for a limited period after 1 September 2008, there is a need to provide some temporary accommodation. There is also a need to provide new permanent accommodation to enable Kingmoor Infant School to make provision for three year olds in line with the 3-7 age-range cited in the statutory proposals.
- 4.32 Work to develop the ideas for the building solution is well underway. Provision to meet the costs of the project is included in the Authority's Capital Plan. This information will satisfy the Cabinet, as the decision-maker and as requested in the DCSF guidance, that the capital resources to implement the proposals will be available.

Over-Provision of Places in the Area

- 4.33 Without action to address the issue, over the next few years the number of primary school places in the North Carlisle area is expected to be 400 more than there are primary aged pupils whose parents wish to seek places at the schools involved. (This is covered on page 5 of the consultation document which is part of Appendix B)
- 4.34 The proposals have the effect, once the transition period is over, of removing 300 of these places. This will make the primary provision serving the area more cost-effective.

Absence of Objections

- 4.35 During the period for representations which followed the publication of statutory proposals, no objections were received.

Reasons for Decisions

- 4.36 Decision-makers are required to identify the reasons for the decisions they take on school organisation proposals. Should Members decide to approve the proposals covered in this report, it is suggested that the key points in the sub-section of the report headed 'The Case for the Approval of the Proposals' should be used in compiling the reasons for the decision.

5.0 OPTIONS

- 5.1 Members can either decide to approve or reject the proposals for school organisation change covered in the report.

6.0 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 Given the very strong case for the approval of the proposals outlined in the covering report and supported by the content of Appendix B, Members will no doubt want to seriously consider supporting the recommendation.

Jim Mitchell

School Organisation Project Team Manager / Coordinator

30 November 2007

APPENDICES

- Appendix A – Statutory Guidance – Summary of Factors to be considered by School Organisation Decision-Makers
- Appendix B – School Organisation : A Strategic Approach - Potential Changes to Primary Education in North Carlisle (9 October 2007 Cabinet paper, including all appendices)
- Appendix C – The Statutory Proposals
- Appendix D – Representation Concerning the Statutory Proposals – Chair, Kingmoor Oak Tree Club

IMPLICATIONS

Staffing: There are real/potential implications for staff working in schools which are the subject of school organisation change. Staffing issues in relation to the potential changes covered in this report are mentioned in the consultation document which forms part of Appendix B.

Financial:
Revenue - The potential implications concern the use of existing resources rather than absolute fluctuations in budget levels overall. Moreover, school organisation change can lead to a more effective use of resources following the implementation stage.

Capital - Capital investment would be required to implement the possible school organisation changes dealt with in this report. Provision for this is made in the Authority's Capital Plan.

Electoral Division(s): All Carlisle

Executive Decision	<input type="text" value="Yes"/>
Key Decision	<input type="text" value="Yes"/>
If a Key Decision, is the proposal published in the current Forward Plan?	<input type="text" value="Yes"/>
Is the decision exempt from call-in on grounds of urgency?	<input type="text" value="No"/>
If exempt from call-in, has the agreement of the Chair of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee been sought or obtained?	<input type="text" value="N/A"/>
Has this matter been considered by Overview and Scrutiny? If so, give details below.	<input type="text" value="No"/>

PREVIOUS RELEVANT COUNCIL OR EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

Cabinet, 7 September 2005
Cabinet, 30 January 2007
Cabinet, 13 March 2007

Cabinet, 9 October 2007

CONSIDERATION BY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

Not considered by Overview and Scrutiny.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Enhancing Lives Through Learning – A Vision for Schools in Cumbria (2006)

RESPONSIBLE CABINET MEMBER

Jim Buchanan

Contact: Jim Mitchell, Manager/Coordinator, School Organisation Project
Tel: 01228 601129 – Mobile: 07971 446247
Email: jim.mitchell@cumbriacc.gov.uk