

**TITLE OF REPORT:**           **Secondary Review: West Area Proposals**

**REPORT OF:**               **Margaret Whellans, Group Director Learning and Children**

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### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To receive and consider the results of the recent statutory consultations on the future of Hookergate and Ryton Comprehensive Schools and to agree recommendations to publish statutory proposals to close Hookergate School.

### **Background**

2. In June 2009, Cabinet agreed to carry out an informal consultation on options for the review and reorganisation of secondary school provision in the West Area. There were a number of reasons why it was necessary to carry out this review:
  - the total number of secondary-age students in the area was reducing and was predicted to continue falling;
  - between 2004-17, the total secondary school population in Gateshead will reduce by 1500 students;
  - surplus capacity in the secondary sector, already significant in some schools, continued growing; Hookergate was particularly affected;
  - the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme would provide significant capital investment to rebuild or refresh secondary schools in this part of the Borough.
  
3. Following informal consultations, a further report was considered by Cabinet in September 2009. Cabinet agreed:
  - A vision for secondary education for the West Area to meet the needs of the whole community, based on having a single community school that offers the highest quality educational opportunities for 11-19 year olds, through an inclusive approach;
  - To develop a new school with state-of-the-art buildings and facilities that are easily accessible for everyone, on a new site chosen to maximise opportunities for the whole area;
  - To retain Ryton Comprehensive School and develop its offer to the whole community, by incorporating the best features and many strengths of Hookergate School;
  - To submit a bid for BSF funding, based on the vision set out above;
  - To develop the vision through partnership working between the Council and the two schools, within the framework of a Memorandum of Understanding;
  - To formally propose the closure of Hookergate School, subject to consultation;
  - To carry out a review of potential sites in the West Area and consult on those considered suitable for a new school building.

4. In June 2010, Cabinet agreed a proposal to close Hookergate School, with effect from 31 August 2011, subject to consultation in accordance with section 16 of the Education and Inspections Act (2006).

Cabinet also agreed proposals:

- to transfer responsibility for the Hookergate School site to the governing body of Ryton Community School, for the academic year 2011-12;
- to endorse the development of a detailed Transition Plan;
- to include all the existing catchment areas of the linked primary schools for Hookergate and Ryton Schools in the catchment area of the new school;
- to include its preferred site for the replacement school building in the statutory consultation process

### **Building Schools for the Future (BSF)**

5. The Council's application for BSF funding, based on a "Readiness to Deliver" submission, was approved in April 2010. Indicative funding of £84.4 millions was allocated and work was progressing on developing the vision and design for the new school building. In July 2010, the government announced that the BSF programme had been ended and any secondary school building projects which were not yet contractual had been cancelled. Future capital spend on school buildings is to be the subject of a review which will inform the next government spending review.

### **Consultation**

6. Notwithstanding the government's decision on BSF, the statutory consultation process on the closure of Hookergate School proceeded as planned. A consultation document was published and widely distributed. Meetings with parents, staff and governors were held, as well as "drop in" sessions which were open to all. The position on BSF funding was explained to consultees (in meetings and on the Council's website) during the consultation process. Details of the consultation process are set out in Appendix 1 and a summary of the feedback is attached as Appendix 2. Careful consideration has been given to all the views expressed, and responses to the main issues raised during consultation are set out in Appendix 3. The following proposals are now recommended for approval.

### **Proposals**

7. It is proposed that Hookergate School should close with effect from 31 August 2011, and that the Council should now publish its complete proposals in the prescribed format (including a statutory notice to be displayed in the local press and elsewhere) and sent to statutory consultees in accordance with the statutory guidance (Education and Inspections Act 2006 – Section 16). A six week period then follows to enable further representations to be made to the Council (the Cabinet acting as the "Decision Maker").
8. It is also proposed that the Hookergate site be maintained for a further academic year (2011-12) to provide education for Years 8, 9 and 11 only. The site would be managed as part of Ryton School, by its governors.

9. It is proposed that the Hookergate site should be decommissioned at the end of the academic year 2011-12 and that all staff and students be consolidated on the existing Ryton School site, with additional accommodation provided as necessary.
10. It is proposed that a detailed assessment be carried out on the accommodation available on the Ryton site to determine what additional accommodation or other works may be required to ensure that the needs of the enlarged school can be met.
11. It is proposed that all the existing catchment areas of the linked primary schools for Ryton and Hookergate Schools combined should constitute the catchment area for the new school, and that the admission number be reviewed to reflect projected intakes from 2012 onwards.
12. It is proposed that the detailed transition planning for these changes be managed by the Steering Group and Joint Governors Group as set out in the agreed Memorandum of Understanding. Further detailed proposals in respect of the transition plan are set out in Appendix 4 to this report.
13. Finally, it is proposed that the Council confirms its vision to build a new school on a new site, to replace the current Ryton Comprehensive School buildings, as and when capital funding becomes available. At this stage, the Council is not asked to make a final decision on a new site.

## **Recommendations**

14. It is recommended that Cabinet:
  - (i) confirms its proposal to close Hookergate School with effect from 31 August 2011 and agrees to the publication of complete proposals to that effect, setting out the required information and the arrangements for representations;
  - (ii) agrees to maintain the Hookergate site for the 2011-12 year, as part of Ryton School, and then ceases to maintain the site as school premises;
  - (iii) requests an assessment and costing of any necessary works to the Ryton School site to ensure it can meet the needs of the enlarged school;
  - (iv) agrees to enlarge the catchment area for Ryton School to include all current linked primary school catchment areas for Hookergate school;
  - (v) confirms the Council's vision to build a new school on a new site, to replace the current Ryton School buildings, as and when capital funding becomes available.

For the following reasons:

To ensure that the Council:

- Fulfils its statutory duty to ensure a match between the predicted demand for school places and the number of schools and places maintained, and to ensure efficient use of resources;

**Policy Context**

1. The Council has statutory duties to:
  - ensure that there are sufficient schools and places in the area;
  - promote high educational standards;
  - ensure fair access to educational opportunity;
  - promote diversity and increase parental choice;
  - make efficient use its resources, including the removal of surplus places in schools;
  - promote the fulfilment of every child's educational potential.

The proposals in this report are consistent with these statutory duties and with the Council's vision for children and young people as set out in the Corporate Plan, the Children and Young People's Plan and the Sustainable Community Strategy (Vision 2030).

**Background**

2. It is a statutory requirement that the Council keeps school provision under review to ensure that the supply of school places and the overall number of schools matches current and future demand. Some surplus places are required in any area to ensure small rises and falls in the population can be accommodated and to support choice for parents. A figure of 10% surplus is considered appropriate across an area. Maintaining too many surplus places or schools represents an inefficient use of resources, which can have an adverse effect on educational standards generally.
3. Small schools often require a disproportionate share of the available resources in order to maintain standards and reasonable class sizes, which in turn can result in the inefficient use of resources and a shortage of funding across all schools. Each school maintained by the Council requires funding to maintain its buildings and site, to employ caretaking, cleaning and administrative staff, and to appoint a head teacher and other senior staff in management posts. Larger schools generally offer better value for money.
4. The Council's bid to for capital funding from the BSF programme was approved in April 2010. This bid included funding to build a new school on a new site to serve the West area. The new Government has stopped the BSF programme and is currently reviewing how it will allocate capital for secondary school projects in future. However, it remains necessary to progress plans for reorganising secondary schools in the West to reduce surplus capacity.
5. Hookergate School is now the smallest secondary school in Gateshead by far. Numbers on roll in September 2010 will be around 375 (11-16). The school is no longer able to offer places for students to start courses in the sixth form. It has a Planned Admission Number of 160, and a total capacity of 800 11-16 places. 81 new pupils started Year 7 in September 2009, and around 50 started Year 7 in September 2010. Surplus capacity significantly exceeds 50% of the total. Falling numbers reduce the budget available to the governors and reductions in staffing have already had to be made to reflect this. Further reductions will be necessary in subsequent years, and the quality of education offered would be at risk.

6. Following extensive informal consultation in the summer of 2009, Cabinet received a report in September 2009 recommending a way forward involving a partnership approach to merging Ryton and Hookergate Schools. This would be achieved through the closure of Hookergate School and the building of a new school on a new site to house Ryton School and students and staff transferred from Hookergate. Cabinet agreed in principle to a proposal to close Hookergate School, subject to statutory consultation taking place. In December 2009, Cabinet received a further report on progress with the partnership approach to the merger, and approved a Memorandum of Understanding which was subsequently signed by the Council and both governing bodies.
7. In June 2010, Cabinet agreed a proposal to close Hookergate School, with effect from 31 August 2011, subject to consultation in accordance with section 16 of the Education and Inspections Act (2006).

## **Consultation**

8. The proposed closure of Hookergate School and the related proposals were the subject of consultation, in accordance with the statutory guidance, for a period of six weeks. A consultation document including a response form was published and distributed widely, as well as being available on the Council's website. Meetings and "drop in" sessions were held in various locations during the first three weeks of July. A representative Cabinet Member was in attendance at all the main meetings.
9. In accordance with the statutory guidance, the following individuals and groups were consulted:
  - the governing bodies of Hookergate and Ryton Schools
  - parents of students at Hookergate and Ryton Schools
  - teachers and other staff of Hookergate and Ryton Schools
  - students of Hookergate and Ryton Schools
  - governors, staff and parents from linked primary schools
  - trade union representatives
  - the local MP
  - ward councillors
  - local residents (especially in the Woodside Road area of Ryton)
  - the Cabinet Members for Children and Young People and for the West.A summary of the responses received is attached as Appendix 2 to this report, and the response to the main issues raised is attached as Appendix 3.
10. Subject to Cabinet agreeing the proposals in this report, the proposals will be published in accordance with the statutory guidance. A period of six weeks is then available for any person to make representations – either to support or to object to the proposals. The Council must consider any such representations before reaching a final decision.

## **Alternative Options**

11. Prior to receiving this report, the Cabinet has considered alternative options including those made during earlier consultations. Following consideration of the recommendations in this report, Cabinet will still have the opportunity to determine

an alternative proposal, having regard to any representations received during the statutory 6 week period for making representations.

## **Implications of Recommended Option**

12. **Financial Implications** - the Strategic Director Finance and ICT confirms the following financial implications for the Council arising from this report. Potential revenue costs arising from operating the split-site arrangements during 2011-12 will be met from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). Potential revenue costs arising from the redeployment, retirement or redundancy of employees from Hookergate School are being assessed and may also fall within the DSG, subject to Schools Forum approval. Revenue savings emerging from the proposed closure of Hookergate School are “ring-fenced” to the DSG, and will be re-allocated to all secondary schools through the funding formula.

The capital implications of increasing the number of students on the existing Ryton campus are being assessed and will be the subject of a future report.

13. **Risk Management Implication** - there is a risk to educational standards and to the efficient use of resources if the closure of Hookergate School is not progressed. There are also risks to educational standards in implementing this reorganisation. These risks have been mitigated by the development of a transition plan involving Hookergate and Ryton Schools and the Council.
14. **Human Resources Implications** - the Human Resources implications arising from this report are the risk to staff whose employment is at risk as a result of the closure of Hookergate School. This risk is mitigated by the development of a Staffing Protocol involving Hookergate and Ryton Schools and the Council.
15. **Equality and Diversity Implications** - equality and diversity issues were discussed during the consultation processes, and are being considered in the transition planning process. An equality impact needs assessment has been carried out, which does not identify any significant negative impact on specific groups.

The SEN Improvement Test has been applied in respect of students with Moderate Learning Difficulties placed currently at Hookergate School in the Mainstream Support Base. This has identified no detriment to students with SEN as a result of these proposals, and the potential for an improved and more inclusive offer for these students in the west.

The impact on Community Cohesion has been considered. The loss of a secondary school has a potentially negative impact on the local community. However, the falling number of parents choosing Hookergate School for their children suggests that the community impact will not be as great as it might have been. Also, delivering the vision of a single school to serve the whole West area will help mitigate the loss of a school.

16. **Crime and Disorder Implications – nil**
17. **Health Implications** – the development of a new secondary school for the West Area, with state of the art facilities for lifelong learning, indoor and outdoor sport and healthy eating would make a significant contribution to the health of the whole

community. The closure of Hookergate School should not significantly reduce the health-related opportunities available to the local community, as the site is not currently used by the community to any great extent.

18. **Sustainability Implications** - the closure proposal will reduce surplus capacity, which represents a waste of resources. Any new build will be designed to the highest standards of environmental sustainability. The home to school travel arrangements for students will need to be planned carefully to ensure no loss of opportunity for those travelling longer distances, and to mitigate against a growth in private car usage. Discussions with Nexus are in progress.
19. **Human Rights Implications** - whenever school reorganisation is considered it is likely that Article 2 of the first protocol to the Convention will be engaged. This provides that parents have the right to expect that the state will respect their right to have their children educated in conformity with their philosophical and religious convictions, but this right is heavily qualified by the requirement that it is compatible with the provision of efficient instruction and training and the avoidance of unreasonable expenditure.
20. **Area and Ward Implications** - there are implications for all Wards in the West Area.

### **Background Information**

Secondary Review reports to Cabinet: 30 January 2007, 2 June 2009, 15 September 2009, 1 December 2009 and 8 June 2010.  
DCSF Guide for Local Authorities – Closing a Maintained Mainstream School

### **The Council's response to the main issues raised during consultation.**

*1. How will the existing Ryton site accommodate additional students? Will additional accommodation be needed? Will the accommodation be suitable?*

The capacity and suitability of the accommodation on the existing Ryton site is currently being assessed against a proposed curriculum model and predicted student numbers. The Council will ensure sufficient suitable accommodation is available to meet the needs of students and staff.

*2. How will any additional short-term accommodation requirements be funded? Will there ever be funding for a new school?*

The Government's review of capital funding for secondary schools (formerly delivered through BSF) will be complete in the autumn. It will be clearer then if the Council is able to secure funding for a new building, or to invest in improving or expanding the existing site. In the short term, the Council will underwrite any capital costs necessary to implement the transition plan.

*3. Will there be sufficient places (11-16 and Post 16) to meet the needs of the West area in the short and long term?*

It is the Council's intention that all students from the primary schools linked to Hookergate and Ryton schools should be able to secure places in the single secondary school, now and in future. Parental choice will have an impact on the actual numbers to be admitted and the planned capacity. Post 16 provision will be available in school sixth forms, F.E. colleges, training providers and apprenticeships, as at present.

*4. How can an effective "one school" culture be created from these two schools, and the risk of Hookergate students feeling excluded or being bullied be addressed?*

The Headteachers, staff and governors of Ryton and Hookergate schools are working closely together to ensure a successful merger of the schools, where all students and staff will feel included and supported equally. Discussions are ongoing in respect of a new name and a new school uniform, to emphasise the ethos of a single "new" school.

*5. Will the transport network support access to a single school in the West?*

Discussions are taking place with Nexus, who are currently reviewing the provision of school bus services, to ensure that students from all parts of the catchment area are able to arrive and leave school at appropriate times of the day.

*6. A large majority (70%) of consultees is opposed to the proposed site.*

The Council notes the levels of concern expressed against its preferred site adjacent to Woodside Road. Local residents are particularly opposed to this site, but many other issues relating to safety and sustainability are noted. As the Council does not have funding for a new school, a final decision on site is not required at this time.

*7. A significant minority (43%) of consultees disagree with the Council's "Vision" for a single school.*

Many diverse reasons were expressed for and against the Council's vision for a single school to provide the "Best for the West". Whilst the various reasons for objection have been noted, it remains the Council's intention to create a single community secondary school serving the whole of the West, incorporating Ryton and Hookergate schools on the Ryton site, and to build a new school on a new site, when resources allow.

*8. A minority (36%) of consultees disagree with Hookergate's closure and the transition plan.*

The Council understands the disappointment felt by the community at the loss of a secondary school. However, it believes that Hookergate School was no longer sustainable and that the proposed merger with Ryton to create a single school for the West represents the most efficient use of resources and the best way to ensure that educational standards will be maintained for all young people.

*9. A significant minority (44%) of consultees disagree with the proposed primary feeder schools.*

Although various comments were expressed in response to the question on linked primary schools, there was no specific support to change any of the current Hookergate linked primary schools, so it is proposed that all the current schools will be linked to Ryton Comprehensive School following Hookergate's closure.

### Detailed Proposals

1. It is proposed to close Hookergate School with effect from 31 August 2011, subject to consideration of any further representations that may be received during the statutory six week notice period. The school will operate normally for the academic year 2010-11, with around 375 students (11-16), although no students have been admitted to Year 12 from this September.
2. From September 2011, Ryton School will admit an increased Year 7, catering for those young people who would previously have applied for places at Hookergate. An indicative admission number of 240 has been used for planning purposes. The number of former pupils of Hookergate School (i.e. Years 8-11) at this point will be around 290. It is proposed that the Hookergate students due to start key stage 4 courses (Year 9) in September 2011 should transfer to the Ryton site, in order to avoid transferring sites part way through their two-year courses. Existing Hookergate students in Years 8, 9 and 11 (around 220) will remain on the Hookergate site, which will be managed and staffed by Ryton School.
3. A staffing protocol has been agreed in principle between the Council and the two schools. This addresses the approach to managing the following staffing implications:
  - the future of Hookergate staff in post at the time the school closes ;
  - the need to secure the additional staff needed to maintain the split-site arrangements during 2011-12;
  - the staffing needs of the enlarged Ryton School from 2012 onwards.

Consultation with staff and trade unions has taken place regarding these arrangements. The aim of the staffing protocol is to maintain staffing stability throughout the transition process, to ensure educational standards are maintained and to ensure all staff secure a suitable alternative post or voluntary severance/retirement at the appropriate time.

4. From September 2012, the Hookergate site will be vacant and decommissioned as a school. The Council will need to consider its future use. All existing Ryton students and the displaced Hookergate students will be accommodated on the existing Ryton site. Work is in progress to determine any additional accommodation needs for that site. The Council has assured parents that students will not be taught in sub-standard or inappropriate accommodation.
5. It is considered essential to have a well-developed transport strategy, agreed with Nexus and the schools, to ensure daily access for all the students at the start and end of the day, plus access at other times for parents and other members of the community using the facilities.
6. The following primary schools are currently part of the Hookergate catchment area:
  - Chopwell
  - High Spen

- Highfield
- Rowlands Gill
- Parkhead
- Winlaton West Lane

It is proposed that the catchment areas for all these schools be added to Ryton's existing linked primary school catchment areas.