

TITLE OF REPORT: School Organisation Plan: Review of Primary Provision

REPORT OF: Maggie Atkinson, Group Director, Learning and Children

Purpose of the Report

1. This report asks the Cabinet to consider the outcomes of the consultation process for Stage 2 of the Review of Primary Provision. It also asks the Cabinet to consider recommendations for preferred options and to agree that these form the basis for further consultation in Stage 3 of the review process, as and when appropriate.

Background

2. In June 2005, Cabinet agreed to a review process to address the issue of surplus places in schools. A three stage process was agreed, with an initial focus on primary schools. Stage 1 was completed in July 2005, and engaged schools in some initial discussions about the problem and the review process needed to tackle it. The result of this consultation was that schools recognised the problem and the need to deal with it through the process outlined in the earlier report.
3. In October 2005, Cabinet agreed a range of options as a basis for consultation in Stage 2 of the review. This consultation was carried out during November and December 2005 and involved a wide range of stakeholders.

Proposal

4. The Cabinet is asked to consider the recommended options set out in detail in Appendix 2 to this report. If agreed by Cabinet, these will become the Council's preferred options for reducing surplus places in the Borough's primary schools, and for setting out a longer-term development plan for the primary sector.
5. An extensive consultation process was conducted at Stage 2 of the review process. The results of this process have been summarised in Appendix 3 to this report. Officers have carefully considered all the views expressed, which have substantially influenced the recommendations in this report. Cabinet will also need to take careful note of the views expressed as they consider the recommendations. The file containing all consultation responses is available on request to the Group Director Learning and Children.
6. The Council has been very clear during this review process that it was not only seeking to address the issue of surplus places in primary schools, but also to put in place a strategy for the future development of primary school provision. Their key aim here being to continue to maintain and improve the quality of education provision offered to our children and young people. The Council also sees this review as creating opportunities for a wider range of community benefits, and for

promoting well-being. Links with the following strategies will be explored during the next phase of this development:

- Neighbourhood Management
- Extended Schools
- Children's Centres
- Review of SEN Provision
- Review of Community Centre Provision

The Council will actively work with partner organisations in the health, social care and voluntary sectors to find alternative uses for school accommodation which is identified as surplus.

Recommendations

7. It is recommended that Cabinet:

- (i) considers and notes the views of all stakeholders, as summarised in Appendix 3;
- (ii) considers the recommendations contained in Appendix 2 and agrees its preferred options in respect of the Review of Primary Provision;
- (iii) requests officers to arrange a further consultation with stakeholders, based on the preferred options, and timescales, as set out in Appendix 2;

For the following reasons

- (i) to ensure the Council fulfils its statutory responsibilities in respect of providing sufficient schools and making effective use of resources;
- (ii) to maintain and improve the high quality of educational provision made by the Council for our children and young people
- (iii) to ensure that any changes to primary schools are only implemented following appropriate consultations.

APPENDIX 1

Policy Context

1. The Council has a duty to provide sufficient schools and to make efficient use of resources. The proposals in this report are in line with the Council's statutory duties and the policies and objectives set out in Towards 2010 for Children and Young People, Lifelong Learning, Community Engagement and Resource Management.

Background

2. The Council's published School Organisation Plan (2003-08) identifies our reducing school pupil population, and the need to take surplus places out of the system. This is clearly signalled as an issue particularly for the primary sector, but by the end of this decade also for the secondary phases. Gateshead mirrors a national problem, but in the North East it is particularly acute.
3. A recent exercise using the latest "live-birth" data for the borough and the annual pupil census of children already in school, and projections forward from both, has enabled school population projections to be calculated to 2010.
4. Bearing in mind that up to 10% of surplus capacity is regarded nationally as acceptable, nearly half of our primary schools currently have 10% or more surplus places with projections forecasting this percentage will grow; and 23% of them have more than 25% surplus capacity. These figures will rise to 64% of primary schools with 10%+ surplus places and 36% with 25%+ surplus by 2010, if no further action is taken. In order to maintain surplus places at no more than 10% for the whole primary sector, 2000 places will need to be removed.
5. Given that in all sectors the greater part of any school's budget is reliant on pupil numbers, the surplus places situation will place an increasing strain on the system in terms of the financial as well as the curricular viability of some schools. We need to act to ensure that schools with falling rolls avoid reaching a funding crisis point where they would be in effect, unviable.

Consultation

6. In June 2005, Cabinet agreed a three stage review and consultation process to address this issue. Stage 1 was completed in July 2005, and gave every school in the Borough an opportunity to send representatives (headteacher and governors to a briefing meeting. The scale of the problem was explained and the representatives invited to make suggestions on how the review should be tackled.
7. In October 2005, Cabinet agreed a range of options which formed the basis for an extensive consultation exercise, which took place during November-December 2005. Meetings were held in each of the eight community secondary schools, to which the staff, governors and parents of all primary schools in the secondary catchment area were invited. Most meetings were well-attended and the discussions were lively and constructive.

8. 16,000 consultation booklets were printed and distributed, not only through schools but also to early years/childcare providers and a range of other interested parties including teaching and non-teaching trade unions and associations. The booklet enabled individuals to respond to the consultation options. Many groups of staff, governors and parents also responded with more detailed letters and statements. A number of petitions were also submitted.
9. As a result of this extensive consultation process, the Cabinet may feel confident that a large number of people with a significant interest in the future of primary education in Gateshead have had the opportunity to read about, listen to, question and discuss the options for change identified in Stage 2. The large number of responses, some in considerable detail, have enabled officers to refine and reduce the original list of options in order to reach a set of recommendations which reflect, as far as possible, the views expressed whilst still addressing the target figure mentioned of 2000 surplus places. Clearly, the recommendations will not please all consultees but the task of removing surplus places will always be a difficult and challenging one for all concerned.
10. A summary of the responses received during consultation, the key messages received and some of the detailed comments for each area are attached as Appendix 3 to this report.

Alternative Options

11. A range of options was identified for the Stage 2 process. These have now been refined and developed into the preferred options set out in Appendix 3. The purpose of a further consultation at Stage 3 of this process is to identify whether there are alternative options which the Cabinet may wish to consider before making a final decision.

Implications of Recommended Option

12. **Financial Implications** – at this stage there are no financial implications arising from the report. The Strategic Director, Finance and ICT, confirms that it is necessary to address the issue of surplus places in order to make efficient use of the resources available for schools. Some of the preferred options have capital implications, which have yet to be quantified, but it will be necessary for the Council to secure additional capital resources before these options can be implemented.
13. **Risk Management Implication** - Nil
14. **Human Resources Implications** – there are clearly human resources implications involved in the reorganisation of schools, although it is difficult to define these in detail at this stage in the process. The general intention of surplus place removal is to ensure that scarce resources are used to maintain staffing levels, rather than to maintain empty classrooms and buildings. Discussions will be held with the relevant trade unions to decide how to manage the implementation of any changes in order to safeguard individuals as far as possible.
15. **Equality and Diversity Implications** – the recommendations in this report have no direct implications for equality and diversity.

16. **Crime and Disorder Implications** – Nil.
17. **Sustainability Implications** – Nil.
18. **Human Rights Implications** – Article 2 of the First Protocol states that no person shall be denied the right to education, and that parents have the right to ensure such education conforms to their religious and philosophical convictions. The second part of the above applies only in so far it is compatible with the provision of efficient education and avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure. The options in this report are clearly directed towards ensuring efficient education and prudent use of public resources.
19. **Ward Implications** – this is a Borough-wide review, and has implications to a greater or lesser degree for all wards.

Background Information

20. The following are relevant background documents for this report:
 - Consultation booklet – “Improving Primary Education in Gateshead”
 - All response forms, letters, petitions and minutes of consultation meetings.