

PRIMARY STRATEGY FOR CHANGE

PORTFOLIO RESPONSIBILITY: CHILDREN'S SERVICES

CABINET

10 JULY 2008

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To approve a Strategy to shape capital investment in Primary Schools in Herefordshire over the next 14 years, and to determine priorities over the next 2 years.

Key Decision

This is a Key Decision because it is likely to be significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in Herefordshire in an area comprising one or more wards.

It was included in the Forward Plan.

Recommendations

- THAT (a) The Primary Strategy for Change document be approved for submission to the Department for Children, Schools and Families;**
- (b) Further work takes place in consultation with Leominster Infant and Junior Schools on the siting, design, and future organisation prior to a final decision from the DCSF; and**
- (c) A match funding budget of £250,000 in 2009/10 and in 2010/11 be established.**

Reasons

1. All Local Authorities are required by the DCSF to prepare a Primary Strategy for Change before Central Government release capital resources for spending in 2009/10 and 2010/11.
2. To enable the capital expenditure to be made over these 2 years, preparatory work is needed.
3. To spread the benefit to other schools.

Considerations

1. In December 2007, the DCSF launched a national programme to make all primary schools 'fit for 21st Century teaching and learning'. This is to run for a 14 year period, and complements the Building Schools for the Future programme, which aims to

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
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improve Secondary Schools.

2. The content of the Strategy has been influenced by DCSF 'Guidance for Local Authorities on Developing, Agreeing and Implementing a Strategic Approach to Capital Investment for Primary Schools'. This guidance emphasises:
 - a) The need for strategies to support the national policy agenda: Children's Plan, world class standards, Every Child Matters, diversity and responsiveness, extended services, personalisation;
 - b) That investment should 'be targeted to address deprivation';
 - c) That 'primary schools should be at the heart of the community, with ICT and children's services in reach of every family';
 - d) That there should be 'improved links between schools and early years settings e.g. co-location with Children's Centres';
 - e) The need for 'excellent design and sustainability';
 - f) The need for 'efficient procurement using best practice partnering arrangements'.

It also states that 'we would expect to see decisive plans for early action to ensure:

- a) That no school has more than 25% surplus spaces
- b) Reduce overall surplus spaces to less than 10% across the Local Authority area'

In the meeting with the Minister for Schools it was clear that this precise expectation does not apply to Herefordshire but obviously any plans we make should be prudent.

3. The guidance is also clear that all stakeholders need to be consulted over the Strategy. In particular the support of and approval by the respective Diocesan Boards of Education is required. The Roman Catholic Schools Commission in Cardiff meet to discuss the matter on Tuesday 7 July and the Hereford Diocesan Board of Education meet on Wednesday 9 July. The outcome of these discussions will be verbally reported to Cabinet at the meeting.
4. A draft Strategy was circulated to all consultees – please see Appendix 1 for full list. It was also placed on the Council's website. Comments were invited by 20 June 2008 either in paper or electronic form. All comments have been read and a summary of the responses is attached as Appendix 2.
5. There is general support for the Strategy as written. Some minor amendments have been made in light of comments received and the amended document, better reflecting the importance of the statutory role of faith schools, is included and Appendix 3. It is proposed that the Strategy is seen in Herefordshire as an evolving framework in which to coordinate investment in Primary Schools. Detailed delivery plans will be developed as appropriate, and clarification of the composition and operation of the Project Board will be resolved in the coming months. Alongside the consultation, schools were asked to check on a more complete set of data. This more complete data set, amended in light of school comments has now been included in Appendix 2 of the Strategy.
6. The five criteria to be used to prioritise investment are generally accepted although there are suggestions to ensure that more schools do receive some benefit from this

capital investment, and that greater support should be given to popular schools. These criteria do favour the larger urban schools particularly those with buildings in poor condition, surplus space or poor outcomes. To that extent feasibility work has been undertaken over possible investment at the following 5 schools: Broadlands Primary School, St Martin's Primary School, Leominster Junior School, Leominster Infants School and Ashfield Park Primary School (see Appendix), all of which meet the criteria. Our investment plans will need to reflect the limited funding available (£8,300,000) initially.

7. All of the potential schemes have been appraised as financially viable. In terms of appraising the relative merits of each option, Leominster Infant & Junior Schools provide an opportunity to do something transformational in terms of improving the organisation of primary school provision in that area (through amalgamation). They also score most highly in terms of the indicators of deprivation for the community they serve and in terms of the cost of outstanding maintenance costs on the existing buildings. As a result, it is recommended that priority be given to the total replacement of the buildings occupied by Leominster Infant and Junior Schools.
8. More detailed work is required to establish the future organisation of the Infant and Junior Schools and to determine the best siting and design for the school which will serve Leominster for the next 40 years. Initial discussions have been held with both the Governing Bodies of Leominster Infants and Leominster Junior Schools. In principle both have resolved to support the proposal, with their formal positions being:

a) Leominster Infants

'It was agreed that the prospect of this investment in Leominster should be looked upon favourably. It would be good for the people of Leominster and for the education and educational environment of the future generations of children in Leominster.

The inference was that a new build may only take place if it was linked to an amalgamation of the schools. As the Junior School desperately need a new building, it was agreed that we would support investment in a new build and amalgamation.

When/if cabinet pass this, lengthy discussions should take place with the schools having an input on deciding the outlay of any new school, on how the project is to be moved forward, how it is to be managed during the build, and how and when any amalgamation should take place.

The Governors felt that it was imperative that the rebuild should encompass at the very least two buildings and preferably three buildings

Leominster Infant School Governors would put to Mr Salmon our agreement to the proposal for a re-build on the existing site, to house children from age 3-11 under a management structure to be discussed.

The conclusions reached following this meeting were unanimously agreed by all Leominster Infant School Governors present. (Three absent)'

b) Leominster Junior

'The full Governing Body of Leominster Junior School met yesterday, Monday 23rd June and, following lengthy discussions, agreed to be nominated by the LA Officer for a new Primary School in an amalgamation with Leominster Infant School. This

decision has today been verbally communicated to Mr George Salmon. The Governing Body feel this is a fantastic opportunity for the current and future children of Leominster, and very much appreciate the Council pursuing this investment at the school.

The Governors feel that serious consideration would need to be given to key points raised during the meeting, seen as intrinsic for any new build and amalgamation.

- *The Health and Safety and security of children and adults is paramount and that use of present accesses is impossible for any new build on the current site.*
- *Both schools must be fully communicated with and involved in every step of the process.*
- *For amalgamation to be successful there must be a single unity of building and purpose and creation of a positive identity for all staff within one Primary School.*
- *Great consideration needs to be given to alternative, adjacent sites which would allow smooth transfer following the new build and thereby ensuring 'good' educational standards are maintained throughout the building period. Also that any new school/ site must not have any less land area than current sites.*

The Governing Body viewed this as a very positive and exciting development for the school and the town of Leominster and a wonderful opportunity to create a flagship educational facility for the County of Herefordshire.'

9. An initial feasibility study suggests that the replacement of Leominster Infant and Junior (630 place) would cost £7,800,000. This includes building costs, fees, ICT, furniture and equipment, based on the anticipated construction costs in the 6th quarter of 2009. The achieved cash flow would be dependant on the timing of approach, and care would be needed to manage this against the £3,000,000 allocation in 2009/10 and £5,300,000 in 2010/11. This compares to the £8,300,000.
10. The draft Strategy suggested the creation of a match funding pot, to which all schools whatever their status could apply by retaining centrally £500,000. Schools would then be expected to match fund against this from their delegated budgets. This will allow benefits to be shared more widely, and could be used in conjunction with S.106, aided schools programme, maintenance programme to achieve significant improvements in schools. It is proposed that the £500,000 resource remaining in 2009/11 be used to establish a match funding scheme, which would aim to achieve at least £1,000,000 level of investment in our schools serving primary aged children.

Financial Implications

DCSF approval of the Strategy will release a grant of £3,000,000 and £5,300,000 in 2009/10 and 2010/11 respectively. The new build project cost at Leominster has been estimated to cost £7,800,000 assuming that a contract was let at the 4th quarter of 2009. It is anticipated that payments for such a scheme would be over a 36 month period, and there would need to be careful management of cash flow to reconcile grant and expenditure

Risk Management

In terms of the Strategy, there is a risk that the technical appraisal undertaken by DCSF consultants will require amendments prior to approval. The policy on extended school services, school meals and ICT within the Strategy has been constrained by an assessment

of what can be sustained in revenue terms. The Council's approach to surplus space is unlikely to achieve the nationally stated target.

However, it is felt that these issues could be resolved through discussion, and approval would only be delayed.

There are risks associated with a project to replace the Leominster Junior and Infant Schools which range from planning, highway design matter to those linked to maintaining the smooth running of the schools and the service to children in Leominster. These will be managed as part of the project itself.

Alternative Options

The Strategy could be amended or withdrawn. DCSF will not release the £8,300,000 capital investment to Herefordshire until the Primary Strategy for Change is presented to and approved by them.

Other priorities could be chosen. Some additional work and therefore delay would be incurred in working up these proposals.

Consultees

Please see Appendix 1

Appendices

Appendix 1 – List of Consultees

Appendix 2 – Consultation Summary Responses

Appendix 3 – Amended Draft Primary Strategy for Change

Appendix 4 – Assessment Criteria for the five schools

Background Papers

- (a) Draft Primary Strategy for Change;
- (b) DCSF Guidance.
- (c) Letter dated 24 June 2008 from Chair of Governors and Headteacher Leominster Junior School
- (d) Email including meeting minutes dated 19 June 2008 from Headteacher of Leominster Infants School