

12 SCHOOL ORGANISATION PLAN

Report By: Head of Policy and Resources

Wards Affected

Countywide

Purpose

1. To seek comments on the draft School Organisation Plan for Herefordshire 2003-08.

Financial Implications

2. None.

Report

3. The key purpose of the School Organisation Plan (SOP) is to set out clearly how the Local Education Authority (LEA) plans to meet its statutory responsibility to secure sufficient education provision within its area in order to provide an adequate number of places and promote higher standards of attainment. The Plan should be designed to help the LEA, schools, promoters, parents and local communities to understand the number of school places needed and how they will be provided. It will also be the starting point for the School Organisation Committee (SOC) whenever it needs to consider statutory proposals for changes to schools. The SOP covers a period of five academic years. A new plan has to be produced in 2003 and thereafter every 3 years as a minimum.
4. The DfES issued revised guidance for the development and approval of the plans in June 2003. The guidance stresses that the Plan should 'set out a strategic vision, showing how developments in school place provision will raise standards and improve outcomes for all pupils in its area and promote good community relations. It should show how the LEA's strategic plans support the Government's policy agenda set out in *Investment for Reform* – in particular, to increase diversity, and to encourage collaboration between schools, in order to raise standards and promote community cohesion'.
5. The draft Plan for Herefordshire was submitted to the School Organisation Committee on Monday 7th July, 2003. An oral report of their conclusions will be given to the Scrutiny Committee. Copies of the draft Plan are available on request from the Head of Policy and Resources on (01432) 260812. A full copy of the draft Plan is also available in the Members' Room.

The key points in the Plan are

- primary schools and high schools numbers are projected to fall in the 2003-08 period (see tables 1,2,3 and 4 at Appendix 1).

- schools generally will have fewer pupils (the current position is shown in diagram 1 at Appendix 2).
- there will be a greater amount of surplus space. LEAs have to state the number of schools with more than 25% surplus space. In Herefordshire there are 13 out of the 84 primary schools with more than 25% surplus space, and the number could rise to as many as 20 within 5 years.
- the Plan confirms the previous policies about the circumstances in which reviews of schools should be considered. No change is suggested in these policies with the exception that a policy applicable to LEA nurseries should be included. It is anticipated that more schools will fall to a size that triggers the initial stage of a review (currently the main review threshold for primary schools is 35 or for pupils on rolls).
- the DfES requirement to include more detail on ethnicity reveals that 96% of Herefordshire pupils regard themselves as 'White British'. Although the numbers in the other 19 ethnic groups are by comparison small, it is noticeable that there are slightly higher numbers in the younger age groups compared to those in Years 10,11 and 12. (see table 5 at Appendix 3).
- the plan records that only 0.8% of all children are placed in special schools, and the majority of other children with special educational needs are being met in primary and secondary schools.

6. The draft Plan draws the following conclusions:

- There are no significant changes that could justify any fundamental reconsideration of the way in which school provision is made in Herefordshire.
- The numbers of pupils will continue to fall, but existing policies on small schools are able to address this issue. It is proposed to reduce the capacity of LEA nurseries from 30 to 26 to allow an improved maximum staffing ratio of 1:13, and then to introduce a policy to review LEA nurseries that operate at less than two thirds of their capacity. (ie. below 18 for a 26 place nursery).

Although there will be new housing, the level of development is likely to generate need that can be met by existing schools, with appropriate extension of premises.

There are likely to be qualitative rather than quantitative changes over the next 5 years with -

More high schools pursuing specialist college status working in collaboration with others to share expertise.

The development of a 16-19 strategy which will see a greater variety of courses being developed, and delivered through collaboration between institutions.

The development of the extended school, which could create greater collaboration between schools, greater involvement of adults in learning, and a wider range of services being offered on school sites.

It is not envisaged that any of these developments per se will have consequences on the organisation of school provision in the County.

7. It is proposed to circulate the draft Plan to interested groups seeking their views before reconsideration by the School Organisation Committee on 21st October.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Committee identify any areas that need further explanation or development in the draft plan.