

Meeting:	Cabinet
Meeting date:	26th February 2015
Title of report:	The future of Colwall C of E Primary school building
Report by:	Head of Education Development

Classification

Open

Key Decision

This is a key decision because it is likely to result in the council incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant having regard to the council's budget for the service or function to which the decision relates.

Notice has been served in accordance with Part 3, Section 9 (Publicity in Connection with Key Decisions) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012

Wards Affected

Hope End

Purpose

Agree the future arrangements for primary education in the Colwall area following the move of Colwall Church of England primary school in September 2014 into temporary accommodation adjacent to the existing school site.

Recommendation(s)

THAT:

- (a) it be noted that the existing Colwall school is considered unsuitable for repair;**
- (b) subject to development of a satisfactory business case a new school is built in Colwall to replace it, either on the existing site or at an alternative location in the parish; and**
- (c) delegated authority be given to the director for children's wellbeing to undertake all feasibility work necessary to develop a business case to inform a future decision, with a view to enabling a new school to be operational by**

September 2018.

Alternative options

- 1 Not to have a school in Colwall. Forecast pupil population data suggests there is a need for a one form entry school (210 places) in the village now and into the foreseeable future.
- 2 Return to the existing building that has a high risk of structural deficiencies including damp. The cost of minimising the risks associated with recurring damp and making the school suitable for the modern curriculum is such that it would be more appropriate to provide a new school that is fit for purpose.
- 3 Consider building a new larger school that would serve other local schools that might need repair or renewal in the future. The nearest schools are Bosbury C of E (NOR 126) and Cradley, VA school (NOR 108) both popular and relatively modern schools.
- 4 Continue in the current temporary buildings. The temporary buildings have been secured on a rental agreement for two years with temporary planning permission. It is considered unlikely that planning permission would be granted to continue beyond five years. The temporary buildings are not suitable on a long term basis and the cost of either purchasing or extending the rental is considerable.

Reasons for recommendations

- 5 The agreement for the relocation of Colwall school with a forecast budget of £2m, was only for up to 2 years (September 2016) pending the resolution of the significant damp problems in the permanent school buildings. The findings and conclusions of the subsequent investigative work are such that it is not considered appropriate to make repairs to the existing building. The remedial work could not confidently provide a suitable and safe school in the short medium or long term for the children of Colwall at a reasonable price.
- 6 The arrangements with the hire of the temporary buildings, which could be purchased or hired for longer than that period, possible land options including ownership and purchase are such that detailed and sensitive work will need to be undertaken to ensure the council secures value for money over suitable new school buildings. Providing delegated powers to officers allows the business case to be prepared.

Key considerations

- 7 The cabinet member for corporate strategy and finance agreed on 8 August 2014 the move of Colwall school into temporary buildings over summer of 2014. The existing school buildings were experiencing unexplained and increasingly serious damp problems. In order to make more detailed invasive investigative work into the nature of the problem the school moved into temporary buildings adjacent to the site at a cost of £2m over two years. The detailed hydrologist's report in October/November 2014 explained the challenges of building in the area and the risks and difficulties associated with the construction of the various extensions to the original building as they currently are. The make up of the ground and flows and levels of water in relation to the existing buildings will make repair costly and only provides limited assurances against further problems in the future.

- 8 Colwall school was originally built in the Victorian period around 1865. Extensions were added in 1981 and again in 1993 to improve the accommodation and meet the growing population of the village. Consideration was given to the building of a new school in the 1990s as the layout and buildings and facilities including toilets and hall were not wholly suitable. These were not progressed through lack of identifiable resource.
- 9 Analysis of the existing buildings shows the school to have classrooms that are smaller than those recommended, a smaller than considered suitable hall and insufficient toilets and storage areas. Additionally the school is in need of significant maintenance work including the updates to the heating and ventilation systems. Moving the school back into a repaired school building, without additional works to improve suitability and compliance, would have the school accommodated in lower than desirable standards of accommodation.
- 10 The situation at Colwall C of E School is highly unusual. It has been described by the insurance loss adjuster as a once in a life time incident. The building of a new school to address condition and suitability issues is also quite exceptional. The production of a school estate strategy by July 2015, as agreed by cabinet as part of the education strategy in October 2014, will provide a clear, well thought out programme to ensure the supply of school places along with renewal as necessary thus reducing the likelihood of similar type circumstances in the future.

Community impact

- 11 An important factor in the future economic prosperity and well being of the residents of Herefordshire is high quality education provision. School buildings play an important part in this and as such should be modern and suitable for delivery of a high quality relevant curriculum.

Equality duty

- 12 The old buildings had adjustments made to support children with disabilities but these could only be considered reasonable in the context of the existing buildings dating back to Victorian times and constructed on different levels, with classrooms that may have been too small for children with mobility difficulties. A new building would be compliant with current thinking on arrangements to support all children with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Financial implications

- 13 The cost of relocating the school to the temporary site is circa £2m over 2 years as set out in the cabinet report August 2014.
- 14 The cost of repair of the damp is estimated to be excess of £350,000 and provides, due to the location, pattern of the water table and existing design, only limited assurance of success. The school's temporary buildings that needed replacing and were removed would need to be reinstated at a cost in excess of £450,000. The repaired building would however be non-compliant with modern school building guidance in terms of number and size of classrooms, school hall size, and storage and circulation space. Additionally the existing building needs a programme of heater replacement, windows and roof work in the next 5 years with additional costs in excess of £300,000.

- 15 The cost of building a fully compliant one form entry primary school is estimated to be in the region of £6.5m including fees. There are however significant dependencies including land acquisition and its characteristics, building design and method and exceptional costs around groundworks.
- 16 The time taken to secure necessary land deals and undertake the building work is likely to require the school to occupy the temporary buildings beyond September 2016. The options on whether to continue with a rental or purchase and then resell are dependent on negotiations with the providers of the buildings.
- 17 The funding to support a new school would be met through grants and prudential borrowing over time. The Council capital programme has made provision for £7m.
- 18 The Education Funding Agency (EFA) announced on 9 February 2015 that under the Priority School Building Programme Phase 2 the application to support the improvement to Colwall has been successful. The detail of the funding provided under this scheme is subject to further survey. The Council will be working with representatives of the EFA over the course of the programme which runs from 2015 – 2021.

Legal implications

- 19 As a voluntary controlled school, the council is responsible for any major capital investment, and in these circumstances would be responsible for the provision of a new school or to ensure the maintenance and upkeep of the current building.
- 20 For the council to consider the closure of the school, a statutory process including a detailed consultation process would need to be complied with. The decision to close the school cannot be made within the context of this report.

Risk management

- 21 A project group of education managers, property services experts and financial managers have been examining the detailed options for continued education for the children of Colwall. This group will continue to review the situation and liaise with the managers and governors of the school to secure the best way forward. Key risks include:
 - a. Delay in securing a suitable site for the school – there are a number of options including rebuilding on the existing site but if agreement to build is not gained in a timely manner significant cost could be incurred in retaining the existing temporary buildings. The council's estate team is negotiating this.
 - b. Costs in excess of those identified in the corporate capital programme perhaps arising from exceptional build costs, land circumstances and delay. The project team are examining the options and will set out the reasons for the options chosen.
 - c. Planning permission – both on temporary solution and future. The development team are working with planning officers to secure a suitable compliant development and the options set out in the next report.

Consultees

- 22 In moving to temporary buildings over the summer detailed consultation was undertaken with staff, parents/carers, governors, local residents and service providers. All those consulted were keen to see the council resolve the damp issues at the school and recognised the challenges of the ground water conditions in the Colwall area. The area is renowned for flooding and the circumstances were not really a surprise to many local people. The parents and governors have been very supportive and appreciative of the actions taken by the council to secure continued education in the area.
- 23 The proposals for the school buildings will be discussed with governors, staff and parents and the community. There will be maximum involvement of the children young people, community and staff to ensure there is a fit for purpose building.

Appendices

None.

Background papers

Hydrogeo report into Groundwater flooding at Colwall Green, Malvern Herefordshire WR13 6DU