

AMALGAMATION OF HUNDERTON JUNIOR AND INFANTS SCHOOLS

PROGRAMME AREA RESPONSIBILITY: CHILDREN'S SERVICES

CABINET

10TH JUNE 2005

Wards Affected

Belmont, St. Martins and Hinton.

Purpose

To receive a report on the outcome of the consultations on the statutory notice to close the existing Junior and Infant Hunderton Schools on 31st August 2006, and open a 3 Form of Entry 3 -11 age range Primary School on 1st September 2006.

Key Decision

This is a key decision because it is likely to be significant in terms of its effect on communities living and working in Herefordshire in an area comprising one or more wards. It was included in the Forward Plan.

Recommendations

- THAT (a) **Cabinet approve the closure of the 2 existing schools, and open a 3 Form of Entry Primary School covering the 3-11 age range on 1st September 2006; and**
- (b) **priority is given in the Children's Services (Education) Capital Programme to replace the existing buildings with new accommodation at the total cost of £6,004,500.**

Reasons

An amalgamated school in new buildings will improve significantly the quality of teaching and learning at this school and benefit considerably the area it serves.

Considerations

The retirement of the Headteacher of Hunderton Infants School in the Summer of 2004 provided the opportunity to discuss the creation of a single school on the Hunderton site.

The following factors suggested that there were potential advantages in amalgamation.

1. Hunderton Junior and Infants were built as separate schools in the post war period to accommodate 5 forms of entry, i.e. 150 pupils per year or a total of 1050. The numbers of children have fallen dramatically, and there are currently 48 children in Reception classes and a total of 471 children in both schools excluding nursery. It has become feasible to manage that number of children in a single school.

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
George Salmon, Head Of Policy And Resources on 01432 260802

2. The evolution of the curriculum requires greater continuity and smooth transition between years. This is easier to achieve in a single school under a single management structure. Good working relationships have been established between staff, but current arrangements varying from separate Governing Bodies, to the very practical issue of separate staff rooms, make this process more difficult and cumbersome than it need be. School performance as mentioned by KS1 and KS2 results are below the County average, and although this may be explained by characteristics of the catchment area, it is imperative for the children involved that everything is done to improve their educational opportunities.
3. The buildings are over 50 years old and the flat roofed reinforced concrete structures require significant maintenance work. Items requiring attention over the next 3 years have been costed at £273,000, and as this addresses relatively small elements of the overall building complex, better value for money would be achieved in modern buildings designed for education in the 21st century. Indeed the distance from one end of the building to the other is 285 metres, and it would be a major obstacle to the success of the single school if new buildings were not provided.

Informal consultations with both Governing Bodies, staff and parents in January 2005 showed support for amalgamation on the understanding that new accommodation would be provided.

Feasibility work has been undertaken showing that a new school catering for 630 and nursery, can be provided on the same site at the total cost of £6,004,500.

This does not include accommodation for the Community Centre, Children's Centre and neighbourhood nursery, which are proposed to be retained on site in the better quality, recently refurbished accommodation.

A bid has been made for this funding under the DfES targeted capital fund. The outcome of this bid will be known in September 2005. It is anticipated that expenditure would be over 3 years, i.e. 2006/07, 07/08 and 08/09. If successful the Council would have to find 20% of the costs. Although significant, this would not be difficult over the 3 year period. If the DfES funding is not available, the project could still be afforded, but this single project would take a major proportion of the capital funding available.

In the statutory consultation period, no objections to the proposal were received. The 2 Governing Bodies reiterated their support. In the absence of any objection, the Council can determine the proposal without further reference. Members of the School Organisation Committee have been advised of the outcome to the consultation, and have raised no queries.

Alternative Options

The proposal to amalgamate the 2 schools could be abandoned, but a significant opportunity to make considerable improvements in this area of deprivation would be missed.

Amalgamation without the provision of new buildings is in theory an alternative, but in practice the benefits sought would be jeopardised and the basis of the public notice which emphasised new accommodation would be undermined.

Risk Management

There is a risk that if nothing is done the education of children in that area will suffer, or will be poorer if the amalgamation does not proceed.

The risk if the proposal is implemented lies in the financial implications of the new building, which will be managed in the standard way. Staffing implications associated with the merger have been assessed, and can be managed without undue difficulty.

Consultees

All parents of existing children at the 2 schools, both Governing bodies, all staff, all schools within the County, the 2 Diocesan Education Authorities, Learning and Skills Councils, and surrounding LEAs.

Background Papers

Consultation Document: Amalgamation Proposals for Hunderton Junior and Infant Schools.