

REVIEW OF SCHOOL ORGANISATION

REPORT BY HEAD OF POLICY & RESOURCES

SCHOOL ORGANISATION COMMITTEE

9TH FEBRUARY 2006

Review of School Organisation & Provision of School Places

PURPOSE

To seek the Schools Organisation Committee's views on the proposal to review the provision of school places in primary, secondary and post-16 phases of education as part of a rolling programme.

WARDS AFFECTED

Countywide

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The review will be labour intensive, but it is proposed to carry out the review within budgeted resources.

REPORT

1. All School Organisation Plans presented to the Committee have identified that falling numbers of pupils will be a characteristic of Herefordshire until 2020. It is projected that numbers in primary schools will fall from a peak of 14,342 in 1999 to below 12,000 in 2016. There could be some recovery in the early 2020's but population projections suggest that numbers will recover by less than 5%.
2. Fewer children in schools will lead to reduced allocations from Central Government, and lead to reduction in teacher numbers. It will be important to ensure that the resources that are available are used to best effect. Indeed it is estimated that over 40% of the budget of a small school is spent on fixed costs [premises, head, secretary, caretaker] but only 13% of a large school.
3. This trend is highlighted by the age profile of children resident in the County.

AGE GROUP	CHILDREN IN COUNTY	CHILDREN ON ROLL
0-1	1695	0
1-2	1770	0
2-3	1723	0
3-4	1707	379
4-5	1722	1486
5-6	1917	1720
6-7	2038	1816
7-8	2039	1823
8-9	2044	1800
9-10	2146	1872
10-11	2023	1851
11-12	2000	1914
12-13	2119	1896
13-14	2201	2045

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
George Salmon, Head of Policy & Resources on (01432) 260802

14-15
15-16

2165
2137

2061
2001

4. By the closing date for admissions only 11 primary and 6 secondary schools were oversubscribed in terms of 1st preference applicants, there being 1708 and 1910 applicants compared to the 2105 and 2050 places which are available in primary and high schools respectively.
5. Within the School Organisation Plan the review policy states that

2.27 *The Council would normally review schools in the following circumstances.*

PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- (a) *a school with fewer than 36 pupils in the September of a school year, or a school whose numbers are expected to fall below that level within the following 5 years, would be reviewed by the Council, in consultation with the relevant Diocesan Education Authority where a Church school is concerned.*
- (b) *schools with 36-45 pupils, which would be monitored by the Director of Education, with the relevant Diocesan Director of Education where a Church school is concerned, to assess whether or not numbers are likely to drop below 35 pupils within 5 years, and to determine whether or not there are other grounds for concern about the future of the school;*
- (c) *where a pyramid of primary schools has unused capacity at a level that could accommodate the closure of the smallest school, with up to 15% unused capacity still remaining if such possible closure were to occur; or*
- (d) *where a school is identified by Ofsted either as having serious weaknesses or in need of special measures;*

2.28 *If, following such review, a school is judged to be currently viable, then no further review of that school would be undertaken for at least 5 years, unless pupil numbers were to fall by a further 25% below the level considered during that review.*

HIGH SCHOOLS

- (e) *where a high school has fewer than 200 pupils on roll at the start of a school year; or*
- (f) *where a high school has sufficient unused capacity for all the existing and projected pupils to be accommodated in the nearest alternative school with up to 15% unused capacity still remaining if such possible closure were to occur; or*
- (g) *where a school is identified by Ofsted either as having serious weaknesses or in need of special measures;*

SIXTH FORMS (16-18)

2.29 *The Learning and Skills Council has the responsibility for planning post-16 education, including the power to make proposals for opening, enlarging or closing Sixth Form provision.*

2.30 *The DfES has published a consultation paper on **Learning to Succeed - School Sixth Form Funding**. The document reiterates earlier statements that each sixth form would*

be guaranteed its current sixth form funding, provided pupil numbers are maintained.

- 2.31 That assurance is welcome in providing a broadly secure framework in which the provision made within individual schools can be reviewed though it is noted with some concern that the safeguards do not promise budget increases for schools whose numbers rise. Discussions are continuing with the DfES in an effort to ensure that the guarantee operates effectively for small sixth forms, serving isolated rural communities.
- 2.32 The potential for closer collaboration with local colleges and with other schools is being explored, with a view to widening the options and quality of provision for students in smaller sixth forms by the Herefordshire Association of Colleges and Schools. Having considered various options, there is a consensus that improvements to the existing framework of provision is the best way forward.
- 2.33 The review of post-16 provision by independent consultants in 2002 commissioned by the LSC confirmed that co-operation to improve existing provision is the best way forward.

NURSERY UNITS IN MAINTAINED SCHOOLS

- 2.34 There is a concern that a significant number of places in maintained nurseries are not used.

From discussions with schools, it appears that many parents prefer the more flexible arrangements available in private and voluntary playgroups including earlier starting times and longer sessional care than offered in the 13 maintained nurseries where 5 two and half hour sessions per week are available. Given that all 3 and 4 year olds can have free early years education from April 2004 and follow the same foundation stage curriculum whatever the setting, the schools with nurseries do feel that they are at a disadvantage despite the undoubted quality of provision. The Local Authority is considering the various issues involved including encouraging schools to work with voluntary providers to achieve full day care on the school site. In the meantime it is therefore proposed that a policy to review those nurseries which are less than 50% full in September of each year be adopted, assuming that capacities are reduced from 30 to 26.'

6. Given the level of surplus space in the County as a whole it is proposed that reviews take place as part of a rolling programme, each review covering all schools in school partnerships (see attached sheet for proposed programme).

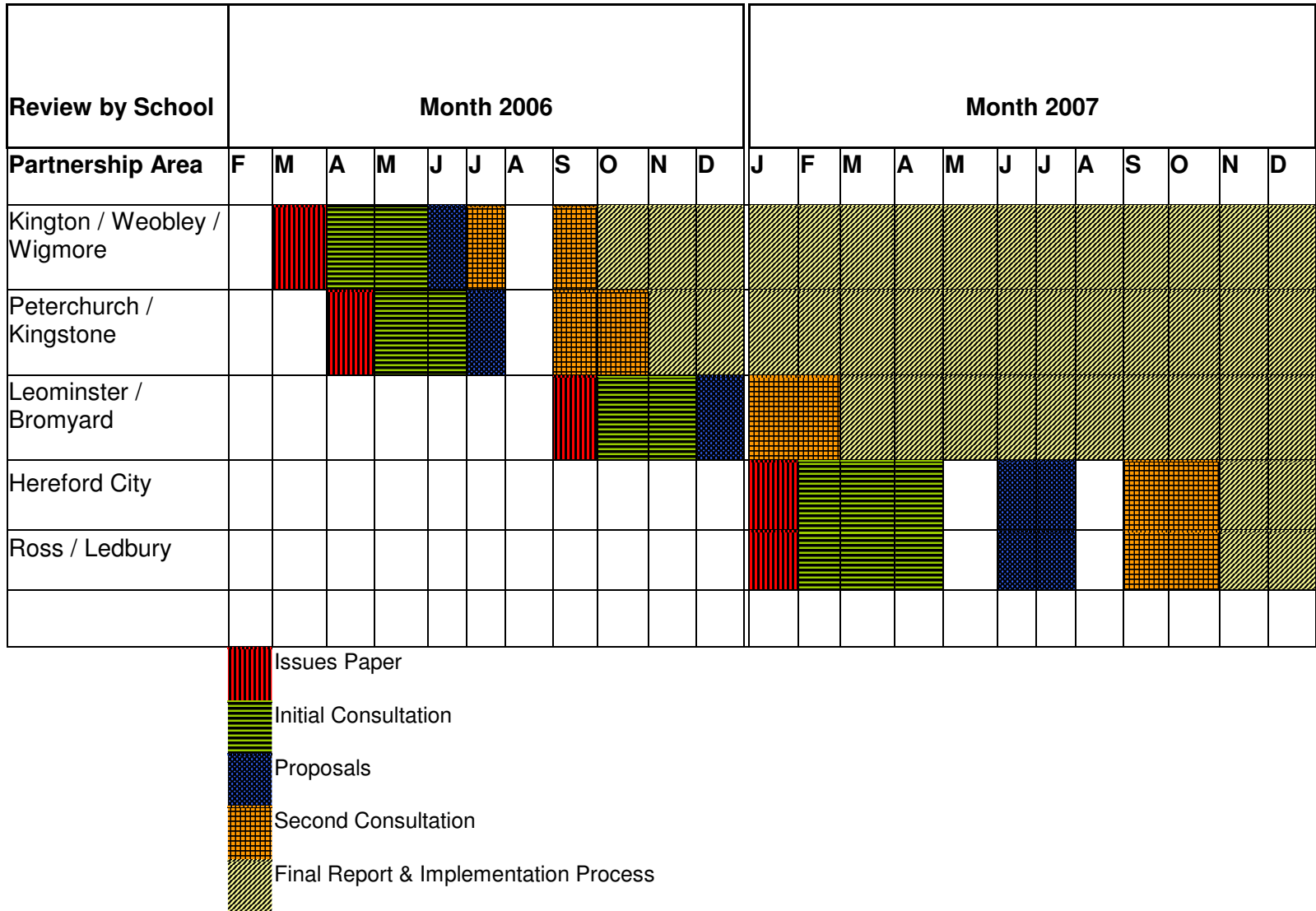
	Primary Schools		High Schools	
	Total Pupil Numbers	Total School Capacity	Total Pupil Numbers	Total School Capacity
Weobley, Kington, Wigmore	1588	1876	1364	1460
Leominster, Bromyard	1661	2086	1081	1300
Kingstone, Peterchurch	1071	1316	1018	995
Hereford City	5296	6293	4818	4900
Ledbury & Ross	2759	3255	2176	2100
Total	12,375	14,826	10,457	10,755

7. It is acknowledged that no parts of the County operate entirely separately, but by considering each part of the County more thought can be given to the possibilities of cooperation between schools. It is suggested that the countywide role played by St. Mary's R C High School and Bishop of Hereford Bluecoat High School be part of the Hereford City process.

8. It is proposed that in each area, a discussion document be produced for consultation with schools, parents and diocesan bodies LSC and others. This would lead to recommendations from the local authority for further discussion. It would only be at the end of that stage that any statutory notice if required would be issued.
9. In this review the following issues will be addressed
 - (A) The standard of teaching and learning at the school at present
 - (B) The potential impact of falling rolls on the school, and the number of teachers and range of expertise and the ability to recruit and retain staff particularly headteachers.
 - (C) The role of the school within the community and the services currently offered and those that could be offered under the extended schools programme and the development of Children's Centres.
 - (D) Alternative school organization arrangements :
 - (I) without closure including federation/co-operation
 - (II) involving some closure
 - (E) a review of catchment areas in an attempt to ensure all areas are served by their nearest school
 - (F) the suitability of the buildings for teaching and learning in the 21st century, their condition and the level of capital investment needed
 - (G) the benefits of aligning the school capacity to the number of children to be served in the area
 - (H) the benefits in removing temporary accommodation from the school
10. The Learning and Skills Council is responsible for planning post 16 provision, and their input to this exercise will be critical for it to succeed.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Committee comment on proposed review of school organisation.



Further information on the subject of this report is available from George Salmon, Head of Policy & Resources on (01432) 260802

This programme is ambitious and experience suggests that issues may have to be revisited. However the aim is to give time for a considered debate over school provision but within a period which will minimise uncertainty for schools, parents, pupils and staff.

A project team will be formed within the local authority and report to Cabinet Member via a project board