

## REVIEW OF THE PROVISION OF SCHOOL PLACES

Report By: Director of Children's Services

### Wards Affected

County-wide

### Purpose

1. To consider the review of school provision.

### Financial Implications

2. The review being undertaken within existing staffing resources.

### Background

3. On 10th April, 2006 this Committee agreed that an informal meeting of Members of the Strategic Monitoring Committee should be held to review the development of work programmes. It was recognised that the current work programmes did not substantially reflect the Council-wide themes and issues identified as priority areas in the Council's Overall Improvement Plan, the Annual Operating Plan and the Herefordshire Community Strategy including the Local Area Agreement.
4. At the informal meeting on 4th May Members were presented with a discussion paper setting out a number of possible themes for the scrutiny programme over the next year. One of the themes was **Herefordshire Thinks Rural**: how effective is our rural proofing of policies and programmes? How could it be improved? Are we sufficiently joined-up in addressing the major issues affecting rural communities, e.g. the rural schools review? Is the Council doing all it can for the rural economy?
5. As reported to the Committee on 26th June Members decided to focus on the schools review including whether the review was addressing all the issues, what part do schools play in the Community, what is the link to other Council plans?
6. At a subsequent informal meeting on 20th July it was decided to proceed on the basis that when proposals from each of the reviews came forward they would be reported to the Strategic Monitoring Committee for consideration and comment. The expectation is that the Committee will be given the opportunity to comment before any formal decision is taken by the Executive.

### Issues

7. On 16th March, 2006 Cabinet approved a review of the provision of school places in primary, secondary, and Post 16 phases of education.
8. This decision was taken in light of the falling numbers of children resident in the County i.e. In August 2005 there were 2,137 15-16 year olds in the County but only 1,695 0-1 year olds. The number of 0-1 year olds was projected to fall even further by 2011.

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Further information on the subject of this report is available from  
George Salmon, Head of Commissioning and Improvement on 01432 260802

9. To achieve a balance between undertaking a thorough review, and minimising the degree of uncertainty, it was agreed that the review should be undertaken in a phased manner looking at 5 areas of the County over a 21 month period. The current timetable of the programme is set out in Annex 1. It is to be noted that a separate review of high school provision is to be conducted in the autumn term.
10. To date 2 initial discussion documents have been issued, the first for the Kington, Weobley & Wigmore areas (Annex 2) the second for the Kingstone & Peterchurch areas (Annex 3). In each of these areas a second document setting out a suggested way forward will be issued in September for a second round of consultation during the autumn term. During this period initial discussion documents will also be issued for the Bromyard & Leominster area, and for the review of high school provision.
11. For each area a small group of members including the Cabinet Member for Children & Young People's, the Chairman of the School Organisation Committee, the Chairman of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee and 3 Local Members has met to discuss the particular circumstances in each area.
12. In parallel with this work, a consultant was commissioned to review models of cooperation and federation between schools elsewhere in the Country, and to advise on its applicability in Herefordshire. A summary is provided in Annex 4. From this work policies are being developed about 'Council's' policies on when school governors would be expected to consider working more closely with other schools. This will centre around the vacancy of the headship in small schools or when proximity to another school does suggest more efficient management can be provided.
13. Responses to the two consultation exercises has been varied. 32 responses have been received in the Kington, Weobley & Wigmore area but only 3 in the Kingstone & Peterchurch area. However that the latter does contain a combined response for all schools in the Peterchurch Pyramid. Overall there is an acceptance that there is likely to be fewer children in schools in the future, although the possibility of in-migration changing this is raised by a number of people. In principle there is general support / interest in schools cooperating with each other, but this is linked to a concern over the loss of a headteacher and/or governing body. It is expected that the proposal papers will elicit more focused replies.
14. The possibility of wider use of school premises has been raised but there has been no significant identification of use or users over and above that which happens at present which can provide sustainable activity and be compatible with the smooth operation of schools. Again this may appear as the detailed proposals emerge.

## RECOMMENDATION

**THAT the report be noted subject to any views the Committee wishes to express on the review, the process and the timetable adopted**

## BACKGROUND PAPERS

- None