

**Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council**

**The Cabinet – 15 June 2005**

**Report of the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning**

**Primary Schools Review – Development of Specific Proposals**

**Purpose**

1. The purposes of this report are:
  - a. to seek the endorsement of the Cabinet for the statements of intent and principle that will inform the development of specific proposals for a new pattern of primary school places through the Primary Schools Review;
  - b. to authorise the Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning to publish proposals for specific schools;
  - c. to authorise the re-use of capital resources released by the implementation of specific proposals within the primary school sector to help ensure that all primary school education takes place in high quality buildings.

**Background**

2. The Primary Review Refresh 2004 Consultation ended on 29 January 2005. The consultation document outlined the reasons for changing the current pattern of primary school places and posed statements of intent and principle to inform the change process. The consultation responses have been analysed and published (copy available in Members' Room). The overall strength of support for the statements of intent and principle provides a solid basis for using them, with some adjustment, as a framework for developing specific proposals for change.
3. The January 1997 Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) recorded 27,710 pupils (Reception – Year 6) attending Dudley primary schools. The number has fallen year-on-year to 26,204 in January 2005 and will continue to fall to an estimated 24,472 by January 2010.

Overall Dudley primary schools have a capacity for 29,513 pupils, a surplus in January 2005 of 3,309 places or 11.2%. Without action, this surplus is projected to rise to 5,041 or 17.1% by January 2010.

4. The fall in numbers is not however evenly spread. 51 of 82 primary schools recorded fewer pupils on roll in PLASC January 2005 than in PLASC January 2004, with the majority of the remainder recording a similar number on roll.
5. This level of surplus capacity cannot be sustained. It is uneconomic and inefficient, as set out below, and will be the subject of severe criticisms in the Joint Area Review of Children's Services to be carried out in March 2006, unless action is underway.
6. The longer term projections from the Office of National Statistics are more hopeful. In 2003 there were 17,000 children aged 0-4 resident in Dudley. This is projected to remain virtually stable over the next 25 years with a projected number for 2028 of 17,100. The implication of this is that while restructuring of primary education is needed urgently, there will be no further need to restructure over a 25 year period. This encourages long-term planning to ensure that the pattern of primary education that we move to over the next year is sustainable for the longer term and which will encompass the change programme set out below.
7. School funding at local authority level is driven by PLASC data, and the year-on-year fall in numbers leads to an ongoing decrease in the overall schools' budget (the Individual Schools Budget (ISB), which from April 2006 will be separated from the overall local authority budget and allocated as a separate grant, the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).
8. In local authorities such as Dudley facing falling rolls, the effects of the 'passporting' process and the 'Minimum Funding Guarantee' are mitigated by the reduction in funding caused by fewer pupils.
9. The most important factor in school funding (income) is the number of pupils on roll. Individual schools' share of the overall budget, calculated through an agreed formula (the Local Management of Schools Formula) (LMS Formula) that is also driven by pupil numbers. Consequently, every school with falling pupil numbers will receive a proportionately smaller proportion of the schools' budget that is also smaller.

10. The costs of providing education (expenditure) are not directly linked to pupil numbers. Schools still have to meet the nationally agreed annual increases in staff pay and related costs, and increased costs of goods, services and premises. Falling income and rising costs present serious financial difficulties for school budgets. Nationally, it is universally the case that smaller schools have higher unit costs, and that schools experiencing contraction have costs that are higher than average for their size.
11. Responses to the Primary Review Refresh 2004 Consultation show overall support for the need to take action. The range of responses demonstrates that change should not be focused solely on removing surplus places. Dudley has an opportunity to secure a change programme incorporating a range of educational and regeneration issues that will transform the quality of provision. The change programme should be transformational and lead to significant improvement in the outcomes for children and young people.
12. Underpinning this change programme is 'Learning for the Future', a Dudley concept, which has evolved into our overarching planning framework. It is designed to join a series of wide-ranging initiatives into a coherent and manageable development programme. The Primary Schools Review must be firmly rooted within Learning for the Future and will take full account of the following major initiatives:
- the continuing development of pre-school settings;
  - the development of Children's Centres;
  - the implementation of the SEN Strategy;
  - the development of Full Service Extended Schools (FSES) and Extended Schools more generally;
  - The development of integrated children's services;
  - Continued development of community use of schools including leisure, libraries and lifelong learning.
13. 'Learning for the Future' will support the Primary Schools Review in developing proposals that will fully contribute to:
- removal of excess surplus places;
  - better use of resources;
  - reinvestment of resources in educational provision;

- an infrastructure for learners of all ages to develop individually and contribute to the health and prosperity of Dudley;
- a pattern of effective and sustainable schools;
- effective links between education, training and employment;
- high quality, fit-for-purpose accommodation;
- transformation from average to excellent outputs such as attainment, added value, and attendance;
- extended and community provision;
- effective partnership between public, private and voluntary sectors
- excellent ratings in relevant external assessments including Comprehensive Performance Assessment, Annual Performance Assessment for Children's Services, and Joint Area Reviews of Children's Services.

### Proposals

14. In consultation with key stakeholders, specific proposals will be brought forward for formal statutory consultation relating to changes in school organisation.

15. The outline timetable is as follows:

June – July 2005	Focus group discussions with key stakeholders
September – October 2005	Formal consultation on specific proposals
November 2005	Publication of statutory notices
January 2006	School Organisation Committee
September 2006	Implementation of first changes

16. It is not possible to define the implementation timetable more precisely until specific proposals emerge and are developed in detail. Some options may be subject to changes in admission arrangements and capital programmes. All proposals and implementation arrangements will be developed in consultation with key stakeholders.

## Finance

17. The change programme will need a small core of dedicated and experienced staff to provide effective project management and expertise in this critical area. This will be financed initially within existing budgets and with some realignment of existing staff roles.
18. Future reports to the Schools Forum will present options for funding the revenue implications in 2006/07 and subsequent years. The new funding arrangements for 2006/07 are expected to provide greater flexibility in the use of education funding for school reorganisation purposes.
19. It is anticipated that there will be some capital receipts from school closures or from other council-owned sites released where incorporation within a school site could improve service provision. The DfES expect capital receipts of this nature to be reinvested in education provision. Bids have been submitted to the DfES for direct grant (2006/7 Targeted Capital Fund) to replace existing inadequate accommodation with two new primary schools.
20. The reshaping of primary provision to ensure that it is cost-effective and efficient will help meet Gershon efficiency targets for the schools sector.
21. Future reports will detail the full revenue and capital implications.

## Law

22. Under Section 28 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 school organisation changes require a reasonable period of consultation with those likely to be affected by proposals for specific schools. Following consultation each proposal requires the publication of a statutory notice immediately preceding a defined period during which representations may be made. The representation period varies for different types of school but in most cases is six weeks. Where representations are received, proposals are referred to the independent School Organisation Committee (SOC) for consideration and subsequently to the adjudicator if the SOC cannot reach a unanimous decision within a defined period.

Equal Opportunities Policy

23. This report is focused on ensuring that all pupils have access to the highest quality of educational opportunities. The processes adopted for the Primary Schools Review will comply with the Council's equal opportunities policies.

Recommendations

24. It is recommended that:
- a. the Cabinet endorses the statements of intent and principle set out;
  - b. the Cabinet authorises the Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning to publish proposals for specific schools;
  - c. the Cabinet authorises the re-use of capital resources released by the implementation of specific proposals within the primary school sector to help ensure that all primary school education takes place in high quality buildings.



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Background Papers

The under-mentioned papers were used in the compilation of this report:

Primary Review Refresh 2004 Consultation Document (available in the Members' Room)

Primary Review Refresh 2004 Consultation Responses Analysis (available in the Members' Room)