

Select Committee on Children's Services – 15 November 2007

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Building Schools for the Future – Primary Schools

Purpose of Report

1. The Select Committee on Lifelong Learning received reports on the Primary Schools Review on 15 March 2005 and 16 January 2006. The changes arising from the Primary Schools Review and capital funding opportunities have substantially addressed the serious problem of growing surplus places. Some concerns remain to be addressed.

This report:

- summarises progress made following the Primary Schools Review
- describes opportunities provided by the Primary Capital Programme to complete the development of sustainable primary schools fit for 21st century learning and at the heart of the local communities
- describes the process to be followed to release the Primary Capital funding from the DCSF (Appendix 1).

Background

2. Dudley has managed numerous changes to the pattern of schooling at critical points over the last 60 years in response to changing demography and approaches to education provision. With the benefit of much better information, Dudley is in a good position to continue the change processes and meet the needs of children, young people and their families for the next 20 – 30 years.
3. Demographic change in Dudley in the last twenty years has been significant. The annual birth rates (using academic year September - March) in Dudley reduced from 4,116 in 1990 to 3,344 in 2003, a fall of almost 20%. There was a slight increase to 3,535 in 2005 but long term projections indicate annual birth rates settling at around 3,500. The slight increase is not sufficient to counter the effects of previous falls in birth rate and on the demand for primary school places.
4. The January 2006 Statutory Return to the DFES records the number of primary

school places available in 82 primary schools as 25,708 and 3,897 surplus places (an increase from 3,318 in January 2005). The record also shows fourteen primary schools with 25% or more surplus places (actual range 26.7% – 54.2%). Dudley is required to comment on how the issues will be addressed in these schools. Without action, the predicted number of surplus places in primary schools would with 25% or more surplus places increase to around 5,000 by 2010. This prediction was based on actual children already attending primary schools and those that were due to start primary education by 2010.

5. Falling pupil numbers has a significant and adverse effect on the level of money available to schools and on their ability to meet the quality of education required for children. The DCSF calculates the education grant for Dudley based on the number of pupils attending its schools. As the demand for places falls, schools receive proportionately less money with higher amounts each year spent on maintaining empty places.
6. The growing problem of surplus places in the Borough's primary schools was highlighted in an external consultancy report by KPMG in 1999, and in the OFSTED Inspection Reports of 2000 and 2002. The more general outcomes of the OFSTED inspection in 2000 caused a delay in the implementing of a full review and action plan, although the need for such a review featured in the Post OFSTED Action Plans in 2000 and 2002.
7. Consultation was carried out:
 - a. On specific school proposals in 2002. Responses were received from headteachers, governors, councillors, parents and others. The consultation led to further consultation on Church of England provision in Halesowen;
 - b. On statements of principle and intent. The Primary Review Refresh 2004 consultation started in late 2004 and ended on 31 January 2005. Meetings were held with headteachers in township groups to promote discussion of the document and clarification of any questions. Widespread consensus was gained on the principles to be followed in the Primary Schools Review;
 - c. In summer 2005 with headteachers, chairs and members on the process to be followed for the Primary Schools Review including legal processes, employment matters, managing relationships and change;
 - d. In autumn 2005 with specific proposals for 82 primary schools set out in the Primary Schools Review. In response to the consultation some proposals were retained, others amended and further consultation was carried out in specific areas e.g. Halesowen North.
8. DfES and Select Committee reviewed the consultation arrangements along with

other concerns raised. The DfES concluded that the authority met their statutory duty to consult interested parties as required under Section 29(4) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (as amended). Select Committee also concluded that requirements had been met. Both reviews made recommendations where improvements might be made and have been incorporated in subsequent school organisation approaches.

9. The main changes arising from the Primary Schools Review include

- closure of four primary schools
- reducing the admission numbers in 22 primary schools
- increasing the capacity in 6 primary schools
- 50 primary schools were unchanged

In addition a range of other measures have been taken (or in progress) including:

- Removal of temporary accommodation
- Use of surplus accommodation for other purposes such as establishment of Children's Centres and Pupil Referral Units

10. The impact of these changes in summary is:

- Number of primary schools with more than 25% surplus places reduced from fourteen in January 2006 to four in January 2007. The figure will reduce to zero within five years.
- The number of schools with between 10 and 24% surplus places has reduced due to taking pupils from closing schools and changes to capacity. Monitoring and possible further action may be required with this group of schools.
- Schools have worked effectively to support successful staff transfers from closed and reducing schools to fill vacancies.
- Significant resources have been released from reducing premises costs for reinvestment in other schools through the Fair Funding Scheme. At best, these resources are mitigating some of the impact from overall education budget reductions from falling numbers e.g. £2.7 m less to distribute in 2007 compared with 2006 which was £2.5 less than 2005.

11. The government has announced a major capital programme which will enable Dudley to continue its vision to create a system of primary schools that are fit for 21st century learning and at the heart of their communities. In his 2005 Budget statement, the Chancellor of the Exchequer set out ambitious plans for a new, long term capital investment programme to rebuild, remodel or refurbish at least 50% of all primary schools in England. In 2006 the Department consulted widely on delivery options and around two thirds of respondents agreed with the

proposed approach. Ministers have confirmed that the programme will run to the principles and timescales set out in the prospectus. Full details can be found in the prospectus *Every Child Matters: Primary Capital Programme. Building Schools at the Heart of the Community*. (DfES 2006).

www.teachernet.gov.uk/docbank

12. The Department invited local authorities to bid for pathfinder funding to rebuild one or more primary schools as pilot projects. Dudley consulted with primary schools on a scoring matrix with a range of criteria to identify one project that would meet the DfES criteria and could start by April 2008. The replacement of Quarry Bank Primary was selected but the pathfinder bid was not successful.
13. The DfES selected 23 authorities as pathfinders who will share £150 million in 2008 – 9. These authorities are required to test aspects of the programme prior to a national roll out, act as regional champions to build local capacity for delivery in their region and build one or more exemplar projects to open by September 2009.
14. From April 2009 all local authorities will share additional capital investment of £500 million per year. This sum includes funding for voluntary aided schools. Subject to future government spending decisions the programme will continue for 15 years. The capital allocations for local authorities were recently announced for the first two years of the national roll out: 2009-10 and 2010-11.
15. Local authorities are not required to bid for Primary Capital Funding but they are required to demonstrate a planned, strategic approach before the money will be released. The preferred method of assessment, set out in the June 2007 guidance to pathfinder authorities, involves the submission of a Primary Strategy for Change document to the DSCF by 31 March 2008. Those authorities that successfully demonstrate how they will use the Primary Capital Programme to improve Every Child Matters outcomes will have access to their allocations from 2009.
16. The Department believes that taking a strategic view of investment through the primary capital programme gives the best opportunity to provide 21st century facilities for all primary pupils. Strategic capital investment should support national and local priorities, drive up standards, enable parents to choose from a diverse range of effective primary schools and secure the role of primary schools at the heart of the communities they serve.
17. The Department sees the benefits of a strategic approach as:
 - A shared focus for investment with immediate investment decisions informed by long-term aims
 - The long-term, system wide view should reveal new solutions to difficult

- problems
 - Local planning, meeting the needs of the local authority area as a whole and of pupils, parents, communities and individual schools within it
 - Pulling together diverse investment from many sources for greater impact
 - Greater flexibility to deliver projects
 - Efficient procurement ensuring value for money
 - Clear local contribution to national policy objectives
 - Streamlined, less burdensome processes from central government
 - Better fit with other improvements to the engagement between central and local government
18. A two stage consultation process is being planned with primary schools. Arrangements are being made to consult during November and December on the criteria and scoring matrix to be used to prioritise the projects in Dudley's Primary Capital Programme. Guidance from DCSF originally scheduled for October has not yet been published. Further consultation is planned in January and February on school specific proposals. This will enable the Primary Strategy for Change to be formally approved and submitted to the DCSF by the end of April. A briefing note about the programme is attached as appendix one.

Finance

19. Dudley has been notified of the capital allocations for 2008-2011. This includes Primary Capital Programme allocations of £4.2 million in 2009-10 and £6.5 million in 2010-11. These resources will be allocated in accordance with the outcomes of consultation referred to above and the Council's capital programme approval processes.
20. The funding of school is regulated through the Financing of Maintained Schools Regulations (England) 2004 and the LEA budget, Schools Budget and Individual Schools Budget (England) Regulations 2004. From April 2006 enhanced funding will be governed by the School Finance (England) Regulations 2005.
21. A further report will be made to the Cabinet on capital and buildings issues after the School Organisation Committee has made a decision on the proposals.

Law

22. The procedures relating to the establishment, alteration or discontinuance of schools are principally contained in Chapter II (sections 28 – 35) and schedule 6 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

Equality Impact

23. Investing in the Future is intended to provide the best teaching and learning opportunities for all in buildings fit for purpose, and within the resources available. Targeted teaching and learning will continue for vulnerable groups, including looked after children and those underachieving, particularly those identified by pupil level performance monitoring processes.

Recommendation

24. That the Select Committee note this progress made with addressing surplus primary school places.
25. Advise the Cabinet Member on the Primary Capital Programme.



.....
John Freeman
Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Ray Watson
Telephone: 01384 814395
Email: name@dudley.gov.uk

List of Background Papers