

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council

Select Committee on Lifelong Learning - 16 January 2005

Report of the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning

Progress Report on the Primary Schools Review

Purpose

1. Select Committee on Lifelong Learning received an update on the Primary Schools Review on 15 March 2005. The update focussed on the responses to the Primary Review Refresh 2004 consultation which ended on 31 January 2005.
2. This report summarises the considerable progress made since March 2005 and sets out a broad timetable for the next steps.

Background

3. Dudley has managed numerous changes to the pattern of schooling at several critical points over the last 60 years. Political, educational and demographic changes have led to the building of new schools, changing their sizes and closing schools. Dudley is now facing again the need to change and, with the benefit of much better information, can respond with a degree of certainty to meet the needs of children for the next 20 - 30 years.
4. The surplus of 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 Plan in 2000 and 2002.
5. Consultation on specific school proposals was carried out in 2002. Responses were received from headteachers, governors, councillors, parents and others. The consultation led to action in several cases including further consultation on the establishment of a new Voluntary Aided (VA) school for Halesowen to replace two existing schools.

6. The annual birth rates (using academic year September - March) in Dudley have reduced from 4,116 in 1990 to 3,344 in 2003. There was a slight increase to 3,514 in 2004 but long term projections indicate births of around 3,300. The DfES sets the minimum education budget for Dudley based on the number of pupils attending its schools. As the demand for places falls, schools will receive proportionately lower budgets, adding significantly to the difficulty for schools of meeting the costs of the quality of education to which all pupils are entitled.
7. Based on the numbers of children already born, primary pupil numbers in Dudley schools are projected to fall by a further 2,358 or 9% between 2005 and 2010. The reduction of 2,358 primary pupils will lead to an annual fall in the Council's revenue grant funding from the DfES and a reduction of £7.8m by 2010, at current prices. The figure of £7.8m is based upon a current 'per pupil' unit funding of £3,329, the DfES baseline assessment for a 'Dudley' pupil in 2005 which will be applied for calculation of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2006 onwards. This data has just been released by the DfES to enable the Council to model future budget scenarios in confidence.
8. The primary sector delegated budget in the current financial year is £71.3m or 49% of the total resources delegated to schools. If the current provision of 82 primary schools were maintained with 2,358 fewer primary pupil places, it is estimated that each primary school budget would be reduced by an average of 10% by 2010. Individual primary school budgets currently range from £0.5m to £1.9m. Therefore schools could expect to see an average annual budget reduction ranging from £50,000 to £190,000 by 2010. With a projected 5,000 surplus places in the system some schools would experience much greater reductions and also considerable year-on-year instability. This is not in the best interests of children.
9. Dudley primary schools currently spend their delegated resources in the following proportions:

Staff	83%
Premises	6%
Supplies and services	11%

Premises costs are largely fixed and there is limited scope for reductions in services, learning materials and other supplies. The main focus for balancing budgets is therefore likely to be in the largest area

of expenditure which is staffing. If the £7.8m reduction were directed at staffing in primary schools, this would equate to an indicative reduction of 230 posts in schools, or more than 10% of the current workforce in primary schools.

10. It has now become imperative to take action to ensure that the pattern of primary school provision is cost effective, with only sufficient surplus places to allow a degree of parental preference and in order to cope with any unplanned expansion. It is important to say that these proposals will affect every primary school in the Borough, ensuring that money is not wasted on maintaining surplus places but directed to the education of children.
11. 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. The 49 written responses received by the end of the consultation period indicated broad support for the statements of intent and principles set out in the consultation document.
12. The responses and comments along with a commentary were circulated in paper form and published on the website as Primary Review Refresh 2004 Consultation Analysis. The document also included a framework of principles that would be used in the development of proposals for the removal of surplus capacity from primary schools. The framework is summarised as follows:
 - All schools must be financially and educationally viable;
 - A sufficient number of local places will be available for local children;
 - Consideration will be given to integrated services and the extended role of schools within their community;
 - Consideration will be given to develop and maintain community cohesion;
 - The balance between church and community school places will be maintained;
 - The aims and actions of the Inclusion Strategy will be supported;
 - Consideration will be given to issues of physical access;
 - Consideration will be given to the quality of school buildings.

Progress Made

13. The Primary Schools Review has been a regular item at business meetings with headteachers and governors throughout 2005. This has helped to inform people about progress and discuss emerging issues.
14. A series of meetings were held during the summer term to
 - provide further information on pupil numbers;
 - describe school organisation legislation;
 - discuss options for applying the framework of principles in developing specific proposals;
 - consider implications for management of the processes.

Meetings were held for headteachers in township groups and chairs of governors also in township groups. A range of options for meetings were provided for councillors.

15. These meetings provided very useful information and there was a high degree of consensus that the process should be completed as quickly as possible to minimise the potential effects of staff and pupils leaving Dudley schools for other settings. The meetings also acknowledged that the specific proposals would require reductions in capacity, closure of some schools and possible expansions of some schools.
16. In parallel with regular discussions with schools a comprehensive data process was in progress. The process ensured that relevant data was available, validated and available for developing specific proposals that would meet the needs of Dudley overall and for individual areas. The data was drawn from a variety of sources including statutory returns provided by Dudley for government e.g. pupil numbers, government sources e.g. Office for National Statistics, and knowledge of schools and their localities.
17. The information was used to shape specific proposals for 82 primary schools. Consultation on these proposals started on 12 September and ended on 21 October 2005. The consultation document was circulated to all schools for distribution to parents and all parents were informed of the consultation by letter. Copies of the consultation document were circulated to a wide range of other parties and published on the Dudley Council website. Consultation meetings were

held for staff, governors and parents at each of the schools proposed for closure.

18. The total number of responses to the 11,000 questionnaires circulated with the consultation document was 778. Almost 50% (350) of the total responses were in relation to the schools proposed for closure or amalgamation. Responses were received in relation to 73 of the 82 primary schools.
19. The Cabinet considered a report on the consultation responses on 17 November and approved recommendations to publish statutory notices to close Beauty Bank, Highfields, Holt Farm, Maidensbridge and Sycamore Green Primary schools with effect from 31 August 2006.
20. In response to concerns raised during the initial consultation process about the impact of the proposed changes on children, staff and community use, temporary arrangements are being developed with other local primary schools.
21. Legislation requires statutory notices for six weeks. During this time representations (objections) may be made. Representations along with Dudley Council's response are considered by the independent School Organisation Committee. It is a matter for the School Organisation Committee to determine the process for consideration and reaching a decision. It is anticipated that the School Organisation Committee will start consideration of these matters on 26 January.
22. The decisions made by School Organisation Committee will influence the next steps and the timetable. Other processes such as admissions, staffing, construction work and safe routes to school cannot progress without the required approvals. Substantial delays in obtaining approvals will severely affect these processes and increase the potential risk of instability. The outline timetable as reported to Cabinet on 17 November is as follows.

Date	Event
17 November 2005	Cabinet Meeting
21 November 2005	Publication of Statutory Notices (21 November – 2 January)
W/C 21 November 2005	Initial letter to parents to establish an indication of which school they wish to apply to.
End of November	Discussions with Schools (Capital Projects)
December 2005	Schools Forum consider revenue support for 2006/07
End of December	Finalisation of briefs for construction work (Capital Projects)
2 January 2006	Final date for Representations (subject to publication of notices on 21 November)
26 January 2006	School Organisation Committee
27 January 2006	Letter to parents of children attending schools proposed for closure asking them to express a preference for a new school
February 2006	Asset Management Plan – review of capital allocations
March 2006	Parents informed of places allocated
Summer 2006	Admissions Appeals
31 August 2006	Schools proposed for closure effectively close.
1 September 2006	Children and staff transfer to new school rolls

23. There were 3,318 (11.2%) surplus places in Dudley primary schools in January 2005. The lower birth rates over the last few years will result in over 5,000 surplus places by 2010. The proposals will reduce the number of surplus places in primary schools by annual steps to 1,904 (7.2%). There is sufficient capacity to meet any future demand for places in the unlikely event that it will be required. The proposals take account of potential housing developments in each area and the birth forecasts for Dudley and surrounding authorities show relative stability at current levels for the next 20 years (Office for National Statistics).

Finance

24. In February 2005, a request to earmark a proportion of the unallocated 2005/6 budget to support the primary schools review was not supported and the money was allocated to schools through the formula. This decision has contributed to the pressures of managing the Primary Schools Review and has contributed directly to difficulties in some areas e.g. responding to correspondence. These pressures

still exist and in December 2005 Schools Forum approved in principle the requirement to provide

- Support for parents in closing schools with regard to any new uniform required through changing primary schools
- Additional revenue grant for closing and “partner schools” in recognition of the additional demands
- Contingency fund in the event of any staff salary protection required.

A detailed report will be considered at the next Schools Forum meeting including how these pressures should be met.

25. The Individual Schools Budget (ISB) for 2005/06 is £146.5m. This budget is delegated to 112 Dudley primary, secondary and special schools in accordance with the locally - agreed LMS Formula. Full details can be found within the Dudley Fair Funding budget statement, which is a statutory publication prescribed by the DfES in accordance with Section 52 of the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998.
26. 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.
27. The capital costs for the proposed changes will be defined through option appraisals once a decision has been reached regarding the proposed changes for each school. There will be a requirement for substantial building work to a number of schools to ensure that the proposed capacity figures for each school can be accommodated. This will include both surplus place removal and increases in size to school accommodation.
28. The Council has been informed of DfES capital allocations for pupil place planning for the financial years 2005/06 to 2007/08 and this, along with any capital receipts from site disposals, will be utilised to address sufficiency of accommodation needs of those schools remaining.

29. 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

30. 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

31. 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.

Proposal

32. Select Committee note this progress report.



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