

DUDLEY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH
COUNCIL
DIRECTORATE OF CHILDREN'S
SERVICES

Response to Objections on School
Organisation Proposals

Closure of Holt Farm Primary School

6 June 2006

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1. PROPOSALS TO CLOSE HOLT FARM PRIMARY SCHOOL

1.1. It is proposed:

to discontinue Holt Farm Primary School, Holt Road, Halesowen, West Midlands, B62 9HG with effect from 31 August 2006.

The fall in demand for pupil places has had a severe impact on the school's budget. Holt Farm no longer has the level of funding required to sustain the quality of education that children are entitled to. The severe pressure on the school's budget will inevitably lead to a reduction in the quality of education, standards achieved by children and an unacceptable increase in the staff workload.

Parents of children attending Holt Farm will be offered places at alternative schools, including Hurst Green and Olive Hill, based on parental preferences. It is expected that siblings will remain together. Subject to School Organisation Committee decisions, individual support will be provided for parents with regard to the options available and any specific assistance required.

Olive Hill will offer places to all Holt Farm children that wish to transfer to Olive Hill. Places will also be provided at alternative schools for children at Holt Farm not wishing to attend Olive Hill.

Olive Hill will need additional capacity and this will be provided in several phases. A scheme to replace mobile classrooms with modern permanent classrooms is in progress and scheduled for completion shortly. From September 2006, Olive Hill will use both sites as described in the consultation document (Appendix N, pages 9 – 13).

Also from September 2006 a further scheme will provide additional classrooms and improvements to the overall accommodation at Olive Hill. In addition a Children's Centre will be established at Olive Hill and will offer services to families and children aged 0 – 5. The funding for these schemes has been identified and secured with the relevant approvals.

The Governing Body of Olive Hill has committed to working with Holt Farm on a new staffing structure and to ring-fencing posts for Holt Farm staff. Support will be provided for all Holt Farm staff and it is anticipated that appointments will be made where there is an appropriate match. Support will be provided for all staff

seeking alternative posts in other schools. It is anticipated that there will be no requirement for compulsory redundancies arising from these proposals.

The admission numbers to Hurst Green (55) and Olive Hill (52) will be increased to 60 from September 2007 following consultation conducted in early 2006. The Council as the admissions authority will exercise its power to admit over the current admissions number if required for September 2006.

In previous reorganisations there have been no compulsory redundancies in Dudley. Similarly, there is no anticipated requirement for redundancies arising from the Primary Schools Review. Olive Hill have committed to developing a new staffing structure and ring-fencing posts for Holt Farm staff. Every effort will be made to support staff in securing alternative posts at Olive Hill, other schools within Dudley or to opportunities that exist across the wider council or elsewhere. Given the turnover rates in the various job roles within schools, it is expected that all staff who wish to continue employment in other schools will be able to do so.

2. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

- 2.1 Dudley has managed numerous changes to the pattern of schooling at critical points over the last 60 years. Details of these changes are being brought together in one place (see Appendix E). Political, educational and demographic changes have led to changes in school size, new schools and school closures. Dudley is once more faced with new pressures and, with the benefit of much better information systems, can respond to meet the needs of children for the next 20 – 30 years.
- 2.2 Surplus places in the Borough's primary schools were 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 implementation 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. Consultation on specific school proposals was carried out in 2002, which led to action in several cases including further consultation on the establishment of a new Voluntary Aided (VA) school to replace two existing schools, Halesowen CE Primary and Hasbury CE Primary.
- 2.3 The annual birth rates (using academic year September - March) in Dudley have fallen from 4,116 in 1990 to 3,344 in 2003, a fall of almost 20% in 13 years. There was a slight increase to 3,514 in 2004 but long-term projections indicate the live birth rate settling at around 3,300. The live birth figures are included in the 17 November Cabinet Report (see Appendix I). All schools are affected

because the Council's revenue grant from government is based on the number of pupils attending school. As pupil numbers fall the level of government grant falls and income for each school falls whilst costs continue to rise. Schools cannot balance their budgets without cutting back in key areas such as staffing and inevitably, the quality of education and standards achieved will suffer. This is not acceptable.

- 2.4 Based on the numbers of children already born, primary pupil numbers in Dudley schools will fall by 2,358 (almost 10%) 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 for calculation of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2006 onwards. The annual pupil census confirms this forecast as there were 587 fewer pupils attending Dudley schools in January 2006 compared with 2005. The schools budget for 2006/7 is reduced by £2.1 million, most of which is borne by primary schools.
- 2.5 The number of pupils aged 5 – 11 attending Holt Farm has fallen from 283 in 1997 to 164 in January 2006. By May, the number had dropped to 139 and will be close to 100 by September 2006. Holt Farm will not have sufficient income to meet the costs of the quality of education currently offered. It is the number of pupils attending each school that determines whether the school has enough money to pay for staffing, premises and other costs. This year the school budget can only be balanced with major cuts to staffing and other areas. There are not enough pupils in the area to make Holt Farm viable. As the numbers continue to fall, reductions in staffing will adversely affect the quality of education and the standards achieved by children. These proposals will enable all children to achieve as good as or higher standards by attending schools that have a greater number of well trained staff able to offer a broader range of opportunities and improved facilities.

3. ASSESSMENT OF THE PROPOSAL

The School Organisation Committee in assessing this proposal should consider the following;

- The Secretary of State's Guidance for Decision Makers on Statutory Proposals;

- The views expressed during the consultation process regarding this proposal particularly from Governors, staff and parents of pupils attending or intending to attend Holt Farm Primary School;
- The Borough's School Organisation Plan;
- Equal opportunities, Racial Discrimination, Disability Discrimination and Human Rights Aspects;
- Any other relevant factors concerning these specific proposals.

In addressing these factors this report follows the Secretary of State's Guidance and applies that Guidance where relevant and appropriate.

It is intended that the thrust of the substantial objections to this proposal will be represented firstly within the body of this report, but for completeness, pages 35 - 68 of this report give a summary of each of the individual objections raised together with the Directorate of Children's Services response. Further, all of the objection letters, together with correspondence arising from the consultation process will be copied to members of the Committee.

EFFECT ON STANDARDS AND CONTRIBUTION TO SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

3.1 Whether the proposals will improve the standards, quality and range and / or diversity of educational provision in the area

The opportunity for the integration of Holt Farm pupils into Olive Hill (and other local schools) will enable pupils to access a wider curricular provision. Holt Farm has 13 teaching staff including the Headteacher and deputy Headteacher. This level of staffing enables small classes in each year group. In September with close to 100 pupils the structure will be severely reduced to 3 or 4 classes that are larger and have mixed age groups and possibly mixed key stages. Fewer staff would also reduce pupil access to the range of opportunities.

The proposals will enable all pupils to have access to larger schools with greater numbers of well-trained teaching, support and administrative staff. More staff will provide a broader range of professional expertise and more capacity to support a wider range of activities within school and as part of the extended provision.

Pupils attending the new enlarged Olive Hill would continue to benefit from having all their education from 3 – 11 on the same site, with all of the continuity and other benefits such as brothers and sisters in the same school. All children will have access to continuous education from 3 – 11 with a greater number of well trained staff, and improved resources. The addition of the Children's Centre

would provide further continuity for children and families from 0 – 11 and make a major contribution to the outcomes in Every Child Matters.

Following the consultation, pupils whose parents would wish to transfer their children to another school in the area would be able to do so. This would allow them to exercise parental preference in their choice of school. Initial indications of preference cover 6 primary schools which are listed on page 13.

The Directorate of Children’s Services believes that the education provision that will be available at Olive Hill and other schools would be of at least as good a quality as at Holt Farm. Olive Hill and Hurst Green have consistently achieved at least as well as Holt Farm in Key Stage 2 performance in English, Mathematics and Science in most of the last 5 years. In many cases the results have been better. It is important to note that the average points score (APS) for Holt Farm has gradually decreased since 2002 (28.0, 27.7, 27.1, 26.9). Over the same period the APS for Olive Hill (25.7, 27.1, 27.0, 27.9) and Hurst Green (27.4, 28.0, 27.3, 28.6, 28.0) are rising. This is evident in the table below.

KS2 Results 2001 – 2005

Year	School	English		Maths		Science		APS
		%L4+	%L5+	%L4+	%L5+	%L4+	%L5+	
2001	Holt Farm	55%	14%	40%	14%	67%	10%	24.5
	Olive Hill	62%	16%	58%	18%	90%	22%	25.9
	Hurst Green	75%	25%	77%	21%	94%	27%	27.4
2002	Holt Farm	89%	35%	70%	27%	91%	40%	28.0
	Olive Hill	64%	29%	50%	16%	75%	27%	25.7
	Hurst Green	70%	24%	83%	43%	85%	48%	28.0
2003	Holt Farm	76%	24%	82%	34%	89%	53%	27.7
	Olive Hill	67%	19%	71%	21%	92%	44%	27.1
	Hurst Green	74%	24%	74%	24%	90%	31%	27.3
2004	Holt Farm	68%	32%	68%	29%	82%	38%	27.1
	Olive Hill	67%	17%	69%	19%	87%	50%	27.0
	Hurst Green	92%	37%	87%	38%	88%	42%	28.6
2005	Holt Farm	78%	22%	70%	19%	85%	37%	26.9
	Olive Hill	82%	25%	73%	22%	94%	57%	27.9
	Hurst Green	87%	9%	85%	34%	92%	47%	28.0

Not Published Nationally by DFES. Figures Based on LEA Data from 2001 and 2002.

3.2 Ofsted headline statements.

The summary statements from the recent Ofsted reports (see Appendix B) confirm that there are differences in the overall judgements about each school and the value for money provided.

Holt Farm Primary School – Extract from Ofsted report January 2002

Holt Farm is an effective school that gives satisfactory value for money. Standards of English and Mathematics are improving but are not yet high enough. The headteacher gives a strong lead and the school has chosen the right priorities for improvement. All staff and governors work well together as a team and ensure priorities for school improvement are implemented satisfactorily. The quality of teaching is satisfactory. It is mostly good in the nursery and for pupils aged eight to eleven. Pupils enjoy school, are well behaved, are keen to learn and work together well.

Olive Hill Primary School – Extract from Ofsted report January 2002

This is a good school. The leadership and management of the headteacher and senior staff are very good. The governors know the school very well and give very good support. Pupils achieve well throughout the school, although standards are below national averages by the end of Year 6. Teaching and learning are good, with some very good features resulting in good learning in classrooms. Provision for special educational needs and for pupils with English as an additional language is very good. The school provides good value for money.

Hurst Green Primary School – Extract from Ofsted report July 2001

This is a good school. Pupils enter the school with standards below expectations. As a consequence of good and often very good teaching, test results indicate that by the age of seven, their standards have risen to the average for similar schools in reading and writing and well above average in mathematics. Work seen indicates that pupils continue to make good progress in Key Stage 2 and that their current standards are in line with national averages in English, mathematics and science. Teaching is good, with one in three lessons being very good or better. The school's leadership and management are good, and the governing body is very effective. Pupils achieve satisfactory in the Foundation Stage and well in the rest of the school. The school provides good value for money.

Summary

Judgements about schools are complex and should take into account many factors. In this instance it is very clear that Holt Farm is no longer viable and cannot maintain the quality and range of provision it has sustained previously. The proposals will see more investment in local schools and ensure that standards, the quality and range of provision and diversity are all improved.

3.2 Whether they advance national and local transformation strategies

The proposals will enhance national and local transformation strategies. The increase in the size of local schools will ensure that there are more staff and improved facilities to meet the key elements of transformation. These include;

1. a broader range of well-trained staff in accordance with the National Workforce Strategy;
2. better prospects for achieving the elements of the Primary Strategy;
3. more opportunity for extended provision;
4. inclusion of all children;
5. more resources to support families and children aged 0 – 11 across the area.

3.3 The standards of education in existing and proposed alternative provision, and particularly in the case of nursery schools, that the alternative provision will be able to enhance the standards of education provision

The standards in alternative schools will be enhanced for the reasons set out previously. They will also be enhanced through the establishment of Children's Centre at Olive Hill which will provide a full range of services for children aged 0 – 5 and their families. Research has consistently shown that investment in families and children during the pre-school and early stages of statutory schooling has a significant benefit on progress, achievement and personal development. During the transition period nursery provision will continue on the Holt Farm and Olive Hill sites as Olive Hill Primary School. Should there be continued demand for services in the Holt Farm area when the Children's Centre opens provision will be made. Hurst Green is a popular school in terms of oversubscription and this proposal is in line with the government policy on expanding popular and successful schools.

3.4 The effect of the proposals on other institutions

The proposals will increase the capacity of local schools to continue raising standards for all children. This will be achieved by ensuring the value of funding received per child rises (due to fewer schools and surplus places) enabling more investment directly in provision for children.

It is anticipated that community use of the Holt Farm buildings will continue during the transition period. Discussions will take place in due course regarding options for further continuity.

NEED FOR PLACES

In assessing the level of need the Guidance directs decision makers to consider;

3.5 The overall supply and likely future demand for places.

In 1997 there were around 2,000 surplus places. The decline in the annual birth rate of almost 20% has led to a further decline in surplus places in primary schools. On the basis of children already born there will be over 5,000 empty places in Dudley primary schools by 2010 – around 17% of the total number of places.

The annual birth rates (using academic year September - March) in Dudley have reduced from 4,116 in 1990 to 3,344 in 2003. Primary pupil numbers in Dudley schools are projected to fall by 2,358 (almost 10%) between 2005 and 2010. Pupil projections over the last few years have been consistently accurate. There were 587 fewer pupils in January 2006 than in 2005 and a loss of income of £2.1 million. 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.

The decline affects all areas of Dudley and the expected surplus place figures for the townships by 2010 are;

Brierley Hill	17.9%
Dudley Central	15.1%
Dudley North	15.2%
Halesowen	23.1%
Stourbridge	13.5%

Halesowen is the most affected area in terms of growing surplus places. There has been a fall in the number of children attending Holt Farm, Olive Hill and Hurst Green from 1,001 in 1997 to 831 in January 2006. Birth rates for the last few years, housing developments and inward migration show no solid evidence of

any significant reverse in this trend. The proposals will result in two schools each with 420 places for boys and girls with additional provision for younger children and their families. There is also provision at nearby Sandwell primary schools and other schools in Halesowen or across Dudley.

The Primary Schools Review is not just about matching the supply of places to demand. It will create a pattern of provision in which all schools can sustain the quality and range of provision required by local and national strategies. The Primary Schools Review is a critical element of 'Investing in the Future' (IIF), a wide-ranging planning framework designed to link a series of national and local initiatives into a coherent and manageable development programme **with effectively joined up and targeted funding streams**. The initiatives that will impact directly on provision for children include:

- Pre-school settings;
- Children's Centres;
- Primary Schools Review;
- Secondary Review (including 14 – 19 strategy);
- Specialist schools;
- SEN strategy;
- Extended schools;
- Integrated children's services; and
- Community use including leisure, libraries and lifelong learning.

(IIF was previously known as 'Learning for the Future', but with the development of joined up Children's Services it is important that the major policy framework should not be limited to learning.)

In-flow and out-flow of pupils to other Boroughs is projected to continue unchanged. However, this is the most optimistic position as other Boroughs are experiencing the same trends in birth rate as Dudley. In this situation even if the same percentage of the total number of pupils resident in other authorities continued to attend Dudley schools the actual number of pupils would reduce. Other authorities are expected to take action to ensure that they retain as many of their resident pupils as possible. This includes substantial capital investment in new schools and the reviews of school provision. For example, the Archdiocese of Birmingham has started a review of primary and secondary provision, which covers a number of local authorities including Dudley MBC.

The Primary School Review also takes full account of the long term planning for Dudley, the Black Country and the West Midlands. The proposals in Appendix 2 of the 17 November Cabinet report (Appendix I) take account of the relevant

elements of the Unitary Development Plan, Local Transport Plan and in the emerging Black Country Study and Regional Spatial Strategy.

Schools with a large number of surplus places or high-cost buildings waste resources that could be spent on teaching and learning. Dudley has a responsibility to ensure that resources are used effectively to improve the quality of education and raise standards for all children. These proposals will ensure children at Holt Farm continue to receive the quality of education required.

Dudley was supported by the Office of the Schools Adjudicator, "I accept the general case that has been made for rationalising primary school provision in the Borough to remove surplus places. The implications of not taking action would be very serious for efficiency, economy and - above all - education effectiveness." (Canon Richard Lindley, 23 February 2006)

The very high number of surplus places locks in substantial resources. These proposals will unlock these resources and ensure children at Holt Farm will have access to education in schools that can make better use of money already available. This will allow a switch of money from surplus places to other areas such as staffing, accommodation or learning resources.

The proposals offer sufficient capacity of good quality to meet the demand for places from all local children.

- **Whether there is sufficient capacity to accommodate displaced pupils in the area**

The potential number of children who would be displaced from Holt Farm Primary at the time of closure totals approximately 115. This figure is calculated using current pupil numbers in Reception to Year 5. Current Year 6 pupils will transfer to secondary schools in September 2006. All pupils, either current or potential can be accommodated in alternative schools. The 115 pupils displaced from Holt Farm can be accommodated in the 287 places available in alternative schools.

There will be sufficient places in local schools for children displaced from closing schools. This is shown in the table below.

Primary School Name	Net Capacity	NOR Jan 2005*	NOR Jan 2006*	No of pupils May 2006**	Surplus places Jan 2006
Holt Farm	280	187	164	139	116
Hurst Green	385	383	388	399	0
Olive Hill	366	304	279	289	87
Our Lady and St Kenelm	210	207	201	201	9
Springfield	351	381	391	391	0
Rowley Hall	420	392	379	379	41
Blackheath	420	387	386	392	34
Totals	2432	2241	2188	2190	287

*Source: DfES Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) Reception to Year 6 Count Jan 2005
** Source: Directorate of Children's Services (CENTRIS)

All of these figures exclude nursery age and younger children

3.6 Whether the proposals will reduce the proportion of denominational places

The proposals will have no impact on the proportion of denominational places. The framework of principles and statements of intent agreed following the Primary Review Refresh 2004 Consultation included a commitment to maintain the existing balance of denominational places.

FINANCE

In relation to the financial effects of the proposal the Secretary of State's Guidance requires the Committee to consider the following;

3.7 Whether the proposals represent a cost-effective use of public funds.

Revenue funding

Based on the numbers of children already born, the number of primary pupils in Dudley is projected to fall by a further 2,358 by 2010. This will result in an annual fall in grant funding received from the DfES in excess of £1m per year. By 2010, using the current unit per pupil funding of £3,329, primary schools will receive £7.8 million less than in 2005/06, a reduction of 9%.

The primary sector delegated budget in the 2006/7 financial year is £77.5m 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. Holt Farm Primary School is no longer viable.

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. Holt Farm will have to make severe cuts in staffing and other areas to balance its budget.

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.

The Audit Commission acknowledge the very strong link between surplus places, efficient use of resources, quality of education and impacts on standards achieved. Surplus places waste resources that could be spent on teaching and learning. The cost of each surplus place in primary schools is calculated to be £250 - £300. The savings to be gained can be considered in two ways;

- 1) Budgets can be redistributed to other schools;
- 2) Efficiency savings on fixed costs – in particular management, administration and premises costs. For example;

- a 420 place primary school would typically spend £218k or 21% of total budget on fixed costs;
- a 60 place primary school would typically spend £82k or 34% of total budget on fixed costs.

The impact of the decline in births over the last decade has had a significant effect on Dudley. In January 2005 there were 3,309 surplus places (11.2%) which has increased to around 3,700 (12.6%) in January 2006. As school funding at Local Authority level is driven by the number of children attending school, the year on year fall in numbers is resulting in a year on year decrease in the overall schools budget. This means there is less money to distribute to schools. All schools bear the costs of falling pupil numbers.

The impact of the overall decrease in funding is amplified in smaller schools. The Audit Commission's example above shows that smaller schools have to spend a greater proportion of their total budgets on fixed costs such as management, administration and premises. The delegated budget cost per pupil at Holt Farm (2006/7 and January 2006 pupil numbers) is £3,547 compared with the Dudley primary school average of £2,864. The difference of £683 is not spent on pupils but is a reflection of the higher proportion of Holt Farm's budget that must be spent on fixed costs. With current pupil numbers of 139 (May 2006) Holt Farm will not be able to balance its budget without reducing costs. It is unlikely that the fixed costs can be reduced significantly and the only option will be to reduce staffing. Any reduction in staffing will impact on the quality of education including potential increases in mixed age and mixed key stage classes, staff workload and reductions in the range of opportunities available to children. It is inevitable that the outcomes for children would be adversely affected.

In 2005/06, Holt Farm received delegated funding via the Fair Funding Formula of £608,190, Standards Fund Grants of £48,671 and Schools Standards Grant of £30,105.

A significant proportion of this funding is likely to follow pupils as they are re-located, but non-pupil led funding will be available for redistribution within the ISB following the closure of the school. The details of this process have been agreed with the schools directly affected.

For 2006/07, 7/12^{ths} of these allocations are estimated to be approximately £87,000 and could be re-distributed within the Individual Schools Budget if the Holt Farm site ceased to operate from 1st September 2006. However, as the Holt Farm site is likely to remain open until additional capacity at Olive Hill is

available, then first call on these funds will be required to cover premises costs incurred by the Holt Farm site until consolidation on the Olive Hill site.

In a full year, the effect of these non-pupil led allocations is estimated to be approximately £149,000.

Schools Forum recognised the additional impact of these proposals and agreed the following;

- Allocation of a one off grant of £40,000;
- A uniform grant for every child in Reception to Year 5 transferring to another school as part of a managed move;
- A contingency fund to cover the costs of staff salary protection if required.

All the schemes including the alterations and additional accommodation at Olive Hill will take full account of DfES Area Guidelines for Schools. The cost information has been prepared in accordance with 'Education Building Projects: Information on Costs and Performance' data. These schemes fully involve the Council's Buildings and Estates Team, Design and Property Consultancy and the services of an independent consultant to support the Children's Centre work.

Unit Cost Comparison

The unit cost per pupil at Holt Farm for 2006/07 was £3,547 compared with the average unit cost per pupil for the primary sector of £2,864. This represents an increase of 23% above the average unit cost and poor value for money. These high revenue costs are not sustainable.

Reserves

At December 2005 Holt Farm had reserve balances of £46,034. This will not be sufficient to meet the costs of provision and offset the fall in income from falling pupil numbers.

3.8 Whether the capital resources required are available

The costs of accommodation changes will be met from Dudley's Capital Programme. The relevant funding for each part of the proposal has already been identified and secured.

For 2006/07, the formula for devolved capital will be a lump sum of £17,000 for primary schools and an amount of £61 per primary pupil. At December 2005, Holt Farm held a balance of uncommitted devolved formula capital of £11,000. If this remains unspent, it can be used by the LEA on other priority capital works at schools, including any of the local schools requiring expenditure to accommodate Holt Farm pupils.

3.9 Whether the sale proceeds of redundant sites are to be made available and whether the Secretary of State's consent has been obtained where necessary

This proposal is not dependent on the proceeds from the sale of Holt Farm or any other site. There is no requirement therefore to include this as a financial consideration or to obtain the Secretary of State's consent.

The Holt Farm site will continue to be used as additional accommodation by Olive Hill until consolidation onto the Olive Hill site in Springfield Road. The Directorate of Children's Services will consider options for the future use of the site at the point when it is no longer required by Olive Hill. This is expected to be at least one year but no more than two and will be determined by the construction programme on the Olive Hill site.

The Council at its meeting on 18th July 2005 resolved that "the use of capital receipts, arising from the implementation of specific proposals under the review of the Primary Schools sector for utilisation to help ensure that all Primary School education takes place in high quality buildings, as referred to in paragraph 2.6.1 of the report, to be approved and included in the Capital Programme." See Appendix Q.

VIEWS OF INTERESTED PARTIES

Clearly the Committee must have regard to the wide range of views that have been expressed in relation to this proposal.

Approach to the Consultation

Background

The surplus places in the Borough's primary schools were highlighted in an external consultancy report by KPMG in 1999, and in the Ofsted Inspection Reports of 2000 and 2002. The wider outcomes of the Ofsted inspection in 2000 caused a delay in the implementation 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.

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. These actions partially addressed the situation but much more remained to be done.

By 2004, the need for action was becoming critical. A further process was initiated as part of the planning framework Learning for the Future. This process was supported by detailed preparation and a further consultation on specific school proposals. Learning for the Future: Primary Schools Review Consultation Document sets out proposals to change the provision of primary school places. The proposals have developed from;

- Consultation on specific school proposals in 2002;
- Further consultation on Halesowen CE and Hasbury CE Primary school proposals;
- Primary Review Refresh 2004 consultation on principles and statements of intent. The consultation was based on a document setting out the issues. The document was used at meetings attended by all primary Headteachers. The consultation responses were published with the Local Education Authorities' commentary. The responses were also considered by the Select Committee for Lifelong Learning in February 2005;
- Briefing meetings with Headteachers, governors and councillors during February and March 2005. All responses from these meetings were included in shaping the process.
- Further consultation in June and July 2005 with Headteachers, chairs of governors and councillors on the approach to further consultation on school specific proposals. The responses from these meetings were included in the overall approach to developing specific proposals and the consultation process. Almost all primary schools were represented at these meetings. In the few cases where schools could not be represented, alternative arrangements were made.

The Dudley Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning approved the start of a consultation process on proposals to change the existing pattern of primary school provision in Dudley. The initial consultation started on 12 September and ended on 21 October. The consultation was based on three documents; Learning for the Future Primary School Review Consultation Document, Consultation Summary and Response Form. Paper copies of the documents were circulated widely and posted on the Council

website www.dudley.gov.uk. The consultation process involved a series of meetings with parents, staff and governors in those schools most affected. Additional meetings were convened on request. There has been a high volume of telephone calls, letters, emails, response forms and other correspondence as set out in the Cabinet Report, Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 included as Appendix I.

Additional information to inform the process was posted on the Dudley Council Website.

INITIAL CONSULTATION 12 SEPTEMBER – 21 OCTOBER 2005

Following a decision to start consultation on primary school review proposals a series of meetings were held with individual Headteachers to support the process of informing staff, parents and children. Letters were sent to all parents informing them of the start of the consultation and details of consultation meetings. Copies of the Consultation Document were available in schools from 12 September 2005 and posted on the Dudley Council website. Briefings were also arranged for Union representatives, Members of Parliament and the media. The consultation finished on 21 October 2005.

A copy of the consultation document was sent to the Directorate of Children's Services consultees, which includes all schools in Dudley, their Headteachers and Chairs of Governing Bodies, Dudley MBC Councillors and key partnering agencies. The full list includes all the consultees in the DfES guidance. In addition a letter of invitation was extended to all parents to make a response through the questionnaire, copies of which were distributed to every school and further copies available on request. Copies of the documents were also published on the Dudley Council website.

Within the consultation document was a questionnaire that asked five questions. Four questions required a 'yes or no' answer and question 5 was open ended. There was also space for comments in questions 1 – 4 and respondents were invited to attach additional information. The response details to this consultation can be found in Appendix O.

The consultation document was supported by a large number of meetings with staff, governors and parents at each school proposed for closure or amalgamation, Area Committee Meetings, small groups of parents, other bodies and individuals. A wide range of additional information was published on www.dudley.gov.uk and the Primary Review pages received over 6,000 visits.

11,000 questionnaires were made available to schools and the normal Dudley Consultees. The questionnaire was also posted on the Dudley Council website. In total there were 778 individual questionnaire responses received. We also received other forms of response including a petition with 5,332 signatures to keep Holt Farm open. All

the responses were considered and included in the report to Cabinet on 17 November (Appendix I). A significant number of individual replies were provided for parents and others in connection with Holt Farm.

During the consultation process, several alternative proposals were suggested. In addition, the Secretary of State announced that Dudley had made a successful bid for over £8 million to replace Wrens Nest Primary School and Old Park Special School. The alternative proposals have been considered carefully and where appropriate, revisions were included in the Report to Cabinet of 17 November (Appendix I).

These options included;

- Federation;
- Reduction of capacity;
- Closure of other schools;
- Amalgamation.

Federation or amalgamation with other schools in Dudley was considered. There is capacity for 280 pupils at Holt Farm measured using the DfES formula. The number of pupils attending Holt Farm has fallen from 283 in January 1997 to 164 in January 2006 resulting in 116 surplus places. The current number of pupils attending in May 2006 is 139 and the number of surplus places has grown to 141. With these low numbers, the school budget would not be sufficient to meet the costs of the staffing, supplies and services and accommodation. The potential saving of one headteacher post through a federation or similar arrangement would not be sufficient to meet the overall costs of provision. The Audit Commission have stated that federation arrangements do not generate significant cost savings and have the potential to increase costs. Inevitably, the quality of provision would be affected as any reductions to staffing would increase class sizes and require mixed age and possibly mixed key stage teaching. The money available for supplies and services and accommodation would also be reduced to balance the budget with additional impact on the quality of provision. Federation could not achieve significant reductions in revenue costs.

If the capacity was reduced at Holt Farm to match the demand for places the financial pressures still exist. The budget is calculated on the number of pupils attending and this will continue to fall. The money available for staffing, supplies and services and accommodation will reduce with the inevitable impact on quality of provision, class sizes and staff workloads. It is possible to use spare accommodation for other purposes to offset the overall costs of maintaining the site. However, the opportunities for joint use of the site are limited to users that would be compatible with young children and by the capacity of the local area to meet the real costs of accommodation. The local area has little potential to provide the level of income that the school would need. For example, in late 2005 a private provider withdrew from using Holt Farm because the business was

losing money despite attempts by the school to subsidise accommodation costs. Unless these overheads are met the costs continue to be met by the school. There are severe limitations regarding the nature of additional uses due to the likelihood of close contact with children and their families. Vehicle access and parking are also limited. There is no realistic possibility of reducing the capacity and securing sufficient income to cover the total costs of providing the quality of education to which children are entitled.

Other schools were also considered for closure, capacity reduction and amalgamation. Hurst Green is popular in that it has sustained the number of children attending at around 380 from January 1997 to January 2005. In May 2006 there were 399 children attending. Reducing the capacity to 210 places for example, would affect a larger number of pupils and their families in terms of disruption and preference for places than the proposals for Holt Farm. Also there is no guarantee that sufficient numbers would transfer to Holt Farm. Should any of the families take places in neighbouring authority schools the financial position for Dudley would be even worse. Similarly, Olive Hill has maintained pupil numbers at over 300 from 1997 to 2005. In January 2006 the numbers had fallen to 279 (age 5 – 11) which reflects the overall decline in demand across the area. The number attending in May 2006 was 289, twice the number at Holt Farm. Reducing the capacity in either of these schools would result in greater disruption for a higher number of pupils and could not guarantee that parents would send their children to Holt Farm.

Closure of any other schools in the area would create a shortage of places in the area, more travel for more families and resulted in additional costs.

The proposal to close Holt Farm Primary will enable all of the pupils in the local area to attend a larger school with a broader range of staff expertise and improved facilities.

After judging the strength of the responses the Statutory Notice that had been posted at Holt Farm was withdrawn and the decision to close outright was amended. The consultation responses raised concerns about the immediate impact for children and families affected. The Council then worked on proposals to annex Holt Farm to Olive Hill and went through a second consultation for this proposal.

SECOND CONSULTATION 2 FEBRUARY – 17 MARCH 2006

On 17 November 2005 the Cabinet approved recommendations to publish Statutory Notices for a range of proposals including the closure of Holt Farm with the buildings continuing to be used as an annex of Hurst Green until consolidation onto the Hurst Green site. This proposal emerged directly from consideration of the consultation responses and alternative suggestions but the Governing Body of Hurst Green decided not to support this proposal. The term “annex” was meant to describe additional accommodation but was interpreted in other ways by some people.

The Governing Body of Olive Hill were approached at the beginning of January 2006 and agreed to support the proposal. Discussions between Olive Hill and Holt Farm took place and rapid progress was made.

On the basis of this progress and the involvement of Olive Hill the Council issued a further consultation document on proposals to close Holt Farm with effect from 31 August 2006. The buildings would continue to be used from 1 September 2006 as additional accommodation for Olive Hill until consolidation on the Olive Hill site in Springfield Road.

A copy of the consultation document was sent to the Directorate of Children's Services list of consultees as described on page 19. In addition the consultation document was issued to every parent of Holt Farm and Olive Hill. Further copies were available on request and copies of the document were also published on the Dudley Council website and made available to download.

Within the consultation document was a questionnaire that asked five questions. Three questions required a 'yes or no' answer, question 4 gave a range of options and question 5 asked for any other comments. There was space for comments in questions 1 – 5 and respondents were invited to attach additional information if required. Additional information provided by respondents included letters and emails.

All responses have been entered onto a database to assist with analysis and all original submissions have been retained. The consultation document was published on 2 February 2006. This stage of the consultation ended at 5pm on Friday 17 March 2006.

Consultation meetings were arranged for staff, governors and parents in separate meetings at both Holt Farm and Olive Hill.

Each meeting began with a presentation covering the background, main issues and specific details for the school. Questions were taken and answered where possible. Attendees were also able to record questions in writing for response after the meetings. Notes of all meetings were taken to assist with the consultation as a matter of public record.

Information was posted on the Dudley Council website. As new questions were raised, the website was updated. This was essential to enable access to the very high volume of information available from the Council, the DfES, the Office of National Statistics and other sources. Paper copies were provided for anyone that could not access information electronically. Monitoring of the website over the period shows over 10,000 visits.

The consultation document also made clear that information could be available in large print or other languages on request. No requests were received during the consultation period. For people without personal internet access, facilities in schools and libraries were available.

Respondents

1000 questionnaires were made available to schools and the list of Dudley Consultees. The questionnaire was also posted on the Dudley Council website. In total there were 46 individual questionnaire responses received although six of these were not attributable due to identification details missing from the form reducing the number of responses to 40. In addition to this the following responses were received

- Letters 3
- Email 5

Number of Questionnaires Issued	1000
Number of Responses Received	46
Response Rate	4.6%
Parent / Carer	29
Headteacher	5
Governor	4
Teacher / School Body Rep	1
Other	1

The views of parents and other local residents, including those who may be particularly affected by the proposals or have a particular interest in them

Every response has been entered on a database and the originals have been retained. The record of evidence, including all submissions, is available to view on request by appointment. The following is a commentary on the responses with statistics summarising the breakdown of the respondents. The report on the consultation is included as Appendix P.

In summary the responses are set out below.

Question 1

Do you agree with the case for changing the current pattern of primary schools as described in the consultation document?

Question 1 by description of respondent

Description of Respondent	Total	Yes	No	Unanswered	% Yes Total	% No Total	% Unanswered
Parent/Carer	29	11	16	2	37.9%	55.2%	6.9%
Headteacher	5	5	0	0	100%	0%	0%
Governor	4	4	0	0	100%	0%	0%
Teacher / school body rep	1	0	1	0	0%	100%	0%
Other	1	0	1	0	0%	100%	0%
	40	20	18	2	50%	45%	5%

Commentary

There is a clear difference in the responses of Headteachers and Governors compared with parents.

Question 2

Do you agree with the proposals for Holt Farm?

Question 2 by description of respondent

Description of Respondent	Total	Yes	No	Unanswered	% Yes Total	% No Total	% Unanswered
Parent/Carer	29	11	16	2	37.9%	55.2%	6.9%
Headteacher	5	4	1	0	80%	20%	0%
Governor	4	4	0	0	100%	0%	0%
Teacher / school body rep	1	0	1	0	0%	100%	0%
Other	1	0	1	0	0%	100%	0%
	40	19	19	2	47.5%	47.5%	5%

Commentary

There is a clear difference in the responses of Headteachers and Governors compared with parents.

Question 3

Do you agree with the proposals for Olive Hill?

Question 3 by description of respondent

Description of Respondent	Total	Yes	No	Unanswered	% Yes Total	% No Total	% Unanswered
Parent/Carer	29	13	13	3	44.8%	44.8%	10.4%
Headteacher	5	5	0	0	100%	0%	0%
Governor	4	4	0	0	100%	0%	0%
Teacher / school body rep	1	0	1	0	0%	100%	0%
Other	1	0	1	0	0%	100%	0%
	40	22	15	3	55%	37.5%	7.5%

Commentary

There is a clear difference in the responses of Headteachers and Governors compared with parents.

Question 4

There are 3 options described in paragraph 21 of the consultation document (Appendix N). Which of these do you support?

Question 4 by description of respondent

Description of Respondent	Total	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	None of these	% Option 1	% Option 2	% Option 3	% None of these
Parent/Carer	29	1	3	20	5	3.4%	10.4%	69.0%	17.2%
Headteacher	5	0	0	4	1	0%	0%	80%	20%
Governor	4	0	1	3	0	0%	25%	75%	0%
Teacher / school body rep	1	0	0	1	0	0%	0%	100%	0%
Other	1	0	0	0	1	0%	0%	0%	100%
	40	1	4	28	7	2.5%	10%	70%	17.5%

Commentary

There is a clear picture of support for option 3.

Non - Questionnaire Responses to the Consultation

Letters

Three letters have been received and entered on the database. Where requested a detailed response has been given. On some occasions the response has referred the writer to the Dudley Council website where answers to questions are available.

E-mails

Five e-mails were received in response to the consultation. All of these have been added to the record of evidence.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning took the decision to publish Statutory Notices. The decision sheet is included as Appendix M and the Statutory Notice as Appendix C. The Statutory Notice, prepared and agreed with the DfES, was published on 7 April 2006.

Representation Period

During the representation period (7 April to 18 May), 105 letters of objection were received by the Directorate of Children's Services, all in opposition to closure, setting out reasons and asking further questions.

These letters were logged according to recipient details and acknowledged by the Directorate. The content of each letter is summarized in Appendix A and separate points of objection noted. There were 90 individual points of objection or query.

All of the representations, along with the Directorate's response to the objections lodged were copied to the Secretary to the School Organisation Committee, in accordance with Statutory Guidance. The letters are also copied to members of the Committee.

Parents and other local residents have expressed their opposition to the closure of Holt Farm Primary School. The strength of the views is emphasised by the number of objections and their detailed nature.

The views of any Local Education Authority affected by the proposals or with an interest

There have been no responses from neighbouring Local Education Authorities. There is however liaison between Senior Officers and each of the neighbouring authorities is aware of the DfES expectation of cross-border co-operation in planning school places and bids for capital investment.

- **The views of other schools and colleges in the area**

Please see above.

- **The views of the Learning and Skills Council (if the proposal affect the provision of post-16 education)**

No views have been received. The proposals will increase the range of opportunities for work based experience, training and employment especially from the establishment of the Children's Centre. It is expected that secondary schools, colleges and the Learning and Skills Council would support this contribution to the 14 – 19 strategy and other training and employment initiatives.

- **The views of the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership**

Dudley EYDC Partnership, although not formally dissolved, has in practice had its role subsumed into the work of the Children & Young People's Partnership in relation to strategic planning and delivery of early years and childcare services. A letter of support from the Children and Young People's Partnership is included as Appendix R.

In relation to Holt Farm there is currently a maintained early education provision for under 5's on the site, consisting of 60 part time places. There was a privately run after school club on the site offering 24 places for 5 - 11 year olds which closed in Autumn 2005 despite sustainability funding support from Early Years & Childcare and considerable support from Holt Farm Primary School. The limited demand for places is reflected in the low level of attendance. Even before the announcement of proposals to close Holt Farm, the attendance was well below the level required to sustain a viable business. Nursery provision will be maintained on the Olive Hill and Holt Farm sites, managed by Olive Hill Primary. This will continue until the Children's Centre is established on the Olive Hill site. During this transition period a further audit of demand for early year's and childcare facilities in the immediate vicinity of Holt Farm will be conducted and appropriate provision made.

OTHER ISSUES

The Guidance identifies a number of further aspects to be considered and it must be recognised that the Committee must consider this proposal on its own merits.

- **The length and nature of journeys to alternative provision**

The statistics in this section are based on January 2005 which is the most recent complete set of validated pupil data (provisional January 2006 data shows a similar pattern but with fewer pupils).

Analysis of the distance travelled by 186 pupils attending Holt Farm Primary (as at Jan 2005) indicates that 71% of pupils live within half a mile, and 88% of pupils live within 1 mile of the school. The impact of these pupils travelling to the alternative schools is not significant in terms of additional distance, with 87% and 84% of pupils within 1 mile of Hurst Green and Olive Hill Primary schools respectively. Further analysis shows that 25 pupils live more than 1 mile from one of the 2 alternative Dudley schools. This compares to 22 pupils, who live more than 1 mile from Holt Farm. For these pupils the journey from home to the 2 alternative Sandwell schools is less than one mile. The proposals will not result in an unreasonable extension of journey times.

All of the pupils' home addresses have been plotted by Geographical Information System (GIS) and the distances to alternative provision for each child calculated as shown in the following table:

Distance* pupils travel to Holt Farm Primary								
	No. of pupils in GIS (Jan 2005)	No. of pupils within 0.5 mile	%	No. of pupils within 0.51 to 1 mile	%	No. of pupils over 1 mile	%	
Holt Farm	186	132	71%	32	17%	22	12%	
Distance* of pupils to alternative schools								
Alternative schools	Holt Farm pupil addresses (Jan 2005)	No. of pupils within 0.5 mile	%	No. of pupils within 0.51 to 1 mile	%	No. of pupils over 1 mile	%	No. (and %) of pupils over 1 mile where alternative is also over 1 mile
Hurst Green	186	115	62%	46	25%	25	13%	25 (13%)
Olive Hill	186	60	32%	96	52%	30	16%	25 (13%)
* Due to the no. of addresses involved, distance is measured via straight line and not via specified walking route								

- **Any sex, race or disability discrimination issues or other human rights issues**

The Council has appropriate policies in place and is committed to compliance with the law in relation to the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 in respect of all of its schools.

Dudley Council supports a highly inclusive policy in its schools and is striving to upgrade the facilities wherever possible with the aim of having as many fully accessible schools as possible in order to satisfy local need. However, this is easier in some cases than others and the capital funding for improving disability access in schools is limited. All of the school buildings in the local area have been surveyed by the Special Educational Needs Team to assess requirements to bring them up to full accessibility.

Many of the schools on the list have a high degree of wheelchair accessibility within the building, i.e. teaching areas, toilets and other areas accessed by children, making them more suitable for disabled pupils. The Directorate of Children's Services would therefore recommend those schools to parents of

disabled children (requiring the use of a wheelchair or other mobility aids). In addition, many of the alternative schools have better access to the building itself, making them more suitable for disabled access to public areas and the school in general.

All of the new accommodation at Olive Hill Primary School will be fully compliant with legislation covering disability including 100% wheelchair accessibility.

Human Rights

Article 2 of the First Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights (the Convention) provides that:-

"No person shall be denied the right to education. In the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and to teaching, the State shall respect the rights of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions".

The United Kingdom has a reservation to this Article which reads:-

"...the principle affirmed in the second sentence of Protocol 1, Article 2 is accepted by the United Kingdom only so far as it is compatible with the provision of efficient instruction and training and the avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure".

Article 2 leaves the structure and funding of public education to the state's discretion. Similarly it does not prescribe the content or purpose of the education that is to be provided and nor does it guarantee access to a particular educational institution or standard of education.

Furthermore, the Convention right to education is not fixed in content but takes the form of the provision made by each member state. The proposal will not bring about a denial of access to education provided for in the statute law of England and Wales.

Individual Cases

Whilst it is the Education Authority's position that there are no discrimination or human rights issues which are of such significance as to call into question this proposal, it is accepted that the effect of the proposal could cause specific individual hardship or difficulties and the Council is committed to addressing each such situation on its own merits.

- **Whether the change will affect the ability to meet the minimum statutory requirements for provision of school playing fields**

The proposals will have no impact on the current provision of school playing fields.

- **The effect of the proposal on infant class sizes**

In the context of a surplus of infant class places and the preparedness of Olive Hill Primary School and other surrounding schools to accommodate all pupils currently at Holt Farm Primary, there will be no adverse effect on infant class sizes by this proposal. All pupils will continue to be taught in classes of less than 30. The class sizes predicted for Olive Hill Primary from September 2006 are smaller than many of the current classes. For example, 15 out of 17 classes would be between 21 and 25 children and the other 2 classes of 29 and 30 and will be in years 5 and 6.

- **The overall effect of a closure on the local community, particularly in areas receiving funding as part of regeneration activity**

The use of the school's facilities has been considered. Community groups that currently use the school will be supported to continue their activities within existing provision in the neighbourhood. All schools, including Olive Hill and Hurst Green Primary Schools, will offer extended provision by 2010. Every effort will be made to meet the requirements of existing community use of the Holt Farm accommodation.

- **Whether the proposals are in connection with the establishment of an Academy**

The proposals are not connected with the establishment of an Academy.

Additional factors if the school is on special measures

None of the schools affected by these proposals are on special measures

Rural schools and sites

None of the schools affected by these proposals are rural schools.

Closure of maintained nursery schools

None of the schools affected by these proposals are maintained nursery schools.

STANDARD OF ACCOMMODATION AND CONDITION OF FACILITIES

Holt Farm is situated on the edge of the Borough's south-easterly boundary. The main school building is Victorian and was erected pre 1919 with subsequent extensions including temporary mobile accommodation added later.

School Facilities and Condition

A number of the areas within the building have been assessed as unsuitable for the purpose that they are supposed to serve.

Six classrooms are below the DfES recommended sizes. They are cramped with inadequate storage facilities. In addition, there are irregular shaped teaching spaces and the library and ICT Suite are well below the DfES recommended size.

The condition survey of the building, carried out during September 2002, listed necessary repairs amounting to approximately £70,000. These included: repairs to external windows and doors, repairs to internal walls and doors, redecorations, electrical services, floor and stairs and ceilings and sanitary elements.

In accordance with DfES requirements the school was surveyed in November 2004 against suitability criteria. The survey confirmed that there were shortfalls of accommodation in the following areas;

- a) Some irregular shaped classrooms making teaching difficult;
- b) The library is too small, this means group sizes are restricted to 8-10 pupils using the library at any one time;
- c) The staff and administration areas are too small;
- d) The field is too small for football matches and athletics, pupils have to travel off site for these activities;
- e) The access to the site is shared for both vehicles and pedestrians;
- f) There are no dedicated community facilities on the site;

The building occupied by Holt Farm was erected just over 100 years ago and the latest condition survey, carried out in September 2002, identified necessary repairs amounting

to 69,917.00 with £26,924.00 of this to be carried out within 2 years. This is not a significant total when compared to many schools and reflects the overall quality of stewardship exercised by schools and Dudley Council over the years.

Outstanding repairs listed;

Priority 2:

Roofs	£101.68
Floors and Stairs	£22,192.00
Ceilings	£1,130.88
Internal walls and doors	£151.28
Electrical Services	£172.36
Fixed Furniture & Equipment	£478.24
Redecorations	<u>£2,697.56</u>
 TOTAL Priority 2	 £26,924.00

Priority 3:

Floors and Stairs	£629.00
Internal Walls and Doors	£944.00
Sanitary Services	£996.00
Electrical Services	£34,373.00
Redecorations	£4,961.00
Fixed furniture & fittings	<u>£1,090.00</u>
 TOTAL Priority 3	 £42,993.00

Even if all of the repairs identified were carried out, a significant number of areas of the building would remain unsuitable for the purpose as defined using DfES suitability criteria. The school's suitability survey identifies several areas of the school site as being 'unsuitable'. The suitability survey grades rooms / areas according to the detrimental effect they have on education in the premises in the following ways:

- Category A - Unable to teach curriculum
- Category B - Teaching methods inhibited
- Category C - Management or organisation of school affected adversely
- Category D - Pupil or staff morale or pupil behaviour affected adversely

Holt Farm has a number of areas in category's B and D:

An irregular shaped classroom, making teaching difficult B

The school library is too small B

The playing fields are too small for football matches & athletics B

The access to the site is shared for pedestrians and vehicles D

All of the points above were reached in collaboration with and agreed by the school staff.

Proposal for Extension Works and Re-modelling at Olive Hill Primary School

Dudley Council has identified in its proposals the choice of alternative pupil places at Olive Hill. A construction project is already on-site at Olive Hill to replace mobile classrooms with a new purpose built, state of the art class room block. This project will be complete during August 2006. The Authority identified this project during 2004 and modernisation funding was allocated to it.

Consultation work has also commenced at Olive Hill with the Headteacher, staff and Governing Body involved in a strategic review of the site. The capacity of the existing building is to be increased by increasing the amount of space available for improved teaching and learning facilities along with improvements to dining facilities for pupils and staff & administration accommodation.

Additional capacity will be created at Olive Hill and it will be increased to 420 pupil places.

Appropriate and sufficient accommodation will be provided with all new build proposals adhering to the design guidance issued by the Department for Education and Skills (DFES). Teaching and learning will be delivered in all parts of the curriculum in spaces of appropriate size, location and with the correct furniture and equipment therefore addressing the suitability issues identified at Holt Farm.

Funding for the project will be through utilising Basic Need formula capital grant awarded 2003/04 and New Pupil Places formula capital grant 2004/05.

This scheme will be consistent with the stated aims of removing surplus places whilst creating a pattern of sustainable schools and improved facilities wherever possible.

4. EDUCATION DEPARTMENT RESPONSE

The Education Department's responses to the points of objection and comments or queries in the letters are as follows:

1. **Holt Farm was the school of choice for my children, not an annex or any other school.**

Holt Farm will not have enough money to meet the costs of providing the quality of education that it currently offers. The proposals will enable all children to attend schools that have a greater number of well trained staff able to offer a broader range of opportunities in improved facilities. The reinvestment of resources in a smaller number of schools will create a pattern of sustainable schools that are properly resourced. There is still a wide choice of primary schools in Dudley.

2. **Holt Farm offers a broad spectrum of extra curricular activities, excellent learning support, teaches to high standards, provides brilliant special needs provision and has a fantastic educational track record. It is set in pleasant surroundings where children can learn about the outdoors. How can you ensure the children at Holt Farm will receive the same standards of education elsewhere?**

Holt Farm currently has 13 teaching staff. The school budget is set by the number of pupils attending the school and the level of money available will not sustain the current staffing levels. Holt Farm will have to reduce the number of staff significantly to balance the budget and the school reserves will not be sufficient to address the problem. The reduction in staff will reduce the number of opportunities that can be offered. The proposals will enable all children to attend schools that have a greater number of well trained staff able to offer a broader range of opportunities and in improved facilities.

3. **The head and staff at Holt Farm do a brilliant job and are held in high regard. They have shown their commitment to our children by staying at the school even though it means they may not have jobs. These are the people we want to look after our children.**

Dudley primary schools have worked hard for many years to improve the quality of education provided for children. Holt Farm has made a contribution to this for many children and has a history to be justifiably proud of. The Council values all of the staff at Holt Farm and will make every effort to ensure that they secure alternative posts in other schools. Olive Hill has committed to developing a new

staffing structure for September 2006 and to ring-fencing posts for Holt Farm staff. There will be sufficient vacancies arising from the normal turnover of staff in Dudley schools to ensure that there will be maximum continuity and no requirement for redundancies.

4. **There must be worse schools in the area that are in need of closure. Other schools have been documented as having a higher level of surplus places than Holt Farm.**

The criteria for choosing the schools are fully described in the reports to Cabinet (Appendix 1) included in Appendix I to this response and in the Primary Review Refresh 2004 documentation available on the Primary Review Pages of www.dudley.gov.uk.

There are other schools with higher numbers of surplus places than Holt Farm. These schools are either proposed for closure or will have their capacity reduced. Where capacity is being reduced there will still be more pupils attending those schools than attend Holt Farm. It is the number of pupils attending each school that sets the school budget and determines whether the school has enough money to pay for staffing, premises and other costs. There are not enough pupils in the area to make Holt Farm viable. As the numbers continue to fall, reductions in staffing will adversely affect the quality of education and the standards achieved by children. The proposals will enable all children to attend schools that have a greater number of well trained staff able to offer a broader range of opportunities and in improved facilities.

5. **a) Birth rates do not seem to be falling as dramatically as Dudley Council make out and verified figures collected by parents have shown that they are in fact increasing.**

b) Is your birth data verified in an unbiased manner?

c) Have you taken into account migration, new housing developments and the effects of the Black Country Study?

d) Why is your birth data inconsistent with the birth data provided by parents during the consultation period?

e) Will new schools need to be built in the future to accommodate all the children that are coming in to the area?

f) If your plans go ahead there will be absolutely NO spare capacity in Halesowen North. This does not meet paragraph 35 of DfES guidelines.

a) A small group of parents presented alternative data to support this claim in October. The data and model was analysed and discussed in October at a meeting with those parents. The birth figures provided by them were hospital births and not hospital births relating to Dudley residents only, which inflated the figures and therefore projections were based on a less accurate model. The accuracy of Dudley's place planning projections is extremely high and published on www.dudley.gov.uk.

Overall, the birth rate in Dudley has stabilised to an average of 3420 for the last 5 years. These birth figures are 3,527 in 2000, 3,313 (2001), 3,417 (2002), 3,344 (2003), 3,514 (2004). Live births for 2005 will be available shortly. The erratic pattern of births for these years certainly does not indicate that the birth rate is improving. Some of these birth years haven't begun school life yet so the count of pupils in Primary schools is currently based on higher year birth figures. These numbers have fallen sharply and will continue to fall until we reach the plateau of the years mentioned above where there is an indication of some consistency. It must also be stated that these are figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and are publicly available. This will further evidence that there is no authority massaging taking place to suit our needs together with an "unbiased manner" in our approach. Halesowen births have fallen from 839 in 1991 to 654 in 2004. In Halesowen North the births have fallen from 190 to 140 over the same period.

Additionally, the ONS has provided projections to 2021 which indicate a slight decline in Dudley births (3,300). The belief is that couples are starting families later in life. There is no supporting evidence identifying when this "later in life" will start to kick and interact with less career minded couples in order to produce a significant birth rate increase. It's feasible that this mindset is partially responsible for the birth rate "blip" together with first time buyer issues, there is no proof to contradict careers still being most peoples' priority and for this reason the ONS long term projections up to 2021 have a sound base of statistical sense.

Given all the factual evidence above and the projected births, the shaping of the number and size of schools now will be robust enough to fit for the future. There will be an in built capacity to account for any slight increases due to migration or birth rate but the perception of any leaps in births is not supported statistically.

a) Yes

- b) Yes
- c) See a).
- d) There is no evidence of children moving into the area in significant numbers. This is illustrated very clearly in successive falls in the numbers of children attending Dudley schools overall and in individual schools rolls.
- e) This is not true. See table on page 13.

6. **The merger with Hurst Green was a good idea and parents may have been behind this proposal as children had a better chance of coping with the transition if all children moved to the joint school at the same time. However this fell through because the Council did not consult with Hurst Green first. Why wasn't this done before parents were informed of the proposal?**

The Council responded to the concerns raised during the initial consultation by identifying a school to support the closure of Holt Farm. The Council consulted with Hurst Green in confidence and received sufficient interest to make a recommendation to Cabinet. In the context of the opposition from Holt Farm to the closure proposals discussions had to be managed sensitively. The Council required clear commitments from the Hurst Green Governing Body regarding joint working with Holt Farm, communication with stakeholders particularly parents, an enlarged staff structure, and ring fencing of posts for Holt Farm staff. A variety of factors including Hurst Green's concerns about how the process could work and the continued opposition from Holt Farm contributed to the Governing Body decision at the end of the Autumn term not to proceed. It was not possible to communicate the level of information that parents needed in advance of securing these commitments. As soon as Olive Hill gave the commitment, information was made available to parents and others.

7. **The timescales for the new proposal are unrealistic. Can you be sure that all changes to Olive Hill can be implemented in time?**

The timescale proposed for closing Holt Farm is from 31 August 2006. The buildings at Holt Farm will then be utilised by Olive Hill until the development of the Olive Hill site at Springfield Road is complete.

8. **Many children are already leaving Holt Farm in order to secure a place at another school before any changes are made because their parents have been scared by the Council. Does this affect the situation and the**

proposals? Why did you allow parents to do this, was it because you knew it would make your argument more viable and give you a stronger case even though your proposal was still only in consultation and not definite?

The number of children attending Holt Farm has dropped every year since 1998. Parents have the option to transfer their children to alternative schools at any time. If places in the alternative school are available the local authority has no legal power to prevent this happening. Despite this every attempt has been made to dissuade parents from exercising this option as it creates instability in schools and it is more difficult for children to integrate in a new school mid way through a school year. Headteachers expressed the view very strongly during the summer of 2005 that whatever the proposals were the Council should carry them out as quickly as possible to prevent the premature transfer of children (and staff) from schools proposed for closure.

9. The proposals are causing a lot of anguish for our children and parents.

Most children will take their lead in these situations from adults. If adults show confidence and provide reassurance most children will adapt to change relatively easily. It is important that schools and parents work together on a range of strategies that help children become familiar with new faces and new environments. The Headteachers of Holt Farm and Olive Hill are already working closely together to ensure that ways are found of bringing children, staff and parents together. This is a very good start to building relationships whatever the outcome of the School Organisation Committee although there is still much to be done. Olive Hill have demonstrated their willingness to welcome children, parents and staff, which is a very good foundation on which to build.

10. We feel we are being railroaded into sending our children to Olive Hill and not being given a choice.

Parents will be supported in making a preference for alternative schools. Places will be available for all children wishing to transfer to Olive Hill and every effort will be made to support parents wishing to transfer to other schools. It is expected that siblings will attend the same school.

11. Are the new buildings and changes that will be needed at Olive Hill going to be more expensive than keeping Holt Farm open? Will there be any cost saving benefits to this? The Olive Hill site is very small, is there enough room or will it mean that the playground space is lost? Do you have planning permission to build? Is the capital funding actually agreed for all this work? The DfES website (paragraphs 38–43) states ‘the Decision

Maker must be satisfied that any capital required to implement the proposals will be available. Normally this will be in the form of written confirmation from the source of funding on which the promoters rely. In the case of a local authority, this may be from an authorised officer within the Authority'. Do you have written confirmation? Can you prove it as we have yet to see it? It also states 'There can be no assumption that the approval of proposals will trigger the release of capital funds from the Department unless the Department has previously confirmed in writing that such resources will be available; nor that any allocation "in principle" can be increased. In such circumstances the proposals should be rejected, or consideration of them deferred until it is clear that the capital necessary to implement the proposals will be approved'. Paragraph 63 also talks about 'minimum areas of team game playing fields to which schools must have access'.

As with all construction projects there is always an initial capital cost. This initial cost of providing a new building should be compared against the long-term running and maintenance costs of Holt Farm. In the long term it is more cost effective to provide new facilities that are more energy efficient, sustainable and more suitable for modern education provision than taking a "patch and mend" approach that is required for older buildings.

The cost benefits of closing Holt Farm and expanding provision at Olive Hill will enable savings to be made in a number of areas such as repairs and maintenance of buildings, running costs of buildings and grounds maintenance costs of the sites. In the long term cost savings will be made in these areas.

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) provides guidance on the size of the playground that should be provided at a school based on the number of pupils the school is designed for. If it is decided that the most appropriate location for new classrooms is on existing playground then this lost area has to be replaced as part of the building project.

Planning Permission has not been sought for the development yet as the proposals are still in the early stages of development.

The capital required to fund the work is in place. The DfES allocate a funding stream called "Basic Need" to all Councils (see Appendix D). This funding is allocated on a formulaic basis and is provided specifically for capital projects that address the removal of surplus spaces and the expansion of schools. This funding has been provided by DfES and is already identified on the Council's Capital Programme.

12. Where will pre-school children go when it comes for them to start primary school? Will there be enough capacity to cope with the new influx?

There are other pre-school providers in the vicinity which are registered for nursery education funding. Parents are able to choose to use their child's entitlement at any provider registered for nursery education funding and the Children's Information Service would provide support for parents in finding out what provision was available locally. There will be sufficient maintained provision from September 2006 by using both Olive Hill and Holt Farm sites until the new Children's Centre is opened on the Olive Hill site. Should a further audit of demand during the transition period identify a need in the vicinity of the Holt Farm site, it will be provided in line with the Local Authority's statutory responsibilities.

13. Are the staff now facing redundancy or will they be redeployed and found jobs elsewhere as promised?

It is our intention to retain the skills and experience of all the staff at Holt Farm by offering redeployment options to allow them to continue their employment with Dudley (see answer to point 3).

14. A petition of over 5000 signatures was submitted in objection to the closure of Holt Farm. Did this make any difference?

The petition was included in the 17 November Cabinet Report (Appendix I, p54).

15. The 39 day consultation process was inadequate and more time was needed for this. Even your 6 week period is way too short for a consultation of this magnitude.

The conduct of consultation is not prescribed in legislation or statutory guidance. It is a matter for the proposer, in this case the Council, to determine. The Council considered this question at a meeting in 2005 and rejected a motion to extend the consultation period. The consultation was long enough for people to make an informed response which is evident in the many detailed submissions from Holt Farm and elsewhere. There was sufficient information to support the development of views and the volume of correspondence, number of questionnaire returns and visits to the website confirm this view.

16. Due to the rapid timeframe of the consultation, no area council and public meetings could be held in the consultation period.

In the context of the premature transfer of children from Holt Farm to other schools the consultation could not have been extended any further or delayed to accommodate the timetable for Area Committee meetings without risking further instability at Holt Farm. Opportunity was available to hold special Area Committee meetings if required. No requests were received, the attendance at parent consultation meetings was low and only 46 responses were received.

17. **The consultation document and questions were biased, misleading and ambiguous. Wording in documents was not clear and questions were phrased to give the answer required, not honest answers. The whole consultation was designed to confuse and intimidate parents. Insufficient information was provided in the documents.**

The five questions on the consultation questionnaire were presented to enable to a clear response to enable analysis. Every question had space for comments for respondents to qualify any of their answers. The consultation document also invited respondents to submit additional information if they wished and informed them that the document could be available in other languages if required. There is ample evidence that respondents were able to express their views in a variety of ways and draw on a very wide range of information provided by the Council or from other sources.

18. **The consultation never offered a choice, only closure of Holt Farm and how to move the children – there was no option for keeping Holt Farm open. Why were no alternatives (many of which were provided to DMBC throughout the consultation) considered or offered? Can you prove other options were explored? Because of these factors parents now believe this is already a done deal and consultation was pointless. What happened to ‘working together’?**

The consultation has been open and the Council has listened carefully to all of the views expressed. There have been a number of changes to the proposals overall. For example, several schools proposed to have capacity reduced from September 2006 will remain as they are and will be kept under review to ensure that the number of places available continues to match the demand in specific areas of Dudley (Appendix I, Report on Consultation and Responses part 2).

The 17 November Cabinet Report included a commentary on the options submitted. Numerous invitations have been offered to explain how other options have been explored and why alternatives were not adopted. All of these invitations have been rejected. The Council has maintained its approach of working together.

19. Proper answers were never given to direct questions asked. Just long winded answers or references to websites which completely avoided the point of the questions. They even contradicted themselves. Some of the answers we did receive were pure lies e.g. guaranteed jobs for staff, no redundancies, guaranteed places at local schools etc. This left parents without the necessary information to make valuable contributions to the process. Why has communication as a whole been so poor?

A very large number of questions have been asked and they have all been answered by Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on the website or by direct responses to letters, e-mails, telephone calls or at meetings. Where it has not been possible to give answers the reasons have been given. For example, it is not possible to describe the technical details of a building project if the project has not reached that stage of development.

The allegation of “pure lies” is not true and must be challenged. At no time has anyone given guarantees of jobs and no employer is in a position to guarantee jobs. Commitments have been given by the Cabinet Member and by senior officers that there will be no requirement for redundancies and this commitment remains. Similarly, there are no contradictions but the Council acknowledges that this is a very complex area and when questions are similar but not asked in the same context then they may receive slightly different responses because they are given in answer to the specific context asked about. It is understandable that these may be interpreted as “contradictions”. Should the objector submit any evidence to support these allegations they will be investigated.

During the initial consultation the total number of enquiries by letter, email, telephone and website hits has not yet been calculated but will be in the region of 10,000. From September to December there were 6059 enquiries to the Primary Review Web Pages on www.dudley.gov.uk. This included 4,269 enquiries to the primary review site and 594 specific enquiries to presentations and notes, 293 to Freedom of Information Responses and 903 to Frequently Asked Questions.

In addition to the provision of this information Dudley has also responded to letters, emails, telephone calls and questions posed at meetings. There have been 21 consultation meetings organised for staff, governors and parents at schools with additional meetings convened by request. There has been a range of additional meetings including Area Committees, parents groups, campaign groups, community groups, individual parents and a wide range of meetings with other Council directorates and external agencies.

Invitations have been extended to individuals or groups to discuss Primary Review issues on several occasions.

20. The Council failed to consult all interested parties i.e. all local schools and the parents (of these), local residents, the local community, local businesses, local churches, local Muslim and ethnic minority groups etc. You did not meet DfES guidance (paragraph 45).

The list of consultees includes all Dudley schools, Dudley Racial Equality, Dudley Muslim Association, Kashmiri Pakistani Professionals Forum and a wide range of other groups and bodies. The full list is included at the front of the consultation document in Appendix N. The scope of the consultation fully complies with DfES guidance. There was also significant coverage of the Primary schools review in television and radio broadcasts as well as in local newspapers.

21. How were the 11,000 consultation documents made available to people? How were the 1,000 documents from the second consultation made available? Who were they sent to?

Approximately 11,000 consultation documents were sent out in initial consultation (12 September to 21 October). These were distributed to all parents of children in all Dudley schools and all staff as well as the list of normal consultees as follows;

- Chairs of Governing Bodies
- Headteachers
- Councillors
- Members of the Lifelong Learning Select Committee
- Members of Parliament
- The Black Country Learning and Skills Council
- Dudley Lifelong Learning Partnership
- Further Education Colleges
- Directorate staff
- Unions and Professional Associations
- Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership
- Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education
- Dudley MBC - Corporate Board
- Dudley Primary Care Trusts
- West Midlands Police
- Worcester Diocesan Education Committee
- Roman Catholic Diocesan Schools Commission

- Dudley Association of Governing Bodies
- Neighbouring LEA Directors
- Dudley Racial Equality Council
- Community Forums
- Community Learning Networks
- Churches together in the Borough of Dudley
- Dudley Free Church Liaison Council
- Dudley Parent Partnership
- The Kashmiri Pakistani Professionals Forum
- Dudley Community Partnership
- Dudley Muslim Association
- Black Country Chamber of Commerce
- Dudley Education Business Group
- Community Representatives Panel
- Sure Start local programmes
- Children's Fund
- Children and Young People's Partnership

The documents were also made available on the internal website for Dudley staff, Dudley Council's website (www.dudley.gov.uk) and in libraries.

Approximately 1,000 consultation documents on proposals for Holt Farm and Olive Hill were sent to parents and staff of both schools as well as the list of consultees above and again was made available on both internal and external websites and through the libraries.

22. Parents and members of the public were told that should they not choose to go along with the council's proposals of amalgamation then the school would simply close. This seemed like blackmail and was said to make us feel guilty. We were also told that if we objected we would be making life more difficult for our children even though we have a right to object. Mr Freeman has also been heard to say it is his mission to close these schools. Where is the fairness for parents?

Halesowen Area Committee met at the Cornbow Hall before Christmas 2005. In response to a question from the public about what would happen if Hurst Green did not agree to work with Holt Farm in supporting the closure process. The response given was factually accurate that the Council could revert to the original proposal of closing Holt Farm. This was not "blackmail" or an attempt to make anyone "feel guilty". It was a direct answer to a direct question. There is no question that people have the right to object to the proposals but it is true that the

longer it takes to make a decision the greater the risk of instability to Holt Farm. See 8.

23. Where will the Children's Centre fit at Olive Hill? How long will it take to build? Will they have enough capacity for the whole of Halesowen North? Has the funding been secured?

The Children's Centre proposed for Olive Hill is at an early stage of development. The Centre will not be a "stand alone" new building on the site. The proposal includes refurbishment and remodelling of the existing building to provide the accommodation required. Initial feasibility work has already been completed and the proposed location is identified in the consultation document (Appendix N).

Children's Centre locations are based on a "super-output" area of 800 children. According to current data available, this will provide enough capacity to cover the Halesowen North area.

The funding for Children's Centre's is provided by the DfES through the Sure Start Unit and is already secured.

24. What will be done about the landfill gas emissions at Olive Hill School? Are there any dangers associated with this? How will the health and safety of our children be ensured if this is the case? Have you put bore holes in place?

Various questions have been put to professionals about the landfill gas emissions. Their responses are as follows;

"Regarding the current development at Olive Hill;

A site investigation report was obtained via Roger Morgan's team (ref: 21.01.05 DPS/13623 O/N N045317G). As part of that investigation, ground gas levels were monitored in some of the boreholes and recommendations made. At the time of investigation, the position of the new development was not fixed so a number of boreholes were sunk at potential construction areas.

Methane was not detected at all.

Carbon Dioxide was detected at various levels in the monitoring boreholes but at levels below 5%, this being the threshold where design measures become necessary against a potential hazard. Levels between 1.5% & 5% indicate the need to consider precautionary measures.

The recorded levels at the final new construction position were less than 1.5%. Notwithstanding this, I considered and discussed the report findings with the Architect and a decision was made to provide a 2000g visqueen membrane over the full building area this being of thicker material than that recommended in the report (1200g). This continuous membrane under the floor slab screed is linked and lapped with the external wall damp proof course and the wall cavities filled with concrete up to that level. All service entries through the floor will have the membrane taped to pre-formed collars in accordance with visqueen recommendations and the screed poured tight around them. In view of the low CO2 levels recorded at the development area, the measures taken are considered to be reasonable, economical and balanced on the side of caution.” (Paul Thomas, Structural Engineer for the new build)

“The former Mucklow Hill landfill site is within the vicinity of Olive Hill Primary School and the Council investigated the landfill site in the 1990's. As part of the investigation boreholes were sunk within the school grounds. The school occupies an elevated position above the landfill site and the boreholes were drilled to a fair depth. No problems of landfill gas affecting either the school or other property to the north of the site were identified. By way of comparison, the B&Q Warehouse in the Southern part of the landfill has been designed and constructed to take account of the ground conditions and gas levels. The school extension development would have needed planning permission and this is why the landfill site has been flagged up. However the landfill gas should not be a problem.

It appears that the possibility of landfill gas affecting the school extension has been investigated and appropriate measures are to be incorporated into the building.

If there is any question about whether landfill gas is being emitted from Olive Hill itself, I feel that we can provide some reassurance and say that it is considered that the council has no evidence to suggest that this is the case.” (Robert Showell, Contaminated Land Manager, Environmental Protection Service)

25. There has been a complete lack of openness and honesty. Where is the promised in-depth analysis?

See 18.

26. In the consultation we have been asked to agree to relocation of funds yet haven't been told how much money will go where. Why have figures never been quoted?

The Dudley Scheme of Fair Funding will ensure that the 82% of the school budget funding released will follow the pupils. The remainder will depend on other factors such as the size of building and the number of free school meals taken.

In June 2005 the Cabinet approved a recommendation to reinvest any resources released from the Primary Schools Review into education (see Appendix Q).

27. The Adjudicator has rejected plans to increase admissions at Olive Hill and Hurst Green and they are already oversubscribed so there has never been enough space. Can your proposals still go ahead as there will not be enough places for the children? Why was the Adjudicator's decision misrepresented on the DMBC website as 'Adjudicator backs the plans' when they clearly don't? You state you can get a temporary increase in these schools, how temporary will this be? The other schools cannot take the number of children currently at Holt Farm (187pupils into 62 places does not go).

Proposals to permanently increase the admission numbers from September 2007 were consulted on as originally planned early in 2006. These proposals are a matter for the admissions authority and will be implemented as planned. The application to the adjudicator for an in-year variation was only for one year and because the proposals were published in September 2005 – too late for consultation in early 2005. The Council has the power to admit over the admission number and will exercise this power if required for September 2006. It is unlikely to be needed as both the Holt Farm and the Olive Hill sites will provide capacity far in excess of need. For places in other schools please see p.11.

28. Your proposals will double the distance many children have to travel to get to school and will force many more parents into cars. Isn't this against government policy? What about parents who do not have cars to transport their children? What about the traffic and pollution increases this will cause on our roads and the effect it will have on the environment and children's health? The DfES guidance (paragraphs 57 – 58) states 'Difficulties with transport can prevent people participating in learning or restrict their choice of the quality, subject matter or type of learning they attend. In considering proposals for the reorganisation of school, Decision Makers should satisfy themselves accessibility planning has been properly

taken into account that e.g. in cases such as school closures and the location of new schools, facilities are to be accessible by those concerned and disadvantaged groups not disadvantaged further, particularly by the cost or availability of transport to places of learning.’ Also, ‘Proposals should also be considered against Government objectives to reduce traffic congestion and promote alternatives to the car through the School Travel Planning Process’.

Please see pages 27-28. The proposals fully comply with the DfES guidance.

29. Education is paid for through local taxation. Surely it should then be up to the taxpayers to decide on the schools future.

Education is not funded through local taxation. Dudley, like all local authorities receives its funding for education through government grant. The size of this grant is determined by the number of children attending Dudley schools. The government determines how much of this money should be allocated to schools and this amount is distributed to schools via a locally agreed formula. The nature of the formula is discussed with schools every year and any changes agreed through the Schools Forum which has representation from schools, Diocese and unions. The provision of school places is a matter for the Council in co-operation with other providers such as the Diocese of Worcester and the Diocese of Birmingham. If there are too many places, money that could be spent on teaching and learning is wasted. Holt Farm is no longer viable and when there is a fixed sum for education giving more to small non-viable schools takes money away from larger more viable schools.

30. The H.S.A has raised lots of money to buy equipment and facilities for the school. What will happen to these now? Many improvements were made to the school with this money; do these proposals now mean that this money has all been completely wasted? It was not the Council’s money; it was the parents and the community’s.

Any funds remaining in the HSA can be spent before the school closes in agreement with the HSA or the account could be transferred to one of the schools who are receiving schools from Holt Farm, again, in agreement with the HSA. The equipment purchased by the HSA can be reallocated to follow the pupils, if the HSA agree.

31. The birth rate trend can be argued by that fact that many women started having children later in life which caused a dip. However this trend has now been established so the dip cannot happen again.

See response to point 5. The issue of the age of women having children is not relevant. The fact is that there are not enough children to fund the number of places and the number of schools in the current pattern.

32. **What will happen to the local nursery / early year's provision? The Olive Hill nursery is already full so where will children go until the new Children's Centre is built (if it is)? Do your proposals to close the early year's provision at Holt Farm contravene paragraph 59 of the DfES Decision Makers Guidance? Happy Families tried to open Nursery provision but you wouldn't allow them to take any admissions therefore adding to the surplus places at the school. Because of this Happy Families had to pull out. This seemed a really contrived way of making sure the school had surplus places and probably would have solved the issue as the extra childcare would have attracted many more parents to the school.**

See page 27 and point 12. The proposals will close the maintained provision at Holt Farm but will replace it with more provision offering a wider range of facilities for children aged 0 – 5. The proposals comply fully with DfES guidance and the Council's statutory responsibilities. Happy Families (a private provider) withdrew from Holt Farm because there was insufficient demand to make the business viable.

Happy Families received sustainability support to provide before and after school childcare at Holt Farm and parents were offered brokerage support to find alternative provision. In the event no parents took up this offer so we assume they found alternative provision themselves.

33. **Olive Hill does not yet have the proper facilities to deal with so many children and building work will be ongoing. Won't these factors disrupt my child's education even more? How can my child's education improve by moving to this school (DfES guidance, paragraphs 1–4, 6–16 & 23–26)?**

The current facilities available at Olive Hill will not cater for all pupils from both Olive Hill and Holt Farm. In the short term part of the buildings at Holt Farm will be used to provide education to pupils who will be registered at Olive Hill.

A construction project is already on site at Olive Hill that is replacing mobile accommodation with a new state of the art classroom block. This work will be completed shortly. Once this project has been completed the next phase can commence which will include the provision of a Children's Centre and additional classrooms, staff and dining accommodation. There is always some disruption to

the smooth operation of any school during a construction project but these disruptions will be kept to a minimum by careful phasing of the work.

34. Wouldn't it be a better and more cost effective idea to reduce numbers at Olive Hill and Hurst Green then reduce Holt Farm to one form entry? It would cost less and cause much less disruption.

Reducing the capacities at Olive Hill and Hurst Green would not be more cost effective. It would be more disruptive for a greater number of children than the current proposals and there is no guarantee that those children would transfer to Holt Farm. It also costs more to run three smaller schools than two larger schools as a higher proportion of the budget is spent on fixed costs such as management, administration and premises. This is described in the Audit Commission example on page 14.

35. Holt Farm may be an older school than Olive Hill but it is in a better condition and has better facilities.

The Condition backlog for Olive Hill is less than that of Holt Farm. This means that less funding is required to be spent at Olive Hill on repairs and maintenance to bring the building back to good condition than at Holt Farm.

Holt Farm has a lack of community facilities and the school field is too small for football matches and athletics, the pupils have to travel off site to other facilities in the Borough for these sports. There are community facilities at Olive Hill, these will be enhanced further with the provision of a new children's centre on the site. The field at Olive Hill was replaced last year utilising Big Lottery funding, resulting in a new field with good drainage and of suitable size that can be used all year round by pupils.

36. This is all about money and not about education, standards or the children. Another school in Dudley was in special measures; why not close them and save money there? You could even have closed Caslon School as the children could have easily fitted into Colley Lane and there wouldn't have been an issue with the distance to travel. Why did you pick Holt Farm over these other schools? Halesowen North has less surplus places than Belle Vale and Cradley. Why not target schools in those wards instead?

There is a very strong relationship between the level of money available and the quality of education provided. If there is too little money schools cannot pay teachers or repair roofs or buy computers. Closing Holt Farm alone will not solve the growing problem of surplus places and the year on year decline in school

budgets. The proposals published in September include a small number of closures and many reductions in capacity in other schools. The principles and statements of intent for addressing the Primary School Review were agreed following the Primary Review Refresh 2004 Consultation. This framework has been closely followed in developing the proposals.

37. **Holt Farm only celebrated its Centenary last year but now you wish to wipe out all this history. The school has served this area well for all these years and is loved by everyone.**

The contribution that Holt Farm has made to generations of children is a record that the school is justifiably proud of. The proposals have not been developed because of the performance of Holt Farm but due to there not being sufficient children to keep the school open. The falling numbers means there will not be enough money and an inevitable deterioration in the quality of education and standards achieved. This would not be fair on the children, staff or the proud reputation of the school and the Council has a duty to ensure that all children have access to schools that can provide sustainable education.

38. **If you knew about this problem six years ago at the beginning of year 2000 why wait until now to do something about it? You then could have tried other cost saving ideas instead of being in a big rush to close schools unnecessarily which should have been the very last option tried.**

Action should have been taken earlier. This does not mean that the proposals would have been any different as the drop in the demand for places is affecting almost every part of the Borough. The proposals to close schools and reduce capacity in others apply throughout Dudley.

39. **It would be a huge loss to the surrounding community if Holt Farm were to close. Primary schools are valuable resources which are needed to maintain the quality of a neighbourhood and when such resources are lost communities are often sent into a downward spiral which takes millions of pounds and many years to address. Does this go against paragraph 60 of DfES guidelines?**

There have been no discussions about what to do with the primary school site at Holt Farm should the school close. It would be possible to consider with the local community the development of a community association to take on the running of the building in order to continue to offer a facility for the community to use within the local area.

However, the community would need to come together to form an incorporated association with its own constitution in order to negotiate a lease of the building. This is an option which could be explored if there was enough interest and commitment from the local community and funding was available.

40. You have changed your plans so often many parents are now unsure what the current state of play is. If you had done more preparation and planning this process would not be in the mess it is in now.

The proposal to close Holt Farm has been maintained from the original consultation in September 2005 to the present position. The only change has been the method of how the closure process takes place. The involvement of other schools, initially Hurst Green and then Olive Hill was arranged in response to concerns raised in the original consultation about the immediate impact on children, parents, staff and community. Listening to peoples views and responding seems to be a reasonable approach. If every detail had been worked through there is always a risk of criticism by those who feel consultation is pointless "as it's a done deal".

41. This proposal will see small children having to cross very busy roads like Long Lane and Springfield Road. What measures will be put in place to ensure children can get to school safely? The DfES and SOC websites state 'In deciding statutory proposals, the Decision Maker should bear in mind that proposals should not have the effect of unreasonably extending journey times or increasing transport costs, or result in children having to negotiate significant barriers such as railway lines or major roads.'

There are existing pedestrian crossing facilities to Long Lane and Springfield Road is has traffic calming in place. A School Crossing Patrol also operates on Long Lane and the location of this would alter if there was a change in crossing demands.

The School Travel Plan Coordinator is currently developing a travel plan with the school, to identify problems and 'obstacles' to safe walking routes. The Council, in partnership with the schools, will review options that would be considered to remove or reduce such 'obstacles'.

42. What will happen to children who are disabled? Will special measures be put in for them? Will there be special parking places to drop off these children (paragraph 53 of DfES guidance)?

Where a child is transported to schools by Children's Services transport the escort or driver must ensure the pupils are delivered safely to school.

When a child with disability moves schools or to new premises, the appropriate support service will advise the new provision on issues relating to inclusion and access to the premises and curriculum. All provision must adhere to the DDA requirements.

43. **If Holt Farm is to become an annex can you please state how that will work, who will run it and provide evidence that these types of arrangement have actually worked in the past? How will the annex and the parent school interact e.g. sports days, awards, school photos, plays etc? If you have children at both schools will you have to decide to attend one child's activities over another?**

The consultation document describes options for how children could be grouped using the two sites. It will be one school using two sites for a short period of time. Holt Farm and Olive Hill are working closely together on a range of issues including how the arrangement will work. The use of Holt Farm as additional accommodation will be for a short time, probably one year until consolidation onto one site. The Governors and staff will ensure that there are no difficulties with planning and scheduling events such as photographs, sports days, awards plays and so on.

44. **What will happen about uniforms? You won't save money if you have to pay for all new uniforms for everybody and many parents cannot afford to buy new ones.**

Olive Hill are keen to promote a new start for all of the children following the coming together of the two schools and as part of this we would strongly propose that all children at Olive Hill on both sites in September, have a new school uniform which is funded by the Council. The principle is supported and welcomed by the Council. Discussions are taking place regarding how the costs may be met.

45. **There is much concern about parking at Olive Hill. There will be many extra cars but no extra parking spaces. It is already very dangerous outside the school and is on a blind bend. Any talk of building a new car park is on a site emitting poisonous gases and further away from the school. Residents around the school already complain about the parking without adding even more cars. The consultation has not covered these areas in enough detail**

and should have gone out to the residents who live around the school to give them a chance to respond as to how your proposals will affect them.

The amount of car park space available is an increasing issue for many schools. The amount of car park space to be provided at Olive Hill will be investigated as part of the overall development of the site. No decisions have been made yet about the location of any new car park. Local residents will be consulted through the normal planning procedures when a planning application has been submitted for the proposals.

46. **Why were parents with young children due to start at Holt Farm's local nursery not allowed to attend the consultation meetings? I wanted my child to attend Holt Farm but was not even allowed to give an opinion. This seems to be at odds with the general policy of Dudley MBC in encouraging schools to be part of the local community and consulting all interested parties.**

Parents with children due to start at Holt Farm's local nursery would have been welcome to attend the parents meeting or to express your views in any other way. A special meeting could have been arranged if requested. The consultation has been open to anyone although the focus has been on parent's consultation meetings at each school.

47. **This whole process was intended to save £1 million. More than that must already have been spent on the consultations alone to pay for the staff and paperwork it must take to keep changing proposals as you change your minds. This money could have gone into the schools and then there would not have been any need to close them.**

Any costs associated with the re-organisation of primary schools within Dudley have been met from within existing resources.

48. **Early friendships are important in a child's life but you are now affecting these by making children move schools therefore causing more upset for our children. This could also leave children open to bullying if they have no friends with them.**

Friendships for all children are indeed vital, an essential element of a child's personal, social and emotional development. Although young children are much more resilient to change than adults, it is natural for parents to be concerned. The schools receiving children from closing schools will be fully aware and ready to respond to children's anxieties and will deal sensitively with the transition. The

staff in schools directly affected by the closures (those closing and those receiving) have already made plans together and are working with children and families to ensure a well supported, smooth transition.

“Olive Hill has always made new pupils very welcome. The dozen children who have moved from Holt Farm already have settled in extremely well and are very happy.

It is always difficult when children move school but there are often as many new opportunities to make new friends and have new experiences as there are challenges. We will be working hard to implement integration strategies once a decision has been made. Joint activities for pupils, parents and staff will be organised.

Olive Hill has a strong behaviour management policy which includes a bullying policy. They are always looking to improve and revise practice and have a day’s training set up for all staff in January. Incidents of bullying are dealt with quickly and involve parents at an early stage.

Olive Hill want to create a happy, cohesive unit. This will take time but can only really begin to happen once the schools have come together.” (Tess Jordan, Headteacher, Olive Hill Primary School)

49. Many children are scared of attending a large school as they have been used to small, intimate schools and classes. They will also be the ‘new children’ entering strange, already established territory and other pupils at the school will already have formed friendships groups so they will be seen as outsiders? Won’t this have a big effect on them?

“In actual fact the class sizes which are predicted for 2006/7 are smaller than many of the classes we have at the moment. 15 out of 17 classes would be between 21 and 25 children and the other two classes are of 29 and 30 and are of Olive Hill children only in years 5 and 6.

Having worked in an even larger school (550 pupils) and in smaller schools I would like to reiterate that the sense of family and warmth of ethos in a school depends on the relationships therein and not on the size of the school.

Indeed larger schools often benefit from economies of scale and have facilities which may not be available in smaller schools e.g. specialist teachers, resources, clubs etc.” (Tess Jordan, Headteacher, Olive Hill Primary School).

50. What will happen to the Church group, the dance group, the Brownie pack, the language classes and other clubs who utilise Holt Farm if it closes?

The Holt Farm building will continue to be used from September 2006 for at least a year. This will enable discussions to take place about the future use of the building and longer term use by the various community groups or other alternatives in the local area. See point 39.

51. Where is the evidence to support your need to close Holt Farm? And indeed the other 4 schools you are trying to close? Where is the evidence to say it is these 5 schools that need to close and no others? Where is the evidence to support other schools staying open?

The evidence is very clear in the falling numbers of pupils attending Holt Farm and the other schools proposed for closure. It is also very clear in the £2.1 million less income for school budgets this year and the number of primary schools already involved in staff redundancies to reduce costs and balance their budgets. It is very clear in the fact that in reception admissions alone for September 2006 there are 805 empty places. Every Dudley school is affected by the year on year decline in pupil numbers and the year on year fall in the amount of money available to distribute to schools. The proposals have not been developed because of the performance of Holt Farm but due to there not being sufficient children to keep the school open. The falling numbers means not enough money and an inevitable deterioration in the quality of education and standards achieved. This would not be fair on the children, staff or the proud reputation of the school and the Council has a duty to ensure that all children have access to schools that can provide sustainable education.

52. You state you have consulted with the children of Holt Farm. How and when did this happen?

There have been a number of letters from children attending Holt Farm which have been added to the consultation responses. They are all available within the record of evidence which can be made available by appointment.

53. Why did your second proposal never go through its own consultation?

The initial interest from Hurst Green was sufficient to make a recommendation to Cabinet that the closure process for Holt Farm could be supported. The Governing Body decided not to go through with the proposal. The process did not reach a point where there was sufficient detail to consult with parents. As

soon as Olive Hill gave the necessary commitments the existing statutory notice was withdrawn and new consultation started.

54. **Holt Farm serves a diverse range of children from various backgrounds. This has previously been commended by Ofsted and has also gained the school an award. Could your proposals mean that minor ethnic groups become isolated?**

There is no reason for this to happen. All Dudley schools should be fully inclusive and there are various monitoring arrangements to ensure that this is the case.

55. **Your surplus capacity figures could be interpreted in many ways but have given no basis for comparison. Could you supply the net capacity of Dudley Schools in 1997 to allow us to see the fuller picture?**

The net capacity of a school is a relatively new method of calculating how much capacity a school has. The DfES set the criteria for calculating the capacity of a school through a strict formula. The first time this data had to be submitted to DfES for all schools was in 2002; therefore, data from 1997 is not available. The critical point is that Dudley Schools are funded on the number of children. If there are not enough children, schools cannot meet the costs of providing education and a proportion of this will be wasted on empty spaces.

56. **Are our children just statistics? Has there been any research into the effects this merger may have on them?**

See point 9.

57. **Holt Farm is traditionally a close knit community school where all children are known by name and where pupils feel happy and cherished. Why can't a bit of extra money be spent to ensure the best for these children and for following generations who will need a good education?**

There is no extra money. See point 29.

58. **Why were the presentation documents for certain schools (i.e. Maidensbridge and Highfields) missing from your website? When they did finally appear they had been changed. Is that legal?**

The website contains a very large amount of information including the presentation documents for the initial consultation meetings. The consultation should provide sufficient information for people to reach an informed view. The

presentation slides for the Holt Farm meetings were posted on the website but they would not provide the level of detail that was contained in the actual presentation or the questions and responses. The many people that attended those meetings had a good opportunity to gain a great deal of information. Visits to the presentation slides would only give a limited picture. The main reason for posting the presentation slides was to comply with requests to do so. Other documents on the website provide a much more information.

59. **Can you guarantee that any money saved will be re-invested into education and will not be used in other pursuits?**

In June 2005 the Cabinet approved a recommendation to reinvest any resources released from the Primary schools Review into education (see Appendix Q).

60. **Why did you replace the mobiles at Olive Hill? If you knew the possibility of them taking extra children was there you could have built it all in one go instead of Olive Hill being a constant building site causing more disruption to children.**

The Council allocated funding to replace the mobile classrooms at Olive Hill during April 2004. The mobiles were in a very poor condition and were no longer suitable as teaching accommodation. The project has taken time to develop and started on site during October 2005. When the funding was originally allocated to replace the mobile classrooms it was not known about the proposal to increase capacity at Olive Hill.

61. **It is understood that Dudley does not receive as much money as other boroughs. Shouldn't you be working on trying to get more money from the government instead of closing much needed and perfectly good schools?**

Yes. Lobbying for higher levels of funding continues. As the DfES receives information about surplus places and other information about how Dudley schools spend money it is important to ensure that we also use the available resources efficiently. It is impossible to demonstrate efficient use of available resources with the current level of surplus places.

62. **The original consultation was for closure. For whatever reasons the Council didn't follow through with these plans and opted for amalgamation at the last minute. From this decision it is obvious that closure isn't in the best interests of anybody concerned and that the consultation on closure did not allow anybody enough time to work towards a suitable plan and**

wasn't offered widely enough to the outside community, other schools and their parents to make their comments.

Please see points 6, 8, 15, 20 and 40.

63. Why not allow Holt Farm to offer Extended Schools facilities or become the ARC centre for Halesowen therefore making them more viable?

Holt Farm receives a budget based on the number of children attending Dudley schools and the amount of money available for distribution to Dudley schools is falling year on year. As the number of pupils attending Holt Farm is also falling year on year the school budget is increasingly stretched to meet the fixed costs such as management, administration and premises. Any joint use of the buildings would have to bring in sufficient money to meet a proper share of these fixed costs. Neither extended provision or resourced places such as in an Additional Resource Centre would provide sufficient funding. The fixed costs would still be borne by Holt Farm Primary School. The school is no longer viable.

64. You have already got it wrong with Halesowen school mergers, they have been rejected twice. Are you sure you've got it right at Holt Farm? Have you considered you could be wrong again?

Dudley has had previous success in bidding for capital funds for new developments. In the DfES Targeted Capital Fund Dudley has secured funding for secondary schools including Holly Hall and Ridgewood. In October the Secretary of State announced that Dudley was to receive £8.5 million to replace Wrens Nest Primary School and Old Park Special School. This bid was scored in the top 10 of 500 bids from Council's in England. The third element of this bid (Voluntary Aided Bid) was turned down for the second time and other funding options are being considered.

The DfES have strict criteria for allocating funding and it is essential that Dudley can demonstrate that it is addressing the removal of surplus places whilst simultaneously investing in the creation of a new pattern of sustainable fit for purpose schools. These proposals are consistent with those aims.

65. Your proposals completely go against the government's policies. All we hear from the government is Education, Education, Education along with smaller class sizes, more choice for parents and local schools for local children. You are totally ignoring all these strategies so therefore how can you justify your actions?

The central part of the government agenda is set out in Every Child Matters. The local authority has a responsibility to ensure that all children have access to the best quality of education and care possible within available resources. Dudley is losing funding year on year due to falling pupil numbers and higher level of funding each year is being wasted on unnecessary fixed costs such as the management, administration and premises involved in maintaining a very high level of surplus places. These proposals are entirely consistent with government policy because they will lead to a pattern of schools that make more effective use of available resources and allow more of it to be spent on children.

66. Why have you chosen to close one school in every township, even where it is not needed? Is it even feasible to close five schools in one year?

The falling pupil numbers affect almost every part of the Borough. This is evident in the annual census data for each school and ward. The proposals published in September include a small number of closures and many reductions in capacity in other schools. The principles and statements of intent for addressing the Primary School Review were agreed following the Primary Review Refresh 2004 Consultation. This framework has been closely followed in developing the proposals. Some authorities have closed more than five schools in one year.

67. With regards to the Church of the Ascension and Maidensbridge consultation, why at the meetings did you put groups of people in separate rooms? Why wouldn't you answer the questions there and then instead of writing them down and answering them at a later date? Why wouldn't you allow parents of both schools to have a meeting together? What were the legal reasons preventing this?

The legislation and statutory guidance requires consultation with the parents of the school subject to proposals. It would not have been possible to conduct consultation of this kind or record it in a joint meeting. The approach to have smaller groups resulted from comments made after some larger meetings by parents who did not feel able to take part in a larger group. Arrangements were made to facilitate discussions in smaller groups where all comments were recorded and questions reported back to the main group but answered in writing. This approach generated many more questions and more detailed responses than would have been possible in a larger meeting.

68. Why did Dudley Council fail to inform all four borough MPs of their plans to close schools before the consultation started?

This statement is not true. An outline project plan was developed during the early part of 2005 and confirmed during the summer with senior officers and the cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning. Emphasis was placed on ensuring that the release of information took account of the need to manage and respond to the high emotions and likely interest from parents, media and others. A detailed process was planned for 8 September to inform;

- Unions in preparation to respond to any staff welfare of other concerns;
- Headteachers of schools proposed for closure or amalgamation, provide personal and professional support and agree arrangements for school consultation meetings;
- Parents through a letter from the Director of Children's Services with details of consultation meetings agreed with Headteachers;
- Media contacted to attend a briefing on 9 September on the consultation and proposals.

Although the sequence of events was planned well in advance the dates could not be confirmed until the Cabinet Member approved the start of the consultation period. With hindsight, the involvement of Members of Parliament should have been sought at an earlier stage. Members of Parliament were invited to a briefing on 9 September before this consultation started. Three of the four MPs were able to attend.

Comments from Headteachers involved were appreciative of the way this very difficult period was approached.

69. According to newspaper reports, you have made such a mess of this consultation that many complaints have been sent to the Ombudsman and as a result you are now being investigated by the Secretary of State for Education. Is this true and, if so, can this stop you making any changes? Have you failed the statutory requirements of consultation?

There have been complaints to the Ombudsman. These are being dealt with in the normal way and there is no connection with the Secretary of State. The Members of Parliament met Jacquie Smith, former Schools Minister to raise concerns about the Primary Schools Review. As a consequence the DfES have asked for further information about the Primary Schools Review. There is no investigation. The process fully complies with the legislation and statutory guidance.

70. **A statement on the DfES and SOC websites states ‘LA’s should take action to remove empty places at schools that are unpopular with parents and which do little to raise standards. The removal of surplus places must always support the core agenda of raising standards and respect parent’s wishes by seeking to match school places with parental choices’. This is not what is happening with any of the 5 schools you want to close. What happened to parental choice?**

The number of pupils attending Holt Farm has fallen every year since 1998. Whilst it remains popular with parents there are not enough children to maintain the school as a viable provider of education. The proposals have not been developed because of the performance of Holt Farm but due to there not being sufficient children to keep the school open. The falling numbers means not enough money and an inevitable deterioration in the quality of education and standards achieved. This would not be fair on the children, staff or the proud reputation of the school and the local authority has a duty to ensure that all children have access to schools that can provide sustainable education.

71. **The DfES and SOC websites state that ‘the decision maker may wish to consider whether the proposals are consistent with the Children and Young People’s Plan for the area’. Is there such a plan for Dudley and if so are your proposals consistent?**

Yes and yes. There is a Children and Young People’s Plan for Dudley which was developed with partners, including the voluntary and community sector and children and young people across the borough. The three month consultation process has just been completed and the final plan is being prepared for publication. The plan contains proposals consistent with the Primary Review and does refer to school closures due to falling birth rates and surplus places.

72. **Won’t your proposals have an adverse effect on other schools in the area i.e. overcrowding, lack of any future capacity etc? How does this comply with DfES guidelines?**

Please see page 13. There will be no adverse effect on other schools in the area. Conversely, Olive Hill and Hurst Green will benefit from the additional children and the improvements that they will be able to make to their facilities. These proposals will enable all children to access schools with a greater number of well trained staff, a wider range of opportunities and improved facilities. These proposals are entirely consistent with the Every Child Matters agenda and other relevant guidelines.

73. **If you read your own principles of consultation you will see that you have broken many of them. How then can this be considered a fair and unbiased consultation?**

Please see pages 22 – 30 and points 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, and 46.

74. **Why at the beginning of this process did you close admissions at Holt Farm? The school could have filled its numbers but you chose not to let this happen so you could reach your own ends. This leads us to believe that you never intended to let Holt Farm continue even you told us it was a 'consultation'.**

Admission to Holt Farm has not been prohibited at any point. Naturally applicants have been advised of the proposals when submitting their application. Applications for 2006/07 were received and dealt with accordingly along with all other community schools.

75. **What do you intend to do with the Holt Farm site once the school has gone? Surely the entire local area should be consulted on that as it will affect everyone.**

Please see point 39.

76. **Why was the consultation document only printed in English when you know you have people at the schools who don't speak English very well? They could not understand your documents.**

The consultation process was agreed with Holt Farm and Olive Hill Schools. Based on their experience of communication with parents it was agreed that there was no requirement to produce versions in other languages. The document stated clearly that such versions could be made available on request. No requests were received from parents or any other group or individual acting on behalf of parents.

77. **Why are you closing all the things that people need i.e. schools, hospitals, swimming pools? Soon there won't be anything left and people will move out of Dudley to another Borough that still has all its facilities.**

The case for removing surplus places and reinvesting the money released into education has been made strongly throughout the Primary School Review and in this document.

78. It has been suggested that the pupils left at Holt Farm will be shoved into the younger end of the school so that only half the school needs to be run. This is terrible. Year 5 children using reception toilets? Or are you going to waste even more money building new toilets for them?

The area of Holt Farm which has been identified by Mr Everington has been chosen carefully for a number of reasons:

1. The well being of pupils and staff being paramount it was felt that this end of the school will feel 'full' despite very small numbers and the rooms to be used are arranged around a central point (rather than being stretched out along a very long corridor);
2. The children will have easy access to all facilities – ICT suite, toilets, hall, library, resources room and office;
3. Only minor alterations will need to be made. The toilets are standard size pans and would only need the urinal lifting and new doors putting on the stalls;
4. There is a room for staff – which is within this area and staff toilets;
5. There is easy access to the playground.

79. Does Olive Hill have the same ethos, same styles, reading books, curriculum etc? Does it have the brilliant computer suite Holt Farm has? Will even more disruption be caused by children having to learn new basic things because of different teaching guidelines etc? Where is the stability?

“Both Olive Hill and Holt Farm follow the National Curriculum.

Olive Hill has planned a complete review of Curriculum in the Autumn Term which will involve all staff and which will be creative and skills based. This is an exciting time and an opportunity to create a new curriculum which will build on the strengths of both schools.

There will no doubt be much debate and the work will have its challenges but it will be in the process of creating something new that staff will come together.

Olive Hill has a fully functioning computer suite. We are purchasing a mobile laptop trolley in addition (16 laptops).

The hard work and assessments completed by Holt Farm staff of their pupils to date will be transferred to Olive Hill. There is no question of children having to relearn skills already confident in.

Staff will liaise re individual children – we would like 2 or 3 additional closure days this term for this very purpose.

There will be stability based on the information shared about individual children but there will also be the opportunity to take a fresh look at things. Education has not stood still in recent memory and nor should we.” (Tess Jordan, Headteacher, Olive Hill Primary School)

80. An annex is another word for closure with no commitment to any timescale. Some parents have indicated a possible option being exploration of federation or amalgamation but these are not requests for a temporary annex.

Annex means additional accommodation. The consultation document describes options for how children could be grouped using the two sites. It will be one school using two sites for a short period of time. Holt Farm and Olive Hill are working closely together on a range of issues including how the arrangement will work. The use of Holt Farm as additional accommodation will be for a short time, probably one year until consolidation onto one site. The proposal was developed as a direct response to concerns raised about the immediate impact on children, parents, staff and the community. Please see pages 20 - 21 for comments on alternative options.

81. Mr Vickers said he would listen to our arguments and take our suggestions on board. He didn't do this before he left but what happens now he is no longer at the Council?

The Cabinet Member listened to all of the views expressed. The 17 November Report to Cabinet was made on the basis of those views. The change in the Cabinet Member does not alter the fact that Holt Farm is no longer viable or the proposals under consideration by School Organisation Committee.

82. Are you planning on making class sizes bigger? This will have a detrimental effect on our children's education at Holt Farm, Olive Hill and possibly Hurst Green.

Please see point 49.

83. It's hard enough for young children to make the transition to High School, how do you think they feel being moved about at a much younger age?

Please see points 9, 43, 44, 48, 49 and 79.

84. As parents we were asked to make suggestions. It should not be up to parents to do this. We do not have the facts and figures that the Council have. We are not in a position to argue the information put to us. We pay our taxes for you to come up with suggestions.

The Council has developed proposals covering 82 primary schools after consideration of a wide range of options. The consultation process encouraged other alternative ideas and various submissions were received.

85. Holt Farm offers excellent Specials Needs teaching and facilities. What will happen to this? Will we be guaranteed it at any other school?

All schools in the borough are required to make provision for children with special educational needs in accordance with the SEN Code of Practice 2001 and Education Act 1996. Where children are the subject of a statement of special educational needs the provision specified in the child's statement is protected whichever school they attend, subject to statutory annual review.

All education providers and local authorities have a responsibility to plan for the inclusion of pupils with disabilities into mainstream schools (SENDA - planning duties). As a result we have many schools that are now physically accessible. Olive Hill and Hurst Green are accessible schools and pupils with physical impairments have attended, and are attending, both. Disabled parking bays are very quick and easy to provide and if needed immediately would be provided. Longer term accessibility planning will mean that they will be provided anyway in the future.

86. You promised to take the Holt Farm children to visit Olive Hill to get to know the school, teachers and layout before any changes were made. This has not been done.

We want to start this process as soon as possible but did not feel that it was appropriate to anticipate a final decision re Holt Farm. Some options of how to introduce the children to Olive Hill have been discussed between the schools but it was thought better to wait until the SOC decision has been made.

87. **Holt Farm serves an area of deprivation and gives less advantaged children a great start in life. Is it now your intention to deprive these children even more and make it even harder for them to get anywhere?**

Please see point 70.

88. **The closure of Holt Farm will leave the Northern part of the ward without a school as all others are in the Southern part. How do you justify this?**

Please see pages 11 - 12.

89. **John Freeman clearly states in his report that the Primary Schools Review is one component of a raft of other related initiatives that will directly impact on children that include: Extended Schools agenda / Children's Centre / Integrated Schools services / Community use including leisure, libraries and lifelong learning agenda to name a few. So how come the proposed closure appears to have been planned in isolation from the raft of these and other Central Government initiatives that all local authorities have to implement by law?**

The Director of Children's Services statement remains true. The objector does not provide any specific examples on which to comment.

90. **Primary education is already failing in some areas with so many young people leaving schools with no qualifications and some without even knowing the basics. Why add to these failures by disrupting education and making less school places available to children?**

Please see point 70.

5. CONCLUSION

It is considered that a compelling case for the closure of Holt Farm Primary School is in existence.

The case for closure of the school is based on a reduction in the demand for school places by almost 20% over the last decade. Holt Farm has seen a fall in the number of pupils attending from 283 in 1997 to 139 in May 2006. The fall in numbers leaves Holt Farm in a non-viable position. The school will be forced to make significant staff reductions that will impact severely on the quality of education provided, outcomes and standards achieved. The loss of staff will result in mixed age and mixed key stage

teaching, larger classes and a more limited range of opportunities. This is unacceptable, especially in a deprived area. The proposals are consistent with Dudley Council's School Organisation Plan commitment to address surplus capacity and create a new pattern of provision where all schools are effective and sustainable.

Existing and intending pupils of Holt Farm can be confidently expected to receive better overall provision at Olive Hill and Hurst Green. These schools are willing and capable of welcoming the displaced pupils from Holt Farm without detriment to those schools or their existing pupils. The proposals to continue using the Holt Farm buildings as additional accommodation during the completion of the rebuilding of the work will ensure a high degree of stability and integration. This is consistent with Dudley Council's declared aims of putting children and young people first and improving educational standards and achievement for all. The Children and Young Peoples Strategic Partnership fully supports the proposal because it improves access for all children and families in the local area including Holt Farm to the range of excellent services that will be available and particularly the establishment of a Children's Centre on the Olive Hill Primary School site.

There should be a presumption to approve proposals for a school to close so that it may be merged with a more successful school where there is sufficient evidence that the development will have a positive impact on standards. The case for closure of Holt Farm, based on the clear link between falling pupil numbers, lower budgets and the adverse impact on quality of education, outcomes and standards is compelling. The proposals will enable all pupils to attend Olive Hill (or other schools) with a greater number of well trained staff and access to a broader range of opportunities and better facilities. The quality of education across the area will be improved with better outcomes and higher standards for all pupils.