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<u>Item No</u> 15 Public

Proposal to Close Stiperstones CE Primary School – Report on Additional period of Consideration

Responsible Officer David Taylor Corporate Director – People’s Services
Email: David.Taylor@shropshire.gov.uk Telephone: (01743) 252402

Summary

This paper reports on the work undertaken by Stiperstones CE Primary School towards developing Federation with Chirbury CE Primary School following the decision not to proceed with closure of the school at the Cabinet meeting of 20 July 2011

Recommendation

That Cabinet:

- (1) notes that Stiperstones CE Primary School and Chirbury CE Primary School have achieved federation status, as from 1 January 2012
- (2) determines not to proceed with closure of Stiperstones CE Primary School within the current proposals
- (3) asks the Corporate Director - People’s Services to continue to monitor the development of the federation in relation to the educational provision and outcomes for pupils and the school’s financial viability.

1. Background

Over the past two years Shropshire Council has worked with Schools, Governors, Elected Members and local communities to review education provision for Shropshire. As part of the process, Shropshire Council consulted with those groups on a new Vision for Shropshire Learners and a set of principles and criteria for school organisation which had been developed by a Cross Party Task and Finish Group of Members representing the main political groups on the Council. This period of consultation included area meetings and a website consultation. The Vision, principles and criteria for school organisation were adopted as Council policy by full Council on 11 November 2010.

- In December 2010 and January 2011 the council consulted with school headteachers and chairs of governors on potential changes to school organisation arising from the school organisation criteria. These meetings were held across the county on an area basis.
- The information arising from these meetings, along with a dataset that had been checked and verified by schools was considered. The outcomes were then presented to Cabinet on 15 February 2011 in the form of a report which proposed consultation on the future of a number of schools in Shropshire.

- On 15 February, Cabinet approved pre-statutory consultation on the future of Onny CE Primary School – ‘In Your Hands’. This was in line with the Vision for Shropshire Learners and the School Organisation Principles and Criteria.
- On 4 May 2011, the Cabinet received a report on the outcomes from the pre-statutory consultation (DfE Stage 1) and agreed to proceed to publication of Statutory Notices and statutory consultation on proposals to close Stiperstones CE Primary School and offer continuing pupils places in Minsterley Primary School.
- On 20 July 2011, the Cabinet received a report on the outcomes of the additional period of consideration on the proposal to close Stiperstones CE Primary School and agreed to allow the school to progress its proposal to federate with Chirbury CE Primary School from January 2012. Cabinet therefore determined not to close Stiperstones CE Primary School. The Corporate Director – People’s Services was asked to monitor the progress towards federation between the two schools and Cabinet reserved the right to request an alternative proposal be brought forward if progress towards a federation leading to sustainability over time and continued improvement in the provision of education and outcomes for children are not maintained

2. Pre-Statutory Consultation

All previous documentation related to the proposals to close Stiperstones CE Primary School is attached as appendix A.

3. Ofsted Assessment

No further Ofsted assessment of Stiperstones CE School has been carried out.

4 Further Consideration

Since 20 July 2011 Stiperstones CE Primary School has worked with Chirbury CE Primary School to develop proposals for federation in order to meet the criteria in appendix B.

The schools were asked to meet specific criteria in developing their plans. The governing bodies were expected to move towards an incorporation date (when the federation and its new governing body is established) by January 2012 and to meet the following timeline:

- By 19 September 2011 - Clear action plans for progress towards federation drawn up by both governing bodies of each proposed federation, outlining clear timescales and submitted to LA officers/School Improvement Advisers.
- Monthly reviews of actions against these action plans undertaken by local authority officers/School Improvement Advisers: week beginning 17 October; week beginning 21 November; week beginning 12 December.
- Progress to be judged against meeting these timescales and demonstrating the potential to meet the criteria outlined for successful federation (attached appendix B).
- Monitoring judgements to be reported at regular intervals. If the proposed federation is judged not to be meeting timescales or unlikely to have potential to meet the criteria

for successful federation Cabinet reserves the right to bring forward alternative proposals.

The main focuses for the federation remain:

- shared senior leadership arrangements, through a single Headteacher and a Site Head;
- the potential benefits of shared school improvement focuses; and
- increased efficiencies, including through effective use of time and resources, and economies of scale including through the new single governing body

At the cabinet meeting of 20 July Stiperstones CE Primary School and Chirbury CE Primary School were asked to work with local authority officers to address remaining weaknesses in the proposals, particularly in relation to:

- confirming financial calculations based on agreed projected number on roll;
- demonstrating increased spending on teaching and learning; and
- strengthening the focus on school improvement, and on outcomes for pupils.

The schools therefore had to meet these criteria additional to those outlined in appendix B. They also had to complete a statutory consultation with stakeholders by the middle of October 2011.

Update on the development of the federation

Both schools are demonstrating commitment to the process of federating and are establishing strong links designed to improve standards and provision for the pupils, as well as focussing on the more practical and operational aspects of federation.

The staffing structure presents possibilities of flexible use of staffing across the two schools, and allows for significant sharing of expertise and professional development. However, it relies on current minimum levels of staffing costs and will need to be reviewed to allow over time for the incremental increase in staffing costs, for sufficient planning, preparation and assessment time for staff and for joint time for the senior leadership team. Appropriate salary ranges for both Headteacher and Site Head posts in the federation have been set by governors.

The schools are in the process of undertaking joint self evaluation through auditing policy and practice across both schools. A single school development plan will then be developed to reflect the areas identified for improvement. Governors will develop a new shared vision and operating systems for the new federation. Joint staff development through a combination of focussed professional development and modelling effective teaching is already established across both schools. Shared staff meetings and professional development days have already focussed on moderating pupil outcomes and sharing teaching approaches in reading and writing, with each school working on specific developments points. The school business managers and administrators are working together to rationalise and streamline administrative processes and the schools are sharing performance management systems.

The financial analysis which accompanies the federation proposal presents potential savings to the schools and a case for sustainability. The figures are now based on accurate calculations, including projected number on roll, and demonstrate an increase in the proportion of expenditure targeted at teaching and learning. The improvements are small,

from 73% of the total spend in the current financial year to 75% over the next two financial years. This is above the local authority average of 73.4%.

The school's financial sustainability is dependent upon operational subsidy funding currently built into Shropshire's local funding formula. The Department for Education is currently consulting on the proposal to develop a national school based funding formula with reduced flexibility at a local level. The federation of Stiperstones CE and Chirbury CE primary schools will need to demonstrate a response to this additional financial pressure in its future planning, and can expect the local authority to monitor this closely.

The schools have conducted a full six week consultation with stakeholders which is a statutory requirement prior to federation. A total of 97 responses were received from stakeholders for both schools, and all were unreservedly positive.

This proposal involves two schools with numbers on roll of 26 and 66 at the time of the 2011 school census. Chirbury CE Primary School has a history of working in collaboration with a group of schools and Stiperstones CE Primary School has recently explored the advantages of collaboration, including through federation. The proposal welcomes the idea that other partner schools might be identified in the future.

6 Financial Implications

Revenue

As detailed in the report to Cabinet on 4 May 2011, the closure of Stiperstones CE Primary School will result in funding being redistributed to other Shropshire schools. The proposals would result in £76,155 in additional funding to schools receiving pupils from Stiperstones. Net of the provision made for funding home to school transport, an additional £61,095 would be available for redistribution through the Dedicated Schools Budget to improve teaching and learning across Shropshire schools.

These savings would not be realised if Cabinet decides not to proceed with the closure. Federation does not allow savings to be made by the local authority for the benefit of all pupils in Shropshire. Any savings made through increasing cost effectiveness are retained by the schools in the federation.

Capital

There is sufficient space in Minsterley Primary School if all the accommodation is used to its maximum capacity to admit all the pupils projected to attend Stiperstones CE Primary School in August 2012 along with the pupils who would normally attend Minsterley Primary School. However, Minsterley village is likely to expand slightly in the period between now and 2026 such that an additional classroom might have been needed regardless of the outcome of the consultation and so it is proposed to create an additional classroom as part of these proposals, which would fill up over time with pupils from any future development. The cost of the additional classroom is estimated at £150,000.

There is a proposal from one developer to build a large housing estate of around 200 homes on land in Minsterley. The Parish Council responded to the initial consultation on the Local Development Framework to say that they would be in favour of this development provided there was a new primary school and water treatment plant in the village as a result. There were other responses in favour and opposing a development of this size. It is possible that a

development on this scale would require major redevelopment of the current Minsterley Primary School either on its current site or on a new site provided as part of the development. However, this does not have any bearing on the current proposals as the numbers of children from a development of the proposed size would require this response regardless of whether or not the proposals for Stiperstones CE Primary School proceed.

No capital receipt would be forthcoming, as the site of Stiperstones CE Primary School is not owned by the Council.

There would be no immediate capital implications if Cabinet agrees not to proceed with the Notices. However, as noted above, there would be a need at some stage to provide an additional classroom for Minsterley School as a result of planned housing growth.

7 Conclusion

The federation proposals brought forward by Stiperstones CE Primary and Chirbury CE Primary Schools have been carefully considered with regard to their viability and transfer of funding to frontline education.

The federation plans are based on local authority estimates for number on roll, present accurate financial information, show an increased level of spending on teaching and learning and focus on school improvement. They are therefore judged as likely to meet the required criteria in the medium term. The cost efficiencies are relatively small when set against the funding that would be available to other schools through closure. The current plans are also dependent on continued funding through the operational subsidy funding. However, the plans are judged to be sufficiently robust to meet current budget constraints and to have some potential for sustainability, especially if a larger number of schools become involved in the federation.

As a result of this analysis, the Corporate Director – People's Services advises Cabinet that it is believed that the federation proposals may provide a viable, sustainable and cost effective solution to the issues identified in the report to Cabinet on 4 May.

The information above and in the appendices shows that:

- (1) Stiperstones CE Primary School as a stand alone institution meets the criteria set out in the school organisation policy and criteria as a school which, due to changing circumstances, is no longer viable in the current network of schools.
- (2) However, the proposed federation with Chirbury CE Primary School may offer a sustainable financial model to secure the future of the school when fully implemented.

It is therefore recommended that the Cabinet determines not to proceed with the closure of Stiperstones CE Primary School within the current proposals and continues to monitor how the federation develops its educational provision, outcomes for pupils and financial viability.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Report to Cabinet – 10 November 2010

Report to Council – 11 November 2010

Report to Cabinet – 4 May 2011

Report to Cabinet - 20 July 2011

Closing a Maintained School A guide for Local Authorities and Governing Bodies (Department for Children, Schools and Families)

Education and Inspections Act 2006

Responses to Pre-Statutory and Statutory Consultations (filed in Member's Library)

Human Rights Act Appraisal

The Human Rights Act 1998 states (Article 2 of the First Protocol) that no person shall be denied the right to education. However, there is no requirement on the Council to provide a school of a particular type or character (including religious character) or a right to a place within a specific maintained school. The decision not to close Stiperstones Primary School but to federate with Chirbury School should have no impact on any pupil's or parent's educational or other human rights.

Environmental Appraisal

An environmental impact appraisal was conducted through the pre-statutory consultation phase and reported to Cabinet on 4 May. Further information is included in the information for decision makers. There are no environmental reasons why the proposals should not proceed.

Risk Management Appraisal

If the Council takes no action on school organisation matters, there is a risk that educational improvement in Shropshire will slow or reverse, as too much of the available resources will be spent on maintaining the inefficient use of buildings and subsidising unfilled places.

Community / Consultations Appraisal

The Independent Policy Commission undertook a public consultation in coming to its recommendations, which included producing a new educational vision, school organisation policy and criteria. The Council developed a draft vision, policy and criteria in consultation with schools and through the mechanism of a Cross Party Task and Finish Group. The council then consulted on the draft vision, policy and criteria which underpins this report during Summer 2010. The vision, policy and criteria were approved by Cabinet and Council on 10 and 11 November 2010.

The Council then undertook a series of local review meetings during December 2010 and January 2011, which provided evidence and suggestions for the Cabinet paper on 15 February which led to the current consultation. The current consultation is Stage 1 (pre-statutory consultation) in the DfE process for school organisation changes, and has been undertaken in accordance with statutory and non-statutory guidance. The evidence underpinning the proposals was published in the Cabinet report of 15 February. The official consultation period was from 28 February until the 8 April. A supplementary consultation document for parents and carers was produced just after the start of the official six week consultation period of consultation, and at the same time updated data was circulated to schools. School were asked to gather the views of their parents through their normal consultation arrangements. Meetings were held at each directly affected school with school staff, governors and interested members of the community (including, particularly, parents).

On 4 May, Cabinet considered the outcomes from the pre-statutory consultation and agreed to proceed to publish Statutory Notices. Notices were published in the Shropshire Star, and displayed on the school premises and in the Shirehall on 16 May 2011.

At each stage, the Council has publicised the email address, postal address and telephone numbers for responses through the local press and broadcast media, on the Council website, at the meetings and in the supplementary consultation document.

Cabinet Member

Cllr. Cecelia Motley

Local Members

Cllr. Heather Kidd

Appendices

- A. Copy of all Cabinet documentation relating to the proposed closure of Lydbury North CE Primary School
- B. Key criteria to assess the business case for federation of a school which is under consideration for closure