Committee and Date	Item
Council Date: 11 November 2010 Time: 12 noon	Public

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NEW SHROPSHIRE SCHOOLS VISION AND ORGANISATION POLICY

Summary

Council is asked to consider feedback from extensive consultation on proposals for a new vision for Shropshire learners and proposals for a new school organisation policy. The consultation period ended on 17 September 2010. The Safe and Confident Communities Scrutiny Committee met on 20 October 2010 to review consultation outcomes and provide suggestions help develop this policy. The Committee noted the cross-party involvement in developing the vision, principles and criteria. It was accepted that doing nothing was not an option. The revised recommendations were proposed, seconded and agreed.

Cabinet on 10 November will decide whether to accept, reject or propose changes to the new vision and school organisation policy included in Appendix B. These proposals have taken into account the views of young people, staff, governors, parents, partners, members of the public and local town and parish councils.

If Council approves the new school organisation policy, subject to any amendments, officers will ask Cabinet to approve on 24 November 2010 the next mandatory phase of the process which requires schools, stakeholders and partners to consider how best to address the challenges faced in their local area. School and local area data will be published along with information packs for schools to consider options and benefits for collaboration and partnering.

Recommendations

1. To consider the outcomes of consultation contained within this report, including amendments set out in paragraph 22 and Appendix B, and consider any further amendments and/ or additions made by Cabinet on 10 November 2010.

2. To approve, amend or reject the recommendations agreed by Cabinet on 10 November 2010 (Appendix D) on 20 October 2010.

3. To note and approve the next stages of the school organisation process and timetable as outlined in Appendix C.

Background

1. On 19 May 2010 Cabinet approved a sixteen week consultation process to discuss and refine the proposed new education vision and a new set of principles and criteria proposed for schools organisation policy in Shropshire. It was noted that these proposals had been influenced by findings and recommendations of the Independent Policy Commission. Consultation sessions involving schools, stakeholders and partners had been undertaken autumn 2009 and spring term 2010, including one specifically dealing with financial and funding aspects. This pre-statutory consultation period provided a number of opportunities for all interested parties to engage in the process.

2. Council officers along with the Leader of the Council and Chair of Shropshire Schools Governors' Forum (SSGF) undertook three area meetings in June 2010 in the north, centre and south of the county. These meetings were exceptionally well attended by headteachers, governors, Elected Members, parish and town councillors and trade union representatives. The number of attendees is recorded in Appendix A.

3. These sessions were designed to be informative but in particular participative providing opportunity for attendees to discuss in groups each aspect of the proposed vision and the proposed school organisation principles and criteria for primary and secondary school organisation. Focus was also given to the opportunities and merits of schools collaborating and partnering over a range of key areas and activities to improve outcomes for children, relieve the burden of management and administration, and to explore more effective and efficient ways of working across the key stages of education.

4. Feedback from these sessions was very good. Attendees were asked to comment on the event as a whole, the presentation material, the group interaction, the clarity of information, the opportunity to hear the views of others and the ability to interact, ask questions and share ideas. A file containing all consultation responses has been placed in the Members' Library.

5. Members of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee were asked on 7 July 2010 to consider this initial feedback and work together in groups to consider any gaps and/ or obstacles that required further information and analysis. This helped to develop the school organisation policy and seek views, especially from co-opted members, on how best to engage with partners and stakeholders as part of this process, particularly children and young people.

6. Further consultation sessions were organised for parent governors, members of the public and a focus group involving representative members of the Shropshire Youth Parliament and Speak Out groups.

7. Further opportunities for people to register their thoughts and comments were accommodated via a dedicated webpage, email address and a telephone contact number at the Council's customer contact centre. The website included an online survey that asked for views on the proposed vision as a whole and the principles and criteria that underpin the new school organisation policy. The Council continues to receive views and enquiries via

these channels and will seek to further promote and provide information via the website and the Shropshire Learning Gateway.

8. Some of the responses offer possible solutions to the funding issue, e.g. potential amalgamation, alternative use of school sites to generate income. A number of responses are specific to their local school and their concerns over possible re-structuring, and several asked for further information about the vision and details of the public meetings.

Evaluation summary

9. The consultation exercise set out the educational, demographic and economic challenges that the Council, schools, education providers, pupils and staff face. These were considered significant when the consultation period was launched back in May 2010. Council must consider the impact on the education and schools budget when the Department for Education provides the detailed grant allocations for schools, early years and local government for 2011-12 in December. This follows the Comprehensive Spending Review announcment on 20th October 2010. Pressures can therefore be considered to be acute as funding becomes scarce, pupil population continues to fall, school buildings and facilities continue to deteriorate, and schools find it increasing difficult to recruit, retain, train and develop staff in particular those directly engaged in leadership, teaching and learning.

10. The Independent Policy Commission reported in July 2009 that the financial position of Shropshire schools was becoming unsustainable. Furthermore it reported that the local schools funding formula required a comprehensive review to deal with perceived disparities in funding levels between schools. This is being addressed by Shropshire Council, in association with the School Forum, and will be incorporated into further rounds of school organisation consultation.

11. It is not therefore unsurprising that a strong acknowledgement was registered during consultation that no change is not an option. It is evident that people recognise that a clear strategy for change and new school organisation principles and models that support collaboration and partnership, along with new innovative ways of maximising the use of schools and their facilities in their local communities, is required in Shropshire.

12. The opinion of young people consulted in September 2010 heavily supported this. They felt that teachers should share more expertise between Primary and Secondary schools particularly in the areas of Modern Foreign Languages, Music and Drama. They were interested to explore the potential for campus style all through schooling delivered on the same site. They expressed a clear view that more use of ICT should be made to connect learners with high quality and well trained teachers spreading their knowledge not only across the local area but also across the county. They pointed out that pupils are able to adapt more readily to changes in school organisation and teaching delivery models. It is adults and communities that are more resistant to change.

13. The principal aim to maintain and continue to improve excellent education in Shropshire was universally accepted and seen as essential. The need to

sustain this quality whilst making the most effective use of resources was recognised as another key aim. Placing the needs of learners at the heart of decision making is judged to be imperative. The diversity and mix of learners and the communities in which they live was cited as another important aspect of the vision. Strong support for the further development and exploration of new collaborations and the sharing of staffing, buildings/ facilities and ICT resources was recorded throughout the consultation exercise. Some concern was raised in terms of how achievable every aspect of the vision can be in the current economic climate however most agreed that the ambition of each element of the vision was sound and relevant for Shropshire learners of all ages.

14. Evidence gained from the consultation exercise demonstrates broad support for the three categories proposed for reviewing Shropshire schools being Quality and Standards, Effective Use of Resources, and Access to Education. The majority of respondents tended to agree with the statement that a review of all schools and facilities in a local area should happen before individual schools come under scrutiny for re-organisation. Most agreed that the Local Authority should provide local area information for groups of schools to consider and if necessary broker discussions that may lead to greater collaborative and partnership working. Understanding to what degree a local school serves, and is supported by, its local community was also judged to be a key consideration when considered the status of an individual school.

15. It was suggested that for a school to be a hub and key service provider within the community, the levels of deprivation that exist in the area need to be assessed. It was felt that this is likely to have a bearing on the type and level of services that are needed and are provided at a local school. This assessment should include an analysis of the number and socio-economic profile of pupils educated at their nearest and catchment school to ensure that the most vulnerable learners and communities are not unfairly disadvantaged by changes in school structure. This adds weight to emerging view that greater use of schools and their facilities must be considered to benefit the local communities they serve.

16. Many people raised the issue of geography being a huge determinant in the need to review the area as a whole. This refers to the specific problems Shropshire faces given the rural isolation of many of its schools. Most agreed with the proposed criteria for access to education and maximum travel times for primary and secondary aged pupils. Young people agreed that, in most circumstances, no primary aged pupil should travel more than 45 minutes to school.

17. Many people indicated that there is a need for Shropshire to ensure its spending is fair to all pupils, highlighting the current imbalances in funding between schools. The issue of unspent individual school balances was raised with many surprised that £7.7m of reserves are currently held across Shropshire schools. This equates to 5.4% of funding. Just under a third of Shropshire primary schools have held balances over the prescribed threshold level (8% or £10,000 whichever is the greater) for the past 3 consecutive years. The main reasons for this include concerns regarding falling numbers of pupils, the desire to protect staffing and curriculum delivery, and the need to improve and modernise school buildings and facilities. The uncertainty of

the outcomes of the school organisation review was also cited by some which justifies the need to adopt a clear, consistent and fair strategy for change that unlocks the potential to share unspent resources for the benefit of learners across a local and county wide area. To this end some people suggested that decisions regarding school organisation, as a means of protecting and improving what is good and dealing with the school funding deficit, is required sooner rather than later.

18. Cabinet and Council may wish to consider ways of providing initial start up costs to encourage collaboration between schools and between schools and partners in their local communities. The expectation is that these collaborations will lead to more efficient use of resources, reduced spending and greater effectiveness in the long run. Nine million pounds of capital investment funded through prudential borrowing has been earmarked in the Children and Young People's capital budget to support capital spending which will support new models of schooling. Capital financing costs for this investment would need to be met from within the central schools budget. Revenue funds allocated via the funding formula and/ or the use of unspent reserves held jointly by schools in a local area may also support partnerships. Some respondents to the consultation exercise argued that the decision to share resources i.e. staffing, buildings, facilities and financial, and create new models of working must be accepted if this is to work. Any new school organisation and funding model should therefore identify the needs and benefits for learners and take into account the needs of the most vulnerable families in their local communities, rather than serve the ambitions of an individual school that works in isolation from others.

19. Feedback from consultation events held in June and July concluded that collaborations between schools are an inevitable outcome of the strategy for change and new school organisation policy in Shropshire. There was widespread support for exploration of a range of models, and acknowledgement that no single model would work in all contexts. In particular models involving collaboration between small primary schools, larger and smaller primary schools, primary and secondary schools, secondary schools themselves and between schools and colleges were discussed. There was also interest in models which led to shared staffing, for example specialist teachers, teaching assistants, one-to-one tutors, learning mentors and school administrators. Some consideration was given to whether new models of leadership (including governance) could secure sufficient and effective future leaders across the local authority.

20. Some schools appear reluctant to consider shared governance and leadership models which may be a legacy of the culture of competition that league tables, school inspection and individual school governance creates. The ability of parents to exercise choice and to transport their children to schools outside of their local area, although this is relatively unusual in Shropshire, serves to increase the sense of competition. In general, young people are less resistant to new organisation models providing that they have access to high quality teaching and facilities in their local area. Many see the opportunity to meet and work with new peers, and across age and year groups, as a strength not a threat to their school.

21. Members of the Youth Parliament asked whether new models of collaboration and partnership may involve cross border relationships. This question was also addressed by headteachers and governors in the June consultation round. There was a view that schools which are located on the outskirts of the county may find cross border collaboration as a useful way of sharing resources. Elected Members and local authority officers were asked to consider how they may broker cross border models and the alignment of education and school organisation policies adopted by neighbouring authorities.

22. Cabinet members are asked to consider the following amendments and additions to the proposed principles and criteria and amend the proposed school organisation policy accordingly prior to submission to Council:

    a. A common set of principles for reviewing school provision in a local area to be applied allowing information to be considered and rounded judgements made on a fair and consistent basis. Appendix B sets out a new consistent set of principles for Cabinet to consider. Certain differences in criteria remain between the Primary and Secondary sector for example surplus capacity and pupil travel times.

    b. Analysis of the extent to which a school provides for local youngsters or those outside the catchment area. For example, local area data should include an analysis of local area deprivation indices, an analysis of in and out of area children, and an analysis of modes of travel to each school.

    c. That school organisation criteria includes an explicit audit and review of an individual school's role and use as an asset that integrates and serves its local community before any decision is taken to change its status. This should include an environmental impact assessment.

    d. That a review of the key performance indicators for an area and an individual school should cover a three year period to establish an aggregated assessment of performance.

Next steps

23. The next steps of the school organisation policy process are set out in table B and Appendix C. Council officers will issue data and information for all sixteen local areas[1] of the county. The school organisation criteria, once approved by Council, and school level data associated with this, will help to identify the local areas that face the greatest challenges and pressures in the short to medium term. The Council intends to undertake a rolling programme of support for all schools to continue to explore new and more effective ways of working. This may lead the Council to pursue different structural solutions with new governance, management and organisation of schools in local areas being proposed.

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[1] Local area is defined as a secondary school catchment area. The whole of the central Shrewsbury area, including all secondary schools, shall be considered as a single local area.

24. The Corporate Director of People will make arrangements for a team of local authority officers, working closely with diocesan education officers, to provide support and information for schools grouped in their respective secondary school catchment areas. Priority in the next round of consultation beginning 29 November 2010 will be given to those areas which are deemed to face the greatest educational, demographic and financial pressures. Each school's Chair of Governors and headteacher will be issued with:

    a. A summary of the pressures, issues and challenges faced in their local area including school and community data analyses.

    b. Data sets will be categorised in accordance with approved school organisation criteria and include further information in a consistent and transparent format that schools may find useful to assess current provision, pressures, and options for change in their area.

    c. Information regarding new collaborative and partnership models that governors and headteachers may wish to explore in consultation with pupils, parents, staff, staff representatives, partners, and their local community.

    d. Named contact officers/ experts for their local area who will provide dedicated advice and support. This will include a community liaison officer to foster closer links with the local and wider area community.

    e. Information published via electronic channels that will include county wide and local area information and useful links to material being developed both within and outside of Shropshire. Groups of schools will receive support and advice to develop their own means of sharing and disseminating information.

25. The Cross Party School Organisation Task and Finish Group chaired by the Leader of the Council met on 13 September 2010 and again on 1 November 2010 to consider consultation feedback and consider the next stages of the school organisation process. This group will continue to meet on a monthly basis to help plan and monitor the progress of the programme and advise how best to communicate key clear, consistent and regular messages and information to all key stakeholders and partners.

26. Cabinet will report its recommendations to Council on 11 November 2010. These will take into account the recommendations made by the Safe and Confident Communities Scrutiny Committee. Council will have the opportunity to vote to accept, amend or reject Cabinet's recommendations. The Local Authority will embark on the next mandatory stage of the school organisation process following Council's decision to proceed or otherwise.

27. The next consultation period will begin on 29 November 2010 and ends on 21 January 2011. Consultation on proposed changes to the Local Schools Funding Formula will run concurrently having been considered extensively through the summer and autumn terms by the Shropshire Schools' Forum and its funding formula sub group. This group comprises of officers, headteachers, and governor representatives of each sector of Shropshire schools.

28. Table B below outlines the next steps in the process. Further detail is contained in Appendix C.

Table B – Summary process and timetable

Actions	Date(s)
Policy stage (P2)	
Scrutiny Committee considers consultation feedback and makes recommendations to Cabinet.	20/10/10
Local area data and briefing materials published for schools and partners to consider pressures in their area.	8/11/2010 – 22/11/10
Cabinet considers and approves policy proposals taking into account the views of Scrutiny.	10/11/2010
Council approves new school organisation policy subject to any amendments.	11/11/2010
Cabinet receives report from the Corporate Director of People identifying the areas where the educational, financial and demographic pressures are most intense and embarks on a programme of local area reviews.	24/11/2010
Mandatory consultation (M1)	
Local area reviews commence across the county with high priority areas identified for intensive officer **support**	29/11/2010
Consultation begins regarding proposed principles and criteria for the new Local Schools Funding Formula.	29/11/2010
Report to Cabinet on the outcomes of the first round of local area reviews and formula funding consultation.	16/2/2011
Mandatory consultation (M2)	
Consultation on proposals for any changes in school organisation in a local area.	28/2 – 8/4/2011
Briefing provided for local Members, headteachers and governors following feedback from schools affected.	19/4-26/4/2011
A report on the consultation on each proposal will be made to Cabinet. Cabinet can decide whether to proceed with or cease the process.	4/5/2011
Scrutiny Committee considers the process and decision making undertaken to date	11/5/2011
Statutory Consultation (S1)	
The Council publishes formal proposals to change the organisation of schools in an area. A statutory six week representation period follows. This cannot be shortened or lengthened.	16/5/2011 – 24/6/11
Confidential briefing provided for local Members, headteachers and governors of school/s affected.	4/7-12/7/2011
Report to Cabinet to decide on proposals within two months after the end of the period of representation otherwise decisions fall to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator. Statutory notices issued.	20/7/2011

29. The findings, outcomes and recommendations of the local schools' funding formula review play an important part in the school organisation process. This will allow each school, and groups of schools within a local area, to consider the proposed funding formula changes and how this may influence decisions regarding new models of working. Any transition to a new funding formula will

phased over a two to three year period and may begin in April 2011 depending on decisions taken by Cabinet and Council.

30. Council officers are preparing a communication plan for the next stages of the school organisation process. Internal and external communications is vital to provide clear, consistent and regular information to all parties concerned. It identifies key publicity events and milestones. All Elected Members and the local media will receive regular briefings. The role and involvement of every local Elected Member is hugely important in this process. Members of the public will have opportunity to raise questions and request further information via the published routes. This will involve a variety of channels including electronic and hard copy literature.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)
Report of the Independent Policy Commission published in July 2009 on Primary School Organisation in Shropshire.

Cabinet papers dated 19 May 2010 that set out the original proposals for a new vision for education and new Primary and Secondary schools organisation policies, principles and criteria.

Human Rights Act Appraisal
The recommendations contained in this report are compatible with the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998.

Environmental Appraisal
No assessment undertaken at this point but will feature throughout the school organisation review phase.

Risk Management Appraisal
Risks shall be assessed and dealt with by officers and Elected Members via the Cross Party School Organisation Task and Finish Group and the Safe and Confident Communities Scrutiny Committee.

Community / Consultations Appraisal
Consultation has and will continue to take place with partners and stakeholders including schools, colleges, early years providers, parents and carers, children and young people, staff and their representatives, and members of the public.

Cabinet Member

Cllr Aggie Caesar-Homden

Local Member

All Members

Appendices
Appendix A – Consultation attendee analysis.

Appendix B – Updated Principles and Criteria for reviewing school provision.

Appendix C – School organisation process and timetable.

Appendix D – Safe and Confident Communities Scrutiny Committee recommendations (20th October 2010).

Appendix E – A Vision for Shropshire Learners