



<u>Committee and Date</u>	<u>Item</u>
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## **NEW SHROPSHIRE SCHOOLS VISION AND ORGANISATION POLICY**

### **Summary**

In July 2009 The Independent Policy Commission published its report on Primary school organisation in Shropshire and recommended that Shropshire Council should develop a new vision for Shropshire schools in partnership with each other and their wider community. Cabinet is asked to consider a new vision for Shropshire schools following discussion and feedback from an extensive series of area consultation meetings undertaken in the autumn and spring terms involving headteachers, governors, partners, and parent representatives.

The proposed new vision and consultation timeline (Appendices A and B) along with proposed principles and criteria for Primary and Secondary school organisation (Appendices C and D) have been considered in depth by a Cross-Party Task and Finish group comprising of local authority officers and Elected Member representatives from all three political parties. This group has met at regular intervals from July 2009 through to May 2010, and support the recommendations contained in this report.

### **Recommendations**

1. To approve the next stage of county-wide consultation to develop and refine the proposed new education vision, a revised set of principles and criteria proposed for Primary school organisation, and new principles and criteria proposed for Secondary schools organisation in Shropshire.
2. Cabinet is asked to comment on the policy consultation process and timetable planned for 16 weeks ensuring that all school staff, partners, parents and carers, pupils, governors, community leaders, and the general public have the opportunity to help shape the future of education in Shropshire and build an effective and viable 21<sup>st</sup> century schools system.

### **Background**

1. In June 2008 Shropshire Council invited an Independent Policy Commission, chaired by Neil Kinghan, to undertake a thorough review of primary school organisation in Shropshire. The review commenced on 23 June 2009 and collected an extensive amount of written and oral evidence involving local politicians; school leaders, staff and governors; unitary, district and parish

councillors; partners including the dioceses of Lichfield and Hereford; and key stakeholders including parents, young people and members of the public. The Commission visited twelve Shropshire primary schools and three schools maintained by Devon County Council, one of Shropshire's statistical neighbours.

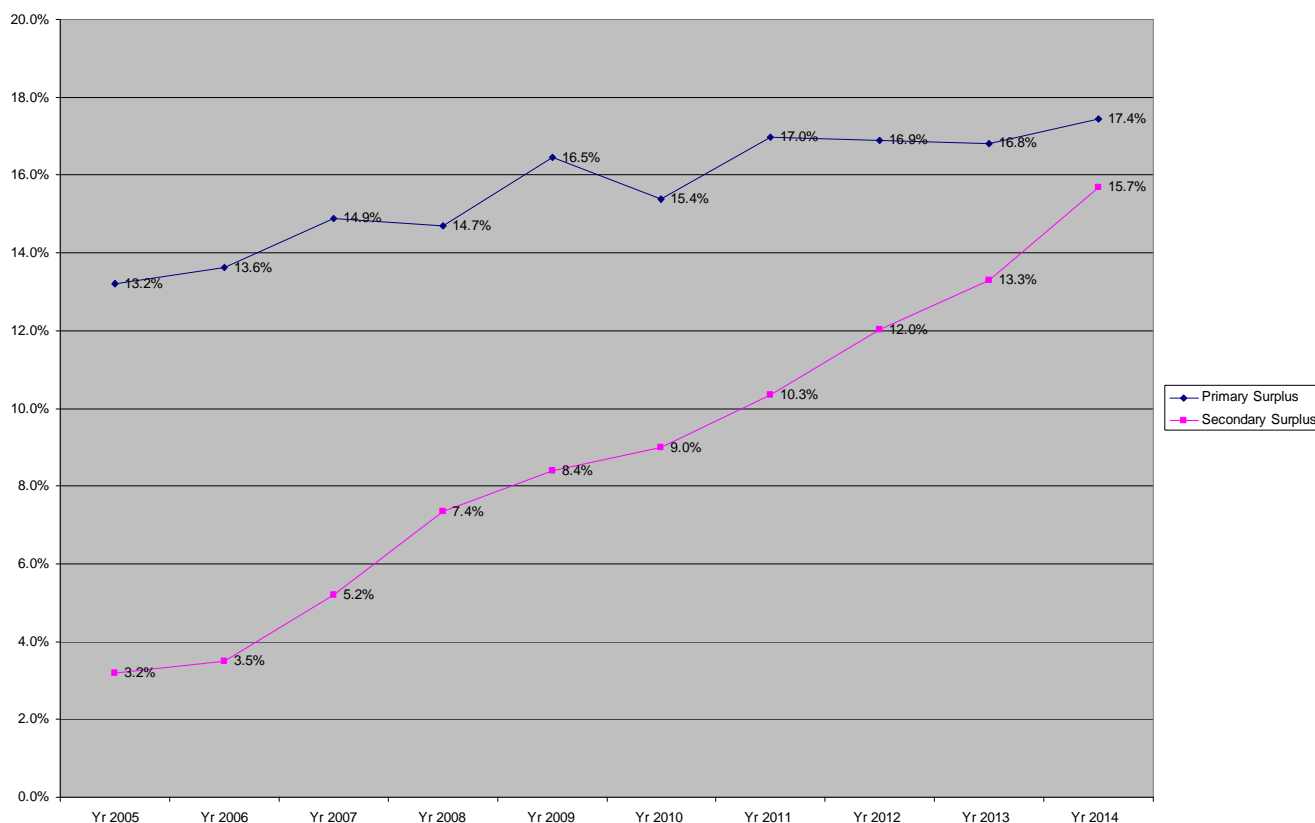
2. The Commission set out a series of recommendations that included:
  - Shropshire Council should develop a new vision for Shropshire schools in partnership with each other and the wider community.
  - Shropshire Council should take a leadership role in actively promoting the development of partnerships, including federations, and other collaborative approaches.
  - Shropshire Council should examine the relationship between all its secondary and primary schools including the scope for re-organising individual secondary schools.
  - Shropshire Council should undertake a review of its local funding formula given that the position of the largest schools in the funding formula could become unsustainable. A move to a new formula should be implemented over three years to avoid sudden or unexpected impacts for individual schools.
  - Shropshire Council considers new factors for school closure including where the number of pupils on roll in a primary school, on average, has fallen during a year to 50.
  - Those debating primary school organisation should accept that the Council's methodology and use of data provide a good and sound basis for forecasting pupil numbers and estimating the need for primary school places.
  - Any future proposals for school reorganisation to be considered by Shropshire Council should include an explicit assessment of the views of parents of all the children affected by the proposals, to be set alongside other factors.
3. The Commission concluded that educational performance in Shropshire is good. The high level of performance is a tribute to the quality and teaching in Shropshire schools with strong and effective support provided by officers and Elected Members of the council, and in particular school staff, parents, governors and volunteers. It recognised, however, that public expenditure will become more tightly constrained in the future and that the existing funding gap amounting to £1m annually for schools in Shropshire may widen further.
4. The emphasis on partnership and collaboration between schools within their wider community will therefore need to become stronger with emphasis placed on planning for children's education as a continuum from the age of 0 through to 19. The Commission stated that more effective partnerships and collaborations will provide scope for the more efficient use of resources whilst pooling expertise, knowledge and skills to improve opportunities for learners of all ages and all abilities. Collaboration, if well planned and embraced by partners, can help to ease the workload demands placed on schools leaders and their staff, and add value to the curriculum and extended services offer for pupils, parents and the local community. It is widely recognised that new innovative solutions are needed to address current recruitment, retention and staff development issues faced by an increasing number of schools in Shropshire.

5. Following the publication of the Commission's report in July 2009 Shropshire Council officers and the Lead Member for Children and Young People's Services embarked on an extensive round of consultation events held around the county that involved local schools, partners and stakeholders to develop a new draft vision for education. Various models of informal and formal partnership models were considered along with data sets for individual schools grouped within the north, central and south areas of Shropshire. A specific meeting attended by over 120 headteachers and governors was held on 25 November 2009 to consider the national and local financial context for Shropshire schools and an in-depth explanation of the Children and Young People's budgetary and local school funding formula framework. This open and honest dialogue has been very well received and helped to raise people's understanding of the education and financial viability challenges that Shropshire Council and its schools face.
6. It is widely acknowledged that the falling pupil demography in Shropshire, combined with the Council's current standing as one of the bottom five worst funded education authorities, is unlikely to improve in the short to medium term. The Authority has taken steps to address the funding gap between the nationally allocated Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and locally distributed Individual Schools Budget by creating seven new Primary schools via largely, but not exclusively, infant and junior school amalgamations. This has resulted in full year savings of £855K in financial year 2010/11. The continuing decline in pupil numbers, however, continues to increase the number of surplus places in Shropshire primary and secondary schools. Funding schools at levels below actual pay and price inflation to address the financial gap results in less funding being allocated to pupils across the entire schools network.
7. In financial year 2010-11 £2.5m of funding has been allocated within the local funding formula to 75 schools (56% of all primary schools) with number on roll below 270 to help protect the level of staff required to teach the national curriculum and to locally manage individual schools. For smaller primary schools with number on roll less than 125 (50 schools) this is necessary to release their headteacher from their teaching commitment to lead the school. It is accepted however that cash protections are often insufficient to cover both the time and cost commitment. £250K has been allocated to nine secondary schools with less than 600 pupils on roll where lower pupil numbers generate insufficient funds to deliver the whole curriculum in their individual school. This continues to put pressure on the level of funds allocated across the whole education system and in particular for larger primary and secondary schools who are not eligible for formula funding protections.
8. In financial year 2009-10 the funds required to maintain Shropshire's current network of schools fell £1m short of the 87% proportion of ring fenced DSG allocated to schools. The position improved slightly in financial year 2010-11 due to a small increase in reception-aged children, additional pupil movements from the independent schools' sector to local authority schools, and the decision by Government not to dis-apply dual registration of pupils in pupil referral units. The Authority was also able to release one off additional funding of £350K to address the DSG funding gap by using specific grant for the extended early years offer for 3 and 4 year olds.

9. There is little scope to increase the proportion of DSG allocated to schools given that centrally managed budgets allow provision for pupils in and out of county with statements of special educational needs (SEN), payments for early years providers, provision of free school meals and contribution to paid meals, schools termination of employment costs and costs associated with school staff maternity leave and other absences. The budget overspend for fees for pupils at independent special schools alone amounted to £930K in financial year 2009-10.

10. In January 2010 36,888 pupils were registered in Shropshire primary and secondary schools. This equates to 2,560 fewer pupils (-6.5%) compared to numbers registered in 2005. The reduction in numbers is apportioned approximately 1,500 Primary school children and just under 1,000 educated in secondary schools. However with primary and secondary pupil numbers forecast to reduce to 34,860 (-17.3%) by 2014, larger shortfalls are predicted in the secondary sector when 2,400 fewer pupils are forecast compared with those registered in secondary schools in 2005. The corresponding increase in unfilled/surplus places across all Shropshire maintained schools is shown in the chart below.

Comparison of Primary and Secondary schools surplus capacity (10 yrs)



11. The Authority monitors with health partners the number of known children born each year in Shropshire to inform forecasts up to 2014 for Primary schools and 2017 for secondary schools. Similarly, population change forecasts supplied by the Office for National Statistics are used to predict longer term pupil number projections taking into account fertility rates and long term inward migration of

families into Shropshire. This helps to inform the strategic demand for public services including school places up to 2025.

12. Although the UK population is forecast to increase Shropshire has had much lower long term inward migration of families compared with city areas along with lower fertility rates; a similar trend in other rural authorities. Shropshire also has a much lower proportion of its population composed of women of child-bearing age. Increases in Shropshire's population and pupil numbers are forecast to take place later than the overall national position, and the percentage increase from the minimum point, when reached, is forecast to be lower. The minimum threshold in primary pupil numbers will not be reached until 2011 (as opposed to 2008 nationally) and in secondary until 2014 (which is more in line with national figures). The Authority remains mindful of the need to continue to monitor birth rates and population trends closely and adjust pupil forecasts accordingly.
13. It is equally important to align Shropshire's strategic plan for school places with proposed plans for housing and economic growth in local areas of the county as part of the Local Development Framework. School place planning methodology currently takes account of outline and known planning permissions and existing growth allocations. Proposed new site allocations currently under consultation as part of the Site allocation and management development plan (SAMDEV) will be considered to ensure that areas earmarked for growth in Shropshire are prioritised for school place capital investment where appropriate.
14. The Authority is aware that there has been no recent announcement due to the General election in respect of the next round of schools capital investment for financial year 2011-12 and beyond. Shropshire Council has been allocated £8.45m up to and including financial year 2010-11 to develop the new amalgamated primary schools. The Authority is also using one school pathfinder grant to build the new £25m William Brookes secondary school and community facilities due to open in September 2010. The Council however is in the last wave of investment for Building Schools for the Future (BSF) and whilst future Government grant to modernise schools is assumed in the Council's capital budget, it is widely predicted to be significantly less than originally anticipated. The outcome of both schools revenue and capital grant allocations for Shropshire Council and its schools from 2011-12 remains unknown at this time.
15. It is very clear therefore that a new schools vision and organisation policy requires a collaborative and partnership approach to address education and financial viability pressures. Increasing the ability to achieve more in partnership is a key driver for changing the way the Local Authority and schools work together. School governing bodies are challenged to look beyond the needs of their own school and community and consider how resources can be shared more effectively and efficiently by working together to maximise progress for today's and future generations of Shropshire learners.
16. There are currently 16 vacant and acting headships in primary schools. This number may rise in future years as the pressure on school leaders intensifies and the cost of attempting to recruit new headteachers increases. Schools are finding specialist teachers harder to recruit. Individual schools are spending large

amounts of their budgets placing recruitment adverts often more than once which drains both time and cost in the process.

17. School governors have the opportunity within their local area to seek support from other schools and colleges to share leadership including the appointment of executive headships; shared deployment of specialist staff including teachers, support staff and business managers; consider joint procurement opportunities; and use ICT more extensively between schools and partners for learning and extended family support services provided within the local community. Effective school partnerships based on local knowledge of joint opportunities, skills, resources, and the needs of children across the wider community can lead to more effective outcomes and better use of resources. This partnership approach is strongly advocated in the recent Government White Papers “Your child, Your schools, Our future: building a 21<sup>st</sup> century schools system”.
18. The recent two day event held on 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> April 2010 titled “Achieving the best through collaboration and developing models of leadership” involved workshops led by representatives from the National College of School Leadership, Devon County Council and Gloucestershire County Council. These workshops were exceptionally well attended by headteachers, governors and partners. Feedback was extremely positive. Some attendees used this opportunity to discuss collaborative opportunities within their local area and between their respective schools and asked local authority officers to provide further information, advice and support to develop discussions of this nature. This may involve grant applications to kick start new collaborative ventures.
19. It is proposed that Cabinet provides approval to begin the next round of the consultation process for schools based on a new education vision (Appendix A) which includes a proposed outline process and timetable (Appendix B). This vision has been developed with a focus group involving local authority officers and headteachers and informed by feedback from the area consultation meetings with all key stakeholders, partners and service users in the autumn and spring terms. This vision has been considered and discussed at regular intervals over the last ten months by a Cross-Party Task and Finish group comprising local authority officers and Elected Members from all three political parties.
20. The vision is underpinned by a revised set of principles and criteria for Primary schools in Shropshire (Appendix C) to replace those previously approved by Shropshire County Council. A new set of principles and criteria for Secondary schools (Appendix D) are also proposed with both to be included, along with the new vision, for widespread consultation covering a period of 16 weeks.
21. The principles and criteria for primary school organisation places emphasis on the need for the Local Authority to provide local area data analyses, based on the criteria listed, and to act as broker for schools in a local area to undertake a local area review. It should be noted that the IPC recommendation to review schools for closure with pupil numbers, on average, less than 50 is not proposed to be included in review criteria at this stage.
22. Local area reviews will consider pupil level, curriculum level, and business management and facilities data, including services provided for and to the local

community. This information considered alongside potential options new collaborative and partnering ventures will allow schools to judge how the quality of teaching and learning and the extended offer of services for pupils, parents and the local community can be enhanced. Schools will be asked to consider new collaborative ways of easing current workload pressures faced by individual schools, in particular headteachers and their staff, including the opportunity for new joint leadership and management models. This may involve cross phase and cross border partnerships with neighbouring briefed and involved accordingly.

23. The Local Authority will act as a commissioner and broker to allow schools the freedom and opportunity to explore the benefits of collaboration and partnering. This will involve providing information regarding various partnership models and funding for headteacher and staff release time to help this process.
24. Members of School Forum will undertake the review of the local schools funding formula and consider the options to fund schools working formally in partnership with one another. The funding formula review process will run in parallel with the school vision and organisation consultation timetable with reports provided for Cabinet on both aspects in the autumn term. Forum will be asked to consider every aspect of the local funding formula ensuring that the level of resources allocated per pupil in larger primary schools is protected in relation to per pupil funding levels for smaller schools. It is recognised that it takes three years to fully implement funding formula changes to dampen the impact of transition on individual school budgets.
25. The proposed new principles and criteria for secondary schools allows scope for re-organising secondary schools where it can be demonstrated that student attainment and achievement can be enhanced, pupil transition planned and supported, and education and community services delivered more effectively and for better value for money in alternative schools and colleges. The review will consider opportunities for collaborative arrangements between secondary schools and colleges in a local area, where relevant, including shared leadership and management, shared teaching and support staff including business managers, and the shared use of IT and physical resources to ensure that maximum use and benefit is derived from the assets available within the local community.
26. The proposed secondary school criteria measure performance and standards along with effective use of resources, measured by minimum size of 600 pupils or less and significant unfilled/ surplus places exceeding 35%, and then considers the accessibility to, and capacity of, alternative secondary schools and education providers to meet the needs of every pupil within the local area. This will include a review of post 16 provision and the need to raise the participation age and deliver the proposed pupil and parent guarantees announced in the recent Government White Paper. The impact on the local community, transport implications and environmental impact will be considered as an important part of this process.
27. The next steps of the proposed consultation process are:

- Launch of a new dedicated website titled “Education for Shropshire” by Friday 14<sup>th</sup> May setting out how and where to engage in further consultation and to provide further information including FAQs;
- Local area meetings (already publicised) to be held on 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> June 2010 to continue face-to-face consultations;
- Further area meetings to be scheduled before schools break for summer;
- Cabinet on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2010 to review evidence and feedback from the consultation process.

28. The Authority recognises the importance of maintaining open, honest and regular dialogue with pupils, parents, school staff, governors, partners, community leaders and members of the public to ensure that everyone who wishes to contribute can be involved. The Council sets a clear ambition for parents to help shape the future of education in Shropshire and build an effective and viable 21<sup>st</sup> century schools system for every child being educated now and for future generations.

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

Independent Policy Commission Report July 2009

Report to Task and Finish Group 10 May 2010

**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

**Risk Management Appraisal**

There are no associated risks

**Community / Consultations Appraisal**

Consultation has been undertaken by the Independent Policy Commission as part of its work and has informed the final report. Further consultation will be undertaken as set out in this report.

**Cabinet Member**

Cllr Cecilia Motley

**Local Member**

All Members

**Appendix**

Appendix A – Final Draft Vision

Appendix B – Proposed Consultation Timetable & Process

Appendix C – Proposed principles and criteria for Primary schools

Appendix D – Proposed principles and criteria for Secondary schools