

CABINET SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 29 JUNE 2006

Report Title: **Consultation on Proposals for the Reduction of Surplus Capacity in Primary Schools in Dover District**

Documents Attached: (a) Relevant Records of Officer Decision with Member Support;

(b) Report to School Organisation Advisory Board, 19 April;

(c) Minute of School Organisation Advisory Board, 19 April.

Purpose of Consideration: To explore particularly the decision-making process about the consultation arrangements on the proposed school closure/amalgamations, and the consultation arrangements themselves.

Possible Decisions: The Constitution (*Appendix 4 Part 8*) provides that the Committee may take one of the following decisions:-

(a) comment to the Chief Executive and Managing Director of Children, Families and Education;

(b) report to the Council;

(c) refer any issues arising from its debate for consideration by the Children, Families and Education Policy Overview Committee or the Cabinet.

Previous Consideration: None.

Background Documents: None.

By: Director - Operations

To: Schools Organisation Advisory Board – 19 April 2006

Subject: PROPOSALS FOR THE REDUCTION OF SURPLUS CAPACITY
IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN DOVER DISTRICT

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report outlines the proposals for reducing surplus primary places in the Dover District to bring them in line with DfES and Audit Commission requirements regarding surplus capacity. They have been developed with reference to the Primary Strategy 2006

Background

1. (1) Birth rates in England and Wales have been falling steadily since the early 1990s and Kent County Council, along with other local authorities, has become increasingly aware of the effect this has had on primary school rolls. The increasing number of surplus school places is already having major implications for funding and consequently the viability of some schools.

(2) As well as having implications for the funding of individual schools, the Audit Commission has calculated that each surplus primary school place costs approximately £300 per annum to maintain (ie overheads that are not saved even when the space is 'mothballed'). With an excess of 12,000 surplus primary school places currently, this is £3m of education money annually currently not being spent on teaching and learning.

(3) In 2004 the County Council decided that it would take steps to deal not only with the problems, but also with the opportunities that this reduction presented.

(4) Following over a year's work by headteachers and officers, a Strategy document containing 50 recommendations, was presented to KCC's Cabinet on 6 February 2006, which was adopted.

(5) As part of the Strategy, Recommendation 27 states that “wherever surplus primary capacity is projected to rise above 7% in any cluster area, proposals should be brought forward to reduce it to 5%”. This is in line with Audit Commission and DfES guidance. The retention of a 5% surplus in any area (rather than zero) is considered to be ‘good practice’ to assist parental preferences being met, and to build in a contingency to deal with any unforeseen short-term increase in pupil numbers (for example a regiment moving). The DfES requires all authorities to report annually on all schools with a 25% surplus, giving justifications why such schools are not being closed or having their net capacity reduced.

(6) Consequently, eleven of the twelve Districts in Kent currently have surplus primary capacity in excess of 7% and this is projected to increase at least over the next five years, officers were asked to bring forward proposals to reduce capacity in each District.

(7) Proposals were requested on a District (rather than a Cluster) basis. In bringing forward proposals, officers were asked to consult with all headteachers and chairs of governors on their appropriateness, to take into full consideration other recommendations in the Primary Strategy, and to have regard to DfES guidelines, for example in relation to rural schools and to those schools with in excess of 25% surplus capacity.

Capacity in Dover District

2. In Dover there are 44 primary schools with a combined capacity of 9717. There are currently 8164 pupils attending these schools giving a surplus capacity of 15.98%. By 2010 it is estimated that the surplus will have risen to 23.18%.

School Name	PAN 2006/07	NET CAPACITY	2006 Roll	Surplus/ Deficit	% Surp/Def (Based on Net Cap)
Aycliffe Community Primary School	30	210	101	109	51.90%
Aylesham Primary School	60	411	221	190	46.23%
Barton Junior School	60	240	205	35	14.58%
Capel-le-Ferne Primary School	28	196	207	-11	-5.61%
Cartwright & Kelsey CEP School	30	210	148	62	29.52%
Charlton CEP School	30	207	211	-4	-1.93%
Deal Parochial CEP School	30	210	214	-4	-1.90%
Dover, St Mary's CEP School	40	280	270	10	3.57%
Downs CEP School, The	60	420	394	26	6.19%
Eastry CE Primary School	30	210	198	12	5.71%
Eythorne Elvington Community Primary School	30	150	126	24	16.00%
Goodnestone CEP School	10	70	55	15	21.43%
Guston CEP School	20	140	109	31	22.14%
Kingsdown & Ringwould CEP School	28	196	204	-8	-4.08%
Langdon Primary School	10	70	52	18	25.71%

Lydden Primary School	12	84	60	24	28.57%
Melbourne Community Primary School	30	210	137	73	34.76%
Mongeham Primary School	60	382	226	156	40.84%
Nonington CEP School	15	104	73	31	29.81%
Northbourne CEP School	20	140	123	17	12.14%
Powell School, The	40	280	191	89	31.79%
Preston Primary School	19	133	118	15	11.28%
Priory Fields School	60	420	359	61	14.52%
Ripple School, The	8	45	41	4	8.89%
River Primary School	60	420	406	14	3.33%
Sandown School	60	420	336	84	20.00%
Sandwich Infant School	56	168	153	15	8.93%
Sandwich Junior School	66	257	208	49	19.07%
Shatterlocks Infant School	60	208	146	62	29.81%
Sholden CEP School	15	105	105	0	0.00%
Sibertswold CEP School	30	192	170	22	11.46%
South Deal Primary School	45	315	137	178	56.51%
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Aylesham	24	142	94	48	33.80%
St Margaret's-at-Cliffe Primary School	30	210	190	20	9.52%
St Martin's School	37	262	254	8	3.05%
St Mary's Catholic School, Deal	30	206	194	12	5.83%
St Radigund's Community Primary School	30	180	143	37	20.56%
St Richard's Catholic Primary School, Dover	30	210	201	9	4.29%
Temple Ewell CEP School	20	140	136	4	2.86%
Vale View Community School	30	210	186	24	11.43%
Warden House Primary School	60	420	396	24	5.71%
Whitfield & Aspen School	51	357	380	-23	-6.44%
Wingham Primary School	30	210	217	-7	-3.33%
Worth Primary School	10	67	69	-2	-2.99%
Totals		9717	8164	1553	15.98%
2008		9717	7812		19.60%
2010 forecast roll and surplus % if no action taken		9717	7465	2252	23.18%

Proposals

3. In order to reduce surplus capacity within the District, seven major proposals requiring statutory proposals are required. They are:

- (a) Amalgamate South Deal and Mongeham Primary schools;
- (b) Amalgamate Melbourne Community and the Powell Schools;
- (c) Close St Josephs's Catholic Primary school, Aylesham;
- (d) Close St Radigund's Primary School
- (e) Close Langdon School;
- (f) Close Goodnestone;
- (g) Close The Ripple School.

South Deal Primary School/Mongeham Primary School – Consult on Amalgamation

Attached as Appendix 1 is a map showing the location of the two schools and Appendix 2 shows the current pupil distribution.

Background

3.1 (1) **South Deal** Primary School currently has 137 Children on roll against a net capacity of 315. The majority of the children live within a one mile radius of the school. The school serves a community with a high degree of disadvantage and the number of children eligible for Free School Meals is well above the national average. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is broadly in line with national averages at around 23%.

(2) **Mongeham** Primary School currently has 226 Children on roll against a net capacity of 382. The school serves a mixed community with 16.6% of children eligible for Free School Meals and approximately 24% of children with special educational needs. The majority of pupils live within a one mile radius of the school with some living between 1 – 2 miles and a small number beyond that.

School Effectiveness

(3) **South Deal** - The school went into Special Measures in January 2003 and was removed from Special Measures in December 2004. Standards have generally improved over the last 3 years and Contextual Value Added scores are now generally in line with or only marginally below national averages.

(4) **Mongeham** - Contextual Value Added scores are below national averages. Mongeham School has faced particularly difficult challenges during the last three years and overall standards have generally declined during this period. The impact of falling rolls has required robust management action to reduce staffing levels and contain costs.

The rationale for amalgamation

(5) Both Mongeham and South Deal have significant surplus capacity and rolls which have declined considerably in recent years. Both schools are therefore facing the challenge of organising, managing and delivering the curriculum entitlement within diminishing resources. The natural catchment areas of the two schools overlaps and they are approximately 0.9 miles apart by road. The building stock at both schools is relatively good but the Mongeham site is bigger and far more adaptable with minimal cost as a host site for an amalgamated school. Amalgamation would offer the potential for the new school with higher numbers to raise standards increasing organisational and curriculum flexibility as well as establishing a more viable and sustainable organisational entity. Amalgamation guarantees a place at the new school for all children who currently attend both South Deal and Mongeham schools. Parents may still express a preference for an alternative school should they wish to do so.

Resource Implications

(6) Both of the existing schools have good sites and building stock. Physically either school could accommodate the proposed new school with a PAN of 45. Mongeham is the bigger site and would provide more flexible options for future expansion should the need arise.

(7) If the proposal to amalgamate is approved and implemented, an interim governing body would be established prior to the implementation date. The interim governing body would include representation from both existing governing bodies and would be responsible for appointing a headteacher and establishing a staffing structure. It is not therefore possible at this stage to quantify the implications for staffing the new school. There would clearly be savings in the reduction of one headteacher post and savings on premises related costs and overheads. These cannot be quantified precisely at this stage.

(8) With a continuing decline in pupil numbers, it is possible that the newly amalgamated school would reduce to a 1FE school in the medium term. The Mongeham site would have sufficient capacity to house a Children's Centre, in addition to a 1FE school. This would meet a community need and complement the educational provision offered by the amalgamated school subject to the outcome of any future consultation. The Mongeham site can be considered as a potential location for a Children's Centre in Round 2 of the Children's Centre development. This represents an alternative option to placing a Children's Centre on the South Deal site as the area would not need Children's Centres on both locations.

(9) An alternative proposal has been received from the South Deal Action Group which essentially suggests the maintenance of South Deal School as a separate entity and co-location on the site of the Children's Centre, alongside the school. This proposal does not appear to address the issue of surplus capacity at Mongeham School but can certainly be considered as part of a process of public consultation.

Other issues

(10) A private pre-school provision has been located on the site of South Deal since September 2005 and occupies the site on a private lettings basis. There are no legal or contractual constraints posed by this arrangement. It was made clear to the school and the private provider prior to occupation that there may be a public consultation on the future of the school and that long term tenure could not be guaranteed.

Conclusion

(11) If Mongeham and South Deal schools were amalgamated on the Mongeham site then the South Deal site could be declared surplus to requirements and would potentially be available for community use or yield a capital receipt.

Primary Strategy Recommendations

(12) This proposal is consistent with recommendations 18, 27, 28, 29, and 32 of the Primary Strategy 2006.

Melbourne Community Primary School/The Powell School – Consult on Amalgamation

Attached as Appendix 3 is a map showing the location of the two schools and Appendix 4 shows the current pupil distribution.

Background

3.2 (1) **Melbourne** Community Primary School is situated on the Buckland Estate in Dover which is the principal community served by the school. The school currently has 137 Pupils on roll against a net capacity of 210. There is also a maintained nursery unit in a detached specialist building on the site. The nursery provides 52 pre school places of which 24 are currently taken up. The majority of pupils live within one mile of the school although a smaller number live between 1-3 miles away. The school has a high percentage of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (42.3%) and a very high percentage of pupils with special educational needs at around 60%. The school also has a designated unit for physically disabled pupils and KCC purchases six PD places annually.

(2) **The Powell** School is also located on the Buckland Estate, approximately 0.7 miles from Melbourne School which is its nearest neighbour. The school currently has 191 pupils on roll against a net capacity of 280. The Powell School has 32.4% of pupils eligible for Free School Meals and 37.3% of pupils with special educational needs.

School Effectiveness

(3) **Melbourne** School - Standards at the school have improved from a very low base in 2003 but with the exception of science remain significantly below national averages. Value added scores have improved during the same period and are now in line with or above national averages.

(4) **The Powell** School - Standards are broadly in line with national averages. Contextual Value Added scores are good and above national averages in all areas except Maths where they are marginally below the national average.

Rationale for the Proposal

(5) Both schools face challenges posed by significant levels of surplus capacity in each case. They serve the same geographic area. Combining both schools would secure sustainable primary provision on the Buckland Estate for the foreseeable future and create a school of 315 pupils offering organisational and curriculum flexibility. Both schools have distinct characteristics and strengths which could be preserved in an amalgamation and form the basis of a really effective and successful community school. The Powell achieves higher academic standards. Melbourne has a deserved reputation for good inclusive practice. These strengths are not mutually exclusive. Amalgamation offers the potential for all children to benefit from the particular strengths of both schools.

Resource Implications

(6) The Powell site is the only realistic location for an amalgamated school, given its much larger area and building stock. Two additional classrooms would need to be built to accommodate a total pupil population of up to 315. The estimated cost of this work is circa. £300k.

(7) Some concern has been expressed about the physical characteristics of the Powell site in terms of its accessibility for physically disabled pupils. Some adaptations would be necessary to improve accessibility at the school.

(8) A major review of special units and designated provisions across the County is currently underway. In due course there will be consultations with the local cluster board and schools in the cluster about the ways in which provision for particular need types may be addressed locally. It is not envisaged that there will be a need to re-establish a new PD unit at a newly amalgamated school. However, the new school would be supported in making adaptations to meet the needs of individual pupils. It is also recognised that there will need to be appropriate specialist support available locally as an outcome from the review.

(9) If the proposal to amalgamate is implemented an interim governing body would need to be established in advance of the implementation date to oversee the transition. The interim governing body would appoint a headteacher for the new school and would then agree a new staffing structure. In advance of that decision it is not possible to quantify exactly the implications for staff. Clearly there would be a reduction in one headteacher post and opportunities for efficiency savings arising from consolidation on a single site. The current headteacher of Melbourne School has announced his intention to retire from the end of this academic year.

Nursery Provision

(10) **Melbourne** School currently has a maintained nursery unit which is significantly undersubscribed. The unit is in purpose built accommodation detached from the main school building. The proposal envisages continuing use of the nursery facility for pre school provision, either as part of a Children's Centre offer or as a base for private pre school provision.

(11) Apart from the nursery unit the remainder of the Melbourne site would be surplus to requirements if the amalgamation were implemented, offering the potential for alternative community use or a capital receipt.

Primary Strategy Recommendations

(12) This proposal is consistent with recommendations 17, 27, 28, 29 and 32 of the Primary Strategy 2006.

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Aylesham – Consult on Closure

Attached as Appendix 5 is a map showing the location of the school and Appendix 6 shows the current pupil distribution.

Background

3.3 (1) St Joseph's Catholic Primary School is a small Aided school located in the former coalfield community of Aylesham. The school has a current roll of 94 against a net capacity of 142. Nearly all of the pupils come from within Aylesham Village with a very small number from up to 3 miles away. Approximately 20% of pupils are eligible for Free School Meals and 46% of pupils have special educational needs.

School Effectiveness

(2) Standards at the school have been consistently below national averages in the last 3 years but have improved in 2005. Value Added scores have improved from a very low base in 2004 and are now broadly at or slightly below national averages except in Maths where they are slightly above the national benchmark.

Rationale for the Proposal

(3) St Joseph's is one of two primary schools serving the Aylesham community. Aylesham Community School is approximately half a mile way and serves the same geographic area. Both schools have significant levels of surplus capacity. Aylesham Community School is bigger than St Joseph's and standards are higher. The Aylesham Community School site is also bigger and the facilities better than St Joseph's School. Amalgamation is not a viable option because of the Aided status of St Joseph's. Consolidation of primary provision within Aylesham within a single school would secure the viability and sustainability of both schools over the medium – long term. The school would benefit from economies of scale and the optimum organisational flexibility which would result. This would potentially have a beneficial impact on standards.

(4) The Aylesham Community School is housed in two formerly separate schools (infants and junior) on a single campus. There is sufficient capacity within the existing school to accommodate 420 pupils (2 FE) which is some 105 more than the combined total roll of the two existing schools in Aylesham. Currently approximately 30% of the pupils at St Joseph's are Catholics.

(5) The three nearest alternative Catholic primary schools by road are St Richard's (Dover) 12 miles, St Thomas' (Canterbury) 9 miles, St Mary's (Deal) 8 miles. There are some places available at each of these schools. Subject to Members' approval, assistance could be provided with transport for children where parents wished to exercise their preference for a denominational education.

(6) Within Aylesham Community School it would be possible to address the faith needs of Catholic children whose parents would prefer their children to receive their education within the local community school rather than leave the village to go to the nearest alternative Catholic school. If parents choose to seek a denominational place for their child but not necessarily a Catholic school place there are a number of places available at Church of England schools within 2-3 miles of Aylesham.

(7) The Archdiocese of Southwark has been consulted on this proposal via the Catholic Schools Commission. The Director of Education for the Catholic Schools Commission has expressed opposition to this proposal on the grounds that there would be no realistic alternative denominational provision for Catholic children in Aylesham, given the distance to the nearest alternative schools. In addition the Catholic Schools Commission takes the view that the school serves a vital community need.

(8) The Chairman of governors of St Joseph's School has suggested an alternative to closure. The suggestion is that St Joseph's relocates from its current site to occupy the former Infant School building on the community school site. This building has five classrooms which is sufficient for the current number of pupils on roll at St Joseph's. There is also a separate playground and hall.

(9) The option outlined above would preserve the Catholic identity of St Joseph's School but there are significant practical concerns about the degree of practical collaboration and joint use of facilities which would be required in the co-location of two completely separate schools. These possibilities are currently being explored and would be considered as part of the public consultation process. The prospect of a federation which could potentially address these issues is not an option in this instance, given that St Joseph's is an Aided School and its status as a Charitable Trust requires the school to remain independent in terms of its governance, leadership and ownership of assets.

Resource Implications

(10) If St Joseph's were to close, no additional space or facilities would be required at Aylesham Community School which has sufficient accommodation to assimilate all of the pupils from St Joseph's. Some refurbishment and redecoration would be necessary, including new toilet facilities in the former Infant School block. The estimated total cost would be £190k.

(11) In addition Members would wish to consider providing financial assistance to those parents who wished their children to attend the nearest alternative Catholic School. It is difficult to quantify these costs at this stage until it was clear how many pupils would require this support and what sort of transport would be required.

Other issues

(12) There is a private pre-school provider currently based at the St Joseph's site (Kaleidoscope). If St Joseph's were to close or relocate consideration would need to be given as to whether to support the relocation of the private provider. This would not be possible on the Aylesham Community School site.

Primary Strategy Recommendations

(13) This proposal is consistent with recommendations 17, 18, 27 and 28 of the Primary Strategy 2006.

Conclusion

(14) Consult on the proposed closure of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, and consider the possibility of relocation as part of the consultation process.

St Radigund's Primary School, Dover – Consult on Closure

Attached as Appendix 7 is a map showing the location of the school and Appendix 8 shows the current pupil distribution.

Background

3.4 (1) St Radigund's Primary school is located in the heart of the most disadvantaged ward in the Dover District. The school has a current roll of 143 against a net capacity of 180. Virtually all of the pupils at St Radigund's live in the immediate vicinity of the school and well within a one mile radius. The school has a very high percentage (56.3%) of children eligible for Free School Meals and 37.2% of pupils with special educational needs.

School Effectiveness

(2) Overall standards and value added scores are extremely low and significantly below national averages. In Autumn 2005 the Keystage 2 SATs results were the second lowest of any primary school in the country. The school has received a substantial amount of advisory support from the Local Authority and is currently receiving intensive support from the Schools Advisory Service, commensurate with a school in Special Measures.

Rationale for the Proposal

(3) St Radigund's has a high level of surplus capacity and educational standards are very low. There are sufficient places in better performing schools locally to accommodate all the pupils who currently attend St Radigund's who are likely to require a place in the future. Closure of St Radigund's would provide pupils with the opportunity to have access to improved learning opportunities and would also reduce the number of surplus places at other local schools.

Resource implications

(4) There are no capital costs associated with this proposal. The St Radigund's site would be surplus to requirements and would have development potential, realising a capital receipt, or alternatively providing facilities for other community use. Intensive support from the Kent Advisory service, currently going into St Radigund's could be refocused elsewhere.

Primary Strategy Recommendations

(5) This proposal is consistent with recommendations 27, 28, 29 and 32 of the Primary Strategy 2006.

Langdon School – Consult on Closure

Attached as Appendix 9 is a map showing the location of the school and Appendix 10 shows the current pupil distribution.

Background

3.5 (1) Langdon Primary School is a small village primary school with a roll of 52 and a NET capacity of 70. Surplus capacity is over 25%. Approximately 25% of pupils have special educational needs. Broadly in line with national averages. A very small percentage (2.5%) of pupils is eligible for Free School Meals.

School Effectiveness

(2) The small pupil cohort makes a statistical analysis of standards potentially unreliable but Contextual Value Added scores are significantly below national averages.

Availability of Alternative Provision

(3) Langdon does take pupils from its immediate community but many pupils travel from more than a mile away, including some from Dover, Deal and St Margaret's-at-Cliffe. There are places available at other local schools.

Resource Implications

(4) The average annual cost of funding a child at Langdon is £3722 against a County average of £2819. The costs of educating individual children is therefore disproportionately high without any commensurate discernible benefit in terms of standards.

(5) Langdon operates with three classes and therefore has classes which contain three or more year groups.

Primary Strategy Recommendations

(6) This proposal is consistent with recommendations 17, 22, 23, 24, 27 and 29 of the Primary Strategy 2006.

Goodnestone - Consult on Closure

Attached as Appendix 11 is a map showing the location of the school and Appendix 12 shows the current pupil distribution.

Background

3.6 (1) Goodnestone is a small rural school with a roll of 55 against a Net Capacity of 70. Surplus Capacity is 21.4%. The school has approximately 17% of pupils with special educational needs and 11.5% of pupils eligible for Free School Meals.

School Effectiveness

(2) The small pupil cohort makes a statistical analysis of standards potentially unreliable. Contextual Value Added scores are above national averages.

Availability of Alternative Provision

(3) The majority of pupils do not live in the immediate vicinity of the school and travel in from a very diverse area with a number of pupils coming from more than three miles away. There are places available at other local schools. Goodnestone is a Church of England Controlled School. There are two other Church of England Primary Schools within two miles of Goodnestone and five more Church of England schools a little over 3 miles away. If Goodnestone were to close there would, therefore, be realistic denominational options for parents wanting to seek a place for their child at a Church of England School.

Resource Implications

(4) There are no capital costs associated with this proposal. The average annual cost of funding a child at Goodnestone School is £3,700 against a County average of £2,819.

Primary Strategy Recommendations

(5) This proposal is consistent with recommendations 17, 22, 23, 24, 27 and 29 of the Primary Strategy 2006.

The Ripple School - Consult on Closure

Attached as Appendix 13 is a map showing the location of the school and Appendix 14 shows the current pupil distribution.

Background

3.7 (1) Ripple is a small rural school with a roll of 41 against a Net Capacity 45. Surplus Capacity is 8.9%. Approximately 52% of pupils have special educational needs and 5.7% are eligible for Free School Meals. The headteacher has secured an appointment to another school and is leaving at the end of this academic year.

School Effectiveness

(2) The small pupil cohort makes statistical analysis of standards potentially unreliable. Contextual Value Added scores are broadly in line with national averages. The Ripple School was inspected by OFSTED in June 2005 and was judged to be delivering a satisfactory standard of education with some good features.

Availability of Alternative Provision

(3) Ripple takes the majority of its pupils from outside the village, mainly from Deal and the surrounding area. There are sufficient places at other local schools to accommodate all of the pupils from Ripple and many of the pupils currently attending Ripple live closer to alternative provision where there are places available.

Resource Implications

(4) The average annual cost of funding a child at Ripple is £4,106 against a County average of £2,819.

(5) There are no capital costs associated with this proposal. If Ripple were to close the site would be surplus to educational requirements and would potentially be available for community use or to yield a capital receipt.

Primary Strategy Recommendations

(6) This proposal is consistent with recommendations 17, 22, 23, 24, 27 and 29 of the Primary Strategy 2006.

Other Proposals to Reduce the Surplus Capacity to 5% Across the Dover District

4. There are other schools in the Dover District which have at least 25% surplus capacity and where public consultation is not being proposed. In each case discussions are underway with the respective headteachers and governing bodies to reduce surplus capacity by other means. Re-organisation proposals have only been commended to Members where public consultation on closure or amalgamation is compatible with the recommendations in the Kent Primary Strategy and where the prospect of re-organisation offers a viable educational solution in the light of local circumstances.

Housing

5. (1) Dover District Council is currently considering options for additional growth of up to 10,000 new houses over a 20 year period. The Council is due to adopt its new policy as part of the Local Development Framework (LDF) in 2008. Development would be phased in over a 20 year period from that time.

(2) As yet there are no certainties about the level of housing or the possible locations. However, the District Council has advised that the bulk of any new housing would be in and around Dover Town, rather than Deal, Sandwich or the rural areas.

(3) There is sufficient flexibility within existing schools to respond to modest localised demand. Major new housing development would offer the potential for additional school provision should this be necessary over the long term with the capacity to generate funding through S.106 agreements.

(4) The one area where there is a degree of certainty over new housing levels is Aylesham. About 1,000 houses are anticipated over a 10-15 year timescale from 2007 onwards. This would be likely to produce no more than 300 additional primary pupils over the period. If St Joseph's Catholic Primary School were to close there would be scope to accommodate 115 pupils over and above the existing combined roll of the two Aylesham primary schools as well as scope for expanding Aylesham Community School further should that be necessary in the medium to long term.

Equalities Issues

6. (1) The need to meet the diverse needs of individual pupils is acknowledged and addressed within the proposals contained in this paper. None of the schools which are directly affected by the proposals contain significant numbers of pupils from ethnic or cultural minority groups which would be in any way disadvantaged by the implementation of the proposals which are envisaged.

The Views of Cluster Boards

7. (1) The review of primary school provision in Dover has involved an extended visit by the Area Education Officer to every infant, junior and primary school in the Dover District and a detailed discussion with the headteacher and Chair of governors in each case. Additionally a number of larger meetings have been held with headteachers and governors. The Cluster Boards have been fully consulted throughout the process.

(2) Both of the Cluster Boards have been consulted about the need to address the issue of surplus capacity. They have expressed support for the process of review and consultation which has been undertaken. Both Boards have declined to comment publicly as a group on individual schools.

Result if Proposals Implemented

8. If all the above proposals were implemented, surplus capacity would reduce to 6% by September 2007 on the basis of January 2006 rolls. In reality the percentage of surplus capacity is likely to increase beyond that as rolls fall further over the next 18 months. If any proposal was not implemented, then alternative proposals would need to be forthcoming to achieve the required reductions.

Conclusion

9. The proposals identified in this paper seek to address the issues of falling rolls and surplus capacity in a way which will secure sustainable and cost effective, high quality provision over the long term. The consequence of not taking appropriate action is that resources will continue to be dissipated and more schools will find themselves vulnerable as rolls continue to decline. Doing nothing is not an option.

Recommendations

10 Members are asked to agree that, where appropriate, the proposals set out in section 3 move to public consultation.

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Background Documents:

Kent Primary Strategy 2006

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SCHOOL ORGANISATION ADVISORY BOARD

Extract from the MINUTES of a meeting of the School Organisation Advisory Board held on Wednesday, 19 April 2006 at Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone.

PRESENT: Mrs V J Dagger (Chairman), Mr W A Hayton (Vice-Chairman), Mrs C Angell, Mr R B Burgess, Miss S J Carey, Mr M J Northey, Mr A R Poole and Mr M J Vye.

OFFICERS: Dr I Craig, Director (Operations), Mr M Doole, Area Education Officer (Thanet/Dover), Mr D O'Donovan, Education Support Officer, Ms C Lay, Area Education Officer; (Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells) Mr D Adams, Area Education Officer (Ashford and Shepway), Mr C Jones, Area Education Officer (Maidstone and Tonbridge and Malling) and Miss J Wiltshire, Democratic Services Officer.

CABINET MEMBERS: Mr L B Ridings and Mr J Simmonds

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Mr T Birkett, Mr N Chard, Mr M Fittock, Mr W Newman, Mrs E Rowbotham, Mr K Sansum, Canon J L Smith, Director of Education, Rochester Diocesan, Mr R Bristow, Canterbury Diocesan Board of Education and Mr Cullinane, Southwark Diocesan Board of Education.

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

58. Proposals for the Reduction of Surplus Capacity in Primary Schools in the Dover District
(Item B1 – Report by Director (Operations))

(1) The report outlined the proposals for reducing surplus primary places in the Dover District to bring them in line with DfES and Audit Commission requirements regarding surplus capacity. They had been developed with reference to the Primary Strategy 2006.

(2) Dr Craig briefly went through the process that these proposals would be taken through provided it was agreed by the Cabinet Member for them to do so. He confirmed the public consultation procedure including timescales and the opportunities members of the public would have to put their views forward. He stated that it was important to remember that today's discussion was solely to go out to consultation on these proposals. No decision would yet be made regarding any amalgamations or closures.

South Deal Primary School/Mongeham Primary School – Consult on Amalgamation

(1) Mr Birkett, local Member stated that he could remember the last time schools were being closed including a Methodist Church school in Deal. This was due to the reduction in birth rate as was the case now for the schools being discussed today although the birth rate was currently on the increase. 35 children, in the past, had been put into the same classroom, which was not appropriate. This could not happen again due to current legislation but thinking back to the closure of schools in the past it was evident that lessons hadn't been learnt. The best way to educate children was to have smaller class

sizes, not larger ones, which was what this proposal would produce. He added that many houses were due to be built within the Dover district which would also increase pupil numbers in the future.

(2) Mr Doole explained that roll numbers within the Dover and Deal areas would continue to decline although this proposal would include a flexibility if needed to respond to any localised pressure generated by new housing development in the medium to long term. Following a query from Mrs Angell, Mr Doole stated that the recommendations within the Primary Strategy document did take into account any capital receipts stating that these would be reinstated back into the Education system.

(3) Mr Burgess questioned provision of safe walking within the Deal area and also what timescales were involved in order to get the Children's Centre up and running.

4) Mr Doole stated that the route to the school was a reasonably travelling distance of 0.9 miles by road.

(5) Dr Craig informed the Board that with regards to the timescales for the Children's Centres, which were currently in Phase 2 of the process with £200,000 of funding available per Centre. He added that by the end of December 2006, it would be announced to the DfES where the 52 Centres would be situated. Until it was known which sites would be put forward, it was not sure where the likely surplus capacity would be. All Children's Centres, it was hoped, would be up and running by September 2008.

(6) Mr Vye questioned how much extra funding would be available, per child, if redundant places were reduced. He also felt the same way as Mr Birkett, that improvement would be more achievable by creating smaller classes.

(7) Dr Craig explained that surplus places were currently in excess of 14,000. This figure also took into account any future new-build. The figure of extra cash available, if a surplus place was disposed of, would be £250 per child. Multiply this by 14,000 would give a figure of £3.5m. It was expected that a saving of 8,000 places would be made which would mean £2m being reinvested back into the system.

(8) Mr Poole expressed his concern that if these schools were to be amalgamated then it would mean losing one of the sites including the Nursery. He felt it would be more appropriate for both schools to become 1FE.

(9) Mr Doole explained that the existing problem was the size of the schools with the numbers continuing to decline. Sustainability would be an issue in the medium to long term. This proposal to amalgamate would be the best way forward in order to accommodate all children from both schools and also any other children who would need a place in the future. Mr Doole added, in answer to Mr Northey, that travel plans would ultimately need to be developed by the schools themselves with support from the Local Authority. Transport and travel implications would need to be considered as part of the consultation process.

(10) Dr Craig explained that as part of the Primary Strategy surplus capacity within schools must be reduced to 5-7%. The DfES would be requesting, annually, the figures for each school/area and would be asking why action was not being taken at schools having in excess of 25% surplus places.

(11) The Board agreed to support the proposals for South Deal Primary School and Mongeham Primary School – Consult on Amalgamate and that it be moved to public consultation.

Melbourne Community Primary School/The Powell School – Consult on Amalgamation

(1) Mr Newman, local Member, stated that there being no alternative proposal to consider was not ideal. He expressed concern that the figure of 15% kept being mentioned but the Primary Strategy figure that surplus places needed to be reduced to was 5%, that being only a 10% reduction of surplus capacity was needed. This was a very important part of the proposal which should be remembered throughout the proposal. Mr Newman also questioned what were ‘efficiency savings’.

(2) Mr Doole agreed with Mr Newman stating that a lot of issues needed to be considered. The consultation paper should be seen as an information document for Members and the public. He explained that as much information as possible needed to be in the Member/public domain and this was precisely what the consultation process was about. A process where all issues could be raised and discussed. He also explained that ‘efficiency savings’ meant that as well as all children receiving the best education possible if savings could be made whilst delivering a high standard of education then it would be a very positive way forward.

(3) Mr Sansum, local Member, questioned the need to close Melbourne School and the funding that would be needed for the Physical Disability Unit. The Powell Site was quite a distance away from the Melbourne Site, which would cause problems especially for the disabled pupils. He also expressed concern with regards to the lack of building space on the Powell School site.

(4) Mr Doole explained that both schools served the same geographical area and essentially the same community. Amalgamation would secure effective sustainable primary provision on the Buckland Estate over the long term. With regard to children with physical disabilities and other special needs, Mr Doole confirmed that there is an absolute commitment to meeting the needs of all children, however complex and specific those needs may be. There is also a recognition that children currently in the PD Unit at Melbourne and others with very significant physical disability are likely to continue to need specialist support and facilities but that there may not necessarily need to be provided in a separate unit. Parents may prefer to exercise other options. The Powell School could be supported in making adaptations to meet specific needs but these needs may also potentially be met in other settings with continuing specialist support. The cost of building two extra classrooms on the site of The Powell School se estimated at approximately £300,000.

(5) The Board agreed to support the proposal on Melbourne Community Primary School/The Powell School – Consult on Amalgamation and that it be moved to public consultation.

St Joseph’s Catholic Primary School, Aylesham – Consult on Closure

(Mrs Dagger read out to Members of the Board a letter received from Mr Cridland, Chair of Governors, opposing the proposal).

(1) Mrs Rowbotham, local Member, expressed her concern regarding this proposal stating that parents in this area should have a choice for their children of a Church education, this way their children would not then have to leave the village to attend school. She explained that there were currently 400 school age children in the Aylesham area so this school was a very much wanted and needed provision.

(2) Mrs Angell stated that if it was a parent's wish for their child to attend a church school then provision should be made available locally.

(3) Mr Doole reassured Mrs Angell that other church school provisions were close by within the area. He added that currently out of the pupils that attended St Joseph's 1/3 were Catholic, about 30 pupils.

(4) Mr Vye stated that he felt the Board should vote against this proposal, as although he understood the rationale of it he did not agree with it. The school had improved dramatically and in September of this year it was expected that twice as many children would enrol at the school in comparison to those who would have left in July. The school also had an excellent Headteacher. He added that it would be a concern if the children from St Joseph's were made to travel to school in the Canterbury or Dover area which was a long distance away.

(5) Dr Craig informed the Board that the proposal for this school had been known for a while and therefore much work had been carried out by way of discussions taking place and research carried out as to how the school could be re-sited with Aylesham Primary School. He reassured Members that all interested parties would have the opportunity to express their views during the consultation process including listening to both children and parents.

(6) Mr Cullinane agreed with Mr Vye's comments stating that the school had many strengths, strengths that would be lost if closed leaving Aylesham without a valuable provision.

(7) The majority of Board Members did not agree to support the proposal for St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Aylesham – Consult on Closure and that it should not be moved to public consultation.

St Radigund's Primary School, Dover – Consult on Closure

(1) Mr Newman, local Member, stated that this school was located within a very deprived area. If it was closed it would take away important facilities used by the community. Pupils would then be made to attend schools where the route for school would be highly dangerous including narrow roads, high hills, busy traffic and into areas where known muggings had taken place involving children as the victims.

(2) Mr Sansum, local Member, agreed, stating how important it was that a safe walking route must be available for pupils. He added that within the school was an excellent nursery provision and the closure of this would tear out the heart of the community. The school was much needed especially following the erection of 6,000 – 10,000 new houses, which would create more pupil numbers.

(3) Mr Vye expressed concern over this proposal stating that the best way forward would surely be a 'Fresh Start' proposal.

(4) Dr Craig explained that there were nine other Primary Schools within a one mile radius of the school for the pupils to attend. Regarding a Fresh Start proposal this scenario would not 'hit the buttons' within DfES Guidelines.

(5) The Board agreed to support the proposal on St Radigund's Primary School, Dover – Consult on Closure and that it be moved to public consultation.

Langdon School – Consult on Closure

(1) Mrs Rowbotham, local Member, stated that rural communities were of great importance as was the education of the children within such rural communities which needed to be preserved. This village had a very close community and it was a concern to her that the school was informed of this proposal at such short notice.

(2) Miss Carey stated that it was important to spend money wisely on proposals such as this one as rural/village schools were more difficult to place the children than other schools where other alternatives were plentiful.

(3) Mr Burgess found difficulty in being part of a process to close village schools. He asked if there was any evidence that the children of this school were receiving a good standard of education when they attended mixed classes of three different years.

(4) Dr Craig explained that yes, there was evidence although this didn't mean that smaller schools were not working efficiently as many of them did. If there were more than two year groups within one class then it would make it more difficult to cope and it would be harder to deliver a high standard of education due to fewer staff.

(5) The Board agreed to support the proposal on Langdon School – Consult on Closure and that it be moved to public consultation.

Goodnestone – Consult on Closure

(1) Miss Carey stated that this was obviously a valued school with many children travelling a great distance to attend it. Apart from this, the school would be one of the ones that would struggle in the future if changes were not made as soon as possible.

(2) Mr Bristow explained that a great deal of money had been spent on this school including £200,000 on improvements such as the playground and new premises. The school had a very good track record and had won a 'Small Church Link Community School' award. It should be supported by KCC, which was the case initially when investments were made in the school.

(3) The majority of Board Members did not agree to support the proposal on Goodnestone – Consult on Closure and therefore should not be moved to public consultation.

The Ripple School – Consult on Closure

(1) Mrs Rowbotham, local member, stated that 18 months ago this school went through this same process, which ended up with the Adjudicator. The decision resulted in

not to close the school. This should speak for itself. She added that the school served a wide area of people and was valued by its community.

(2) Mrs Angell stated that there were a number of schools with more surplus places than this school, which was offering a good level of education and it was a surprise to see this school back on the Agenda.

(3) Mr Burgess stated that he believed children from Ripple could obtain a good education from other schools.

(4) Mr Vye understood that Ripple School had 52% of Special Needs pupils which was a considerably high proportion. It was obviously a school that provided a high level of education for its pupils.

(5) Mr Northey agreed stating that the number of Special Needs pupils at the school was impressive. He felt that there should be a period of three years before a school which had already been taken through this process before it could be brought through it for a second time.

(6) Rev Smith stated that during the previous consultation on Ripple School both Mr Bristow and himself had voted against the closure. However, now there was a Primary Strategy and therefore it should be taken through the consultation process for closure. A decision should not be swayed by letters that had been received or by people's comments.

(7) The majority of Board Members did not support the proposal on Ripple School – Consult on Closure and therefore should not be moved to go to public consultation.