

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services

**Ref No. CYP03
(08/09)**

**Rother Valley School Reorganisation –
Planning Rother Valley Schools for the Future**

**Key Decision:
Yes**

**Report by Executive Director of Adults and
Children and Head of Capital**

Part I

Electoral Divisions:

**Fernhurst
Midhurst
Petworth
Pulborough**

Executive Summary

The Planning Rother Valley Schools for the Future consultation took place between February and April 2008 and set out proposals for each school in the area following an initial consultation in Autumn 2007, which established principles for change and a high degree of consensus concerning the need for change in the Rother Valley area. This report assumes that there will be a single secondary school from September 2009; the nature of the school is to be the subject of a separate report due in June 2008.

Conclusions

Following detailed analysis, the Cabinet Member has been able to consider the response to consultation on each primary school in the Rother Valley. The Cabinet Member has listened carefully to the views of the community and has modified proposals in a way that should secure sustainable schooling in this rural area.

Recommendation(s)

That the Cabinet Member asks officers to proceed to the next stage of consultation, that is the publication of statutory notices, in June 2008 with a view to the Cabinet Member being able to reach a final decision on these proposals by September 2008. These proposals are itemised in section 3 of this report.

1. Background

- 1.1 In Autumn 2007 a County Council initial consultation on the proposed reorganisation of educational provision in the Rother Valley from September 2010 onwards identified that 78% of respondents agreed with the proposal that schools should be reorganised so that children transfer to secondary school at the end of Key Stage 2 (at the age of 11). In January 2008 the Cabinet Member agreed to launch a school-by-school consultation which took place between February and early April 2008.

- 1.2 The consultation document <http://wsgfl.westsussex.gov.uk> identified three main reasons for change. The first was educational; research shows that children make better progress if they change school less often. The second was demographic as there has been a significant fall in the number of children living in the area. This reason is linked to financial pressures, as there is a need to plan for a sustainable school system with an efficient use of resources. The third reason is the need for investment, both to plan for the future of secondary education and to provide the additional teaching spaces in primary schools to accommodate Year 6 children as well as any other extended services.
- 1.3 This report does not make reference to proposals for secondary education as there has been a separate consultation on whether the single secondary school proposed for the area should be an Academy.

2. Discussion

- 2.1 An analysis and commentary on the responses supplied by over 1500 individual consultees and the governing bodies and other consultees is provided at Appendices 1 and 2.
- 2.2 The recommendations in this report suggest that the Cabinet Member should decide to move to statutory consultation on proposals for all schools, as there has been substantial discussion of these proposals, including some alternatives which had not previously been identified as "preferred options".
- 2.3 The recommendations suggest that statutory consultation at Northchapel Primary and Rogate CE Primary should proceed on the basis of both schools changing character to become 4-11 primary schools. In the case of Northchapel Primary School, it was always clear that there were sufficient pupils in the community to support a viable primary school. The preferred option for consultation was designed to test whether children would benefit from the economies of scale and improved learning environment that could be achieved by locating all Key Stage 2 provision at Petworth CE Primary School. There was a strong response from the community that parents would wish to see 4-11 provision retained in Northchapel even with the recognition that the lower quality SCOLA-type accommodation could not be replaced in the medium term.
- 2.4 In the case of Rogate CE Primary, the governing body has also galvanised a high level of community support for the school. It has argued that numbers are now recovering after a period of uncertainty and projects that, with the certainty of Year 6 provision, pupil numbers will rise in the foreseeable future. The Cabinet Member has expressed a desire to do all that the County Council can to maintain schooling in village communities and it is now for the community of Rogate to demonstrate its commitment to its local school by supporting it as the preferred school for children in the catchment area. Whilst numbers of local children opting for a place at the school for September 2008 are still low (the figure of four in-area children has remained constant since applications were made prior to the current consultation), there is uncertainty about the additional pupil numbers that can be drawn in by the new school system for the Rother Valley. It would then be a reasonable course of action to support the governing body's desire

to develop the school as a 4-11 primary school and review whether the community does in fact support the school and that the governing body's projection of at least 71 pupils (at least 10 pupils per year group) is achieved after a reasonable period of time to allow the new system to settle. It is suggested that officers undertake this review with the Diocese and the governing body three years after the Age of Transfer change. Whilst the governing body's preferred option would be an amalgamation with St Mary and St Paul CE First School at South Harting, it is felt that further discussion should take place on the development of federations and amalgamations across the areas rather than impose such new arrangements at this stage.

- 2.5 The implication of retaining schooling at Rogate is that there will be 285 school places at the time of school reorganisation rather than the planned 270. Officers support the assessment of St Mary and St Paul CE First that further places would be required if the proposal for consultation had proceeded. This would leave an additional 10 places per year group to meet further demand for places that could be generated by the new school system. This is in addition to the capacity available within the original planning figure of 270 places per year group. Schools and parents have been generally optimistic about the impact that a new primary school system with transfer at 11 and a new secondary school arrangement will have on the take-up for places in the primary sector. This position will need to be monitored carefully into the future on a school by school basis as the September 2008 Reception cohort is one of the largest in the Rother Valley for some years (forecast intake 285 pupils) with numbers dropping to nearer 235 in September 2009 and 245 in September 2010. It will also be important to achieve community support for local primary schools, demonstrated by a high level of in-area children entering their local rural school, whilst allowing for an element of parental preference.
- 2.6 There has been much discussion of amalgamation being a way of sustaining rural schooling by securing high quality leadership and more efficient management models across two sites. The proposals for amalgamation were based on the successful experience of the Lavington Park Federation where Duncton and Graffham schools have benefited from a more gradual approach, retaining two budgets (and some resultant bureaucracy) of two separate schools, whilst new ways of working have been developed.
- 2.7 Unfortunately in two of the other sets of amalgamations proposed, governing bodies and parents have seen this proposal as a 'deficit model' rather than as an innovative, positive development. Having listened very carefully to the views of the community, it is recommended that three of the four primary school amalgamations should not be immediately taken forward but that we should work with the governing body of Duncton and Graffham schools and the Schools Forum to trial a new model of funding that builds on their already successful federation. In the meantime officers and schools could continue to work on innovative, sustainable solutions to schooling across the area, such as formal collaborations, federations and potentially amalgamations, which could retain schooling in local communities with shared leadership and governance.
- 2.8 It would be reasonable for the Cabinet Member to expect there to be a period of review wherever there is a vacancy for a primary headteacher post.

However, rather than impose changes, the County Council could work with governing bodies to gradually develop new models of leadership. This is especially important when there is a need to focus on planning for Year 6 provision in 2009/10.

- 2.9 The County Council's initial consultation in Autumn 2007 proposed that we should plan for change in September 2010. Secondary schools argued that it would be increasingly difficult to sustain a secondary school curriculum in three separate secondary schools and that change should take place in September 2009. The second consultation document sought the views of parents and schools about whether we should retain the three tier system until September 2010. There were, however, strong representations from parents and most primary schools to bring forward the change in the Age of Transfer to September 2009, thereby ensuring that the current Year 4 pupils would not in some cases need to change school twice in two years or be part of a 10-18 secondary school. Further discussion with all headteachers and chairs of governors revealed support for change in September 2009, provided that change took place at the same time across the area and that capital expenditure on temporary accommodation should be kept to the minimum. Schools have provided information about the accommodation required to retain Year 6 in September 2009. Officers are confident that change can be achieved for September 2009, particularly if schools are flexible in supporting interim arrangements in some cases where necessary permanent adaptations to buildings can be put in place for September 2010. Every effort will be made within the Capital Unit to bring forward building timescales on projects within individual schools.

3. **Proposals**

It is proposed that the County Council publishes statutory proposals to consult on change in schools in the Rother Valley for September 2009. The proposals for each school are set out below.

Proposals for Rother Valley Primary Schools for September 2009

St Mary and St Paul CE First, South Harting	To become a 4-11 Primary School	(Published Admission Number 15)
Rogate CE Primary	To become a 4-11 Primary School	(PAN 15)
Rake CE First	To become a 4-11 Primary School	(PAN 15)
Hollycombe Primary	To become a 4-11 Primary School	(PAN 15)
Camelsdale First	To become a 4-11 Primary School	(PAN 30)
Fernhurst Primary	To become a 4-11 primary school	(PAN 20)

Midhurst CE Primary	To become a 4-11 Primary School	(PAN 30)
Stedham Primary	To become a 4-11 Primary School	(PAN 15)
Easebourne CE First	To become a 4-11 Primary School	(PAN 30)
The Lavington Park Federation (Graffham Infant and Duncton CE Schools)	To become a single 4-11 CE Primary with a 4-7 site and a 7-11 site	(PAN 15)
Petworth CE Primary	To become a 4-11 Primary School	(PAN 30)
Northchapel Community Primary	To become a 4-11 Primary School	(PAN 15)
Bury CE (Aided) First	To become a 4-11 Primary School	(PAN 10)
St James' CE Primary, Coldwaltham	To become a 4-11 Primary School	(PAN 15)
Fittleworth	To become a 4-11 Primary School	(PAN 15)

4. **Consultation**

Extensive consultation has taken place with almost 5000 consultation documents sent to parents, governors, school staff, early years providers, Parish Councils, the Diocesan Board of Education of the Diocese of Chichester, the District Council, local County Councillors and the Member of Parliament. There have been 13 public meetings with over 700 people in attendance and a County Local Committee surgery in addition to separate meetings for the school governing body and staff group (approximately 164 attendees). The response rate from over 1500 individuals as well as over 20 governing bodies and other organisations is one of the highest rates of response from an area-wide school reorganisation.

5. **Resource Implications and Value for Money**

The revenue implications for changing the Age of Transfer are all contained within the Dedicated Schools Grant. Changing the Age of Transfer will support the County Strategy objective of raising outcomes for children and young people. The Schools Forum has agreed to the principle of using revenue savings from base allocations that would be released from the reduction in schools within the Rother Valley being used to support prudential borrowing. It is expected that prudential borrowing of £2.5m should provide sufficient capital investment to achieve any necessary changes to school accommodation that will be required to admit Year 6 pupils. The timing of

capital expenditure and the availability of prudential borrowing are issues that will need to be addressed within the capital programme.

There is a potential loss of savings to the schools' budget – potentially up to £150,000 or £1.5m capital investment that will not be achieved through the decision not to proceed with proposals to establish three amalgamated schools and £80,000 or £800k capital investment as a result of the decision to retain Rogate Primary School.

6. Risk Management Implications

There is a risk that insufficient or too many places are retained in the Rother Valley, thereby reducing parental preference by too much or leaving schools potentially unviable. The County Council will continue to work with governing bodies to monitor the impact of a change in the Age of Transfer on school places in the area.

There is also a risk that the disruption of reorganisation might impact on the work of schools to raise standards and support the progress of children. The County Council's Learning Service will work closely with governing bodies and headteachers to manage the changes in such a way that a clear focus is retained on pupil progress. County Council officers will also share the learning of 'growing schools' in Crawley that have been through similar change.

7. Customer Focus Appraisal

A Customer Focus Appraisal has been undertaken and is attached as Appendix 3 to this report.

8. Crime and Disorder Act Implications

Not applicable.

9. Human Rights Act Implications

Not applicable.

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Background Papers

None.

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