

This report may be of interest to: Members of the Community Learning Committee.

ISSUES FOR THE STRUCTURE OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

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1. Purpose

- 1.1 To update the Committee on issues related to school planning and to recommend additional resources necessary to proceed with the next stage of reviews.

2. Summary

- 2.1 The report presents issues for the future planning of the school system in the context of progress on the School Organisation Plan and a range of issues potentially impacting on the structure of the school system. The issues are corporate in relation to the use of resources and accommodation overall by the Council. The report makes recommendations about additional support necessary to take the planning exercise further .

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That progress to date on school planning be noted and agreement given to continuing the reviews identified in this report, subject to further reports to the Council and to the School Organisation Committee.
- 3.2 That agreement be given to the additional resources set out in para 6.5 and exemplified in the Annex in order to manage the necessary work.
- 3.3 That, following consideration of item 3.2, that the matter be referred to Council for inclusion in overall budget decisions for 2000/01 and subsequent years.

4. Background

4.1 At present there are many national policy developments and local issues which could have significant implications for the structure of our schools' system. Most of these have been referred to in previous reports to Education and/or Community Learning Committees, but have greater significance when taken together. These are briefly listed below, followed by more detail on some issues:

- Early Years and Childcare planning and the strong interest from schools in one point of entry at 4+;
- the focus on raising levels of achievement, the regime of Ofsted inspection and the publication of information about school performance and target-setting;
- the revised National Curriculum – Curriculum 2000;
- a new focus on the range, quality and cost effectiveness of post-16 provision;
- the growing number of surplus places in Milton Keynes primary and secondary schools;
- the difficulty of adequately funding new school places on the rapidly growing flanks;
- the implications of class sizes legislation;
- school condition surveys and Asset Management Planning;
- the change in the ages of transfer in Buckinghamshire; and
- obtaining Best Value;

4.2 All **school planning** is now done within the context of the School Organisation Plan (SOP), which is approved by the School Organisation Committee (SOC), on which the Council is represented with other interested groups, e.g. the Diocesan authorities. If there is dissension within the SOC, matters are referred to the Regional Adjudicator to resolve.

4.3 All **buildings-related issues** are being covered by the Education Asset Management Plan (AMP). Both the SOP and the AMP will require evidence of thorough analysis, sound cost appraisals and substantial consultation, to a new, detailed, nationally prescribed level. Future capital funding will depend on the soundness of this planning and the analysis of costs. The Council has already adopted its Local Policy Statement, setting out the framework for its AMP and this is now being graded by the DfEE (Minute E44/00 refers).

4.4 Admissions matters are now coordinated through an Admissions Forum, representing the various admissions authorities. Again, there is recourse to an Adjudicator.

5. Issues and Choices

- 5.1 There is a combination of older schools built to meet a different set of needs, and newer schools planned as part of MK development on a model which sets out provision until 2002 and is now moving to 2011 and beyond. Many of the older buildings are in areas of declining school populations and we have significant numbers of empty places by national standards. However, on the growing east and west flanks some schools are over-flowing, and it is a struggle to identify the capital resources to respond. Despite this volatility, pupil numbers are currently slightly declining, even though the population is growing.
- 5.2 There is a large number of temporary classrooms. These are unsatisfactory for learning, constrain capital bids and programming, and the older ones are a maintenance liability, especially as this responsibility is delegated to schools.
- 5.3 The recent condition surveys, which form one part of the Education Asset Management Plan (with sufficiency and suitability), show an estimated £25m investment will be needed over the next 5 years to bring buildings up to standard. Suitability and sufficiency surveys are likely to identify additional building requirements. It is necessary to be much clearer about our total building requirements in order to make sound investment decisions.
- 5.4 At age **4+**, **admissions** to First and Combined Schools are currently determined to a degree by schools themselves and there is great inconsistency. There has already been consultation on changing to a consistent policy of one point of entry in September and Education Committee has resolved that it would be desirable, subject to resources and further work on practical issues. The extra resources for implementation are not currently available and such a change would need to be carefully planned in the context of the various issues outlined above.
- 5.5 Members are fully aware that the **ages of transfer** from first to middle and middle/combined to secondary school do not coincide with the end of National Curriculum Key Stages, in contrast to most other authorities. In February 1998, Learning and Development Committee considered a report on the age of secondary transfer, related to a proposal in principle from the Governing Body of Denbigh School to admit high- attaining younger pupils. The Committee resolved that a further examination of the educational and practical issues surrounding the ages of admission and transfer, including discussion with interested parties, be endorsed. In recognition of the lack of resources available for this work, no specific timescale was applied and it was simply resolved that a further report should be submitted to a future meeting (Minute LD57/98 refers).
- 5.6 At the time of writing the Education Development Plan, the DfEE advised that there was no evidence that structures of themselves made a difference to standards and any proposals for change to date have not been seen as a priority. In response to a concerted view from secondary schools that this was an issue needing review, a desk top analysis of secondary school provision was included in the School Organisation Plan in the current year, though this was not specifically and solely related to the age of transfer question.
- 5.7 Secondary schools have since become more concerned about the importance of this issue and two secondary schools (St Paul's and Denbigh) have actively started to

explore ways forward. Part of the Diocese served by St Paul's is in Aylesbury Vale and 6 pupils were admitted at age 11 in 1999 from that area. This is likely to be repeated in 2000. It is unlikely that this number of pupils constitutes a significant change, at least at this stage.

- 5.8 Denbigh School has, however, offered places to 28 pupils for entry at 11+ in September. These pupils are from the school's own area or have siblings at the school and are mainly from Two Mile Ash Middle School. All are predicted to achieve three Level 5s in the Key Stage 2 assessments and are strongly recommended by their primary headteachers as capable of transfer to secondary school. This does raise issues about enlargement and change of character and the adherence to published admissions procedures. Legal advice is being sought urgently about the significance of this move and appropriate ways for the Council to address it, particularly in the context of the need to plan systematically, should change be regarded as appropriate and beneficial for pupils' learning.
- 5.9 In the **16-19** age range there is over-provision of places, whilst the two new schools have been planned on the basis of a 12-18 age range, but it is difficult to make a convincing argument to the DfEE for Basic Need allocations. There has been no allocation so far for Shenley Brook End, where there is clearly an expectation of opening a sixth form in 18 months time. Walton High, having only just opened, is some distance away from this, but planning is very much based on the concept of seamless lifelong learning for the area.
- 5.10 Across the area, the provision on offer to students varies considerably in range, depending on geography and catchment. The Learning & Skills Council will be in action from the autumn and assurances have been made about 6th forms maintaining funding, providing their numbers stay the same. Nevertheless, there will almost certainly be a move to convergence of funding at some point with Further Education, coupled with an emphasis on viability. A number of our 6th forms are currently facing viability problems. These issues are already included in the plan of the Lifelong Learning Partnership.
- 5.11 Secondary heads are currently compiling ideas about how they see their schools in 2004, assuming either an 11-18 scenario, or a 12-18 scenario, for further consideration by heads and Learning and Development Directorate staff. Primary representatives are being informed of these developments. The work at this stage is about putting the issue on the agenda and sharing ideas.
- 5.12 The broad intention will be to propose ideas to the meeting of the School Organisation Committee in June, to feed into the annual revision of the School Organisation Plan for June and subsequently into DfEE capital bidding rounds. However, before we could get to this point we would need an understanding of the amount of work required to carry any review through, and how it would be organised and funded. This would also be only the first phase of an extensive, complex review.
- 5.13 In Milton Keynes, there are 36 '**small schools**' by the DFEE definition of below 200, though there is a debate about this definition and clearly a lot depends on circumstances. The issue for Milton Keynes is the relatively large number and the fact that, prima facie, a disproportionate amount is being spent on management and building costs. This situation raises questions about the most effective use of resources. It is a matter for the whole of the borough, though sometimes seen as affecting rural areas only.

- 5.14 Any exercise to look at the age of transfer, as well as 4+ entry, would need to include the viability of school sizes. This is always a highly contentious issue, especially in rural areas.
- 5.15 In order to pursue these matters properly, there would need to be a thorough examination of the educational issues and the structural, funding and general issues relating both to change and to maintaining the current system, in consultation with schools in all phases. Significant structural changes and therefore statutory proposals would affect all schools in the area, if changes to the age ranges were agreed. A range of partners, particularly the Diocesan Authorities, would need to be fully involved and there would need to be extensive public consultation.
- 5.16 The Council is currently reviewing use of accommodation corporately and reviews of school places would be linked to this overall corporate approach.
- 5.17 **In conclusion**, all of the potential activity in this report could be described as a grand scale Best Value Review. The potential implications and costs are huge, but if these issues are not addressed systematically, there is a risk that individual actions will precipitate unplanned change. There may also be real opportunities to make better use of the resources we have, which could assist with the costs of any new build and refurbishment. The timescale would need detailed work, but this is potentially a 3-5 year exercise. The co-ordination of this exercise is fundamental to the Council's role as an LEA. Failure to address school planning issues adequately is a criticism made of LEAs by the Chief Inspector in his most recent Annual Report.
- 5.18 The Council currently is not in a position to deal adequately with the issues set out in this report. There are concerns about the failure to address the work commitments set out in the School Organisation Plan, which already signalled the need for preliminary work on secondary places and on empty places in key areas of the Borough (starting with Bletchley). The DfEE now requires significant additional detail to support any statement of case around school planning. This report is therefore seeking additional resources to undertake the necessary work. These are set out in the paragraph on staffing implications and exemplified in the attached Annex.

6. **Implications**

6.1 Environmental

There are significant environmental implications in reviewing use of accommodation. There is already close working around individual schools' issues and in connection with the revision of the Local Plan. These would be strengthened as part of the developments set out in this report.

6.2 Equalities

This report is about ensuring the robustness of the school system in future years, to ensure that all children have access to a high quality education.

6.3 Financial

The review of school places is about ensuring the best use by the Council overall of educational resources. The costs of additional staffing are estimated at approximately £100,000 in a full year. This money can be found from the amount

available for allocation within the Education & Early Years budgets for 2000/01, as noted by Community Learning Committee in January and as considered by the Budget Panel set up by the Committee. It will count towards education expenditure in SSA terms. The Council's wish to prioritise expenditure on schools direct is understood and the request for additional resources is not lightly made. Without this investment schools will differentially experience serious consequences from unplanned pupil movements. Indeed many are already doing so. This impacts on schools' ability to plan budgets and manage their accommodation. This investment is necessary to give all schools the security of orderly pupil intakes and efficient use of accommodation. The use of this money will be kept under review with headteacher representatives.

6.4 Legal

The work in this report is covered by the Council's duties under the School Standards and Framework Act.

6.5 Staff and Accommodation

The strategic planning work set out in this report would fall primarily within the remit of the Education Planning Team, though it would require contributions from across the Directorate and Council especially from the newly consolidated Business Development Unit within the Directorate. The new Business Development Manager will play an essential role in taking this work forward.

A project plan needs to be developed and further thought is needed about the definition of existing and new staff roles, in the light of decisions about resourcing.

It is currently envisaged that the Education Planning Manager would lead the work directly and broadly that four staff would be needed to cover existing and new tasks. However, there is already a vacancy in the Education Planning team, which could now be re-defined to take account of this work, reducing the requirement for new posts to three. In order to have a significant involvement in this work herself, some of the Education Planning Manager's current work would need to be re-distributed within the team. For such a review, there is a need for officers who can:

- lead any element of the work associated with School Organisation Planning, addressing the educational issues and impact;
- carry out complex statistical work to support this, developing and analysing data and modelling options;
- doing the complex investment appraisals now required by the DfEE and modelling all financial implications and investigating funding strategies, such as PFI/PPP (to be within the Directorate Finance team); and
- administrative/clerical support, which would be particularly essential to support any consultation exercises.

The second of these posts is arguably the most urgent. These estimated costs of these posts are set out in the attached Annex.

Due largely to the establishment of the Early Years and Childcare Division and posts arising from the Standards Fund, there is no further space available in the Education

and Early Years Department in Saxon Court. Increasingly there is a need for an alternative location, or the exploration of teleworking, for some Education and Early Years staff.

7. **Conclusions**

- 7.1 This report updates the Committee on work related to school planning and seeks authority to proceed on a range of related issues to make progress against items in the School Organisation Plan. This work will be set within the Council's overall commitment to review accommodation use, to ensure this is efficient and meets future service needs.

Background Papers:

School Organisation Plan

Learning & Development Committee papers February 1998