

**SUPPLEMENTARY ITEM**  
**COMMUNITY LEARNING COMMITTEE**

**4 APRIL 2000**

<b>This report may be of interest to: This report may be of interest to: Members of the Policy and Resources and Education Committees and Bletchley Ward Members</b>
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**LEON SCHOOL**

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**1. Purpose**

1.1 To apprise Members of the serious premises issues at Leon School and to secure approval for the necessary urgent expenditure.

**2. Summary**

2.1 As part of the Council's asbestos survey, in which schools have been prioritised, exposed asbestos has been found at Leon School. Whilst undamaged asbestos is safe, damage led to a decision to close the site for fuller assessment of the situation. Swift precautionary action has been taken, as part of the Council's approved asbestos management procedures.

2.2 Urgent remedial work is required to reinstate major areas of the site, which have strategic importance because access points are affected. There is no earmarked funding for this extensive work, the cost of which is currently estimated at £250,000.

2.3 At present, the school site remains closed and the difficult task of finding alternative accommodation for 655 students is in hand. Priority is being given to ensuring that external examinations are not prejudiced.

**3. Recommendations**

3.1 The Committee is recommended to:

- (a) approve the essential expenditure for asbestos removal at Leon School;

- (b) note that further expenditure is likely to arise to ensure continued education;
- (c) note that the short-term resolution of this issue should take account of longer term issues, wherever possible; and
- (d) note that it is now possible for the leisure facility to be used safely, which will maintain community provision.

#### **4. Background**

- 4.1 In October 1999 the Council began a survey of its properties to ascertain where asbestos was present in the building materials and to categorise this according to its nature, state and safety. Schools were prioritised. Those built during the period when asbestos was a common building material (1950-1980) have been prioritised within this.
- 4.2 If undisturbed, asbestos poses no risk. However, when damaged or disturbed, the fibres released can be harmful to health.
- 4.3 The February meeting of the Education Committee received a report about the Greenleys Middle School fire, which included information about schools where asbestos had been found as part of the survey, for which a bid had been submitted under the New Deal for Schools 4.
- 4.4 The asbestos material has been used extensively in ceiling tiles in Leon School. As part of the asbestos survey in the week beginning 27 March 2000, it was noted that many tiles had been badly damaged, partly as a result of building adaptations.
- 4.5 Consequently, a decision was quickly taken to close the school on Friday 31 March 2000 and Monday 3 April 2000 (since extended to include Tuesday and Wednesday 4/5 April 2000) in order to assess the situation further and as a necessary precaution.
- 4.6 Further visual checks have been carried out and the Health and Safety Executive has been informed. For reasons explained in the following section, it has been necessary to extend the closure of the site and urgent remedial action is required.
- 4.7 Leon School has 655 students on roll. Examinations have just begun and will affect many of them in the near future. Work is in hand to make provision for their continued education, with priority given to examination and SAT groups.

#### **5. Issues and Choices**

- 5.1 The damaged asbestos is located at a number of points in the school, three of which are strategically very important, because they affect exits. The need to ensure safe access and egress of the building in the event of a fire or other emergency has been a significant factor in determining whether the site should be temporarily closed.
- 5.2 The asbestos will have to be removed and alternative materials used and equipment will have to be professionally cleaned before areas of the site can be used. The estimate for this work is £250,000 and is likely to take approximately four weeks.
- 5.3 The option of providing temporary classroom accommodation on the site has been considered. However, the timescale to acquire and construct sufficient buildings precludes their use in this instance.

- 5.4 There is no earmarked funding for this work. The total responsive maintenance budget for schools amounts to only £160,000 and New Deal for Schools 4 bids have been closed some time ago. Nevertheless, the work must be carried out to meet the Council's statutory duties and to provide for Leon's students. There is further urgent health and safety work on the school site which should be carried out at the same time, though the responsibility and costs of this would largely fall to the school, which is carrying a significant budget deficit.
- 5.5 Work is still in hand to continue the education of these students in the short-term. The priority is to ensure that external examinations continue. A small number of students taking drama practicals, language orals and art examinations during this week have been accommodated. External examinations begin in earnest in mid-May. Years 11, 12 and 13 are therefore the priority groups.
- 5.6 There is no site which could accommodate the whole school, or even a significant proportion of it. A range of premises has been explored in order to accommodate year groups in different places. The most likely venues now appear to be:

- Wilton Hall
- Holne Chase Centre
- Bletchley Park
- Queensway Centre (for school admin staff)

Other sites are still being explored. Some of those above will clearly involve disruption to existing users and incur costs.

- 5.7 Planning permission would not be required to use existing school, college or university buildings to accommodate displaced year groups. Public halls, churches or day centres could also be used. The temporary use of a leisure centre or office buildings for educational purposes would normally be a change of use needing planning permission. However, the Head of Planning has advised that, if the use only continued for a short period (two or three weeks) it would be regarded as "de minimis" and a planning application would in these circumstances not be required.
- 5.8 Whilst there is no alternative in the short term but to carry out remedial works in order to reinstate the site, account also needs to be taken of longer term issues, if possible. Leon School's numbers have reduced significantly and there are issues about the viability of the sixth form. The school is already in the early stages of discussion about joint sixth form arrangements with Lord Grey School. The Council is now embarking on a major structural review of the school system, which will address, inter alia, the age of transfer, post-16 provision and the state of school buildings, which is generally poor at Leon.
- 5.9 It has now been ascertained that there is no asbestos present in the swimming pool and leisure area of the school and that there are safe access and exit points. Professional advice is that community use of this facility can safely continue. This is important for the school as a specialist sports college and the community as a whole.

## 6. **Implications**

### 6.1 Environmental

The environmental impact of damaged asbestos is at the heart of this report.

### 6.2 Equalities

The solutions for the continued education of the students will involve additional home to school transport.

### 6.3 Financial

The estimate of the cost of asbestos removal is £250,000. There will be additional costs for home to school transport, moving furniture, hire of facilities and equipment, payments to third parties and other environment/health and safety work at the school. Some of this will be the responsibility of the school, though it is currently carrying a significant deficit.

### 6.4 Legal

The Council has a legal obligation to comply with the regulations regarding asbestos, and in this respect the advice of the Asbestos Officer should be sought and adhered to. In addition, the Council owes a duty of care to students, staff and other persons who are authorised to visit the school premises, but this could also include trespassers, to ensure that the premises are safe. As the owner and occupier of Leon School, the Council has responsibility for ensuring that the necessary works to comply with this duty are undertaken.

### 6.5 Staff and Accommodation

These are covered in the report.

## 7. **Conclusions**

- 7.1 Urgent precautionary action has been taken following the discovery of disturbed asbestos in the Council's surveying work. Action has been taken to arrange alternative provision for students, though some disruption is inevitable. Significant costs, which are not included in the 2000/01 budget, will be incurred.

Background Papers:           Plan indicating affected areas of school.