

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

2 February 2016

Report of the Strategic Director for Children's Services

**PROPOSAL FOR THE RE-ORGANISATION OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN
ASHBOURNE (CHILDREN'S SERVICES)**

1. Purpose of Report

To report to Cabinet the outcome of the pre-publication consultation on the proposal for the re-organisation of primary education in Ashbourne and to seek approval for the publication of a Statutory Notice to progress with the proposal

2. Information and Analysis

Ten responses to the consultation were received and all expressed their support for the proposal. Many of the respondents stated their support for the proposal with no additional comment, but some provided a detailed discussion of the issues they perceived needed to be addressed. The individual issues are outlined together with the Local Authority perspective on each of them.

Normal Area

All respondents agreed that a shared normal area was the most appropriate and fair way of deciding the admissions arrangements for the three primary schools. One parent wished to avoid any system that created bias or might be seen to encourage social or economic segregation. Other observations regarding the normal area for the schools are as follows. If there were three separate normal areas, issues could arise as new housing developments change the density of population across the town and put pressure on the schools for places. Utilising the distance from residence to the school is a much fairer way to allocate places than creating an arbitrary line dividing the town into normal areas. A single normal area for the town provides parents the freedom to express personal preference for the school their child attends (depending on school numbers).

Local Authority Response

In proposing the option of a shared normal area, the Local Authority took account of the geographic issues and pattern of parental preference across the town. It is positive that this proposal is seen by all respondents as the right option to pursue.

Enhanced Resource School Provision at Hill Top Infant School

One respondent understood that there is a proposal to include an Enhanced Resource for Physical Impairment at Hill Top Infant & Nursery School and suggested that this should be included in the consultation for the re-organisation of all the schools. It is suggested that a separate consultation might confuse parents and suggest that the Enhanced Resource provision is an afterthought rather than a considered part of the plan for the schools of Ashbourne.

Local Authority Response

The Authority has not taken a decision on whether to propose an Enhanced Resource provision at Hill Top Infant & Nursery. Any such proposal would be completely separate from this proposal that the three schools become primary schools and would, therefore, not be expected to cause confusion.

Class Organisation and Growth of schools into Primary

One respondent expressed concern that the development of Hill Top Infant & Nursery School to a primary school will be incremental. Their particular concern is that the children who enter Year 3 in 2017 will be the oldest in the school each year until they go to QEGS. Any new children in the area would still have to go to Parkside Community Junior School if they fell between the oldest year and high school age. In addition, this respondent felt that it would be better if there were no classes of mixed year groups and that following the re-organisation into primary schools, there should be separate classes for each year group at junior level.

Local Authority Response

The growth of the two infant schools could be incremental in that each year the oldest children in the school stay on an extra year until they reach secondary age. An alternative is that once all three schools have changed their age range then they are able, if they wish, to admit children into all the new year groups if there is demand to do so. It is understood that the schools may look to do this, subject to demand from parents. This will allow parents to realise the benefits of the reorganisation sooner than through incremental growth. The Authority will investigate the

practicalities of doing this and liaise with the schools in order to agree a co-ordinated process if this is what all parties agree.

In terms of mixed age classes, this is an inherent feature of this proposal. St Oswald's and Hill Top will have capacities of 120 and 140 respectively. It is inevitable that these children will be organised into mixed age classes. The benefits of primary organisation are considered much more beneficial than any problems this may cause.

Provision of Childcare

One of the responses identified a concern that the investment and extension to Hill Top Infant & Nursery School would not be sufficient and requested that any changes would result in additional out of hour's childcare.

Local Authority Response

The Local Authority has a duty to make provision for statutory aged children and funding available to address the accommodation requirements at the three schools will need to address this as a priority. Many schools do organise Breakfast Clubs and After School Clubs as part of their commitment to supporting children and families and the three schools in Ashbourne may look to make this provision once the re-organisation has been implemented. This could be easier once they are primary schools and families are not addressing the logistical difficulty of collecting children from two schools separated by the main town centre.

Public Access to School, for Example for Elections

One respondent identified that a larger school requires a larger central area for gatherings and the existing one at Hill Top Infant & Nursery School is not seen as adequate. Currently, when elections take place the Pre-school/Nursery rooms at Hill Top Infant & Nursery School are requisitioned as a Polling Station. The rest of the school is able to continue functioning. However last May, when there were Parliamentary, District and Town elections (and with the increased population in the area), there was a need for two polling stations. The only venue for this was Hill Top Infant & Nursery School and the pre-school class room was not large enough. To accommodate the double polling station, the Hall was required and as a result the school took the decision to close the school and parents had to organise alternative childcare. The respondent felt that the re-organisation proposals provided an appropriate opportunity to provide a new larger hall, constructed in a place that could be accessed separately by the public and, therefore, make closing the school unnecessary.

Local Authority Response

The use of premises to deliver Election venues is a statutory duty and the Returning Officer has the authority to requisition premises that are considered appropriate. The Head Teacher and staff have a duty to ensure that all children are safe and protected and that they address safeguarding within the school location. This can mean that closure of the school site is the only way to ensure this during an Election. The funding available for this reorganisation is not sufficient to provide a new Hall at Hill Top. However, the works that are proposed will be designed with this issue in mind and seek to address the problem as far as possible.

Logistics for Movement across Ashbourne

A number of responses agreed that it will make the logistics of dropping off siblings easier if they are based on the same site and that it will reduce traffic and congestion in the town. It was noted that it is difficult for younger sibling(s) to have to walk across town from Parkside Community Junior School to either of the current infant schools if families have had to drop off an older sibling first and then have to do the same journey at the end of the school day before walking home. This is particularly a problem with reception children who are young and get tired in the first year or so of school.

Local Authority Response

The Local Authority has noted that the schools in Ashbourne have re-arranged opening and closing times to try to make the drop off and pick up of children at different schools as easy as possible, but it is accepted that this movement across the town creates many difficulties about timing and traffic. The re-organisation will address a number of these concerns.

Transfer between Infant & Junior

Three of the respondents made the point that a primary school system avoids the need for parents to go through the anxiety and process of having to apply for a junior place for Year 3. In a primary school, it is possible to offer a mix of opportunities for collective activities as appropriate (e.g. separate play grounds, or a mix of separate age appropriate assemblies) whilst KS1 can access KS2 resources as appropriate. Norms and expectations for behaviour can be pitched differently for different age groups. One respondent felt that those parents who feel that their children are more likely to thrive in a smaller school environment will be continue to have this option. One respondent felt that this could have a positive impact, at an academic level as well as socially and logistically; the continuity it will bring for the children to be able to complete their primary education within one setting must be positive.

Local Authority Response

The Local Authority favours primary over infant/junior organisation and supports those proposals where schools seek a re-organisation to create primary school based provision.

Impact of Housing Developments

In consideration of the current and proposed housing developments in Ashbourne, there will be a need for more primary school places in the town. With all of schools as primary schools, there is more flexibility to add capacity at whichever of the three locations has the greatest need.

Local Authority Response

The Local Authority has a published protocol for seeking developer contributions where housing development will impact on education infrastructure. This enables the Local Authority to ensure that there are sufficient places available in response to increased demand generated by new housing. The flexibility to deliver additional places across the three primary schools serving Ashbourne will be very helpful.

Additional response after the close of the consultation

The Local Authority has received a late response to the consultation on the proposals for re-organisation of primary education in Ashbourne on 16 December 2015. The following summarises the issues and concerns received in that response for consideration by Cabinet.

1. Concern was expressed that the consultation paper did not refer to the background of why this proposal has been put forward, indicating that it had been part of the Neighbourhood Plan discussion.
2. On the specific proposal about Hill Top Infant & Nursery School, the response questioned why it had only six class groups.
3. A point was made about the link between the primary reorganisation proposal and the housing developments proposed for the town.
4. The response raised a number of issues about admissions, particularly will the larger year groups in year 2 at Hilltop and St Oswald's be able to continue into year 3 after reorganisation.
5. The response raised a number of other issues as general questions on admissions, including would there be forced

movement because of numbers, could there be transfers back to a school, is it year by year progression, and can pupils in the village primary schools apply for places at the new primary schools once created.

6. The response raised concerns about the details of the expansion project at Hilltop and how the design will be developed.
7. The response concluded by stating that the Governing Body was supportive of the proposal for a primary re-organisation. It also includes a document giving details of the expansion the school would like to see as well as some other proposals for the school.

Local Authority Response

1. The consultation aims to set out clearly succinctly what is proposed and why is it being proposed. It does make reference to proposed housing in the area but does not include superfluous background.
2. The consultation states that Hilltop will have initially have 20 places each year – 140 capacity overall but could expand overtime to have 30 places – a capacity of 210 requiring 7 classrooms.
3. The proposal in this consultation is not driven by the plans for housing development within Ashbourne, but by the request from the Head Teachers and Governors of the three schools in Ashbourne to investigate the possibility of a primary re-organisation in the town and by the Authority's belief that a primary school re-organisation is a better option for the education of young people. Nevertheless, the consultation makes clear that the proposal will allow the three schools to accommodate rising numbers due to housing.
4. Once the age range of these schools has changed pupils will be able to continue within the school. This could create a bulge in numbers and this has been discussed with the schools. One of the questions in the consultation is seeking information on what parents' wishes are so that we can understand the size of this effect. There is already some indication that there may be movements between the three schools as parents seek to place all their children in the same school that could mitigate this effect. This issue will be discussed further with the schools.
5. The Admissions Code sets out the basis on which parents can express a preference for a place at a particular school, and the admissions criteria and published admission number governs how places are allocated at individual schools. It is important and appropriate that, in this exceptional set of circumstances, there is careful thought and planning about how the regulations of the

Admissions Code can be applied to the process of growth of each school into a primary school whilst supporting parents through the process.

6. The Authority will develop an expansion project based on national guidelines and will agree this project with the head teacher and governors.
7. The Local Authority is pleased by the level of support expressed by the Governors. Officers thank the Governors for the time and effort they have put into their response and the suggestions for things to include in the design brief when those discussions start.

3. Financial Considerations

A Cabinet report of 3 November 2015 identified the S106 agreements that have been agreed with developers. The totals represent the amounts that are estimated to be available for primary education. The actual receipt of this funding is dependent on the progress of the individual housing developments. In the event that sufficient funding has not been received to carry out the initial projects totalling an estimated £520,000, then short term funding could be secured from the Children's Services capital programme 2016/17. Allocations for projects that are required by this reorganisation will be considered when Cabinet receives a report on the next stage of the process – the formal consultation / statutory notice period.

4. Legal Considerations

This proposal is subject to the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013 that came into force on 28 January 2014. Although there is no longer a prescribed 'pre-publication' consultation period for prescribed alterations, there is a strong expectation on schools and the Local Authority to consult interested parties in developing their proposal prior to publication as part of a duty under public law to act rationally and take into account all relevant considerations. This 'pre-publication' consultation has been held and the responses received are outlined in this report; these comments must be taken into account by the decision maker. The next steps are to publish a statutory proposal with details of the new arrangements for primary education in Ashbourne, the timescales for implementation and the process for making comments on the proposal. This will be undertaken in term time if approved by Cabinet, and responses sought from the widest range of statutory consultees and interested bodies. If agreed by Cabinet, the publication would take place on 25 February 2016. The outcome would be reported to Cabinet within two months of

the closure of the publication period (24 March 2016) for a decision on implementation or not.

5. Other Considerations

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered – prevention of crime and disorder, equality of opportunity, health, human rights, human resources, environmental, transport, and property considerations.

6. Key Decision

Yes

7. Call-in

Is it required that the Call-in period be waived in respect of the decisions being proposed within this report? No.

8. Background Papers

A file is held in the Children's Services Development Team office which holds information on the responses to the consultation, together with Cabinet Report of 3 November 2015.

9. Strategic Director's Recommendation

- 9.1 That Cabinet notes the support expressed in this consultation for the proposal; and
- 9.2 That Cabinet approves the publication of a Statutory Notice to progress the proposal for the re-organisation of primary education in Ashbourne.

Ian Johnson
Strategic Director for Children's Services