

TITLE OF REPORT: **Secondary Review: West Area Proposals**

REPORT OF: **Maggie Atkinson, Group Director Learning and Children**

Purpose of the Report

To receive a summary of the views expressed during the recent consultation on secondary school provision in the West Area and to agree a preferred option to be the subject of further consultation and to be included within a "Readiness to Deliver" (RtD) submission to secure funding from the "Building Schools for the Future" (BSF) programme.

Background

1. Cabinet agreed to begin a Borough-wide review of secondary education in Gateshead in January 2007. Initially, this review concentrated on secondary school provision in Gateshead's East Area. The outcome of this phase of the review is that the two secondary schools serving this area, Thomas Hepburn and Heworth Grange, are being redeveloped on their current sites through the BSF Wave 1 Programme, both with reduced capacity.
2. To enable the Borough to secure the necessary funding from the BSF programme to rebuild or refurbish the rest of its secondary schools, it is necessary to review the provision in the West Area of the Borough and produce a robust plan for addressing demographic trends, the impact of parental preferences and the removal of surplus places. This will involve the following schools to varying degrees:
 - Hookergate
 - Kingsmeadow
 - Ryton
 - St Thomas More RC
 - WhickhamAlthough not in the West Area, Joseph Swan School will also feature in the BSF bid, as will the requirements for secondary special education provision.
3. In June 2009, Cabinet agreed to carry out an informal consultation on options for the review and reorganisation of secondary school provision in the West Area. There were a number of reasons why it was necessary to carry out this review:
 - the total number of secondary-age students in the area has been reducing over the last few years and is predicted to continue falling for at least the next six years as primary school cohorts feed into secondary schools;
 - it is estimated that between 2004-17, the total secondary school population in Gateshead will reduce by 1500 students;

- surplus capacity in the secondary sector, already significant in some schools, continues to grow; Hookergate is particularly affected;
 - the BSF programme will provide significant capital investment to rebuild or refresh secondary schools in this part of the Borough (with the exception of Kingsmeadow, which has already been rebuilt through the PFI programme); BSF will only provide funding for the projected demand for places, not to replace the current capacity;
 - Gateshead has been invited to submit a “readiness to deliver” submission by 17 September 2009, through which the Council will seek to secure BSF funding several years earlier than originally indicated (2015-16); agreeing a “preferred option” is critical to the success of the bid;
 - Hookergate School has suffered a reduction in pupil numbers greater than any other secondary school. Further reductions are predicted. If no action is taken, the school may quickly become unsustainable and unable to continue to provide its current good quality of education.
4. An extensive informal consultation was carried out during the period June to July 2009. A consultation document was widely distributed, containing background information and three options for discussion. Eighteen meetings were held involving students, parents, governors, staff, trade unions and the Area Forum, and many hundreds of people attended. Several thousand written responses (completed questionnaires and letters) have been received. A detailed analysis of the comments received during this process is attached to this report as Appendix 2.
5. Careful consideration has been given to all the views expressed. It is important to note the huge amount of interest that this consultation generated, the passionate support expressed for the two schools involved (Hookergate and Ryton) and the recognition by most consultees that the Council is seeking an outcome from this review that will best meet the needs of all young people in the West Area, for the foreseeable future. It was also clear that whilst consultees saw positive aspects in all three options suggested by the Council, there was no single option around which there was general consensus from the various stakeholder groups. This has led to the development of a new option which aims to provide a positive way forward for the whole community of the West.

Proposals

6. Following careful consideration of all the views expressed, it is proposed that the Council’s preferred option should draw on the best of what was stated. It should be based on developing a new, positive and inclusive vision of secondary education for the West Area that meets the needs of the whole community, both current and future generations. This vision will be based on having a single community school that offers the highest quality educational opportunities for 11-19 year olds, through an inclusive approach. This school should have state-of-the-art buildings and facilities that are easily accessible for everyone.
7. It is considered that this vision can be best achieved by retaining Ryton Community School, but developing its offer to the whole community by incorporating the best features and many strengths of Hookergate School. A new school building is proposed, on a new site chosen to maximise opportunities for the whole of the West Area. The new building will be designed to the highest standards of environmental sustainability, reflecting the strong rural character of the area with many significant

landscape features. Achieving value for money from the new build will be a key consideration in determining the site for the new school.

8. To help develop and deliver this vision, it is expected that the Council and the two schools will work closely together to ensure that students, parents, staff, governors and the wider community are fully involved and engaged with the project. To facilitate and cement this partnership approach, the Council and the two schools will sign an agreement (“memorandum of understanding”) committing all parties to moving forward together, based on principles of openness, trust, collaboration, inclusion, equal representation and a collective desire to deliver a shared vision for the whole of the West Area.
9. To secure the capital resources to deliver the vision in the West, the Council will submit a Readiness to Deliver bid, based on this preferred option, seeking the early release of finance from the BSF programme. This bid will also seek to secure funding for the replacement of Whickham and St Thomas More RC Schools, for the completion of the refurbishment of Joseph Swan School and for the Borough’s secondary-age SEN provision. The total value of this bid will be around £150 million.
10. The proposed size of the new building will provide for a planned annual admission of 240 students plus a large sixth form. Ryton School’s planned admission number will be adjusted in due course to reflect this.
11. A review of the potential sites for the new building will be urgently carried out, addressing the opportunities and challenges presented by the available sites and seeking the views of all stakeholders in order to reach a final decision. A sustainable transport strategy will be developed, in consultation with Nexus, to ensure ease of access to the new school.
12. The closure of Hookergate School is proposed. This will be subject to a formal statutory consultation process prior to the publication of final proposals. Ideally, the Council would wish to see Hookergate continue operating until the new build is completed, allowing students to transfer directly from both Hookergate and Ryton to the brand new school building. The potential date for completion of the new build is late 2012.
13. When a site for the new school is confirmed, the primary schools currently serving as Hookergate catchment area schools will be consulted in respect of which secondary school they would wish to be linked with, following Hookergate’s closure.
14. Further details on the preferred option are in Appendix 1 to this report.

Recommendations

15. It is recommended that Cabinet agrees that :
 - a) the option for the West Area described in this report be adopted as the Council’s preferred option and be the subject of consultation with stakeholders;
 - b) the preferred option in this report be the basis of the Readiness to Deliver submission for Building Schools for the Future;

- c) the further development of the preferred option be managed by the Council and the two schools working in partnership, with an agreed Memorandum of Understanding to ensure the full commitment of all parties to the process;
- d) the proposal to close Hookergate School and the re-allocation of its current catchment area primary schools be the subject of a statutory consultation with stakeholders;
- e) the Group Director for Development and Enterprise be requested to identify and review potential sites in the West Area and recommend those which may be suitable for the purposes of further consultation with stakeholders.

For the following reasons:

To ensure that the Council:

- Fulfils its statutory duty to ensure a match between the predicted demand for school places and the number of schools and places maintained, and to ensure efficient use of resources;
- Is able to take the opportunity to make an application for the early release of BSF programme resources to ensure that all Gateshead secondary schools have the necessary investment in buildings and resources to deliver education fit for the 21st century.

Policy Context

1. The Council has statutory duties to:
 - ensure that there are sufficient schools and places in the area;
 - promote high educational standards;
 - ensure fair access to educational opportunity;
 - promote diversity and increase parental choice;
 - make efficient use its resources, including the removal of surplus places in schools;
 - promote the fulfilment of every child's educational potential.

The proposals in this report are consistent with these statutory duties and with the Council's vision for children and young people as set out in the Corporate Plan, the Children and Young People's Plan and the Sustainable Community Strategy (Vision 2030).

Background

2. It is a statutory requirement that the Council keeps school provision under review to ensure that the supply of school places and the overall number of schools matches current and future demand. Some surplus places are required in any area to ensure small rises and falls in the population can be accommodated and to support choice for parents. A figure of 10% surplus is considered appropriate across an area. Maintaining too many surplus places or schools represents an inefficient use of resources, which can have an adverse effect on educational standards generally.
3. Small schools often require a disproportionate share of the available resources in order to maintain standards and reasonable class sizes, which in turn can result in the inefficient use of resources and a shortage of funding across all schools. Each school maintained by the Council requires funding to maintain its buildings and site, to employ caretaking, cleaning and administrative staff, and to appoint a headteacher and other senior staff in management posts. Larger schools generally offer better value for money.
4. Capital investment for new and refurbished secondary school buildings, through the BSF programme, is determined by reference to the predicted number of students. In reviewing its secondary school provision serving communities across the West Area, the Council has to maximise the impact of the available capital funding by planning for the appropriate number of places and for a sustainable number of schools. There is an opportunity for the Council to submit a "readiness to deliver" bid to the BSF programme by 17 September 2009. In order to qualify for the release of BSF funding, the Council needs to have robust plans in place to address the future demand for pupil places and the pattern of school organisation.
5. Hookergate School is now the smallest secondary school in Gateshead, with just over 400 students aged 11-16 (plus around 90 post 16 students). It has a Planned Admission Number of 160, and a total capacity of 800 11-16 places. 81 new pupils started in September 2009, of which 65 were "first preferences" for Hookergate. Falling numbers reduce the budget available to the governors and a significant reduction in staffing has already had to be made to reflect this. Further reductions are likely to become necessary in subsequent years.

6. Of the other secondary schools in the West Area, Ryton, Whickham and St Thomas More RC Schools remain at or close to full capacity and are usually oversubscribed, although numbers in their catchment areas have been falling. Kingsmeadow School is operating at around 75% of its capacity.

Consultation

7. In June 2009, Cabinet agreed to carry out an informal consultation on options for the review and reorganisation of secondary school provision in the West Area. Three options were offered for consideration by stakeholders, with no preference from the Council indicated:

Option A

To close Hookergate School and transfer the existing pupils to Ryton School; the Council would seek to build a new “state of the art” school to replace the existing Ryton building, on a new site in the Greenside area.

Option B

To close both Hookergate and Ryton Schools and open a new secondary school, initially with all pupils on the Ryton site; the Council would seek to build a new “state of the art” school to replace the existing Ryton building, on a new site in the Greenside area.

Option C

To close Hookergate School and transfer the existing pupils to Ryton School; the Council would seek to rebuild or refurbish Ryton School on its existing site.

8. Full details of the consultation methodology, the numbers of responses received and an analysis of the comments made are attached as Appendix 2 to this report. It has not proved possible to reproduce all the letters and comments received, but every effort has been made to reflect all the opinions expressed. Minutes of all meetings are on the Council's website.
9. Key issues arising from the consultation that have significantly influenced the development of the preferred option, include the following:
 - both schools have significant strengths and support from their communities
 - Ryton School is popular and not suffering from falling rolls
 - Hookergate School is not sustainable on current and projected numbers
 - the closure of both schools would bring significant risks for students
 - no support for an academy or trust solution for the West
 - the quality of education and support for students through transition is vital
 - more than one change of school site is potentially damaging to students
 - none of the suggested options fully meets all aspirations
 - choice of site for a new build is critical
 - the transport infrastructure will need to be carefully developed
 - any solution must be equitable for all communities in the West
 - an inclusive approach is needed, rather than one that creates competition
 - equality of opportunity for all staff involved.

Preferred option

10. As stated in the covering report, the Council's preferred option should be based on developing a positive and inclusive vision of secondary education for the West Area that meets the needs of the whole community, both current and future generations. To ensure that the development of the preferred option remains in line with this vision, it is proposed that a memorandum of understanding (MOU) be agreed between the Council and the two schools. This MOU will reflect some of the necessary principles underlining the transition process, specifically, that all parties will need to work:
 - in a spirit of trust and openness
 - collaboratively and inclusively
 - to pursue excellent outcomes for all
 - to deliver a shared vision for the West

11. The management and delivery of the transition process, and responsibility for securing the vision, will be vested in a small strategic steering group, comprising representatives from both schools (two representatives per school) and the Council (two representatives). This group will consider the following key themes that need to be addressed through the transition process:
 - Joint governance
 - Student partnership
 - Parent partnership
 - Staffing implications
 - Educational standards
 - Special educational needs
 - Location of new build
 - Environmental sustainability
 - Sustainable transport strategy
 - Community engagement
 - Partnership working
 - Communications strategy
 - Branding – review of school name, uniform etc

12. Further details on the Readiness to Deliver submission, based on the preferred option, are contained in a separate report to be considered by Cabinet following the discussion on this report.

13. The proposed closure of Hookergate School will be the subject of consultation, in accordance with the statutory guidance covering such processes. Subject to views expressed during consultation, and subject to a successful bid for BSF funding to build a new school, the formal closure of Hookergate School would be linked to the opening of the new building. To achieve this will necessitate Hookergate and Ryton Schools (especially their staff) working closely together to maintain good quality education for all pupils. Admission to Hookergate's Year 7 in September 2010 will be carried out as usual, subject to parental preferences.

14. The following primary schools are currently part of the Hookergate catchment area:
- Chopwell
 - High Spen
 - Highfield
 - Rowlands Gill
 - Parkhead
 - Winlaton West Lane

These schools will be consulted in respect of re-allocating secondary school links, resulting from the closure of Hookergate.

15. The identification of one or more potential sites for a new build school will be carried out by officers from the Council's Development and Enterprise Group. The issues to be considered in selecting suitable sites will include the following:
- ownership of the site
 - existing or previous activity on the site
 - any planning constraints
 - utilities
 - site topography and ground conditions
 - geographical location relative to school catchment area
 - highways impact
 - transport and access issues
 - environmental impact and sustainability
 - community impact
 - value for money

Consultation Arrangements

16. Consultation will take place during the Autumn of 2009. Key stakeholder groups for consultation will include: students, parents, staff and governors of Hookergate and Ryton Schools; trade unions; feeder primary schools; ward councillors; the Area Forum and the local MP.
17. The Portfolio Holders for Children and Young People, and for the West Area have been consulted during the preparation of this report.

Alternative Options

18. The initial and informal consultation exercise on this review included alternative options. To progress to the next stage, the Council is required to identify a preferred option for consultation, as identified in this report. However, even following the next stage of consultation, the Council still has the opportunity to develop and propose an alternative option to that set out here.

Implications of Recommended Option

19. **Financial Implications** - the Strategic Director Finance and ICT confirms that there are no financial implications for the Council arising from this report. The costs of developing the preferred option and carrying out further consultation can be met from existing resources. Revenue savings emerging from the proposed closure of Hookergate school are “ring-fenced” to the Dedicated Schools Budget, and will be re-allocated to all secondary schools through the funding formula. The capital implications of the preferred option would be largely covered by the BSF funding programme. More details are included in the report on the Readiness to Deliver.
20. **Risk Management Implication** - there is a risk to educational standards and to the efficient use of resources if the review is not progressed.
21. **Human Resources Implications** - there are no Human Resources implications arising from this report, but there will be staffing implications arising from any proposals for change following consultation. The proposals above in respect of transition planning process aim to put in place arrangements to minimise any the impact of school closure on the staff affected.
22. **Equality and Diversity Implications** - equality and diversity issues were discussed during the consultation process, and will be key issues in the transition planning process. An equality impact needs assessment will be carried out.
23. **Crime and Disorder Implications – nil**
24. **Health Implications – nil**
25. **Sustainability Implications** - the preferred option aims to reduce surplus capacity, which represents a waste of resources. Investment from the BSF programme will improve school buildings in terms of energy efficiency and sustainability. Sustainability will be an important consideration in choice of site and the design of the new building.
26. **Human Rights Implications** - whenever school reorganisation is considered it is likely that Article 2 of the first protocol to the Convention will be engaged. This provides that parents have the right to expect that the state will respect their right to have their children educated in conformity with their philosophical and religious convictions, but this right is heavily qualified by the requirement that it is compatible with the provision of efficient instruction and training and the avoidance of unreasonable expenditure.
27. **Area and Ward Implications** - there are implications for all Wards in the West and Inner West Areas.

Background Information

Secondary Review reports to Cabinet, 30 January 2007 and 2 June 2009
Consultation Document – “Secondary Review – West Gateshead”
DCSF Guide for Local Authorities – Closing a Maintained Mainstream School
Responses to the consultation exercise