

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET - 16th OCTOBER 2008

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES

REVIEW OF PRIMARY SCHOOL PLACES: OUTCOME OF PREVIOUS PHASES, VALUE FOR MONEY AND FUTURE STRATEGY

1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides a summary of the current position in respect of primary school places, developments resulting from previous phases of the Review, and issues for the future. It seeks Cabinet's approval for further phases of area reviews involving schools and stakeholders to identify any further opportunities for the removal of surplus places, taking into account the impact of the forthcoming Primary Capital Strategy programme. The report also identifies the programme from a Value for Money perspective. In relation to a previous phase, the report seeks Cabinet's approval to an amendment to the potential implementation date for the proposed closure of Arrowe Hill Primary School.

2.0 Background

2.1 Following the presentation of the report Provision of Primary School Places – Future Strategy on 20th October 2004, Cabinet instructed that the principle of phased area reviews of primary school provision be established, and identified the small planning areas of South Birkenhead, Central Birkenhead, North Birkenhead and Beechwood to form Phase 1 of the review.

2.2 The sequence of subsequent review phases was agreed by Cabinet on 20th October 2005 following the presentation of the report, Primary School Places Review – Update and Strategy for Phase 2, as follows:

Phase 2 – Bebington, Bromborough and Eastham, Spital and Thornton Hough

Phase 3 – South Wallasey, North Wallasey, Leasowe, Greasby, Upton, Heswall, Pensby and Thingwall

Phase 4 – West Kirby, Hoylake and Meols, Woodchurch, Noctorum and Moreton

2.3 The reviews were carried out within the context set out by the Director of Children's Services, of the need to reduce the growing number of primary school surplus places and take account of Audit Commission guidance on surplus places against a continuing fall in the number of primary age pupils, and issues identified in the Joint Area Review. In addition to removing unnecessary surplus places, options arising from the Reviews were intended to make more effective use of resources, take account of patterns of parental preference, reflect the additional challenges of maintaining small schools in an urban area and contribute to the wider standards agenda through the more efficient use of resources.

2.4 Reducing surplus places forms part of the corporate strategic objective, "To raise the aspirations of young people" by ensuring that public money is spent to maximum effect in all Wirral's schools. It also forms part of the corporate strategic objective "Create an excellent Council" by meeting the 2008-2013 corporate aim, "Improve the use of the Council's land and assets", which is also a 2008/2009 priority for improvement.

2.5 This report updates Cabinet on the outcomes of the first complete review of primary school provision across Wirral and seeks Cabinet's views on future reviews to be carried out.

3.0 Consultation and process

- 3.1 In order to ensure that the review of surplus places in Wirral's primary schools was both seen and experienced as transparent, open and consultative, the following ways of working were adopted at the beginning of each Review phase.
- a) Each small planning area was considered, in an order decided by Cabinet.
 - b) The key factors to be analysed included the number of children and their actual distribution across the area in relation to schools available, including denominational schools, and parental preferences.
 - c) Officers, headteachers and chairs of governors have discussed how many schools were required, compared to the number currently available, and the geography of where schools are in relation to the communities they serve.
 - d) Feasible options were then developed, informed by current and future land use plans, for example, information about new housing developments.
- 3.2 Options arising from this pre-consultation phase were reported to Cabinet, who then approved a range of options to proceed to formal consultation. Feedback from the community is an integral part of the consultation process.
- 3.3 Through all phases of the Review, in order for all stakeholders to have access to relevant background information and have the opportunity to comment and respond, the following methods of consultation have been employed :
- a) A range of documentation has been produced and distributed. This comprised:
 - (i) the full consultation document sent to all schools in the review area; local One-Stop shops, libraries and the Central Libraries; Wallasey Town Hall and relevant community centres;
 - (ii) a review pack comprising all the relevant background information sent to all the locations in (i) above;
 - (iii) parents'/carers' consultation leaflets and comments forms to all parents/carers, via all schools named in the options;
 - (iv) standard letters to all the schools in the small planning areas, one format for schools named in the options and one for other schools in the small planning area.
 - b) A dedicated web-site on the Wirral Learning Grid was established and advertised on the council web-site, the council Intranet, and in the parents' consultation leaflets and the standard letters to schools. This site provided access to all the information produced in paper form and allowed e-mail responses to a dedicated e-mail address.
 - c) Meetings were arranged for all interested stakeholders at each of the schools named in options for closure or amalgamation. These meetings followed the same format, with a presentation on the overall position and the school specific position followed by around ninety minutes of time for audience comments, feedback and questions. The meetings were attended by parents, carers, staff, governors, Ward members and various other interested persons and bodies, including Diocesan representatives where appropriate. Each meeting was chaired by the Cabinet member for Children's Services and Lifelong Learning. The dates for the meetings were in the parents' leaflets and on the specific web-site and a general notice was published in the local press.
 - d) Opportunities have been provided for other means of response. Submissions have been received in paper and e-mail formats – all of which will be made

available before and at the Cabinet meeting, in addition to the summaries contained in this report.

- e) All of the relevant LA documentation produced for the consultation has been shared with the Diocesan Bodies.

3.4 The outcome of the consultation was then reported to Cabinet, who would then decide whether to approve any of the options to proceed to statutory notices.

3.5 When statutory notices were published, these were posted at the school concerned, in the local press and in the local area to the school. There followed a further representation period for any person to write and express their views about the proposal in question.

3.6 Proposals made prior to 25th May 2007 were considered by the School Organisation Committee (SOC), which had representatives from schools, the Local Authority, Early Years, the Church of England and Catholic Diocese and the Learning and Skills Council. The SOC was abolished from this date by the Education and Inspections Act 2006. Proposals made since May 2007 are now considered by the Council's decision making body, which in Wirral is Council's Cabinet. Under some circumstances, the final decision maker is the national School's Adjudicator.

4.0 Proposals and outcomes

4.1 Prior to the Review, the last time significant alterations were made to primary school provision in Wirral was in the mid-1990's, when a number of Infant and Junior schools were amalgamated to form primary schools – these included Bidston Avenue Primary, Heygarth Primary (formerly Glenburn Infant and Heygarth Junior), Millfields Primary (formerly Mill Park Infant and Junior), Hillside Primary and Townfield Primary schools. In addition, Prenton Infant and Prenton Junior School were amalgamated to form Prenton Primary School in 2005.

Phase 1

4.2 The statutory proposals arising from Phase 1 of the review were as follows:

In South Birkenhead:

- Closure of The Dell Primary School

In North Birkenhead and Beechwood

- Closure of St Paul's Catholic Primary School
- Closure of Vyner Primary School, and
- Closure of St Oswald's CE (Controlled) Primary School, linked to
- Establishment of a new CE (Controlled) primary school on the current St Oswald's site

4.3 These proposals were considered by the SOC in January 2006. All the proposals were approved, with the exception of the closure of St Paul's Catholic Primary School, on which a unanimous decision could not be reached.

4.4 The decision on the closure of St Paul's Catholic Primary School therefore passed to the national School's Adjudicator, who following additional consultation with stakeholders, rejected the proposal in April 2006.

Current position

4.5 The Dell Primary School closed with effect from 31st August 2006. Having been declared surplus to requirements, and having applied for and received permission from the Secretary of State for the sale of school playing fields, the Council-owned site

was sold at auction and is now subject to a recent application for redevelopment as private housing, which is pending approval (Planning application no. 20085589).

- 4.6 Following the closures of Vyner Primary and St Oswald's CE Primary, Bidston Village CE Primary School opened in the existing buildings at the former St Oswald's site in September 2006. A new entrance and administration block linking the two existing buildings is under construction and due to be completed early in 2009.
- 4.7 The former Vyner building was extensively redeveloped and refurbished, and in September 2007 the former Solar School relocated to the building as The Observatory School, a special school for pupils aged 11 to 14 with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties.
- 4.8 Parents of pupils attending The Dell Primary were asked to express a preference for an alternative primary school. Parents of pupils at both Vyner and St Oswald's CE were guaranteed a place at the new Bidston Village CE Primary School, with the option to apply for a place elsewhere if they wished to do so. Places were allocated under the Admissions Code, and pupils took up their new places in September 2006.

Phase 2

- 4.9 The statutory proposals arising from Phase 2 of the Review were as follows:
- Closure of Bromborough Pool Primary School
 - Closure of St Mary's CE Primary School
- 4.10 Cabinet's preferred option for schools in Eastham was to close both St Mary's CE Primary School and Millfields Primary School in order to open a new CE Controlled school on the Millfields site, an option which arose from consultation. However, following additional consultation with stakeholders and the Anglican Diocese of Chester during Summer 2006, this option did not proceed further at that time. However, subsequently St Mary's CE Primary School was placed in the Ofsted Category of Special Measures in Autumn 2006 and following the Director of Children's Services recommendation to Cabinet of 14th December 2006, Cabinet agreed to publish a proposal for the closure of St Mary's CE Primary School.
- 4.11 The closure of Bromborough Pool Primary School was considered by the SOC in Summer 2006, where the proposal was approved. The school closed with effect from 31st August 2007.
- 4.12 The closure of St Mary's CE Primary School was considered by the SOC in March 2007, where a unanimous decision could not be reached. The decision therefore passed to the national School's Adjudicator, who following additional consultation with stakeholders, decided in May 2007 that the proposal for closure should be approved. The school closed with effect from 31st August 2007.

Current position

- 4.13 Neither of these two buildings were Council owned, both being leased from an external party. Bromborough Pool has now been returned to Riverside Housing Association as the freeholder. The St Mary's building is owned by Trustees of the Diocese of Chester and final negotiations to transfer the building to the trustees will be resolved shortly. The Council has retained ownership of the playing field to the rear of the St Mary's building.
- 4.14 Parents of pupils attending both schools were asked to express a preference for an alternative primary school, places were allocated under the Admissions Code, and children were settled into their new schools from September 2007.
- 4.15 Millfields Primary School in Eastham is investigating the possibility of opening as a Church of England Controlled School, which remains Cabinet's preferred option in this

area. Formal discussions between the school, the Authority and the Diocese of Chester have now begun. It is likely that a further round of formal consultation with stakeholders will be required before any proposals could proceed.

Phase 3

4.16 The statutory proposals arising from Phase 3 of the review were as follows:

In South Wallasey:

- Closure of Poulton Primary School, linked to:
- Extend the lower age range of Park Primary School to provide an LA designated F1 (nursery) class

In Pensby:

- Closure of Pensby Infant School, and
- Closure of Pensby Junior School, linked to:
- Establishment of a new Community Primary School at the Pensby Infant and Junior site.

and

- Closure of Pensby Park Primary School

4.17 Cabinet also agreed that the Director of Children's Services be authorised to support the Anglican Diocese of Chester and Catholic Diocese of Shrewsbury in respect of the establishment of a new joint denominational school on the site of Our Lady of Lourdes in Leasowe. Pending the outcome of this new kind of school for Wirral, the schools in the Leasowe planning area would then be reviewed again in a future phase.

4.18 The establishment of a new primary school in Pensby was subject to new regulations whereby a statutory competition must be held to invite bids to operate the new school. However, guidance indicated that the amalgamation of an Infant and Junior school might be considered as an exception to the competition requirement. The Local Authority successfully applied to the Secretary of State for an exemption from the requirement to hold a competition for the new Pensby primary school prior to the publication of statutory notices.

4.19 As a new school proposed by the Local Authority, the final decision on the amalgamation of Pensby Infant and Junior School to open a new primary school was passed to the national Schools Adjudicator for consideration, and was approved in January 2008.

4.20 The proposals in South Wallasey, and the closure of Pensby Park Primary School, were approved by Council's Cabinet in January 2008.

Current position

4.21 The school closures officially took effect from 31st August 2008. In September 2008, Pensby Primary School will open in the existing buildings at the Pensby Infant and Junior site. A new build replacement primary school has been identified as one of the initial projects for the Primary Capital Strategy programme, subject to funding and planning permissions.

4.22 A Children's Centre has been sited within the former Pensby Park building.

4.23 In South Wallasey, from September 2008, Park Primary School will relocate temporarily to the former Poulton building. This will allow the existing Park site to be cleared ahead of proposed major rebuilding works, subject to funding availability from various sources, including the Primary Capital Strategy programme, and planning permissions.

- 4.24 With regard to admissions, all existing pupils at Pensby Infant and Pensby Junior school were guaranteed a place in the newly formed Primary school, although parents could apply elsewhere if they wished to do so. Parents of pupils at Pensby Park Primary School were asked to express a preference for an alternative primary school. Parents of pupils at Poulton Primary were guaranteed a place at Park Primary School, with the option to express a preference for an alternative primary school if they wished to do so. Places have been allocated according to the Admissions Code and pupils have taken up these places from September 2008.
- 4.25 With regard to the establishment of a new joint denominational school in Leasowe, officers are advised that the two Diocesan authorities have now agreed the basis on which such a school can operate, and will shortly be ready to begin formal consultation with stakeholders and the community at large.

Phase 4

- 4.26 In June 2008, following extensive consultation, Cabinet decided that the following statutory proposal should be published:
- Closure of Arrowe Hill Primary School

Current position

- 4.27 Statutory notices will be published in the Autumn term, followed by the six week representation period where anyone who wishes to do so can express their view on the proposal.
- 4.28 Discussions with stakeholders at Arrowe Hill Primary School suggest that the original date for the proposed implementation of the closure of the school in Summer 2010, which was intended to allow any necessary building works to be carried out ahead of the transfer of pupils to their destination schools, could produce more disadvantages than advantages. The governing body of Arrowe Hill Primary School have confirmed this view to the Authority in writing. Consequently, the date for implementation in the statutory notice will be shown as 31st August 2009.
- 4.29 The decision maker in this instance will be Council's Cabinet, and following due process, a report will be brought to Cabinet early in 2009.

5.0 Pupil numbers and places

- 5.1 In 2004, at the beginning of the Primary Places Review, the number of pupils of primary age in Wirral schools was 26,044 and was projected to fall to 24,294 by 2008. The actual number of primary age pupils in 2008 was 23,855, 439 pupils fewer than had been projected at that time, differing by -2% from the original projection.
- 5.2 The number of primary age pupils has been falling steadily over a long period of time and will continue to fall for the next two years. Based upon live birth figures which will translate into intakes up to 2013, there are indications of an increase in the annual number of births resulting in small rises in primary age pupils from 2011 to 2013.

| | YEAR | PUPILS | ANNUAL CHANGE |
|------------------|------|--------|---------------|
| ACTUAL | 1983 | 29,940 | |
| | 1988 | 27,547 | |
| | 1993 | 29,387 | |
| | 1998 | 29,498 | |
| | 2003 | 26,556 | |
| | 2004 | 26,044 | - 512 |
| | 2005 | 25,421 | - 623 |
| | 2006 | 24,853 | - 568 |
| | 2007 | 24,275 | - 578 |
| | 2008 | 23,855 | - 420 |
| PROJECTED | 2009 | 23,685 | - 170 |
| | 2010 | 23,646 | - 39 |
| | 2011 | 23,676 | + 30 |
| | 2012 | 23,789 | + 113 |
| | 2013 | 23,922 | + 133 |

The numbers set out above are for primary age pupils (4 – 11) in mainstream schools, including any part-time four-year-olds in Foundation 1 classes.

- 5.3 Figures for live births are obtained from Wirral Health Authority Primary Care Trust (PCT). The transfer rate from births to Foundation 2 is reviewed annually, and a three year average is applied to the live birth figure to produce the projected arrivals in the equivalent Foundation 2 year group. The methodology has been approved by the Audit Commission. It is too soon to say whether the recent small rise in the birth rate is the beginning of an upward trend, or an indication of a period of stability at a lower level than in previous years.
- 5.4 From this overall figure for Wirral, an estimate is generated for each future year for individual schools, based on a three year average of intakes to each school. Individual school intakes can of course fluctuate due to various factors e.g. changing patterns of parental preference or changing age profiles in the community served by the school.
- 5.5 Despite the small recent upturn in births, Wirral's primary schools are still expected to accommodate 2,100 fewer pupils in 2013 than in 2004 when the review began. Further details and the breakdowns by the smaller planning areas used in the School Organisation Plan are attached as Appendix A to this report.
- 5.6 The following table shows actual and projected surplus places in Wirral primary schools.

| | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2013 (projected) |
|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------------------|
| Number of schools | 101 | 101 | 100 | 98 | 96 | 92 |
| Schools with surplus places | 78 | 87 | 85 | 81 | 83 | 76 |
| Total places | 28,754 | 28,931 | 28,335 | 27,849 | 27,529 | 27,021 |
| Total surplus places | 3,134 | 3,758 | 3,724 | 3,772 | 3,785 | 3,281 |
| % Surplus places | 10.9% | 13.0% | 13.1% | 13.5% | 13.8% | 12.1% |
| Schools with 25% and 30 surplus places | 12 | 17 | 21 | 23 | 25 | 19 |

Projection to 2013 assumes that all current and pending proposals under the existing Primary Places Review are implemented and that otherwise no further action to reduce surplus places is taken.

- 5.7 Whilst in terms of overall percentage, at first glance there appears to have been little impact in reducing surplus places, it is estimated that had the Primary Places Review not been carried out and difficult decisions made to close and amalgamate schools, the 2008 figure of 3,785 and 13.8% surplus places would now have reached 5,135 and 18% surplus places.
- 5.8 Taking into account all current and pending proposals, a reduction of 1,733 places will have been achieved by the end of the first full review of Wirral's primary schools.
- 5.9 Despite the slight rise in the birth rate, if no further action is taken, it is projected that overall surplus places in Wirral in 2013 would remain above the Audit Commission's guideline of a maximum of 10% surplus places beyond which resources are deemed to be wasted supporting empty space. In addition, 1 in 5 schools are likely to have more than 25% and 30 surplus places, a key indicator on which an annual report is made to the Department for Children, Schools and Families. On this basis, further reviews of primary school provision are recommended.

6.0 Primary Capital Strategy

- 6.1 On 22nd May 2008, Cabinet approved the Wirral strategy document, "Primary Strategy for Change" which is a requirement for the national DCSF Primary Capital Investment Programme and requires approval by the DCSF prior to capital funding being released.
- 6.2 Following a consultation period in 2006, the DCSF announced details of the National Primary Strategy for Change Programme in December 2007. This initiative is the mechanism for capital investment in primary schools, alongside the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme in secondary schools. The report to Cabinet and minute are attached as Appendix B.
- 6.3 The key priorities for the first four years of this 14 year programme include major schemes arising from the Primary Places Review, beginning with new primary schools in Pensby and in South Wallasey (Park Primary).
- 6.4 Within Wirral's vision for transforming primary schools is the following statement:

"(that the) best match of provision to need is achieved by reviews of primary place provision continuing on a small planning area basis, once the first four year cycle of reviews is completed in Summer 2008. Focus to be on those small planning areas with the highest number of surplus places and those individual schools with more than 25% surplus places".

The Primary Places Review is intended to continue to be the main route through which priorities for capital investment are identified over the lifetime of the Primary Capital Strategy in conjunction with Diocesan partners and other stakeholders.

- 6.5 The Authority is awaiting confirmation from the DCSF of approval of the Strategy for Change, which will enable the first four years of identified schemes to proceed to implementation.

7.0 Review Phases

- 7.1 The following table shows actual and projected surplus places, schools with more than 25% surplus places and small schools (under 180 pupils) by small planning areas.

| | 2008 % surplus | 2013 % surplus (projected) | No. Schools > 25% surplus in 2013 | No. Small schools in 2013 | Old Review Phase | Suggested Review Phase (Year) |
|---------------------------|----------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|
| Prenton | 6.9 | 7.6 | 0 | 0 | - | 5 (08/09) |
| Beechwood | 28.4 | 29.7 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 5 (08/09) |
| North Birkenhead | 22.7 | 17.3 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 5 (08/09) |
| Central Birkenhead | 16.1 | 18.4 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 5 (08/09) |
| South Birkenhead | 22.6 | 21.7 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 5 (08/09) |
| Noctorum | 9.5 | 5.7 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 5 (08/09) |
| South Wallasey | 27.8 | 23.7 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 6 (09/10) |
| North Wallasey | 2.2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 6 (09/10) |
| Leasowe | 29.6 | 17.4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 6 (09/10) |
| Greasby | 8.5 | 13.7 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 6 (09/10) |
| Moreton | 21.8 | 16.9 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 6 (09/10) |
| Upton | 5.9 | 9.5 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 6 (09/10) |
| Pensby/Thingwall | 13.7 | 7.8 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 7 (10/11) |
| Hoylake/Meols | 7.6 | 9.7 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 7 (10/11) |
| West Kirby | 10.3 | 10.2 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 7 (10/11) |
| Heswall | 0.5 | 3.8 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 7 (10/11) |
| Woodchurch | 20.7 | 27.6 (8.9*) | 2 | 2 | 4 | 7 (10/11) |
| Bromborough | 7.2 | 7.4 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 8 (11/12) |
| Bebington | 8.2 | 5.4 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 8 (11/12) |
| Thornton Hough | 15.8 | 9.2 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 8 (11/12) |
| Spital | 2.4 | 1.6 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 8 (11/12) |

Shading indicates 10% or more surplus places in the first two columns, and the presence of schools with high surplus or small size in the next two columns. * = Projected percentage if current proposal in Woodchurch area is approved.

7.2 The recommended new Phases of the Review can be summarised as follows

- Phase 5 - Birkenhead, including Prenton and Noctorum
- Phase 6 – Wallasey, Leasowe, Moreton, Upton and Greasby
- Phase 7 – Deeside, including Pensby/Thingwall and Woodchurch
- Phase 8 – Bebington and Bromborough, including Spital and Thornton Hough

7.3 The original first phase of the Review was Birkenhead, but excluding Prenton, which had at that time recently undergone the amalgamation of the Infant and Junior to form Prenton Primary, and also excluding Noctorum.

7.4 The implications of the potential new primary school at the proposed Birkenhead High Academy for Girls in Claughton, which if approved, is likely to open in September 2009, has implications for mainstream primary schools in the surrounding area which will need to be examined as part of the Review. Early indications are that an impact is likely to be felt not only in the Central and North Birkenhead areas, but also in Noctorum. For this reason, the Noctorum planning area has been included in Phase 5 of the Review alongside the rest of those areas traditionally considered to form “Birkenhead”.

- 7.5 Phase 6 of the review largely constitutes the same planning areas as the original phase 3 of the review, with the addition of Moreton due to close links with the Leasowe area, and the omission of Heswall and Pensby/Thingwall which move to a later phase.
- 7.6 Phase 7 of the Review is principally those areas that would traditionally constitute “Deeside”, with the addition of Woodchurch, which is presently the subject of a proposal for the closure of a school in 2009.
- 7.7 Lastly in this round, Phase 8 of the Review comprises the Bromborough and Bebington areas, including Eastham, Thornton Hough and Spital. These areas indicate the least issues in terms of current and projected surplus places.
- 7.8 In previous phases of the review, Cabinet has approved the principle whereby a Review can be initiated under certain circumstances, namely if a school’s roll collapses, or if a school is placed into an Ofsted category of concern, since the LA has a statutory duty to consider whether a school in Special Measures should be closed or amalgamated with another school. This principle is reiterated for the new phases of the Review.

8.0 Staffing Implications

- 8.1 Current staffing levels need to be taken into account in determining the number and timescale of proposed area reviews.
- 8.2 Over the course of the first three Phases of the Review, in total 58 teaching staff and 121 non-teaching support staff have been affected by the closure or amalgamation of schools. Outcomes for these staff were as follows:

| | Teachers | Support staff |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| Redeployed | 77% | 69% |
| Early Voluntary Retirement | 23% | 20% |
| Severance/Compulsory Redundancy | 0% | 11% |

9.0 Financial Implications and Value for Money

- 9.1 There are no financial implications arising directly as a result of this report.
- 9.2 In financial terms, excluding those pupil related budget elements that follow children to their destinations, at the end of Phase 3, £591,114 will have been returned to the overall schools budget annually to be distributed to the remaining schools. Over the term of the Review to the end of Phase 3, cumulatively £1,294,296 has been returned to the overall schools budget.
- 9.3 The capital receipt generated by the sale of the former Dell site, in an area where residential housing has been an acceptable planning option, was £2.62 million. This has been reinvested through the Council’s Capital Programme including works in primary schools.

10.0 Equal Opportunities Implications

- 10.1 There are none arising out of this report.

11.0 Local Agenda 21 Statement

- 11.1 The removal of old, inefficient accommodation contributes to Council principles and targets in respect of Agenda 21.

12.0 Community Safety Implications

- 12.1 Rationalisation and refurbishment of schools allow the most vulnerable accommodation to be removed and other security improvements carried out.

13.0 Planning Implications

- 13.1 The relationship between housing development policy and school place provision is a factor in considering surplus place removal.
- 13.2 Construction of any new classroom provision would be subject to the usual planning permissions.

14.0 Anti-Poverty Implications

- 14.1 The redistribution of funding released by school reorganisation, in combination with the Authority's intention to realign the schools budget to give higher levels of funding to schools with high levels of deprivation, as well as improved accommodation, goes towards raising aspirations and narrowing the attainment gap for vulnerable groups.

15.0 Local Member Support Implications

- 15.1 Primary place planning and potential surplus place removal have relevance to all Wards.

16.0 Background Papers

Audit Commission Report: Planning School Places in Wirral September 2004.

LA document "Pursuit of Excellence: Primary Education in Wirral".

School pupil number returns, January 2008 (Annual Census return to DCSF).

Supply of School Places return, August 2008, to DCSF requirements.

Other data held in Department including that provided by Wirral Health Authority.

17.0 Summary

- 17.1 All Wirral's primary schools have now been examined as part of the Primary Places Review. Decisions taken following extensive consultation with stakeholders have already resulted in a real reduction in the number of surplus places, with an on-going financial benefit to all Wirral's children through the redistribution of resources. No one closes schools lightly. However, there is general agreement amongst all stakeholders that action must be taken to address the issue of surplus capacity. Officers are required to offer clear advice as to appropriate action in order to spend public money wisely and ensure all Wirral's children benefit equitably from the funding available. Continuance of the area review principle is recommended in order to identify further areas for reorganisation and transformation, producing priorities for the national Primary Strategy for Change.

18.0 Recommendations

- 1) That renewed approval be given to the principle of area reviews to study current primary school provision in order to match future needs and support the opportunity for transformational change provided by the Primary Capital Strategy.
- 2) That approval be given to the sequence of planning areas to be examined in each new Review phase.
- 3) That Cabinet approve the principle whereby a Review can be initiated where a school's roll collapses, or a school is placed in an Ofsted category of concern.
- 4) That approval be given for the amendment of the implementation date for the proposed closure of Arrowe Hill Primary School to 31st August 2009.

Howard Cooper

Director of Children's Services