

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET - 12th JUNE 2008

REVIEW OF PRIMARY SCHOOL PLACES: OUTCOME OF CONSULTATIONS ON OPTIONS PUT FORWARD FOR THE PHASE 4 PLANNING AREAS

Executive Summary

- 1.0 This report advises the Cabinet of the outcomes of the consultation process which has taken place in the Woodchurch planning area, in respect of the options for consultation agreed at Cabinet on 29th November 2007. This report describes the responses to the various options put forward for discussion, including additional suggestions put forward during the consultation process, and makes recommendations with regard to statutory proposals in this area.

Background

2.0 Context Of The School Organisation Plan

Until March 2005, School Organisation Committees (SOC) were required by law to have regard to the School Organisation Plan (SOP) when considering statutory proposals for changes to schools' provision. The plan itself was approved on a regular basis by the SOC. However the SOP was one of seven statutory plans repealed by the Children Act 2004. The SOC itself has now been abolished by the Education and Inspections Act 2006 with effect from 25th May 2007. Nevertheless the policies and principles set out in the SOP remain an important context in which the Wirral Primary Review was set, and continue to be key guidance for the consideration of statutory proposals.

2.1. DCSF guidance on the School Organisation Plan states that

"The key purpose of the School Organisation Plan is to set out clearly how the Local Education Authority (LEA) plans to meet its statutory responsibility to secure sufficient education provision within its area in order to promote higher standards of attainment. It should be designed to help the key stakeholders – LEA, schools, promoters, parents and local communities, understand what school places are needed at present and in future, and how they are provided. Importantly it will be the starting point... in considering statutory proposals for changes to schools".

- 2.2 As indicated above, the plan contains the policies and principles proposed by the LA and agreed by the former SOC for the planning of school provision. These policies and principles are set out at Appendix 1 to the report. It will be seen that the intention (prior to the abolition of the requirement to consider the plan) was that any proposal should be considered within the context of the principles set out in paragraphs 3 to 5 of the Policies and Principles. There is an over-riding requirement that overall provision is effective and efficient, i.e. that there should be an appropriate balance between school places and the following principles/criteria:

- parental preference
- delivering the curriculum
- meeting statutory and desirable goals on class sizes
- maintaining or promoting diversity
- SEN
- standards
- accessibility
- (secondary schools only) post 16 provision

- contribution to the community.

Paragraph 4 of the Policies and Principles adds the issue of overall school size within the primary sector and paragraph 5 deals specifically with the objectives of the Diocesan authorities.

2.3 View of the Wirral Schools Forum

Members should note that in June 2005 the Schools Forum passed the following resolution:

“Resolved - That Wirral Schools Forum recognises that the local education authority has a duty to maintain and fund schools in an efficient and effective manner. This implies that the number of schools should reflect the pupil population and the needs of Wirral communities, which could mean the amalgamation or closure of schools for the efficiency and effectiveness of the service.”

2.4 Following the presentation of the Primary School Place Provision report on 16th March 2006, Cabinet instructed that five Area Reviews be carried out within Phase 4 of the Primary Places Review : West Kirby, Hoylake and Meols, Woodchurch, Noctorum and Moreton. These areas equate to the small planning areas in the Authority’s School Organisation Plan. The outcomes of these area reviews were reported to Cabinet on 29th November 2007 and a copy of this report is attached as Appendix 2.

2.5 Following consideration of that report, Cabinet agreed that no options would be brought forward for the West Kirby, Hoylake and Meols, Noctorum or Moreton small planning areas at this time, although numbers and place provision would be kept under review. A number of options for consultation were proposed in respect of the Woodchurch area.

2.6 The options were:

- A Closure of Arrowe Hill Primary School
- B Closure of Fender Primary School
- C Amalgamation of Arrowe Hill Primary School and Fender Primary School at either the Arrowe Hill site (C1) or the Fender site (C2).

These options were approved for consultation.

2.7 The options were 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 took account of Audit Commission guidance on surplus places against a continuing fall in the number of primary age pupils, and issues identified in the recent Joint Area Review. In addition to removing unnecessary surplus places, the options 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.

2.8 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 Woodchurch area; local One-Stop shops, Woodchurch library 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.
- 2.9 The importance of eliciting the views of pupils is sometimes raised and this is an issue which is taken very seriously. We are sensitive to the fact that school re-organisation is by its nature upsetting and potentially stressful, particularly for children. Throughout the review, discussions with headteachers have taken place as to whether pupils should be formally consulted, and if so, how this could be carried out with minimum impact. The professional opinion of headteachers involved in this Phase of the Review was that any formal consultation would be unnecessarily distressing to children, nevertheless, the consultation does include responses received from individual children, or as a joint response from a School Council.
- 2.10 The consultation process and the presentation of LA, small planning area and school data to this wider audience does appear to have persuaded most people of the need to reduce the number of school places, though understandably people wish to advocate the case for their school in respect of closure or amalgamation options.
- 2.11 In addition to the detail set out below, further records of views put forward during the consultation period are attached as Appendix 3. Feedback is set out school by school. The record for each school brings together the responses from the meeting held at the school, together with any points raised in written or e-mail submissions to the Authority.

Outcome of the Consultation

- 3.0 Further suggestions in relation to primary school provision in the Woodchurch area were made as part of the consultation process:
- Build a new primary school alongside rebuilt Woodchurch High School
 - Amalgamate with St Michael and All Angels Catholic Primary School

Further discussion of these suggestions is given with the related consultation options below.

3.1 There were several key themes in the combined responses from consultees:

- General understanding of the falling rolls situation
- Effect of proposed housing and demographic changes on pupil numbers
- Respect for school staff in their skills and relationships with pupils and parents
- Educational standards and quality of provision
- Concern for the fate of closed buildings and sites
- Travel distance to school and the effect on traffic and road safety
- Disruption to pupils' education and confidence
- Class sizes
- Importance of small schools
- Effect of any change on children with special educational needs
- Importance of out of hours facilities, such as adult learning and breakfast clubs
- Importance of early years provision, including day care facilities
- Relationship between school and community
- Keeping friends and siblings together
- Staff redeployment
- Continuity of school over several generations.

3.2 **Responses from the Anglican and Roman Catholic Diocese**

The Diocese of Chester and the Diocese of Shrewsbury are key partners along with the LA in making provision for the education of children in Wirral. Both Diocesan Authorities were provided with the consultation documentation with an opportunity to respond. In this area, with no direct impact on any Catholic or Church of England schools, neither Diocese provided any formal comments.

Implications of the abolition of the SOC

3.3 Until the SOC's abolition on 25th May 2007, each Diocese was represented by a voting group on the SOC. Under the new guidance on school re-organisation proposals, each Diocese has the ability to object to any statutory proposal decided by the Local Authority Decision Maker, thereby referring the proposal to the School's Adjudicator. This is not a significantly different position to their former roles on the SOC. Full guidance has now issued by the DCSF and is available to read or download on-line at <http://www.DCSF.gov.uk/schoolorg/index.cfm> Key points of the guidance and a commentary in relation to Phase 4 options for Woodchurch is included within the report at Appendix 4.

Commentary on small schools

3.4 The Authority funds its schools through the operation of its local funding formula. The formula is designed so as to ensure that sufficient resources are made available to schools for the pupils they have to teach. The formula ensures that, however small a school, it will have sufficient resources. One would not therefore expect any school, simply through smallness, to become financially unviable. What does happen is that small schools draw in a greater share of the resource per pupil from the total available for distributing among all schools.

Since the total sum available for spending on all our children does not increase if we choose as an Authority to organise our children in more schools than is necessary for the efficient and effective delivery of education, it follows that the maintenance of small schools, where this is not necessary, comes at the expense of all other children.

The key questions therefore in terms of use of resources are:

- i) How small does a school need to be within the context of Wirral before it would be considered as contributing to an ineffective use of resource?
- ii) Are there reasons in specific cases why individual schools although “small” by Wirral standards should continue to be maintained even though they are relatively expensive?

3.5 With regard to Wirral’s policy on small schools, the School Organisation Plan (agreed in 2003) contained the proposal that the LA “should consider the implications of an increasing number of primary schools with less than one form of entry – 30 pupils and therefore primary schools with fewer than 210 pupils i.e. 7 x 30”. That review was carried out in great detail and with the involvement of a wide range of Headteachers, and culminated in the policy document “The Pursuit of Excellence”, extracts of which are included in Appendix 6. This policy adopted in 2004 suggests that a school should have at least 180 pupils in order to be viable. The guidance to Decision Makers (Appendix 4a) makes no mention of school size. DCSF guidance says that “Schools with fewer than 150 pupils may be educationally and financially sustainable only through substantial subsidies via their local authorities funding formula” :

www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/fallingschoolrolls/schools/educational_decisions

One problematic issue which is discussed in some detail in Appendix 6 is the potential difficulty of mixed age teaching, especially across key stages.

3.6 With regard to organisational viability there can be no question that small schools face greater challenges. This of course does not mean that at any one time a particular small school cannot produce excellence through having outstanding teachers. Furthermore it is often the case when small schools are considered nationally that many small schools enjoy a number of advantages as a result of their location and are attractive to staff. In many parts of the country it is a clear necessity to maintain small schools because the alternative would be that children be transported, perhaps for a number of miles, to the nearest school. Authorities who have such schools receive additional sparsity funding from the government which enables them to spend more on these schools without it being at the expense of others, in order for them to be organisationally viable. Wirral does not receive this element of grant.

3.7 Our experience in Wirral, has been that while overall until quite recently we have had few primary schools that have fallen into one of the Ofsted categories of concern, those that have done so have generally been among our smaller schools. We do not believe that this is coincidence: it arises because of the inevitable requirement on individual staff in small schools to take on wider burdens of responsibility and from the disproportionate impact which one weaker member of staff will have on the school as a whole.

4.0 **Commentary on options**

The next section of the report comments on the agreed options, discussing individual schools separately where appropriate. Numbers on roll are from the January 2008 School Census.

A Closure of Arrowe Hill Primary School

4.1 Arrowe Hill Primary is a small school with 115 pupils on roll, about a third of the number on roll just 12 years ago (343). This is largely the result of the falling

population, although 73% of potential community school parents living in the catchment zone choose to send their children elsewhere, principally to Woodchurch CE Primary School (37%, 101 pupils), Overchurch Infant and Junior (13%, 34 pupils) and Fender Primary School (11%, 30 pupils). Set against this “outflow”, 42% of pupils on roll in Summer 2007 came from outside the school’s catchment zone, however overall there was a net loss to other community/CE primary schools of 53% (145 pupils). There are a large number of surplus places (45%, 95). This is predicted to remain about the same at 47% (99 places) by 2013. In 2006-2007, expenditure per pupil was £5,171 compared with the Wirral average of £3,249.

- 4.2 The contextual value added score (102.1) for Key Stage 2 in 2007 shows that pupils at Arrowe Hill Primary School are making above the expected rate of progress (see Appendix 5).
- 4.3 All current and projected pupils from Arrowe Hill Primary could be accommodated at primary schools within a reasonable distance without requiring any new build classroom provision, dependant on a particular pattern of parental preference. As stated in 4.1 above, large numbers of parents living within Arrowe Hill’s zone choose Woodchurch CE Primary School, and there are 21 alternative primary schools (including Infant/Junior as a single school) within a 2 mile radius of the school. The catchment zone of Arrowe Hill Primary School would, in the main, be allocated to Fender Primary School, with the exception of a small area at the “top” of the zone which would be allocated to Overchurch Infant and Junior Schools. The intention would be to better match where parents live and choose to send their children to school. Parents currently in-zone for Overchurch Infant and Junior would continue to be in-zone and would be unaffected by this change.
- 4.4 Respondents from Arrowe Hill Primary raised the school’s excellent attainment record, and the quality of the relationships between parents, pupils and staff. There were concerns that children would not “fit in” at other local schools, about additional expense in purchasing new uniforms, the impact on travel and transport, and about the perceived waste of money which had recently been spent condensing the school from two buildings into one.

Arrowe Hill consolidation

- 4.5 As far back as 2001, Arrowe Hill Primary School was the subject of a Targeted Capital bid for £672,000 of central government funding for a scheme to remove surplus places at the school which were already high and rising. This bid was not successful, and consequently a less extensive surplus place removal and modernisation project was approved by the Council in 2004/2005.
- 4.6 This project involved “mothballing” the former Infant building (now used by the Council for storage) and some modifications to the former Junior building including an improved entrance and office facilities, bringing disabled access up to legal requirements, improving energy efficiency, installing a new fire and intruder alarm system and make necessary changes to accommodate the full age range of pupils within a building formerly occupied solely by Key Stage 2 pupils. This project has cost £360,500. It has been funded via a combination of the Council’s capital programme, Arrowe Hill’s formula capital budget and other external funding sources including the Schools Access Initiative and Extended Schools grant.
- 4.7 The result of these works is that the total net capacity at Arrowe Hill Primary School has been reduced from 325 places in 2004, to 210 places in 2007. Had this work not been carried out, the school would now have 62% surplus places, a third more than at present.
- 4.8 Consultees allied to Fender Primary School were in favour of the closure of Arrowe Hill either alone, or in conjunction with an amalgamation at the Fender site. They saw

the closure of Arrowe Hill Primary as the least disruptive option, since it would affect fewer pupils and maintain the highly respected SEN bases at Fender with minimum disruption.

- 4.9 New housing in the area was mentioned as a potential source of additional pupils to fill surplus places, as well as a source of additional traffic outside the Arrowe Hill site in particular. New housing either under construction or with planning approval in the area includes 17 flats on Houghton Road on the former Pelican Hotel public house site, 20 flats on the disused garage site at Eltham Green and 31 new houses on New Hey Road comprising 12 two bed bungalows, 13 two bed houses and 6 two bed houses. Outline planning permission for residential development has been granted for the former Ganneys Meadow site on Ganneys Meadow Road. A planning application for 190 flats and houses on the former St Benedict's Catholic High School site on New Hey Road was submitted in 2007, and has been recommended for approval by the Council's Planning Committee, pending a Section 106 legal agreement. 19 of the 190 units will be affordable housing, e.g. shared ownership or social housing. In total within the Woodchurch area 238 properties will be or have recently been built. Even treating flats as houses, these developments are projected to produce 67 primary age pupils, of whom 18-20 are likely to attend a Catholic primary school, with a similar number opting for a Church of England primary school such as Woodchurch CE. The New Hey Road site is within the catchment zone for Fender Primary School. Also, the additional pupils are likely to be existing Wirral residents and may already live locally, in which case they may continue to attend their existing school. Local housing changes are unlikely to make a significant impact on the issue of surplus places in this area.
- 4.10 There has been no intention signalled to change the Green Belt in the near future and the Council's policy for new housing development in the west of the Borough now includes the extension of the Interim Planning Policy for new Housing into the east of the Borough. Woodchurch is no longer an area favoured for new housing development, except within the constraints of the Interim Planning Policy for New Housing.
- 4.11 If this option were to proceed, depending on parental preferences, there may be a requirement for relatively modest capital works at the Fender Primary site, to which the majority of Arrowe Hill's catchment zone would be transferred. The current capacity of the Fender building as it is currently organised, and excluding the Annexe which is now part of Ganneys Meadow Early Years Centre, is 210 pupils. In the event that the new capacity at Fender following any required building works reached 350 pupils or more, a statutory expansion notice would be required. The most vulnerable children, those in Special Needs classes, would have continuity of provision on the Fender site.
- 4.12 This option for the closure of Arrowe Hill Primary School is recommended to proceed as a statutory proposal with effect from August 2010, with a proviso to guarantee all former Arrowe Hill pupils on roll at the time of the school's closure a guaranteed place at Fender Primary School. Former Arrowe Hill parents who did not wish to take up the guaranteed place at Fender Primary would be offered the opportunity to express a preference for an alternative primary school. Places at these schools would then be allocated based on the admission criteria published in the Authority's booklets for parents, within the limitations of the Infant Class Size limit. The proposed implementation date of August 2010 will allow for any works required at Fender Primary School to be carried out ahead of Arrowe Hill's closure.

B Closure of Fender Primary School

- 4.13 Fender Primary has 180 pupils on roll, having last had more than 210 pupils on roll in 1992 (218). The roll has risen from a low of 134 in 1999 to stabilise at around the 180 level for 8 years, no doubt buoyed by the school's close association with the adjacent

Ganneys Meadow Early Years Centre. Similarly to Arrowe Hill Primary School, 60% of potential community school parents living in the catchment zone choose to send their children elsewhere, principally to Woodchurch CE Primary School (31%, 92 pupils) and Arrowe Hill Primary School (12%, 36 pupils). 31% of pupils on roll in Summer 2007 came from outside the school's catchment zone, however overall there was a net loss of 41% (122 pupils) to other community and CE primary schools.

- 4.14 The school has 14% (30) surplus places, and this is projected to rise to 19% (39 places) by 2013. While the surplus is lower than that at Arrowe Hill Primary, this is above the 5-10% surplus identified by the Audit Commission, beyond which money is being wasted, and it is right to look at ways of reducing this surplus.
- 4.15 In 2006-2007, expenditure per pupil was £4,680 compared with the Wirral average of £3,249.
- 4.16 The contextual value added score (99.5) for Key Stage 2 in 2007 shows that pupils at Fender Primary School are making the expected rate of progress (see Appendix 5).
- 4.17 As identified by respondents, the school has around 180 pupils on roll, the number identified in the Authority's policy "In Pursuit of Excellence" as the point below which schools become more challenging to manage financially and organisationally. All current and projected pupils from Fender Primary could be accommodated at primary schools within a reasonable distance without requiring any new build classroom provision, although dependant on parental preference and with the agreement of the governing body and Diocese of Chester, there may be additional accommodation needs at Woodchurch CE (Aided) Primary School. While this may meet the requirement to consider the expansion of popular and successful schools, such a proposal has not been discussed with the Diocese of Chester and may not be feasible on the restricted site at Woodchurch CE Primary School. As stated in 4.1 above, large numbers of parents living within Fender's zone choose Woodchurch CE Primary School, and there are 24 alternative primary schools (including Infant/Junior as a single school) within a 2 mile radius of the school. The catchment zone of Fender Primary School would, in the main, be allocated to Arrowe Hill Primary School, with the exception of a small area at the "top" of the combined zone which could be allocated to Overchurch Infant and Junior Schools. The intention would be to better match where parents live and choose to send their children to school. Parents currently in-zone for Overchurch Infant and Junior would continue to be in-zone and would be unaffected by this change.
- 4.18 Respondents from Fender Primary raised the quality of the relationships between parents, pupils and staff, the proximity of local facilities including Ganneys Meadow Early Years Centre, Woodchurch Library, Woodchurch leisure centre and local shops. The importance of maintaining stability for pupils in the school's two Education Inclusion bases was very strongly emphasised.
- 4.19 Consultees allied to Fender Primary School were not in favour of this option. Many were in favour of either the closure of Arrowe Hill Primary (Option A) with more children attending Fender Primary, or of the amalgamation of Fender and Arrowe Hill at the Fender site to maintain access to the facilities listed in 4.11 and provide a stable environment for pupils in the SEN bases. The point regarding the Special Needs Classes is important. This is one of the strengths of the school, and the Authority is anxious to maintain the quality of this provision within any outcome that may be determined.
- 4.20 If this option were to proceed, depending on parental preferences, there may be a requirement for internal alterations at the Arrowe Hill or Woodchurch CE Primary sites. Statutory expansion notices at either school might be required at a later date.
- 4.21 This option is not recommended to proceed as a statutory proposal.

C Amalgamation of Fender Primary School and Arrowe Hill Primary School either at Arrowe Hill site (C1) or Fender site (C2)

- 4.22 The two schools taken together have a combined roll of 295 pupils, which is not large in Wirral terms, being around 1.5 forms of entry. The pattern of parental preference in this area indicates a high level of mobility between catchment areas and overlap between the pupil populations of the two schools, with similar numbers attending schools in the “other” catchment zone, facilitated by high levels of surplus places.
- 4.23 The CVA scores for both schools indicate that pupils are making at least the expected rate of progress or more. Good standards at Arrowe Hill were cited by some respondents as a reason not to amalgamate the two schools, on the basis that the ensuing disruption would impact upon the quality of education and threaten standards. Some parents indicated that they would not want their children to be educated with children from the other school due to a perceived difference in background; however geographical analysis of where parents live indicates that there is an overlap between the pupil populations of the two schools. Staff from both schools have strongly expressed their commitment to ensure that all pupils would be welcomed in any setting, whatever the outcome of the consultation.
- 4.24 Respondents allied to both schools were concerned that the site for any amalgamated school should be carefully chosen. Issues around parking and safe drop-off areas were raised around both sites.
- 4.25 If all pupils from both former schools attended an amalgamated school, it is estimated that the Fender site would require relatively modest capital works. Accommodating all pupils at the Arrowe Hill site would involve bringing the existing Infant building, currently mothballed, back into use. In general, consultees from both schools were in favour of an amalgamation into a new build primary school, although had differing ideas on which would be the best site for an amalgamation. Whichever site were chosen, the other building could be utilised to accommodate pupils whilst construction work was underway.

Foundation and Community schools

- 4.26 In an amalgamation, both existing schools close and a new school opens. Under the Education and Inspections Act 2006, all new primary schools, as has been the case for some time in secondary schools, are subject to a “competition” where the Authority invites bids to establish the best provider for the new school. The Authority can enter its own proposal into the competition, and in many cases, particularly in primary school competitions, is likely to be the only entrant. Other possible proposers could include faith organisations, businesses, universities, colleges or a charitable organisation. A new school would be a Foundation school, not a community school. The Secretary of State can, however, decide to grant permission for Wirral LA to propose a new community school within a competition. The criteria that would be used are given in Appendix 4b. An application could also be made to the Secretary of State for permission to establish a new school without holding a competition. While each case is different, examples in the guidance do not appear to apply if Fender and Arrowe Hill were to amalgamate. Reaching a decision under the statutory competition process is likely to take at least 6 months longer than would be the case without a competition.
- 4.27 A minority of respondents were concerned about the impact that Foundation school status might have on education, admissions or staffing of a new school. The differences between community and Foundation schools are as follows:
- In a community school, the Local Authority owns the land, buildings and all the other assets of the school, employs the staff, and decides the admission criteria for the school. The running of the school is delegated to the governing body.

- In a Foundation school, as well as running the school, the governors own the land and buildings, employ the staff, and decide the admission criteria. The governors have greater freedom to spend money on building projects, and can choose to set their own term dates.

Pupils at Foundation schools follow the same national curriculum as those in community schools, and staff are employed on the same nationally agreed terms and conditions. Funding for Foundation schools comes from the Authority in exactly the same way as for community schools. While the governing body of a Foundation school could decide to have different admission criteria, the school still has to follow the same admissions code as community schools.

Other than the land and buildings, which must be conveyed from the Authority to the Foundation governing body or Trustees, other assets in the school (books, equipment etc.) remain the Authority's property. Excellent relationships continue to be maintained with Wirral's Foundation secondary schools, and there is no reason to believe that this position would differ in the case of a Foundation primary school.

- 4.28 Option C does not fall into any of the categories that would be highly likely to receive an exemption from the Secretary of State to hold a competition, e.g. an Infant and Junior amalgamation or reorganisation of schools with the same religious nature. Holding a competition will add 6 months to the decision making process, with extended levels of uncertainty about the future of primary schools in the local area which could have a destabilising effect on primary school rolls, and a case could be made for the need for expediency to resolve community uncertainty, however, it seems unlikely that approval to establish a school without a competition would be granted in this case. Amalgamation, whilst offering an opportunity for the staff in particular, but also the pupils of both schools to start afresh in a "new school", albeit in existing buildings, may not be the most appropriate solution in this instance.
- 4.29 This option is not recommended to proceed to statutory proposals.

Other suggestions raised during consultation for these schools

- 4.30 **Variant to option C - Build a new primary school alongside the newly rebuilt Woodchurch High School**

This suggested option would produce a "campus" at the Woodchurch High School site.

The Children and Young People's Department has been awarded the sum of £25,962,900 from the DCSF Building Schools for the Future - One School Pathfinder initiative. The approved bid is for the replacement of Woodchurch High School, approved by Cabinet on 15th November 2006. Design development is in progress. A partner will be contracted later this year and a completion date of September 2010 is currently planned.

The site of the existing school buildings and the surrounding open land is designated as Green Belt in the Council's Unitary Development Plan adopted in February 2000 and is also identified as an area identified for transport corridor environmental improvements. The development proposed will therefore need to be considered as a departure from the Development Plan. The intention to grant planning permission for a departure from the Development Plan must be referred to the Secretary of State before planning permission can be granted.

The One School Pathfinder budget has been entirely allocated to the rebuilding of Woodchurch High School, and there is unlikely to be any further central government funding through this route. If a new primary school in Woodchurch were considered for a future year of the Primary Capital Strategy, the site would be subject to consultation at that time, although greenbelt, flood plain and playing field restrictions bring

complexities to the remainder of the Woodchurch High school site once the new secondary school is completed.

This suggestion is not recommended for further consideration.

4.31 **New option – Amalgamate Arrowe Hill Primary School with St Michael and All Angels Catholic Primary School**

The rationale behind this suggested option is to amalgamate the two smallest schools with the highest levels of surplus to form a new primary school, with Fender Primary School remaining as a community school. Were these two schools of the same status, that is, both community schools or both Catholic Aided schools, this would be an attractive option.

As in any amalgamation, both schools would close, and a new school then established on one of the two sites. There are benefits to amalgamation over closure for pupils and staff. Legally, however, it is not possible to combine community and Aided provision into a single school. It might be beneficial to community cohesion to relocate one of the existing schools onto the same site to form a “joint denominational campus” of separate schools, but this would be costly and unlikely to resolve surplus place issues in the area. Another alternative which would achieve the same end would be to propose closure of Arrowe Hill Primary School, linked with relocating St Michael and All Angels Catholic Primary School into the Arrowe Hill building, which would require a statutory alteration, not a statutory competition, however, the Catholic Diocese of Shrewsbury would need to approve this move, which would separate the school from the adjoining Church, albeit by a relatively short distance.

This suggestion is not recommended for further consideration.

- 4.32 In summary, Option A, Closure of Arrowe Hill Primary School is recommended to continue as a statutory proposal. A further statutory alteration proposal to officially expand the capacity at Fender Primary School may be required at a later date.

5.0 **Implications of the Review Process for Pupils**

Admission Arrangements: present and future pupils

- 5.1 The closure and/or amalgamation of primary schools will have implications for the Authority’s admission arrangements. The DCSF have advised that there is no requirement to consult separately on any changes to admission arrangements as long as full details are provided to parents in the statutory public notices on the proposed alterations to the school provision. This would include details on how the Authority would propose to manage the transfer of pupils to alternative schools, and also deal with applications from parents living in the areas concerned for places in Foundation 2.

Re-zoning of areas

- 5.2 In the event of any reorganisation, school catchment areas would have to be reviewed. In the case of an amalgamation it might be assumed that the catchment areas of the schools involved could simply be merged but it is likely that we would take the opportunity to consider any other necessary adjustments. In the case of a school closure, zones of neighbouring schools would have to be re-drawn . Changes would need to take into account consideration of home address in relation to nearest appropriate schools, the new capacity of schools in the area, and other factors such as planned housing development.

In relation to the potential transfer of existing pupils to alternative schools, the Authority would invite parents to indicate a preference. If their preference was for a placement in a community or controlled school, then the Authority would seek to meet

that preference, within the admission criteria set out in the Authority's booklets for parents.

Pupils with Special Educational Needs

- 5.3 If any pupil has a Statement of Special Educational Needs then the Statement will be amended to reflect the new school, and the provision specified in the Statement will be delivered appropriately. Any pupils who are currently placed in designated special provision such as a Special Needs Class would be transferred to an alternative placement according to parental preference. For all those pupils on the SEN register who are affected, the Authority would deploy an element of any savings to provide enhanced support at their new school. Details of how such a scheme may operate would need to be developed.

6.0 Staffing Implications

6.1 Closure of Schools

If a school closes, staff would technically be redundant. However, the neighbouring schools to which pupils relocate will require additional staff, and these schools would be requested to give prior and preferential treatment to redundant staff.

6.2 Redeployment

In previous years, Wirral has had an excellent record of finding alternative employment for school staff. When posts are advertised in Wirral, schools are requested to give redundant staff who meet the advertised criteria, either a prior and preferential interview or an interview in competition with other candidates.

7.0 Financial Implications

- 7.1 The recommendations contained in this report have capital implications in respect of the re-location of current pupils and the re-allocation of future pupils to schools. The level of capital required will depend upon the final, approved proposals and will require further, detailed development work. An amount of £500,000 is included in the 2008/09 Schools Capital Programme for "scheme development resulting from primary reviews" which was approved at the Cabinet meeting of 22nd May 2008. This will allow schemes to be drawn up, costed and tendered, with any balance contributing to build costs. The balance of the capital build costs would need to be drawn from the following sources: DCSF Modernisation Grant, council capital including capital receipts from the disposal of surplus assets, Prudential Borrowing and capital forming part of other national initiatives. It is a requirement that funding is clearly identified when proposals are submitted to the decision maker for approval.

- 7.2 The recommendations contained in this report include the closure and amalgamation of schools, which in turn will produce revenue savings, to the benefit of other schools as the funding is re-distributed. In the short term the Authority could be required to fund any staff severance costs following closures and amalgamation but they may be partly or entirely offset by savings.

8.0 Equal Opportunities Implications

- 8.1 There are none arising out of this report.

9.0 Human Rights Implications

- 9.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

10.0 Local Agenda 21 Statement

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

11.0 Community Safety Implications

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

12.0 Planning Implications

12.1 The relationship between housing development policy and school place provision is a factor in considering surplus place removal.

12.2 Construction of any new classroom provision would be subject to the usual planning permissions.

13.0 Local Member Support Implications

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

13.2 The current options affect the Upton Ward directly.

14.0 Background Papers

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

School Organisation Plan.

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

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

School Net Capacity Calculation, July 2007, to DCSF requirements.

Consultation Documents

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

15.0 Appendices

See list attached.

16.0 Summary

16.1 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. The recommendations below I believe will ensure best value for the future generations of children in the review areas, and more equitable spending for the benefit of all Wirral's pupils, from the savings made.

17.0 Recommendations

- 1) That statutory proposals be published in respect of Option A, closure of Arrowe Hill Primary School from August 2010.
- 2) That the Director of Children's Services be authorised to take all necessary steps to publish these proposals, ensure the prescribed procedures are followed, including requesting permissions from the Secretary of State and proposals for the re-zoning of schools, in furtherance of the proposals.
- 3) That the Director of Children's Services be authorised to instigate an evaluation of potential sources of funding related to building work at the Fender Primary School site, including the Primary Capital Strategy and return to Cabinet with an option appraisal report on this matter.

Howard Cooper

Director of Children's Services

List of Appendices

Appendix	Description
1	Extract from School Organisation Plan: Policies and Principles
2	Cabinet Report and resolution from 29 th November 2007
<i>Consultation</i>	
3a	Analysis of Consultation
3b	Summary of responses
<i>Education and Inspections Act 2006</i>	
4	Summary of new regulations on school re-organisation
<i>Standards</i>	
5a	Standards – KS2 data; Value Added
5b	Standards – Extracts from Ofsted reports
<i>Issues concerned with size and viability</i>	
6a	Extract from “ In Pursuit of Excellence”, written by Wirral Headteachers and the Primary Team, School Effectiveness
6b	Extract from “Small Schools: How well are they doing?” (Ofsted 2000)
6c	Size and viability in consultation areas
<i>Building Costs</i>	
7	DCSF School Building and Design Unit – Information on costs and performance data, April 2003

Minutes - Cabinet - 12 June 2008

Present

Chair S Foulkes

Councillors

George Davies, PL Davies, G Gardiner, SA Holbrook, SE Kelly, M McLaughlin, RK Moon, Jean Quinn, JV Stapleton

In attendance:

JE Green, A Pritchard, GCJ Watt

Minute 48 - CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND LIFELONG LEARNING: REVIEW OF PRIMARY SCHOOL PLACES: OUTCOME OF CONSULTATIONS ON OPTIONS PUT FORWARD FOR THE PHASE 4 PLANNING AREAS

The Director of Children's Service presented a report which advised the Cabinet of the outcomes of the consultation process which had taken place in the Woodchurch planning area, in respect of the options for consultation agreed at Cabinet on 29th November 2007. The report described the responses to the various options put forward for discussion, including additional suggestions put forward during the consultation process, and made recommendations with regard to statutory proposals in this area.

With the permission of the Chair, the Chair of Governors of Arrowe Hill Primary School addressed the Cabinet, and spoke against the proposal to close Arrowe Park Primary School and in support of the option contained within the report to amalgamate Arrowe Hill Primary School with Fender Primary School.

The Director of Children's Services responded to the issues raised in terms of the disruption of closing two schools, the fact that no capital was available for a new build school at the present time and the rules regarding a competition process if a new school was to be provided.

The Leader of the Council referred to the option of including a new school on the site of Woodchurch High School and the Director indicated that there were three site options considered for amalgamation. It was felt that Fender Primary School, with its close proximity to Ganneys Meadow Early Years Centre was the most appropriate option.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Lifelong Learning thanked the Chair of Governors and the staff at Arrowe Hill Primary School and indicated how impressed he was with their passion and commitment. He referred to the challenge of falling school rolls and the wise use of resources. In view of the number of schools within close proximity and to keep the disruption to a minimum, he supported the Option set out within the recommendation.

Councillor Holbrook queried the support for amalgamation from Fender Primary School and, in view of the timescales for proposed closure, would the school roll be sustainable.

The Director of Children's Services referred to the experienced team that would be involved in the closure if it was approved. He accepted that there were some advantages to amalgamation and indicated that the capital programme was compiled on the basis of school condition. With reference to the proposed closure date, it was noted that this was to avoid undertaking statutory consultation over the summer holidays and on past experience it was envisaged that the number at the school would enable it to remain open until the proposed closure date.

Councillor Kelly supported the recommendation to minimise disruption.