

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET

6 NOVEMBER 2014

SUBJECT:	PERMISSION TO CONSULT ON AMALGAMATION OF PENSBY HIGH SCHOOLS
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	CLLR TONY SMITH
KEY DECISION?	NO

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 In May 2010, the two Pensby secondary schools entered into a hard Federation, enabling the two schools to work together more closely under a single governing body led by a single headteacher, building on the existing joint sixth form arrangements, helping to safeguard viable secondary education for both girls and boys in Pensby as rolls fall in forthcoming years.
- 1.2 The governing body of the Pensby High Schools federation has recently approached the Council to begin a formal consultation on the amalgamation of the two schools to form a single establishment.
- 1.3 This report recommends that as required by guidance, a six week public consultation is held on the proposed amalgamation of Pensby High School for Boys and Pensby High School for Girls, through closure of Pensby High School for Boys, and changing the gender intake of Pensby High School for Girls to form a mixed sex secondary school in Pensby. The outcome of the consultation would then be reported to Cabinet to decide whether the amalgamation should proceed to the next stage.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 2.1 At its meeting of 1st October 2009, Cabinet approved the division of Phase 2 of the Secondary Places Review into two phases – Phase 2A comprising the Wirral West area and beginning in Autumn 2009, Phase 2B including schools in the Wallasey area, due to begin in Autumn 2010.
 - 2.2 As stated in section 9 of that report, the falling secondary roll, whilst impacting on all schools in the Phase 2A area, was particularly acute in the Pensby area. The possibility of a federation was discussed. It should be noted that while there may be benefits and efficiencies to be made by federated schools, federation by itself has no direct impact on surplus places.
 - 2.3 The governing bodies of the two Pensby secondary schools instigated a joint group to investigate the possibilities of various kinds of federation, and held several meetings, including discussions with officers over the following months. This resulted in an agreement that a consultation would be held on a hard federation between the two schools.
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- 2.4 Following the closure of the consultation on 19th March 2010, the two governing bodies met separately to discuss the outcome on 20th April 2010, followed immediately by a joint governing body meeting at which the decision was to proceed with the hard federation proposal to dissolve the existing governing bodies and reconstitute a single governing body on 4th May 2010.
- 2.5 At that time both Governing Bodies ceased to exist and were replaced by one new Governing Body for both schools. Each school remained separate and retained its own identity and budget. The Governing Body appointed one Head Teacher to lead both schools.
- 2.6 The Pensby High Schools Federation has been in operation with a single governing body for four years, and whilst the two schools retain their separate status within the Federation in terms of standards, the Federation has successfully established a single staffing structure led by a single Principal and the budgets have been merged into a single budget for the Federation.
- 2.7 On 26th September 2014, the governing body of the Pensby High Schools Federation wrote to the Director of Children's Services to formally request that a consultation be carried out on proposals to formally amalgamate the two schools into a single establishment. This fits with the Council's school organisation strategy and maintains viable secondary school provision in the Pensby area.
- 2.8 The simplest route to amalgamation is to propose to cease to maintain one of the two schools, combined with a linked proposal to change the gender intake of the remaining school from single sex to mixed sex. All pupils currently on roll at the closed school would transfer automatically to the roll of the remaining school, if that is what they wish. The governing body can then agree a suitable new name for the mixed sex school.
- 2.9 The alternative route would be to close both predecessor schools, and to open a new school in the existing buildings. In this case, the new school would be expected to be an Academy, and would be subject to the statutory competition regulations required for any new school. This route would be likely to add at least 6 months to the standard timescale for any school organisation change. The governing body indicate that they wish to proceed to amalgamation with the minimum of delay.
- 2.10 The Pensby High School Federation governing body indicate that their preferred route would be that in 2.8, with the Boys school being proposed for closure, and a change in gender intake (and name) for the Girls school. The choice of which school to close is a technicality, as the same process could be carried out in either case. Amalgamation through this route does not preclude the governing body of the mixed gender school considering Academy status at a later date, if they wish to do so.

3.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 3.1 The governing body indicate that whilst the Federation has brought significant benefits, if the two schools continue as a Federation, there are concerns about the impact of the continuing low numbers on roll in the two individual schools on financial viability, and thereby on providing a broad curriculum offer, the best teaching and learning and therefore outcomes for young people. Amalgamation would offer the best solution to provide a viable, stable future for secondary education in the Pensby area.
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4.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 See 2.9 above.

5.0 CONSULTATION

5.1 Although there is no longer a prescribed 'pre-publication' consultation period for prescribed alterations (such as a change of gender intake), there is a six week minimum consultation period on the closure of a school, and the two proposals would be linked and consulted on together. The consultation would follow the statutory guidance on school organisation issued by the Department for Education (2014).

5.2 It is therefore proposed to carry out a six week public consultation on the linked proposals. As per guidance, consultees will include:

- parents of pupils;
- the governing body (as appropriate);
- pupils at the school(s);
- teachers and other staff at the school(s);
- any LA likely to be affected by the proposal ;
- the governing bodies, teachers and other staff of any other school that may be affected;
- parents of any pupils at other schools who may be affected by the proposal including local primary schools
- trade unions who represent staff at the school(s) involved;
- the MP and local councillors whose constituencies/constituents are likely to be affected
- any other interested body/person, as appropriate.

5.3 The outcome of the consultation will be reported to Cabinet, who will decide whether the proposals should proceed to the next stage, which is for statutory notices to be published. The statutory notice would be followed by a four week representation period in which there is a further opportunity for consultees to respond prior to any final decision being made.

6.0 OUTSTANDING PREVIOUSLY APPROVED ACTIONS

6.1 None.

7.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

7.1 None.

8.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

8.1 Operating a six week public consultation has financial implications to the Council in terms of resources and staff time.

- 8.2 Should the proposals be finally approved, all staff are currently employed by the Pensby High Schools Federation and can work or be instructed to work in either school.
- 8.3 As a Federation, the schools have separate budgets which does not support the sharing of resources across the schools as effectively as would be the case with a single budget and also requires separate financial management and accounting processes to be carried out not only by the schools but also by the Council. For example,
- Each school is required to submit separate pupil census and other data returns.
 - Separate accountability and inspection regimes (e.g. Ofsted).
 - Lack of clarity in relation to communication lines from outside agencies.
- 8.4 There are no savings for the Council of the change proposed for consultation. Amalgamation would eventually return the closed school Lump Sum of £100,000 into the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for re-distribution to all schools through the budget formula (2014-2015 figures). Under the new School Funding Guidance for 2015-16, an amalgamating school is entitled to receive 85% of the two Lump Sums in the first year (£170,000 total lump sum). The document now makes provision for this to be extended to 2 years if the LA applies for this exceptional factor.

9.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None to this report.

10.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Has the potential impact of your proposal(s) been reviewed with regard to equality?

a) Yes and impact review can be found via the following link -

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/community-and-living/equality-diversity-cohesion/equality-impact-assessments/eias-april-2014/eias-families-wellbeing>

11.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

11.1 None.

12.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

12.1 None.

13.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

13.1 This report recommends that a six week public consultation is held on the proposed amalgamation of Pensby High School for Boys and Pensby High

School for Girls, by ceasing to maintain Pensby Boys and changing the gender intake for Pensby Girls to create a single mixed sex secondary school in Pensby.

14.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

14.1 The Pensby High Schools Federation has operated successfully for four years. The governing body of the Federation has now approached the Council to formally consult on the amalgamation of the two schools into a single establishment. This fits with the Council's strategy for school organisation in this area and is supported.

14.2 Whilst hard federation has already delivered many benefits, amalgamation will bring additional organisational and educational advantages, for example, a cost effective and more easily managed curriculum, staff retention and recruitment opportunities, economies of scale and savings on planning and administrative time. It is considered that the amalgamation of the two schools will provide a more effective framework to build on the strong foundations already established through the Federation.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: LETTER FROM GOVERNING BODY OF PENSBY HIGH SCHOOLS FEDERATION.

REFERENCE MATERIAL

Statutory guidance about making organisation changes to maintained schools, including school closure. (www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-organisation-maintained-schools)

BRIEFING NOTES HISTORY

Briefing Note	Date

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date