

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET - 20<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2007

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

**REVIEW OF PRIMARY SCHOOL PLACES: OUTCOME OF CONSULTATIONS ON  
OPTIONS PUT FORWARD FOR THE PHASE 3 PLANNING AREAS**

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**Executive Summary**

- 1.0 This report advises the Cabinet of the outcomes of the consultation process which has taken place in the Pensby and Thingwall, South Wallasey and Leasowe planning areas, in respect of the options for consultation agreed at Cabinet on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2006. 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 each area under review.

**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 However the SOP was one of seven statutory plans repealed by the Children Act 2004.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 25<sup>th</sup> 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. DfES 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 16<sup>th</sup> March 2006, Cabinet instructed that six Area Reviews be carried out within Phase 3 of the Primary Places Review : Pensby and Thingwall, Heswall, Greasby, Upton, South Wallasey and North Wallasey. These areas equate to the small planning areas in the Authority’s School Organisation Plan. Following the subsequent report on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2006 advising Cabinet of the outcome of Ofsted’s inspection of Castleway Primary School, the small planning area of Leasowe was brought forward for inclusion in this phase of the review. The outcomes of these area reviews were reported to Cabinet on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2006 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 Greasby, Heswall, North Wallasey and Upton 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 remaining areas.

2.6 In the South Wallasey small planning area, these options were:

- A Closure of Poulton Primary School
- B Amalgamate Park Primary School and Poulton Primary School either at the Park site (B1) or the Poulton site (B2)
- C Closure of Brentwood Early Years Centre AND open new Foundation 1 (nursery) classes at local primary schools

2.7 In the Leasowe small planning area, these options were:

- A Closure of Castleway Primary School
- B Amalgamate Castleway Primary School and Leasowe Primary School either at the Castleway site (B1) or the Leasowe site (B2)
- C Closure of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School

The following options relate to faith school provision. Option D1 was a joint suggestion by the Anglican Diocese of Chester and the Catholic Diocese of Shrewsbury. Options D2 and D3 were suggested by the Catholic Diocese.

- D1 A joint denominational school to be established by the Anglican Diocese of Chester and the Catholic Diocese of Shrewsbury
- D2 Expansion of Our Lady of Lourdes to a one form of entry primary school (210 places) whilst maintaining the current admission policy that welcomes applicants from other or no faiths whose parents want their children to have an education in a Catholic school
- D3 Maintain Our Lady of Lourdes with its existing planned admission number and its current admission policy that welcomes applicants from other or no faiths whose parents want their children to have an education in a Catholic school

2.8 In the Pensby and Thingwall small planning area, these options were:

- A Closure of Pensby Park Primary School
- B Amalgamate Pensby Infant and Pensby Junior to form an all-through primary school
- C Closure of Pensby Park Primary School AND amalgamate Pensby Infant and Pensby Junior to form an all-through primary school
- D Amalgamate Pensby Park Primary School, Pensby Infant and Pensby Junior School to form an all-through primary school on the current Infant/Junior site (D1) or the current Pensby Park site (D2).

The following option was suggested by the Anglican Diocese of Chester.

- E To include in any of the above options the establishment of a Church of England primary school in Pensby

These options were approved for consultation.

2.9 These 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.

2.10 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 each area; local One-Stop shops, libraries and the Central Library; 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.

2.11 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.

2.12 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.

2.13 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 were made as part of the consultation process:

In the South Wallasey area

- Close Poulton Primary School and guarantee places to all former pupils at Park Primary School (this is a variant on South Wallasey Option A)

In the Leasowe area:

- Amalgamate Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School and Leasowe Primary School

- Close all three existing schools and establish a new primary school on a central site
- Close Leasowe Primary School

In the Pensby and Thingwall area

- Build a new all-through primary school on same site as Pensby High School for Boys and Pensby High School for Girls
- Close Pensby Park, build a new primary school on the Infant/Junior site then amalgamate Pensby Infant and Pensby Junior once the building is ready

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 and the need for change
- Effect of proposed housing 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. In the Leasowe area, Option D1 was a joint suggestion from both Diocesan bodies. Options D2 and D3 in this area originated from the Diocese of Shrewsbury, while Option E in the Pensby and Thingwall area originated from the Diocese of Chester. The written submission from the Diocese of Chester in the Pensby and Thingwall area has been included within the report at Appendix 4, that from the Diocese of Shrewsbury has been included within the report at Appendix 5. Cabinet is requested to give careful consideration to these responses.

**Diocese of Chester Education Service submission (comment)**

3.3 The Diocesan Director of Education for the Chester Diocese explains that they would welcome the opportunity to establish a joint denominational school in the Leasowe area, as there are currently no Church of England primary schools in either the

Leasowe or in the North/South Wallasey areas. In the Pensby and Thingwall area, the Diocese would be interested in establishing a new Church of England Controlled school if there is sufficient parental demand, although they acknowledge that the area is currently partially served by Dawpool CE Primary School in Thurstaston and St Peter's CE Primary School in Heswall.

### **Diocese of Shrewsbury Education Service submission (comment)**

- 3.4 The Diocesan Director of Education for the Shrewsbury Diocese expresses their strong interest in maintaining a Catholic denominational presence in the Leasowe area, and in the benefits that could be made by establishing a joint denominational primary school on the Our Lady of Lourdes site.
- 3.5 It is understandable that the Diocese should be concerned if this consultation resulted in proposals which would mean there would no longer be a Catholic primary school in the Leasowe area. There are five Catholic primary schools within a 2 mile radius, the nearest of which is Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School, 1.7 miles away.

### **Implications of the abolition of the SOC**

- 3.6 Until the SOC's abolition on 25<sup>th</sup> 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 DfES and is available to read or download on-line at <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/schoolorg/index.cfm> Key points of the guidance and a commentary in relation to Phase 3 options is included within the report at Appendix 6.

### **4.0 Commentary on South Wallasey 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 2007 School Census.

#### **A Closure of Poulton Primary School**

- 4.1 Poulton Primary has 151 pupils on roll, less than half of the number on roll just 11 years ago (342). This is largely the result of the falling population, although 66% of potential community school parents living in the catchment zone choose to send their children elsewhere, principally to Park Primary School (21%, 65 pupils) and St George's Primary School (18%, 58 pupils). 30% of pupils on roll in Summer 2006 came from outside the school's catchment zone. There are a large number of surplus places (27%, 57). This is predicted to remain about the same at 25% (51 places) by 2012. In 2004-2005, expenditure per pupil was £3,486 compared with the Wirral average of £2,984.
- 4.2 The overall value added score (99.5) and contextual value added score (99.7) for Key Stage 2 in 2006 shows that pupils at Poulton Primary School are making the expected rate of progress (see Appendix 7).
- 4.3 Some respondents were concerned about the potential loss of the school's Foundation 1 (nursery) class if Poulton closed. In January 2007, there were 18 part-time pupils in the F1 class (9 FTE). If the school closed, the F1 class would be relocated to another local primary school. Nearby Park Primary School, for example, does not currently offer F1 provision. Legally, this would necessitate the publication of a statutory notice to make a "prescribed alteration" to the age range of the school. Subject to provisions for referral to the Adjudicator, the Authority could determine this alteration. Alterations or extensions to existing accommodation would be funded through the Council's Capital programme. Any new F1 provision would meet current

DfES regulations for room size, outdoor facilities and so on, and would be the right size for the number of expected pupils.

- 4.4 Some respondents were concerned about disabled access at alternative local primary schools. Poulton Primary occupies a two storey building, to which a lift has been fitted, providing full access to classrooms. Disabled access to Park Primary School is 40% at present, while other schools in the area have full, or almost full disabled access. Disabled access alterations to schools are made on a needs led basis. The lift at Poulton Primary was installed to meet the needs of particular pupils. Following discussions with parents of children with special needs, access alterations would be prioritised through the existing accessibility programme operated by the Children and Young People's Department. Aided school projects over £2000 would be eligible for funding through the Voluntary Aided Co-ordinated Programme (VCAP), by agreement with the relevant Diocese.
- 4.5 A small number of respondents were concerned about the loss of a historical building, possibly listed, that had served many generations of children in the area. Poulton Primary School is an Edwardian Board School, built originally as separate Infant and Junior buildings. The other building was demolished following bomb damage during the Second World War. Consequently, the Park Primary building was constructed as the Infant building of Poulton Primary School, only later becoming the base for a separate primary school. Poulton Primary's building is not on the Listed building register.
- 4.6 All current and projected pupils from Poulton Primary could be accommodated at primary schools within a reasonable distance without requiring any new classroom provision. As stated in 4.1 above, large numbers of parents living within Poulton's zone choose either Park Primary or St George's Primary, and there are 27 alternative primary schools within a 2 mile radius of the school. The catchment zone of Poulton Primary School would, in the main, be allocated to Park Primary, with the exception of a small area at the "top" of the zone which could be allocated to St George's Primary School. Some concerns were raised about the rationale for altering the catchment zones in this way. The intention was to better match where parents live and choose to send their children to school. Parents currently in-zone for St George's would continue to be in-zone and would be unaffected by this change.
- 4.7 Respondents from Poulton Primary were concerned that children would be "dispersed" in the event of closure, with a resulting loss of established friendships, which were seen as an important way of mitigating the impact of transition to new schools. In an amalgamation, former pupils from both schools are guaranteed a place at the new school. For this reason, as well as for community and staff cohesion, the majority of consultees allied to Poulton Primary School preferred amalgamation with Park Primary to the closure of Poulton Primary School.
- 4.8 Consultees allied to Park Primary School were largely in favour of the closure option, rather than the amalgamation of the two schools. While respondents understood the Council's reasons for proposing change, they were concerned about the impact of amalgamation on the standards and ethos of Park Primary, and saw the closure of Poulton Primary as the least disruptive option, since only one school would close, not two.
- 4.9 If this option were to proceed, depending on parental preferences, there may be a requirement for additional accommodation at other school sites, principally the Park Primary site, to which the majority of Poulton's catchment zone would be transferred. Following closure, retention of the Poulton site as a transitional measure whilst building work was on-going at the Park site could be considered, with a view to operating from a single site from 2009. The current capacity of the Park building is 280

pupils. If the new capacity following building works reached 350 pupils or more, a statutory expansion notice would be required.

## **B Amalgamation of Park Primary School and Poulton Primary School either at Park site (B1) or Poulton site (B2)**

- 4.10 Park Primary School currently has 229 pupils on roll, having dropped from a peak of 311 pupils in 1999. As identified by respondents, the school has more than 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. Similarly to Poulton Primary School, a high proportion of parents living within the school's zone attend other community primary schools (61%). This loss of potential pupils is balanced by a small net gain from other local schools, principally from the Poulton zone. Some respondents cited this as an indication of the school's popularity with parents. Popular schools retain high proportions of in-zone parents. The pattern of parental preference in this area indicates a high level of mobility between catchment areas, facilitated by high levels of surplus places. The highest retention for a community school in South Wallasey is 59% at Somerville Primary School. The pattern of parental preference appears to demonstrate that regardless of catchment zone, within the immediate surrounding area, more parents choose Park than Poulton.

The school has 18% (51) surplus places, and this is projected to remain about the same at 18% (49 places) by 2012. While the surplus is lower than that at Poulton 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.

- 4.11 The overall value added score (99.6) and contextual value added score (100.1) for Key Stage 2 in 2006 shows pupils at Park Primary School are making the expected rate of progress (See Appendix 7). By this measure, the standards achieved by the two schools are not significantly different. Good standards at Park were cited by many 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. Geographical analysis of where parents live indicates considerable overlap in 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.
- 4.12 Respondents allied to both schools were concerned that the site for any amalgamated school should be carefully chosen. In addition to concerns about disabled access, respondents from Poulton Primary raised issues regarding the condition of Park's existing buildings, particularly the two mobile classrooms. Issues around parking, safe drop-off areas and the size of the playground were raised by respondents from both schools. Both schools currently use Central Park for outdoor PE in the summer months, as neither has their own playing field. Park Primary has an existing arrangement by which the school has exclusive use of caged courts belonging to Central Park in term-time, reverting to community use in school holidays. Excluding the caged area, the playgrounds of the two schools are similar in size.
- 4.13 There are currently 380 pupils on the combined roll of the two schools. If all pupils from both former schools attended an amalgamated school, it is estimated that the Park site (B1) would require between 4 and 6 new classrooms, including replacing mobile accommodation and integrating a new F1 classbase. The opportunity would also be taken to improve parking and drop-off at the front of the school, and with the Council's permission, in future there may be scope to relocate the existing caged area

a few metres further into Central Park to extend the school's play area. Discussions at officer level with appropriate officers in Regeneration are on-going. Accommodating all pupils at the Poulton site (B2) is estimated to require five new classrooms alongside some internal alterations to two existing rooms. The location of the site restricts any expansion, surrounded as it is by roads. In general, consultees felt that building an entirely new school would be disruptive, and a waste of money which would be better spent on refurbishing existing buildings. Nevertheless, it is worthy of consideration. Both buildings have significant condition issues related to their age and construction. Whichever site were chosen, the other building could be utilised to accommodate pupils whilst construction work was underway.

- 4.14 New housing in the area was mentioned as a potential source of additional pupils to fill surplus places, as well as source of additional traffic outside the Park site. New housing either under construction or with planning approval in the area includes 16 two bedroom flats on Poulton Road between Winterhey Road and Lindeth Road, five 3 bedroom houses on Poulton Road at the rear of the Rose and Crown, and a single terraced house on Rankin Street. A planning application for 57 homes at the former Marymount site was approved at the end of January 2007. At application, these 57 properties comprised 10 four bed houses and 11 three bed houses, the remainder being either 1 or 2 bed flats. In total, 79 properties (including flats) are being built locally. Even treating flats as houses, these developments are projected to produce just 22 primary age pupils, of whom 4-7 are likely to attend a Catholic 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.

#### **Foundation and Community schools**

- 4.15 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 most 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 6b. 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 Park and Poulton 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.
- 4.16 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.

#### **Other suggestions raised during consultation for these schools**

##### **4.17 Variant: Close Poulton Primary School and guarantee all former Poulton pupils a place at Park Primary School**

When statutory notices proposing the closure of a school are published, the notice must contain details of schools to which it is suggested former pupils may transfer. A variation raised during consultation which would resolve not only understandable concerns about dispersal of pupils after closure, but also remove the necessity for a statutory competition to open a new school, would be to propose the closure of Poulton Primary School (Option A), and to specify Park Primary School as the intended destination for former Poulton pupils. The pupil populations already overlap, and the building requirements would be the same as in Option B1.

It should be borne in mind that Option A including this variant may require further expansion of Park Primary School than Option A. As parental preference operates over coming years, this expansion may eventually result in further surplus places developing at Park Primary School.

Former Poulton parents who did not wish to take up the guaranteed place at Park 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.

##### **4.18 With a modification to reflect the variant described above, Option A, Closure of Poulton Primary School is recommended to continue as a statutory proposal, alongside a linked statutory alteration proposal to extend the lower age range at Park Primary School to create a new Foundation 1 class. A further statutory alteration proposal to expand the capacity of Park Primary School may also be required at a later date.**

#### **C Closure of Brentwood Early Years Centre AND open new Foundation 1 (nursery) classes at local primary schools**

4.19 Brentwood Early Years Centre is an LA maintained nursery school with 40 full-time equivalent early years places for three and four year olds. In January 2007 there were 6 full-time and 46 part-time pupils attending the school. The school is also registered with Ofsted to provide 20 full day care places for children aged birth to 5 years, 48 weeks of the year from 8 am to 6 pm, 10 out of school places for 3 to 5 year olds attending the "main" F1 provision, and 12 term-time only crèche places.

4.20 In 2000, the Foundation Stage curriculum was introduced nationally as a distinct phase of education for children aged 3 to 5, with six statutory areas of learning: creative development; physical development; personal, social and emotional development; mathematical development; knowledge and understanding of the world;

and communication language and literacy. Guidance makes it clear the importance of continuity and progression across the Foundation stage between F1 (nursery) and F2 (Reception). Across Wirral, just over half of all infant and primary schools have an LA designated F1 class, which allows this continuity to be managed, and eases the transition for pupils into “big school”. Some schools have private pre-school provision on site, which while not part of the school, often allows a close working relationship to develop.

- 4.21 There are three maintained Early Years Centres in Wirral. Two of these, Ganney’s Meadow in Woodchurch, and Leasowe Early Years and Adult Learning Centre, are now designated as Children’s Centres for their respective areas. The site of the Children’s Centre in the South Wallasey area is Seacombe Family Centre.
- 4.22 Consultees were sometimes confused by the inclusion of Brentwood EYC in a review of primary school places. Brentwood is now the only Early Years Centre not to have become a Children’s Centre. In addition, school-based F1 settings are considered generally to be beneficial to children’s education, not only by the majority of respondents to consultation, but by the Authority, as there are sound educational reasons to operate continuous Foundation Stage provision. When discussing the future of primary education in this area, it is certainly valid to examine whether the needs of the community currently served by Brentwood Early Years Centre could be equally or better met by early years provision within primary schools.
- 4.23 Respondents praised the good work carried out by staff at Brentwood, particularly in relation to children with special needs, and the quality of the outdoor play provision at the school.
- 4.24 This option involves replacing the current F1 places at Brentwood EYC with F1 classes at local schools who do not currently have LA maintained classes. For example, Somerville Primary School, to which the majority of former Brentwood pupils transfer when they reach F2, has a small pre-school on site, and has expressed an interest in extending the school’s age range to incorporate a full-size F1 class.
- 4.25 A major outcome of the consultation was the high value placed by parents on the extended facilities provided at Brentwood, such as affordable day care and crèche places enabling parents to work or attend college.
- 4.26 Some respondents allied to Brentwood expressed concerns about F1 pupils mixing with older pupils. These issues are successfully managed in primary schools across Wirral on a day to day basis. The majority of schools have a designated, separate Foundation outdoor play area.
- 4.27 The Decision Makers guidance on the potential closure of nursery schools is included in this report under Appendix 6a. There is no doubt that F1 places could be created at local primary schools, which would be equivalent in number and educational quality to those at Brentwood. Further investigation is needed into the feasibility of replacing the existing day care and extended school facilities locally, as this vital resource must not be lost for those parents who need it.
- 4.28 **In December 2006, Cabinet agreed to return to the South Wallasey area once the Housing Market Renewal Initiative has progressed further, and I recommend that the position of Brentwood should also be re-examined at that time.**

## 5.0 **Commentary on Leasowe options**

All these options involve these three schools to varying degrees. To avoid repetition, each school will be commented on separately before the options for this area are discussed.

### **Castleway Primary School**

- 5.1 Castleway Primary School currently has 174 pupils on roll, having fallen from a peak of 241 pupils in 1991. The school is now a “small school” under the Authority’s policy “In Pursuit of Excellence” with fewer than 180 pupils. Castleway retains 64% of non-catholic choice pupils living in-zone, and has a net gain of pupils from the Leasowe Primary zone. The pattern of parental preference in this area indicates a high level of mobility between catchment areas, facilitated by high levels of surplus places. The school has 17% (36) surplus places, and this is projected to reduce to 10% (21 places) by 2012. In 2004-2005, expenditure per pupil was £3,398 compared with the Wirral average of £2,984.
- 5.2 The overall value added score (98.1) and contextual value added score (98.5) for Key Stage 2 in 2006 shows pupils at Castleway Primary School are not making the expected rate of progress (see Appendix 7). In March 2006 Castleway was placed by Ofsted in Special Measures, the highest category of concern.

### **Leasowe Primary School**

- 5.3 Leasowe Primary School currently has 130 pupils on roll, having fallen from a peak of 415 pupils in 1993, and is therefore also a small school. The school retains 45% of non-Catholic choice pupils living in-zone, and shows a net loss which is largely attributable to almost a third (29%, 82) of resident in-zone pupils attending Castleway Primary School.

Despite having recently relocated into a far smaller, new PFI one form entry building (210 places), the school has 38% (80) surplus places at present. This is projected to reduce to 17% (35 places) by 2012. In 2004-2005, expenditure per pupil was £5,014 compared with the Wirral average of £2,984, although it should be noted that the school occupied the old larger building during this period, causing a temporary distortion in the funding level which has now reduced.

- 5.4 The overall value added score (96.8) and contextual value added score (98.2) for Key Stage 2 in 2006 indicates that pupils at Leasowe Primary School made significantly below (VA) or below (CVA) the expected rate of progress (see Appendix 7).

### **Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School**

- 5.5 Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School currently has 97 pupils on roll, almost half the size of the school at its peak of 180 pupils in 1994. This is a small school, and has been so for some considerable time. The school retains a third of the total Catholic choice pupils in its admission catchment (34%, 79) which includes the Parish of English Martyrs. If the Our Lady of Lourdes Parish is analysed separately, the school retains 61% (73) of total Catholic choice pupils. Almost a fifth of Catholic choice parents in the Our Lady of Lourdes Parish send their children to Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School (19%, 23). It may be worth noting that even if all potential Catholic choice pupils in the Our Lady of Lourdes Parish attended the school, it would remain small at 120 pupils.

The school has 35% (53) surplus places at present. This is projected to remain about the same at 36% (54 places) by 2012. In 2004-2005, expenditure per pupil was £3,721 compared with the Wirral average of £2,984.

- 5.6 The overall value added score (98.9) for Key Stage 2 in 2006 shows pupils at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School were not making the expected rate of progress, However, the contextual value added score (99.8) indicates that pupils are making the expected rate of progress (see Appendix 7).
- 5.7 The school has an LA designated F1 class which in January 2007 had 1 full-time and 15 part-time pupils.

## **Ofsted issues**

- 5.8 Some respondents thought that Castleway's placement in Special Measures in May 2006 had been unfairly used as a criterion to consider school re-organisation. When a school is placed by Ofsted in Special Measures, the Authority has a legal duty to consider whether the school should be closed or amalgamated with another school, and consequently in March 2006 Council's Cabinet decided that the Leasowe area should be brought forward to Phase 3 of the Review, which began in Autumn 2006.
- 5.9 Consultees allied to Castleway also stated that Leasowe Primary School should be inspected by Ofsted under the latest framework before any re-organisation took place. Some of these respondents appeared to believe that the Council was responsible for Ofsted inspections. To clarify, the Ofsted Inspectorate is responsible to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills. Schools are inspected by Ofsted at least every three years. Leasowe Primary School was last inspected by Ofsted in January 2005, and we would expect the next inspection to take place through the normal process some time during 2008. The most recent Ofsted reports and up to date information about school buildings have been used by the Authority.

## **Commentary on small schools**

- 5.10 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?
- 5.11 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 8. 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 6a) makes no mention of school size. DfES 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](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/fallingschoolrolls/schools/educational_decisions)

One problematic issue which is discussed in some detail in Appendix 8 is the potential difficulty of mixed age teaching, especially across key stages.

- 5.12 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.
- 5.13 Our experience in Wirral, has been that while overall until quite recently we have had few primary schools who 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.

### **Options in relation to community school provision**

#### **A Closure of Castleway Primary School**

- 5.14 In general terms, respondents allied to Castleway were strongly against the closure of the school, as would be expected. Respondents allied to Leasowe felt that the new building should continue to be used as a school, and that more children could be accommodated if necessary if it were decided that Castleway should close.
- 5.15 Respondents from Castleway cited the school's relatively large size and low surplus place levels as reasons why the school should not be considered for closure. As stated above, all three schools in this area are now small schools under Wirral policy. The surplus place level is higher than the Audit Commission's guideline of 5 to 10 percent, above which money is being wasted. Surplus places are relatively high at all three primary schools in the Leasowe area, and the consultation options were intended to address the surplus place issue across the whole area and provide a better fit between pupils and places in schools. Surplus across the area is projected to remain high overall, at 19% by 2012, and it is right to look at ways of reducing this surplus.
- 5.16 Castleway's relative popularity and good reputation with local parents was a strong feature of responses to consultation, indeed the school retains the highest proportion of in-zone pupils of the three Leasowe schools. The destinations of pupils from Leasowe Early Years Centre follow closely the overall pattern of parental choice for the Leasowe planning area, which is that around 40% of Leasowe EYC pupils go on to attend Castleway Primary School, while around 30% attend Leasowe Primary School, the remaining pupils attending primary schools outside the Leasowe area.
- 5.17 Respondents identified the former Beacon status of Castleway and cited the withdrawal of the additional Beacon funding as a reason for the decline in standards at the school. Castleway Primary became a Beacon school for behaviour management for the three years following the school's 2000 Ofsted inspection. Beacon status came with time-limited additional central government funding which naturally expired at the end of the 3 year period. It should be noted that the 2000 Ofsted inspection also raised many areas where improvement was needed, including the use of ICT, pupil punctuality and attendance and standards at Key Stage 2. The Beacon programme has since been replaced by Primary Strategy Learning Networks, where groups of

local schools come together to help raise standards, supported by the Authority and funded by the DfES.

- 5.18 Concerns were raised by consultees about behaviour and levels of bullying at other schools. All Wirral primary schools have an anti-bullying policy, and the individual social, emotional and educational needs of children are the highest priority for staff in schools. I have no reason to believe that this would not continue to be the case following a school closure or amalgamation. Leasowe Primary's 2005 Ofsted report stated that "the school is very successful in dealing with difficult behaviour or bullying". Statements were made that large numbers of pupils had moved from the other two schools to Castleway Primary due to bullying. This claim has been investigated. Between 2000 and 2006, slightly more children have transferred from Leasowe and Our Lady of Lourdes to Castleway, than from Castleway to Leasowe and Our Lady of Lourdes, but the numbers involved are low. It is not possible to comment on individual parents reasons for transferring between primary schools.
- 5.19 Concerns were also raised by respondents from both schools about the possibility of children returning to a school which they had previously left. Pupils who have been permanently excluded from a particular school would not usually be expected to return to that school.
- 5.20 Some respondents suggested that new housing in the area would generate more children. The impact of new housing development has already been taken into account when making projections of how many school places will be needed in future years. Recently approved planning applications for new housing in the Leasowe area include 26 flats on the Leasowe public house site, an additional 12 flats on Reeds Lane and four 3 bed semi-detached houses at Garswood Close. All these developments are within the catchment zone of Eastway Primary School. The largest development of 131 dwellings (69 houses and 62 flats) at the former Leasowe Primary school site are within the Leasowe catchment zone. It is estimated that 48 primary age pupils might be generated by these new dwellings. The nature of the housing also has an impact. Flats and retirement housing will clearly generate fewer children. It should also be remembered that children moving into new houses will tend to be existing Wirral residents, and may continue to attend their existing primary school. None of the new housing developments are within Castleway's catchment zone, although patterns of parental preference indicate that some parents may decide to send their children to Castleway Primary School. It is unlikely that new schools would be required in the near future, as demographic trends indicate that the number of children born each year is unlikely to rise significantly. Any building work carried out as a result of this Review would allow for flexibility and extension at a later date, if it was required.
- 5.21 Travel distance, traffic congestion and safety were raised. The Castleway and Leasowe sites are just half a mile apart, and many children already travel across the area to attend various schools. A minority of parents said that they would prefer to travel to schools outside the Leasowe area if Castleway were closed or amalgamated. When a school closes, parents are asked to submit their preferences for alternative primary school places, and may choose to apply to out of zone schools if they wish to do so. Places are then allocated on the basis of the admission arrangements published in the Authority's booklets for parents. One parent said that they would prefer to home-school their child. Every parent/carer has the right to decide to home school their child, either themselves or by hiring a tutor, but it is a complex decision which must be taken very seriously and in the best interests of the child concerned.
- 5.22 Concerns were raised about the future of the redundant site if the school closed. Decisions about sites are made only after the educational decisions have been made, and are not, as some respondents suggested, the sole aim of the review. If school

playing fields are to be sold, the Council usually has to ask permission from the Secretary of State. There are no plans or planning applications in relation to any of the sites involved in this Phase of the review.

- 5.23 Parents are often concerned about increased class sizes following school re-organisation. However, a distinction should be made between small schools, and small classes. If the overall number on roll at a school goes up, this does not mean that class sizes would necessarily go up. This is because the money a school receives in its budget depends mostly on the number of pupils on roll. Larger schools can afford to employ more teachers, so that class sizes are not necessarily different to those in smaller schools. Larger schools also have more flexibility to spend money on additional resources such as classroom assistants, books and equipment. At Key Stage 1 (Infants) there is a national class size limit of 30 pupils with which all schools are expected to comply, regardless of the overall size of the school. The average class size for a Wirral primary school is lower than this at 25-26 pupils. If new classrooms are needed to accommodate pupils at receiving schools, this would be funded as a priority investment in school buildings.

### **B Amalgamation of Castleway Primary School and Leasowe Primary School at the Castleway site (B1) or the Leasowe site (B2)**

Many of the concerns raised by consultees apply equally to Option B as to Option A. Additional points and differences are identified in the following paragraphs.

- 5.24 In relation to 5.18 above, a new amalgamated school would have an anti-bullying policy, just as in all Wirral primary schools.
- 5.25 In relation to pupil places, while all children at both former schools would be guaranteed a place at the newly established school in an amalgamation, some parents may not wish to take up that place. Parents would be asked to express a preference, and places would be allocated using the admission criteria, which include keeping brothers and sisters together at the same school wherever possible, and subject to the Infant Class size limit.
- 5.26 In relation to staff issues, if Castleway and Leasowe were amalgamated, at either site (Option B), all the staff from both former schools are technically redundant and are available for redeployment. The new school's shadow governing body is drawn from the governors of the former schools prior to the new school's creation. The shadow governing body is then responsible for appointing the headteacher as well as deciding the staffing structure, and is expected to give prior and preferential treatment to staff on the redeployment register.
- 5.27 The distinction between community and Foundation schools has been covered in paragraphs 4.14 and 4.15 of this report. Regulations relating to statutory competitions would apply and are covered in brief in Appendix 6b.
- 5.28 Before and after school provision, and extended services such as adult learning, are currently offered by both schools. While this would be a matter for the new governing body to decide, it is likely that facilities provided would continue in a new school.
- 5.29 The consultation documents were drawn up using the most recent data available at the time, which was the January 2006 Census, at which time Castleway Primary had 192 pupils (now 174) and Leasowe Primary had 140 pupils (now 130). The total roll of both schools combined was 332 pupils (now 304). In order to accommodate all pupils from both schools, it was projected that Leasowe would require 4 to 5 additional classrooms and associated facilities, and that Castleway's building would require 2 or more new classrooms, alongside some internal alterations to return rooms currently in use for other purposes into classrooms. Building alterations to classrooms and other

provision would be agreed between the Authority and the new school and funded from the Capital programme.

- 5.30 With regard the location for an amalgamated school, respondents from Leasowe Primary were concerned about the potential loss of the new building and its facilities, emphasizing the capacity of the building to accommodate additional pupils, including expansion if this was necessary. Generally, it was felt that an amalgamation would be too disruptive for pupils so soon after the move to the new building.
- 5.31 Castleway respondents were concerned about traffic congestion, parking and access at the Leasowe site. While some acknowledged that Castleway's building required refurbishment, the ability to expand on the site was emphasised. Building a new school was generally considered too expensive in comparison to refurbishing and extending the existing buildings.

### **Options in relation to denominational provision**

#### **C Closure of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School**

- 5.32 Respondents related to Our Lady of Lourdes were universally against the closure of the school since there would no longer be any denominational provision within the Leasowe area. The benefits of small schools, improving standards at the school and the importance of links with the community were raised.
- 5.33 Concerns were raised about the distance to alternative Catholic primary schools (see 5.5 above), and the possibility of pupils losing priority status on admission to Catholic secondary school if they attended a non-Catholic primary school.
- 5.34 The Diocese of Shrewsbury predicts a rise to 125 pupils on roll (excluding the nursery) by 2011, and suggests that the Authority is in agreement. The projections in the consultation document indicate a fall to 88 by 2011. Following the 2007 census, the Authority's latest projections suggest a small stable roll at Our Lady of Lourdes, with 92 pupils in 2011, and 96 in 2012.
- 5.35 The former parents room at the school is now used exclusively for the purposes of Interdiocesan Fuel Management, and this has been cited by the Diocese as removing surplus places. The parents room was already discounted from the DfES Net Capacity of the school, and consequently the change of use has had no impact on surplus places.
- 5.36 Those with affiliations to other schools who expressed an opinion regarding the denominational options, were largely in favour of the closure of Our Lady of Lourdes, although one respondent said that there should be a choice of a "faith" and a community school in the Leasowe area.

#### **D1 A joint denominational school established by the Anglican Diocese of Chester and the Catholic Diocese of Shrewsbury**

- 5.37 Respondents allied to Our Lady of Lourdes were, with a sole exception, in favour of this option.
- 5.38 The concern raised by a single respondent was in regard to the loss of the existing school's ethos. Other respondents overwhelmingly felt that the school's ethos would be enhanced by joint denominational status, contributing to community cohesion.
- 5.39 This is an exciting option, and if it were to be enacted, would be the first such school on Wirral. The process of establishment of a joint denominational school is likely to be complicated. The religious ethos of the school cannot simply be changed. Legally, a proposal to close Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic School would be made either by the Governing body or by the Authority. A linked proposal would be published jointly by both Diocesan Authorities to establish a new joint-denominational Aided primary

school. The consultation document suggested that an alternative school site, or a new site, could be used, however, the Diocese of Shrewsbury have indicated their intention to remain at the Our Lady of Lourdes site, to which the Diocese of Chester have not objected. In Aided schools, the buildings and site are owned by Trustees, and there may be land and financial implications to be resolved by the two Diocesan bodies. The regulations on competitions for new schools would usually apply. However, an application could be made by the two Diocesan bodies to the Secretary of State for permission to propose the establishment of the new joint denominational school without a competition. The example given in the official guidance is for replacement of two or more schools with a single school with the same religious ethos, which is not the case in this situation. However, the Diocese of Shrewsbury has had provisional unofficial advice that the Secretary of State may be prepared to grant an exemption from the competition process, as the new Aided school would replace an existing Aided school.

**D2 Expansion of Our Lady of Lourdes to a one form of entry primary school (210 places) whilst maintaining the current Admission policy that welcomes applicants from other or no faiths whose parents want their children to have an education in a Catholic school**

- 5.40 Concerns were raised by some respondents about the quality of the land on which the existing school is built, suggesting that subsidence may be an issue in future if the school is extended. Further investigations would need to be carried out in this matter.
- 5.41 Respondents from community schools stated that they would not choose Catholic primary provision in the event of their school's closure or amalgamation, and that those parents who wanted their child educated at a Catholic school had already made that decision.
- 5.42 To expand Our Lady of Lourdes without a concurrent reduction in places at other schools in the area appears counter-productive when surplus in the area is already high. There is little indication from consultation that community school parents would choose to transfer to Our Lady of Lourdes if the school were expanded.

**D3 Maintain Our Lady of Lourdes with its existing planned admission number and its current Admissions policy that welcomes applicants from other or no faiths whose parents want their children to have an education in a Catholic school**

- 5.43 This is effectively a "no change" option for Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School, understandably attracting little comment from respondents. As such, this option requires no legal change to the school, and consequently no specific decision by Cabinet.
- 5.44 **Other suggestions raised during consultation for these schools**

**Close all three schools and build a new primary school on a central site**

This suggested option would mean that Leasowe had a single primary school, which on current numbers on roll would cater for 401 pupils, or approximately two forms of entry. This is not large in Wirral terms, and would maintain a single viable school in the Leasowe area for the foreseeable future. The cost of building a primary school of this size is estimated at £4 to £6 million pounds, excluding any site purchase costs. Under the Education and Inspections Act 2006, a statutory competition would operate to ascertain the best bidder to operate the new school. As this suggestion would include the closure of a Catholic Aided school, it is unlikely that the Diocese of Shrewsbury would support such an option unless the resulting school were either Catholic Aided, or a joint denominational school in conjunction with the Anglican Diocese, so that

there would no longer be a community primary school in the Leasowe area. PFI issues in relation to the former Leasowe site would also need to be resolved.

This suggestion is not recommended for further consideration.

### **Amalgamate Leasowe Primary School and Our Lady of Lourdes 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 school at the Wallasey end of the Leasowe estate, with Castleway remaining at the Moreton end 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 Leasowe Primary School, linked with relocating Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School into the Leasowe building, which would require a statutory alteration, not a competition, however, the Diocese of Shrewsbury has indicated that their preferred site is the existing site next to the Church.

This suggestion is not recommended for further consideration.

### **Close Leasowe Primary School**

Leasowe Primary School occupies a PFI building, which the Council has committed to lease for 25 years. It may be possible to find an alternative non-school use for the Leasowe building, if it were to be declared surplus to requirements. Leasowe Primary School is a small school in terms of number on roll, with a large proportion of surplus places. However, new school buildings are usually attractive to parents, and this should have a positive impact on the school’s roll over the next few years.

This suggestion is not recommended for further consideration.

- 5.45 **In the light of the positive consultation response to Option D1, the joint denominational school, it is recommended that this option be explored in more depth with the Anglican and Catholic Diocesan Boards and the publication of any necessary proposals in relation to this option be undertaken. The number of non-catholic choice parents that might be attracted to a joint denominational school must be considered. On this basis, it is also recommended that a decision on changes to community school provision in the Leasowe area be delayed until a future review phase, pending further discussions with interested parties on the options provided by the Education and Inspections Act (2006). Numbers on roll and standards at all the schools in this area will continue to be monitored.**

### **6.0 Commentary on Pensby and Thingwall options**

All these options involve these three schools to varying degrees. To avoid repetition, each school will be commented on separately before the options for this part of the area are discussed.

#### **Pensby Infant School**

- 6.1 There are currently 77 pupils on roll at Pensby Infant School, which means there are 36% (43) surplus places. The peak was 166 pupils in 1993, more than double the

current roll. The number on roll is projected to be about the same at 75 pupils by 2012. The catchment zone of Pensby Infant School is the same as that for Pensby Junior School, and together the two schools retain 47% of in-zone non-Catholic choice pupils (49% Infant, 47% Junior). The remaining in-zone non-Catholic choice Infant pupils attend various schools in small numbers, of which the largest group attend Pensby Park (15%, 17 pupils), with roughly equal numbers from the Pensby Park zone attending Pensby Infant (11%, 15 pupils).

- 6.2 The expenditure per pupil in 2004-2005 was £3,468, compared with the Wirral average of £2,985.
- 6.3 Average points scores at Key Stage 1 in 2006 for all core subjects were significantly above the national averages (see Appendix 7).
- 6.4 The school operates a F1 class, which was attended by 34 part-time three and four year olds in January 2007. Wrap-around care and a joint before/after school club runs from mobile classrooms on the site.

### **Pensby Junior School**

- 6.5 Pensby Junior has 112 pupils on roll, less than half the size of the school at its previous peak of 228 pupils in 1998. The school has 36% (64) surplus places, and this is predicted to increase slightly by 2012 to 40% (70) surplus places at 106 on roll. As mentioned in 6.1 above, more than half of non-Catholic choice parents living in the catchment zone send their children to other schools. Various other schools are attended in small numbers, of which the largest group attend Heswall Primary (11%, 17 pupils). Just 7% (11) of potential Pensby Junior pupils attend Pensby Park – the number making the opposite journey is far higher (20%, 29 pupils). There is demonstrably a high level of overlap between the pupil populations of the existing Infant/Junior and Pensby Park schools, and a high level of mobility in the area as demonstrated by the number of different schools that pupils attend.
- 6.6 The expenditure per pupil in 2004-2005 was £3,164, compared with the Wirral average of £2,985.
- 6.7 The overall value added score (99.3) for 2006 and contextual value added score (99.7) show that pupils are making the expected rate of progress (see Appendix 7).

### **Pensby Park Primary School**

- 6.8 Pensby Park Primary now has 90 pupils on roll and has reached 25% (30) surplus places, the point at which the DfES requests an explanation of how this situation will be addressed. The number on roll is projected to fall to 67 by 2012, which would increase surplus places at the school to 44% (53) surplus places. Pensby Park attracts just 38% (55) of non-Catholic choice pupils residing in its zone. The majority of the remaining 62% (87) of potential pupils attend Pensby Infant and Junior (31%, 44 pupils) – almost as many pupils attend Pensby Infant and Junior as attend Pensby Park.
- 6.9 The expenditure per pupil in 2003-2004 was £3,551 compared with the Wirral average of £2,985.
- 6.10 The overall value added score (100.1) for 2006 and contextual value added score (99.7) show that pupils are making the expected rate of progress (see Appendix 7). There was no significant difference in the progress made by pupils at Pensby Park and at Pensby Junior.
- 6.11 A pre-school playgroup operates from the school's building, which in Summer 2006 was attended by 13 children, equivalent to 4.3 full-time.

The options for this area will be commented on in the next section.

## A Closure of Pensby Park Primary School

- 6.12 Pensby Park is a small school with high levels of surplus places. All current and projected Pensby Park pupils could be accommodated at other local schools. The Pensby Park catchment zone would be allocated to Pensby Infant/Junior, at which there are ample places to accommodate former Pensby Park pupils.
- 6.13 Consultees related to Pensby Park blamed the small size of the school on scaremongering and uncertainty in the community caused by a previous review of primary schools carried out by the Council in 2000, suggesting that if the threat of closure were lifted, more parents would choose the school, causing rolls to rise. Rolls have, however, been falling at the school for more than 20 years, predating both the current review, and the 2000 consultation. The pattern of falling rolls at this school has been of a long slow decline – the last year in which there were more than 180 pupils was 1983, when there were 188 on roll. Ten years ago in 1997, there were 123 pupils on roll, now 90 pupils in 2007.
- 6.14 The possibility of new families moving into the area was raised. In recent years, Wirral has had only a small net gain of people from outside the area, about 50 people per year. Families moving into houses are likely to be existing Wirral residents, and often children continue to attend their previous school rather than transfer to a new school. Pensby is within the Council’s planning restraint area for new housing, and it is clear that new housing will have no significant impact on surplus places for the foreseeable future.
- 6.15 Concerns were raised that the Authority had not properly considered changes in age demographics in Pensby. The following table shows actual **proportions** of people living in the Pensby and Thingwall ward, and across Wirral at the last National Census in 2001 (shaded), and projected for Wirral in 2028.

Age group	Pensby and Thingwall	Wirral	Wirral-Pensby difference	Wirral 2028	Wirral change to 2028
0 to 9	11	12	-1	11	-1
10 to 14	7	7	0	6	-3
15 to 19	8	9	-1	5	-4
20 to 44	27	31	-4	28	-3
45 to 59	21	20	+1	18	-2
60 and over	29	23	+6	32	+9

*Source: Office for National Statistics. Total persons living in Pensby and Thingwall, 13,316, total in Wirral 312,293 (2001). Percentages may not add exactly due to rounding.*

Wirral, in common with many other parts of the UK, has an aging population as fewer children are being born and more people are living for longer. Projections produced by the Office for National Statistics indicate that across Wirral between 2003 and 2028, there are expected to be 5,600 fewer children and young people aged under 15, 10,000 fewer 15 to 44 year olds (the age group that could reasonably be expected to have children), 4,400 fewer 45 to 59 year olds, but 28,800 more people aged 60 and above.

Pensby and Thingwall ward already accommodates a higher proportion of persons aged 60 and over than in Wirral generally, and is unlikely to differ significantly from the overall Wirral age demographic trend.

- 6.16 The DfES Net Capacity method and the Authority’s pupil projection methods were both questioned. The Net Capacity of every primary school is determined by a national formula which uses the number and actual size of classbases, and the admission

number of the school, to calculate the total capacity of each building. Rooms that may formerly have been classbases but are now used for other purposes, are excluded from the calculation. At Pensby Park, originally designed as a school for 210 pupils, three classbases have been redesignated as an ICT suite, parents room and preschool playgroup respectively, leaving 4 classbases in use as such.

Wirral's methodology used to project future pupil numbers has been ratified by the Audit Commission. Actual pupil numbers in each year group at each primary school are collected in the Annual Census and rolled forward accordingly. Estimates of the number of children entering Foundation 2 are based on actual live births provided by the Health Authority, to which a three year average of the transition rate to F2 is applied. This overall number is then apportioned to individual schools on the basis of a three year average of intake. In 1981, 622 pupils attended community primary phase schools in Pensby. By 2007, these schools were attended by 279 pupils, 343 fewer. Projections to 2012 indicate 249 pupils between these three schools.

The birth rate also indicates that the average number of children in each family is significantly fewer than when these schools were built – more than 40 years ago in the case of Pensby Infant and Pensby Park, more than 70 years for Pensby Junior. In the late 1960's, the average number of children per woman was 2.9. This reached 1.6 in 2000, and is expected to settle at 1.7 children per woman. The proportion of women who never have children has also risen in recent years, from 1 in 10 in 1981, to 1 in 5 by 2001.

Parental preference of individual schools can indeed vary over time, but there are demonstrably fewer children attending schools in Pensby, and this is not projected to increase significantly for the foreseeable future.

- 6.17 The possibility of additional government funding to keep the school open was raised. As mentioned in paragraph 5.12, Wirral maintains small schools at the expense of all other schools, and consequently all other pupils, as the authority does not qualify for additional sparsity funding from the government.
- 6.18 As mentioned in 6.8 above, Pensby Park now has 25% and at least 30 places. The parents group response stated that this measure was a solely a local performance indicator (BVP 34a) that was no longer reported nationally. The Authority is required to make an annual statutory return to the DfES showing numbers on roll, Net Capacity and surplus places for every primary and secondary school on Wirral. For every school in the 25% and 30 or more surplus place category, the DfES requires an individual statement on how this surplus is being addressed. Pensby Infant, Pensby Junior and Pensby Park are all now in this category.
- 6.19 Standards at alternative schools were of concern. Pensby Junior School has operated an Authority designated Special Needs Class, which tends to impact on overall results. However, value added scores at schools in the Pensby and Thingwall area in 2006 indicate that all pupils are making the expected rate of progress, with the exception of Ladymount Catholic Primary School, where pupils made above the expected rate of progress. There is no significant difference between the progress made by pupils at Pensby Junior and at Pensby Park (Appendix 7).

Lower standards in larger schools was mentioned in the parents group response. In Wirral primary schools, little correlation has been found between total number on roll and performance.

- 6.20 Some Pensby Park parents stated that they had chosen Pensby Park specifically because they did not wish their child to attend separate Infant and Junior schools. The other primary school in Pensby is Ladymount Catholic Primary School, and these parents were concerned about increased travel to community primary schools outside

Pensby. Three-quarters of current Pensby Park pupils would reside in the combined zone formed by merging the existing zones of Pensby Park and Pensby Infant/Pensby Junior. In the event of closure, parents would be asked to express a preference for a school, and places would be allocated through the usual procedures.

- 6.21 Increased traffic congestion was also raised, although it should be remembered that the distances between existing sites are not great, for example, Pensby Park and Pensby Junior are 0.7 miles apart. The pupil populations show a significant overlap.
- 6.22 Concerns have been raised that the on-site pre-school would be lost if the school were to close. While some preschools are co-located in school buildings or on school sites, privately run pre-schools operate successfully across the Borough without any special tie or proximity to a particular school. Discussions would take place to find alternative accommodation for the pre-school, such as co-located with other community facilities or a Children's Centre.
- 6.23 Concerns about increased class sizes have been discussed in paragraph 5.23 of this report.
- 6.24 Pensby Park's building and site are owned by the Authority, and alternative uses could be considered if it were no longer in use as a school, including the possibility of siting a Children's Centre, Area team or other community facilities.
- 6.25 This school generated the highest number of consultation responses of any school involved in this phase of the review. It is worth considering that the majority of these, almost 70%, were from people with no, or only an indirect connection with the school (See Appendix 3a). Guidance says that "The Decision Maker should not simply take account of the numbers of people expressing a particular view when considering representations made on proposals. Instead the greatest weight should be given to representations from those stakeholders likely to be most directly affected by the proposals" (see Appendix 6a).
- 6.26 Resolving parental uncertainty about the future of primary schools in this area was a strong feature of many responses. Projections indicate that pupil numbers in this area are unlikely to rise significantly. If the decision were once again that no change would be made, this uncertainty would remain, leaving three small schools to cope with the financial and organisational difficulties that inevitably follow, which may have a detrimental effect on children's education.

## **B Amalgamate Pensby Infant School and Pensby Junior School**

- 6.27 Amalgamating these two schools would involve the closure of both, followed by the establishment of a new primary school on the combined site, with a total current number on roll of 189 pupils.
- 6.28 Under this option, Pensby Park would remain open and this option was the preferred option for consultees allied to Pensby Park. Respondents allied to the Infant and Junior schools did not express strong opposition to this option. On average 90% of Pensby Infant pupils go on to attend Pensby Junior school.
- 6.29 Respondents were enthusiastic about the possibility of a new school building if an amalgamation went ahead, rather than refurbishment or extension of either of the existing buildings. Construction of a new building would allow the site to be landscaped, with improved drop-off and parking facilities.
- 6.30 One consultee felt that the consultation documents had not properly considered the benefits of separate Infant and Junior schools, focusing instead on the benefits of all-through primary education.

- 6.31 The main concern for Infant parents related to a perception of lower educational standards in Pensby Junior school in comparison to Pensby Infant school. In terms of attainment, 2006 Key Stage 2 results demonstrate that pupils at Pensby Junior are making the expected rate of progress. Headteachers and governors at Pensby Infant and Pensby Junior have already committed to working together closely to ensure that standards are maintained across the primary age range. Were the two schools to come together as a primary school with a single headteacher and governing body, continuity of educational provision would be resolved.
- 6.32 Other concerns raised related to older and younger pupils mixing in the same playground, poor quality of the accommodation in the Junior school (if a new school was not to be built) and the importance of minimising disruption to children's education that might be caused by major building work on the adjacent part of the site.
- 6.33 As mentioned under Option A, a Children's Centre is due to be sited in Pensby. It would be an option during the design and construction of a new purpose built primary school to incorporate the Children's Centre, alongside the new primary school's F1 class. Efficiency savings would be available not only in ceasing to maintain old, inefficient school buildings, but in the construction costs, which are estimated at around £3 million for a primary school of this size.
- 6.34 Under the recently introduced legislation, there may be a duty to operate a statutory competition to operate the new primary school, however, in the case of an Infant and Junior amalgamation, it is possible that this may be waived by the Secretary of State (Appendix 6b).

### **C Closure of Pensby Park Primary School AND amalgamate Pensby Infant and Pensby Junior to form an all-through primary school**

- 6.35 This is effectively a combination of Options A and B.
- 6.36 The Governing bodies of Pensby Infant and Pensby Junior School supported this option, but with a **variation** which would stagger the change, so that Pensby Park would close first, with the Infant and Junior School amalgamation delayed until a new school building was ready to be occupied. Former Pensby Park parents who have specified that they do not want separate Infant and Junior schools would then have to either travel elsewhere, or accept attendance at the separate schools as a temporary change pending the new school building. The rationale behind this request for a staged implementation appeared to be to ensure that funding for a new school building is in place, and does not disappear if the amalgamation occurs ahead of the commencement of building work. From a practical perspective in relation to design and construction of the new school, it would be significantly less complicated and time-consuming to work in partnership with a single headteacher and governing body, rather than two, or indeed three including Pensby Park.
- 6.37 One consideration with regard to this option is that as an Infant and Junior amalgamation (rather than as in Option D, the amalgamation of all three schools), the Authority could ask permission from the Secretary of State to waive the duty to advertise a competition to open the new primary school, reducing the length of time before a decision was reached.
- 6.38 It is a legal requirement of statutory proposals that the Council (or other sponsor) identifies the source of funding for any changes that result from a proposal, whether extension or new build, prior to consideration by the decision maker. Appendix 9 to this report is the DfES Schools Building and Design Unit cost guidelines. In order to accommodate all 279 pupils from the existing Pensby Park, Pensby Infant and Pensby Junior, the minimum gross floor area required under Building Bulletin 99 would be approximately 1480 m<sup>2</sup>. Using the DfES cost guidelines and allowing for 3% annual

inflation since 2003, the cost of building a new school of this size (excluding Children's Centre or extended school services) is likely to be in the region of £2 million, however officers experience would be nearer to £3 million. Paragraph 9.0 of this report indicates some potential sources of funding. In some circumstances, such as PFI arrangements, Building Schools for the Future, or when awaiting capital receipts from site sales, the decision maker can give conditional approval of a proposal with a defined date by which the funding must be secured. This should resolve governor's concerns about amalgamating ahead of the commencement of building work on site, whether new build or extension and refurbishment.

**D Amalgamate Pensby Park Primary School, Pensby Infant and Pensby Junior School to form an all-through primary school on the current Infant/Junior site (D1) or the current Pensby Park site (D2)**

- 6.39 Although this is the most radical of the options under consultation, the outcome would be a new primary school with 279 pupils on roll (January 2007), which is not by any means a large primary school in Wirral terms. This should produce a school of a viable size, providing stability to primary education in the Pensby area for the foreseeable future.
- 6.40 As an amalgamation of three schools, the statutory duty to operate a competition for a new school would apply. While there are unlikely to be a many bids to run the new school, it is estimated that the necessary consultation and legal processes would add around 6 months to the whole procedure of closure and amalgamation. Experience from other phases of the Review, and from consultees, it is desirable that decisions are made as quickly as possible to avoid uncertainty in the community regarding the future of primary schools in this area.

**E To include in any of the above options the establishment of a Church of England primary school in Pensby**

- 6.41 This option was raised as a possibility by the Diocese of Chester, based on strong links between local churches and schools in this area.
- 6.42 Those allied to Pensby Park who stated their preference for a CE school in Pensby, saw this option as a way to "save the school" by communicating to the community at large that the school was not about to close and therefore raise admissions. The possibility of additional funding from Church of England status has been raised. The only additional funding available from central government to Church schools is the LA co-ordinated Voluntary Aided Programme (LCVAP), which provides capital funding for Aided schools (not for Controlled schools) towards building works identified as a priority by the school, the Diocese and the Authority. This funding cannot be used for non-capital expenditure such as staff salaries or the purchase of resources.
- 6.43 If Pensby Park were to become a Church of England primary school, the existing school would close and a new school opened on the same site. This new school would be subject to the duty to hold a competition. Respondents from Pensby Park have been keen to emphasise the unique ethos of the school. It should be borne in mind that gaining Church of England status is not simply a matter of changing the school's name. If approved, as in any such closure, all staff would be made redundant, although of course the new school would need staff. The new governing body would be different in composition to that of the existing school. There is no way of predicting whether a Church of England school on the Pensby Park site would prove any more popular with parents than the existing school. The limitations of the building mean that this would always be a small school, with the possibility that if the number on roll did not improve, the school could be reviewed again within a few years.

- 6.44 Most consultees did not comment on the prospect of a new school having Church of England status. A single comment was made about money being wasted on creating a Church of England school, and another that any such school should be Controlled, not Aided, so that the admission policy of the school would be open to all.
- 6.45 There are already two Church of England Aided schools in the surrounding locality, Dawpool CE Primary School in Thurstaston and St Peter's CE Primary School in Heswall. Parents from the Pensby area do not live in zone or Parish for either of these schools, but 11% (49 pupils) from the community catchments have obtained places at them. Excepting some respondents from Pensby Park, consultation on this issue has produced an ambivalent reaction from local parents, and it is possible that the desire for denominational education in this area is largely being met by Ladymount Catholic Primary School and these two CE primary schools.
- 6.46 If under any of the options, a competition is required, the Diocese of Chester may decide to enter a bid to operate a new school in this area and will be provided with every support by the Authority according to the regulations. If the Authority enters its own bid, the final decision maker would then be the Schools Adjudicator.

#### **Other suggestions for changes to schools in this area**

- 6.47 **Build a new all-through primary school on same site as Pensby High School for Boys and Pensby High School for Girls**

This is a variant on Option C or Option D, using a location other than existing primary school sites. Campus style accommodation with primary and secondary schools sharing certain facilities, such as sports halls, operate successfully all over the country, and the Authority has no particular reason to object to such an arrangement.

Considerations include increased traffic congestion, parking, and issues of security. The Pensby High site is towards the edge of Pensby, whereas current primary sites are more centrally located within Pensby. In addition, the minimum size of the site which would be required for a primary school of 280 pupils may be unacceptable to the secondary school, as this area would effectively be "lost".

There are likely to be planning issues in relation to loss of greenbelt land.

This suggestion is not recommended for further consideration.

- 6.48 **Option C is recommended as the Council's preferred option, without the Governing body's variation to apply the proposals in stages. Prior to publication of proposals, detailed work must be carried out to provide indicative costs for a new build primary school of an appropriate size, relative to the costs of refurbishing and extending either of the existing buildings, as well as an appropriate funding source secured, should the option be chosen. I will bring a report to Cabinet with a full option appraisal later this year examining it in detail, with further advice on options for a Children's Centre in this area.**

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

##### **Admission Arrangements: present and future pupils**

- 7.0 The closure and/or amalgamation of primary schools will have implications for the Authority's admission arrangements. The DFES 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**

- 7.1 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**

- 7.2 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.

## **Staffing Implications**

### **8.0 Amalgamation**

An amalgamation requires both schools to close, and a new school to open. A 'shadow' governing body is established, and decides on the appropriate staff structure. Posts are ring-fenced initially to staff from both schools, and appointments made. Options such as early voluntary retirement would be made available, if appropriate, after consultation with staff. Every effort will be made to find suitable alternative employment for staff not appointed to the new school.

### **8.1 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.

### **8.2 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.

## **Financial Implications**

- 9.0 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 draft 2007/08 Schools Capital Programme for "scheme development resulting from primary reviews" due to be considered at the Executive Board meeting of 7<sup>th</sup> June 2007, which 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: DfES 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.

- 9.1 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.

### **Equal Opportunities Implications**

- 10.0 There are none arising out of this report.

### **Human Rights Implications**

- 11.0 There are none arising directly from this report.

### **Local Agenda 21 Statement**

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

### **Community Safety Implications**

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

### **Planning Implications**

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

### **Local Member Support Implications**

- 15.0 Primary place planning and potential surplus place removal have relevance to all Wards.
- 15.1 The current consultation affects the following Wards directly: Seacombe, Leasowe and Moreton East, Pensby.

### **Background Papers**

- 16.0 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 2007 (Annual Census return to DfES).  
School Net Capacity Calculation, July 2006, to DfES requirements.  
Consultation Documents  
Other data held in Department including that provided by Wirral Health Authority.

### **17.0 Appendices**

See list attached.

## Summary

18.0 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.

## 19.0 Recommendations

A) I recommend that statutory proposals be published in respect of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 below:

### **1 Closure of Poulton Primary School**

### **2 Extend the lower age range of Park Primary School to provide an LA designated F1 class**

These two proposals to be regarded as linked.

### **3 Closure of Pensby Park Primary School**

This proposal to be regarded as separate.

### **4 Closure of Pensby Infant School**

### **5 Closure of Pensby Junior School**

### **6 Establishment of a new Community Primary School at the Pensby Infant and Pensby Junior site**

These three proposals to be regarded as linked.

- B) That I 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.
- C) That I be authorised to give all necessary support to the governing body of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School, the Anglican Diocese of Chester, and the Catholic Diocese of Shrewsbury with regard to publishing proposals to close Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School and to establish a new joint denominational school on the Our Lady of Lourdes site.
- D) That the position of community primary schools in the Leasowe planning area be monitored and reviewed in a future review phase pending the outcome of C) above.
- E) That the position of Brentwood Early Years Centre be re-assessed in conjunction with primary schools in a future review of the South Wallasey planning area.
- F) That prior to publication of statutory proposals in regard to items 4, 5 and 6 above, I be authorised to instigate an evaluation of potential sources of funding related to building work at the Pensby Infant and Pensby Junior site and return to Cabinet with an option appraisal report on this matter.

**Howard Cooper**

**Director of Children's Services**

# List of Appendices

<b>Appendix</b>	<b>Description</b>
1	Extract from School Organisation Plan: Policies and Principles
2	Cabinet Report and resolution from 14 <sup>th</sup> December 2006
<i>Consultation</i>	
3a	Analysis of Consultation
3b	Summary of responses
<i>Diocesan issues</i>	
4	Response submission, Anglican Diocese of Chester
5	Response submission, Catholic Diocese of Shrewsbury
<i>Education and Inspections Act 2006</i>	
6	Summary of new regulations on school re-organisation
<i>Standards</i>	
7a	Standards – KS2 data; Value Added
7b	Standards – Extracts from Ofsted reports
<i>Issues concerned with size and viability</i>	
8a	Extract from “ In Pursuit of Excellence”, written by Wirral Headteachers and the Primary Team, School Effectiveness
8b	Extract from “Small Schools: How well are they doing?” (Ofsted 2000)
8c	Size and viability in consultation areas
<i>Building Costs</i>	
9	DfES School Building and Design Unit – Information on costs and performance data, April 2003

# **Minutes - Cabinet - 20 June 2007**

## **Present**

**Chair: S Foulkes**

**Councillors: PLDavies, G Gardiner, PJ Hackett, SA Holbrook, SE Kelly, RK Moon, Jean Quinn**

**In attendance: JE Green, Mrs LA Rennie**

**Apologies: George Davies, M McLaughlin**

### **Minute 84 - CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND LIFELONG LEARNING - REVIEW OF PRIMARY SCHOOL PLACES: OUTCOME OF CONSULTATIONS ON OPTIONS PUT FORWARD FOR THE PHASE 3 PLANNING AREAS**

The Director of Children's Services presented a report which advised the Cabinet of the outcomes of the consultation process which had taken place in the Pensby and Thingwall, South Wallasey and Leasowe planning areas, in respect of the options for consultation agreed at Cabinet on 14th December 2006. 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 each area under review.

With the permission of the Chair, Mike Collins, Chair of Governors at Pensby Junior School addressed the Cabinet. Mr Collins referred to the governors wish to see a new school built to serve the existing infant and junior schools, but expressed the view that the schools should not be amalgamated until such time as the new build was completed.

With the permission of the Chair, Councillor Sarah Quinn, a member of the governing body of Pensby Infant School, addressed the Cabinet. Councillor Quinn added her support to the issues raised by Mr Collins previously and expressed a wish to see the two schools (and their governing bodies) remaining separate until such time as the new joint school was completed.

With the permission of the Chair, Tom Howarth, headteacher of Poulton Primary School, addressed the Cabinet. Mr Howarth requested that children at Poulton Primary School be guaranteed places at The Park Primary School to discourage parents attempting to move their children prior to the school closing.

With the permission of the Chair, Ted Tindall, chair of governors at Pensby Park Primary School, addressed the Cabinet. Mr Tindall stressed that the

school had always attempted to balance its books and that, by proposing closure, the Cabinet would be losing an excellent school.

The Director of Children's Services responded to issues raised by the speakers. Mr Cooper felt it was preferable to appoint a new shadow governing body for the proposed Pensby Primary School at the earliest opportunity to enable the headteacher and other senior staff to be appointed. To avoid disruption to the pupils, it was proposed that the two existing school buildings would remain open until the new school was completed. There would be a further report on the location of the final round of children's centres to the Cabinet in due course. In terms of Mr Howarth's points, Mr Cooper referred to the previous rounds of reviews that had been managed successfully and indicated that further work would be undertaken on how the transition would occur.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Lifelong Learning thanked everyone that had contributed to this phase of the review and the consultation process. In addition, he thanked the Director and his staff for co-ordinating the review and reiterated that the purpose was to ensure that public money was used wisely. Councillor Davies supported the views of Mr Howarth and indicated that he would ensure that the transition was as smooth as possible. With reference to the proposals for the Leasowe area, he felt it made sense to work with the two Dioceses. With regards to the proposals for Pensby, he suggested that there were exciting funding proposals around but in terms of the amalgamation, he was more in favour of taking the action forward at the earliest opportunity.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group indicated that proposals to close schools were never easy decisions. He paid tribute to the staff and governors of the schools concerned and stressed that the decisions did not reflect on the performance of the schools. He noted that the governing bodies of Pensby Infant and Junior Schools welcomed the proposals for a new school. He suggested that the governors could form a joint project board to make decisions on the new school but felt that managing the transition from two schools to the new build would be easier with one school governing body. Councillor Holbrook indicated that he supported the site of Pensby Park Primary school to be the most appropriate for a new Children's Centre.

The Director of Children's Services indicated that it was essential to keep the issue of the Children's Centre separate to the proposals under consideration and a full options appraisal would be required. In terms of timing, the proposals would be in place for September 2008.

With the permission of the Chair, the Leader of the Conservative Group addressed the Cabinet. He placed his thanks on record to all those who had taken part in the consultation exercises and those members of staff that had worked on the review. He stressed that the money saved by the review would be spread out across all other primary schools in Wirral, and not kept centrally by the Council. He associated himself with the remarks of Councillor Davies regarding the Leasowe area. He indicated that he was a supporter of separate

infant and junior schools but indicated a preference for keeping the two schools separate until such time as further plans were available regarding the new build school, operating the two schools as at present until the capital become available for the proposed new building. He felt that the discussions regarding the new Children's Centre should be kept separate. Councillor Green queried whether there was a plan for Pensby Park Primary School if further children left the school over the 2007/8 academic year and whether the new competition regulations would apply to Pensby.

The Director of Children's Services responded that Pensby Park would be able to work in collaboration with neighbouring schools prior to the proposed closure, and that this would be assisted by his officers within Children's Services. Mr Cooper indicated that the amalgamation of infant and junior schools was exempt from the competition regulations.

Councillor Holbrook queried whether the site at Poulton Primary School could be retained as a transitional measure.

The Director of Children's Services indicated that the proposals could involve significant development at the Park site and the use of the Poulton site would be considered.

The Leader of the Council stated that this was one of the most difficult decisions that the Cabinet was required to make. This was the third phase of the review and would ensure that more money per pupil would be available across the borough. He indicated that he had seen the benefits of the Children's Centre within his own ward and supported the establishment of a centre at Pensby Park Primary School site. In terms of Pensby Infant and Junior Schools, he felt it was better to amalgamate the schools now.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Lifelong Learning moved an additional motion, duly seconded, regarding the decision of the School's Adjudicator regarding St Mary's CE Primary School in Eastham.

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Minute Decision :  
Resolved - That

(1) statutory proposals be published in respect of a, b, c, d, e and f below:

a Closure of Poulton Primary School

b Extend the lower age range of Park Primary School to provide an LA designated F1 class

These two proposals to be regarded as linked.

c Closure of Pensby Park Primary School

This proposal to be regarded as separate.

d Closure of Pensby Infant School

e Closure of Pensby Junior School

f Establishment of a new Community Primary School at the Pensby Infant and Pensby Junior site

These three proposals to be regarded as linked.

(2) 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) the Director of Children's Services be authorised to give all necessary support to the governing body of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School, the Anglican Diocese of Chester, and the Catholic Diocese of Shrewsbury with regard to publishing proposals to close Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School and to establish a new joint denominational school on the Our Lady of Lourdes site;

(4) the position of community primary schools in the Leasowe planning area be monitored and reviewed in a future review phase pending the outcome of (3) above;

(5) the position of Brentwood Early Years Centre be re-assessed in conjunction with primary schools in a future review of the South Wallasey planning area;

(6) prior to publication of statutory proposals in regard to items 1(d), 1(e) and 1(f) above, the Director of Children's Services be authorised to instigate an evaluation of potential sources of funding related to building work at the Pensby Infant and Pensby Junior site and return to Cabinet with an option appraisal report on this matter; and

(7) the decision of the School's Adjudicator to support the Council's decision to close St Mary's CE Primary School in Eastham be noted and the Cabinet's thanks be extended to all the staff and governors at St Mary's CE Primary School.

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Footnote :

Councillors Jeff Green and Jean Quinn declared a personal interest in this matter (minute 83 refers).