

REVIEW OF PRIMARY PLACES PHASE 5: AREA REVIEWS OF BIRKENHEAD, BEECHWOOD, NOCTORUM AND PRENTON AND POSSIBLE RELOCATION OF GILBROOK SPECIAL SCHOOL

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report advises the Cabinet of progress on the Phase 5 Area Reviews of primary school places in the small planning areas of Central, South and North Birkenhead, Beechwood, Noctorum and Prenton. Following meetings with key stakeholders in each of these areas, this report contains a summary of provision in each area and puts forward recommendations for options for consultation, and comments briefly on some of the issues involved. A recommendation is also made to consult on the possible relocation of Gilbrook School from Birkenhead to Woodchurch.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 At its meeting of 16th October 2008, Cabinet instructed that Phase 5 of the Primary Places Review should comprise Prenton, Noctorum, North Birkenhead and Beechwood, South Birkenhead and Central Birkenhead. The minutes of that Cabinet meeting are attached for Members' information as Appendix A to this report. As in previous phases, the first stage of the Review has been to conduct a process where, on a confidential basis, meetings have taken place with key stakeholders in each of the areas under review. These stakeholders included Ward Councillors as well as officers of the Diocese of Chester and Shrewsbury, headteachers and chairs of governors of schools potentially affected by the Reviews. Following these confidential discussions, recommendations can now be made for options for consultation in the next stage of the review process.
- 1.2 In addition to the options described below there is considerable analytic and background material that was used as the basis for the identification of options; this is available for Members on request. A brief description of this material is included at Appendix B. Numbers on roll provided in this report are from the annual School Census of January 2009.

2.0 Prenton

- 2.1 The small planning area of Prenton was included within the Phase 5 Area Review in order to ensure that we had looked coherently at provision across this region of the Wirral. The Prenton area is served by a single community primary school.
- 2.2 Formed by the amalgamation of Prenton Infant School and Prenton Junior School in 2005, numbers on roll at this school have fallen in recent years, following the general trend across the borough, and are projected to remain relatively stable over the next five years. Prenton retains more than 80% of in-zone community/CE choice pupils, and also shows a net gain of pupils from other local schools, principally from the catchments of Devonshire Park Primary and Townfield Primary schools. In terms of size, the school is likely to remain well above the Wirral policy definition of a small school. In 2006, Ofsted judged Prenton to be a good school, and 2008 Key Stage 2 contextual value added shows that pupils are making the expected rate of progress.

Conclusion

- 2.2 There has been careful consideration of this planning area, the outcome of which is that the opinion of officers is that there is no need at this stage to proceed with consideration of options for change.

3.0 Noctorum

- 3.1 The small planning area of Noctorum contains four schools, two community, one Church of England Aided and one Catholic Aided. Of these, Hillside Primary and St Peter's Catholic Primary School are within the Wirral policy definition of a small school. Only Hillside Primary has significantly high surplus places (26.7%).
- 3.2 Hillside Primary School was originally separate Infant and Junior schools, amalgamated in 1998 in separate buildings, then consolidated into the former Infant building once building work was completed. There are sufficient places at schools within 1 mile to accommodate Hillside Primary School pupils, and almost as many community/CE choice pupils from Hillside's catchment attend Townfield Primary School, as attend Hillside Primary. Ofsted rated Hillside Primary as "satisfactory", and Townfield Primary as "good" in 2007. Key Stage 2 contextual value added in 2008 indicates that pupils at Hillside Primary are making the expected rate of progress, and at Townfield Primary, more than the expected rate of progress.

Cloughton Children's Centre has recently been established in the existing building at Hillside Primary School, which may have a longer term impact on improving numbers on roll at the school, which are currently projected to remain stable in the next five years.

- 3.3 St Peter's Catholic Primary School retains almost two-thirds of available Catholic choice pupils within the catchment Parish. Although overall there is a net loss to alternative Catholic primary schools, there is some overlap in pupil terms with the neighbouring Parish of St Paul's Catholic Primary (Beechwood), with 15% of pupils attending St Peter's residing in St Paul's Parish. While small, the school has few surplus places using the DCSF calculation method, and was rated "good" by Ofsted in 2006. Key Stage 2 contextual value added in 2008 indicates that pupils at St Peter's Catholic Primary are making more than the expected rate of progress.

Conclusion

- 3.4 St Peter's Catholic Primary School is the only Catholic primary in this planning area, although there are links with St Paul's Parish which should be monitored. The presence of the Children's Centre at Hillside Primary School may encourage more parents to choose the school over time. Pupils at both schools are making the expected rate of progress or better. On this basis, it is recommended that the Noctorum area should be monitored and reviewed in a later phase of the Review.

4.0 Central Birkenhead

- 4.1 The small planning area of Central Birkenhead contains six schools, three all-through community primary schools, a Church of England Controlled primary, and two Catholic Aided primary schools.

Surplus places are high in two of the six schools in this planning area – Christ Church CE (Birkenhead) Primary and Devonshire Park Primary. Christ Church CE Primary also falls into the Wirral policy definition of a small school. Oxtan Children's Centre and a Spaces for Sports and Arts Initiative facility are located adjacent to the school.

- 4.2 Christ Church CE Primary had 162 pupils on roll in January 2009. Projections indicate an increase to 193 pupils by 2014, which would reduce surplus places from the present level of 32% to 19%, below the 25% or more level which requires an annual report to the DCSF. The Governing body have indicated a desire to expand the school through a rebuild on the same site. This is not supported by current projections. Other options for change in neighbouring schools may have minor ramifications for pupil numbers at Christ Church, however there is sufficient scope within the existing building to accommodate additional children if required.
- 4.3 Devonshire Park Primary School had 289 pupils on roll in January 2009. The Net Capacity of the current buildings is currently 420 pupils, which means 31% surplus places, above the

25% reporting threshold. Projections indicate that the number on roll will be broadly similar in 2014, with surplus remaining high unless action is taken. In 2007, Ofsted rated the school as good with outstanding features, and Key Stage 2 2008 contextual value added indicates that pupils are making the expected rate of progress.

- 4.4 The school occupies four pre-World War I buildings on a relatively confined site, originally Temple Road School. The two main buildings, North and South, and the former caretakers house are two storey, while the separate kitchen and dining block is single storey. The school has an F1 (nursery) class, and designated special needs classes at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.
- 4.5 Devonshire Park is rated as a high priority for Primary Capital Strategy funding based on a multi-factorial scoring system. There is scope to rationalize the school into a single main building by a combination of internal adaptations and extension. This could include a new entrance and admin area and relocation of existing kitchen and dining facilities into the main building. The scheme would incorporate extended school and community use of the building. The redundant building(s) would then be cleared and landscaped into additional play and on-site green space, which is currently lacking on the Devonshire Park site. The F1 class and SEN classes would be retained.
- 4.6 The rationalization is expected to reduce the Net Capacity of the school from 420 places to 300 places, which on current projections will reduce surplus places at the school to less than 10%. It will also reduce future expenditure on outstanding condition items from the school's Devolved Formula Capital.

Other considerations

- 4.7 Woodlands Primary School is the subject of a capital scheme development process listed on another item on the same Cabinet agenda, involving a two classroom extension to the main building in order to vacate rooms in use by the school at the adjacent Beechcroft building. The current admission number at Woodlands Primary is 44. This scheme would alleviate some of the accommodation suitability issues faced by the school, which would be further enhanced by a reduction in admission number to 30 places. However, dependant on the outcome of other options discussed in this report, pupil places may be required at Woodlands Primary School and consequently a reduction in admission number will not be pursued at this time.

Conclusion

- 4.8 It is recommended that an option appraisal is carried out to determine the most effective solution to the rationalization of Devonshire Park Primary School. Transforming accommodation through the Primary Capital Programme and other schemes, provides opportunities to promote joint agency work to promote co-ordinated solutions for pupils and their families. There is scope for community participation in the design process of any new school buildings, raising the school's profile within the community. Current funding predictions would indicate a 2011/12 implementation date at the earliest for any scheme.

5.0 South Birkenhead

- 5.1 The small planning area of South Birkenhead contains five schools – four community primary schools and one Catholic Aided primary. Of these two are below the Wirral policy definition of a small school, and both of these have significantly high surplus places.

With one exception, Mersey Park Primary, surplus places are relatively high in schools across this area. The table below shows for each school the current Net Capacity, number on roll and percentage surplus, with the projected number on roll and percentage surplus in 2014. Shaded cells indicate 25% or more surplus places.

School	Capacity	2009 NOR	2009 Surplus %	2014 NOR (projected)	2014 Surplus %
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Bedford Drive	406	314	22.7	364	10.2
Mersey Park	399	371	7.0	367	8.1
Well Lane	243	150	38.3	175	27.8
Rock Ferry	329	248	24.6	271	17.7
St Anne's Catholic	243	175	28.0	173	28.7

- 5.2 As demonstrated above, current projections indicate that surplus places are likely to remain high at both Well Lane Primary and St Anne's Catholic Primary schools, despite projected additional pupils at Well Lane Primary. Well Lane Primary is the base for an Area team in the stand alone block to the rear of the school.
- 5.3 During Phase 1 of the Primary Places Review in 2005, consultations on the closure of Well Lane Primary school were carried out with stakeholders in the South Birkenhead area. The outcome of that consultation was reported to Cabinet at its meeting of 18th July 2005. At that time, the closure of The Dell Primary School was considered a higher priority, and there were concerns about implications for class sizes at adjoining schools should both The Dell and Well Lane close at the same time.
- 5.4 27% of community/CE choice children who live in Well Lane's zone attend the school, which means that about two-thirds attend other schools. Despite a reduction in the Net Capacity from 351 pupils in 2003 to 243 in 2008, including the location of an Area team into part of the school, surplus places at Well Lane have been consistently high for many years and are projected to continue to be so. There is little further scope for rationalization of the existing building. The expenditure per pupil at Well Lane was £4,284 per pupil in 2006/2007, above the Wirral average of £3,249.
- 5.5 In 2006, Ofsted judged Well Lane to require a "notice to improve" with particular reference to children's standards and achievements, the curriculum and attendance. In 2007, the school was judged by Ofsted as "satisfactory". Key Stage 2 2008 contextual value added indicates that pupils were making the expected rate of progress.
- 5.6 Combined with potential to raise the admission number at Mersey Park Primary School (57 to 60), there are sufficient places at local schools to accommodate all current and future Well Lane pupils. In 2009, there were 269 surplus places at alternative schools within the South Birkenhead planning area and 1,290 surplus places at the 27 schools (counting Infant and Junior separately) within a 2 mile radius. While small, standards at the school have improved and numbers on roll are projected to rise over the next five years. It is not recommended to proceed to formal consultation in relation to Well Lane Primary School, although the position of schools in this area will continue to be carefully monitored.
- 5.7 There is some minor scope for "on paper" reductions in Net Capacity and surplus places at Rock Ferry Primary School and Bedford Drive Primary School through small reductions in their admission numbers. Admission number reductions are consulted upon through the Admissions Code of Conduct process and do not require formal consultation through the Review process. Officers will discuss the potential for such reductions with headteachers and Chairs of Governors at the two schools.

Diocesan Issues

- 5.8 As shown in 5.1 and 5.2 above, surplus places and small school size are also factors involving St Anne's Catholic Primary School.
- 5.9 St Anne's retains about half of the Catholic choice pupils living in its catchment Parish, with an overall net loss to other Catholic primary schools. Of those who attend Catholic schools elsewhere, the largest proportion (37%) attend St John's Catholic Infant and Junior schools in Bebington, located x miles away. The school occupies a mid-1970's building on two floors with little scope for rationalization. Expenditure per pupil at St Anne's was £3,561 per pupil in 2006/2007, slightly above the Wirral average of £3,249.
- 5.10 In 2006, Ofsted judged St Anne's to require a "notice to improve", with particular reference to Foundation stage provision. In 2007, the school was judged by Ofsted as "satisfactory". In

Key Stage 2 in 2008, the contextual value added score of 99.4 indicated that pupils were making the expected rate of progress.

5.11 The Catholic Diocese of Shrewsbury have indicated an interest in rebuilding St Anne's Catholic Primary School using Primary Capital Strategy funding. This is intended to resolve various building condition issues, but would include a reduction in size to 210 places (rather than 243 places). The current site is completely surrounded by housing, and has very narrow and limited access. Resolving this issue would require consideration of the transfer to a new site in the immediate local area, potentially through purchase by the Diocese or a land swap to a Council owned site, alternatively a temporary relocation of the school to allow demolition and rebuild.

Conclusion

5.12 Factors involved in the inclusion of the closure of Well Lane Primary School in 2005's consultation remain an issue, and it is right to consider whether the school should continue to be retained. It is recommended not to proceed to consultation on closure of Well Lane Primary School at this time. Standards at the school have improved in recent years, and projections indicate that the number on roll should increase over the next five years, although remaining a small school. The area will require careful monitoring and will be considered again in due course, or earlier if circumstances require.

5.13 The Diocesan option for the rebuilding of St Anne's is unlikely to require publication of statutory notices. The reduction in surplus places achieved if this proposal were approved would be minimal, and St Anne's is currently rated as a medium priority for Primary Capital Programme funding. It is recommended that preliminary investigations take place into alternative sites in the local area, but that formal consultations are not carried out at this stage.

6.0 North Birkenhead and Beechwood

6.1 The small planning area of North Birkenhead is currently served by eight primary schools. Four are Community primary schools, one is Church of England Aided, and three are Catholic Aided. From September 2009, the area will also be served by the primary division of the Birkenhead High Academy for Girls, the only single-sex maintained primary school in Wirral. Of these nine schools, four are within the Wirral policy definition of a small school, and three of those four schools also have more than 25% surplus places.

The small planning area of Beechwood is served by three primary schools, one Community primary, one Church of England Controlled and one Catholic Aided. Two of the three are within the Wirral policy definition of a small school. Surplus places are relatively high at all three schools, but reach more than 25% surplus places in one school.

North Birkenhead

6.2 Cathcart Street Primary School and Cole Street Primary School are both small schools with high levels of surplus, situated in close proximity. The following table shows current capacity, number on roll and surplus places alongside projections for 2014.

School	Capacity	2009 NOR	2009 surplus places	2009 Surplus %	2014 NOR (projected)	2014 Surplus %
Cathcart Street	210	101	109	48.1	95	45.0
Cole Street	210	124	86	59.0	108	51.4
Total	420	225	195	53.6	203	48.3

The combined pupils of the two schools are effectively a single form of entry primary school, both now and projected to five years time, with almost a schools worth of surplus places between them. Options to combine the two schools should form part of the consultation in this area.

- 6.3 Cole Street Primary School occupies a 1920's two storey building on a confined site overlooking Birkenhead Park. The school has a roof top playground and there is little scope for rationalization of the existing building. Cathcart Street Primary School occupies a 1970's building on a pleasant, but relatively confined site. A community group, "CATS" occupies a double mobile classroom on the Cathcart site, but again there is little scope for rationalization of the building.
- 6.4 Cathcart Street Primary retains two-fifths of community/CE choice children who live in the catchment zone, the largest proportion of the remainder (a third) attending nearby The Priory CE Primary School. Cole Street retains a just a quarter of in-zone community/CE choice children, with the remaining three-quarters attending various local schools, including The Priory CE, Christ Church CE (Birkenhead), Woodchurch Road Primary and Cathcart Street Primary schools. The pupil populations of the two schools overlap slightly, in that some Cole Street zoned pupils attend Cathcart Street Primary School. It should be noted that The Priory CE and Christ Church CE have catchment zones that overlap those of the local community schools. Expenditure per pupil at Cathcart Street Primary School was £5,089 (fifth highest) and at Cole Street £4,066 (thirteenth highest) in 2006/2007, above the Wirral average of £3,429.
- 6.5 In 2009, Ofsted judged Cole Street Primary School to be "satisfactory". Cathcart Street Primary School was last inspected by Ofsted in 2006, at which time it was judged to be a "good" school. In Key Stage 2 in 2008, the contextual value added scores of 100.1 at Cole Street and 99.9 at Cathcart Street Primary indicated that pupils at both schools were making the expected rate of progress and standards at the two schools are therefore not dissimilar.
- 6.6 There are several methods for arriving at a single school. Legally, this could be achieved by closing one of the two schools and guaranteeing former pupils of the closing school a place at the other school, or by an amalgamation, which involves closing both schools and establishing a new school on a single site at which former pupils of both schools are guaranteed a place.

This leads to the following options for consultation:

A: Closure of Cathcart Street Primary School

B: Closure of Cole Street Primary School

C: Closure of both Cathcart Street and Cole Street Primary Schools, linked to the establishment of a new school on a single site.

- 6.7 Either existing building could accommodate the pupils of both schools within the current accommodation with minor alterations. If attractive, a new building, potentially on a new site, would become a high priority for 2011/2012 Primary Capital Strategy funding with a view to open in 2013, unless earlier funding is available from the Council's Capital pot. An option appraisal of existing and potential sites for a new school building is recommended.

Diocesan Issues

- 6.8 St Laurence's Catholic Primary School, located across the road from Cathcart Street Primary School, now has 75 pupils on roll and 64% surplus places, the roll having reduced by a third in the last three years alone. The roll is projected to continue to fall to 62 pupils and 70.5% surplus places by 2014. An Annex to the main building is currently leased by the Authority's Adult Learning team, and the school is the site of a satellite to Birkenhead and Tranmere Children's Centre based at St Werburgh's Catholic Primary School. There is little scope for further rationalization of the existing school building.
- 6.9 St Laurence's retains 61% of Catholic choice pupils within the St Laurence's portion of the joint Parish of St Laurence's and St Werburgh's and has a net loss to other Catholic primary schools. The joint Parish is currently served by two primary schools. The other, St Werburgh's, is in the small planning area of Central Birkenhead. St Werburgh's was rebuilt in 1999 as a single form of entry primary school and has few surplus places. It retains 69% of

Catholic choice pupils in the St Werburgh's part of the Parish, and has a significant net gain from other Catholic primary schools, including St Joseph's (Birkenhead) and St Laurence's.

- 6.10 In 2008, Ofsted judged St Laurence's as "good". In Key Stage 2 in 2008, the contextual value added scores of 101.4 indicated that pupils were making more than the expected rate of progress. Expenditure per pupil at St Laurence's was £5,520 in 2006/2007, above the Wirral average of £3,429 and the highest of any Wirral primary school.
- 6.11 At the 27 alternative primary schools within a 2 mile radius of St Laurence's, in 2009 there were 1,609 empty places, 295 of which were in Catholic schools. Excluding those in Wallasey, there were 144 empty places in the five alternative Catholic primary schools in the Birkenhead area, which is projected to fall slightly to 130 empty places by 2014.
- 6.12 In order to provide Catholic primary places in this area of Birkenhead, the Catholic Diocese of Shrewsbury has already proposed the expansion of nearby Our Lady and St Edward's Catholic Primary School by three to four classrooms, including replacing a mobile classroom. This scheme is funded via the Local Authority Co-ordinated Voluntary Aided Programme and the Primary Capital Strategy and is expected to create an additional 90 places. In combination with existing surplus places in the area, if St Laurence's Primary School were to close, there should be sufficient Catholic primary places to meet parental demand in Birkenhead for the foreseeable future.
- 6.13 Relocation of the Authority's Adult Learning team to a central Birkenhead location would depend upon the outcome of the review, and the availability of suitable premises in the local area.

Beechwood

- 6.14 In 2005 when this area was last reviewed, there were 34% surplus places across the three schools. Two proposals for change arose from Phase 1 of the Review, one of which was implemented.

Community and Church of England Controlled schools

- 6.15 The amalgamation of Vyner Primary and St Oswald's CE Primary School to form Bidston Village CE Primary School on the former St Oswald's site was implemented in 2006. The site was projected to have 188 pupils and 42% surplus places in 2009, but as a result of the proposal being implemented, now has 277 pupils and 21% surplus places, which although high, is a significant improvement. In 2008, Ofsted judged the school to be "good", and Key Stage 2 2008 contextual value added indicates that pupils are making more than the expected rate of progress.
- 6.16 Numbers on roll at Manor Primary School have continued to fall in the last few years, and surplus places have now reached 45%. In 2006, Ofsted judged the school to be "satisfactory", and Key Stage 2 2008 contextual value added indicates that pupils are making the expected rate of progress. A satellite to the Bidston St James Children Centre has been established at the school in the existing building which may have a longer term impact on improving numbers on roll at the school, which are currently projected to continue to fall over the next five years.

Diocesan Issues

- 6.17 The second proposal resulting from Phase 1 of the Primary Places Review was the closure of St Paul's Catholic Primary School, which was referred to the School's Adjudicator. The Adjudicator's decision at that time was to reject the proposal, principally on the grounds of that there was no guarantee of sufficient places in the three alternative Catholic primary schools, and no significant difference in standards between St Paul's and these three schools.
- 6.18 In 2009, while there are small numbers of surplus places at alternative Catholic primary schools, there are fewer than would be required to accommodate former St Paul's pupils. In

terms of standards, at their last inspections St Paul's was judged by Ofsted as "satisfactory with some good features" (2007), St Joseph's Catholic Primary (Upton) was found to be "satisfactory" (2007), as was Holy Cross Catholic Primary School (2008), while St Peter's Catholic Primary (Noctorum) was judged as "good". Key Stage 2 2008 contextual value added at Holy Cross, St Paul's and St Joseph's (Upton) indicated that pupils were making the expected rate of progress, while at St Peter's (Noctorum), pupils were making more than the expected rate of progress. As discussed in Section 3 above, there is a degree of pupil population overlap between St Paul's and St Peter's (Noctorum).

- 6.19 St Paul's remains a small school with relatively high surplus places. There is no official waiting time between the Adjudicator's decision to reject a proposal and beginning the consultation process again on that proposal. However, in initial discussions the Diocesan Director of Education for the Diocese of Shrewsbury have made it clear that at this time they would again take up their right to refer a decision on the closure of St Paul's to the Schools Adjudicator, and without a significant alteration in the factors that led to the decision to reject the proposal in 2006, it is difficult to see how the Adjudicator would reach a different conclusion.
- 6.20 The development of 213 new houses in the Beechwood area is expected to generate around 50 primary age pupils, of whom 1 in 5 is likely to choose Catholic education. Although some will probably be children who already live locally, the number on roll at St Paul's could reasonably be expected to increase by around 10, and Manor Primary by about 20. The first phase of housing development on Beechwood consisted of 30 houses to be rented to existing Beechwood tenants, and 9 three and four bed houses for sale or shared ownership. The 30 rental properties include 14 retirement bungalows, 6 two bed houses, and 8 three and four bed houses. If this pattern is repeated across the other 7 development sites, 40% of the 213 houses built would be for retired or single people without children. Around 75% of the 213 would therefore be rented to existing residents. The new housing is intended to stabilise the community in the area, rather than to significantly increase its size.
- 6.21 It is not recommended to proceed to proposals in this area, although numbers and standards require careful monitoring. The area will be reviewed again in due course, or as required if circumstances change significantly.

Conclusions

- 6.22 When last reviewed in 2005, there were 1,786 pupils attending schools in the North Birkenhead planning area, with 499 (22%) surplus places. Four years on, there are 1,796 pupils attending schools in the North Birkenhead planning area (including Birkenhead High Academy), and 454 (20%) surplus places, a small reduction. In Beechwood, there were 444 pupils attending three schools, with 232 (34.3%) surplus places, rising in 2009 to 482 pupils and 195 (28.8%) surplus places.
- 6.23 In 2005/2006, proposals were made to reorganize school provision in the Bidston end of the Birkenhead North and Beechwood planning areas. In this phase of the Review, it is recommended to proceed to consultation on changes to school provision in the Birkenhead end of the planning area as follows:
- A: Closure of Cathcart Street Primary School
 - B: Closure of Cole Street Primary School
 - C: Closure of both Cathcart Street and Cole Street Primary Schools, linked to the establishment of a new Primary school
 - D: Closure of St Laurence's Catholic Primary School

7.0 Phase 4 - Relocation of Gilbrook School

- 7.1 The closure of Arrowe Hill Primary School, Glebe Hey Road, Woodchurch, resulted from Phase 4 of the Primary Places Review. The school will formally close on 31st August 2009.

- 7.2 The Governing body of Gilbrook School, a special school with 50 places for primary age pupils with emotional and behavioural issues, have expressed an interest in relocating to larger premises with improved facilities to carry out additional behaviour support work to mainstream schools. The governors expression of interest letter is attached as Appendix C. The school is currently located in a semi-industrial area on Pilgrim Street, Birkenhead, but serves pupils from the entire Wirral area. A Sports Barn is located on the Gilbrook site.
- 7.3 Relocating to the former Arrowe Hill building would increase the net floor area available to Gilbrook by a third, and although the school would no longer have access to the Sports Barn, the total site area available to the school would triple including a substantial increase in hard and soft play area. The Authority would retain the former Infant building for storage purposes.
- 7.4 Travel to school arrangements would continue as specified in the Authority's information booklets for parents, which are that the Authority would pay the travel costs of children attending Gilbrook either by providing a travel pass for pupils able to travel by public transport, or by arranging travel on the Authority's own or contracted vehicles, including providing an escort if necessary.
- 7.5 The distance between the two sites is more than 2 miles in a straight line, which means that a "prescribed alteration" notice must be issued. Accordingly, it is recommended that Cabinet approve a formal consultation lasting at least six weeks to be carried out with various stakeholders including the governing body, parents/carers, staff and pupils of Gilbrook School, local residents, ward members and local MPs. The outcome of the consultation would then be reported back to Cabinet later this year for consideration.
- 7.6 Subject to approval, another item on the same Cabinet agenda includes £200,000 from 2009/2010 capital resources to facilitate the move to the former Arrowe Hill building.

8.0 Next steps

- 8.1 If the Council decides to approve any or all of these options which require consultation, this would involve publishing the options within the areas and inviting comments and suggestions from as wide a range of stakeholders as can be practicably achieved. Most critically this would involve the parents and carers of children in the schools potentially affected. Consultation meetings would therefore be held where views can be expressed directly to LA officers and the Cabinet member. We would also invite written comments. The outcome of these consultations would then be reported back to Cabinet for further consideration, as would any further options that had emerged during the process and the consultation.
- 8.2 There are new requirements for statutory competitions when new primary schools are established (as for example in an amalgamation). Appendix D provides a summary of the competition regulations.

9.0 Financial Implications

- 9.1 There are none arising as a result of this report. If options are approved for consultation, there will be further detailed reports that will set out all the implications.

10.0 Staffing Implications

- 10.1 There are none arising as a result of this report. If options are approved for consultation, there will be further detailed reports that will set out all the implications.

11.0 Equal Opportunities Implications

- 11.1 It is essential to plan school provision across the Authority so that it is both efficient and effective in the interests of all pupils. Consultations on the options set out in this report will need to address very carefully the impact of any preferred options on pupils which are served by the schools concerned.

12.0 Community Safety Implications

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

13.0 Local Agenda 21 Statement

13.1 The provision of efficient and effective education is a vital part of serving local communities; inefficient use of resources is wasteful both in educational and physical resource terms.

14.0 Planning Implications

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

14.2 Any proposals that may arise out of options after the consultation and decision making process for school re-organisation would be subject to the usual planning processes.

15.0 Anti-Poverty Implications

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

16.0 Social Inclusion Implications

16.1 School re-organisation and transforming accommodation through the Primary Capital Programme and other schemes, provides opportunities to promote joint agency work to promote co-ordinated solutions for pupils and their families. There is scope for community participation in the design process of any new school buildings, raising the school's profile within the community.

17.0 Local Member Support Implications

17.1 The schools specifically mentioned in the report and appendices, and the Wards in which they are situated, which are Bidston and St James, Birkenhead and Tranmere, Prenton, Rock Ferry, Oxtton, Claughton, Noctorum and Prenton.

Background Papers

18.1 Surplus place returns

DCSF guidance on Surplus Place Removal

Pupil and Capacity data held by the LEA

Recommendations

(1) That an option appraisal be undertaken regarding the consolidation of Devonshire Park Primary School into a single building.

(2) That consultations be undertaken regarding the following options for change in the North Birkenhead small planning area:

- A - Closure of Cathcart Street Primary School
- B - Closure of Cole Street Primary School
- C - Closure of both Cathcart Street and Cole Street Primary Schools, linked to the establishment of a new Primary school on a single site
- D - Closure of St Laurence's Catholic Primary School

- (3) That an option appraisal be undertaken regarding potential sites for a single primary school resulting from any of consultation options A, B and C.
- (4) That consultations be undertaken regarding the transfer of Gilbrook School to the former premises of Arrowe Hill Primary School, Woodchurch.
- (5) That the remaining Phase 5 small planning areas be reviewed again as necessary or through the usual review process.

Howard Cooper

Director of Children's Services