

**OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION ON POSSIBLE RELOCATION OF GILBROOK SPECIAL SCHOOL**

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

To report on statutory consultations which have been held for the proposal to relocate Gilbrook Special School to the former site of Arrowe Hill Primary School and enable Cabinet to decide whether to publish statutory notices for the proposal.

**1.0 Background**

- 1.1 The Governing body of Gilbrook School, a special school with 50 places for primary age pupils with emotional and behavioural issues, has expressed an interest in relocating to larger premises with improved facilities to carry out additional behaviour support work to mainstream schools. 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.
- 1.2 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 31<sup>st</sup> August 2009.
- 1.3 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.
- 1.4 At its meeting of 28<sup>th</sup> May 2009 Cabinet instructed that a formal consultation should be carried out with various stakeholders. This consultation ended on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2009 and the outcome is the subject of this report.

**2.0 Consultation**

- 2.1 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 :
  - (i) A consultation leaflet and comments form to all parents/carers of pupils attending Gilbrook School. The information was also provided to trade union representatives, relevant Ward and parliamentary representatives and other persons specified by guidance. The consultation leaflet is attached as Appendix A.
  - (ii) 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. Woodchurch T.R.U.S.T residents association was contacted and has advertised the consultation on their website, [www.woodchurchtrust.com](http://www.woodchurchtrust.com).
  - (iii) The consultation leaflet was made available and advertised at Woodchurch and Upton libraries, the central libraries, Woodchurch community centre, The Lauries community centres and at the Conway Centre One-Stop shop.
  - (iv) A meeting for all interested stakeholders was held at Gilbrook School. This comprised a short presentation on the option, followed by audience comments, feedback and questions. The meetings were attended by parents, carers and staff. The date of the

meeting was in the parents' leaflets and on the specific web-site and a general notice was published in the local press.

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

### **3.0 Outcome of the Consultation**

- 3.1 Ten written responses to the consultation were received. Eight of these were from parents/carers of pupils at the school, the remaining two from other interested people. Anonymised comments are attached as Appendix B.
- 3.2 The meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2009 was attended by 16 people – 11 were parents/carers, four were staff members (including the headteacher) and 1 was an interested person. 20% of pupils attending the school were represented by at least one parent/carer. The comments and views made at this meeting were recorded in writing. The notes are attached as Appendix C.
- 3.3 All written responses received were positive regarding the proposed relocation. Respondents cited the benefits of moving to a larger building and site in a more central location within Wirral with better car parking and outdoor play facilities. The Governing body believes the potential benefits to include:
  - More classrooms, which should help reduce class sizes even further
  - Better quality accommodation for the exclusion base
  - More meeting spaces for various agencies including social care, health, education and parents, as well as one to one sessions with pupils
  - More capacity to provide extended services – parents weekly workshops, for example
  - More car parking and a larger staffroom
  - More space to carry out additional behaviour support training and advice to mainstream schools.

As would be expected, some concerns were raised, particularly at the meeting, in relation to the transition to the new site, principally around the logistics of moving furniture and other equipment, the security of the new site, staffing issues, access to indoor play facilities and potential for new uniforms.

- 3.4 It should be noted that 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.
- 3.5 The long-term benefits of relocating to the former Arrowe Hill site appear to outweigh any short-term disruption to the school caused by the move. The proposal is recommended to proceed as a statutory proposal.

### **4.0 Financial Implications**

- 4.1 The 2009/10 Schools Capital programme approved by Cabinet on 28<sup>th</sup> May 2009 includes £200,000 to facilitate the move to the former Arrowe Hill building.
- 4.2 If the proposal is approved, as a change in place of employment beyond their control, Gilbrook staff (teaching and non-teaching) may be entitled to claim Disturbance and Travelling Allowance for four years, equivalent either to weekly or monthly train/bus fare or additional travel mileage allowance for essential car users.

### **5.0 Staffing Implications**

5.1 As a relocation, it is expected that all current staff will transfer to the new building. The only effect upon the staff will be in terms of them having to work in a new location (See 4.2 above).

## **6.0 Equal Opportunities Implications**

6.1 It is essential to plan school provision across the Authority so that it is both efficient and effective in the interests of all pupils.

6.2 An Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out in relation to this report.

## **7.0 Community Safety Implications**

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

## **8.0 Local Agenda 21 Statement**

8.1 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.

## **9.0 Planning Implications**

9.1 Any proposals that may arise from school re-organisation would be subject to the usual planning processes.

## **10.0 Anti-Poverty Implications**

10.1 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.

## **11.0 Social Inclusion Implications**

11.1 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.

## **12.0 Local Member Support Implications**

12.1 Special school provision has relevance to all Wards.

12.2 Gilbrook School and the Wards in which the two sites are situated, which are Birkenhead and Tranmere and Upton.

## **Recommendations**

- (1) That statutory proposals be published in respect of the statutory alteration to transfer the site of Gilbrook Special School to the former site of Arrowe Hill Primary School
- (2) That the Director of Children's Services be authorised to take all necessary steps to publish these proposals, ensure the prescribed procedures are followed, including requesting permissions from the Secretary of State in furtherance of the proposal.

**Howard Cooper**

**Director of Children's Services**