

<u>Cabinet</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Paper</u>
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PROPOSAL TO AMALGAMATE LONGMEADOW CE (CONTROLLED) AND OAKLAND SCHOOLS – REPORT ON FORMATIVE CONSULTATION

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Summary

On 30 January 2008, Cabinet commissioned formative (pre-statutory) consultation on the amalgamation of Longmeadow and Oakland schools. This report sets out the outcomes from the consultation, the recommendation of the Acting Corporate Director for Children and Young People's Services and asks Members to consider whether to proceed with formal proposals.

Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

- (1) note the outcomes from the formative consultation;
- (2) decide whether to proceed to formal proposals to close both Longmeadow and Oakland schools and invite the Diocese of Lichfield to publish proposals to open a new 420 place Voluntary Controlled school to serve the combined catchment area in line with the recommendation of the Acting Corporate Director for Children and Young People's Services.

1. Background

On 30 January 2008, Cabinet considered a report on the future organisation of primary schools. At the meeting, Cabinet resolved to consult with eight pairs of schools on school organisation change. This decision was subsequently confirmed, following call in, by the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel on 20 February. The consultation period ran from 11 March to 2 May. A number of strategies were used to inform stakeholders and collect views and the outcomes are attached to this report. As this consultation is at the formative stage of the process, there were no predetermined outcomes, and the consultation documents made it clear that all options would be considered. The consultation document also noted that the process was not a referendum, but a chance to inform the consideration of elected Members.

Cabinet is asked to decide whether to proceed with formal proposals to amalgamate the schools, and, if so, what form the proposals should take.

2. Proposals

Consultation took place on three options for possible routes to amalgamation, as well as whether amalgamation was appropriate. These were:

- expansion of Longmeadow School with consequent closure of Oakland School;
- expansion of Oakland School with consequent closure of Longmeadow School;
- opening a new school following closure of both existing schools.

In addition, the consultation sought views on the character of the amalgamated school.

Other options were sought as part of the consultation.

3. Consultation

A consultation document was prepared and distributed to all parents, governors and staff of the schools (see Appendix 1). A special section of the Council's website provided more information. Officers, accompanied by senior Members, have held consultation meetings with each school included in the proposals, and the minutes of the meetings for Longmeadow and Oakland schools are attached at Appendices 2a and 2b. Responses to the consultation were sought by post, e-mail, via the Customer Service Centre and via the Council's website. A file containing all responses received is available to Members.

Governor representatives and headteachers from the two schools agreed a factfile setting out key information about the two current schools. This is included as Appendix 4 to this report.

Formal responses to the consultation were received from the two school governing bodies. These are included at Appendix 5. Bayston Hill Parish Council has set out their view that: 'The Council needs to support all children of Bayston Hill and they take the view that to maintain long term and sustainable quality education for all, our parish can no longer sustain two primary schools due to falling numbers of children' They also request that any vacated building is retained for community use. Longden Parish Council has set out general concerns about school reorganisation involving rural schools. There are two children from this parish area educated in Bayston Hill.

The response from the governing body of Oakland Primary School sets out:

- the positive work undertaken to expand the school's core curriculum offer and extended services over recent years;
- suggestions on further usage and reduction of unfilled places at Longmeadow Primary School;
- their view that the community and parental preference may best be served by ongoing provision of education in Bayston Hill through two separate primary schools.

A local referendum was commissioned following the hosting of a local parish meeting by Oakland Primary School's Chair of Governors. This referendum returned a majority amongst those voting for motions that state that the community is large enough to sustain two schools and that school reorganisation should not be progressed. 731 people voted that Bayston Hill was large enough to sustain two primary schools, whilst 225 said it was too small. 719 people voted that amalgamation should not go ahead, with 218 saying the two schools should merge. The turnout was 24% of the eligible electorate. The referendum is not binding on the County Council and does not answer the key question in determining school organisational change

proposals. The key question is whether any change is in the best interests of education in the area.

A further survey was commissioned by the governors of Longmeadow Primary School. The returns of this survey revealed high levels of support amongst that school's community for school organisational change. Sixty two questionnaires were returned. Longmeadow Primary School's Governing Body and staff have set out their vision for how school organisational change can benefit the local community.

Number of returns to date	62			% in favour	% in favour
	Yes	No	Total	of total	of returns
1. Do you share our vision as outlined in the letter?	51	8	59	86.4	82.3
2. Do you support the proposed amalgamation?	42	16	58	72.4	67.7
3. Should the amalgamated school have CE status?	54	3	57	94.7	87.1
4. Should it retain an LA run nursery?	58	0	58	100.0	93.5
5. Should it be the Londmeadow site?	59	1	60	98.3	95.2

Fifty five individual letters have also been received. Comments in the individual letters include the definition of rural and urban communities, whether there is a longer term need for two schools, the level of savings to be made, and support for or opposition to the proposed amalgamations. General comments on issues raised in the letters are dealt with in this report, whilst individual comments and concerns and the responses to these can be found in Appendix 3.

The Diocese of Lichfield have responded to the consultation to state that considerable benefits could arise by bringing together the two schools, providing this transition is handled sensitively and there is parity of treatment for the two schools.

Cabinet members visited Longmeadow Primary School and Oakland Primary School on 29 April 2008.

4. Key Issues and Factors for Consideration

The key issues regarding whether or not to proceed to formal proposals, and if so what form the proposals should take, are set out in the paragraphs below. The key issues are: the effect on standards of education, effect on local communities, effect on equal opportunities and community cohesion, effect on diversity of provision, financial implications and effect on staffing.

Amalgamation of two smaller schools into a larger school can have significant benefits. This section sets out some of those benefits.

- 4.1 Slightly larger schools have more staff resources, allowing staff the opportunity to specialise to a greater degree and share more specialist knowledge, to the benefit of the pupils and the curriculum.
- 4.2 When results are corrected for intake, larger schools in Shropshire add slightly more value to the education of both mainstream pupils and children with special educational needs.
- 4.3 Slightly larger schools can have more types of specialist accommodation, while smaller schools have to make the same space, often a general classroom, do more than one job.
- 4.4 Slightly larger schools can cope more easily with short term changes in pupil numbers (e.g. small year groups), so that they don't have to repeatedly employ then lay-off staff short term on short term contracts.
- 4.5 Slightly larger schools can maintain a wider range of out of school activities, including sports teams.
- 4.6 Slightly larger schools attract more investment in buildings and services because the costs per pupil are lower than in a small school.
- 4.7 Slightly larger schools allow pupils to interact with a wider range of peers. This is an advantage both socially and in academic and sporting terms where pupils of all abilities can challenge themselves to compete with pupils of the same age and approximate ability.
- 4.8 There would be no artificial divide in the community – all children would be educated together, and all parents would be more aware of the strengths of the whole community.
- 4.9 A combined school would have higher priority for inclusion in Primary Capital Programme investment plans, leading to better learning environments and more facilities.
- 4.10 The combined school would be able to draw on the considerable strengths of both schools as set out in the Ofsted reports at:
<http://tinyurl.com/2dy4zp> (Oakland)
and
<http://tinyurl.com/349nj5> (Longmeadow)
- 4.11 The combined school would be able to retain existing high quality staffing as pupil numbers and budgets change over the next few years.
- 4.12 Investment in the buildings of a combined school would lead to a reduction in the total carbon emissions from education in the village.

5. Effect on Standards of Attainment

Standards of attainment at the existing schools are recognised by both Ofsted and Shropshire County Council as “good”.

Bringing the two schools together would enable the new school to build on the strengths of both of the existing schools. This includes building on both the outstanding Foundation key stage at Oakland and the outstanding pastoral care and special educational needs education in Longmeadow School, and the different and complementary academic strengths in each school. Both schools are to some extent limited by their accommodation and investment in buildings will enable the new school to offer increased opportunities to pupils and the

community. Staffing from the two schools would be complementary and would also increase the opportunities for pupils. Although all three possible routes to amalgamation allow some involvement from both Governing Bodies, closing both schools and opening a new school would enable the most equal partnership between two effective and committed governing bodies. All these strengths together means that it is possible to be confident that standards of attainment would improve, and there is every chance that the new school would develop to be outstanding.

6. Effect on the Local Community and the Environment

Much has been made by advocates of maintaining two separate schools in the consultation process of the fact that Bayston Hill is a village and therefore “rural” (see Appendix 3). The Parish Council’s website defines Bayston Hill as an “urban village” which is an apt response to the built-up environment of Bayston Hill. Virtually all the children in the two schools come from within the main settlement. This is in marked contrast to many other Shropshire villages, where the village and the school are at the centre of an extended rural hinterland, and/or serve a number of satellite communities.

The County Council’s decision-making processes in relation to school organisation are fully compliant with national statutory requirements. Any eventual determination on a school reorganisation would need to be compliant with statutory requirements and clearly in the best interests of education in the area.

In the context of the County Council’s local school organisation policy, Councillors need to determine the nature of the area and consider whether schools are of sufficient size and occupancy to provide a sound educational experience in a financially viable and stable institution.

As a large single settlement, Bayston Hill deserves 21st century educational and community services for all the pupils in the village. An enlarged school with refurbished facilities, which neither separate school could provide on its own, would also provide enhanced community learning facilities.

Investment in the buildings of a combined school would lead to a net reduction in carbon emissions, even allowing for some additional traffic. There is likely to be investment in extended schools and children’s centre services. The two current school sites are very close to each other meaning that there would be no loss of access to school facilities used for other purposes. It is recommended that the current Longmeadow site is used for the combined school, as this is the larger site and is level, making it easier to develop and for children and adults with impaired mobility to access.

7. Effects on Equal Opportunities and Community Cohesion

Although Bayston Hill is a single settlement and pupils come from all parts of the village to attend each school, it has become clear through the consultation that some members of the community see a divide in the community and that this is expressed through the schools. A single school would remove any perceived divide and ensure that the community can meet, work and achieve together through pride in a single school.

Currently, Ofsted recognises that Longmeadow Primary School has an above average proportion of pupils with special education needs. The school is recognised as ensuring that those children have every opportunity to achieve to their full potential. Appropriate provision is also made for children with special educational needs at Oakland Primary School. In a new combined school, all children with special educational needs would need to benefit from

interaction with a wider range of ability and further improved opportunities for staff support and specialisation.

8. Effect on Diversity of Provision

Oakland Primary School is a Community school. Longmeadow Primary School is a Voluntary Controlled school with a Church of England religious character. Depending on the route chosen for amalgamation and the character of the school, this could mean the loss of up to 297 places with a Church of England character. Alternatively, opening a new school with Church of England character would mean an increase of 123 Church places.

9. Financial Implications

Updated projections for the total budget for the two schools in the financial year 2010/11 (the first full year after the proposed date of implementation) is £1,080,480. The budget for a combined school would be £951,010, a saving of £129,470. This is an efficiency saving as a result of having one headteacher and fewer tasks completed twice, and will not affect the quality of education or the resources available. Investment in the buildings could also lead to reduced running costs, freeing more money for expenditure on staff and resources.

10. Effect on Staffing

The Bayston Hill schools both currently have a permanent headteacher. One headteacher's post would be made redundant in an amalgamation. If one school were to be expanded and the other closed, then the headteacher of the school which was to be expanded would become the headteacher of the new school. If both schools close, the temporary governing body for the new school would recruit a headteacher for the combined school.

Other staff from both schools would be transferred to the new school. If the new school were to have a Foundation or Voluntary Aided character, the Governing Body would be the employer. TUPE type arrangements would apply, and the terms and conditions of many categories of staff, including teachers, are set by national agreement. However, the recommended category for the new school is Voluntary Controlled, and in that category staff are employed by the Local Authority. The staffing structure of the new school would be a matter for the temporary Governing Body to decide. All or almost all staff would be allocated posts within the new structure on the basis of their experience and interests, in consultation with the headteacher designate and the temporary Governing Body.

Staffing protocols have been agreed with the trade unions representing school staff. Assistance would be given by Shropshire County Council to any member of staff who could not be accommodated in the new staffing structure, for example where amalgamation coincided with a reduction in pupil numbers.

11. Consideration of Alternatives and Conclusion

11.1 Make no change

Making no change would have three main effects on education in the area.

- (i) The benefits of amalgamation listed in Section 4 above would not be available.
- (ii) If the two schools remain as separate institutions, the revenue savings set out above will not be achieved. This will have an effect on all schools in Shropshire, including Longmeadow and Oakland schools. The impact would be a reduction in

- resources equivalent to about one Teaching Assistant or 0.5FTE teaching staff for Oakland school. The effect on Longmeadow school would be greater.
- (iii) If the schools continue as two separate institutions it is likely that they will have a reduced priority for early inclusion in the Primary Capital Programme because of the inbuilt inefficiencies of developing two separate schemes.

11.2 Expand Longmeadow Primary School with consequent closure of Oakland Primary School.

The new school would be a Voluntary Controlled school with Church of England character. The headteacher of Longmeadow Primary School would automatically become the headteacher of the expanded school and the Governing Body of Longmeadow Primary School would be adapted to become the Governing Body of the new school, with Oakland Primary School governors co-opted to maintain continuity.

11.3 Expand Oakland School with consequent closure of Longmeadow School.

The new school would be a Community school. The headteacher of Oakland Primary School would automatically become the headteacher of the expanded school and the Governing Body of Oakland Primary School would be adapted to become the Governing Body of the new school, with Longmeadow School governors co-opted to maintain continuity. The maintained nursery, which serves both schools but is located at Longmeadow, would close and separate notices would have to be published to extend the age range of Oakland Primary School if the decision was taken to re-establish it.

11.4 Open a new school following closure of both existing schools

The new school could be in any category or have any religious character, or none. However, it is recommended that the new school be a Voluntary Controlled school. In schools in this category the staff are employed directly by the County Council, the admissions are controlled by the County Council, but a proportion of the Governing Body would be nominated by the Diocese of Lichfield. The Diocese of Lichfield is supportive of any school being created having Voluntary Controlled status.

In this case, a new temporary governing body would be set up from governors of the two existing schools. The temporary governing body would be responsible for drawing together staff and governors to appoint the headteacher, set the policies and the staffing structure and bring the new school to opening. A permanent governing body would be appointed (usually during the first term of operation of the new school), including elections for new staff and parent governors.

11.5 Other Options

A few parental responses suggested federation of the schools under a single headteacher and governing body. This would effectively create a split site school, but with common ethos and educational philosophy. It is not considered appropriate in such circumstances to manage a school in this way in such close proximity.

12. Recommendation of the Acting Corporate Director for Children and Young People's Services

Following analysis of the available evidence including all the responses made during the consultation, due consideration of all the alternatives and their effects on the attainment of pupils, the environment and the community, it is recommended that Cabinet proceed to consult on formal proposals to close both schools and invite the Diocese of Lichfield to publish proposals to open a new Voluntary Controlled school for 420 pupils.

13. Next Steps

If Cabinet accepts the recommendation of the Acting Director for Children and Young People's Services to develop proposals to amalgamate the schools by closing both schools and creating a new school, the next step would be to for the Diocese of Lichfield to contact the Secretary of State to request permission to publish proposals to establish the new school and for Shropshire County Council to publish proposals to close the two existing schools.

Publication of proposals would be followed by a six week consultation period during which comments would be invited from interested parties. It is intended to bring a report back to Cabinet on this phase of consultation on 22 July 2008, but this is dependent on a speedy response from the Secretary of State. Should the Secretary of State require it, the Council could be instructed to conduct a competition to commission the new school, but this is thought to be relatively unlikely in this case following initial consultation with national officials.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Primary School Organisation – Report to Cabinet 30 January 2008

Human Rights Act Appraisal

Children have a right to education. However, there is no right to a place within a specific maintained school. A proposed closure or amalgamation of a school does not, therefore, affect an individual pupil or parent's human rights.

Environmental Appraisal

The recommended proposal would mean a minor improvement in the effect on the environment as the new and refurbished accommodation would be more efficient than that in use currently.

Risk Management Appraisal

Changes to the organisation of schools must be carefully managed to achieve the full benefits, or there is a risk that the disruptive effects of change will outweigh the benefits to be gained.

Community / Consultations Appraisal

Formative consultation already undertaken is detailed in the report. Full community consultation would be undertaken as required by Statute if the decision is taken to proceed to formal proposals.

Cabinet Member

Cllr. Ann Hartley

Local Member

All

Appendices

- 1 Consultation document
- 2a Notes of meeting with Governors
- 2b Notes of meeting with Parents and Other Members of the Community
- 3 Key points from responses and commentary by officers
- 4 Bayston Hill Fact File
- 5 Formal responses from the Governing Bodies of Oakland and Longmeadow Primary Schools (hard copy only)