

Bath & North East Somerset Council	
MEETING:	Children & Young People Overview & Scrutiny Panel
MEETING DATE:	10 August 2010
TITLE:	Additional information from Children's Service responding to call-in of decision E2097
WARD:	All
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM	
List of attachments to this report:	
None	

The information set out below provides for the panel an initial response from officers in the Children's Service to the grounds set out in the call-in of the decision E2097: 'A Review of Secondary Schools in Bath' taken by the Cabinet on 21st July 2010. Under each of the four grounds stated for the call-in, a summary response is provided, together with supporting evidence.

- 1. The consultation was based on the scenario of closing three schools and reopening two – one in the north and one in the south of the city. This scenario was approved by the majority of respondents (66%). By abandoning this scenario and recommending the closure of one school in the south, the Cabinet has disenfranchised residents who, believing that the outcome of the consultation would be a new, coeducational school at Culverhay (which is what the community has wanted for a long time), did not respond to the consultation in large numbers.**

Response

The consultation did include this specific scenario, but importantly also sought views on the overall plan for Bath and indicated that this was not the only possible option. It is clear that responses from communities linked to Culverhay were relatively low, but responses from other Bath communities suggest widespread support for the overall strategy, regardless of the potential impact on their local secondary school. We have recommended (and the cabinet has resolved to undertake) a further consultation on the specific proposal to close Culverhay with no new school on the site. Residents and all other consultees will have the opportunity to respond to the new proposal.

Evidence

The consultation was very specific in seeking views on the proposal "to close St Mark's C of E school, Oldfield school and Culverhay school and open one new 11-18 co-educational school with a planned admission number of 160 in the north of the city and a linked proposal to open one new 11-18 co-educational school with a planned admission number of 160 in the south of the city".

The consultation document was also quite clear (page 6) that “It is important to note that no decisions have been taken about the future of schools only to consult on preferred options. This paper is the first stage of that consultation process. Other options may emerge as a result of the consultation”.

The overall plan was supported by 72% of respondents (consultation question 1). These responses were in relation to the plan as a whole not simply specific schools north or south of the river, although this was one of the six key points in that plan.

The question that 72% of respondents stated they agreed with was: -

1. Do you agree with the Council’s overall plan/strategy for Bath which is to:
- Reduce the number of schools from seven to six to remove surplus places and reflect the current and future need in Bath.
 - Reduce the number of single sex places and provide more co-educational places to meet parental demand.
 - Provide sufficient Church school places to meet the level of demand.
 - Maintain one single sex girl’s school and one single sex boy’s school to provide choice for parents (Beechen Cliff and Hayesfield).
 - Create the right size schools which are educationally and financially viable.
 - Have one new co-educational school located in the north of the city and one new co-educational school in the south of the city.

In the consultation responses, the views of parents, pupils and staff from St Marks, primary school parents, governors and staff across the City and communities close to the three schools each showed a majority in favour of the overall strategy, even though those close to or linked with Oldfield or St Marks could have seen their local secondary school as under greater threat than Culverhay families.

The recommendation by cabinet to consult on the closure of Culverhay with no new school on this site recognises that the proposal is different from the main consultation question. That is why we recommended (and the cabinet decided) to now consult specifically on the closure of Culverhay with no new school on this site and not simply to close Culverhay without further consultation.

2. The decision is premature. The availability of ‘Building Schools for the Future’ funding was a significant driver of reorganising secondary provision in Bath. Given that this funding stream is no longer available following the change in Government, the Cabinet has not adequately considered the need to wait until the situation regarding schools legislation and future funding mechanisms is more certain.

Response

This decision is the culmination of a lengthy process over many years, is not based on the availability of national capital funding and seeks to address known and pressing issues of surplus places and lack of available capital.

Evidence

The decision is based on raising standards; maintaining choice and diversity and meeting parental demand for co-educational and church places; support from parents and wider stakeholders; more effective and efficient use of resources; enabling young people to access a local school. These are set out in the cabinet

paper, including the prospects for capital funding following the cancellation of the BSF programme.

This decision builds on work over many years including parent and carer surveys from 1999 and 2004; an Overview & Scrutiny Panel review in 2007; and the strategy for the future of secondary schools in Bath & North East Somerset approved by the Council in March 2008.

The decision is not based on the “Building Schools for the future” (BSF) programme, which has been cancelled, nor on future central government funding, which is unlikely to be available for many years to come.

In Bath we have 1500 more places than are required for Bath pupils, of which 800 remain unfilled. We have seven schools requiring on-going maintenance and limited funds for investment. The lack of availability of external capital funding means there is no prospect of modifying buildings from single sex to co-educational provision without Council investment. This could be achieved from the closure of a school, as set out in the cabinet paper.

3. The Cabinet has decided that there should be no change to schools in Keynsham, but the option of no change to schools in Bath has not been considered under section 9 of the report. This is inconsistent.

Response

This decision is about schools and standards in Bath, not Keynsham.

The option of no change in Bath was considered but not explicitly stated in the report, because of both the compelling rationale for change and the level of public support for the overall strategy.

Evidence

The high percentage of responses in favour of the overall strategy (question 1) in the consultation demonstrate that change is supported by the majority of people.

The rationale in section 8 of the cabinet report sets out why change is required.

The reasons that no change for Bath was considered but rejected are: -

- Standards overall are not improving fast enough – more effective use of resources can help to address this
- There is a clear and strong demand for more co-educational places
- There 800 places remain unfilled in the 7 schools
- 1,000 pupils a day come to the seven schools from outside Bath (only 4,000 from within Bath) and this may not be sustainable.
- Maintaining seven large school buildings with significant repair maintenance and suitability issues is expensive and difficult to sustain in the current economic situation.

In addition, consideration was given to retaining all seven schools with Oldfield and Culverhay both becoming co-educational schools. Although this meets the criteria for increasing co-educational places, it would not reduce surplus places; would not address the issue of standards; and is not affordable – i.e. there is no prospect of being able to fund the necessary modifications to the buildings without a capital receipt from sale of a surplus site.

4. **If the primary purpose of the review is to improve educational standards, it is inconsistent to close a school which is rated as ‘good’ by Ofsted but to keep both schools in Keynsham, which have lower Ofsted ratings, open. Furthermore, insufficient consideration has been given to the extra services provided at Culverhay school to pupils and to the community (e.g. leisure centre, extracurricular activities, links with primary schools and Bath Spa University) and to the ‘value added’ to pupils’ educational attainment.**

Response

This decision is about schools and standards in Bath, not Keynsham. If the plan for Bath, which is widely supported, is to reduce from 7 to 6 secondary schools, then that will result in the closure of a good school - but for valid reasons, as set out above.

Full consideration can now be given (in connection with the specific consultation on closure) to the community facilities available at the Culverhay site and whether these can be maintained.

Culverhay provides a good education and high value added but few parents choose the school and so it has a high number of surplus places. The authority needs to take into account a range of measures when assessing school performance, as well as looking at how standards can best be maintained and improved across the City in the context described.

Evidence

The evidence for wide support and the rationale for reducing from 7 to 6 secondary schools are set out above and in the cabinet paper.

We have no secondary schools in Bath currently rated below ‘Good’ by Ofsted (Hayesfield, Oldfield and St Gregory’s are rated ‘Outstanding’, the others ‘Good’).

The cabinet paper indicated (section 8.7) that ‘If the decision was made to close the school with no new school on the site, careful consideration would need to be given to the impact of this on pupils and staff at the school and on the local community.’ This consideration can now be built in to the next stages of the process.

Culverhay received 33 first preference choices and has been allocated a total of 45 year 7 pupils for September 2010, compared to a Planned Admission Number of 102.

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Background papers	<i>Agenda papers already circulated</i>
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