

- Legal Jane Pollard / Richard Freeth – comments incorporated in the report
- Finance David Clarke, County Treasurer – “fine”
- Other Chief Officers
- District Councils
- Health Authority
- Police
- Other Bodies/Individuals

FINAL DECISION **NO**

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS:

Details to be specified

- Further consideration by this Committee
- To Council
- To Cabinet For decision at 8th December meeting
- To an O & S Committee
- To an Area Committee All five Area Committees to be consulted during the November round of meetings
- Further Consultation

The Cabinet – 8 September 2005

Draft School Organisation Framework 2005/10

Report of the County Education Officer

Recommendations:

- (1) That the draft School Organisation Framework 2005/10 be approved as a basis for consultation with key stakeholder organisations.
- (2) That the County Education Officer be authorised to consult key stakeholders on the draft document and subsequently report responses to the consultation to a future meeting of Cabinet.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The statutory requirement for Local Education Authorities to produce a School Organisation Plan was repealed nationally on 1st March 2005, with the first commencement orders of the Children Act 2004. Warwickshire was already exempt as part of the Single Education Plan pilot. Although technically exempt from the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) process by virtue of being an "excellent" Authority, Members have approved our intention to produce a CYPP for April 2006. In the process of its construction it is proposed to consult the Warwickshire School Organisation Committee.
- 1.2 The Warwickshire School Organisation Committee (SOC) is a statutory body responsible for making final decisions on statutory school organisation proposals. With the abolition of the School Organisation Plan, which it was formerly responsible for approving, the DfES requires SOCs to have reference to its School Organisation 'Decision Makers Guidance' and expects SOCs to "continue to consider how proposals fit into local plans".
- 1.3 School organisation planning within Warwickshire takes place against a background of falling pupil numbers in primary schools, the need for the County Council to continue to raise levels of achievement, secure value for money, make the best use of resources and respond to and develop a range of new initiatives including the 'Every Child Matters' agenda.

2. Proposals

2.1 The case for retaining a Warwickshire school organisation framework document

2.1.1 Whilst seeking to achieve a more streamlined strategic planning structure, it should be noted that:

- school organisation matters will necessarily form just a small part of the wider CYPP when it is introduced
- the Warwickshire SOC will still need to take account of local plans on school organisation
- school organisation planning will form part of the Joint Area Review of Education and Children's Services, also introduced by the Children Act 2004
- the County Council remains under a duty to ensure that sufficient primary and secondary school places are provided within its area.

2.1.2 Given these circumstances, Members may consider that, in order to ensure that an effective basis for planning school organisation continues, a dedicated, non-statutory, County Council policy framework is produced.

2.2 Frequency and consultation arrangements

The draft framework document would be subject to consultation with Area Committees, the Warwickshire SOC, key stakeholder organisations, the Local Skills Council, Diocesan authorities, other admission authorities, schools and health authorities in Warwickshire. The final School Organisation Framework will be approved by Cabinet. It is further proposed that, although the demographic information would be updated each year, the framework itself would only be changed and consulted upon every four years or if there was a major policy change.

2.3 The planning framework

The following represents the key issues which would form the basis of the planning framework which would give a broad overview of the context and principles within which school organisation proposals may be developed. It is suggested that if agreed these should be included in the document together with more detailed demographic information.

2.4 Planning principles

2.4.1 When planning the pattern of school provision in order to reduce or increase the number of places, there are a number of factors to be considered.

2.4.2 Below are a series of policy statements in relation to each of these factors. In coming forward with proposals for changing the pattern of school provision, whether by creating new schools, expanding or reducing the capacity of

existing schools, amalgamating schools or closing them, the County Council will assess each of these factors.

2.5 School improvement

The County Council is committed to school improvement and raising the standards of attainment and achievement in Warwickshire schools. Any proposals for school reorganisation will consider how the quality of education will be improved.

2.6 Balance of denominational provision

2.6.1 There are in Warwickshire a number of 'voluntary schools' provided by the Church of England and the Catholic Church. The County Council is committed to this 'dual system' and the provision of sufficient denominational places from 4+ to 18, and will continue to involve the Church Authorities fully in drawing up proposals to meet the relevant need.

2.6.2 The County Council will consider the impact of any proposals to close or reduce the capacity of denominational places would have on the balance of denominational places. The Authority will consider school organisation proposals in respect of denominational schools from the Church of England, the Catholic Church or from other religious groups.

2.7 Gender

All nursery, primary and special schools in the county are co-educational, i.e. admitting both boys and girls, and any new school established will admit both boys and girls. Most secondary schools are co-educational. In Rugby and Stratford, however, there are separate boys' and girls' grammar schools. In line with the requirements of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, the Authority will maintain equal numbers of places for statutory-aged children for boys and girls.

2.8 Selection

2.8.1 The County Council operates a selective system in the Eastern and Southern Areas of the County. There are two grammar schools and a bilateral school in Rugby, two grammar schools in Stratford and one in Alcester.

2.8.2 The Government has set out in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, the procedures for changing selective admission arrangements for grammar schools. Such changes may only take place following a parental ballot. The County Council will respond, as required by the Act, to the outcome of parental ballots.

2.8.3 The Authority does not support the introduction of selection by ability as a consequence of a school gaining Specialist College status. None of the existing specialist colleges have introduced selection by ability.

2.9 Equality of Access

The County Council will take account of the legislation in relation to equalities including the Race Relations Amendment Act and the Disability Discrimination Act.

2.10 Infant class size

Since September 2001 the law has required that every child of infant school age is educated in a class of 30 pupils or fewer. The planning of school places should not compromise the Authority's ability to comply with the infant class size limit.

2.11 All-through primary schools

Wherever practicable, the Authority has established all-through primary schools for children aged 4+ to 11. The Authority believes that such schools have some advantages over separate infant and junior schools. In some circumstances, however, an all-through primary school is not appropriate and there are separate infant and junior schools. In establishing all-through primary schools, priority will be given to those situations where there are falling rolls, the separate infant and junior schools occupy the same site or adjacent sites, and/or where any necessary capital costs in amalgamating the schools are either self-financing or have been identified as a spending priority.

2.12 Federation

2.12.1 Schools are encouraged to co-operate to raise the levels of achievement of pupils. The School Governance (Federations) (England) Regulations (2004) make legal provision for between two and five schools to join together to share key activities from strategic planning and policies to sharing resources. Unlike amalgamated schools, federated schools retain their separate identity but share a governing body and may share a headteacher. Federation offers a legal framework for a whole spectrum of arrangements through which schools can work together.

2.12.2 An alternative to Federation is Collaboration, where two schools or more work together sharing ideas and approaches. The Collaboration legal framework enables schools to operate joint committees of their governing bodies on anything from overarching strategic planning to single issue matters or hold joint meeting of governing bodies. These flexible arrangements can be reviewed annually.

2.13 Primary school size

2.13.1 The County Council wishes to see schools large enough to offer a well-resourced and broadly based education to all pupils but not so large that they become impersonal. The Audit Commission defines a small primary school as one with 100 pupils or less and a very small school as one with 30 pupils or less.

2.13.2 As a guideline, it is suggested that primary schools should have a minimum of 100 pupils and a maximum of 420. It should be emphasised that this is a guideline and the ability of a school to deliver high quality education for pupils should be the overriding factor. Also, it is acknowledged that in rural areas, for example, for reasons of accessibility, schools may have fewer than 100 pupils.

2.13.3 Very small schools can have a significantly greater unit cost per pupil and it is considered that all primary schools with, or forecast to have, 30 pupils on roll or less should be reviewed. Issues the review would consider would include projected pupil numbers, the standard of education provided and value for money, and the contribution of the school to the community. Once a school has been reviewed under these arrangements, there should normally be no further review for a period of at least four years.

2.14 Secondary school size

2.14.1 No guidelines exist for the size of secondary schools, but similar factors need to be considered, i.e. to ensure the school is of a size to be able to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum in Key Stage 4 and, where appropriate, an effective 14 to 19 curriculum to a high standard while not being so large as to become impersonal.

2.14.2 Judgements on the optimum size of schools will need to be made in the context of the Authority's 14-19 strategy which anticipates increased collaboration between schools and other providers of learning opportunities to ensure all young people in an area have access to the broadest range of courses and programmes. Optimum size will differ according to the type of school (grammar, high school or comprehensive) or age range (11-16 or 11-18).

2.15 Parental preferences

2.15.1 The County Council's Strategic Framework aims so far as is possible to meet the preferences of parents for the school of their choice.

2.15.2 In general, the County Council would not, in seeking to bring down the number of surplus places in an area, reduce the number of places at over-subscribed schools. Where there is a requirement for additional places, the County Council will plan to expand popular schools, in line with parental preference, so long as there is site capacity, it would represent good value for money and the short- or long-term impact on local provision is not distorted.

2.15.3 Given the County Council's limited resources for capital expenditure, it would not normally expect to expand a popular school where places exist in neighbouring schools within a two-mile radius for primary schools and a three-mile radius for secondary schools.

2.16 School transport

2.16.1 The County Council provides free transport for pupils to attend their nearest school when distance between home and school is over two miles for children under the age of eight and three miles for children aged eight or over.

2.16.2 The County Council's transport policy states that a child's journey to school should be no longer than 75 minutes for children aged 11 and over or 45 minutes for children aged under 11. In practice, the County Council considers it desirable for journey times to be much shorter than this. In planning school places, the Authority will take account of the accessibility of provision in order to help ensure reasonable journey times for pupils, enable as many pupils as possible to walk to school and reduce the number of car journeys.

2.17 Value for money – removal of surplus places

2.17.1 The number of empty or surplus places in each school is the difference between how many children a school could take when full to capacity and the actual number of children on the school roll. Empty places can cost money to maintain, and where this is the case the Government and the County Council believe this money would be better spent for the benefit of pupils. The County Council will continue, therefore, to monitor carefully the number of surplus places in schools. It is recognised, however, that there needs to be some surplus places in the system to give flexibility to respond to fluctuations in pupil numbers and parental preference. It is suggested that the level of surplus places should be around 7%.

2.17.2 There are significant variations in the unit costs of primary school places, with the smallest schools having unit costs in the region of £4,500 per pupil compared with an average unit cost across all primary schools of £2,444.

2.17.3 It should also be noted that the DfES no longer provides funding for the removal of surplus places and with majority of capital funding going directly to schools, the main source of capital funding for large strategic projects the County Council is through the New Deal for Schools and Modernisation (NDS). NDS funding has fallen from a high point of £11.3m in 2003 to a more normal level in 2005 of £9.7m, although much of this has been committed.

Other initiatives

2.18 The Children Act 2004

The Children Act 2004 has been described as the most important piece of legislation affecting the lives of children in modern times. The five cornerstone aims of the 'Every Child Matters' agenda include the right for children to be safe, to achieve and to contribute to society. Amongst the many challenges posed by these aims is the need to provide accessible, high quality, education. Just one example of how school organisation planning should support these aims is through contributing to the development of a pattern of wide ranging

services for children and their families, e.g. through the Extended Schools initiative.

2.19 Extended Schools

2.19.1 A Warwickshire Extended Schools Strategy was developed in June 2005 that offers a strategic framework for the development of Extended Schools. It is intended that all schools, children and families will be able to access a core of extended services, which are developed in partnership with others. Extended Services can include childcare, adult education, parenting support programmes, community-based health and social care services, multi-agency behaviour support teams and after-school activities.

2.19.2 Extended Schools will vary from school to school as they need to be designed around local needs and take into account any existing provision; therefore the key principle of partnership work with other agencies is vital.

2.19.3 There is potential to make better use of school buildings as a community resource after school hours and making services more accessible. Schools with surplus places will be encouraged to explore the use of accommodation to develop these services.

2.20 Children's Centres

Until now the development of high quality early years and parent support services through Children's Centres has focused on the most deprived areas of the County and involved significant capital investment. The second round of Children Centre developments will roll out provision to a much broader area of need and in significantly greater numbers. The capital available for this scale of provision means that the development of new Centres will need to maximise the use of existing school accommodation.

2.21 Workforce Re-modelling

2.21.1 The Government is encouraging schools to take advantage of a number of changes, including the training of classroom assistants, to make more flexible use of the workforce. The main aims of the initiative are to ensure that tasks and activities in a school are carried out by the most appropriate people and reduce to the work burden on individual staff. The Government predicts that, nationally, as a result of these changes, at least 10,000 extra teachers and 50,000 extra support staff will be appointed in schools. Support staff will include school bursars as well as classroom assistants.

2.21.2 With many schools witnessing a growth in staff numbers it is anticipated that there may be a need for extra accommodation, including office space and larger staffroom areas.

2.22 Building Schools for the Future

2.22.1 The Government's 'Building Schools for the Future' programme will see the replacement or re-modelling of all the nation's secondary schools over a period of time from 2005. Warwickshire has been informed that it can expect to have its top priority secondary schools, that is all those in the areas of Nuneaton/Bedworth and North Warwickshire addressed in 2013. In the meantime the DfES will make it possible for one secondary school to be replaced before that date.

2.22.2 While 2013 is a considerable time away and beyond the life of this document, Warwickshire will need to begin its planning over the next two or three years and Local Authorities are being invited to think radically about the position and size of prospective schools. At some point in this strategic planning period it will be necessary to start wide consultation about the provision of secondary education and related functions throughout the County.

3. Summary of the general conclusions in the draft Framework

3.1 The primary school population has been falling steadily while pupil numbers in secondary schools have been more stable. The draft document shows demographic data indicating that primary pupil numbers may continue to fall from a total primary school population in January 2005 of 40,075 to 36,352 in September 2009, a fall of 9.3%. This could result in the level of surplus school places growing from the current 10% to 18%, if no action is taken. The Framework document suggests that measured steps should be adopted to move toward a reduction of surplus places to a target of 7%.

Table 1: Primary Pupil Numbers 2004/09

	Actual Pupil Numbers	Surplus %	Forecast Pupil Numbers					Surplus %	Capacity
Year	2004/05	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2009/10	
Total	40,072	9.8%	39,464	38,280	37,597	36,972	36,352	18.1%	44,403

*Note: Actual Pupil Numbers do not include Nursery Unit or Nursery School pupils
All other data is from the Current Forecast System administered by WCC LEA*

3.2 At the secondary phase, the draft document shows demographic data indicating that pupil numbers may be expected to fall from 34,224 in January 2005 to 32,794 in September 2009, a fall of 4.2%. The level of surplus pupil numbers is currently quite low at 6% but is expected to grow to 10% by 2009/10 unless action is taken. A review of secondary school provision will be needed during the period of this framework in order to prepare in good time for the planning of new secondary schools in the first tranche of 'Building Schools for the Future'. In the meantime, action may be required only if there were issues concerning viability to deliver the curriculum or secure value for money. Again a target of 7% surplus places is suggested.

Table 2: Secondary Pupil Numbers 2004/09

	Actual Pupil Numbers	Surplus %	Forecast Pupil Numbers					Surplus %	Capacity
Year	2004/05	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2009/10	
Total	34,329	5.7%	34,392	34,041	33,432	33,075	32,794	9.9%	36,412

All data is from the Current Forecast System administered by WCC LEA

- 3.3 In some areas this fall in numbers will be offset by new housing developments and, indeed, additional school places will be needed across all age groups in some areas because of new housing. Information relating to new housing is included in the draft document.
- 3.3 There are a number of local and national initiatives, mainly in the development of Children's Centres, Extended Schools and Workforce Re-Modelling, which will result in changes to the use of school accommodation over the life of the document.

4. Proposed action for reducing surplus places

It is proposed that in order to address the issue of surplus places:

- (a) a target of 7% surplus places for primary and secondary schools by the end of the planning period 2010 be set
- (b) all very small primary schools are reviewed
- (c) priority for the amalgamation of separate infant and junior schools be given where there are falling rolls, the schools occupy the same site or share adjacent sites, and/or where the cost of the amalgamation is either self-financing or the cost has been identified as a spending priority
- (d) schools are consulted on the use of their accommodation in the light of the development of
 - Children's Centres or other early years provision
 - the Extended Schools programme
 - the impact of the Workforce Re-Modelling
 - other changes in school use
- (e) temporary accommodation is removed as soon as it is no longer required and new temporary accommodation only provided where there is a short-term necessity to deliver the curriculum.

5. Recommendations

Cabinet is asked:

- (1) to approve the draft Strategic School Organisation Framework set out in the report as a basis for consultation with key stakeholder organisations
- (2) to authorise the County Education Officer to consult key stakeholders on the draft document and subsequently report responses to the consultation to a future meeting.

ERIC WOOD
County Education Officer

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24th August 2005