

<b>CABINET</b>	<b>Paper No.</b>
<b>Meeting date: 28 November 2006</b>	
<b>From: Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Corporate Director – Children's Services</b>	
	<b>**</b>

**SCHOOL ORGANISATION – A STRATEGIC APPROACH:  
PLANNING 11-19 EDUCATION FOR THE NORTH COPELAND  
AREA**

**SECTION A:  
RECOMMENDATION OF CABINET MEMBER**

**1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1** *This paper is about the future of secondary education provision in the North Copeland area. Decisions emanating from it are therefore important ones.*
- 1.2** *More specifically, the report informs Members of the nature and outcome of the public consultation exercise concerning 11-19 education in the North Copeland area. It then goes on to provide some analysis designed to help Members reach conclusions on a way forward for the future.*
- 1.3** *Towards the end it draws attention to the fact that the decisions taken at this point represent only the beginning of the change process. An indication of the next steps required is then provided.*
- 1.4** *The length of the paper reflects the importance and multi-faceted nature of the issues involved, the focus that will be on it and the range of 'audiences' it will have.*

**2.0 POLICY POSITION, BUDGETARY AND EQUALITY  
IMPLICATIONS AND LINKS TO CORPORATE STRATEGY**

- 2.1** *The policy position on school organisation matters was set out in the 7 September 2005 Cabinet paper 'School Organisation – A Strategic Approach'.*

- 2.2** *The document ‘Enhancing Lives Through Learning – A Vision for Schools in Cumbria,’ which was approved by Cabinet on 28 February 2006, underpins and guides the Authority’s school organisation process.*

**Budgetary Implications**

- 2.3** *There are not likely to be significant implications for the absolute levels of revenue budgets. School organisation change can, however, free-up existing resources to be put to alternative use in or for other schools. However, some initial outlay on transitional arrangements will be necessary in the case of change to secondary education provision in the North Copeland area.*
- 2.4** *As far as capital expenditure is concerned, the potential school organisation change identified in the report would require funding from the capital plan to secure its implementation.*

**Links to the Council Plan**

- 2.5** *The basic thrust of the strategic approach to school organisation is to safeguard and improve the education and other services to children and their families provided through schools in the County.*
- 2.6** *This is supportive of the Plan’s themes, ‘Improving Council Services’ and ‘Children and Young People’.*

**3.0** **RECOMMENDATIONS**

*Cabinet is asked to consider:-*

- 3.1** *Supporting all of the steps necessary to establish an Academy which operates in line with County Council protocols, publishing formal proposals, if and when appropriate, to secure the closure of Ehenside School, Cleator Moor and Wyndham School, Egremont.*
- 3.2** *Agreeing that the identification of a location for the Academy occurs following further technical work on site suitability and further discussions locally and with the DfES Academies Unit.*
- 3.3** *Should the establishment of an Academy not come to fruition, taking all necessary action to secure the closure of Ehenside School, Cleator Moor, with its catchment area being added to that of Wyndham School, Egremont*

**Philip Chappelhow**  
**Cabinet Member for Children’s Services**

## **SECTION B:**

### **ADVICE OF CORPORATE DIRECTOR – CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

#### **4.0 BACKGROUND**

##### **General Background**

- 4.1 On 7 September 2005, Cabinet adopted a more strategic approach to the supply of school places, school organisation and related issues. The aim was to review the whole of the school network in the County during 2006 and 2007.
- 4.2 The catalyst for this countywide review is the very significant reduction in the pupil population which will occur over the next decade and beyond and the effect this will have on the proportion of unfilled places. If left unaddressed, this will lead to the less effective use of finite resources and dilute the quality of education provision. Good progress is being made generally on the implementation of the new approach.
- 4.3 Because of particular issues relating to standards at two of the schools, a high priority was given to reviewing secondary provision in the North Copeland area. This was the second area in the County to be reviewed.
- 4.4 The strategic approach to school organisation involves a high degree of partnership working. Its implementation is overseen by a countywide School Organisation Forum (SOF). Local Partnership Groups (LPGs) are tasked with developing ideas for improving provision through school organisation change.
- 4.5 The West Cumbria LPG, in looking at secondary provision in North Copeland, considered a wide range of information on schools, communities and County Council policies, including transport and rural issues. A series of options was produced and refined during the early part of the summer, and the LPG agreed to ask partners and stakeholders for their views on three options. The feedback received helped the LPG to firm up on those options. These were endorsed by SOF. Cabinet agreed on 18 July to there being wide public consultation on the three options.
- 4.6 The membership of SOF and the West Cumbria LPG is set out in Appendices A and B respectively.

##### **The Consultative Process**

- 4.7 A consultation document was prepared and issued on 15 September 2006. It argued the case for change, outlined the agreed options and their implications, provided much contextual information and began to point to ways in which conclusions might be drawn. A questionnaire was included to capture preferences, comments and encouraged amendments to and/or additional options to be given. In all, 8,500 copies were distributed/made available to parents of primary and secondary aged pupils (via direct mailing), young people, school staff, school governors, early years/nursery groups, many other partner organisations and the general public. A copy of

the document is attached as Appendix C. The three options for change are set out in the table on page six of the document.

- 4.8 As an important part of the consultative process, five special Neighbourhood Forum meetings were held across the area. These were intended for parents and the general public and four of them were well attended. There were also meetings for school staff and for governing bodies. There was a concerted effort to engage young people in the consultation process. In total over 30 meetings and drop-in events were held as part of the consultation exercise.
- 4.9 There was full press and media coverage throughout the consultations. Two weeks or so prior to the deadline for responses, parents were mailed a reminder to return the questionnaire contained in the consultation document if they wished their views to be known. Given the comprehensiveness of the consultation process, it is probable that all those who would have wanted to contribute had the opportunity to do so.
- 4.10 A range of different ways of responding to the consultation document were offered. The consultation period ended on 3 November 2006.

### **Feedback from the Consultation**

#### ***Analysis by CN Research (CNR)***

- 4.11 An independent company, CNR, was commissioned to analyse the responses received. Its report on the feedback is attached as appendix D. (A 'verbatim' account of the responses received, which runs to 91 pages, is available on request and there will be copies for reference provided at the meeting.)
- 4.12 Just under 350 responses were received. These were in the form of questionnaires from the consultative document, questionnaires completed online, emails, letters and notes of the Neighbourhood Forum meetings and meetings of school staff and governing bodies.
- 4.13 The standard practice for Cabinet reports concerning school organisation consultation is to make particular documentation emanating from them available to Members as they consider taking decisions. In line with this, the notes of the meetings of school staff and governing bodies are provided as Appendix E, the notes of the Neighbourhood Forum meetings are attached as Appendix F and copies of the written responses from organisations/groups appear as Appendix G.
- 4.14 The respondents represent a good spread in terms of their sphere of interest with 71% being parents of children and young people presently attending primary or secondary schools, 18% parents of pre-school children, 2% students, 7% teaching staff, 5% school support staff, 11% governors and 32% local residents. Obviously, some of those responding fell into more than one of these categories.
- 4.15 Naturally there was a greater proportion of responses from parents linked with the two schools potentially most affected by the options, Ehenside and Wyndham, than from those linked with the two schools in Whitehaven.

4.16 Appendices D – G, which relate to the response to the consultation document, contain much information and comment. The intention in this section of the covering report is to look for the main points and the key messages contained in the feedback received.

4.17 The questionnaire in the consultation document was aimed at finding out from the respondents:

- whether they agreed with the West Cumbria LPG that the status quo is not a viable option;
- whether they were in favour or against each of the three options, and which one of them they preferred;
- their views on the possibility of an Academy;
- their preferences for a site were the Academy opportunity to be pursued.

The Need for Change

4.18 As can be seen from CNR’s report, 83% of respondents feel that the status quo is not appropriate for the future and that some change is needed.

4.19 Respondents holding this view outnumbered those who were content with the present situation by over 8:1. There were 7% ‘don’t knows’.

Views on the Options

4.20 The balance of those in favour and those against the three options is indicated in the table below:

	<b>In Favour (%)</b>	<b>Against (%)</b>
<b>Option 1</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Option 2</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Option 3</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>26</b>

4.21 There were 322 respondents who expressed a preference for a particular option:

	<b>Preferred Option (%)</b>
<b>Option 1</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Option 2</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Option 3</b>	<b>54</b>

### *The Possibility of an Academy*

- 4.22 The CNR report indicates that “the overall clear preferred choice for the area is to build an Academy”.
- 4.23 As already stated, 63% of respondents were in favour of Option 3 which involves the provision of an Academy. In response to the direct question about an Academy, two-thirds of respondents said that they would like to see one built if Ehenside and Wyndham Schools were to close. Only 20% indicated that they would not want an Academy.
- 4.24 As is clear from CNR’s report, there is less agreement on the location of an Academy. Of the sites which could be capable of development in line with the Local Plan, there is a marginal preference for Site 6 rather than for the existing Wyndham School site. There is, however, a sizeable group of people who feel that the Academy should be sited between Egremont and Cleator Moor.
- 4.25 Further exploration of potential sites needs to take place very quickly.
- 4.26 Though there is strong support for the creation of an Academy and the new state of the art building that comes with it, during the consultation exercise many of those contributing to it felt that it was important for it to be very much part of, and working collaboratively with, the existing local network of education providers. It was also seen as crucial that the Academy’s specialism(s) complemented rather than duplicated those of other local secondary schools.

### ***Petition – ‘Say NO to the Closure of Ehenside’***

- 4.27 A petition containing 655 signatures was received on 6 November.
- 4.28 The petition is headed ‘Say No to the Closure of Ehenside’. This is followed by reference to an ‘Option 4’ which would see Ehenside School staying open and an indication of opposition to Options 1, 2 and 3.
- 4.29 Reference to the possibility of a further option was made at the Neighbourhood Forum meeting in Frizington on 4 October. The Panel indicated there that the consultation paper made reference to alternative options being welcomed and gave assurances that, if any came forward, they would be considered.
- 4.30 Obviously it is not possible to analyse a petition in the same way as questionnaires, letters and other responses which convey a range of information and comment. For example, it is not possible to ascertain whether those who signed the petition are parents, teachers or governors.

### ***Assessment of an ‘Option 4’ to Retain Ehenside School***

#### ***The LPG’s Views***

- 4.31 In formulating the options, the LPG was clear in its view that Ehenside School would not be viable in the future. This was because the Group did not believe that the school could recover educationally from being placed in

Special Measures whilst pupil numbers continued to fall considerably and a significant financial deficit had to be cleared.

### ***Ehenside School's Current and Potential Future Roll***

- 4.32 The school's roll at the time the consultation document was produced and distributed in September this year was around 300. This compared with a roll of around 480 ten years ago.
- 4.33 At the time of writing, there were 268 pupils in the school with the likelihood being that there will be rather fewer next term. As far as the admissions process for next September is concerned, this has not unexpectedly produced just 20 first preferences for Ehenside. This compares with admissions of between 40 and 73 over the last five years.
- 4.34 In the circumstances, predicting future pupil numbers is clearly very difficult. If the potential 2007 admissions are ignored in projecting into the future and only earlier trends are taken into account, the pupil roll would be likely to fall to 175 in five years' time. If the likely low admission next September is used as a benchmark, the roll would fall to around 115 in that timeframe.
- 4.35 When the consultation document was prepared only 32% of the children living in its catchment area actually attended Ehenside School. This percentage figure began to drop a number of years ago. Of course, this trend will have been exacerbated by both the school needing Special Measures and, to a greater extent, by the consultation exercise and the nature of the options identified.
- 4.36 Whatever factors brought the school to its current situation regarding its roll, it is unrealistic to think that the total number of pupils will do anything but fall further given the relative size of the intake groups compared to the year groups which will be leaving the school in the next two or three years.

### ***The School's Budgetary Situation***

- 4.37 At the start of the financial year 2006 / 2007, the school was in deficit by over £350K. Reductions in staffing are set to cut costs during the current year. The further fall in numbers since September 2006 referred to above though, is likely to negate the positive effect of this.
- 4.38 With pupil numbers set to plummet, as also indicated above, very significant further reductions in staffing would be necessary to avoid the school's deficit becoming larger.

### ***The Impact of Falling Rolls and the Budget Deficit on Educational Quality and Viability***

- 4.39 Like all schools in Special Measures, Ehenside is receiving a lot of financial and other support geared to improving standards. This is having a positive effect.
- 4.40 The need to make additional and significant reductions in staffing in the next few years to bring the budget closer into balance will obviously work very much against attempts to raise standards. It is impossible to see, for

example, the post-14 curriculum being adequately delivered in the circumstances.

- 4.41 Given the scenarios outlined in this section of the report, the school is almost certainly unsustainable.

#### **The Views of the Council's Key Partners/Stakeholders on the Most Preferred Option as Per CNR's Report**

- 4.42 Towards the end of the consultation period and when the consultees' preferred option was becoming clear from the returned questionnaires, the School Organisation Project Team held a series of meetings with key individuals associated with the Council's main partners in the provision of 11 – 19 education in the North Copeland area. The purpose of these meetings was to gauge how they felt about Option 3 which was emerging as the most favoured option.
- 4.43 A joint meeting of the representatives from those partner bodies followed on 6 November. At that meeting, the previously expressed indications of the position of partners were checked out and, where appropriate, clarified and adjusted.
- 4.44 The informal indications of the views of partners on Option 3, which came out of those meetings are set out in Appendix I.

#### **Establishing a Way Forward**

##### **General Background**

- 4.45 The consultation document pointed up the issue of the impending fall in pupil numbers and the consequential increase in the proportion of unfilled school places. It also indicated the difficulties being faced by Ehenside School and the significant concerns about its future viability.
- 4.46 The West Cumbria LPG felt that for things to stay as they are was not tenable. The overwhelming majority of those who responded directly to the question regarding the status quo agreed with the LPG. This strongly supports the introduction of changes to present provision.
- 4.47 Members do, of course, need to consider alongside the analysis in CNR's report the petition which appears as Appendix H. Although this contains 655 signatures, it cannot be established how many of these belonged to parents or others with an involvement in secondary education in the area. Nor is it known whether the signatories were informed of the issues through reading the consultation document.
- 4.48 It is worth bearing in mind that at four of the five Neighbourhood Forum meetings held to consult with parents and the general public, there appeared to be an acceptance that Ehenside School's difficulties rendered it unviable for the future. Only at the meeting at Frizington were there calls for its retention.

## ***The Viability of Ehenside School***

The position regarding Ehenside School in terms of its pupil roll, its budget and its educational viability is dealt with in paragraphs 4.31 to 4.41.

The conclusion has to be that, for the reasons identified, the school cannot be retained. It is not viable and would not be capable of providing the kind of quality education which the young people of the area need and deserve to have.

## ***The Preferences for the Options in the Consultation Document***

- 4.51 Consideration has been given to the additional option to emerge from the consultation exercise. As has been made clear, this does not appear to be at all tenable. Assuming Members agree that this has been established, they will want to look to the response to the options in the consultation document to guide them to a way forward.
- 4.52 The clearly favoured option is Option 3. This involves the closure of both Ehenside School and Wyndham School and the establishment of an Academy. This has the support of the Council's key partners and stakeholders. Given the degree of backing for Option 3, this obviously suggests itself as the way forward to pursue.
- 4.53 The Government has indicated that it would very much like to see an Academy developed in this area of West Cumbria. There is much to be done, however, before this can become a reality. Once an 'in principle' decision is taken by Cabinet, an Expression of Interest would need to be written, the sponsorship arrangements (which are well advanced) would need to be secured and a site identified and made available by the Council. Once these issues have been resolved, the project would move to what the DfES terms 'the feasibility stage'.
- 4.54 Whilst there is a very good prospect of the Academy coming to fruition, this is not guaranteed. For that reason, a fallback position needs to be identified.
- 4.55 This would need to be either Option 1 (the closure of Ehenside School with its pupils transferring to Wyndham School, or to Wyndham and Whitehaven Schools), or Option 2 (the amalgamation of Ehenside and Wyndham Schools on the Wyndham site).
- 4.56 The responses to the consultation show a slight preference for Option 1. In similar situations in the context of the way forward for Carlisle, where the coming together of a large school and a much smaller school were involved, the decisions were to close the smaller of the two schools and for its pupils to transfer to the larger school. This involves potentially less disruption and avoids the need for the kind of competition referred to on page 10 of the consultation document.
- 4.57 Members may, therefore, wish to go for Option 1. In doing so it would seem appropriate to add all of the catchment area of Ehenside School to that of Wyndham School. That way the sizes of the three remaining secondary schools are likely to be more equal. (CNR's report concludes that the response on the subject of whether to split Ehenside's catchment area or to

transfer it all to Wyndham as just suggested, is inconclusive as to the preferences in that respect of the Ehenside parents). It is relevant here to reiterate that the much favoured Academy solution involves the combination of all of the catchment areas of both existing schools.

### **Next Steps and Transitional Arrangements**

#### **General**

- 4.58 Establishing a way forward is just the beginning of the change process. Much work and activity on a range of fronts on the part of Council officers and partners will be necessary to bring about implementation.
- 4.59 There will be a need for further decisions by Cabinet at the appropriate time. The identification and confirmation of a suitable site is one example.
- 4.60 It is important to set out for Members the scale and scope of the kind of further action required. This is categorised and outlined in the remainder of this section of the report.

#### **Developing a Transitional Partnership – Ehenside and Wyndham Schools**

- 4.61 The embryo of a transitional partnership between Ehenside and Wyndham Schools has existed for a little while now. It is currently being further developed in a positive fashion involving the staff of the two schools.
- 4.62 Amongst the transitional arrangements being planned are:
- joint options for next year's Year 7s (Ehenside is to change the school day to enable it to run the same timetable as Wyndham);
  - joint training for governors and staff;
  - sharing of some teaching staff.
- 4.63 The intention is that Whitehaven and St Benedict's Schools assist as much as possible to support the transitional arrangements.

#### **Pursuing the Academy Possibility**

- 4.64 Discussions regarding potential sponsorship are well advanced though not yet finalised. This position is expected to be clearer in the next week or two.
- 4.65 Assuming the Academy possibility is to be pursued and once sponsorship is secured, the next step is the production of an Expression of Interest to the DfES. It will be important that discussion and negotiation occurs with the sponsor(s) on its content so that it reflects, as far as possible, the section on Academies in the strategic framework for school organisation approved by Cabinet in May 2006 and addresses the concerns of partners / stakeholders set out in Appendix I.
- 4.66 The Council will want to remain involved in the stages that follow the Expression of Interest. It may also wish to consider whether to support the sponsor(s) with a revenue contribution towards the total of the £2m required.

It could do this over, or at any point during, the five year period stipulated for acquiring that sum.

#### Identifying a Site for an Academy

- 4.67 The consultation document identified two sites which it was felt could be developed in compliance with Copeland Borough Council's Local Plan (see pages 14 and 24 of Appendix C). Of these two sites, there was a slight preference for Site 6 amongst the respondents to the consultation exercise.
- 4.68 Another five possible sites between Egremont and Cleator Moor were identified. It was judged that these would be difficult to develop because that was at odds with the policies embodied in the Local Plan. There was a fair degree of support in the responses to the consultation for the Academy to be located between the two main communities served by Ehenside and Wyndham Schools.
- 4.69 It is the responsibility of the Council to identify and provide the site for an academy. There is a good deal more technical work required to test the suitability of the potential sites before that can happen. There is urgency in this because of the situation at Ehenside and the need to identify a suitable site before the completion of the Expression of Interest.

#### The Publication of Formal Proposals

- 4.70 The recommendations, if accepted as they stand, mean that the Council would need to publish statutory school closure proposals to achieve their implementation.
- 4.71 In the event of moving ahead with an Academy, proposals to close both Ehenside and Wyndham Schools would be published at the appropriate time. If there was not to be an Academy, a formal proposal to close Ehenside School would be made as soon as that outcome was clear.
- 4.72 The aspiration would be that the effective date for those proposals would be the end of the 2007 / 2008 academic year. This is the earliest that closure could reasonably be achieved. Given the situation at Ehenside School, change is felt to be required as soon as is practically possible.
- 4.73 The responsibility for taking decisions on formal proposals is currently in the hands of the School Organisation Committee. The Committee is, however, to be disbanded in May 2007. Its decision-making powers will then revert back to the County Council. It is likely, therefore, that any formal proposals arising out of this report will be determined by the Authority.

#### Supporting the Local Communities Involved

- 4.74 There are likely to be potentially negative effects on the local communities and economies resulting from the possible school closures and the decisions on the location of a new school, emanating from the review exercise.
- 4.75 It is important for the Council to do all it can to offer support. There are roles in this to be played by more than one directorate.

- 4.76 There would be a need to consider how the facilities provided on the campuses at Egremont and Cleator Moor, and accessed by the community, might be retained or replaced. Support in terms of the economies of the areas will also be important.

Assessing / Funding the Transitional Costs

- 4.77 It is anticipated that the transitional costs will be contained within existing and overall future budgetary provision.
- 4.78 A strategic group already exists, and a local group of relevant officers and representatives of partners, including schools, will be formed to work on a range of different kinds of transitional arrangements. Included in this will be work to assess the costs involved.

## **5.0 OPTIONS**

- 5.1 In section four of the report a possible way forward is identified and this is reflected in the recommendations.
- 5.2 Members can agree to move ahead on the basis of this identified possibility, suggest variations to it or adopt an entirely different approach.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 There is very significant support for change to secondary education in North Copeland.
- 6.2 Taken together, the clear preference for Option 3 shown in CNR's report (Appendix D), the assessment regarding the possible retention of Ehenside School in paragraphs 4.31 – 4.41 and the views of partners / stakeholders set out in Appendix I, suggest strongly that the potential Academy solution should be vigorously pursued.
- 6.3 It is hard to escape concluding that a brand new school in a high quality brand new building offers by far the best of the available ways forward for the area.

**Jim Mitchell, Manager/Coordinator, School Organisation Project**

*12 October 2006*

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## **APPENDICES**

- Appendix A – School Organisation Forum Membership List
- Appendix B – West Cumbria Local Partnership Group Membership List
- Appendix C – ‘Planning 11-19 education for the North Copeland area – A consultation document’
- Appendix D – CN Research report on ‘Planning 11-19 education for the North Copeland area’
- Appendix E – Notes of consultation meetings held with student councils, school staff and governors
- Appendix F – Notes of Neighbourhood Forum meetings
- Appendix G – Responses from organisations / groups
- Appendix H – Petition: ‘Say No to the Closure of Ehenside’
- Appendix I – Position of Partners / Stakeholders

## **IMPLICATIONS**

- Staffing: There are real/potential implications for staff working in schools which might be the subject of school organisation change.
- Financial: Revenue The potential implications concern the use of existing resources rather than absolute fluctuations in budget levels overall. Moreover school organisation change can result in a more cost effective use of resources.
- : Capital There would be some capital expenditure implications implementing the potential school organisation change covered by the report. Resources are contained in the capital programme to meet the costs involved.
- Electoral Division(s): All Copeland Local Committee Members; Cockermouth East; Cockermouth West; Harrington, Clifton and Stainburn; Keswick and Derwent

- Executive Decision
- Key Decision
- If a Key Decision, is the proposal published in the current Forward Plan?
- Is the decision exempt from call-in on grounds of urgency?
- If exempt from call-in, has the agreement of the Chair of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee been sought or obtained?
- Has this matter been considered by Overview and Scrutiny?  
If so, give details below.

## **PREVIOUS RELEVANT COUNCIL OR EXECUTIVE DECISIONS**

- Cabinet, 7 September 2005.
- Cabinet, 28 February 2006
- Cabinet, 2 May 2006.
- Cabinet, 18 July 2006

## **CONSIDERATION BY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

The Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel received reports on the strategic approach at its meetings on 5 October 2005, 1 February 2006, 22 March 2006 and 12 July 2006. The Panel will continue to be regularly up-dated on progress regarding its implementation.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

School Organisation Plan 2003-2008

'Enhancing Lives Through Learning – A Vision for Schools in Cumbria'

'Strategic Framework for School Organisation Change – Guidance for Local Partnership Groups (LPGs)'

## **RESPONSIBLE CABINET MEMBER**

***Philip Chappelhow***

***Cabinet Member for Children's Services***

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