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CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

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Dear Councillor

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CABINET - TUESDAY, 7 OCTOBER, 2008

I am now able to enclose, for consideration at next Tuesday, 7th October, 2008 meeting of the Cabinet, the following reports that were unavailable when the agenda was printed.

Item 6 - Key Decision CE20 - Shared Services (Pages 1 - 12)

To consider the shared service recommendations made by the Joint Liaison Committee to the Cheshire East Shadow Authority.

Report attached.

**Item 7 - Key Decision CE22 - Transforming Learning Communities:
Emerging Issues from Locality Review for Alsager, Congleton,
Sandbach and Holmes Chapel (Pages 13 - 50)**

To consider the outcomes of the informal consultations held on the options identified by the Locality Review and the subsequent recommendations.

Report attached. *N.B: The appendices that were previously in part 2 of the agenda are now attached with the report.*

Yours sincerely

Cherry Foreman
Democratic Services Officer

CHESHIRE EAST

CABINET

Date of meeting: 7 October 2008
Report of: Deputy Lead Performance and Capacity
Title: Back Office Shared Service Proposal

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To progress shared service recommendations made by the Joint Liaison Committee to the Cheshire East Shadow Authority.

2.0 Decision Required

- 2.1(i) To endorse the recommendations of the Joint Liaison Committee (on 19th September 2008) regarding further areas of pan-Cheshire service delivery.
- (ii) To agree, in principle, the recommendation of the Deloitte report on Shared Back Office Services specifically to:
- (a) establish a Shared Back Office primarily located in West Cheshire, subject to confirmation of the governance arrangements, the detailed scope of the service, an outline Service Level Agreement, clarification of the cost-sharing arrangements, the scope for flexible and mobile working and locality-based staff.
 - (b) review the arrangements within two years and to consider further development of the service including market-testing as appropriate
 - (c) engage in the necessary consultation on the details of the agreed approach

3.0 Financial Implications for Transition Costs

- 3.1 The Deloitte report suggests that the proposed approach to Shared Back Office services will minimise transitional costs. However more work will be undertaken to confirm the detailed figures and the outcome of this work will be reported to Members.

4.0 Financial Implications 2009/10 and beyond

- 4.1 The Deloitte report suggests that the proposed approach to Shared Back Office services is the least cost option generating estimated savings of £6m on current operating costs and some £3.5m less than separate services for East and West. More work will be undertaken to

confirm the detailed figures and the allocation of any saving. This will be reported to Members.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 The report to the Joint Liaison Committee on 1 August considered three possible governance models for Shared Services and recommended the constitutional model as the primary governance needed for Cheshire. Further work will be required to determine the details of the governance model for Shared Back Office Services to ensure that the interests of the Authority continue to be protected and are reflected in the operational delivery of the service. In addition it will be necessary to ensure this meets the service level agreement and the staffing arrangements that there is an equitable sharing of risk

6.0 Risk Assessment

- 6.1 There are no specific additional risks in relation to this in principle decision to set up a shared Back Office Service. A number of strategic risks that are relevant to the whole Local Government Reorganisation apply equally to this case. They are around:
- Ensuring continuity of service delivery as the new authorities set up.
 - The capacity of staffing resources to manage the changes
 - The need to set a balanced budget
 - Adequate communication with staff, unions, services and other stakeholders affected by change
 - Adequate support for staff who are experiencing change

7.0 Background and Options

- 7.1 The Joint Liaison Committee (JLC) has met twice to consider proposals regarding Shared Services.

Joint Liaison Committee 1st August

- 7.2 At its meeting on 1st August 2008 it considered a paper entitled "Shared Services: Principles, Governance and Functions". The JLC made a number of recommendations to their respective Authorities which were subsequently endorsed by Cheshire East. These recommendations were:-

1. Seven Key Shared Services Principles (see Appendix 1).
2. To approve three governance models and endorse the constitutional model as the primary governance mechanism for Cheshire.
3. Shared Pan-Cheshire Services - A limited number of functions were recommended for provision as a shared Pan-Cheshire Service. These fell into two broad categories:-

- (i) **Transitional Arrangements** – Given the very short timescale that we are facing in Cheshire to establish the new Unitaries, there are some pragmatic reasons why a limited number of services which are currently pan-Cheshire may need to remain so, at least for Day 1.
 - (ii) **Functions Recommended for a Shared Service** – These are the functions where officers from all Authorities are collectively recommending establishing a single pan-Cheshire service. This also includes a number of contractual areas (such as Extra Care Housing) which Members of the Joint Liaison Committee also recommended should be supported on a shared basis.
4. That further independent work be commissioned to address the issue of the shared back office.

Joint Liaison Committee 19th September

7.3 At the following JLC (19th September), Members received a further series of potential Shared Service arrangements. The following were recommended as transitional arrangements for pan-Cheshire services.

- (i) Archaeological Service (Regulatory/Planning).
- (ii) DAAT – Drugs and Alcohol Action Team.
- (iii) Commissioned Community Equipment Service.
- (iv) Learning Resource Network (LRN).
- (v) Cheshire Domestic Abuse Partnership.

These areas were proposed after officer discussions at Full Joint Implementation Team. Appendix 2 summarises the reason for each recommendation and for each service area individual business cases and supporting evidence (including the common criteria template agreed by Members) has been produced and are available upon request.

7.4 Members were also asked to note the further progress regarding Research and Intelligence and Strategic Procurement as noted in Appendix 2. In these areas, the Joint Liaison Committee recommended that:-

- (i) Research and Intelligence - a more detailed business case was required to establish collaborative working with partners in the Police, Fire, PCT and third sector prior to structures being developed for each authority.
- (ii) Strategic Procurement - as the projected benefits would only be available to much larger organisations, it was agreed that this service be divided into East and West, but the possibility of joint working in the future was not ruled out and both Authorities are currently participating in the project to develop a procurement hub for the sub-region.

Shared Back Office

- 7.5 At the August Joint Liaison Committee, members recognised that further work was required to examine the case for a shared back office. This would consist of a service which would provide a range of support functions taking advantage of optimised working practices and common IT platform proposed post-transition, the scope likely to include business processes within the operational areas of Finance, Procurement (in particular the “procure to pay” element), Human Resources and Information Technology. As it was likely that this would be the largest Shared Service across East and West Cheshire, it was recommended that a piece of independent work be commissioned to define the scope and business case for such an arrangement.
- 7.6 Deloitte were commissioned to undertake this independent work and the Executive Summary of their findings has been circulated separately with this agenda. Copies of the full report by Deloitte and the summary presentation provided by Deloitte to the Joint Liaison Committee are available to Members upon request. The following paragraphs (7.7 to 7.17) provide a summary of their key findings.
- 7.7 Deloitte were commissioned by the Joint Liaison Committee to undertake an independent examination of the case for shared back office services for Cheshire West & Chester and Cheshire East Unitary authorities. The principal objective being to recommend a preferred strategic route for service provision which would best deliver benefits and minimise risks for both parties.
- 7.8 Deloitte reviewed the current back office business model deployed by the County Council, assessed its current performance levels relative to others, and reviewed the scope to expand and optimise the model to deliver further benefits for the two new Unitary authorities. It was recognised however that this needed to be a new service considering best practice from all seven existing Councils and from elsewhere. The scope of services under consideration are listed in the table below:

Area	Function	Example activities
Transactional Human Resources (HR)	Recruitment	Recruitment, Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) management
	Contracts	New contracts, changes to contracts, leavers management
	Payroll	Payroll calculations, salary and pensions processing, sickness and absence calculations, Inland Revenue correspondence
	HR Systems maintenance	Systems functional maintenance
Transactional Finance	Account Management and Reconciliation	Accounts Payable and Accounts Receivable Reconciliation, Central Account Reconciliation, Bank Reconciliation, Payments Reconciliation
	Financial Data Management	Functional Management of Finance systems, creating new financial structures, accounts maintenance, month end close down, access etc
	Management Information & Report Processing	Transactional support to Strategic finance via journal adjustments, budget adjustments, creation of standard reports

Exchequer Services	Purchasing	Purchase Order processing and administration
	Payments administration	Payments, Cancellations, recoveries of overpayments, scanning invoices
	Income administration	Cash receipting, credit notes, bills processing, direct debits
ICT (non-strategic)	Development	Infrastructure, Programme Management and development, IT Resource Management
	Support	Desktop support, Technical support, Application support, External client support (e.g. schools), i.e. support and development for all ICT operations including shared and non-shared platforms
Shared Services Management Office (SCMO)	Client Management and Contracts	Service Level Agreement (SLA) Management and Integration. Customer training and support
	SCMO Administration	Helpdesk for Service Centre, performance management of Service Centre

Note: Members have already agreed that the current County Council CBS Supplies operation would be part of any Shared back Office arrangement subject to review in its first years of operation

7.9 An independent options appraisal, using the priorities and corporate principles identified by the respective Shadow Authorities, together with a financial assessment of each option has been undertaken to determine the revenue cost impact and associated one off set up costs. Economic appraisal criteria were used to assess operational effectiveness, strategic flexibility and risk associated with each option.

7.10 A number of structural options for back office service delivery in Cheshire were assessed in recognition that the preferred delivery model must identify a short-term transitional and longer-term governance and management structure. Three principal governance models have been considered being contractual, constitutional and corporate.

7.11 Members of the Joint Liaison Committee considered the business case findings and recommendations prepared and presented by Deloitte on 19th September. The Committee was minded in principle to accept these recommendations. In summary there are two principal recommendations;

- Optimising the current set of business processes deployed via the Oracle business system under the umbrella of a single back office based in the West. A constitutional governance model is recommended in the short term, transitional phase.
- To conduct a joint market test of all in-scope back office services, together with the common core ICT systems, to determine a longer-term governance and delivery model for the back office. This is likely to require at least an eighteen month procurement process

7.12 The Deloitte report estimated that a shared back office operation could yield over £6m savings in ongoing structural savings compared with the aggregation of budgets across seven Cheshire local authorities. Furthermore it is estimated that this preferred model has the benefit of

the lowest combination of operating and set up costs compared with other structural options. The report emphasised that these figures represented a 'decision model' rather than a 'budget model' and as such more work is required to assess the detailed budgetary implications.

- 7.13 Approximately 640 back office staff are employed within in-scope back office teams across the seven Cheshire authorities. It is estimated that a headcount reduction of approximately one fifth is possible within a unified pan Cheshire operation. Services will be delivered for the two new Authorities, and Cheshire schools, under a single corporate management framework. Local delivery teams will continue to deliver high standards of customer relationship management, training and support. Flexible and mobile working arrangements and locality-based posts will be considered for some staff currently located in Cheshire East.
- 7.14 In relation to the various alternative options the report estimated that setting up contractual arrangements to establish an arms length company could cost up to £900K to arrange within an extremely tight timeframe prior to vesting day. Splitting the existing back office business model into two shared service centres, East and West, could cost £800k to set up and **£3.5m more** to operate each year. The short-term problem of lack of accommodation for any independent shared service centre in the East is also a limiting factor.
- 7.15 Deloitte has assessed current performance levels and taken into account the scope to optimise these jointly for both new Unitary authorities. To date the County Council's Transforming Cheshire Programme has delivered £467K of savings and is on course to deliver a further £1m in the current financial year. It is estimated that **further savings of £1.2m** can be achieved per annum by optimising current business processes. This is likely to be achieved in the second financial year after vesting day. Such savings would mainly accrue to the two new Authorities through the streamlining of their business processes to reduce costs across all departments.
- 7.16 Deloitte believe that the current centralisation of business processes within a single back office operation is in line with currently accepted best practice around the implementation of modern day financial systems. The guiding corporate principles of standardising, streamlining and automating business processes may continue to provide the benefits of more efficient and effective business practice. Savings and efficiencies achieved in the back office may be invested back into front line services. The percentage of Cheshire schools using the Oracle system has increased from 86% to 96% in the last twelve months on this basis.
- 7.17 Deloitte recommend that a shared back office should be capable of realising substantial savings for both authorities on an ongoing basis but longer term efficiencies are likely to require the involvement of a third party or parties to bring additional customers, technology or location

benefits. Deloitte's second principal recommendation is therefore to market test alternative options once the savings that are achievable internally have been optimised. This would involve both Unitary authorities undertaking a joint procurement exercise within two years. This process should review options to opt for a joint solution using similar business systems and similar business processes or, at an appropriate point, to disengage and pursue alternative unilateral arrangements either procured independently or managed in house. Similar economic and financial criteria may be considered for this.

Next steps

7.18 To agree, in principle, the recommendation of the Deloitte report on Shared Back Office Services specifically to:

- (a) establish a Shared Back Office primarily located in West Cheshire, subject to confirmation of the governance arrangements, the detailed scope of the service, an outline Service Level Agreement, clarification of the cost-sharing arrangements, the scope for flexible and mobile working and locality-based staff.
- (b) review the arrangements within two years and to consider further development of the service including market-testing as appropriate
- (c) engage in the necessary consultation on the details of the agreed approach

7.19 Members are asked to agree to the establishment of a project team to undertake the detailed work now required and to note that a more detailed report on the next steps will be produced for consideration by Members.

For further information:

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Officer: Alistair Jeffs / Ian Simpson

Tel No: 01244 972228 / 01270 529 608 Email: alistair.jeffs@cheshire.gov.uk / ian.simpson@congleton.gov.uk

Background Documents:

1. Deloitte's report – 'Future back office shared provision in Cheshire- Business Case- September 2008

Documents are available for inspection at:

Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach, Cheshire CW111HZ

Seven Key Principles Underpinning Shared Services

1. Cheshire East and Cheshire West & Chester will be two new authorities with their own objectives, priorities and identities. Shared Services should, therefore, be selected carefully. They should be chosen to allow the new Authorities to concentrate on their core priorities and transformational objectives while securing value for money for the taxpayer.
2. There is a presumption that Services will be split between West and East Cheshire unless there is a strong business case for the establishment of a Shared Service or a short term transitional requirement.
3. Shared Services must deliver clear efficiencies and / or genuine improvements to performance to the mutual benefit of Cheshire East and West and other potential partners.
4. Shared Services, both individually and collectively, should be underpinned by a clear and equitable sharing of assets, liabilities, staff, decision making, benefits and risks between West and East Cheshire. This, for example, may involve the Lead Authority roles being allocated broadly equally between East and West Cheshire.
5. It is recognised that Shared Services arrangements need to be flexible in order to support change and new opportunities. Any arrangement must be subject to regular review and the freedom to end the relationship or develop it to include other partners and providers is essential.
6. Shared Services will be new functions created specifically to meet the needs of the new Authorities and their partners.
7. That any Inter-Authority Agreements contain clear service standards and performance management mechanisms.

2. Recommendations of Joint Liaison Committee 19th September

Ref.	Service	2008/09 Approx. Net Revenue Budget (£ 000s)	2008/09 FTE (approx)	County and / or District function	Recommended Service Delivery Model	Reason for Decision and supporting Evidence	Current Lead Officer
1	Archaeological Service (Regulatory/ Planning)	TBC	6.5 FTE	County / District	Retain current arrangement for 12 months during which time a review will be undertaken to look at the options for disaggregation.	In order to secure the seamless delivery of this statutory service at Vesting Day, with least cost. This would pool the expertise of existing providers in planning, regeneration, characterisation, data management, community involvement and partnership working and the risk of service failure would be minimised.	Greg Yates
2	DAAT	Funding streams totalling in excess of £4.2m. Staff Infrastructure cost = £250K	9 FTE	County-wide commissioning service	Retain current county-wide arrangements for one year (to April 2010). During this period plans are developed to disaggregate the service as Local Authority responsibilities for commissioning, reflected in emerging staffing structures, become clearer.	The current arrangements have strong partner support and deliver a nationally recognised high-performing “beacon” service. Therefore, this is not a function that can be disaggregated in the short term without a significant risk to service delivery and performance levels. The disaggregation of the DAAT will require early consideration of how various functions can be aligned to new service structures and responsibilities as they emerge. This will need careful attention to ensure no loss of the strong shared sense of purpose embedded by the current working model across key strategic partnerships. Furthermore clear lines of accountability will be needed to maintain the stringent reporting requirements expected by Government Office North West and the National Treatment Agency.	Joan Feenan

3	Commissioned Community Equipment Service	£150K	4 FTE	County	Retain as pan-Cheshire service until 2010/11 and then disaggregate	To minimise and manage the risks (both financial and service related) which both the new local authorities and the PCTs could face if the service was disaggregated on Day 1.	Jane Colville
4	Learning Resource Network (LRN)	£350k External Funding £700k p.a. Grant	2 FTEs (temporary)	County	Request for one of the local authorities to act as the Accountable Body in the short term. In the longer term the LRN is seeking to become an independent body.	The timescales are too short for the LRN to achieve independence by Day 1. The possibility of forming two partnerships has been considered but it was felt that the LRN is at a too early stage to split at the moment. Their work needs to be consolidated over the next 12 months and to respond to the new environment of two Unitaries across Cheshire.	Christine Burkett
5	Cheshire Domestic Abuse Partnership	£238K	2 FTE	County	Retain current county-wide arrangements for one year (to April 2010). During this period plans developed to disaggregate the service as Local Authority responsibilities for commissioning, reflected in emerging staffing structures, become clearer	The current arrangements have strong partner support and deliver a nationally recognised high-performing "beacon" service. Therefore, this is not a function that can be disaggregated in the short term without a significant risk to service delivery and performance levels. It is the clear view of the CDAP lead partners that the functions should remain on a pan-Cheshire basis (in the short term) as the most resilient way to secure increased safety, improved health and achievement, participation and economic well-being of families who experience domestic abuse across Cheshire.	Gavin Butler

Other Areas to Report on:

Research and Intelligence: At the August Joint Liaison Committee it was requested that further discussions took place with the relevant Executive Members on the future service delivery model for Research and Intelligence. Arising from these discussions the following recommendations are being put forward:-

1. To recommend that both unitary Councils have their own Research and Intelligence function from 1 April 2009
2. That the Joint Liaison Committee supports the continuation of collaborative working on information and data sharing between public sector partners across Cheshire, Halton & Warrington to evaluate the potential for efficiencies in the collation, management and analysis of community data
3. Requests the development of a business case and options appraisal for the above by 31 January 2009
4. Determines the scope and remit of the R&I function in each authority based on the outcome of the above in February 2009.

Strategic Procurement: At the August Joint Liaison Committee it was requested that further officer discussions took place on the future service delivery model for Strategic Procurement. These discussions are on-going but a final officer recommendation has been deferred until there is confirmation of the proposed service management of Transactional procurement (i.e. the Procure-to-Pay process) and CBS Supplies (the current thinking is that both of these functions are managed within a shared back office arrangement). The evaluation and recommendation is also dependent on the outcome of defining more precisely the role and remit of a potential strategic procurement hub operating across the sub region of Cheshire and Warrington.

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CHESHIRE EAST

Cabinet

Date of meeting: 7 October 2008
Report of: Joan Feenan – Director of Children’s Services
Title: **TRANSFORMING LEARNING COMMUNITIES (TLC) :
EMERGING ISSUES FROM LOCALITY REVIEW FOR
ALSAGER, CONGLETON, SANDBACH AND HOLMES
CHAPEL**

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to draw Members’ attention to the outcomes of the informal consultations held on the options identified by the Locality Review and the subsequent recommendations.

1.2 In accordance with Rule 13.1 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules, the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee has been consulted and has agreed that this item is urgent and is, therefore, exempt from the call-in procedure.

2.0 Decision Required

2.1 Members are asked to endorse the proposed actions by the County Council in respect of the Alsager, Congleton, Sandbach and Holmes Chapel TLC Review, following the recommendations made by Cheshire County Council’s School Planning Select Panel on the 1st September 2008 which are:

- To authorise statutory public consultation on the possible closure of Church Lawton Primary School with effect from September 2009;
- To authorise statutory public consultation on the reduction in the net capacity of Offley Primary School to 315 places located in a single building, and the alternative use of the premises of the former Offley Infant School as a centre for delivering 14-19 education for the locality to be investigated; the reduction in the net capacity of Sandbach Primary School to 105 places with the Children’s Centre for Sandbach and co-located Children’s Services in the released accommodation;
- To authorise to invite the Chester Diocesan Board of Education and the Governors of Chelford CE Primary School to develop proposals for the revision of the school’s net capacity to 60 by re-designation of the use of one classroom in such a way that future potential use

of the building for an expanded Chelford CE Primary School, should this become warranted, is not compromised;

- To submit to the Cheshire East Unitary Authority information relating to pupil numbers in the Holmes Chapel area together with the proposed means for reducing capacity at Holmes Chapel Primary School should this be warranted at a future date;
- To authorise consultations and to request officers to develop proposals in respect of the group of schools identified for potential Federations, as described below:

Chelford CE VC, Peover Superior Endowed, Lower Peover CE VA, Marton and District CE VA, Brereton CE VA, Smallwood CEVC, Astbury St Mary's CE VA, Scholar Green, Woodcocks' Well CE VC and Goostrey Community;

- To authorise statutory consultation as part of the admission arrangements for September 2010 in respect of changes in Published Admission Numbers:

School	Current Net Capacity	Proposed Net Capacity	Current PAN	Proposed PAN
Haslington Primary	329	280	50	40
Brereton CE	150	147	30	21
Sandbach Heath St John's	150	180	30	25
Marlfields Primary	180	210	30	30
Buglawton Primary	178	210	30	30
Astbury St Mary's CE	112	126	16	18
Scholar Green	210	180	30	25
Alsager Highfields	233	233	40	37
Smallwood CE	112	126	16	18
Woodcocks' Well CE	103	89	15	12
Goostrey Primary	182	209	26	30
Black Firs Primary	240	270	40	38
TOTAL	2179	2230	353	320

Note: these are changes needed to align net capacity and PAN in the light of current use of accommodation

- To authorise consultation as part of the admission arrangements for September 2010 on reduction in the published admission number for Cranberry Primary School from 45 to 30, and to ask officers to develop proposals for the use of the released former infant school building which retained it for use as a nursery and which enable the development of co-located Children's Services in such a way that future potential use of the building for an expanded Cranberry

Primary School, should this become warranted, is not compromised;

- To authorise consultation as part of the admission arrangements for September 2010 on the reduction in the published admission number for Daven Primary School from 60 to 30 to give a capacity of 210, with the released accommodation becoming available as a centre to support multi-agency working in the Congleton locality. There should be a review of the operation of primary school catchment areas in and around Congleton.

3.0 Financial Implications for Transition Costs

3.1 None.

4.0 Financial Implications 2009/10 and beyond

Revenue – Dedicated School Grant (DSG)

- 4.1 The proposal to close Church Lawton Primary School on September 1st 2009 would result in a DSG saving of approximately £58,000 in 2009-10 and an annual DSG saving of approximately £100,000 thereafter.

CAPITAL

- 4.2 There may be a need for capital expenditure in relation to adapting buildings for their future use in some of the options and this would need to be considered as part of the draft capital programme.

5.0 Risk Assessment

5.1 There are risks associated with further delay in proceeding with the TLC reviews to do with a failure on the part of the Local Authority to have in place mechanisms to manage the supply of school places. There are also implications to do with effective deployment of resources and Best Value if school place provision and pupil demand are not well matched.

5.2 This locality review was launched in November 2007 and the emerging proposals were shared with the communities in the locality over the summer term. Any delay in the commencement of the next stage of the process is likely to result in increased uncertainty in the locality and can lead to some schools becoming destabilised through parental anticipation of the outcomes.

6.0 Background

6.1 The Alsager, Congleton, Sandbach and Holmes Chapel (ACS&HC) Review

This locality review was launched in November 2007 through a Stakeholder Conference. Informal consultations on the emerging options were held in Alsager, Sandbach and Congleton in June/July.

- 6.2 The School Planning Select Panel paper attached, presented to members on the 1st September 2008 details the outcomes and the responses of the communities that took part in the informal consultation as part of the locality review.

7.0 Options

- 7.1 In light of the outcomes of the informal consultations, Members are invited to offer advice on whether to proceed to formal consultations on any or all of the options identified previously and to consider the possibility of amending the initial options in the light of representations made and the latest knowledge of projected pupil numbers presented in this report.

8.0 Reasons for Recommendation

- 8.1 To allow the County Council to continue to make progress with the Alsager, Congleton, Sandbach and Holmes Chapel (ACS&HC) TLC Review and the need to move to formal statutory consultation.

For further information:

Portfolio Holder: Councillor P Findlow

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Background Documents:

Documents are available for inspection at:

MEETING : THE SCHOOL PLANNING SELECT PANEL
DATE : 1 SEPTEMBER 2008

REPORT OF : The Principal Manager – Planning and Development
Contact : Bryan Slater, Room 422, County Hall, Chester
Officer Tel: 01244 973384
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TRANSFORMING LEARNING COMMUNITIES (TLC): REPORT OF THE OPTIONS IDENTIFIED BY THE LOCALITY REVIEW FOR ALSAGER, CONGLETON, SANDBACH AND HOLMES CHAPEL

INTRODUCTION

1 This Discussion Paper sets out the outcomes of the informal consultations held on the options identified by the Locality Review of this area and makes recommendations for further actions.

2 The Panel received a Discussion Paper on the emerging options for the Locality at its meeting on 2 June 2008. The Panel made recommendations to the Children's Services Executive that it authorised the announcement of a number of options, and hold informal consultations on them.

3 These recommendations were accepted by the Children's Services Executive on the 12 June 2008. The options for informal consultation were presented to meetings of Headteachers, Chairmen of Governing Bodies and other stakeholders on 25 June 2008. The Panel's recommendations, as adopted by the Children's Services Executive for consultation, are set out in **Appendix 1**. Parents of pupils and governors of all schools in the locality were advised of the options on 25 June and were invited to attend informal public "drop-in" sessions. These sessions took place on the 30 June in Alsager, on 1 July in Sandbach and on 2 July in Congleton.

4 A consultation document describing the emerging options, and seeking responses to them by the 5 August 2008, was issued. **Appendix 2** provides a summary of the feed-back obtained through the informal "drop-in" sessions and also summarises the issues raised in response forms, emails and letters about the options. The response forms, emails and letters will be available for inspection by Members in each of the Members Group Rooms during the week prior to the meeting of the Panel, and will also be available for reference during the course of the Panel Meeting.

5 Members are encouraged to read the feed-back documentation to gain an overview of the range of perspectives expressed and the nature of concerns raised. Members are asked to note particularly that the governing bodies of Sandbach Community Primary School, Church Lawton Primary School, Chelford CE Primary School, Holmes Chapel Primary School and Black Firs Primary School have all made formal responses to the consultation document. As part of their response, in almost all cases alternative options have been put forward. All these submissions are included as **Annexes to Appendix 2**.

6 The Panel is invited to make recommendations to the Children's Services Executive, which meets on the 9 September 2008 on whether to proceed to formal consultations on any or all of the options identified previously and to consider the possibility of amending the initial options in the light of representations made and the latest knowledge of projected pupil numbers presented in this report. The paper is being made available to the Cheshire East Cabinet, which meets on 8 September. Any advice from that body will be reported orally to the Children's Services Executive.

THE INFORMAL CONSULTATIONS

7 As in previous reviews, the announcement of options has resulted in a considerable amount of public interest. The review featured in a "phone-in" programme on Silk FM during which officers responded to calls from members of the public about the review and the options being consulted upon.

8 Both the Alsager and Sandbach "drop-in" sessions were extremely well attended by parents, staff, governors and other local people. By comparison, the drop-in session in Congleton was very quiet.

9 In total, over 250 letters, messages and response forms have been received, again mostly relating to the emerging options relating to Church Lawton Primary School and to Sandbach Community Primary School.

10 The feed-back on the informal consultation options obtained through the drop-in sessions and through the response to the consultation document are both summarised in **Appendix 2**.

UPDATED PUPIL FORECASTS

11 The paper received by the Panel in June was written using the projected pupil numbers derived from the January 2007 PLASC but also in the light of the then unconfirmed pupil projections based on the 2008 PLASC for individual schools, on which headteachers had had a chance to comment. That process has now been completed and has allowed the overall aggregate projections to be made and confirmed. The outcome is showing a slightly different picture for the locality as a whole, and for areas within it. Whereas the overall level of surplus places in the primary sector for the locality had been forecast to rise to 18.5% by 2012, that figure has now been revised downwards to a projection of 15.9% overall surplus places by the same time. Now that the final confirmed set of projections is available, the options which were the subject of informal consultation over the summer have necessarily been reviewed in the light of this revised information as well as in the light of the consultation feed-back. There appear to be implications, particularly for the proposals for Sandbach. These are discussed below.

DISCUSSIONS OF OPTIONS AND ASSOCIATED TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGES

(a) The Possible Closure of Church Lawton Primary School With Effect From 1 September 2009

12 The overwhelming majority of responses in relation to the possible closure of Church Lawton Primary School were opposed to the options. The main points made are summarised in **Appendix 2**. Respondents frequently made reference to the community aspect – that the school was the only location in the community for meetings and its removal would effectively leave Church Lawton bereft of any such

amenity. Frequent reference was also made to the perceived expertise which the school has developed in relation to children with special educational needs.

13 The Governors of Church Lawton Primary School have put forward an alternative proposal (see **Annex to Appendix 2**). The essential features of this proposal are

- to reduce the net capacity of the school to 75 children
- to use the remaining physical space in the school to house child care provision, a unit for children with special educational needs and a life long learning centre

14 The option as put forward attempted to meet the anticipated concerns of the local community about the absence of a school facility by considering the potential to relocate St Gabriel's Roman Catholic Primary School into the present Church Lawton premises. The Roman Catholic Diocese of Shrewsbury have confirmed that they do not wish this possibility to be pursued. There remains the alternative of the building being used to support the broader delivery of Children's Services in the Alsager locality, and it may be that the incoming Cheshire East Authority will see an alternative use for the building.

15 However, for the moment Cheshire is not currently looking to place a resourced school for SEN pupils in this locality. In the Alsager area there are 14 pupils with a statement of special educational needs and these pupils are currently being catered for within their local mainstream setting. Church Lawton Primary School has one pupil with a statement of special educational needs. The proposed unit which forms part of the Governor's alternative proposal does not therefore at this stage appear a viable proposition.

16 The proposal made by the Governors of Church Lawton to reduce the school's PAN to 75 does not sufficiently address the need identified by the review to remove surplus places in the rural area outside Alsager. Seven alternative primary schools are within 2 miles of Church Lawton Primary School, and just two of these – Rode Heath Primary and Scholar Green Primary – will have enough surplus places in the future for the projected number of pupils attending Church Lawton Primary. The latest forecasts show

	January 2008 actual		January 2010 forecast		January 2013 forecast	
	NOR	Surplus Places	NOR	Surplus Places	Nor	Surplus Places
Church Lawton	68	37	66	39	58	47
Rode Heath	157	53	158	52	159	51
Scholar Green	152	28	146	34	136	44

(this table assumes a reduction in net capacity at Scholar Green to 180)

Members will wish to take into account the strongly expressed views of the broad community about the impact of the loss of its school, but will also be aware of the stark nature of the picture painted by the above data.

The Panel may therefore wish to recommend that this option, but no longer containing the possible relocation of St Gabriel's Roman Catholic Primary School, be the subject of statutory public consultation.

(b) The possible location of Cranberry Primary School into one building, with a net capacity of 210

17 The responses received in relation to this option expressed concerns related to the possible future need for more places in Alsager town because of housing developments and changes to the use of the current premises of the Manchester Metropolitan University.

18 The most recent information on live births shows a continuing decline both in the wider area around Alsager and in the town itself. Housing completions have numbered about 45 per year over the last 10 years but this has not had any noticeable effect on the total number of pupils in the schooling system. The current Regional Spatial Strategy shows a continuing expectation of approximately 45 dwellings per annum because of restraints on development in Alsager related to the priority given to the regeneration of the nearby Potteries. There has been a recent change, however, in the expectation of dwellings resulting from the MMU site. This figure has doubled from 150 to 300, and at some future date this may generate as many as 50 pupils of school age. The most recent forecast data for Alsager shows only a very marginal increase in projected numbers of pupils by 2012 compared to the projection based on the January 2007 PLASC.

19 It is therefore suggested that the Panel may wish to recommend that the proposed reduction in net capacity at Cranberry Primary School go ahead, but that the nursery unit remain in place in the former infant school building and that the remaining premises be used to support broader developments in Children's Services in such a way that any future need to enlarge the working capacity of Cranberry Primary School be not compromised.

(c) The possible closure of Sandbach Community Primary School with effect from 1 September 2010

20 The potential closure of Sandbach Community Primary School has encountered considerable opposition, as described in **Appendix 2**. Key aspects of the objections are

- the importance of the school to its local community which is an area of relative deprivation
- the quality of support which the school provides to individual children
- the walking distance to the main alternative school (Offley Primary School)
- the perception that Sandbach Community Primary School children would not be welcomed by receiving schools
- the perception that the school performs very well for the children who attend it
- the view that the location of a Children's Centre in Sandbach would be more appropriate at Sandbach Community Primary School, and a 14-19 centre more appropriate at Offley Primary School.

In addition to the many letters, response forms and emails supporting the school a petition containing 956 signatures has also been received.

21 The Governing Body at Sandbach Community Primary School has made an extensive response to the consultation (**see Annex to Appendix 2**) in which it makes an alternative proposal. This is centred on the location of the Children's Centre at a still functioning Sandbach Community Primary School, with accommodation for 14-19 education located elsewhere. The same proposal is made in a responses by Sandbach Youth Council.

22 Previous pupil projections have indicated that a total PAN for the Sandbach area of 265, with 175 of these places being in Sandbach town itself, would be appropriate. This is the figure which would be reached if the current proposals went ahead. However, the most recent projections based on the January 2008 PLASC data show a slower decline in pupil numbers in Sandbach than had previously been expected. It now appears that we can expect at least five more pupils per primary age-group than previously. A total PAN for Sandbach town of 175 would have left 5.7% spare capacity in the town's schools according to previous projections. However, were this figure now to be achieved the projection is that it would leave only 1.1% of spare places in the town in total. This means in practice that the present option could not go ahead with any degree of confidence that sufficient pupil places would then be available in Sandbach town itself should actual pupil numbers vary slightly from current projections.

23 The revised forecasts imply that a total PAN for the primary schools in Sandbach town should be at least 185, giving a forecast surplus capacity of 6.4%. This could be achieved in one of two ways.

Alternative 1

- The closure of Sandbach Community Primary
- The retention of 420 places at Offley Primary
- The Children's Centre would need to be located in the premises of the former Sandbach Community Primary, together with retained nursery and co-located Children's Services

Alternative 2

- The retention of Sandbach Community Primary with 105 places
- Offley Primary becoming 315 places in a single building
- The Children's Centre could be located at Sandbach Community Primary with co-located Children's Services
- The remaining building at Offley Primary could be considered for development as a 14-19 centre

24 An obvious disadvantage of Alternative 1 is that it provides no certain location for the development of 14-19 education, since priority needs to be given to establishing a Children's Centre and to developing co-located Children's Services. Support for 14-19 education remains an important part of the TLC review in the locality as a whole. Alternative 2 has the advantage of very closely matching projected pupil numbers for both Sandbach Community Primary and for Offley Primary and would offer the potential for expanding the size of Offley Primary to the 350 figure envisaged in the current proposal, should future numbers in Sandbach require this.

25 Alternative 2 has the essential features of the alternative proposal put forward by the Governors of Sandbach Community Primary. It should be considered now as an alternative option for consultation principally because of the need to ensure an adequate supply of school places in the town in the light of the most recent projections of pupil numbers.

26 There is no doubt that Sandbach Community Primary serves an area of social need. Were it to be retained as what would be a small primary school, this would be consistent with Cheshire's emerging approach to small primary schools generally. The ranking of the super output area which contains the school in terms of the Index of Multiple Deprivation places it just outside the DCSF's definition of "disadvantaged"

using in the formulation of Children's Centre policy. Nevertheless it is in the 310 most disadvantaged areas nationally.

27 Sandbach Community Primary was made subject to special measures following an Ofsted inspection in June 2002, and was removed from that category two years later. A further inspection in November 2005 confirmed it "a good school with many strengths". The most recently available Contextual Value Added (CVA) data relates to 2007, and shows a decline from 2006, placing the school at the 81st percentile nationally. Attainment at Key Stage 1 for 2007 also shows a decline from the previous year and is significantly lower than the national average.

28 Should Alternative 2 be pursued, Members will wish to be assured that the quality of education provided to children at a retained Sandbach Community Primary could be guaranteed in the long term, and that therefore collaborative arrangements involving other local primary schools, possibly working towards federation, would be an important element of any such viable option.

29 Considerable comment has been received about the implications of closure of Sandbach Community Primary for the travel arrangements of children to alternative schools, principally Offley Primary. Currently 75% of children walk to Sandbach Community Primary – a much higher percentage than the Cheshire average of about 52% for primary aged children. The School Travel Team Manager has reviewed the route between the school and Offley Primary, which is considered generally safe, however the additional walking distance is just over 1km which may cause difficulty for some parents. Offley Primary have three walking buses which have been risk assessed, two of which operate currently. Should Sandbach Community Primary close, a further walking bus from the school, or a minibus driven by volunteers are possible means of assistance.

30 Both alternatives would need to be the subject of early feasibility studies of the proposed uses of the buildings and the associated capital input required, and neither could be given effect until September 2010 because of the size of existing pupil cohorts.

31 Members may wish to recommend the adoption of one, or potentially both, of the two alternatives above as a basis for formal consultation.

(d) The possible reduction in size of Daven Primary School to give a net capacity of 210

32 No responses have been received in relation to this proposal and it may be therefore that Members of the Panel will wish to recommend that it go forward for formal consultation unamended.

(e) The possible re-designation of part of the accommodation of Chelford CE Primary School to give a net capacity of 60

33 The governors of Chelford CE Primary School have made an alternative proposal that the net capacity be reduced to 77 (**see Annex to Appendix 2**). However, this would be extremely difficult to achieve in physical terms, since it is necessary to adapt the use of the accommodation to match the then calculated net capacity. It is therefore suggested that Members may wish to continue formal consultation around the present proposal to remove from the school's use one classroom, giving a revised net capacity of 60.

- (f) **The possible removal of temporary accommodation from the site of Holmes Chapel Primary School and a reduction in the school's net capacity and PAN at a future date should this become warranted.**

34 The response of the governing body of Holmes Chapel Primary School is included in **Annex to Appendix 2**. Revised pupil forecasts do not at this stage make the retention of this possibility necessary, and it is therefore suggested that Members may wish to recommend that the response of the governing body be noted and that this possible option for future change be remitted to the new Cheshire East Council.

- (g) **The possible development, in collaboration with Governing Bodies and the Church of England Diocese of Federated groupings of the following schools**

Chelford CE VC, Peover Superior Endowed, Lower Peover CE VA, Marton and District CE VA, Brereton CE VA, Smallwood CE VC, Astbury St Mary CE VA, Scholar Green, Woodcocks Well CE VC and Goostrey Community

35 This proposal has resulted in a very small amount of correspondence which has either sought clarification about the nature of what might take place, or has pointed to practical difficulties involved in federated working. An initial meeting between officers and headteachers has taken place to answer some specific Federation questions and while there has been no adverse reaction as such, some headteachers have confused the arrangements that would operate under Federation with collaborative arrangements such as those currently taking place through Education Improvement Partnerships.

36 The effective development of practical Federated arrangements between groupings of primary schools is seen as an important element in delivering TLC outcomes. Discussion with all interested parties as envisaged through the options announcement does need to continue, and Members may wish to recommend that the Local Authority's input to these discussions be strengthened by the development by officers of some broad long-term expected outcomes (in terms of the management of surplus places and in terms of the quality of curriculum delivery, for the group of schools identified through the review). These broad expectations could then be used as the means by which continued monitoring of the developing federated arrangements takes place over the coming months.

37 Should the results of such monitoring warrant it, Members may also want to recommend that officers be asked to develop alternative proposals for school amalgamations should it appear that the Federation approach is not likely to achieve the required outcomes, and to remit the matter at that point to the Cheshire East authority for further consideration.

- (h) **Proposals to change published admission numbers**

38 The only proposal which has generated a significant response has been that for Black Firs Primary School. It is recognised that the net capacity calculation for the premises occupied by the school, given their usage, is somewhat problematical. The school has suggested that a net capacity of 270 and a revised PAN of 38 be adopted. It is recommended that this change be agreed. Members may wish to recommend the revised proposed changes be the subject of consultation as part of the admission arrangements for September 2010.

(i) Financial implications

39 The majority of the revised options put forward in this paper have minimal financial effect to those previously reported. However the option to retain Sandbach Community Primary School does mean that the anticipated revenue formula savings of £112,000 on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) will not be achieved.

(i) Transformational Change

40 The recommendations made below contain key opportunities as discussed here and in previous reports, to make transformation changes in the delivery of Children's Services. These are set out below

Opportunities for Transformational change associated with Options	
Location	Nature of development
Church Lawton Primary	Premises available for future use by Cheshire East authority
Cranberry Primary Alsager	Second building available to develop co-located Children's Services
Sandbach Community Primary/ Offley Primary	Children's Centre and co-located services at Sandbach Primary
Alternative 1	
Alternative 2	Children's Centre and co-located services at Sandbach Primary Building at Offley available to develop 14-19
Daven Primary/Marlfields Primary Congleton	Co-located Children's Services/Inclusion provision at Daven/Marlfields
Chelford Primary	Co-located Children's Services in re-designated accommodation

RECOMMENDED:

That the School Planning Select Panel recommends the Lead Member for Children's Services

1 to authorise statutory public consultation on the possible closure of Church Lawton Primary School with effect from September 2009;

2 to authorise statutory public consultation on

either:

2a the closure of Sandbach Primary School with effect from September 2010, with the released school building being used to accommodate a Children's Centre for Sandbach together with co-located Children's Services

or:

- 2b** the reduction in the net capacity of Offley Primary School to 315 places located in a single building, and the alternative use of the premises of the former Offley Infant School as a centre for delivering 14-19 education for the locality to be investigated; the reduction in the net capacity of Sandbach Primary School to 105 places with the Children's Centre for Sandbach and co-located Children's Services in the released accommodation.

Alternatively:

- 2c** Members may wish both options to be the subject of statutory public consultation.
- 3** To invite the Chester Diocesan Board of Education and the Governors of Chelford CE Primary School to develop proposals for the revision of the school's net capacity to 60 by re-designation of the use of one classroom.
- 4** To submit to the Cheshire East Unitary Authority information relating to pupil numbers in the Holmes Chapel area together with the proposed means for reducing capacity at Holmes Chapel Primary School should this be warranted at a future date.
- 5** To authorise consultations and to request officers to develop proposals in respect of the group of schools identified for potential Federations, as described above.
- 6** To authorise statutory consultation as part of the admission arrangements for September 2010 in respect of the list of schools at paragraph 7 of Appendix 1, with the amendment in respect of Black Firs Primary School mentioned above.
- 7** To authorise consultation as part of the admission arrangements for September 2010 on reduction in the published admission number for Cranberry Primary School from 45 to 30, and to ask officers to develop proposals for the use of the released former infant school building which retained it for use as a nursery and which enable the development of co-located Children's Services in such a way that the future potential use of the building for an expanded Cranberry Primary School, should this become warranted, is not compromised.

This report has been prepared in accordance with the Checklist for Members Reports and relevant matters have been included.

Local Members

Cllr M Asquith, Cllr R Fletcher, Cllr S Wilkinson, Cllr K Oliver, Cllr P Mason, Cllr W Wolstencroft, Cllr D Brickhill, Cllr N Price, Cllr R Giltrap

**RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES EXECUTIVE
ON 12 JUNE 2008**

**TRANSFORMING LEARNING COMMUNITIES (TLC): REPORT ON THE OPTIONS
IDENTIFIED BY THE LOCALITY REVIEW FOR ALSAGER, CONGLETON,
SANDBACH AND HOLMES CHAPEL**

RECOMMENDED:

That the Lead Member for Children's Services approves the recommendations set out below on the emerging options for the Transforming Learning Communities Locality Review for Alsager, Congleton, Sandbach and Holmes Chapel, and on holding informal consultations in early July 2008 on these options:

- 1 the closure of Church Lawton Primary School with effect from 1 September 2009 or 2010, with the school building being used either to re-house St Gabriel's RC Primary School or to support the delivery of broader Children's Services in the Alsager locality; and**
- 2 the closure of Sandbach Primary School with effect from 1 September 2010, with the released school building becoming a shared resource for the delivery of 14-19 education in the locality; and**
- 3 the reduction in size of Daven Primary School with effect from 1 September 2009 or 2010, to give a capacity of 210 and a PAN of 30, with the released accommodation becoming available as a centre to support multi-agency working in the Congleton locality and as a base for key stage 4 inclusion work in the town. A further possibility may be support for the delivery of special educational needs. There should be a review of the operation of primary school catchment areas in and around Congleton; and**
- 4 the re-designation of part of the accommodation of Chelford CE Primary School in consultation with the School Governors and the revision of the school's Net Capacity and PAN with effect from September 2009; and**
- 5 the removal of temporary accommodation from the site of Holmes Chapel Primary School and a reduction of the school's Net Capacity and PAN at a future date should this become warranted; and**
- 6 the development, in collaboration with Governing bodies and the Church of England Diocese of Federated Groupings of the schools set out in the Appendix; and**
- 7 the proposals in below in respect of changes in Published Admission Numbers, to go forward for consultation as part of the Admission Arrangements for September 2010; and**

School	Current Net Capacity	Proposed Net Capacity	Current PAN	Proposed PAN
Haslington Primary	329	280	50	40
Brereton CE	150	147	30	21
Sandbach Heath St Johns	150	180	30	25
Marlfields Primary	180	210	30	30
Buglawton Primary	178	210	30	30
Astbury St Mary CE	112	126	16	18
Scholar Green	210	180	30	25
Alsager Highfields	233	233	40	37
Smallwood CE	112	126	16	18
Woodcocks' Well CE	103	89	15	12
Goostrey Primary	182	209	26	30
Black Firs Primary	240	240	40	34
TOTAL	2179	2230	353	320

8 the proposals below in respect of reductions in Net Capacities at schools with surplus capacity to be further investigated.

School	Current NC	Proposed NC	Comment
Chelford CE	90	60	Re-designation of 1 classroom
Offley Primary	420	350	Use of 1 site
Cranberry Primary	315	210	Use of 1 site
TOTAL	825	620	

TRANSFORMING LEARNING COMMUNITIES (TLC): REPORT ON THE OPTIONS IDENTIFIED BY THE LOCALITY REVIEW FOR ALSAGER, CONGLETON, SANDBACH AND HOLMES CHAPEL: ISSUES RAISED AT THE INFORMAL CONSULTATION SESSION AND IN CORRESPONDENCE

INTRODUCTION

The following summarises the main points which have been raised in relation to each option. Members are encouraged to read the feedback documentation to see the range of individual perspectives expressed. This will be available for inspection by Members in each of the Members group rooms in the week prior to the Panel Meeting and also at the Panel Meeting itself.

Where schools have provided submissions setting out their views and alternative suggestions, these are included as Annexes to this Appendix.

POSSIBLE CLOSURES OF SCHOOLS

Church Lawton Primary School

95 forms, 75 letters/e-mails and a petition with 615 signatures were received. These were overwhelmingly opposed to the proposal to close the school. Points which were frequently made were

- the importance of retaining a school for the local community
- a caring ethos of the school
- the disruptive effect of closure on children currently attending the school
- the quality of the teaching and overall education provided at the school
- the need to retain small village schools
- the favourable pupil-teacher ratio at the school
- the belief that its location made Church Lawton a rural school even though it was not officially so classified
- the possibility that numbers at the school might recover in the future
- the individual attention which children perceive and the wide range of after school activities are available
- the importance of the existence of a school in the village specifically to senior citizens for their meetings and for the holding of the village annual fair

Less frequently mentioned points were

- the detrimental environmental effects of children being taken to alternative schools by car
- the inappropriateness of closing a school for financial/economic reasons
- the reduction in parental choice should the school close
- the school's particular expertise with children who had special educational needs

The range of respondents to the consultation was extremely wide: parents, grandparents, and other relatives, ex-pupils, ex-teachers as well as some of the current pupils, all were involved. In some cases respondents made the point that they had moved into the area specifically in order to access the kind of education available at Church Lawton Primary School.

The drop-in session at Alsager Civic Centre on 30 June was very well attended, and again all the above points were made during the evening together with others listed in the available documentation. 4 letters/e-mails and 1 form referred to the possible relocation of St Gabriel's RC Primary School, and this was also raised at the drop-in centre. All of these comments were opposed to this possibility.

SANDBACH COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL

7 forms, 47 letters/e-mails and 2 petitions, one with 956 signatures and one with 180 signatures were received. These were overwhelmingly opposed to the possible closure of the school. Points which were frequently made were

- the school is at the heart of the vulnerable community
- the school provides high quality support for vulnerable children especially regarding emotional aspects of learning
- the school would be a better location for the Children's Centre for Sandbach than Offley Primary School

Other points, made less frequently were

- the school is ideally located for developing integrated service delivery around a vulnerable community
- Offley Primary School would be a better location for a 14-19 centre than Sandbach Primary School as it is closer to main transport links
- new housing is planned for the area served by the school
- concerns about the safety of the walking route to the alternative school at Offley
- the threat to the Wesley Avenue Playgroup if a children's centre were to be located at Offley Primary School

Respondents were parents, children at the school, a Tenants Association and the Wesley Avenue Playgroup, amongst others.

The drop-in session at Sandbach Town Hall on Tuesday 1 July was extremely well attended by parents and children from both Sandbach Community Primary School and Offley Primary School. Both communities expressed their opposition to the proposals, making all of the above points together with others summarised in the documentation.

POSSIBLE REDUCTIONS IN THE SIZE OF SCHOOLS

Daven Primary School, Congleton

No responses were received concerning the proposal.

Chelford CE Primary School

One email – concerning a technical aspect of the proposal – was received from the Diocese of Chester. A letter was also received from the Governing Body of Chelford CE Primary School in which an alternative proposal of a reduction in net capacity at the school to 77 is made. This is reproduced in the Annex.

Offley Primary School, Sandbach

No correspondence was received in relation to the proposal to reduce net capacity to 350 pupils. However, a number of parents of children attending Offley Primary

School attended the drop-in session at Sandbach Town Hall on 1 July. The points which they made are summarised in the documentation. Key concerns were

- that siblings of children currently attending school could not obtain a place there if the PAN is reduced
- the capacity of the school to take children from a closing Sandbach Community Primary School

Cranberry Primary School, Alsager

1 letter was received, from the Chair of the Interim Governing Body. This asked that future potential housing developments in Alsager be taken into account when considering the proposal to reduce the net capacity at Cranberry Primary School. The same request was made by parents attending the drop-in session on 30 June, as summarised in the documentation.

Holmes Chapel Primary School

A total of 3 letters/e-mails were received, including a letter from the Governing Body which urges that ongoing planning issues be given further consideration before any final decision is made.

Hermitage Primary School

Although there was no proposal to make changes at Hermitage, 2 letters were received supporting the retention of the current planned admission number.

Black Firs Primary School

A total of 3 letters/e-mails were received including a letter from the Governing Body of the school which is reproduced in the Annexe. This proposes a net capacity of 270 and a revised PAN of 38.

3 parents of children attending Black Firs were present at the drop-in session on 2 July and expressed concerns about the proposed reductions in the school's PAN. Points made are summarised in the documentation.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF FEDERATED GROUPINGS OF SCHOOLS

A total of 3 feedback forms/letters/e-mails were received. These either sought clarification about the nature of what might take place or have pointed to practical difficulties involved in federated working.

**Learning for the 21st century in the
Alsager, Congleton, Sandbach and
Haslington locality**

Sandbach primary schools:

**A response to Cheshire County Council
and alternative proposals for
primary schools in Sandbach**

July 2008

Prepared by Governors at Sandbach Community Primary School

Introduction

The educational community within Sandbach fully accepts the need for a review of school provision. A reduction in the projected number of surplus places is an inevitable consequence of that review. Decisions about the location of the Children's Centre and the use of surplus capacity also need to emerge as an outcome of this process. However we do not accept that the 'emerging options' for Sandbach in Cheshire County Council's June 2008 document are the best way forward. There is no evidence in the June 2008 document that the needs of children have been adequately considered in drawing up the proposals. Principle 5 of Cheshire County Council's TLC review process states that special protection and support will be given to vulnerable communities, rather than taking a simplistic view of school closure. When the needs of vulnerable children are carefully set out and properly considered, it is clear that the proposals have many serious shortfalls.

Projections for intake to Sandbach Community Primary School

In many towns in the UK, school intakes vary considerably over a period of time. School staffing changes, school reputations fluctuate, parental preferences change, housing developments change the local demographic, and so on. These and other factors can lead to major changes in school populations over short periods of time. For this reason any projection of future intakes to primary schools can only be tentative. On their own they do not provide a secure foundation on which to base decisions about school closures.

The proposal to close Sandbach Community Primary School appears to be based on the forecast for the percentage (not number) of surplus places in 2012 and the number of children who would be affected by that closure. No evidence of any other criteria being used is put forward. Clearly it is important to use accurate figures for these forecasts. We believe that the figure for Sandbach Community Primary School will be seriously inaccurate, based on the number of children known to be joining the school in September 2008. The school came out of special measures in June 2004, followed by two years of unsecured leadership when the headteacher was seconded out. The school now has secured leadership and is increasing admissions into Reception, suggesting that the trend used to make the current projection has altered.

We look forward to receiving the revised forecasts for the Sandbach and Haslington primary schools early in the autumn term. It will of course be helpful for Cheshire County Council to publish the forecasts for enrolment and surplus places for **all** the primary schools in Sandbach and Haslington, unlike the partial forecasts in the June 2008 document.

In itself the location of a Children's Centre would not be sufficient justification for keeping a school open. However Cheshire County Council does not appear to have taken into account the impact that the location of a Children's Centre would have on a school's intake. Those parents who have most contact with the Children's Centre will inevitably find that there are advantages in their children attending the school where the Children's Centre is located. This will have an impact on admissions to the school, and therefore on the projected number of surplus places. We see no evidence that the TLC review has taken this factor into account.

A Sainsbury's Homebase store will soon open, and new houses will be built, on the

parcel of land between Crewe Road and the A534, opposite Waitrose supermarket. This will generate an obvious need for new pedestrian crossings to ensure ready access to the town, especially across the busy A534. At present there are children in the catchment area for Sandbach Community Primary School who are isolated from the school by the latest section of the A534. This road is extremely busy, especially during the time of children going to and returning from school. It is not a safe road to cross on foot. We will be pressing for better pedestrian crossing arrangements in this area, which will improve access and make it more feasible for some children in the catchment area for Sandbach Community Primary School to attend the school.

The impact of closure of Sandbach Community Primary School

It was noted above that the needs of children should be paramount in making decisions about schooling. Currently Sandbach Community Primary School serves a community with a relatively high proportion of vulnerable and disadvantaged children. As a consequence the staff there have built up expertise in a wide range of aspects of education which are not typical of the other primary schools in Sandbach. These include multi-agency working, inclusion, behaviour management, Special Educational Needs and parenting support. The school has made a commitment to providing a learning mentor from its own budget and has made a Nurture Room available for both children and parents.

The school currently meets the **FULL** Extended School core offer and is particularly strong in the following areas:

- Swift and easy referral – evidence for this can be obtained through consulting the school nurses' team, Speech and Language Service, CAMHS, ADHD team, Anti-social Behaviour Co-ordinator, Social Care (particularly Family Workers at Sandbach Family Centre), LA Safeguarding Team and Police (including local PCSOs). The school currently works with each of these services to support a number of vulnerable children and their families.
- Parenting Support – the school delivers parenting classes, co-facilitated by the school's learning mentor and Cheshire Family Learning using Share Plus materials. The school's learning mentor is a trained parenting course facilitator. The school has recently run a course for the EIP; background to this can be obtained from the Locality Extended Schools Manager, Roger Billinge.

The school meets the requirement in the Cheshire Children and Young Person Plan 06-09 to implement Common Assessment Framework, to shift the focus of services from dealing with the consequences of problems in children's lives to preventing things from going wrong in the first place. The school has two staff trained to use the CAF. One CAF is in place and a second is being completed. Staff at the school act as the Lead Professional. The use of the common assessment framework has strengthened the school's work with other agencies and specialist support services.

This expertise will be lost if the school is closed and the children redistributed to other local primary schools. **We see no evidence that the question of whether their needs will be met through being redistributed to other primary schools has been considered as part of the TLC review.** The Headteachers from both Sandbach high schools are quite explicit in stating that this will not be in their

schools' best interests, and that children who are currently managed very effectively in their primary years are more likely to become disaffected or unable to cope in the secondary school. Since parents from Sandbach Community Primary School tend to be less mobile than those from other primary schools in Sandbach, access to these other schools may not be easy and problems with children's attendance are therefore likely to increase.

Relocation of the maintained nursery at Sandbach Community Primary School is also undesirable. Many of the parents of children at the nursery do not have their own transport, and would not find it easy for their children to attend a nursery at Offley Primary School. The likely consequence is that the number of children attending a nursery from the catchment area for Sandbach Community Primary School will decrease, leading to vulnerable children being further disadvantaged.

Location of the Children's Centre

It is important to separate the issue of the location of the Children's Centre from the question of potential school closure.

Co-location of the Children's Centre in a primary school is an advantage, if the relevant criteria are met, but this is not essential. Local authorities are charged with the duty of reaching the most disadvantaged families and children through Children's Centres, and the criteria for determining the location of the Children's Centre are clear and explicit. **These criteria would not be met by locating the Children's Centre at Offley Primary School.** Local authority officers confirm this. The proposal put forward in the June 2008 document, that the Children's Centre be located at Offley Primary School, is therefore not a viable proposal. **The only primary school in Sandbach where the criteria for locating the Children's Centre can be met is Sandbach Community Primary School.** Again, local authority officers confirm this. Some of the reasons for this are set out below.

- The SureStart Children's Centres Planning and Performance Management Guidance states that Children's Centres must reach the most vulnerable and disadvantaged families at greatest risk of social exclusion. Within Sandbach the most vulnerable and disadvantaged families live within pram-pushing distance of Sandbach Community Primary School. Evidence to support this includes the school's relatively high percentage of SEN and Free School Meals, compared to other schools in the locality. Headteachers from all the schools in the Sandbach and Haslington EIP have informed the Lead Officer and Ric Turnock of their view, that the most vulnerable and needy families are those in the catchment of Sandbach Community Primary School.
- The Children's Centre must reach the most excluded groups who are most at risk of achieving poor outcomes. Many families attending Sandbach Community Primary School belong to those excluded groups, i.e. lone parents, parents with a learning difficulty or mental health problem, those experiencing domestic violence or misusing drugs, families of offenders, and so on. Similarly Children's Centres are expected to offer strong outreach and home visiting. Families must be sought out and offered services. Being located within the community where many of these excluded groups live will enable this to happen more readily.

- The SureStart Children's Centres Planning and Performance Management Guidance strongly encourages the continuing use of maintained nurseries as a base for the development of Children's Centres, when they are already located in the most disadvantaged areas. Sandbach Community Primary School is the only school in Sandbach and Haslington with a maintained nursery, and it is located in the most disadvantaged area.
- The SureStart Children's Centres Planning and Performance Management Guidance advises local authorities to consider opportunities to co-locate children's centres with primary schools, and offer integrated care and learning from a single setting. Sandbach Community Primary School is a natural focus for the most disadvantaged community. This co-location would improve transition arrangements for children starting school. The school already exemplifies good practice in extended school and integrated services. This could be built on, in accordance with DCSF guidance that Children's Centres and integrated services should be built on current good practice rather than starting from scratch.
- In terms of deprivation, families in the catchment of Sandbach Community Primary School are comparable to the 30% most deprived areas. There is an expectation from DCSF that they should receive a similar range and intensity of services as centres in disadvantaged areas. If the school is closed, children will be redistributed to a number of other schools, making it even more difficult to achieve this than if children were in the location of the Children's Centre.
- Locating the Children's Centre in a more affluent area is inappropriate. Evidence from SureStart's national evaluation indicates that the most vulnerable can be prevented from accessing Centres if they are dominated by 'cliques' from more advantaged groups. The location proposed in the June 2008 document is in a relatively affluent area. This is likely to present barriers to access which would reduce the effectiveness of the local programme.
- Local authorities now have a statutory duty to work with NHS and Jobcentre Plus partners. Sandbach Community Primary School is ideally located to work closely with Ashfields Health Centre. Families in the school's catchment are those who would benefit most from the service of Jobcentre Plus, to improve the outcomes for the most disadvantaged children and reduce inequalities in outcomes.

Sandbach Community Primary School therefore has the key components to build on to develop a high performing and effective Children's Centre, such as good provision of extended and integrated services, a good track record of improving outcomes for children and their families, a maintained nursery, a strong inclusive and socially welcoming ethos, good partnership working within the EIP, and current use of CAF.

Guidance from central government about the location of SureStart Children's Centres is clear. Location of the Children's Centre at Offley Primary School would not be consistent with this guidance and would appear to put the local authority in breach of its statutory duty. Although location of the Children's Centre at Offley Primary School is described in the June 2008 document as an 'emerging option', it is not a credible option. When setting up a SureStart Children's Centre the local authority is **required** to consult key partners and relevant groups, and to locate the

Children's Centre in the area of most significant disadvantage. The only acceptable option is to locate the Children's Centre in the immediate vicinity of Sandbach Community Primary School. This could be co-located within Sandbach Community Primary School. Alternatively, if Sandbach Community Primary School were to close, the local authority will need to find suitable premises in the immediate vicinity of Sandbach Community Primary School.

Alternative proposals

- All primary schools in Sandbach to remain open
- Location of Offley Primary School into a single building
- Adjustment of current PAN where necessary, to ensure that all schools are viable and have manageable admission numbers
- Use of surplus capacity in primary schools, as set out below:

1. A 14-19 Education Centre

Currently there is no agreement amongst the relevant high schools that there is any need for a 14-19 Education Centre, or where it should be located. However, if a 14-19 Education Centre is to be provided in the borough, then Offley Primary School would provide a location where traffic from schools to the east of Sandbach could reach it, without having to go through the town centre. The premises required would become available when the location of Offley Primary School into a single building is complete.

2. A Children's Centre

Premises can be made available for the location of a Children's Centre at Sandbach Community Primary School, without any requirement for extensive building work. The advantages of locating the Children's Centre here are set out above.

3. EIP shared provision

There is already a need for some shared provision within the Sandbach EIP, such as Speech & Language Therapy, Educational Welfare provision and Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services. Currently the EIP within Sandbach is viewed as functioning well. The desire within the EIP is to increase the amount of work across the EIP through collaborative arrangements requiring shared provision, and so enable the needs of children to be met more effectively. Clearly shared provision requires some sort of base from which to operate. This could be made available in any of the Sandbach primary schools with surplus capacity, and would not all have to be in a single location.

4. Early years provision

The June 2008 document identifies a need for an increase in free early years education places for 3 and 4 year olds in Sandbach. Future developments in Sandbach, including new housing, the development of a Science Park and the location of the new East Cheshire Council Offices at Westfields, are likely to increase this demand. Additional early years provision could be made available in any of the Sandbach primary schools with surplus capacity, and would not all have to be in a single location. [It is worth noting that the closure of Sandbach Community Primary School will actually reduce the amount of early years provision, even if the maintained nursery in the school is relocated].

Democratic accountability

At present Cheshire County Council officers are charged with making decisions about schooling through the TLC review. We respect the integrity of those officers involved in making difficult decisions. However Cheshire County Council will be dissolved in April 2009, and its officers will have no further responsibility for their actions. From April 2009 nobody will be accountable for decisions made by Cheshire County Council.

By contrast, the new East Cheshire Council will be accountable for decisions which they have not made. Recent developments in Bollington indicate clearly that the two authorities will not necessarily come to the same conclusions about possible school closures in East Cheshire.

It would be **entirely undemocratic** for Cheshire County Council to go ahead with decisions about school closures before April 2009. The newly elected, democratically accountable officers at East Cheshire Council are the only ones who should make this decision.

Some local authority officers give freely of their time to serve as school governors. This provides a valuable service to the community, but inevitably creates the possibility of a conflict of interest when difficult decisions are being made about the future of schooling in Sandbach. We would welcome an assurance from Cheshire County Council's lead officer for TLC, that nobody with a personal interest in the proposals for schooling in Sandbach has been or will be involved in helping to construct those proposals.

**ANNEXE
To Appendix 2**

Alternative Proposal for Church Lawton Primary School

Introduction

The Transforming Learning Communities review for the Alsager area contained an emerging option for the possible closure of Church Lawton Primary School. This option is not suitable for the children, their families and the local community of Church Lawton, or indeed educational provision in the wider community of the east of Cheshire.

It is therefore important to give serious consideration to alternative options for the future of Church Lawton Primary School. The Governors, Friends of the School (PTA) and Parents have prepared these alternative options for your consideration.

Strengths of Church Lawton Primary School

The ethos of Church Lawton Primary School is unique in that it offers parents a real choice in the style of education by offering individual learning plans and a very rounded education for all children. The school has a caring and supportive atmosphere. This has been recognised by OFSTED:

- “...a warm and caring atmosphere.”
- “pupils enjoy their time at school and they form good quality relationships with each other and adults.”
- “(pupils) behave well and say that they find lessons interesting.”

Church Lawton achieves positive outcomes for children as evidenced by Contextual Valued Added (CVA) scores.

The School is at the heart of a rural community and has significant presence in this community.

The school building is the best place in Church Lawton for the local Senior Citizens’ Club to meet. This is a vital resource for them. The school is the home of the Village Fete and the local area Football Tournament. The children from the school also regularly visit Lawton Manor Nursing Home, where they interact with the elderly residents, singing and talking.

Church Lawton Primary School’s building is in excellent condition and in a very pleasant location. Therefore the pupils, their families and the local community feel that it promotes learning in a safe and welcoming environment. This is a priority for the East Cheshire Authority Cabinet as indicated in their minutes of 17th July, 2008 as outlined in Appendix B.

The options developed below aim to build upon these strengths.

The local demographic

1a. Village Demographics.

We are told that there are many older people living in Church Lawton currently holding onto housing stock. We know many families are waiting to try and get into Church Lawton but housing is not available. We know that many such families have emailed and written to the consultation process, to confirm this. The ageing demographic is going to change soon and the need for a school in Church Lawton will become even more crucial. The simple trends model used to calculate the 2012 figures will not accurately demonstrate this at individual school level.

1b. New Build Projects.

There are new build projects proposed in the Church Lawton area and although these are not in the Local Development Plan, they are extremely likely to go ahead. This would mean a further:

160 houses at present Cardway Cartons site;
300 houses at present Twyford's factory site.

The closest and obvious place for children from these developments is Church Lawton Primary School, as the build is within the Church Lawton area.

1c. Local Demographic Considerations

In the East Cheshire Authority Cabinet Meeting minutes of the 17th July, 2008 in discussing the TLC process it was proposed that flexibility must be maintained within the Authority's school structure. This should support parental choice and allow the Authority the ability to react to changing birth rates and demographic changes currently taking place. The full details can be seen on Page 29 paragraph 6 of the minutes, an extract is attached in Appendix B.

Proposal – Reduction in Net Capacity

The information outlined above indicates that moving to a potential scenario where Church Lawton Primary School no longer functions as a school is not a desirable outcome. This outcome would not be in the best interests of the current school or wider community nor would it provide the flexibility in school places that the new Cheshire East authority requires. Consequently it is proposed to reduce the Net Capacity to 75 children from 2009 intake.

We believe with continued pro-active leadership and diligent work promoting the school, a significant improvement would occur in the uptake of places at all key stages. A new website and prospectus have been under development since January 2008 as this has not been seen as a priority in the past.

This will mean that there will need to be plans for the use of the available space. We have outlined three possible options below.

2. Other Usage of Available Space

Reducing the Net Capacity will mean physical space will become available in the school. The school is working on the following proposals for its use:

2a. The Extended Schools Agenda

There is an ongoing dialogue with a third party local Child Care Provider to transfer the nursery to run within the school. We expect this to move to finalised stages, and to be operational, by September 2009.

Part of this proposal is for the same provider to deliver full wrap around care, from 8am to 6pm. They will also offer holiday clubs. This will be operational by January 2009.

2b. A Unit for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN)

The data attached in Appendix A, based upon the PLASC return for 2007, suggests that there is a real need in the Alsager area for SEN provision and additional Learning Support. The inclusive ethos of Church Lawton Primary School and its physical environment make the school the perfect location to develop such a specialist resource provision. Church Lawton Primary School has an excellent track record in meeting the needs of all children especially those with additional needs. This is evidenced by the high CVA scores that indicate the school's success at adding value.

At present in Cheshire there are 14 special schools. When the Cheshire authority divides into two unitary authorities then East Cheshire will only have 4 special schools in situ. In the Minutes of the East Cheshire Authority Cabinet Meeting of the 17th July, 2008 special reference was made to this fact and that special attention must be given to ensuring such facilities are made available. Details of this can be found in page 28, paragraphs 1 and 2 (again extracted and attached in Appendix B).

With such a SEN requirement established and with the Cheshire County Council's SEN policy focusing on improving provision by facilitating inclusion in mainstream schools, it would make sense to build upon Church Lawton Primary School's acknowledged skills in this area.

2c. Life Long Learning Centre

Church Lawton Primary School would be a user friendly centre for this proposal. The school has a warm, inviting and friendly atmosphere that would be suitable to support Life Long Learning. This could also build on the school's ICT infrastructure. As learning in the 21st century shifts its focus into community and family based learning such a centre could become a beacon for other schools to follow.

Church Lawton Primary Schools Future Plans

As already highlighted, the school is developing a new website and prospectus to generate new interest in the school.

The School and its excellent Friends organisation are to expand the school's role in the local community with new plans to open a Parent and Toddlers' Club starting in September 2008.

We have also been approached by a local Stage School to use the School starting September 2008.

Conclusion

We firmly believe that to continue with the emerging option, as outlined in the document Learning for the 21st Century in the Alsager, Congleton, Sandbach and Holmes Chapel Locality June 2008, is an undesirable outcome for the children, families and wider community of Church Lawton Primary school. It is also likely to have a negative impact on educational provision in the east of Cheshire where flexibility needs to be retained during this period of local authority reorganisation. We urge you to reconsider and to enter into dialogue with ourselves in order to formulate a new emerging option based on this paper, one that will guarantee the future of Church Lawton Primary School, extending its remit and providing learning opportunities for all that are in line with current thinking of what constitutes a 21st century education service.

Appendix A – PLASC SEN Data

With regard to the SEN situation in the 'a Case For Change' document (page 17) mentions "Members approved the following: Up to 22 resourced provisions for a range of additional and complex needs for the first pupil intake in September, 2007, with the possibility of further provisions to be kept under review. Twelve have been designated to date with discussion on-going in a small number of others":

Marlfields (Congleton), Dee Point (Chester), Upton Acresfield (Chester), Wyche Primary (Nantwich), Elton Primary, (Elton), The Acorns (Ellesmere), Woodfall Primary (Neston), Ivy Bank (Macclesfield), Barnton (Northwich), Wallerscote (Northwich), Bexton (Knutsford), and Willow Wood (Winsford).

Assuming the 12 above are the ones already designated, if this is the case at present then Marlfields is the closest of these schools to the Church Lawton/Alsager area but is still a very good distance for children with special needs or a disability to travel every day.

According to the PLASC returns for last year Church Lawton Primary had the highest number of SEN pupils than all of the other surrounding schools in the area with 7.8% pupils with statements or who were supported at School Action Plus and 23.3% of pupils with SEN supported at School Action.

Excalibur only have 3.5% at SAP and 1% at SA, St. Gabriel's have 0.5 % at SAP with 7.9% at SA, Pikemere 1.4% and 7.1% respectively, Cranberry 2.3% and 11.6%, Rode Heath 3.4% and 6.9% and Highfields 1.9% at SAP and 13.1% at SA.

There is such a significant difference between Church Lawton Primary and the other local the schools regarding the number of SEN pupils they have on roll, despite the fact that Church Lawton's CVA (contextual value added) is currently within the top 3 of all the Alsager schools.

From the CVA scores quoted below, for 2007, it is clear that Church Lawton Primary School not only offers support to all of the children but actively enhances their education to such a degree that they are achieving to a high standard, indeed far better than other schools in the area. Supporting the East Cheshire Authority Cabinet ideals of inclusion.

	CVA	Aggregate score	Average Points per Pupil	Cohort	SEN Percentage
Alsager Highfields Community Primary					
1 School	101.7	290	29.9	49	24
2 St Gabriel's Catholic Primary School	101.5	300	31.6	25	8
3 Church Lawton Primary School	101	255	28.1	11	54
4 Rode Heath Primary School	100.4	283	30.6	23	17
5 Excalibur Primary School	100.3	290	30.2	31	6
6 Pikemere Primary School	100.2	279	29.6	34	6
7 Scholar Green Primary School	100	277	29.3	26	7
8 Cranberry Junior School	100	268	28.7	44	13
9 Woodcocks' Well CofE Primary School	99.5	256	27.6	16	19

Appendix B - Information taken from the East Cheshire Cabinet Report 17th July, 2008

Page 27 (Special Educational Needs)

“Cheshire County Council’s SEN policy focuses on improving in-county provision for children with special educational needs and facilitating inclusion in mainstream schools”.

Page 28 (paragraphs 1 & 2)

“With only 4 special schools being located in East Cheshire, consideration will need to be given to ensuring that there is appropriate level of provision to meet the needs of the new authority”.

“The improvement of outcomes for children with SEN has been identified as a priority within the ‘Children and Young People’s Plan’.

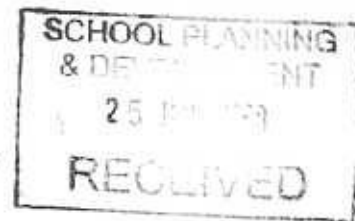
Page 29 (paragraph 6)

“Live births across the County are rising but thus far to a degree that indicates a slowing in the forecast rate of decline in the pupil population rather than an upturn. There has been noticeable migration from Eastern Europe in some areas of Cheshire such as Crewe and the potential impact on the need for school places is being monitored closely. The demand for school places is closely monitored and the gap between the County primary pupil population and school capacity is shown at Appendix 1. As can be seen, as the pupil population has declined action has been taken to reduce the net capacity of primary schools. **Care is being taken, however, to ensure that flexibility is retained at school level to enable fluctuations in pupil numbers to be met without difficulty and to maintain the ability to meet parental preferences for schools”.**

Page 35 (paragraph 4)

“The views of children and young people are routinely sought and incorporated into planning. The pupil’s views included their desire that school buildings should be inspirational and feel welcoming, so that adults and children are comfortable and there is empathy and respect. They would like buildings to feel safe and inclusive, where everyone can access modern facilities together and have a range of opportunities for learning inside and outside, so that children can learn in different ways, particularly through active learning”.

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TEL: 01625-861351



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Children's Services
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as from: Oaklands
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23 July 2008

Dear Ms Burnett,

TLC – Holmes Chapel Locality – Chelford (CE) Primary School - Options for Change

I am writing on behalf of the Governors of Chelford (CE) Primary School with our response to the 'emerging options' outlined in Joan Feenan's letter of 25th June. These were for a reduction in the Net Capacity (NC) of the school from 90 to 60; reduction of the Pupil Admission Number (PAN) from 15 to 9 and exploration of the possibilities for Federation among neighbouring, especially CE, schools in the Holmes Chapel area. In addition, in the document entitled "Learning for the 21st century etc", dated June 2008 and handed out at the meeting at Crewe Hall on 25th June, mention is made of "Inter-agency working at premises released at Chelford Primary School". (This document incidentally, contains an error, pointed out at the Crewe Hall meeting, on page 15 where the 'Status' of our school is shown incorrectly as 'VC', when it should read 'CE VC'.)

These options have now been discussed by Governors. Staff at the school have been consulted. Parents have been notified by letter and by an invitation to discuss the issues involved with Governors at an open evening at the school. They have also been reminded of their right to make individual representations either at the drop-in sessions or directly to Children's Services by 5th August. The Parish Council has also been briefed.

The Governors note the proposed reductions in NC and PAN but have the following concerns about the scale of them. They point out that numbers at the school have been rising steadily from a low point of 31 in 2001, to a total of 50 today. They know that the total number of state-sector primary school age children within the Chelford catchment area is approximately 80-90, as was forecast when the school was new-built in 1999, and is evidenced today by the numbers of Chelford-based, maintained sector pupils shown in document DP7 of TLC/Core Schools Dataset. They note the likelihood of the current 'Credit Crunch' influencing the parents of some private sector pupils into sending their children to the state sector at primary school level.

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The Governors would find it unacceptable to be compelled to turn away future applicants to Chelford school on the grounds of a permanent NC or PAN number which had been fixed at too low a level. They do not wish to see the school artificially disadvantaged against its nearest rival establishment. They therefore propose a reduction in NC to 77 and a PAN of 11-12, to place us on equal terms with Peover Superior school. They ask what degree of flexibility, both in time and degree, would exist in the future to revise the NC number upwards, and the PAN similarly, as demand for places at Chelford increases.

The Governors are very ready to enter into discussions with any neighbouring schools over the possibility of Federation but are unclear what might be involved in practice. They ask if a representative of the Children's Services could attend a meeting to set this out in detail as they have no experience of Federation on which to make a judgment now.

The Governors recognise the potential advantages of utilising a part of the school premises for inter-agency working but would want to be assured of flexibility over this. If our predictions are correct and the NC and/or the PAN needs to be raised in the medium-term future to accommodate additional pupils living in Chelford whose parents wish them to attend their local primary school, we should wish to be able to recover the use of such leased school premises at short notice in order to accommodate this. There are many practical issues (e.g. the type of agency, number of agency personnel, type and cost of alteration to existing accommodation) which need to be explored. There is also a question over the Chelford Educational Foundation and its relationship with the school, which needs to be clarified if there is a proposal to use the school premises for any other than strictly educational purposes.

The Governors would welcome an opportunity of a meeting with Children's Services to discuss all of the above matters, well before any of the current 'emerging options' are firmed-up.

Yours sincerely,

David McLeod

D R McLeod
Chairman of Governors, Chelford (CE) Primary School.

c.c. George Osborne, MP
C Cllr Paul Findlow
C Cllr Steve Wilkinson
Cllr Carolyn Andrews
Cllr Andrew Knowles
Jeff Turnbull, Diocesan Board of Education
Andrew Norbury, Chairman, Chelford Parish Council
Governors, Chelford (CE) Primary School

} all of whom have been consulted, to a greater or lesser degree.

DRM

Holmes Chapel Primary School

Director of Children's Services
Cheshire County Council
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To
H Beer

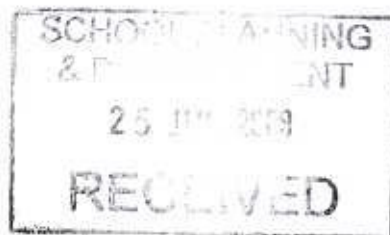
25 JUL 2008

CHESHIRE COUNCIL

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Dear Sir/Madam,

11th July 2008

TRANSFORMING LEARNING COMMUNITIES (TLC) Holmes Chapel locality : Options for Change

The Governing Body of Holmes Chapel Primary School wish to contribute to the above review and consultation process in relation to the impact on our school should the suggested option, outlined in your letter to Staff and Governors of 25 June 2008, of possible reduction in the net capacity from 420 pupils to 350 pupils, at a future date, should it become warranted.

Holmes Chapel has two primary schools, at the present time, located within walking distance of each other. In addition, the schools serve the surrounding rural area where, for example, Cranage and Twemlow do not now have schools. Both schools in Holmes Chapel are expected to respect parental choice in the decision of which school to make application to when children reach school age.

For many years there has been expansion in the size of population so that Holmes Chapel is now on the verge of Town status and, indeed, is considered the next largest area in the Borough of Congleton after Alsager, Congleton Town, Middlewich and Sandbach. At the present time, this area is actively involved in Local Government Reorganisation and the split of Cheshire into two regions has had an impact on future planning, not least in ongoing developments which include a percentage input of affordable homes on two large sites within Holmes Chapel itself and other smaller but significant sites within the rural area. This will impact on the school's numbers within the next two/three years.

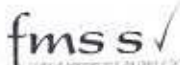
Another factor is that Holmes Chapel Primary School has a large area of land which would be better utilised for expansion or amalgamation, rather than reduction of places, whereas the other primary school site is restricted access and surrounded by development on all sides.

We note that no decisions have yet been made, but we would urge that ongoing planning issues affecting this large village and the surrounding rural area, at the present time, are given further consideration before any final decision is taken.

Yours faithfully,

Chairman,

Governing Body, Holmes Chapel Primary School



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Black Firs Primary School

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Teacher: Mr M Casserley

Mr. B. Slater,
Cheshire County Council,
County Hall,
Chester, CH1 1SQ

18th July 2008

Dear Mr. Slater,

TLC review

Position and issues for Black Firs School

The Full Governing Body of Black Firs School met on Wednesday 16th July and wish to raise the following points with regards to TLC review:

1. Reducing the PAN of schools is 'smoke and mirrors' it does not save or recoup any resource in removing surplus places. Aided schools can and do ignore them to suit, therefore disadvantaging LA schools, e.g. Astbury PAN 16 applied to increase it to 18 but have 21 on books for September. If falling rolls will impact our locality then surely every school should slightly reduce its PAN? Otherwise some schools are reduced at the expense of others. Why not reduced all school PANs by 10%?

Net Capacity calculations. Because we are not typical – our mixed team-teaching models, holistic curriculum, use of the School as a whole learning environment - we don't 'fit' LA / DCSF forms and tick sheets. This has led to assumptions being made about our current sufficiency assessment? We challenged your published assumptions when we met at Black Firs. Governors can't understand why the LA wants to reduce our PAN, it will not save any money – nor does it cost the LA any more to leave our PAN at 40. By law all schools have to maintain pupil: teacher ratios in KS1 of 30. A PAN of 34? How can we deliver infant class sizes for 12 extra children, the funding would not cover the cost of a full teacher. We have recently challenged the accuracy of our published net capacity of 240 with Ken White, Planning and Development Officer. He has reviewed our School plans and has re-calculated our net capacity to 270 giving us a PAN of 38.

Governors have agreed that we will compromise with the TLC process, and accept a reduction in PAN to 38.

2. The LA policy has been NOT to replace or repair mobiles, "Natural way of reducing surplus capacity is to remove mobiles". Why should local schools be allowed to maintain or achieve higher Net Capacity if the quality of the mobile accommodation is old and poorly maintained? Black Firs Governors used 3 years of our DFC to build, replacing our mobile classroom. If schools in Congleton are expected to reduce PANs to match their net capacity, Governors believe that mobile classrooms should be removed from a schools net capacity before such reductions are made.

We refurbished the mobile to develop our extended school services to best serve our community. Why should we now lose out because we have tried to address Full Core Offer Extended School and lost capacity to achieve this? Other schools have ignored the requirement, under spent their budgets, and are now being

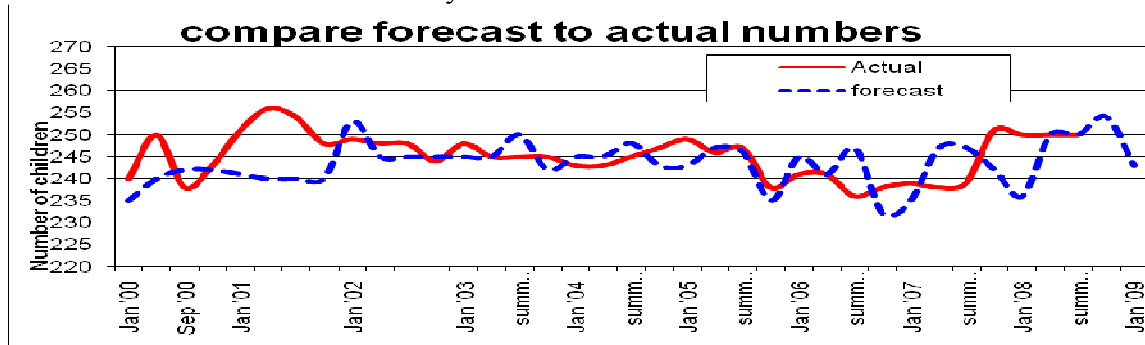
financially rewarded with higher possible PANs & could become eligible for Building Schools for the Future funding?

3. What about equitable access to services and children's centres – why is improved access only for areas of deprivation? We were given data in May 2006 that a 3rd phase universal children's centre would be required in West Heath (this was based on Sure Starts footprint map). Ric Turnock, LA Children's Centre Strategy Manager, now tells us in Jan '08, that the Government had increased the pre-school population totals per footprint, so that a 2nd centre for Congleton was now no longer required. We believe that this creates an unfair system – Congleton EIP has agreed that equity to basic services is the right of *all* children who live in Congleton regardless of their background.

We have plans to expand and extend child / community services; we require a larger more purpose built pre-school facility. Our community are keen to see a NHS dentist and (at least a part-time) doctors consulting room. The Governing Body has discussed the possibility of borrowing monies to build and extend the current facilities.

4. Reducing our PAN will reduce parental choice. We are always being told that successful schools will survive and expand but we seem to be suffering by being successful? Over the last decade we have been a very popular school in Congleton because of our unique child centred, holistic curriculum based around life-long learning & emotional intelligence through Sport & Performance Arts. We are also academically very successful – top 2.5% for CVA. Parents have no choice because we cannot accommodate all the children in our current catchment. Financial break-even is about 250 for our current style of delivery – if we fall below this figure then we cannot maintain staffing levels.

5. The forecast for Black Firs has always been inaccurate



In an More Open Enrolment admissions market, this Governing Body could foresee Black Firs becoming a School of around 260-270; we would not want to grow beyond this figure. This would give BFS the financial viability to maintain our current team-based delivery model without having a detrimental impact on the child-centred 'family feel' we have now.

Unless LA effectively reduces surplus school accommodation, saving money, & can redistribute the saved resources to school budgets they will have to do this exercise all over again at what additional financial cost?

Yours sincerely,

D. Whitewright,
Chair of Governors