

Area West Committee - 20<sup>th</sup> January 2010

## 7. School Organisation Proposals – Chard, Crewkerne & Ilminster Area

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### Purpose of the Report

To inform members of the Area West Committee about the School Organisation proposals for the Chard, Crewkerne and Ilminster area.

### Recommendation

Members are asked to note and comment upon:-

- (1) the review of schools in the Chard, Crewkerne and Ilminster area;
- (2) the School Organisation proposals that went to the Cabinet of SCC on December 9<sup>th</sup> 2009.

### Summary

The review looked at all schools in the Chard, Crewkerne and Ilminster area. Discussions were held with Headteachers in Crewkerne and Ilminster over a substantial period of time; a meeting was also held with the Headteachers in the Chard area.

The two-tier structure in the Chard area will not be changed. The current Small Schools Policy is under review and, in the light of this, any proposals regarding individual schools are deferred until the position is clarified.

There is uncertainty around the major capital investment in the area that would come from the Building Schools for the Future programme (BSF). The announcement about the continuation of the programme is expected after the 2010 General Election and subsequent comprehensive spending review.

Because of the uncertainties outlined above, there are no proposals regarding schools in the Chard area.

The report to Somerset County Council Cabinet on 9th December 2009 proposed consultation on the new structure for school provision in the Crewkerne and Ilminster area of South Somerset currently organised on a three-tier system with first, middle and upper (14-19) schools.

Cabinet agreed the proposals to:-

- 1) Once Primary Capital Grant and Building Schools for the Future grant become available, undertake the necessary consultations with all interested parties to consider whether changing the current three-tier system to two-tier is the preferred direction for educational provision in this area.

- 2) Secure the viability of schools in the three-tier system through a series of federations which would include, for example:
- Officers to encourage Crewkerne Wadham, Swanmead Middle and Maiden Beech Middle Schools in pursuing Hard Federation to improve liaison and transition at age 13 and facilitate the sharing of staff and expertise;
  - Officers to encourage Shepton Beauchamp Primary School and St Mary and St Peter's Primary School to pursue Hard Federation;
  - Officers to encourage the other first schools and their governing bodies in the area, to pursue appropriate Hard Federation and collaboration, to improve liaison and transition at age 9 and facilitate the sharing of staff and expertise.

## 1. Background

- 1.1 At the Executive Board meeting of SCC on 26th September 2007, a commitment was given to undertake a review of school provision on an area basis. Following the review of provision in West Somerset, South Somerset was identified as the next most pressing area as a result of falling rolls and the expiry of the lease of Greenfylde First School in 2011. In addition, there were concerns about the impact on attainment of transition at the end of year 4 and year 8, and the financial viability of some schools. Two first schools have already been designated as primary schools, challenging the viability of the three tier system in Iminster.
- 1.2 Extensive discussions have been held with Headteachers in this three-tier system to look at the most appropriate arrangement of educational provision in the Iminster/Crewkerne area. Headteachers asked LA officers to work up a number of proposals including an area school to cater for all pupils in Iminster/Crewkerne, a simplified three-tier system and a two-tier arrangement.

## Report Details

### 2. Options Considered

- 2.1 **Option 1:** A school catering for 4-18 on a single site was not deemed to be feasible by the LA as this would require a significant number of very young pupils to travel beyond the two mile limit after which transport has to be provided. Moreover, such a large school was not considered to be advantageous to pupils' education and well-being.
- 2.2 **Option 2:** Headteachers were supportive of the concept of a move to a two tier system whilst recognising the implications for them personally. A two tier system would involve Crewkerne Wadham becoming an 11-18 school. This option is not deemed viable until such a time as central government confirm the continuation of the BSF programme after the General Election in 2010 and subsequent comprehensive spending review. Moreover, there is also the need for grant from the Primary Capital Programme to rebuild Greenfylde (either as a first or primary school); again, this is subject to central government commitments related to rebuilding schools.
- 2.3 **Option 3:** given the financial constraints surrounding option 2, a low cost option had to be sought which tackled the challenges faced by schools in the South Somerset three tier system. This would involve a rationalisation of the current

three tier system to minimise transitions and make better use of resources and hence secure the viability of schools.

- 2.4 It is proposed that Wadham, Swanmead and Maiden Beech pursue Hard Federation under a single governing body to give more unified provision for ages 9-18. This would enable the resources available to the current three schools to be deployed more effectively.
- 2.5 It is proposed that Shepton Beauchamp, St Mary and St Peter's Schools pursue Hard Federation with a single governing body. This will improve liaison and facilitate the sharing of staff and expertise across the schools.
- 2.6 It is proposed that officers work closely with the other first schools and their governing bodies in the area, to examine new models for school organisation based upon Hard Federation and collaboration. There is an imperative that the schools consider these options urgently in order to maintain the viability of the schools in the area.

### **3. Consultations Undertaken**

- 3.1 Extensive discussions have been held with the Headteachers from the Chard, Crewkerne and Ilminster area. The Diocese of Bath and Wells has been involved.

### **4. Financial Implications**

- 4.1 There are no capital implications in relation to these proposals, at this stage.
- 4.2 There are no revenue implications. Federated schools continue to receive their own delegated schools budget but there is flexibility to use budget allocations across all of the schools within a federation.

### **5. Implications for Corporate Priorities**

- 5.1 The issues in this paper support Aim 4: Enjoying and Achieving priority 6 of the Annual Plan relating to raising achievement through access to learning, culture and other opportunities and removing barriers they may experience.
- 5.2 Links to section 35 of LAA, parts 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 16, which focuses on the raising of standards across and between the various key stages.

### **6. Other Implications**

#### **6.1 Personnel**

Federated schools would normally be expected to maintain their current staffing structures and levels. Over time, staffing structures can be reviewed, in particular with a view to developing federation-wide leadership and management structures and sharing staff resources. Any proposals to revise staffing structures will require consultation with staff and their trade union representatives.

Federation can also ease the feeling of isolation among teachers who are working in a rural setting. Teachers can provide support for one another in terms of collaborative planning, induction training and covering absence. A larger team can provide a greater pool of expertise and create more opportunities for promotion.

Officers from Governor Services and Human Resources will be providing training to staff and governors in the Ilminster/Crewkerne area about federation and the implications for schools.

## **6.2 Legal**

Federation proposals are governor led and, therefore, do not require statutory proposals.

**Background Papers:** Executive Board paper dated 26.09.07 re School Organisation Strategy  
<http://www.somerset.gov.uk/council/board3b/2007%20September%2026%20Item%2011%20School%20Organisation%20Strategy.htm>

An Introduction to School Federations in Somerset  
[http://www.six.somerset.gov.uk/sixv3/content\\_view.asp?did=17538](http://www.six.somerset.gov.uk/sixv3/content_view.asp?did=17538)

Cabinet Paper dated 9.12.2009.  
<http://www1.somerset.gov.uk/council/board3c/2009%20December%209%20Item%207%20Review%20of%20School%20Organisation%20in%20the%20Ilminster%20and%20Crewkerne%20Areas.pdf>

Executive Board paper dated 26.09.07 re Small Schools Strategy  
<http://www1.somerset.gov.uk/council/board3b/2007%20September%2026%20Item%2012%20Implementation%20of%20the%20Small%20School%20Strategy.htm>

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