

STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

PROFORMA

Cabinet Meeting5th November 2009

1. Title of Item/Report

Proposed amalgamation of Bewley Infant School and Bewley Junior School

2. Record of the Decision

It was explained that the Bewley schools were the only remaining pair of separate infant and junior schools in the borough. The School Organisation Plan published annually included a policy statement (agreed by Cabinet on 9 March 2006) preferring integrated primary schools.

The Primary Capital Programme (PCP) was a government funding programme intended to support the renewal or improvement of primary school buildings over a fourteen-year period. Confirmation of PCP funding for the next two years allowed the Authority to allocate capital to priority projects identified in the PCP Strategy for Change agreed by Cabinet in February. A primary school to replace Bewley Infant School and Bewley Junior School was included among the priorities in the Strategy for Change.

It was proposed that a largely new building be constructed on the combined Bewley sites in September 2011. This would involve closing the existing schools and establishing a new school. This required a statutory process of consultation and decision making. Initial consultation with parents, school staff and governors had established that the prospect of a largely new building had removed most of the opposition that existed when amalgamation at Bewley was suggested three years ago.

The view that change seems unnecessary was expressed at meetings for parents. There was clearly a concern that these successful and popular schools might be put at risk, either by the process of reorganisation or by the potential disruption caused by building work. The benefits of amalgamation were not immediately apparent to many parents. The Authority's preference for primary schools was based on the educational benefits of primary schools. Teaching and learning can be more consistent across the age ranges, with one headteacher and a single staff team working in a single building. The transition from infant

school to junior school would be avoided, along with the need for a separate admissions process. Staff in primary schools enjoyed a greater breadth of experience and enhanced career opportunities compared with those working in a single key stage. Management and governance of the school could benefit from a larger budget and opportunities for economies of scale. At the second of the two meetings for parents both headteachers voiced their support for the amalgamation proposal and their confidence that a primary school at Bewley would be at least as successful as the two separate schools.

Aside from the educational case for amalgamation, the condition of the buildings at both schools meant that the Council could not simply leave the schools as they were. Surveys point to a need to invest more than £1 million on maintenance work over the next ten years. This was not due to any structural defects or neglect of maintenance in the past, but simply that important elements of the buildings (e.g. roofs, heating and lighting systems) were reaching the end of their useful life and will need to be replaced. An investment of £3m+ in a largely new building would offer better value for the long term and could be managed in a way that would minimise disruption to teaching and learning. The present buildings were structurally sound and safe, but the working environment for children and staff is likely to deteriorate in the coming years. The money available to the Council from April 2010 provides an opportunity for renewal that may not come again for many years.

There was some concern over the impact of reorganisation on school staff: that the expertise of staff in particular key stages might be lost, or that amalgamation would place some staff members at a disadvantage. There was no doubt that reorganisation would create a period of uncertainty for staff, but the present headteachers were already working to alleviate this by planning for a joint future. Amalgamation would result in some duplication of posts and responsibilities. If the proposal was approved by the adjudicator, a temporary governing body would be set up to manage the transition to a primary school. The temporary governing body would be made up of existing governors from both schools. Working with the existing headteachers and governing bodies of the infant and junior schools, they would appoint a headteacher designate, draw up a new staffing structure appropriate to the needs of a primary school, and attempt to place existing staff members in suitable posts. This process could begin eighteen months before the new primary school opened.

Other questions raised at the parents' meetings included school management issues such as future class sizes and concern about possible bullying. There was concern about whether any part of the

present school sites would be lost. It was likely that the total area occupied by the two schools would be retained in order to ensure sufficient playing fields area, safe access routes and adequate parking space for a primary school.

A primary school would receive an annual budget around £62,000 less than the combined budgets of the two separate schools. This is because school budget shares, largely based on pupil numbers, include some flat-rate elements. This loss (out of a budget in excess of £1.3 million) would be more than offset by savings accruing from reduced energy and maintenance costs in the new building, and the removal of duplicate staff posts.

RESOLVED that a statutory Public Notice be issued describing a proposal to:

- discontinue Bewley Infant School and Bewley Junior School with effect from 31st August 2011, and
- establish a new primary school with effect from 1st September 2011.

3. Reasons for the Decision

Sections 7 to 15 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 lay down a statutory procedure that must be followed when major changes to school organisation are under consideration. The Authority must first consult those persons most likely to be affected by the change. Having taken account of the views expressed in consultation, the next stage is to publish a Statutory Notice of the Authority's intention to proceed with the proposals

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

None

6. Details of any Dispensations

Not applicable

7. Date and Time by which Call In must be executed

By Midnight, Friday, 13th November 2009

Proper Officer
10 November 2009