

CABINET – 15TH JANUARY 2008

**RE-ORGANISATION OF SCHOOLS IN MELTON MOWBRAY AND THE VALE OF
BELVOIR; PROPOSALS TO CONSULT ON CHANGES TO SECONDARY
CATCHMENT AREAS**

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICE

PART A

Purpose of Report

1. To seek Cabinet approval of proposals for consultation on changes to the catchment areas relating to the three secondary schools in Melton Mowbray.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended:
 - a) That approval be given to the start of consultation with all stakeholders at the end of January 2008, on proposals to merge the existing catchment areas for King Edward VII, John Ferneley High and the Long Field High schools, to establish one common catchment area for the three schools;
 - b) That it be noted, in the context of the above proposals, the agreement of the Governing body of the Long Field High School, as its own admission authority for the consultation, to establish a common catchment area;
 - c) That it be noted, that in developing the proposals, consideration has been given to the principles recorded in the County Council minutes for 21st March 2008 to guide the development of catchment areas for the Melton secondary schools, but it has been concluded by representatives of each school and officers, that it was in the best interests of schools and potential pupils to consult on a common catchment area.

Reasons for Recommendations

3. The establishment of a common catchment area in Melton to serve the three secondary schools maximises choice, enabling access for pupils to both their nearest school and the others locally that offer specialisms.
4. Keeping the admissions policy for the Long Field High school aligned to that of the Local Authority also supports the fair and equitable treatment of all pupils.

5. Establishing a common catchment area for the three secondary schools provides the best opportunity for their long term sustainability and to achieve a balanced pupil intake for each school through the transitional period.
6. Undertaking a widespread consultation with all stakeholders will ensure that those directly affected by the proposals are able to express their views, and Cabinet are able to consider the response, before any changes are made.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

7. The organisational changes previously agreed for the Melton schools have effect from September 2009. The admissions cycle for 2009 will commence later in the autumn, however current legislation places a duty on the Council to have consulted on any changes by 1st March 2008, and to have agreed any subsequent changes by 15th April 2008. A decision to consult upon the proposals is therefore required at this meeting.
8. There will be an opportunity for the Children and Young People's Service Scrutiny Committee to consider the proposals set out in this report at its meeting on 25th February 2008. Comments will also be sought from Scrutiny Committee spokespersons as part of the consultation process.
9. The results of the consultation will be presented to the Cabinet at its meeting on 8th April 2008.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

10. The Cabinet at its meeting on 3rd March 2007 gave approval to the proposals to re-organise schools in Melton Mowbray and the Vale of Belvoir. This will include the development of three 800 place 11-19 schools (to provide for 11-16 year olds) in Melton Mowbray, supported by a separate 600 place Post 16 Centre also to be located within the town, and jointly managed by the three schools and Belvoir High School.
11. The proposals for re-organisation were subsequently confirmed by the County Council on 21st March 2007.

Resource Implications

12. There is potential for any adjustments to catchment areas to have impact to the schools transport budget, although at this stage the effects are thought to be limited. All of the Melton schools are well served by the schools transport provision. New routes are unlikely to be required, but there is likely to be a requirement for re-scheduling of existing routes to accommodate multiple drop-offs. It is too early to establish exactly the financial affects of the proposed change, however officers in the Highways, Transportation and Waste Management Department (Public Transport) will be requested to do more detailed analysis during the period of consultation, and their findings reported in due course.

13. On a wider issue, work is currently in progress with each secondary school to establish the full costs of transition and to determine how these might best be met. A report will be submitted to the Cabinet on this issue in due course.
14. The Director of Corporate Resources has been consulted in the preparation of this report.

Circulation Under Sensitive Issues Procedure

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PART B

Background

15. In March 2007 the Cabinet (and subsequently full Council) agreed proposals for the re-organisation of secondary schools in Melton Mowbray and the Vale of Belvoir, to enable;
- The re-modelling of the Belvoir High School to provide a 600 place 11-19 school.
 - Developing three 11-19 schools in Melton Mowbray each of 800 places (for 11- 16 year olds) on the existing sites
 - Providing a new jointly managed Post 16 Centre of 600 places
 - Changing the age range of primary schools in the Vale to accommodate pupils to Year 6 (age 11)
16. The proposals were predicated on the total number of secondary age pupils in the Melton and Vale area remaining relatively stable for the next 10 years, and sufficient to support 20 forms of entry (each of 30 pupils); 4 at Belvoir High, and 16 spread across the three Melton secondary schools. For the Melton schools this would generate expected year groups of circa 480 pupils, taking account of anticipated housing gain and growth in future years, and a Year 7 admission number of 160 pupils for each school.
17. More detailed work completed by officers to examine the position for future years has produced projections for the Melton schools to identify a best and worse case scenario. This indicates for 2009 to 2017 Year 7 intake it would be prudent to assume a lesser figure of 410 pupils on the basis that this marks a realistic point in the range identified (387 – 440 pupils). The actual figure is dependent on the success of reversing increased out of catchment trends to Rutland, De Lisle (Loughborough) and other County schools, as well as the effects of new housing expected in the area, and other population movement.

The table below illustrates for each of the secondary schools their current admission number and 2007 Year 7 pupil intake, their future admission number and number of pupils currently living in catchment.

School	Current Admission No.	2007 Actual Year 7 intake	Future Admission No.	Pupils living in catchment
John Ferneley	220	166	160	217
King Edward VII	150	68	160	95
Long Field	180	167	160	118
Belvoir High	110	105	120	120

18. The figures in the table confirm that there is a need to review the catchment areas as a means of achieving a balanced intake for each of the schools, and controlling future admissions.

Numbers of parental first preferences for King Edward VII for September 2008 pupil admissions are currently at a low level, final numbers will be reported to the Cabinet in April together with the outcomes of the consultation process.

It can be seen that the Belvoir High school has good potential for take up in future years from within its own catchment area, and hence has been excluded from the proposals contained within this report.

19. Appendix A provides a map to show the geographic extent of the current secondary catchments and serves to illustrate that these appear to have historically evolved without a clear strategy.

In the context of the above information there is clearly a case to make changes to the catchment areas to provide coherence and sustainability to the agreed organisational model.

Options considered

20. Representatives of each of the four secondary schools in the area (including Belvoir High) and officers, have considered a number of options for adjustments to catchment areas. These were predicated on the transfer of certain geographic areas (the outlying villages of Melton) between John Ferneley in the north of the town, and the other two schools to the south. Although these go some way to achieving more balanced pupil numbers, they fall significantly short of the desired position, and would require significant re-drawing of the catchment boundaries. The best achievable position in terms of seeking to balance pupil numbers would in effect create a compact central town catchment for John Ferneley, and require the division of certain primary school catchments. Such a proposal would also require the capping of admission numbers for each school (to below 160) to be successful. This would generate considerable adverse public opinion, and fail to provide an urban/rural or socio- economic balance for each school. Such changes might also not address school popularity issues. Hence the redrawing of individual catchment boundaries for each secondary school is not recommended. This position has been endorsed by the Programme Board responsible for managing the re-organisation in Melton and the Vale and representing a wide range of stakeholders for the area.
21. The County Council has previously noted the consideration of three principles to guide any development of catchment areas for the Melton schools. The principles were;
- Catchment areas should respect physical and geographic boundaries
 - Primary school catchment areas should be coterminous with those for secondary schools
 - Catchment areas should be contiguous ie.not split.
22. These principles reflect good practice when planning catchment areas. In the context of Melton they were intended to achieve a coherent solution in the event of maintaining individual catchment areas for each secondary school.

The three principles described above were considered fully in the discussions between schools and officers, but the final recommendation endorsed locally was for a single catchment area.

The proposed way forward

23. In the context of the above findings, the option of having a common catchment area to serve all three Melton secondary schools has been explored. This would encompass the existing outer boundary of the catchment areas for the three schools as shown on Appendix A. This proposal would appear to offer a number of benefits;
- Allows pupils equal access to both their local schools and others within the town offering particular specialisms
 - Best supports the development of a strong and equitable partnership
 - Helps maintain public confidence in the programme of change
 - Maximises the availability of three school sites to respond to future growth
 - Avoids disruption to any primary catchment areas

The proposal also appears to have a number of risks;

- May serve to further highlight school popularity issues
 - Some potential for increased transport costs
24. It should be noted that the risk of successfully improving the position of King Edward VII is a constant factor irrespective of the option selected for adjustment of the catchment areas. In addition it is also known that demographic forecasts indicate that pupil numbers for this school and Long Field are expected to remain below the 160 admission number until 2014, hence they will need substantial transitional support to sustain.

Current admissions policy

25. The current admissions policy for Leicestershire maintained schools provides for the consideration of eight criteria to determine entitlement for children in the appropriate age range, and whose parents applied on time. The criteria, listed in Appendix B to this report, are considered in sequential order to determine admissions. Advice given by the County Solicitor indicates that the current admissions policy (without amendment) would be sufficient to manage admissions in the event of the Cabinet approving a common catchment area solution for the Melton secondary schools.

The consultation process

26. It is proposed that the consultation will be undertaken by sending proposals to all parents/carers, school governing bodies and staff, and other associated stakeholders including neighbouring admission authorities eg Rutland, Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire . The consultation will encompass primary schools as well as secondary, and discussions with pupils where appropriate. The consultation will be supported by the use of other County Council publications such as the website and Partnership News (the dedicated newsletter for the re-organisation).

27. While the County Council aims to allow twelve weeks for any consultation exercise, it is necessary to shorten that period in this instance because there is a requirement on the Council to have concluded the consultation by 1st March 2008. This will enable a decision on 2009 admissions by the Cabinet before 15th April 2008.
28. The Long Field High school, as a foundation school, has an entitlement to determine its own admissions policy. The Governing body of the school have been consulted on the proposals and confirmed their agreement to be part of the process for consultation set out in this report and be guided by its outcomes.

Equal Opportunities Implications

29. The proposals for a common catchment area will ensure that all pupils entitled to attend Melton schools are treated fairly and equitably, and maximises their choices.

Conclusion

30. The programme of re-organisation for schools in Melton Mowbray represents a long term commitment by the County Council to transform our schools and to raise standards for the pupils within them. The Cabinet is asked to approve the proposals set out in this report to consult upon a common catchment area solution for the Melton secondary schools as a means of managing the transition, achieving balanced pupil intakes and supporting the longer term development of the schools partnership.

Appendices

Appendix A – Melton secondary schools catchment area map

Appendix B – Mainstream schools admissions criteria for managing parental preference

Background Papers

Report to Cabinet – 5th March 2007

Report to the County Council – 21st March 2007