



## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD**

**28<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY 2006**

### **FINAL REPORT - PRIMARY EDUCATION REVIEWS**

#### **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1. To present the findings of the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel in relation to Primary Education Reviews in Middlesbrough.

#### **BACKGROUND/AIM OF THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION**

2. The number of pupils of primary school age in Middlesbrough has been falling for a number of years and this trend is forecast to continue. This led to a surplus 14% of primary school places at the beginning of 2005, with this figure forecast to increase to 25% by 2009. Long term action - including possible school closures and amalgamations - will continue to be necessary to address this issue.
3. The aim of the scrutiny exercise was to investigate the process of how reviews of primary education are undertaken. A review of primary education provision in East Middlesbrough was undertaken earlier in 2005, with that review being used as the basis for much of the scrutiny panel's investigations.

#### **TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION**

4. The terms of reference for the scrutiny investigation were as follows:
  - i. To what extent are consultation activities successful in engaging an appropriate range of stakeholders at an appropriate stage of process?
  - ii. To what extent do the comments received from consultation inform the development of policy/proposals?
  - iii. To what extent does the Council take into account the wider policy agenda when considering primary provision, through effective liaison with other Council departments and partner agencies?





stage of consultation are taken into account at that stage, they would not be carried forward for further consideration at the formal stage unless they were resubmitted at that time.

18. The Panel was advised that methods of engaging interested parties and stakeholders in the consultation process include:

- publishing detailed documents which explain the need to take action (for example where there are falling school roll numbers in a particular area).
- producing a detailed document (at the informal stage of consultation) which is circulated to Head Teachers, Governing Bodies, MPs, Council Members and staff at the schools. This document provides in-depth analyses of the issues which the authority intends to address through school reorganisation.
- publication of a summary leaflet, which is circulated to parents and other stakeholders, together with notification that a copy of the full detailed document is available on request. Both of the above documents include a freepost response to enable respondents to send a reply to the authority. Telephone and address contacts are also provided and the documents are placed in libraries and community centres.
- publishing a statutory notice at the second (formal) consultation stage to explain the changes the authority intends to make to education provision in the area. This is published in the Evening Gazette, at the entrances to each school involved and in other public areas served by the schools - for example libraries, housing offices, shops and lamp-posts. At that time, any interested stakeholders are invited to submit representations in writing to the Director of Children, Families and Learning within a prescribed time period. All responses which are received are forwarded to the School Organisation Committee for consideration.
- arranging briefings with headteachers and chairs of governors to inform them of the different re-organisation options, the consultation process and decision-making procedures. A series of school and public meetings is also held in order to discuss the content of the document and answer any questions raised. In addition, drop-in sessions are held at schools, where parents can access information and ask questions without having to attend a more formal meeting. Parents of children below statutory school age are accessed through local Sure Start services via a letter.
- publication of all documentation on the Council's website.
- the use of press releases to publicise developments more widely.

19. The Panel considered that issues which arise from examining the above term of reference relate to the need to ensure that stakeholders fully understand the review process, and that this is clear and explicit.







schools, despite the school's view that it was affected by the proposals. The headteacher stated that she had received no information on the East Middlesbrough Primary Review following adoption of an option which did not include her school, so had then had to obtain this from other headteachers.

- h. The view was expressed that information regarding reviews was released in a tactical way, so as to 'drip feed' information to stakeholders.
- i. Some parents had expressed the view that there was no point in making representations as a decision on the outcome had already been made.
- j. That although difficulties associated with issues such as funding bids were understood, the review process appeared to be open ended with no definite timescales identified.

28. The Panel considered that issues which arise from examining the above term of reference relate to the need to ensure that parties involved in, or affected by, a review understand how to make representations about the review and how such representations can affect the process. There is also a need to ensure that all information associated with a review is made readily available.

**TERM OF REFERENCE: "TO WHAT EXTENT DOES THE COUNCIL TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE WIDER POLICY AGENDA WHEN CONSIDERING PRIMARY PROVISION, THROUGH EFFECTIVE LIAISON WITH OTHER COUNCIL DEPARTMENTS AND PARTNER AGENCIES?"**

29. The Scrutiny Panel sought to investigate whether liaison between Children, Families and Learning and other Council service areas is effective.

30. The Panel heard that regular liaison meetings are held between Regeneration and Children, Families and Learning Officers on both general and specific issues. These meetings aim to address and bring together the differing aspects of the planning and education processes. Issues include:

- regeneration issues arising from land sales - for example whether these would produce an appropriate quality of investment from both the Council and private developers.
- producing communities with the right balance of housing, schools, leisure, retail etc.
- housing densities as determined by planning legislation and in order to receive funding/support for regeneration schemes - for example Government North East.
- the differing timescales associated with the planning and education processes.

31. In addition, officers from Planning and Education are involved in early and regular consultation on all major developments. Inter-departmental Working Groups have been established and the Council's Corporate Management Team is also a major source of constructive liaison.



32. The Panel considered that issues which arise from examining the above term of reference relate to the need to ensure that it is recognised that primary education reviews will impact on other Council service areas and on wider Council policy. and that this is clear and explicit.

**TERM OF REFERENCE: “WHEN CONSIDERING SCHOOL PROVISION, IS THOUGHT GIVEN TO, AND ARE MEASURES PUT IN PLACE TO, SMOOTHEN PUPILS' TRANSITION THE NATIONAL KEY STAGES?”**

33. The Panel was informed by the Council's Senior Standards Advisor that the local authority's objective is to minimise disruption to pupils transferring between National Key Stages of education. It is recognised that any changes in pupils' educational arrangements can result in lower academic achievement, reduced attendance and increased truancy, together with increased levels of exclusions.
34. Such disruption can also arise from the implementation of a primary education review, either from the creation of a new primary school or from amalgamation of different schools. In such circumstances, issues which the authority needs to address include pupils' and parents' concerns, difficulties arising from new structures and procedures, different teachers, different classmates, different premises and changes in location. The Senior Standards Advisor's view is that it is vital that consultation between authorities, schools, parents and pupils is undertaken in order to minimise any disruption.
35. Information was considered by the Scrutiny Panel in relation to social issues, vulnerable youngsters, managerial and bureaucratic issues, personal issues, curriculum content, teaching practices and the management of learning - all of which can impact on primary education reviews. The following points - which have been identified as "five bridges to be crossed" to ensure effective transition between National Key Stages 2 and 3 - can also be applied to primary education reviews:
- Management/Bureaucratic - ie keeping communities informed, providing and receiving accurate information and ensuring that allocation of places and personal/ education/pastoral issues are effectively addressed.
  - Personal and Social - ie pupils adapting to their new environment by visiting the school, meeting new teachers, spending time in class and ensuring that Special Educational Needs/vulnerable pupils are given appropriate support during an induction period.
  - Curriculum Content - ie the need for all staff to be involved in training methods/ meetings to develop planning procedures.
  - Pedagogical - ie how pupils are taught. There needs to be clear, planned links between different establishments to enable discussions about working methods to be undertaken.
  - Management of Learning - ie development of key skills to enable pupils to thrive in a new environment. This includes data analysis, information and communication technology pilot schemes, science projects, achievement information and individual education plans.





- i) That there are important links between primary education reviews and the extended schools agenda. For example, surplus places could possibly be developed as learning facilities for local communities. Middlesbrough's strategy in this area should be made clear.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUBMISSION TO THE EXECUTIVE:**

1. That all documentation published in relation to primary education reviews is examined to ensure that:
  - a. All aspects of the process are explicit and clear.
  - b. All interested parties are aware of how they can influence the process and how representations are dealt with - particularly that representations can be made in support of proposals and not just in opposition.
  - c. Any preferred options are transparent, balanced and present a reasoned case.
  - d. It is clear to all parties, including governing bodies, that they must provide any comments in writing in order for them to be taken into account.
2. That it is ensured that participants in the review process are clearly advised that comments, views or objections made at the informal consultation stage of the process need to be re-affirmed if they are to be also considered at the formal consultation stage.
3. That timescales for reviews should be identified where possible.
4. That mechanisms continue to be developed and strengthened to maximise the benefits of inter-departmental and inter-agency working in relation to primary reviews.
5. That all schools potentially affected by a review - including those on the periphery - are kept fully informed of developments.
6. That reporting mechanisms from public meetings are reviewed to ensure that:
  - a. information from, and records of, the meetings can be easily obtained.
  - b. interested parties attending those meetings are informed that any points raised at the meeting should be put in writing to ensure that they are taken into account in the review process.
7. That a procedure - such as that which has been developed to ensure a smooth transition for pupils moving between National Key Stages 2 and 3 of education - is developed by the local authority to ensure that disruption caused to pupils by reviews of education arrangements is minimised.
8. That the extended schools agenda is actively considered and taken into account in all primary reviews and that a procedure is developed to ensure that this - and also consultation with local communities about alternative school usage - takes place.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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T Sutcliffe, Head of Service (Capital and Assets), Children, Families and Learning  
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17 February 2006

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**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

The following background papers were consulted or referred to in preparing this report:

- (a) Minutes of Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel meetings August - December 2005
- (b) Report to Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel - 30 August 2005 "Primary Review - Falling rolls in Primary Schools"
- (c) Report to Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel - 20 September 2005 - "Draft Terms of Reference - Evidence Gathering"
- (d) Report to Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel - 20 September 2005 - "Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement" including:
  - November 2004 Booklet - "Consultation Document - Primary Review: Options for Primary School Reorganisation in East Middlesbrough"
  - November 2004 Leaflet - "Consultation Document - Primary Review: Options for Primary School Reorganisation in East Middlesbrough"
  - February 2005 Leaflet - "Consultation Document - Primary Review – Proposal for Primary School Reorganisation in East Middlesbrough"
- (e) Report to Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel - 13 December 2005 - "Evidence Gathering and Update - Extended Schools in Middlesbrough - Briefing Paper (Appendix 1)"