

TORBAY COUNCIL

Report No: **Chi/4/04**

Title: Review of Primary School Provision in Torquay and Paignton

To: Executive on 11th January 2005

1. **Purpose**

- 1.1 To recommend changes in school organisation in order to reduce the number of surplus places in primary schools in Torbay.

2. **Relationship to Corporate Priorities**

- 2.1 Placing Learning at the heart of the Community

3. **Recommendations**

- 3.1 That the Planned Admission Number of Curledge Street Primary School be reduced from 86 to 60 with effect from September 2006 in order to facilitate the removal of poor quality accommodation.
- 3.2 That approval be given to begin public consultation on the amalgamation of Foxhole Infants School and Foxhole Junior School to form an all through primary school in September 2007 and that this primary school be a new build on the site of the Junior School forming the hub of a "Community Campus".
- 3.3 That the Planned Admission Number for Ellacombe Primary School be reduced from 60 to 45 with effect from September 2006 in order to facilitate the creation of a specialist teaching space for ICT and a Library.
- 3.4 That the Planned Admission Number of Watcombe Primary School be reduced from 45 to 30 with effect from September 2006 in order that some classrooms can be converted for use by the Children's Centre.
- 3.5 That approval be given to begin consultation on the closure of Upton St James CE Primary School with effect from July 2006.
- 3.6 That the supply of primary school places be kept under review and that any future actions required be reported to Executive.

4. **Reason for Recommendation(s)**

- 4.1 The Council is under a duty to manage the supply of school places.
- 4.2 There is a growing number of surplus places in Torbay and action is needed to manage this surplus.

5. **Key Risks associated with the Recommendation(s)**

- 5.1 If the Council takes no action, then the number of surplus places will grow. School enrolments will in some cases be significantly lower than the Planned

Admission Number. In most cases, this will result in the introduction of mixed age teaching and financial uncertainty for schools. The Council would need to take action to protect schools by redistributing funding within the “schools’ block” or by allocating additional resources to the schools block. The Council would attract criticism from the Audit Commission for running a high level of surplus places. In 2001, OFSTED criticised the Council for having “unsatisfactory” school place planning and secured a better verdict in 2004 on the back of action taken in Brixham and outline plans to tackle surplus places in Torquay and Paignton.

- 5.2 Adjustments to Planned Admission Numbers in order to remove poor accommodation, or to convert accommodation for specialist use, is low risk.
- 5.3 Amalgamation of the Foxhole schools in the way suggested is a low risk given that the existing schools can continue to operate until the new primary school is built. There is a small risk that the receipt for the Infants site will be lower than anticipated. It is not thought that there would be strong opposition.
- 5.4 The suggested closure of Upton carries more risk in that there is potential disruption to the education of existing pupils. There is likely to be opposition to the closure.
- 5.5 There is a risk that birth rates will begin to climb after 2008, but there is no evidence to suggest the downward trend, which is being experienced nationwide, is about to reverse.

Likelihood	6	6	12	18	24
	5	5	10	15	X
	4	4	8	12	16
	3	3	6	9	12
	2	2	4	6	8
	1	1	2	3	4
		1	2	3	4
		Impact			

Low risk
 Intermediate risk
 High risk

The "x" in the above matrix denotes where the author has assessed the level of final risk to fall

6. Alternative Options (if any)

- 6.1 The Council could decide to make no changes to school organisation, but the risks are outlined above.
- 6.2 The Council could decide to make changes at other schools, but the proposals deal with four schools with very high levels of surplus places (Ellacombe, Foxhole Infants, Foxhole Juniors and Watcombe) and two schools with issues surrounding the quality of accommodation (Curledge Street and Upton).

6.3 The Council could make changes to these schools that are different to those recommended.

7. Background

7.1 The Council is under a duty to manage the supply of school places to ensure efficient use of resources. The Audit Commission Best Value Performance Indicator (PI) 34a and 34b relate to the number of primary and secondary schools with 25% or more unfilled places. The expectation is for LEAs to manage school places so that as few schools as possible fall into this category.

7.2 Torbay is experiencing falling rolls in primary schools. Numbers have fallen steadily since 2000 and are expected to continue to fall. This is in keeping with a national trend. Although there are some significant new housing developments in Torbay, these are not sufficient to counteract the fall in birth rates. Forecasts indicate that, across the Bay, there will be a drop of 700 primary aged pupils between 2000 and 2007. This is almost 8% of the primary population. There has been a history of in-migration but this is likely to account for only a few dozen additional pupils.

7.3 In a short time, this will create a problem with regard to the number of surplus places in primary schools. By 2007, some 15% of primary places would be empty if no action were taken.

7.4 Appendix 1 details the extent of falling rolls.

7.5 Surplus places are expensive to maintain. The majority of funding for schools is allocated based on the pupil roll and schools will face budget difficulties. School will have to balance the books through changes to staffing and school organisation that may not be in the best educational interest of pupils.

7.6 Reducing the number of places available and adjusting school capacity to align it to need will offer schools better security for planning and organisation. The Audit Commission recommends between 5 and 10% spare capacity to allow for parental preference. Anything higher than 10% needs to be addressed.

7.7 The Council has divided the Bay into three areas for planning purposes – Torquay, Paignton and Brixham. The Council has already brought forward plans to remove over 70 surplus places in Brixham via changes to Brixham CE Infants and Eden Park Infants and Junior Schools.

7.8 Following a series of events to raise awareness to this issue among members, headteachers, governors and unions, working groups were formed from representatives of these stakeholders – one for Paignton and one for Torquay. The groups examined the options for changes to school organisation in order to reduce the number of surplus places.

7.9 Each working group met three times during the autumn term and the recommendations mirror those of the working groups.

7.10 In broad terms, there are several actions a Council could take to manage surplus places including

- School organisation changes (e.g. infant/junior amalgamation)
- School closures
- Removal of poor quality accommodation to reduce the capacity of schools
- Changing the use of school buildings for extended school activities
- Changing the use of school buildings for early years provision

This list is not exhaustive.

- 7.11 The options recommended for Curledge Street and Ellacombe address issues of overcrowding and poor accommodation. It will be some time yet before the number on roll at these schools falls to the point where changes to accommodation can be made, but by adopting this recommendation, the Council will be committing itself to the capital investment necessary. The changes to accommodation to Curledge Street Primary School would likely take place in 2007 and cost in the region of £650,000. The changes to accommodation to Ellacombe Primary School would likely take place in 2006 and cost in the region of £150,000. Meetings have taken place with the schools and there is support for these proposals. Ellacombe is in need of specialist facilities, as noted by OFSTED and Curledge Street is a very overcrowded site at present and would benefit most from a reduction in the roll.
- 7.12 The option for Watcombe has not yet been discussed in detail with the school governors. Some year groups already have fewer than 30 pupils and the forecasts for enrolment in the next few years are very low. It is hoped that the new Children's Centre will aid recruitment, but is unlikely to yield more than 30 pupils who wish to join Reception. Converting some existing accommodation to extend the offer at the Children's Centre will be of more benefit to the community than leaving the rooms empty.
- 7.13 Adjustments to Planned Admission Numbers do not require public consultation, but are subject to a statutory process i.e. the annual admission consultations. To make adjustments to Planned Admission Numbers, the Council simply has to propose the new numbers in its annual consultation with governors and other admitting authorities.
- 7.14 The amalgamation of the Foxhole schools would be through a statutory process presaged by a full public consultation. The Council already has a policy to explore amalgamation when the opportunity arises because it considers that all-through primary schools offer a more effective education for children than infant-junior arrangements. The review of primary places is just such an opportunity to consider this question.
- 7.15 It is also timely to consider this option in the light of the recent announcement of the Council's allocation of Government Supported Capital Expenditure and school Modernisation Funding for the next three years. The Council is likely to be able to identify sufficient resources to construct a brand new 420-place primary school in Foxhole to replace the existing schools that between them have 630 places.
- 7.16 This represents an opportunity to create a full service extended school that would form the hub of the local community.

- 7.17 Having said that the Council is likely to have sufficient capital resources, this assumes that the new build would be in the vicinity of the existing Junior school site and that the Infants school site would be sold for development and the receipt used to part fund the new build.
- 7.18 It is not thought that there would be any widespread opposition to the plan, though this could only be tested during consultation. No pupil would be displaced by the change and a new school could be built whilst the existing schools continue to operate as normal.
- 7.19 Officers have been in discussion with the Foxhole Community Association that simultaneously is working on plans to develop the Community Centre and improve facilities at the Belfield Road football field. Meetings between parties have been very positive and it is now clear that the two schemes i.e. the school rebuild and the Association's plans can proceed separately, but complement each other. The two schemes could create a "Community Campus" for Foxhole with a new extended primary school, a Community Centre, plus sporting and play facilities.
- 7.20 In order to open a new school at Foxhole in September 2007, public consultation on amalgamation would need to begin at the latest by the start of the summer term 2005. Following consultation, the final decision on amalgamation would be taken by the School Organisation Committee.
- 7.21 In the case of Upton St James CE Primary School, closure would remove 210 places in Torquay, but it is recognised that this is a sensitive issue. Closure would be via a statutory process presaged by a full public consultation. The Council must decide whether to begin consultation.
- 7.22 There is no concern over the quality of teaching and learning at Upton which is very good. Instead, it is suggested that the school is an unsuitable environment for 21st Century education and, against a backdrop of falling rolls, it will struggle to retain its ability to recruit pupils. The school is split across two sites where ICT links can be unreliable. Both sites are landlocked with very little outdoor play space. The main school building is an old Victorian school house and the LEA's Asset Management Plan lists many suitability issues. Most other schools in Torquay have a better physical environment and, in the longer term, pupils joining these schools will enjoy better surroundings than those at Upton.
- 7.23 If a proposal is made to close the school, it is suggested that closure should take place in July 2006. There is enough room in other local schools so that pupils can transfer. At that time, pupils who would be in the Year 5 and Year 6 classes would each transfer en bloc to two nearest schools i.e. Year 6 transfers to one school, Year 5 to another school. For children in Years R to 4, parents would be invited to express a preference for an alternative local school. Pupils would be matched to places taking into account preference, sibling links, home to school distance etc. Appendix 2 explains how pupils would be decanted upon closure. Appendix 3 shows the home location of Upton's pupils.
- 7.24 It is acknowledged that new house building is planned for the South Devon College site and Upton is one of the three nearest schools (the others being Torre and Cockington). The precise shape and form of the development is not yet clear, but 330 dwellings have been mooted which would typically yield 8

pupils per year group. Some of these pupils would already be attending local schools, but it is acknowledged that some would need places. Appendix 4 shows a map of the College site and the location of Torquay schools.

- 7.25 Following public consultation, the final decision on closure rests with the independent School Organisation Committee. In order to close Upton in July 2006 and ensure an effective transfer of pupils, public consultation would need to begin in May 2005 at the latest.
- 7.26 The adjustments suggested to schools in Paignton will remove 399 places reduce the percentage of surplus places to around 4% by 2008. In the medium term, there may need to be further adjustments in Paignton and the most likely option for this would be to adjust the Planned Admission Number for Roselands Primary School as part of a mobile classroom replacement project.
- 7.27 The adjustments suggested in Torquay will remove 385 places, but surplus places are forecasted to grow so fast that by 2008 there will still be 15% surplus and further action will need to be taken. It is only possible to forecast primary school admissions four years ahead and, at this stage, it is impossible to predict which schools will experience falling rolls and recommend a second phase of changes. Further work will need to be undertaken and it is likely that further changes will need to be proposed in 2007.
- 7.28 Appendix 5 shows the effect of suggested changes to the supply of places in Torquay and Paignton.

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IMPLICATIONS, CONSULTATION AND OTHER INFORMATION

Part 1

Does the proposal have implications for the following issues? If "Yes" - give details. <i>delete as appropriate</i>		Name of responsible officer
Legal	Yes. Statutory Processes will need to be adhered to in order to carry out recommendations.	Lorna Lee
Financial – Revenue	Yes. The recommendations may require special transitional arrangements at schools where changes are made.	Lisa Finn
Financial – Capital Plan	Yes. The recommendations will require capital expenditure, but will also generate capital receipts. The availability of funding for the various proposals will depend upon Council approval to the Capital Plan Budget which is currently under review.	Lynette Royce
Human resources	Yes. Adjusting the pupil capacity of a school will have implications for staffing requirements. Closing a school would have staffing implications.	Anthony Goble
Property	Yes. The recommendations involve the disposal of Council land.	Sam Partridge

Part 2

The author of the report must complete these sections.

Could this proposal realistically be achieved in a manner that would more effectively:		
(i)	promote environmental sustainability?	No
(ii)	reduce crime and disorder?	No
(iii)	promote good community relations?	No
(iv)	promote equality of opportunity on grounds of race, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief?	No
(v)	reduce (or eliminate) unlawful discrimination (including indirect discrimination)?	No

If the answer to any of the above questions is "Yes" the author must have addressed the relevant issue/s in the main report and have included a full justification and, where appropriate, an impact assessment.

Part 3

The author of the report must complete this section.

Does the proposal have implications for any other Directorates?	No
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Part 4

Is this proposal in accordance with (i.e. not contrary to) the Council's budget or its Policy Framework?		<i>delete as appropriate</i>
		Yes
1.	If "No" - give details of the nature and extent of consultation with stakeholders and the relevant overview and scrutiny body.	
2.	<p>If "Yes" - details and outcome of consultation, if appropriate.</p> <p>Informal working groups have met to debate the options for change before the recommendations were framed. These groups included representation from primary headteachers, secondary headteachers, governors, unions, Diocesan authorities, elected members, social services, youth service and early years service.</p> <p>If the recommendations are adopted, then further formal public consultation would be required for certain options. This would involve a brochure on options being sent to parents, public meetings and meetings for school staff and governors.</p>	

Part 5

	<i>delete as appropriate</i>	If "Yes" - give Reference Number
Is the proposal a Key Decision in relation to an Executive function?	Yes	X52/2004

Part 6

Wards

All Torquay and all Paignton

Appendices

- Appendix 1 Primary Age Pupil Forecasts
- Appendix 2 Suggested decant of pupils from Upton
- Appendix 3 Home Locations of current pupils at Upton
- Appendix 4 Location of South Devon College Housing Site and local school
- Appendix 5 Changes to the supply of places in Torquay and Paignton.

Documents available in Members' Room

Background Papers:

The following documents/files were used to compile this report:.