HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET
MONDAY 27 JANUARY 2003 AT 2.00 P.M.

Agenda Item No.

2

THE FUTURE OF THE PINES PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report of the Director of Children, Schools and Families

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Executive Member: Robert Gordon
Local Member: Frank Escott

1. Purpose of report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Cabinet with the results of the consultation about the proposed closure of The Pines School in August 2003 and the proposal that the children on roll at the time of the proposed closure should complete their primary education at Wheatcroft School, and to inform Cabinet that the proposals received unanimous support at the CSF Resources Panel.

2. Summary

2.1 The key issue and the reason put forward for the closure of The Pines is that the school has been adversely affected by a decline in its numbers on roll and is at risk of being financially unviable. This situation has also adversely affected the school's ability to recruit staff.

22. The key issues which would then flow from a decision to close the school are

- whether or not there would then be sufficient primary school places in Hertford, and
- that the proposals for the continuation of the primary education of pupils on roll at the time of possible closure are adequate.

2.3 52 responses were received of which 40 were from parents, a majority of which were against both proposals. Neither school governing body expressed a view about the closure of The Pines and the governors of Wheatcroft School indicated that they would be pleased to co-operate with the Council. The other local 'stakeholder' - the community church - expressed reservations about both proposals but was not totally against them.

2.4 The results of the consultation exercise are being considered by the Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee on 22 January and their comments will be reported to Cabinet.

3 Conclusion

3.1 The results of the consultation process are set out in summary above and in more detail below. Cabinet is asked to decide whether or not to publish a statutory notice to close The Pines School with effect from August 2003.

4 Background

4.1 A copy of the consultation document is attached as appendix A to this report. It explains that there would be sufficient primary school places in Hertford if The Pines were to close, and sets out the proposal for the continuation of the primary education at Wheatcroft School of those children on roll at the time of the possible closure. It also indicates that the current cost per place at The Pines is £3740 compared with an average in the County of £2151.

4.2 The estimated number on roll for autumn 2003 is as follows. This has changed from the figures published in the Consultation Document because some children have already left the school.

Admission limit	**R**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**Total**
17	4	3	6	4	4	2	2	25

5 Statistical results of consultation

Category of respondent	RESPONSES						
	Total	For closure	Against closure	Don't know	For Wheatcroft	Against Wheatcroft	Don't know
Parent - The Pines	9	0	9	0	1	8	0
Parent - Wheatcroft	31	5	26	0	2	29	0
Governor -The Pines	1	0	0	1	0	0	1
Governing Body - Wheatcroft	1	0	0	1	1	0	0
Staff - The Pines	1	0	1	0	0	1	0
Staff - Wheatcroft	1	0	1	0	0	1	0
Community Church	3	0	3	0	1	2	0
Other	5	0	4	1	0	4	1
TOTAL	52	5	44	3	5	45	2

6 Major comments made during the consultation process

6.1 One group of objections related to the increasing amount of housing being built east of Hertford and that there will be insufficient places on that side of the town. Our pupil number forecast has factored in all but the most recent housing proposals and demonstrates that there are adequate places within reasonable travelling distance of the children. Since the proposal was put forward, a small development on the police station site has been made public. If this development goes forward the 120 surplus places in the Hertford area would be sufficient for the additional children likely to be needing places.

6.2 The next group of objections related to the high quality of education at The Pines, linked to its small class sizes, and its value as a community resource. While the quality of some of its work is not denied, this has failed to attract sufficient pupils to render the school financially viable. It is our view that a comparable standard of education would be available at Wheatcroft School as is confirmed by the number of respondents who praised it. No decision has been taken about the future of The Pines site and buildings but, when such decisions are taken, the needs of the local community will be borne in mind.

6.3 Finally, there were a group of comments relating to the possible adverse effect of closure on the quality of the educational provision at Wheatcroft School. They centred on the increase in class sizes, general overcrowding of the site and the inadequacy of providing temporary accommodation for the extra pupils. The Council's view, discussed and agreed with headteacher and governing body of the school, is that the additional temporary accommodation is adequate for the temporary increase in the number of pupils in the school. If the proposal goes ahead Wheatcroft School is likely to have 259 children in eleven classes which will not have a detrimental impact on the School.

7 Analysis of the results of consultation

7.1 Clearly a majority of responses were against both proposals. However, the response rate (9) by parents of children at The Pines was low (there were at the time of consultation 30 children on roll). Nevertheless, the County Council recognises that these parents have genuine concerns about the future education of their children and is committed to ensuring that this is of high quality and appropriate to their needs.

7.2 Of the two governors who responded, the one from The Pines responded on behalf of the community church which meets there. That response was not totally against the closure of The Pines but suggested that it might be 'mothballed' against future increase in demand for places. The response also indicated that Wheatcroft School was full and on a small site with limited space for expansion. The three individual members of the community church

who responded all disagreed with the closure of The Pines and two of them disagreed with the proposal to provide places at Wheatcroft School.

7.3 No response has been received from The Pines Governing Body as a whole, or the head teacher.

7.4 The other governor response was from the Chair of Wheatcroft School Governing Body and sent on their behalf. They expressed no view on the closure of The Pines but indicated that, if the school were to close, they would be pleased to co-operate with the Council in allocating the remaining pupils from The Pines at Wheatcroft School subject to the necessary financial resources being made available.

7.6 None of the responses claimed that there were insufficient primary school places in Hertford, although there were some comments about the distribution of those places in different parts of the town. Similarly none of the responses took issue with the financial information in the consultation document or the stated difficulty which the school has had to attract pupils and staff.

7.7 A small number of responses suggested that the children remaining on roll at the time of closure should be offered places at Hertford Heath School and another small number suggested that Wheatcroft School could use the site of The Pines for part of its provision.

7.8 In summary, although numerically a majority of the responses were against the proposals, the total number received and the distribution of views between the stakeholders concerned indicates that there is acceptance by some of the case to close the school and to offer the pupils remaining on roll places at Wheatcroft School.

8 Financial implications

8.1 The detailed financial implications are set out in Appendix B. The net revenue position is summarised in the table below:

Financial year	**2003/04**	**2004/05**	**2005/06**	**Long Term**
	170	(6)	(75)	(75)

8.2 In the medium term, this proposal will lead to a significant revenue saving. However, we need to identify a mechanism to fund the £170,000 costs in relation to security and mobile classroom provision, identified in Appendix B.

Background information referred to by the author:

Consultation Document, November 2002
Resources Panel Report, 15 January 2003

Appendix B

The Pines Closure- Financial Implications - pupils transfer to Wheatcroft

	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	Long Term
	£000	£000	£000	£000
Net Impact School Budget Shares	(47)	(80)	(80)	(80)
Recruitment & Retention	5	0	0	0
Uniform	3	0	0	0
Transport	0	0	0	0
Redundancy/Pension (*1)	42	5	5	5
Out of Use Site/Security (*2)	97	69	0	0
Mobile Classroom	70	0	0	0
	170	(6)	(75)	(75)

Notes

(*1) These figures represent a maximum cost to the Authority.

(*2) Figures derived from a schedule produced by Herts Property which takes into account the security risk and likely speed of disposal of the property.