

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MONDAY 12 JULY 2004 AT 2.00 P.M.

Agenda Item No.

5

PRIMARY SUPPORT BASES

Report of the Director of Children, Schools and Families

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Executive Member:- Robert Gordon

1. Purpose of report

1.1 To inform Cabinet of the outcome of public consultations on the

- closure of 6 special educational needs units for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties, and
- opening of 4 primary support bases,

in order that it can decide whether or not to publish statutory notices to effect these changes.

2. Summary

2.1 The Education Panel, at its meeting on 2 July 2004, will consider this matter and whether it should recommend Cabinet to authorise statutory notices to be published to propose the closure of 6 special educational needs units for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties, and opening of 4 primary support bases. The proposals stem from the Council's behaviour and achievement strategy and form part of a county-wide review of current provision to improve the support for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) in mainstream primary schools.

2.2 The review concluded that a network of primary support bases in primary schools, which provide support to pupils in their local schools as well as offering a small number of places for pupils for whom this is not appropriate, would be a more effective way of meeting needs. This method has been piloted in three schools and has been validated externally as highly successful.

- 2.3 To achieve a successful spread of bases, as well as the three pilot bases, some existing EBD special needs units will change their operation to the new format. Other units would need to close and four new primary support bases would need to open. A full list of resultant nine primary support bases is attached as Appendix A. The opening and closure of SEN provision is subject to a statutory process.
- 2.4 Public consultation letters were issued on 26 April 2004 for each individual school affected. There was a majority in favour of the four proposals to open new primary support bases and the closure of two of the existing EBD units. The majority of respondents disagreed with the closure of the remaining four existing EBD units.
- 2.5 The recommendations of the Education Panel meeting, on 2 July 2004, will be reported separately.

3. Conclusions

- 3.1 Cabinet is asked to decide whether or not to publish statutory notices to:
- close the special needs units for emotionally and behaviourally disturbed pupils on 31 March 2005 at the following primary schools:

Birchwood Avenue in Hatfield
Bushey Manor in Bushey;
Lannock in Letchworth;
Manland in Harpenden;
Oughton in Hitchin; and
Priors Wood in Ware
 - open primary support bases on 1 April 2005 at the following primary schools:

Andrews Lane in Cheshunt;
Bowmansgreen in London Colney;
Radburn in Letchworth; and
Springmead in Welwyn Garden City

4. Background

- 4.1 Consultation letters were sent to all parents, governors and staff of the schools affected, to all schools in the areas either currently served by existing units or to be served by new bases, and to all other statutory consultees. A copy of the type of letter sent to schools where it is proposed to close existing units is attached as appendix B. A copy of the type of letter sent to schools where new bases are proposed is attached as appendix C.

4.2 Meetings were held with the governing bodies of the schools where new bases are proposed in advance of consultation to explain the proposal and to gain their agreement to it. Meetings were also held with each headteacher and chairman of governors of the schools where it is proposed to close existing units. In response to a request from the governing body of Birchwood Avenue School in Hatfield, officers attended a full governing body meeting to discuss the proposal. In response to the request of parents at Springmead School in Welwyn Garden City a surgery was held for parents to answer their questions.

5. Responses to the consultations

5.1 Copies of all responses received are available in the Members Room.

Proposals to open primary school bases

5.2 The responses of the headteachers and governing bodies of the schools where new primary support bases are proposed to open are attached as appendix D .

5.3 A full breakdown of the responses for each of those schools involved, by type of respondent, is shown in appendix E. A summary of those responses is:

School	Agree	Disagree	Don't know	Total
Springmead	24 (44%)	23 (43%)	7 (13%)	54
Bowmansgreen	18 (67%)	6 (22%)	3 (11%)	27
Radburn	26 (84%)	3 (10%)	2 (6%)	31
Andrews Lane	23 (92%)	1 (4%)	1 (4%)	25
Other Connection	1 (100%)	0	0	1

Proposals to close existing EBD units

5.4 The responses of the headteachers and governing bodies of the schools where it is proposed to close existing EBD units are attached as appendix F .

5.5 A full breakdown of the responses for each of those schools involved, by type of respondent, is shown in appendix E. A summary of those responses is:

School	Agree	Disagree	Don't know	Total
Manland	12 (60%)	5 (25%)	3 (15%)	20
Birchwood Avenue	0 (0%)	17 (77%)	5 (23%)	22
Bushey Manor	18 (58%)	9 (29%)	4 (13%)	31
Lannock	4 (25%)	11 (69%)	1 (6%)	16
Oughton	5 (42%)	6 (50%)	1 (8%)	12
Priors Wood	1 (4%)	19 (83%)	3 (13%)	23

6 Main concerns raised

- 6.1 Generally there was no significant level of response for any proposal. The main concerns raised by respondents were:

Opening bases

- 6.2 As well as a number of very supportive comments for the opening of bases at the four schools some concerns or questions were raised. The main issues were:

- the effect of a larger number of pupils with special needs within the school involved e.g. in mainstream classrooms, during playtime, etc.

There would be no more than six pupils at any one time within the base school which would be a very small proportion of the total number of pupils within the school. Those six pupils would be supported by three adults: a very high adult pupil ratio. The staffing structure of the base, and hours worked by staff, would allow flexibility for supervising/supporting pupils for whom integration into mainstream classes or playtime would be appropriate.

- a reluctance to disrupt an existing good school, to place additional burdens on its management and staff, or for it to become known as a school which caters for such needs.

Schools were selected for the proposed new bases because of the authority's confidence in their ability to manage this new service, both within their own schools and to become a centre of excellence in the area, advising other schools and supporting their pupils. The staffing structure is generous and would not place significant additional burdens upon existing senior management teams or governors. Indeed, the existence of a base would strengthen the management and professional capacity of those schools to meet the needs of existing pupils.

- that the new system would not provide sufficient places or meet all geographical needs.

A needs analysis was carried out for the whole county in planning where provision is needed to cover known patterns of need. The new pattern of provision would provide a much better geographical pattern of support to more pupils. 54 pupils would be supported within bases and 54 more within their local schools at any one time (and this number would be larger as pupils are supported for less than a full year). The new structure would therefore support a minimum of 20 pupils more than the previous pattern of EBD units.

- detailed questions about how the bases would work, staffing levels, etc. Some respondents wanted more information than included in the consultation letter.

Parents took up the offer of individual discussions with named officers during the consultation period. Questions raised on response forms have been answered, which were mainly from parents of Springmead School and some from Bowmansgreen School. In response to a request from Springmead parents, a surgery was held at the school on 25 May to answer parents' questions direct. Approximately 15-20 parents attended the surgery. The questions were mainly about the level of need of the pupils involved, the staffing ratios and potential integration of pupils.

Closing units

6.3 The main concerns were:

- whether any EBD unit should close when behavioural issues were being highlighted nationally.

Some respondees identified with the growing awareness of the impact of behaviour on achievement and therefore questioned the wisdom of closing any or specific EBD provision. The proposals are a direct response to this national agenda and are one strand of Hertfordshire's behaviour and achievement strategy at primary level, alongside nurture groups, enhanced Behaviour Support Teams and outreach provision from Education Support Centres within each quadrant. This continuum of provision will give more capacity than what is currently available.

- the need to ensure sufficient coverage e.g. access to places in the bases for towns without bases, or for rural locations.

The review carefully analysed need across the county and planned the proposed provision to better match need, both for base and extended roll support within other mainstream schools. Towns without planned bases and rural villages would have equal access to the places and support offered .

- the need to ensure appropriate arrangements for pupils in units proposed for closure.

Individual transition plans would be put in place for any pupil in a unit proposed for closure. Parents of those children have been written to separately, naming an individual case officer who has been in contact with them to give them personal support and guidance. Transition arrangements would be made in response to the needs of each individual pupil.

- that there was no need to disrupt existing provision, especially where it appears to be working well.

The units proposed for closure are either in response to the need to improve the geographical spread of provision or because of their capacity to support other schools at their current stage of development. Most existing Units have experienced periods of instability and low pupil numbers and several have asked at one time or another in the past for the authority to consider their closure. The new bases, with an enhanced staffing structure, offer greater consistency and security of provision.

7. Financial implications

Revenue

- 7.1 The impact of the proposal based on the Hertfordshire funding formula is as follows (at 2003/04 prices):

	<u>£000s</u>
Existing provision	1022
2004/05	1074
2005/06	1322
2006/07 (and later years)	1301

- 7.2 The figures include provision for set up costs and are net of savings from closing EBD units. However, it is important to note that these savings from closures can only be realised if the DfES agree an exception to the normal operation of the minimum guarantee. Assuming that such an exception is approved, the cost of the proposal will be met by the budget provision of £300,000 for expanding primary support units (within the Behaviour and Achievement programme).
- 7.3 In addition there will be redundancy and pension costs. Based on the "worst case scenario" these would be approximately £80,000 in 2005/06 and £12,000 per year in later years. It is expected that these potential costs will be lower owing to the redeployment of staff.

Capital

- 7.4 Provision has been made within the 2004/5 capital programme for £300,000 to cover the cost of providing new accommodation at Bowmansgreen and Springmead Schools from the new modernisation (all schools) allocation.

8. Staffing implications

- 8.1 The opening and closure of units is planned to synchronise in order to maximise opportunities for staff affected. A meeting was held with staff placed at risk by the proposals on 11 May 2004 at which the proposals were explained in detail by the behaviour and strategy manager and the implications for staff were explained by a human resources manager.

9. Conclusions

- 9.1 The responses to the consultation broadly support the opening of the four new primary support bases.
- 9.2 The responses also support the closure of two of the existing EBD units at Manland and Bushey Manor Schools. In order to move to the proposed new structure of primary support bases (Appendix A) it will also be necessary to close the EBD Units at Birchwood Avenue, Lannock, Oughton and Priors Wood schools. The units proposed for closure are either in response to the need to improve the geographical spread of provision or because of their capacity to support other schools at their current stage of development. Most existing Units have experienced periods of instability and low pupil numbers and several have asked at one time or another in the past for the authority to consider their closure. The new bases, with an enhanced staffing structure, offer greater consistency and security of provision.
- 9.3 Cabinet is asked to decide whether or not to proceed to publish appropriate statutory notices for all ten schools which were the subject of consultation.
- 9.4 Should Cabinet decide to proceed statutory notices would be published in September, with a view to consideration by the Hertfordshire School Organisation Committee in November or December 2004.