

District Review of School Places

PROCESS FOR DISTRICT REVIEW OF SCHOOL PLACES

October 2005
Version 3

Staffordshire
County Council

Staffordshire County Council
Children and Lifelong
Learning Directorate

**STAFFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
CHILDREN AND LIFELONG LEARNING DIRECTORATE
PROCESS FOR DISTRICT REVIEW OF SCHOOL PLACES
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Contents

- 1. Purpose of Document**
- 2. Audience**
- 3. Background**
 - 3.1 Planning of School Places in Staffordshire
 - 3.2 School Organisation Plan
 - 3.3 Aims of the District Review of School Places
- 4. District Review Procedure**
 - 4.1 Summary of Procedure
 - 4.2 Procedure in More Detail
 - 4.3 Roles
 - 4.4 Partnership with the Catholic Diocese
 - 4.5 Partnership with the Church of England Diocese
 - 4.6 Partnership with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC)
 - 4.7 Key related strategy documents
 - 4.8 Factors affecting the timetable for Reviews
 - 4.9 Confidentiality

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PROCESS FOR DISTRICT REVIEW OF SCHOOL PLACES

1. Purpose of the Document

- 1.1 The District Review provides a formal, structured opportunity to review school provision for the next 5 to 10 years and beyond.
- 1.2 The review will provide a 21st century perspective on the supply of school places to reflect the current and future demands of pupils and students.

2. Audience

This document is aimed at all stakeholders and will be made available widely.

3. Background

3.1 Planning of School Places in Staffordshire

The pattern and provision of schooling nationwide is based largely upon the demographics of earlier generations. The majority of schools were built over 30 years ago.

The national fall in birth rates, which is reflected across the county, provides the opportunity for Staffordshire to plan school provision for current and future generations.

3.2 School Organisation Plan

The School Organisation Plan sets out how the Authority proposes to fulfil its statutory duty to ensure the supply of primary and secondary school places, to meet the needs of its population during the next 5 academic years.

The Staffordshire School Organisation Plan 2004-09 concluded that a countywide District Review of School Places.

The Plan is published by the School Organisation Committee for Staffordshire, a committee which is independent of the County Council.

3.3 Aims of the District Review of School Places

The aims of the District Review are:

- to support schools to provide an excellent, improving and inclusive education;
- to ensure that our schools are vibrant and viable;
- to assist schools to develop a wider role in their community; to provide the right number of places, where possible, in the right location;
- to minimise the number of unfilled, or surplus, school places.

4. District Review Procedure

4.1 District Review Procedures: Summary of Procedure

A INFORMATION GATHERING STAGE

1. The district is divided into geographical zones for the purpose of analysis.
2. Briefing Papers containing demographic data are sent to schools.
3. Zone-based Briefing Meetings with headteachers are held to consider the Briefing Papers.
4. Individual visit to all schools to gain headteacher views.
5. Report produced by the Corporate Director (Children and Lifelong Learning).
6. Report "signed-off" by the Cabinet Member (Children and Lifelong Learning) and sent to all County Council members for the "call-in" period.
7. During the call-in period, schools that could be significantly affected are visited or contacted by the DEO, in confidence.
- 8a. If the report is called-in it must be considered by a Scrutiny Panel and approved by Cabinet before the Consultation Stage can begin.
- 8b. If there is no call-in, the report is approved and the Consultation Stage will start.

B CONSULTATION STAGE

First phase of consultation – on a range of options

9. Issue Cabinet Report with options and consult interested parties.
10. Explanatory meetings in schools where there are significant implications.
11. Report drafted for approval to proceed to consult on specific proposals.

Second phase of consultation – on specific proposals

12. Consultation on specific proposals.
13. Report back to Cabinet who decide whether to publish Statutory Proposals.

C PUBLICATION AND DECISIONS ON STATUTORY PROPOSALS

14. Statutory notices published.
15. Representation period.
16. School Organisation Committee considers objections to Statutory Proposals.
17. Adjudication, if required.

4.2 District Review Procedures: Stage A

A: INFORMATION GATHERING STAGE

1. The district is divided into geographical zones for the purpose of analysis.
Each district is divided into zones based on geographically coherent areas
2. Briefing Papers containing demographic data are sent to schools.
A Briefing Paper is prepared for each zone, containing an analysis of current and projected pupil numbers and school capacities.
3. Zone-based Briefing Meetings with headteachers are held to consider the Briefing Papers.
These will be informal discussions, led by a District Education Officers (DEO). The DEO will set the scene by presenting the data contained in a Zone-Based Briefing Document, but not options for re-organisation. Headteachers are asked to brief governing bodies.
4. Individual visit to all schools to gain headteacher views.
DEOs will carry out discussions with all Headteachers. As appropriate, schools are encouraged to include diocesan representative and may wish to invite one or two governors.
5. Report drafted by the Corporate Director (Children and Lifelong Learning)
Discussions on the report will be conducted with other stakeholders, including local members, diocesan bodies and, where appropriate, the Learning and Skills Council.
6. Report “signed-off” by the Cabinet Member (Children and Lifelong Learning) and sent to all County Council members for the “call-in” period.
The report will be signed-off under delegated authority. There are 4 days during which any member may “call-in” the report.
7. During the call-in period, schools that could be significantly affected will be visited or contacted by the DEO, in confidence.
- 8a. If the report is called-in it must be considered by a Scrutiny Panel and approved by Cabinet before the Consultation Stage can begin.
- 8b. If there is no call-in, the report is approved and the Consultation Stage will start.
Before official publication, the report will be mailed to all schools in the district (with a copy enclosed for the Chair of Governors and the staff noticeboard). Affected schools will be contacted by the Directorate’s communications officers and offered support to deal with media enquiries.
Then the report is published on the Staffordshire Web with an accompanying press release.

4.2 District Review Procedures: Stage B

B: CONSULTATION STAGE

First phase of consultation – on a range of options

9. Issue Cabinet report with options and consult interested parties.

Those who are considering bringing forward statutory proposals (proposers) need to consult interested parties. There is often more than one way of reorganising Education and it is good practice to look at different options.

In doing so the proposers need to allow adequate time and provide background information for those being consulted. Where, in the course of consultation, a new option emerges which the proposers wish to consider, it will probably be appropriate to consult afresh on this option before proceeding to publish proposals.

10. Explanatory meetings in schools where there are significant implications.

Meetings are required for these schools in order to explain the options. There should be meetings of:

- a. Governors (including Diocesan representation where relevant).
- b. Staff (with union representatives).

11. Report drafted for approval to proceed to consult on specific proposals.

The report will summarise the views expressed during the first phase of consultation, together with officers' responses to the points raised.

Second phase of consultation – on specific proposals

12. Consultation on specific proposals

The options, having been formulated into specific proposals, need to be presented and consulted upon at formal meetings of:

- a. Governors (including diocesan representation where relevant)
- b. Staff (with union representatives)
- c. Parents

13. Report back to Cabinet who decide whether to publish Statutory Proposals

By this point there should be a clear understanding of what the proposals mean, and the main interested parties should have had an opportunity to express views.

4.2 District Review Procedures: Stage C

STAGE C: PUBLICATION AND DECISIONS ON PROPOSALS

14. Statutory Notices published

Proposals will be published in a local newspaper, and posted at the main entrances to schools named in the proposals, and at some other conspicuous place in the area served or to be served by the school. Regulations prescribe the information which must be given in the proposals, and specify what information must be submitted to the School Organisation Committee.

15. Representation Period

Once proposals are published there will be a statutory representation period during which representations (objections and comments) must be sent to the Local Education Authority (in the cases of its own proposals) or to the School Organisation Committee in other cases.

16. School Organisation Committee considers Statutory Proposals

After the Representation period, the School Organisation Committee will meet to determine the proposals. The Committee will consider any representations received together with the proposer's comments on those representations.

The Committee reaches a decision when all groups on the Committee who vote on the proposal - each group has one vote - vote for the decision, and none against.

The Committee may decide to:

- reject the proposals;
- approve the proposals without modification;
- approve the proposals with modifications following consultation with the proposers and others; or
- give a conditional approval. A conditional approval may be appropriate for example where implementation depends on the proposers obtaining planning permission, or acquiring a site.

17. Adjudication, if required

Where the Committee cannot reach a decision, they will pass the proposal to the Schools Adjudicator. The options open to the Adjudicator in reaching a decision are the same as for the Committee.

Then, implementation of the approved Statutory Proposal/s.

4.3 District Review Procedures: Roles

1. County Council Cabinet - will agree whether to publish formal statutory proposals.
2. Cabinet Member (Children and Lifelong Learning) – the Cabinet Member may “sign-off” reports under delegated authority. In these circumstances, all County Councillors have the opportunity to call-in the report. The Cabinet Member and Support Member (Schools) intend to attend school meetings during the second phase of the Consultation Stage.
3. Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny and Performance Panel - The Panel has a role to scrutinise (or call-in) the decisions of Cabinet or those made under delegated authority by the Cabinet Member (Children and Lifelong Learning). Scrutiny and Performance Panels collect as much information as they can about a subject and make recommendations for the Cabinet to consider.
4. Diocesan Boards – are key stakeholders to be consulted and involved with issues affecting Church of England and Catholic schools.
4. Staffordshire Learning and Skills Council – coordination is important for proposals impacting on post-16 issues.
5. Directorate Management Team – will prepare reports on the outcome of each stage of the review. A member of the Team will attend school meetings during the second phase of the Consultation Stage. The Team will ensure that decisions are implemented.
6. The consultation will involve officers inside and outside the Directorate. The District Education Officer (DEO) will play an important role as facilitator of discussions, initial fact-finding and framing of options. They will take a lead in the consultations and write the majority of the reports. The School Organisation and Information Unit will provide detailed background data, analysis and comment. The Joint Schools Property Division (JSPD) will provide information concerning sites and buildings.
7. School Organisation Committee (SOC) - The School Organisation Committee is independent of the County Council. Its principal function is to determine statutory proposals relating to the organisation of schools.
8. Central Consultative Committee - This is a strategic group for the whole County, consisting of representatives from the Council, the Headteachers Forum, trades unions and Diocesan Boards. The Committee is formed from the Asset Management Planning Forum. There is no particular expectation however that this group will participate in the detailed activities and meetings of the district reviews.
9. Headteachers - headteacher will be the key consultees during the Information Gathering stage and will help to ensure the data is accurate. The headteacher will have a major role during the Consultation Stage and any subsequent stages.
10. Governors – Governors will be particularly involved in steps 10 and 12 at the Consultation Stage, when meetings are held to explain and consult on options.
11. Parents - Parents are the main customer for education provided at schools and their views matter. Every care will be taken to ensure that their views are listened to, reported carefully and considered with due weight throughout the consultation.

4.4 Partnership with the Catholic Diocese

We will continue to work in partnership with the Catholic Diocese to ensure that a number of common objectives, in relation to school organisation planning, are met. These include:

- a. Ensuring that the balance of denominational provision in different areas of the county is maintained.
- b. Ensuring that the OFSTED action plan in relation to controlling admissions is delivered, in order to prevent overcrowding in certain situations, particularly at secondary level.
- c. Reviewing provision, as indicated in the agreed School Organisation Plan.

A key feature of the Catholic system as agreed in partnership with Staffordshire, is that a place should be made available for any child from a family which is adherent to the faith. This means that there are two systems of catchment area provision: The community and voluntary Church of England schools; and the Catholic system. The County is committed to this diversity in its systems: it also strives to achieve equality of opportunity in all parts of its provision.

The Archdiocese of Birmingham is also conducting a review of Catholic school provision across its schools.

4.5 Partnership with the Church of England Diocese

The Children and Lifelong Learning Directorate works with the Lichfield Diocesan Board of Education with the same objectives as outlined in the previous section.

The Church of England schools form an integral part of the Education system in the sense, for example, that voluntary controlled schools have catchment areas which directly complement those of community schools. Because of this, the procedures in this document will involve representatives of the Lichfield Diocese, and this will be from a very early stage.

4.6 Partnership with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC)

The Learning and Skills Council is responsible for funding and planning education and training for over 16-year-olds in England.

The Staffordshire LSC and the County Council are working with partners in the Staffordshire 14+ Strategic Partnership which has responsibility for identifying and co-ordinating arrangements for students from the age of 14 to 19. The LSC and key partners have a draft 14-19 strategic plan.

4.7 Key Related Strategy Documents

1. Staffordshire County Council Corporate Strategy 2005/2008
2. Education and Lifelong Learning Directorate Improvement Plan 2005/06-2007/08
3. Children and Lifelong Learning Directorate Values and Principles (draft)
4. School Organisation Plan 2005-2010
5. Asset Management Planning policy
6. For procedural matters: LEA Guidelines on Personnel Implications for School Closure/Amalgamation.

4.8 Factors affecting the Timetable for Reviews

The District Review Briefing Booklets include an outline timetable for each District Review. The timetable does not preclude earlier action being taken in any area where opportunities or major issues arise or if the Review is progressing at a faster pace.

Experience from the Reviews in other districts demonstrates that it may be necessary to conduct the review over a period of around two years. Whilst this may create a longer period of uncertainty, it is important that consultations are of sufficient duration to 1) allow for expressions of support, objection or comment, for examination and 2) explain, refine and generate options and proposals for change.

Periodically, a District Review timetable will be communicated. This inevitably shows changes in the timing of the reviews, which is affected by factors such as:

- a. The possible involvement of Scrutiny and Performance Panels to scrutinise reports.
- b. The timing of meetings, as appropriate, to discuss the stages of the review with headteachers, governing bodies and parents, members, officers and other stakeholders.
- c. The need to undertake traffic impact surveys for a proposal.
- d. Improved methods for conducting the review, for example, seeking sign-off of the earliest reports instead of a formal Cabinet approval.
- e. The timing of Stages B and C (Consultation and Publication) may be affected by the need to identify capital funds to implement a possible option.
- f. The legislation and DfES advice regarding the conduct of consultation, in particular, during the publication of statutory proposals at Stage C.

4.9 Confidentiality

The County Council is committed to the principles of open government in the way we do business, in delivering our services and in how we make our decisions. However, when the reviews affect individuals, confidentiality will be maintained as far as possible throughout the process, with full regard to the sensitive nature of the issues involved.

Produced by

**Staffordshire County Council
Children and Lifelong Learning
Directorate
School Organisation and Information Unit**
