

D: REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR SCHOOLS

Statutory Plans

- 1 Work is now under way to prepare Buckinghamshire County Council's new Education Development Plan for 2002/07. This is perhaps the most important of the statutory plans required of Local Education Authorities by the Government.
- 2 There has been extensive consultation on the key priorities to be included in the plan. 20 liaison groups of headteachers have met to give their views, representing 96% of schools. In addition, heads of secondary and special schools and of small schools in the Wycombe Area have held meetings to make separate responses. Headteachers will again be involved in the writing of action plans, which began on 6 November. The Cabinet has seen and commented on the Plan in draft. The final version is due to come to the full Council on 24 January.
- 3 The School Organisation Plan for 2001/06 has been completed and approved by the School Organisation Committee, whose ultimate responsibility it is. It has also been endorsed by the Cabinet. The School Organisation Plan sets out the forecast changes in pupil numbers over the period of the Plan and the ways, subject to planning, consultation and decision, these pupil numbers will have to be provided for.

Review of Catchment Areas

- 4 The School Organisation Team has now begun work on a county-wide review of secondary school reserved/catchment areas. This is the first such review since the early 1980s. Since then there have been considerable changes:
 - Successive legal changes have complicated admissions law.
 - The population of Buckinghamshire has changed in size, age structure and centres of population growth.
 - Buckinghamshire secondary schools are nearly all full and will remain so for at least the next five to six years.
 - The traditional admission system based on reserved areas has been under some challenge from parents whose choice of school cannot be met.

- The present layout of reserved areas results in high costs of home to school transport.

The review has been discussed in detail at the last three meetings of the Schools Policy Advisory Group. It will include two phases of consultation, and will be completed by the Spring of 2002, with the aim of implementing it from September 2003.

School Amalgamations and Closures

- 5 Berryfield Infant School and Icknield Junior School, Princes Risborough, will amalgamate on 1 January 2002. The new school will be named Princes Risborough Primary School.
- 6 I have agreed to the publication of Statutory Notices proposing the amalgamation of King's Wood Infant and Junior Schools, High Wycombe, on 1 September 2002. The amalgamation date previously proposed, 1 April 2002, was changed after representations from the Governing Body.
- 7 Discussions are continuing about proposed amalgamations of Shelburne Infant and Lansdowne Primary Schools, High Wycombe, and Stokenchurch Infant and Junior Schools.

Excellence Cluster for High Wycombe

- 8 The Government has announced that an Excellence Cluster is to be established in High Wycombe from September 2002. Excellence Clusters are an extension of the Excellence in Cities (EiC) programme, and are intended to bring the benefits of that programme to smaller groups of schools in relatively deprived areas. The schools in the cluster will receive additional resources for Learning Mentors, Learning Support Units and a programme for gifted and talented pupils.
- 9 Cressex School and Highcrest Community School will form the core of the Excellence Cluster, which will also include a number of primary schools: Ash Hill, Beechview, Booker Hill, Castlefield, Disraeli, King's Wood Junior, Lansdowne and Millbrook.

- 10 The additional resources for the Cluster could be worth over £2 million over three years.

Literacy and Numeracy

- 11 On 3 October, 2001, a meeting was called by the DfES to agree the pupil attainment targets set by Buckinghamshire for 2004. The senior managers for the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies were present at this meeting and went out of their way to emphasise that Buckinghamshire had very strong approaches to both aspects of school support. It is particularly pleasing to report their view that this county had two of the country's best advisers for these curriculum areas.

It is interesting to note that:

- after two years of the literacy strategy those schools receiving support saw their results at KS2 improve by an average of 6.4% per year compared to 3.5% across the county overall. Schools not receiving support improved by an average of 2.6% per year.
- after one year of the numeracy strategy, those schools receiving support saw their results at KS2 improve by an average of 9% compared to 6% across the county overall. Schools not receiving support improved by an average of 4.25%.

Post-16 : Learning and Skills Council

- 12 Following concerns raised by the Council, I am pleased to be able to report that Mrs Dewar and I, and our Strategic Managers, had a very productive meeting with the Chief Executive and three other Council Members of the local Learning and Skills Council.
- 13 The LSC agreed to a regular meeting of their Buckinghamshire-based Council members with ourselves to air common issues. They also agreed to draw up with us a “memorandum of understanding” to govern the working relationships between the LSC and the County Council, and our schools. This will enable us to play a formal part in working with schools and the LSC on planning future

post-16 developments for Buckinghamshire young people.

- 14 I have to say that we were very pleased at the clear willingness of the LSC to work with us. They offered a briefing and consultation discussion for Councillors on the LSC's current draft strategic plan, which we are looking to arrange in the near future.

**MARION CLAYTON
CABINET MEMBER FOR SCHOOLS**