

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

20 February 2008

STATEMENT OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES PORTFOLIO HOLDER (Early Years education and all school related education issues and advisory services)

COUNTY COUNCILLOR JOHN WATSON OBE

Primary Capital Strategy

Capital funding of £12.966M has been allocated to North Yorkshire for 2009-2011 as part of a 14 year capital investment programme in primary schools. A further £3.7M per annum is anticipated for the remaining years of the programme. The funding is conditional on approval of a 'Strategy for Change' document which must be submitted to DCSF before 17 June 2007 outlining the authority's strategic vision for primary schools and identifying the first priorities for investment. It has to have broad support from schools, diocesan authorities and other stakeholders. Executive members will be asked to give approval to consultation on the draft strategy on 22 February. The consultation period will run from 25 February until 16 May and must include a wide range of stakeholders including parents and pupils. The strategy will be considered by the Executive on 17th June. DCSF will advise us of the outcome in September 2008.

The DCSF framework for the strategy initially gave rise to speculation nationally that it would precipitate review and possible closure of many small schools. This was principally because the guidance pointed towards review of schools with 25% plus surplus capacity. On paper, many smaller schools (that is, those with 2-3 classrooms) have that proportion of surplus places, but in practice few actually have an unused classroom. The DCSF has recognised the point and clarified that the guidance is not intended to apply to such cases.

Small schools continue to be an important part of our service and community infrastructure in North Yorkshire. As a Council we maintain a higher proportion of small and very small schools than other, rural authorities (178 schools with fewer than 100 pupils, of which 82 have fewer than 50 pupils). We will continue to do so.

The Primary Capital Strategy provides a welcome opportunity to improve facilities and prospects for schools which face the biggest challenges from deprivation, lower attainment or viability. It will be important for us to achieve a balance of investment between urban and rural areas which face these issues.

Schools Capital Programme 2008/9 - 2010/11

The total capital allocation from DCSF for CYPS for 2008-2011 is £135.1M. This includes a number of allocations which are ring-fenced for specific initiatives. £6.7M is available for early years settings including private and voluntary settings, £4.6M for Phase 3 of the Children's Centre programme, £6.6M for the Voluntary Aided Schools

capital programme, £796K for Children's Social Care and £12.9M for ICT. Of this allocation, schools capital to be determined by the County Council is £60.8M

Schools will receive £41.7M via devolved formula capital to be spent on maintenance and local improvement priorities. This may be joined up with funding from the primary capital programme or other capital funding streams.

Within the schools capital programme of £60.8M, £11.966M is ring fenced for delivery of the Primary Capital Strategy. There is £8M targeted capital support for SEN and 14-19 provision and £3.6M for Schools Access.

Although the allocation is larger than in previous years there will be great pressure on the programme. This is due to the scale of funding needed to implement the Special Educational Needs and Behaviour Review and the need to allocate funding for specialist provision for 14-19 diplomas which, in North Yorkshire, have to be up and running before Building Schools for the Future funding arrives. In addition there are some specific significant building issues relating to health and safety such as asbestos removal, gas ventilation in kitchens and boilers and work required following fire risk assessments. Mindful of the many strong cases for investment, and joint investment with schools, which fall outside these categories, we are doing all we can to develop a balanced programme within challenging constraints. Proposals are expected to come forward in March.

Richmond School BSF

The County Council has been working on the design of a replacement secondary school in Richmond with private sector partners Atkins, Faithful and Gould, who were selected from the Partnerships for Schools framework, since April 2006. Planning approval was granted in May 2007. In September 2007 after a competitive tendering exercise run through OJEU we entered into a partnering arrangement with AFG and contractors Shepherd's Construction with a view to signing a contract for works in December 2007, once price certainty had been achieved. In view of the tight timescales associated with the project we commissioned Shepherd's to undertake essential enabling works on site in parallel with this exercise.

Cost estimates were within budget in July 2007 and Shepherd's were confident that they could deliver the design within the available funding. However the result of Shepherd's market testing of the design which was communicated to the County Council on 19th December was a price well in excess of the available budget. Contact with other one school pathfinder authorities informs us that other schemes are facing similar challenges.

The County Council took the decision to partially suspend the enabling work on site in order to concentrate efforts on value engineering a solution for the scheme as a whole. During January intensive efforts have been made to identify opportunities for

achieving value on the scheme. This has already generated significant potential cost reductions, although they remain insufficient to get the scheme completely back within budget and this work is continuing.

A report is expected from our advisers on 18 February drawing conclusions from these early value engineering activities and making recommendations to the County Council for taking the project forward. If we can be confident that the entire scheme can be delivered on budget it may be possible to take the sixth form element forward as a separate contract. This would allow work on site to proceed whilst further efforts are made to achieve affordability on the later new-build elements of the scheme. An assessment will be made of the risk involved to the County Council before such a decision is taken.

Low Bentham CP School and site for new school for the Benthams

Governors of Low Bentham Community Primary School wrote to the Local Authority in January explaining that they felt it would no longer be possible to provide the full spectrum and quality of educational experience from September 2008. There are currently 9 children at the school, and there are likely to be only 6 children on roll in September. We are therefore consulting on a proposal to close Low Bentham CP School from the 31 August 2008.

This is a sad position for the school. The County Council has been working with Low Bentham and High Bentham since August 2005 on a proposal to amalgamate the two schools and create a new primary school. Despite considerable efforts, the Council has not yet been able to acquire a suitable site for the new school. During protracted negotiations with landowners, numbers at Low Bentham School have fallen more quickly than anticipated by the school or the County Council. Work to obtain a suitable site for the new primary school will continue despite the closure proposal.

The 14-19 Challenge

The changes relating to the 14-19 agenda now need to increase in pace. The challenge is as follows:

- By 2013, every young person aged 14-19 has the right to choose from 17 different diplomas at 3 different levels. They must also have the choice to sign up to an apprenticeship at the age of 16 if they so wish.
- No single school or Further Education College can provide the entitlement outlined above: it requires excellent collaboration between neighbouring schools, colleges and employers.
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- this presents a particular challenge in North Yorkshire:
 - schools are often a long way from each other;
 - colleges may be even further away; and in one or two areas there is no further education college;
 - employers tend to be very small and may have difficulty in gearing up to offering work-related learning and apprenticeships
- there are ways forward which must be explored urgently:
 - looking at the whole transport offer including home to school and public transport; and finding innovative ways of delivering the need for in-day school to school and college transport;
 - development of appropriate facilities, including centres to serve a geographical area;
 - outreach and peripatetic specialist teaching/training arrangements, which involve staff travelling rather than students;
 - delivering the potential of e-learning.

Currently we have, across the county, seven Area Learning Partnerships who are working well together. We now need a clear strategic plan to deliver the entitlement by 2013 and are currently developing this.

School Catering

The review work on school catering is making good progress. The work is necessary because of the challenges to increase take-up, provide healthy meals which meet minimum nutritional standards, recover the extra costs arising from job evaluation and, more recently, the loss of the YPO dividend.

The Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee have assisted considerably in the review work. Their recommendations were reflected in a recent consultation with Primary schools which concentrated on the budgetary implications of the options available to the service and schools. Further consultations will follow this month with both the Schools Forum and the Catering Board. It is recognised that further consultations will be necessary with pupils, parents and governors before final decisions are reached.

The options under consideration all involve giving more choice and, therefore risk, to Primary schools but built upon a partnership between the schools and the catering service around a significantly enhanced Marketing Strategy. Given the current estimated financial shortfall of circa £700K per annum it is recognised that cost control, and price charged to parents will also be important elements for a final solution. It is recognised there are particular challenges in providing viable catering

services in small schools and schools in areas of significant disadvantage. Given all these challenges it is very helpful that the County Council has recognised, in its budget strategy, that some recurring financial assistance may be necessary if all these aims are to be met.

Young People and Sport and Outdoor Education

These two reports from the Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee were very helpful and timely pieces of work. Both Sport and Outdoor Education have come back to the top of the agenda nationally because of their strong links with young people's health and their positive personal development.

North Yorkshire has made good progress so far with School Sports Partnerships, and the Directorate also makes a major contribution to the other partnerships concerned with community-based sports and clubs. As the Committee's report identifies, however, whilst the various partnership arrangements have many strengths at grass roots level, overall planning and accountability are not all that clear. The risk, therefore, is that the development of opportunities is patchy and may be difficult to sustain. This would be a matter of concern to the County Council and Sport England.

To address this, the Director has invited the Committee to present its report to the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board with a view to establishing a voluntary, over-arching strategic framework through which progress on all fronts can be monitored. If agreed by the CYPSP Board, this would then form part of the new Children and Young People's Plan for 2008/09 – 2010/11.

In relation to the Outdoor Education Service, the Committee's work has provided further evidence of the valuable contribution it makes to young people's education and wider development. They have identified potential for further development and efficiencies, both of which are helpful, and they also confirmed the pressing need for investment to modernise some of the premises. The Executive has been pleased to respond promptly to that by allocating resources from the Wrea Head Trust for improvement works at Bewerley Park Centre. This is a charitable trust which was left to the County Council to be spent on elements of non-statutory education. It was used to build the accommodation annex at Grantley Hall and, when this was sold, returned to the Trust. It amounts to about half a million pounds. As Outdoor Education is non-statutory provision, it fits the requirements of the Trust.

County Councillor John Watson OBE
Executive Member for Education

CW/BAW
12 February 2008