



Children and Young People's Services

Shropshire Schools For The Future

Policy Consultation on Primary School Organisation

Appendix 3 : Questions and Answers Arising From Responses To The Consultation

Appendix 3: Responses to Questions Raised in the School Organisation Policy Consultation

This document lists the questions raised by respondents to the consultation on the policy principles proposed for a new School Organisation Policy, and replies prepared by officers from Children and Young People's Services and other directorates within the Council. As essentially the same question was often received from more than one respondent, and in some cases from many respondents, similar questions have been combined with wording which reflects the common points made.

Question	Proposed response
Why are you doing this?	<p>Primary age pupil numbers in Shropshire are reducing. Shropshire will have twice the recommended level of unfilled places by 2012, with 3400 empty desks in primary schools. School budgets will have a shortfall of £1.9m per year. No action will only exacerbate the problems.</p> <p>This shortfall represents part of the £6.5m reduction (at today's values) between 2007 and 2012 in the government's allocation of Dedicated Schools Grant which results from falling pupil numbers.</p>
Is this just a cost-cutting exercise?	<p>It would be wrong to deny that that the financial situation facing schools is not a major driver in changing the policy to ensure a future network of secure financially viable schools. Unless some action is taken, schools will face a very substantial reduction in their budgets (even if their pupil numbers remain the same), as government grant reduces and a greater proportion of resources support small and part empty schools.</p> <p>However, there are many other very important factors involved. The first is the need for young people to interact with a peer group of sufficient size to challenge and stretch their intellect and allow them to develop a range of social interactions to prepare them for later life. The second is to relieve the burden on staff and particularly head teachers of planning for classes with three or more age groups. The third is to allow staff to develop a smaller number of specialisms to support planning and teaching and learning. The fourth is to concentrate investment in providing good and comprehensive facilities at a smaller number of sites. Finally, with regard to the proposals for infant and junior school amalgamations, to ensure good transition planning between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.</p>
Will you really listen to the consultation responses?	<p>Yes, particularly where they are well argued and give clear alternatives. However, officers believe that no change would greatly exacerbate the situation, as the financial effects on the whole schools network of finding the school related funding shortfall of £1.9m per year would be dreadful.</p>
What have you done to publicise the consultation?	<p>The consultation has been publicised through contacting our partner organisations, utilising the local print and broadcast media, through the Council's website and by email to school and letters and newsletters to parents via schools. There have been briefing meetings for Headteachers, and consultation meeting for head teachers and Governors.</p>

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<p>Are you already planning to close particular schools?</p>	<p>There is no “hit list” of schools. We are currently consulting on the potential closure of one school under the current policy, but there are no plans laid for any other particular school. As noted in the proposals, there would still be a need for a network of small schools to ensure Shropshire County Council can meet the distance entitlement of a school within six miles of home. Sometimes, these schools might be relatively close to urban centres or other schools in order to maintain the network. It will require further analysis based on the final agreed policy to identify which schools should be considered as part of the review, and wide consultation to identify which should be the subject of proposals. If a consultation started in the Autumn or Spring terms of this academic year on any statutory changes to a school, the earliest they could be implemented would be in August 2009.</p>
<p>Where did the two mile and six mile distance proposals come from?</p>	<p>The intention of the six mile criterion is to make what is really a journey time limit easily measurable on a map. The six miles was based on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> six miles at an average speed of 20mph = 20 minutes 10 stops of 2 minutes each to collect pupils = 20 minutes total = 40 minutes. <p>The best practice maximum journey time is 45 minutes, so this allows a little extra for congestion. Only children joining at the first stop would spend anywhere close to the expected maximum time on the bus and most planned routes would be less than six miles and less than 40 minutes in total. In practice, none of the existing six mile transport routes comes close to 40 minutes, with the longest primary journey, at 7.7 miles, taking only 30 minutes.</p> <p>The two mile limit is based on the government’s statutory walking distance for children of primary school age, and equates to approximately 40 minutes walking, so is broadly comparable to the good practice bus journey time.</p>
<p>Where do you your projections on pupil numbers come from and have you checked them?</p>	<p>Our pupil number projections are based on a combination of factors and sources of information. Our medium term forecasts, up to about 2011, are based on numbers we obtain from the health authorities of children living in each post code. At the point where children enter school, this data is far more accurate than using birth data from four years before. From historical data, we know on average what proportion of these children go to each school in the area. Obviously, we know what children are already in each year group in a school, and from history we can track changes in this through time and make forward projections. Our medium term projections are very accurate on a county wide basis and are usually within one or two pupils in each year group at a school. Longer term forecasts are based on Office of National Statistics projections of the number of adults of child bearing age in Shropshire. These include planning and immigration assumptions. We can compare these numbers historically with numbers of children in Shropshire schools and extrapolate the future number of children. Both medium and longer term forecasts show that Shropshire will need significantly fewer school places in the future.</p>

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<p>Will you consult with the children?</p>	<p>Shropshire County Council would be delighted to receive the views of young people and is actively seeking them. However, it would be unfair simply to ask young children at this time if they wanted their school to close or not, as this would simply increase levels of anxiety without resulting in a significant contribution to the debate. Shropshire County Council is undertaking focus group work with children how have recently transferred to secondary school to determine what they think were the key factors in a successful primary education so that these can be replicated through the new policy. Should there be proposals about individual schools arising out of a new policy young people would have another chance to express their views.</p>
<p>Will you take into account the quality of the existing schools?</p>	<p>Yes. All the proposals are about increasing the quality of schools. As noted elsewhere, the consultation is currently at the stage of identifying principles. However, Shropshire County Council would take the opportunity of any review arising from a new policy to review schools in Ofsted categories of concern. It should be noted that this is not the same as saying that because a school is popular with a small number of parents, or parents from out of area, or its pupils achieve at a high level that this would place that school outside the review. High achievement by individual pupils and high value added scores are a characteristic of Shropshire primary schools. Where it is clear that high quality education can equally well be provided at one site rather than another, other factors listed in the policy would need to come into consideration.</p>
<p>Will class sizes increase as a result of the change in policy?</p>	<p>The intention of the proposed policy is not to increase class sizes in itself. However, some of the smallest classes (below 20 pupils) would be less likely in the future, as schools with more classes have more flexibility in organisation and are likely to share pupils across classes rather than have a single very small class. There is a limit of 30 pupils for any class containing mainly KS1 (infant) pupils.</p>
<p>Will you consider other kinds of school organisation such as clusters (federations) or shared teachers and resources?</p>	<p>Yes. All these options would be considered as part of the review, both at the stage of determining policy and at any future stage which considers proposals for individual schools. However, experience in other Local Authorities has shown that these options are at least as expensive as traditional models of operation. These models should not be thought of as a panacea even if they do have a place in the new policy.</p>
<p>Will the savings from closing schools be eaten up by the costs of additional transport?</p>	<p>No. Although there would be some additional costs of transport in some schools, experience has shown that these are generally significantly less than the savings achieved by site closures.</p>

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<p>Will you consider introducing middle schools?</p>	<p>All suggestions will be considered, but it is highly unlikely that, without substantially different evidence to that currently available to the Council, that a policy of introducing middle schools will be an acceptable outcome. Middle schools (dealing with the 9 -13 age group) are increasingly seen as outmoded and the additional transfer to be detrimental to children's education. Although some middle schools exist in neighbouring authorities, these same areas have by and large been reorganising from three tier to two tier over recent years.</p>
<p>Will children, particularly those with Special Educational Needs, be 'lost' in a larger school?</p>	<p>The organisation of primary schools is based much more on the individual class than in secondary schools. This means that, for most of the day, in any size of school each pupil will mainly deal with only their classmates and one or two staff. Most primary classes are below 30 (83%) and this would not change. Only a small proportion of pupils (7%) are in classes of less than 20 pupils.</p> <p>There might be some concern about children being physically lost in larger school buildings, and all children do go through a short period of anxiety before accommodating to their surroundings, regardless, it would seem, of the size of school. Most Shropshire primary schools are smaller than the national average size of primary school, which is 236 pupils. The average size of school in Shropshire is 151 pupils, and these proposals would be unlikely to increase that significantly.</p> <p>That said, all sizes of school in Shropshire have pupils with special needs and serve them well. Larger schools often have specialist staff and facilities which cannot be provided in smaller schools.</p> <p>No primary school in Shropshire is so large that each individual pupil cannot be recognised by all the staff, and the majority of pupils will know each other even in a full two form of entry (420 pupil) school.</p>
<p>Will Headteachers still know the name of every child in the school?</p>	<p>Educational research, and experience in larger schools, shows that head teachers can easily cope with knowing every child in a two form entry (420 place) school. This is because they don't have to learn them all at once – they may only have 80 names to learn each year (60 new Reception children and perhaps 20 or so who leave and are replaced. Most other teachers will also know almost all the children, because they have taught them in an earlier year, or through clubs and activities. However, the most important relationship for each child is that with their classroom teacher, and this would still be based on target class sizes at or below 30.</p> <p>Some new secondary schools in cities are being organised on administrative units of 300-400 children to mimic this primary school relationship between teachers and pupils and pupils and pupils, to allow human scale interaction even if the total size of school is up to 2000 pupils.</p>

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<p>What will happen to extra curricular activities if pupils have to travel to school?</p>	<p>Less than one in four (23.4%) of pupils from schools of less than 100 pupils currently walk the whole journey to school, while 55.2% travel in private cars. It is possible that the percentage of walkers might reduce further as a result of a future review of school organisation, but it is hoped that parallel improvements in home to school travel would mean that the proportion travelling by private car would not increase.</p> <p>Given these figures, it is clear than most parents already have travel arrangements in place for children to attend extra-curricular activities, and this would not change as a result of the review. In addition, there is no requirement that extended schools activities take place on school sites</p>
<p>What about denominational (faith) education?</p>	<p>Shropshire County Council has a duty in any reorganisation to at least maintain the balance of faith and non-denomination places in the area. If the new policy leads to proposals about individual schools we would consult with our colleagues in the Diocesan education boards on those proposals, in order to meet this duty.</p>
<p>What will be the effect on pre-schools?</p>	<p>In Shropshire, the entitlement to a high quality pre-school education place is delivered mainly through partnership with the private and voluntary sectors, and through a relatively small number of maintained nursery classes attached to schools. The proposals commit the Council to continuing to make high quality early years places available, but do not intend to change this partnership approach. The future of maintained nursery classes would be considered in any individual proposals, as would any private and voluntary provision on the school site. The Government have recently announced changes in the funding of such provision, and so the opportunity of a review might well be opportune timing. Private and voluntary provision not on schools sites would be able to choose whether or not to become involved in the review.</p>
<p>Will you look at the facilities available to and money invested in schools, particularly those which might receive pupils from closing schools?</p>	<p>This is largely a matter for a later stage, where proposals for individual schools might be considered. However, the report to Cabinet does link the outcomes of the review and the Government's Primary Capital Programme, which is due to start in 2009. It should be noted that the Government in fact allocated £8.4m to Shropshire in the first round of the Primary Capital, rather than the expected £4m mentioned in the report.</p>
<p>Is this being done to make money from selling school sites?</p>	<p>No. The primary drivers for proposing a new entitlement-based policy are educational and financial. Any re-investment arising from the sale of sites would be marginal and incidental. As noted elsewhere, some sites don't belong to the council or Diocesan educational authorities and would revert to the original owners. Some are owned by the dioceses and there might be a possibility of re-investment. Some are owned by the council, and any income would be reinvested in council services. However, site ownership or value issues are not part of the proposed policy review criteria. The entitlement policy proposals do not consider ownership of sites to be a suitable criterion for consideration.</p>

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<p>Does the six mile limit mean there will only be schools in towns?</p>	<p>No. Were the Council to accept the six mile distance criterion as part of a new policy, this distance would be measured by road from home to school. This means that the majority of the county would still need at least some rural schools to provide a comprehensive network of education places.</p>
<p>Will you consider journey times and ease of travel as well as the distance criterion?</p>	<p>Yes. As noted elsewhere, the six mile figure was developed from an expected maximum journey time on the bus. Where there are particular difficulties in travel, this would be considered in the consideration any individual proposals which might arise from a new policy.</p>
<p>What effect will the proposals have on the carbon footprint of pupils travelling to school?</p>	<p>The proposals mean that only a small number of pupils would be transported six miles to school, and many would have much shorter journeys with a substantial proportion still walking to school. In addition, as noted elsewhere, the majority of children currently attending the smallest schools are already transported there. It is certainly true that the proposals might increase the length of journey for some pupils, but on the other hand the proposals might well mean that more children travel by minibus rather than private car. On balance, though, it is likely that the proposals would slightly increase carbon emissions from home to school travel. However, reducing the number of school sites maintained by Shropshire County Council would more than offset that. Even the smallest school produces between 15 and 20 tonnes of carbon emissions per year. This is the equivalent of 110000 bus passenger miles. This is compounded by deliveries of school meals, good and services, etc. and visits by necessary support staff to an extended network.</p>
<p>What effect will the proposals have on community spirit in villages?</p>	<p>We would welcome more information on the historical impact of school closures on communities. Our experience has been that communities support their school because it is the school where their children go, rather than its physical location. This means that the majority of community members who are involved in community activities at a school which closes become involved in activities at the school to which the children transfer. In many cases there is an alternative location for very local, non-school related activities such as church jumble sales, usually in a church or village hall.</p> <p>Parents who walk to or otherwise bring their children to school and then use local facilities such as a village shop would still have the option of bringing their child to a central collection and drop off point.</p> <p>We understand the concern of residents about the potential effect on a school closure on the village. We have yet to see evidence, as opposed to anecdotes and dire predictions, of significant deleterious effects. Recent research (Reynolds, 2007) confirms that the recent reviews in Powys have had a limited impact on communities.</p>

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<p>Are you considering the special needs of rural communities</p>	<p>Almost the whole of the policy proposals are based on the special needs of rural communities. The intention of the proposals is to move away from a situation where rural schools and communities are considered solely on the basis of the number of children in the area around a school, and potentially subject to closure proposals in isolation from the wider context. The planned outcome is that every home in a rural community has access to a place in a high quality viable school within a defined maximum distance. Any child would have the same high quality educational entitlement regardless of their community.</p>
<p>What about parental choice?</p>	<p>Most children in the county would still be within reasonable distance of more than one school. As at present, parents would be able to express a preference for any school in the County and their child would attend that school if places were available. However, also as at present each child would be in the catchment area for one school, and the majority of children, as in most areas at present, would attend the local school.</p>
<p>Can't you bus people out of towns to maintain rural schools rather than bussing people into town schools?</p>	<p>All options can be considered. However, the proposals are for children already in urban areas to be able to have a place within walking distance. It would be a poor sustainability proposal to bus these children into rural areas.</p> <p>Conversely, as noted elsewhere, the purpose of the proposals is not to create a network of town schools only. As at present, most children living in rural area would go to a school in a settlement, village or small town. However, that school might be slightly larger (although still less than the average size of schools in England and probably less than half that size) and slightly further away for a very small number of pupils. For completeness, though, it should be said that if the current criteria are incorporated into a new policy, a small number of rural children might well begin to attend the town school where that is nearby and their current school is very small and supported mainly by children from out of catchment.</p>
<p>Are four class schools feasible in rural areas?</p>	<p>Very much so. Although detailed proposals are for a later stage of the process and would depend on the principles underpinning a new policy on school organisation, it is possible to demonstrate that four class schools are feasible in rural areas. There are a number of areas of the County where there are two or more small schools in close proximity, and by combining these one or more four class schools would be the result.</p>
<p>Will children in larger schools miss out on the chance to participate in school teams?</p>	<p>The reverse is quite possible, as larger schools often have more opportunities to participate in a wider range of inter-school activities. In addition children would be able to compete along with and against children of the same age and physical development.</p>

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<p>Will some shy children lose the chance to become used to speaking in assemblies if they move to larger schools?</p>	<p>Most larger schools have a range of opportunities for children to speak in public in addition to whole school assemblies. These might include Key Stage assemblies with two, three or four classes, year assemblies in two form entry schools or presenting projects to other single classes.</p>
<p>Isn't the birthrate increasing again?</p>	<p>That depends on what is meant by birthrate. The number of children born per woman of childbearing age has now returned to the rate (1.86 live births per woman, on average) it was in 1980, after falling to rates as low as 1.63. However, in 1964 this figure was 2.95, 58% percent higher than now.</p> <p>More importantly, the number of women in Shropshire of child bearing age has fallen steadily, which will have a far larger effect that the small increase in the number children born per woman.</p> <p>Recent reports concerning the increasing birth rate have not been reflected in the information for Shropshire derived from the Primary Care Trust known children database.</p>
<p>420 pupils in a school is too many. Shouldn't the size of schools be limited to, say, 350?</p>	<p>1886 primary schools in England (11% of the total) have more than 400 pupils. The vast majority of these will be two form of entry schools (420 pupils when full). 350 pupils is a logical choice in one sense, as it is about that number of people that psychologists tell us we can relate to in our daily lives. This figure is now being used in planning administrative units within some large secondary schools. However, a primary school of 350 pupils would need to have mixed age teaching in every year group which is often unpopular with parents of children at larger schools. The internal organisation of a fourteen class school provides other ways of splitting down the whole school group, and in light of this it is felt that the larger size is more than compensated for by the use of single age classes.</p> <p>Head teachers and other key school staff are used to dealing with larger than average numbers of people in their daily lives, so knowing four or even five hundred people is a task to which they are well used.</p>
<p>Won't some children moving from small to large schools be bullied?</p>	<p>All Shropshire schools have robust anti bullying policies. Where bullying does occur, although it is rare, it is no more likely to occur in a large school than a small one. In addition, even if a new school organisation policy does result in proposals to close some very small schools, in the main children would then transfer to schools which, although larger, still have target sizes of less than the England average (in the case of 7 class schools) or half that figure yet (in the case of 4 class schools).</p>

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<p>Why are you changing from a policy based on educational reasons to one based on financial reasons?</p>	<p>Nothing could be further from the truth. The current policy is based solely on numerical sizes of schools. While these were initially based on educational and financial principles, they are now part of a wholly mechanistic policy. The proposed new policy is based on sound educational principles providing children with a solid educational and social experience at a primary school within a reasonable distance from home, although as noted elsewhere the effect on school's budget of doing nothing would be so extreme that financial pressures are a significant driver for the consultation.</p>
<p>How are the proposed savings made up?</p>	<p>If a school site were to close, savings would be made in the allocations for maintenance and facilities management, utilities (energy, water and rates) and basic staffing allowances (such as that part of the head teacher's salary set aside for non-contact time, and the difference between a heads salary and that of a mainstream teacher, costs of site management and some administrator time). These are allocated to schools as a lump sum. A significant part of the budget is pupil led – that is, any funding would transfer with the pupil to a new school – but small schools with significant unfilled places also receive additional funding to allow them to pay the basic salaries of their teachers. For example, a two class school just large enough to avoid review under the current policy could receive up to £50,000 in additional funding for salaries alone.</p>
<p>What do other counties do in the same position?</p>	<p>Other counties have been undertaking reviews. Worcestershire is in the middle of a long term review and their policy now says that they should review any school which is forecast to fall to 70 pupils or below in a five year period. Hereford say they will review schools below 60 and all schools regardless of size where the unit cost is higher than government grant. Cheshire and Cumbria do not set any triggers but say they will review schools with falling rolls. Powys say they will review any school with 25% or more surplus places and have decided recently to close four schools. Gwynedd have just published proposals to close 29 out of 87 schools following a review. Shropshire County Council will also explore other possibilities for schools, such as federations or cluster schools and sharing resources.</p>
<p>What can central government do to help?</p>	<p>Obviously, more money from central government would help. However, central government are unlikely to listen to requests for more funding while a substantial number of schools have surplus places.</p>
<p>What evidence do you have for the statements you make about small schools</p>	<p>Officers have worked closely with many schools on school workforce remodelling and school improvement over recent years. Key issues have been identified with schools and addressed with local authority support.</p>

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<p>Why aren't you proud of our small schools?</p>	<p>Shropshire County Council is proud of the high quality education provided by all our schools. We acknowledged this several times during the consultation. Slightly larger schools can organise their classes to have less age groups in each class, reducing the planning workload and allowing more time to be spent on teaching and learning. They can allow staff to specialise to greater depth in fewer core subjects and then share that expertise within the school. They find it easier to attract senior staff, because they can offer higher salaries and more non-contact time for Headteachers to concentrate on school improvement.</p>
<p>Aren't surplus places only a statistic which can be changed with the stroke of a pen?</p>	<p>No. Surplus places are real, physical empty space in schools which have to be heated, lit and maintained, and, where class sizes drop significantly below 30 in each class, staffed by teachers and support workers. This can only be paid for by reducing the budget allocation for other pupils in the county.</p> <p>Shropshire County Council has successfully taken out over 1200 surplus places (equivalent to eight average size schools) in recent years by physically converting spaces to uses such as early years provision, community ICT, Multi Agency Team Offices, etc. However, there is a limit to the number of places which can be taken out this way.</p>
<p>Why does Shropshire not recognise that schools of less than 100 provide high quality education?</p>	<p>As noted elsewhere, Shropshire does recognise and celebrate the excellent work done by our small schools. However, high quality education is also provided in our larger schools with four or more classes, and these schools have significant advantages for staff and pupils.</p> <p>Very small schools have challenges for staff and other schools. Staff workload is significantly reduced in only slightly larger schools. This does not mean teachers in larger schools work less hard, but they are able to spend less time on planning for teaching different age groups together and more on teaching and learning and can develop greater depth of knowledge in a smaller number of specialist areas, safe in the assumption that other teachers in their school are doing the same and such expertise can be easily shared. Small schools also have a significant effect on the budget of all schools. This year, places at two exceptionally small schools together cost £155k more than the Shropshire average – which was funded by reducing the budget for every primary pupil in the county by £7.31. Although these schools are exceptional, there are still significant financial effects on all pupils from maintaining a network of very small schools in Shropshire especially as numbers continue to fall, which increases the average cost per pupil up at smaller schools and the level of subsidy having to be provided.</p>

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<p>Aren't rural areas the highest areas of growth?</p>	<p>There is no evidence to indicate that rural areas in Shropshire are growing faster than urban areas. However, the population is growing across Shropshire. The growth is mainly in older people. In terms of new development, there will undoubtedly be continuing infill development, which tends to be executive housing where children, if any, are older than primary age, and a small number of developments of 20 to 40 homes. Very large developments are much more likely to be attached to existing urban areas, and where developments have more than 400 family homes in rural areas or 900 family homes in urban areas we should be working with developers to create new schools to serve these areas, not expecting children to travel to existing empty places.</p>
<p>Is rural stability a prime concern at Shropshire County Council?</p>	<p>Shropshire County Council is concerned to see its rural areas develop viable, sustainable communities. However, these community areas need not be coterminous with the catchment areas of existing very small schools. There are a number of viable settlements in rural Shropshire which consider themselves part of a larger community, including employment and education but which do not have a school within the settlement. The proposed policy might result in a realignment of some of these community areas, but not their destruction.</p>
<p>What demand is there in rural areas for extended schools and wrap around care?</p>	<p>Rural areas have at least as much need for childcare and extended school services as urban areas. While not every parent needs access to childcare services, where they are needed they are very important indeed. Other extended services can provide social and education enrichment opportunities for young people and provide "places to go, things to do" for young people who might otherwise drift into antisocial behaviour.</p>
<p>Are you increasing rural unemployment by these changes?</p>	<p>There is no intention to take money out of the government's Dedicated Schools Grant for education services to spend on other areas. However, as noted elsewhere, this grant is expected to reduce as pupil numbers fall. Some of that reduction will lead to less staff being employed and some of that reduction will be in rural areas. However, in the main, budgets for teachers and teaching assistant would transfer from a closing school to the school receiving the pupils and would sustain and increase staffing levels at other, nearby schools.</p>
<p>If it ain't broke, don't fix it!</p>	<p>If Shropshire County Council does not address the issue of reducing pupils numbers and the financial effect of large numbers of small schools, the budget for each school of one hundred pupils will be £23,000 less by 2010/11, a total of £1.9m across all schools. These levels of cuts would force many small schools into non-viability in any case, but would seriously damage the education of pupils in the process. It is far better to have a considered, planned change now that a rushed and reactive one a couple of years down the line.</p>

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The following questions and answers are taken from the report to Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Panel, 17 October 2007. The original questions were submitted by Cllr Peter Phillips.

<p>Currently when we close small schools it is for educational reasons and we have stated that there are no significant cost savings mainly because of extra transport. How will the new Policy deliver savings?</p>	<p>Revised policy would have to look at both the educational and financial viability of the overall schools network. It is true to say that the majority of the funding of a school is pupil related and would follow pupils from a merged or closed school to the new institution. However, not all of the budget is pupil related and savings are available from premises related budgets, e.g. lump sums, ground and floor area and also (in many schools) from salary protection allocations. It is also true that in some cases extra transport would be required were the network of schools to be reduced. However, this is not true in all cases as many pupils are already transported to schools in rural areas.</p>
<p>4 or so years ago, we adopted base reductions and were advised this Policy would achieve the required savings on the demographic projections. What has changed?</p>	<p>The last policy change, adopted in 2004, was intended to remove surplus places from schools, which it did in part by reducing the capacity of some schools (for example, by redesignation of former class bases). However, the impact on revenue funding of the introduction of the Minimum Funding Guarantee methodology in 2005 could not be considered in that policy. Over the last three years a total of 1202 places have been removed from the primary sector. This work is ongoing and further potential reductions have been identified. The reduction in school places has not fully kept pace with the reduction in pupil numbers (1373) over the same time period. This is understandable because there are limits on our ability to reduce numbers without actually resorting to closing schools. In addition, the financial pressures have increased as the lump sum, area related and salary protection budgets have remained in place for schools of reduced size. At the time of the last policy change, it was estimated that changes to school sizes to be introduced would save around £600,000. However, the introduction of the Minimum Funding Guarantee has reduced the Council's ability to make these savings and has imposed additional larger financial pressures.</p>
<p>Following the advice, can we look at the report which established that Policy and examine the demographics and cash projections and compare with now?</p>	<p>The demographic projections have been borne out in practice. The report at that time drew upon forecasts made in 2002 for the School Organisation Plan dated 2003-2008: The February 2004 report warned that there would be a net decrease in available funding of £1.8m between 2004 and 2007, with approximately £0.6m cost savings arising out of reducing school places. There is every indication that the financial projections would have been proved correct as well, but, as noted above, the introduction of the Minimum Funding Guarantee has had a larger effect on funding than the reduction in places, with further savings of £1.86m per year required in 2011.</p>
<p>The current projections are only until 2012. Do we have a potentially</p>	<p>The detailed projections are based on known numbers of children, including the live births numbers received from the Primary Care Trust. As these only run to 2006, this limits the detailed projections made on an area basis to 2012. However, the number of Shropshire residents of child-</p>

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<p>short term problem but a long term policy?</p>	<p>bearing age has also been falling from a high point of just over 38,000 in 1996, and from the mid-year population estimates prepared by ONS will not recover above 29,000 until after 2020, if at all. The fall in residents aged 25-34 years is mirrored by the fall in pupil numbers, so it can be expected that pupil numbers will fall beyond 2012 levels and then increase slightly without reaching the levels of earlier this decade. There has also been some speculation that additional housing will provide a demographic counter pressure. Where developments take place in small numbers in rural areas, the effects of development on pupil numbers will be marginal, with the additional homes simply offsetting the smaller number of adults per household indicated by current trends. Large developments are mainly forecast to occur as additions to existing larger towns, and should have their own schools and other community facilities constructed as part of the development and at the cost of the developer. This also applies to large green field developments. The Council already makes use of developer contributions to expand schools when significant development occurs near an existing school. However, to turn a full two class into a four class school would require 290-300 homes to be developed in the catchment, which is very unlikely in a rural area.</p>
<p>The accumulative shortfall by 2011/12 is 3.8 million. What are the annual shortfalls?</p>	<p>The projected shortfall by year is £0.5m in 2008/09, £1.44m in 2009/10, £1.86m in 2010/11.</p>
<p>The six mile travel issue – What would be the geography of any groups of schools from which the 6 mile central point may be measured.</p>	<p>The draft policy entitlement is that the journey from home to school, by reasonable road route, should be no more than six miles. The six mile radius, therefore is potentially measured from each house in the county, although an actual physical measurement would be likely to be necessary in a small number of cases. Most houses are likely to have more than one school within the radius.</p>
<p>What would be the position of a small school which fail the various physical criteria but is a really excellent school? Also, what of a small school that had fewer surplus places?</p>	<p>The proposed policy principles recognise that Shropshire schools (of all sizes) offer a good standard of education to children. The proposed distance entitlement also recognises that Shropshire will always need some small schools if it is to be delivered for all children. However, very small schools also share the vulnerabilities and support needs set out in the Cabinet paper. Salary protection in small schools, whether or not they have surplus places, contributes to the budgetary challenge faced by the Council. Should application of the proposed policy lead to a situation where there is a choice CYP Scrutiny: 17 October 2007: SCHOOL ORGANISATION POLICY PRIMARY PROVISION whether or not to continue with one school or another, with both having equivalent facilities and potential for development, it may be reasonable to consider at that point which school had the highest standards and was most popular with parents.</p>
<p>What alternative</p>	<p>Officers have reviewed the strategy adopted by a range of other</p>

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<p>strategies have been researched from other areas e.g., Hereford/Powys</p>	<p>Children’s Services Authorities in reducing surplus places, including Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Powys, and Cheshire. Cheshire is a relevant comparator as that Council is also currently looking to review the pattern of organisation rather than simply make some schools smaller, reduce the number of headteachers, or close a number of schools. The results of the review showed that it was better to have a period of consultation with stakeholders on the principles before any individual schools are considered, and that dealing with schools one at a time in isolation was the least productive approach for a sustainable long term strategy for school provision. These results have been incorporated in the principles underpinning the proposed review.</p>
<p>Why 6 Miles? Why not 3, 4 or 8?</p>	<p>The six mile figure is based on a reasonable estimate of time spent travelling to and from school, by bus. The DCSF recommended maximum best practice journey home to school time for primary pupils is 45mins. This suggests a journey of eight miles (24 minutes rolling at a 20mph average speed and 10 two minute stops) would be the absolute maximum. This doesn’t allow for any delays or deviations from the route, and so the six mile figure is proposed to allow for a degree of flexibility and a more realistic route to pick up a number of pupils on each vehicle. The two mile figure proposed for urban areas is linked to the DCSF maximum walk to school distance. A house in Shrewsbury might have as a many as a dozen schools within that distance, although in some market towns there is only one. A figure of three or four miles means that in several areas there would be fewer children served by each school than there are currently, and would result in very small schools in areas which, although remote, are not really isolated as they are on fair transport routes to existing schools.</p>

The following questions were additional and supplementary questions raised by Councillor Phillips. As before, his exact question is included with a reply prepared by Council officers.

<p>What is the Actual Closure Year?</p>	<p>There are no proposals to close any school in Shropshire, with the exception of one school which falls under the terms of the policy agreed in February 2004. However, if a school was subsequently to be reorganised as a result of passing of a school reorganisation proposal following adoption of this policy it would not occur before 2009.</p>
<p>Public Participation and Governors – the letter was very jargonistic, specially the one to parents. Doubtful if implications are realised. Lots of criticism of the County’s website.</p>	<p>Participation is increasing rapidly as the consultation progresses. Concern has not been widespread. Communications specialists were used in constructing the website for parents and carers, in order to ensure that the wording was appropriate.</p>

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<p>What about schools with pre-school for the 5 Year Childcare Strategy which implies that this is rolled out to primary schools but this is threatened. It threatens (a) parental choice and (b) very young kids with long bus journeys</p>	<p>Shropshire County Council has a duty to ensure that an early education place is available for every three to four year old child whose parents want one. From 2010 this will also include an element of wrap around childcare. There is no defined distance from home within which this place has to be offered. There is also a very strong assumption, supported by Shropshire County Council, that places will continue to be offered in partnership with the private and voluntary sectors. One of the key principles in the consultation document is the provision of high quality early years education. Provision of early years places would be one of the factors considered in the implementation phase of any new policy.</p>
<p>Is it a minimum of 4 (in rural areas) with various caveats or in urban areas 7 or 14 – will these different sizes lead to chaos? How will sustainability of the larger schools be guaranteed in the long-term?</p>	<p>The draft entitlement criteria suggests that 4, 7 or 14 class primary schools would be the preferred design sizes of schools. These sizes are soundly based, with four classes being the smallest which means that three age classes are not an absolute requirement and 7 and 14 class schools based on one or two full classes in each year group. This also suggests the possibility of any remaining infant and junior schools being designed as 9 class infant schools and 18 or 12 class junior schools. However, it is likely that there would be a number of smaller schools in rural areas in order to meet the key principle of distance from any child's home to a primary school. Larger schools have a more stable admissions as they deal with catchment areas with more homes. In addition to this, they are by their very nature able to sustain changes in organisation which would be very difficult to bear in a small school. For example, a seven class school which loses one teacher would lose 14% of its staff. A two class school which loses a teacher would have to close.</p>
<p>Geographical isolation – clarity of definition required</p>	<p>An area of geographical isolation is one which has only one primary school within six miles (or any alternative distance or criterion decided by Cabinet after consultation) of a child's home.</p>

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<p>Paragraph 4 has been represented as being untrue or misleading. The statement that small schools may struggle to deliver the curriculum is untrue as all Ofsted reports demonstrate. In general terms, if there are problems with some schools the implication is that schools should be closed on an Ofsted basis rather than others.</p>	<p>Shropshire County Council has made it clear in all documentation and throughout the consultation that many small schools, and indeed almost all small schools in Shropshire, deliver a high quality of education. This is not to say that they do not sometimes struggle to do so. Staff in small schools have to specialise in a much larger number of curriculum and other skills areas than those in larger schools where such duties can be shared. They do not have a number of colleagues within the school with whom they can discuss ideas and solutions to problems. There are further curriculum challenges on the way, for example, the introduction of modern foreign languages to Key Stage 2, and it will be difficult to develop the skills to teach French to a class of four age groups, with a quarter of pupils arriving new each year with potentially no experience of the language, as would be the case in some two and three class schools. Many very small schools providing a high standard of education only do so at the expense of the work life balance of their staff, particularly head teachers, and the support of the Council's Raising Achievement and Inclusion Service. As indicated in the question, Councillor Phillips might wish to propose that, when considering schools for closure, schools in Ofsted categories are considered in advance of those which are not.</p>
<p>There is no information anywhere of the impact of closure of schools on the community. It is the case that the larger the school, the less the impact on the community (because there are other focuses of activity).</p>	<p>There are no plans to close any school apart from the one already identified through the current policy. Should the identification of a new set of principles lead to a new policy on school organisation, and the implementation of that policy lead to proposals to close an individual school or schools, there would be a separate consultation process relating to each institution, during which factors such as the impact on the community and any additional transport implications would be considered. It is thought unlikely that there is any diminution of the impact of closure with increasing school size, as larger schools tend to undertake a greater and wider range of after school and extended school activities.</p>

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<p>There is a projection of “50,000” new homes for Shropshire. Do we know where they are going to be? Can we determine some location into rural areas to support the small school? Can we determine that the right type, i.e. affordable/shared equity, is built?</p>	<p>Development planning is a highly legislated and regulated area. Councils (currently District or Borough Councils) have some limited scope to determine the location and type of housing which obtains planning permission. Policies currently vary across the five district and borough councils. With the creation of a single authority for Shropshire, there would be a single planning authority. However, this new authority would be to some extent bound by Local Plans or Development Strategies. In most cases, these foresee the greater part of new development being attached to existing larger settlements, particularly the market towns and Shrewsbury. It is unlikely that many villages or small settlements would welcome the addition of the number of new homes required to, say, make a two class school into a four class one (from 8 to 15 pupils per year group). Based on nationally recognised figures, 7 additional pupils in each year group would require about 200 additional family homes in the catchment area. As current district policies are mainly that 40% of homes should be affordable, this means that any development is likely to have some larger, executive style homes which do not produce children at primary age, so the actual number of new houses would have to be larger, say 250-300 depending on the mix of the development. The addition of this number of houses to a small village would substantially change the character of the settlement. While some supporters of the local school might welcome this, many of the villagers would not and so, even if land were to be available it is likely that planning permission would be strongly opposed. Small, infill developments are not covered by legislations which allows councils to include the requirement to build affordable housing.</p>
<p>Broadscale demographic projections cannot deal with micro-level changes, or another way, a couple of households in a rural parish can lead to a difference between the 2 and 3 teacher school shall we say.</p>	<p>Schools with pupil populations just above the threshold for three or four classes are the most financially inefficient and require most subsidy, which comes from the Dedicated Schools Grant that otherwise would be allocated to other pupils and schools. Shropshire County Council prepares detailed forecasts, to the individual household level, for every school and these are shared each year with the headteacher of the school.</p>

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<p>Education Priorities – have all other economies in the Education Budget been looked at since it is quite clear that if asked, residents’ top priority would be front-line provision, i.e. schools rather than anything else? Keeping the schools open might be more important than expending revenue on, e.g. healthy school grants; extended school building revenue provision, the ISA system (which surprisingly receives unenthusiastic comments). In sum, is the LEA spending more peripheral things than schools?</p>	<p>The Children and Young People’s Services budget is open to question by all members during the budget setting process. Shropshire County Council operates lean support mechanisms which are essential in particular to the support of very small schools and vulnerable pupils. The ISA system is essential to the child protection process and it not clear that fully informed residents would be willing to risk the wellbeing of vulnerable children if they were aware of the full implications of cutting the service. Some expenditure is supported by specific grant, and if it is not spent on the service for which the grant is received it has to be returned to the government. Extended schools services are heavily supported by grants of this kind. Financial modelling has also shown the impact above the £3.8m cumulative shortfall in school funding. This additional pressure relates specifically to school support services.</p>
<p>In terms of site provision and future expansion possibilities – many rural schools have lots of space for future expansion.</p>	<p>It is true that some rural schools have generous sites. Others, however, have very restricted sites, and some are without key facilities such as halls suitable for Key Stage 2 PE and have no space in which these could be built. Some others have deeply unsuitable buildings. Perhaps unexpectedly, none of these factors are automatically related to the age of the building, with some very old schools offering environments which are eminently suitable for modern education. Some more modern buildings have significant problems which would be very difficult to address. At present, the facilities and site of schools are not proposed as key principles or criteria during the review process. Some capital investment is equally good value for money regardless of the size of school – capital maintenance and ICT, for example. However, a hall of the DCSF minimum size for KS2 PE costs around £400,000 regardless of whether it is built for a school of 50 pupils at £8,000 per pupil and used for PE for 4 hours per week or a school of 200 at £2,000 per pupil and used for PE for 14 hours per week. It is therefore much more cost effective to build these facilities at larger schools.</p>

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<p>Individual schools would like to know the impact of doing nothing, for example, would it mean fewer staff progressively, or would the LEA be forced to adjust the funding formula?</p>	<p>The presentations taking place this week for head teachers and governors give details of the effects of doing nothing. The example is given of a school of 100 pupils which reduces to 83 as a result of the drop in pupil numbers across the county. Over the period it will lose £68,000, of which £23,000 is due to the fact that the Council will not be able to meet the minimum funding guarantee (that is, due to the effect of surplus places on all schools). This loss of finance would inevitably have a severe impact on staffing in all schools. There are no plans to adjust the detail of the funding formula as a result of the gap between the Dedicated Schools Grant received and the expected allocation to schools, except to reduce the cash values to below those which would be indicated by the minimum funding guarantee.</p>
<p>Why are there no proposals for secondary schools, for example, could Shrewsbury lose a secondary school and the money spent on revenue saving as required? It's assumed of course that the policy is about surplus places which permits primary amalgamations in certain instances, e.g. Shrewsbury perhaps, rather than small schools versus large schools. Given that the argument is based in surplus places, surely the secondary schools must be brought into the frame in order to determine the overall education/schools budget?</p>	<p>The proposed policy is not driven solely by surplus places. Surplus places are not mentioned in the key principles or proposed policy entitlements. The issue is that pupil numbers are reducing in the primary phase of education in Shropshire, and that this is having an effect on both the viability of the school network in educational and financial terms.</p> <p>The intention of the new policy is to provide a robust way forward in which every pupils is entitled to a high quality place within a reasonable distance of home. The dedicated schools grant is calculated on the basis of the number and age of pupils in the County. It is relatively easy to separate expenditure on primary and secondary phases and compare them to the income from DSG. It is unlikely that schools or parents would volunteer to have money allocated by the government for expenditure on their secondary aged pupils reallocated to support small primary schools which cost significantly more per pupil than they themselves receive.</p> <p>Pupil numbers have just begun to decline in the secondary sector and the trend is increasingly downwards. There is likely to be a need to readjust the sizes, if not the numbers, of secondary schools in the medium term, and, like Primary CPG its secondary counterpart accepts the need for action in due course. However, the most severe effects of declining pupil numbers are expected in secondary in the early years of the next decade, which matches well with the expected timetable for Building Schools for the Future. As the funding available for BSF depends in part on the number of existing schools at the start of the process, it makes sense to wait until Shropshire is in BSF to make adjustments to secondary school organisation.</p>
<p>There are worries about divisiveness opening up between large and small school or indeed primary and</p>	<p>The Primary CPG group, SSGC, the Schools Forum and the School Organisation Reference Group all contain representatives of both small and large primary schools and three of these also have representatives of secondary schools. No divisiveness has</p>

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secondary schools. The comment that is sometimes lodged that funding of small schools in Shropshire is at a detriment to larger schools need to be put in the context of the financial benchmarking where Shropshire's small schools are at the bottom level of funding. Comparisons have been offered with Derbyshire, Dorset, Hereford, Worcestershire, Lancashire, etc; where they score highly is in number of pupils per teacher. Two quotes have been offered. For example "The best way to make a place like Lydbury North isolated is to close its school". "if people want to see the impact of closing a community school they should visit Sarn which is now a soleless (sic) collection of housing since the primary school was closed." If schools close there is to be protection of staff, or to put it another way we have excellent education provision in Shropshire, how are we going to retain this excellence, i.e. these staff for Shropshire school children.

been noted at recent meetings of these groups, or at the current round of heads briefings or heads and chairs consultation meetings. It is widely accepted that small schools cost more per pupil to run than larger schools and that the allocation per pupil to larger schools is smaller as a result. Most large schools accept that this is a result of the range of school sizes needed in a county such as this, but are concerned that very small schools have a disproportionately high cost. All schools accept that the issue of falling pupil numbers needs to be addressed, although at this stage of the consultation there is no consensus from all schools on the way forward, and clearly some small schools have been concerned that this review might result in their closure. A number have had misinformation on possible timetables, decision making or implementation. Shropshire, along with a number of other authorities, has always been poorly funded compared to London Boroughs and metropolitan authorities. However, the current review has not been prompted by this fact (although extra money is always welcome). Instead it is prompted by the reduction in pupil numbers and the fact that this reduction, not the absolute quantum of funding, means that the County will fall £3.8m short of the amount of money it should have distributed to primary schools by 2011.

Shropshire has a good record of protecting staff in reorganisations. However, it is true to say that our demographic profiling and turnover rates indicate that there will be opportunities for high quality staff to continue and indeed advance their career in Shropshire schools. This would be true even if there were a future reorganisation which resulted in school closures.

The following questions were asked by members of the public following a meeting organised by Lydbury North Parish Council on 5 November 2007.

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1	The Councillors have stated this is the very beginning of the consultation process yet we are only given one policy option at this stage. If this policy is not agreed what other options are there?	This question is based on a misunderstanding of the nature of the consultation. A set of principles have been put forward for comments or additions through the consultation process. Outcomes from the consultation could include acceptance of some principles but not others, the addition of additional principles or the modification of one or more of the existing principles.
2	Why is the council using an online questionnaire that is weighted so that anyone reading the policy and principles would answer 'yes' which then gives a mandate for the council to close schools for non-educational reasons?	The online questionnaire asks whether respondents agree with the proposed principles. If they are in full agreement respondents need only tick the yes box. However, if they are in partial agreement or partial or full disagreement they are invited to give their reasons and/or propose other principles. At no point in either the consultation document or the consultation response form is there any indication that any school could be closed without the specific eleven stage community consultation and decision making process. The current consultation process is also clear that the reasons for consulting on new principles are to sustain a network schools in town and rural areas to provide high quality education.
3	How will you ensure there remains choice for parents in rural areas?	Parents will still have the option to apply for a place for their child at any school.
4	In the event of this policy proceeding who will conduct the investigation into the impact on local communities?	If a new policy is agreed and this results in any proposals to close schools, the immediate investigation would be conducted through the consultation and research process on individual school proposals. However, the most recent published independent investigation into the effect of the closure of small schools on both pupils and communities has recently been published by the Institute of Welsh Affairs (see http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/7081810.stm). Shropshire County Council is also working with DCSF on a national pathfinder project on school organisation which means that the process and outcomes of the organisation policy proposals will be monitored and followed up.

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5	Are children registered with bordering Counties doctors included in the statistics? (e.g. Powys)	Yes. The Children and Young People's statistics team work with the health service and other partners to obtain the highest possible quality data. This involves using (anonymised) data from a number of different sources to obtain an accurate picture of potential pupils living in each area. We can also make a good estimate, based on data from previous years, of the number of pupils who move into and out of Shropshire for their education.
6	In the light of the report by Prof. Robin Alexander of Cambridge University, which highlights very specific problems in Primary education, does the panel regret the council plan to close primary schools that are avoiding these problems?	There is no Shropshire County Council plan to close any specific school other than the one school where a consultation is currently under way. That said, Shropshire County Council is following with great interest the Primary Review, (See http://www.primaryreview.org.uk) which so far has said nothing about the relative merits of small or large, rural or urban schools. However, as the avowed aim and first principle of the proposed new policy is to ensure a network of schools providing high quality education it will certainly be the intention of Shropshire County Council to avoid any of the specific problems mentioned in the review's various reports.
7	Central Government, only last week, was forced to change its policy on the claw back of 5% of annual profits of Primary Schools because of public pressure. Can the County not exert the same public pressure to reverse this latest policy?	The proposed policy and principles are a local response to maintain high quality education in the face of reducing pupil numbers. Shropshire County Council continually pressurises the Government to allocate more resources to rural councils and councils at the lowest end of the funding range for schools, but even additional funding would still mean that significant challenges would have to be faced.
8	Have the council looked at ring fencing the rural sparsity funding to secure the future of rural schools?	There is no specific funding for sparsity allocated to Shropshire County Council through the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) to "ring fence". Shropshire County Council, however, allocates additional resources from within DSG to smaller primary schools to support staffing levels. The proposed policy commits to continuing to provide enhanced support for smaller schools.

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9	Why is the current policy not working?	The current policy has been very successful in maintaining the current network of schools as primary pupil numbers have dropped from the most recent high point in 2000. However, as pupil numbers have continued to drop the situation can no longer be contained within the current policy and proposals have been brought forward for consultation on how to address this renewed challenge.
10	Have the LEA already earmarked funds to transport displaced children to other schools?	Many children in rural schools are already transported to school. Should a new policy be agreed which leads to proposals to close an individual school the proposal would need to be considered on its merits. The level of additional transport required, if any, would form part of the consultation on the proposal and the costs of transport would be set against the savings arising from closing the school.
11	What evidence does Mr Budd have to support statements in his report to Cabinet (26/9/07) regarding the standard of education delivered in small schools?	Shropshire County Council readily acknowledges that almost all small Shropshire schools provide a good quality of education. There is clear evidence that it is difficult to attract good fields of candidates for headships of very small schools. Several governing bodies have made multiple attempts before they have managed to find a high quality recruit. Ofsted have also commented on the range of facilities available to small schools, particularly the ability to deliver the Key Stage 2 PE curriculum. Many headteachers of small schools have in the past approached the Local Authority with concerns about their workload. However, it would not be appropriate to identify the schools involved, particularly at this time, and in any case these are not factors which will factor in the application of any new policy to individual schools.
12	Why didn't the LEA make any plans to directly inform either parents or governors (via the Autumn Term governors meeting agenda) that this process was being undertaken?	Shropshire County Council asked its headteachers, as the professional officers in the closest contact with parents and governors, to pass information directly to those groups. The Autumn Term governing body agenda was published before the report to Members had been considered by Cabinet. Shropshire County Council is led by its elected Members and it would not have been appropriate to release details of a consultation before it had been considered and approved by Members.

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13	<p>Why are the smallest and most vulnerable communities being targeted to make up the shortfall in funding when the quality of education provided in small schools is undisputed?</p> <p>(Ref: letter from Liz Nicholson & Ann Hartley, Sept 06, "Shropshire continues to provide one of the very best educational services in the Country")</p>	<p>No communities are being targeted, far less the smallest or most vulnerable. As noted above, the quality of education in all schools remains high. However, as pupil numbers and resources continue to reduce there is the possibility of unplanned failures of schools which might well leave vulnerable communities in a poor situation. By proposing to create a sustainable network of rural schools Shropshire County Council is also proposing to protect rural communities in the longer term.</p>
14	<p>Have small schools been singled out for closure for financial expedience and does the council think they will cause the least rumpus and go quietly?</p>	<p>No small schools are proposed for closure in the current consultation.</p>
15	<p>What percentage of the total education budget is £1.3m?</p>	<p>Shropshire County Council has never used a figure of £1.3m, and it cannot be reconciled to any of the figures in the report or consultation document. Falling pupil numbers drive a reduction (at today's values) in DSG of £6.7m between 2007 and 2011. This results in a shortfall in school commitments of £3.8m between 2008 and 2011, of which £3.3m is between 2009 and 2011.</p> <p>However £1.3m would represent 2.2% of the annual budget for primary schools. £3.8m is 6.5%</p>
16	<p>How many schools would it be necessary to close to produce the required savings?</p>	<p>This question cannot be answered precisely as it would require selection of individual schools. The precise amount saved in the closure of a school varies from school to school depending on specific site factors and community planning.</p>
17	<p>To what extent will academic results be a factor in whether to close any particular school?</p>	<p>Shropshire County Council would take account of any Ofsted report which placed a school in a category of concern. There are currently no schools in categories of concern in Shropshire.</p>
18	<p>Do we need 8 secondary schools in Shrewsbury?</p>	<p>This question is outside the scope of the current consultation. However, there are six secondary schools serving Shrewsbury. There are insufficient places overall to absorb displaced pupils from any one school into another.</p>

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19	Why was the consultation document not more user-friendly and more widely publicised?	The consultation document was widely publicised through schools and in the media, and through the Council's own website. The user-friendliness or otherwise of the document is a matter of opinion, but the document was scrutinised by a number of individuals before release, including Elected Members.
20	Why did the LEA make no effort to inform the major stakeholders in this process i.e. Parents?	See the answers to questions 12 and 19.
21	The latest statistics in the birth rate figures indicate a rise. How is it realistic to close schools which will be needed in future years?	It is true to say that the population of England is forecast to rise, and that the rates of birth and fertility of individual women are both increasing. However, this process has been happening at a national level for some time while the school age population of Shropshire has continued to decline. This is because the age profile of Shropshire is changing faster than the effect of immigration, development and increasing fertility, with fewer and fewer women of child bearing age living or moving into the county. Even if the level of development were to increase substantially, the pattern of development has been and is forecast to continue to be such that mainly large houses with few pupils of primary school age are constructed in rural areas. Substantial new developments are likely to be attached to existing larger settlements and in any case should have access to their own education provision, not just where unfilled places happen to exist at the time.
22	How many primary schools have less than 4 classes in Shropshire?	It should be noted that the proposed principles and entitlement do not propose the closure of any schools and certainly do not propose the closure of all two and three class schools. Indeed, it has been made clear throughout the consultation that there would have to be a network of small schools to meet the entitlement to a primary school place within six miles of home. In addition, any specific future proposal could lead to a current two class school being expanded to a three class school, or a three class school being expanded to a four class school through redistribution of pupils. In January 2007, there were 42 schools with less than four classes.

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23	What other policy options did the council consider before putting forward this particular policy document?	The Council has identified a set of principles which are open to comment or addition, rather than a set of inflexible options to be chosen amongst. Initial option appraisal did consider other options for the distance principle and the option of larger schools in rural areas, but felt that these would not be sustainable in the Shropshire context.
24	Why has the council allowed the shortfall in central funding to continue for so long without informing the public about this crucial issue?	Shropshire County Council has continually publicised the fact that Shropshire is poorly funded compared with other authorities and has pressurised the Government to provide more funding. Publicity has also been given to the reduction in pupil numbers. The specific policy of a minimum funding guarantee which is used in the calculation of the shortfall figure of £3.8m between 2008 and 2011 was introduced from April 2006.
25	Can you prove that you will do something as a result of the consultation – otherwise why have a consultation?	The report to Cabinet on 28 November will include consideration of all the points raised in the consultation. Clearly no guarantee can be given that any individual view expressed will result in changes to the proposed policy and entitlement, but Members will consider the outcomes from the consultation in great detail.
26	Given that the office of National Statistics shows an increase of 5-9 year olds from 2008 and levelling out by 2018 what will the LEA long term strategy be post closure?	See the answer to question 21.
27	Why have the public only just found out about the consultation? Councillors seem surprised by the poor response but I believe it is entirely due to bad publicity.	The public have been informed about the consultation in many ways since the report to Cabinet was first published on 19 September and the consultation commissioned on 26 September. This has included direct communication from schools, articles in the press and on radio and publicity through the Council's website. At the time of writing, written responses had been received from over 1150 individuals, and many additional individuals had attended the consultation meetings with headteachers and governors. This is a strong response to a consultation based upon principles.

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28	Please consider extending the consultation deadline as the full impact of the proposed policy is only just getting through to grass roots?	<p>Responses have been received from members of the public from the very first days of the consultation period. Sufficient time and publicity have been given to the consultation for any concerned Shropshire resident or interested person to respond. Indeed, responses have been received from national and local bodies who were not directly informed of the consultation.</p> <p>Councillors will consider any responses that arrive after the deadline but before Cabinet.</p>
29	You may not have received many replies to your online 'questionnaire' but you cannot ignore the strength of response via the local press.	As noted above, many hundreds of people have responded to the consultation, far more than the number of individuals who have had letters published in the press. As this is a policy consultation, careful consideration will be given to the issues and practical solutions offered by consultees. Quality of response is more important than quantity in arriving at a sustainable strategy for the future of primary education in Shropshire.
30	Would the proposal not simply accelerate the 'demographic time bomb' requiring future remedial action beyond this proposal?	This is good point and one which was considered in the preparation of the initial report. It will no doubt be considered again should any proposals be made regarding individual schools. In practice there is no general evidence that the age profile of settlements in rural areas with no school is aging at a greater rate than those with schools.
31	Why is this simply a mathematical exercise with no other factors taken into consideration?	It is most certainly not simply a mathematical exercise. Shropshire County Council has considered and rejected the model used by Council W, which uses a multivariate analysis mathematical model to select schools for closure or amalgamation. However, Shropshire County Council has also rejected the gradualist approach adopted by Council C which has left schools in extended periods of uncertainty and resulted in some schools undergoing unplanned closure as a result. Having learned from these extremes, Shropshire County Council has proposed a model where broad principles are discussed and adopted and then would be applied using common sense and further consultation on any proposals for individual schools.

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32	Why has the discrepancy in central government funding not been addressed sooner?	See the answers to questions 8 and 24 above.
33	How do you have the nerve to use the words 'every child matters' when they quite clearly do not factor equally in this policy?	Shropshire County Council firmly believes that every child matters, whether they are in a small rural school or a two form entry urban school. The proposed policy principles aim to make a high quality education available to all pupils in Shropshire. Additional support is proposed for smaller schools to ensure that their children receive the equivalent entitlement to those in larger schools.
34	How do you propose to address transport/traffic issues relating to additional vehicles being required?	Should the proposed new policy result in proposals relating to individual schools, the travel and traffic arrangements at receiving schools would be part of the consultation process. As noted above, the number of extra vehicles is in practice often less than initially thought likely in public consultation, in part because many children are already transported to school and vehicles are simply redirected, and in part because spaces in existing vehicles can be better utilised. It is also true to say that maintaining a smaller network of schools would enable a higher level of capital investment in each school and this might be directed to access issues where appropriate.
35	Do you think it is acceptable for a child of 4 or 5 to be on a bus for up to 2 hours each day?	Many rural children will continue to walk to school. There is no proposal in the principles for any primary pupil to be on a bus for more than 40 minutes in any journey, and the overwhelming majority of journeys will be considerably shorter. The longest regular journey to school currently undertaken by a pupil is 7.7 miles and takes under 30 minutes.
36	If a child is taken ill at school or has an accident, during the school day, how do you propose the parents (who many not have a car or drive) to be able to reach them speedily?	At present only a minority of parents are within walking distance of rural schools during the day. Schools adopt a variety of practices to ensure that parents can reach school outside regular home to school times and this would continue should the school network be changed.

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37	How can you justify the significant increase in traffic with regard to the Carbon footprint in Shropshire?	As noted above, the increase in travel is likely to be less than initially considered in consultation. Detailed calculations relating to a school closure proposal have shown that the reduction in carbon emissions which result from the closure of the site, and the reduction in vehicle miles from fewer deliveries, can actually result in a significant net reduction in emissions even when additional transport of pupils is included. We would study the carbon footprint implications of any other school change proposal.
38	Have you 'rural proofed' the policy?	The impact of the proposed policy on rural communities has and will continue to be considered at each stage.
39	You will need to re-employ teachers elsewhere; you will not necessarily enjoy any funding from sale of school premises; you will have increased running costs in other schools; you will have to fund a building programme; you will have increased transport costs; you will have increased administration costs, please explain precisely how the proposed savings are to be made? (This does not even take into account the 'hidden' costs and increased carbon footprint)	When a school is closed, there are substantial savings in fixed costs such as the cost of utilities and maintenance. Some of the displaced children would go to fill unfilled places at nearby schools and reduce the cost per pupil at those schools. There are savings in management and administration costs, and smaller savings (per school) at county level. As stated, any additional transport costs in rural areas would have to be netted off against these savings. However, as noted above the costs are likely to be limited because many rural children are already transported to school and other will be able to take up unfilled places on existing vehicles. As there are no proposals for individual schools, it is not possible to comment on needs for immediate capital investment or on the level of funds for reinvestment which could be raised by the sale of redundant sites. However, the County is about to embark on a major programme of investment in primary schools in partnership with the Government. This will enable improvements to be made to about half the current number of schools in the county over the remainder of this decade and the next. At least £8.5m is due to be invested in the years 2009 to 2011, and the government expect this should be linked to proposals to rationalise school places.

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40	Have you asked the children what they think about this?	Yes. Pupils who have recently transferred to secondary school (and so can look back with recent memories on a full career in primary education) have taken part in consultation activities on the policy and vision for primary education. The outcomes will form part of the evidence pack for Members considering the Cabinet report on 28 November.
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The following questions were asked by a group of headteachers meeting as a geographic group.

Point Raised	Response
How will church schools be considered in the reorganisation?	The Dioceses are key partners in the provision of school places and will be involved in any review of schools. There is a duty on the Local Authority not to worsen the balance of denominational and non-denominational places across the area.
If there is to be no significant rebuilding, how will the council cope with a small school that is isolated and needs to take in more children due to other closures or a medium size school that has to take in more children?	Shropshire County Council will continue to invest heavily in its primary schools, and investment will be concentrated on ensuring that schools are able to provide facilities for the pupils which attend them. The Council has just been allocated £8.5m as part of the Primary Capital Programme and if the school review goes ahead it is intended to link this investment to the review.
Had the planning departments considered the future when they allowed small but expensive housing developments that this would not encourage young families and thus more children to Shropshire?	Development planning of new homes is a currently matter for District Councils. Planning is a heavily regulated area and the discretion of authorities is limited. However, under a unitary Council there will be a consistent approach.
Is it always true that larger schools have better facilities?	In a consultation document covering 143 schools it is necessary to look at generalisations, and there are always exceptions. It could be argued that Bicton School (5 class) has far better facilities than any 7 class school except Wilfred Owen, which has better facilities than any larger school in the County. However, in general, larger schools can provide better facilities and certainly it is better value for money to make capital investments at these schools as the fixed costs are shared across a larger number of pupils.
What evidence is there that a larger school with more facilities provides more value added for the children?	At no point does the report or consultation document argue that larger schools produce better value added scores. However, research for the Reference Group shows that a similar range of value added occurs in larger schools as in smaller schools. Larger schools with enhanced facilities are able to offer a wider range of experience to support children's learning.

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<p>Are parents getting less choice if schools are all large ones?</p>	<p>The proposed consultation document does not suggest that all schools should be large schools, even in Shropshire terms and certainly not in national terms where the average primary school size is 236 pupils. If all schools were clones, it would undoubtedly be the case that there would be less diversity. However, every school develops its own ethos and pedagogy and it is this, along with the existence of Voluntary Aided, Foundation or Trust schools which will provide the diversity in the system, with differences in size in fact have a significantly lesser effect.</p>
<p>Will communities be destroyed if their school closes?</p>	<p>No. There are many vibrant and connected communities in Shropshire which look to a school outside their settlement. In the case of virtually every rural primary in Shropshire, children come from a number of different settlements. Experience with previous school closures has shown that receiving schools quickly adopt the community served by the closing school into their own. In addition, there are other focuses of community life in addition to the school, such as sports and social clubs and village halls.</p>
<p>Could you guarantee that all heads that will potentially be made redundant/ redeployed will be mentored and supported?</p>	<p>Yes. This is current and future planned practice.</p>
<p>Will all heads receive 2.5 days minimum release time in future?</p>	<p>The intention of the review is to create a network of viable and sustainable schools. Most four class schools are able to support a headteacher with little or no permanent teaching commitment. However, it is not possible to give an absolute guarantee, not least because the deployment of a school's resources is a matter for the Governing Body.</p>
<p>How is the redeployment of heads going to take place?</p>	<p>There is no legal mechanism to allow the redeployment of staff from one locally managed school to another. However, all Governing Bodies have currently signed up to a protocol which means that they will give prior consideration to displaced staff, and it is intended to strengthen this protocol as part of the review. There is a significant turnover of head teachers each year in Shropshire, and a constant demand for good headteachers across the schools' network.</p>
<p>When will we know exactly the time scale of this and how long the processes will take place?</p>	<p>The time scale is a matter for elected Members. It seems likely that the timescale will be defined in January 2008. The earliest any changes could take place would be from September 2009.</p>

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<p>Can you guarantee that we will know all related information regarding this issue ahead of the press?</p>	<p>Headteachers were informed of the publication of the initial report at the same time as elected Members in September, and future announcements will take place on the same basis. It is not appropriate for headteachers to be informed before elected Members. Once any kind of public announcement is made it is inevitable that the media will pick up on it quickly, so headteachers will have to be aware of the need to act quickly when an announcement is due.</p> <p>However, if there are to be proposals affecting an individual school, these will be made known to the head and chair of governors on a confidential basis in advance of any consideration by elected Members.</p>
<p>Why is the SSGC commenting on the unfortunate but necessary closure of some small schools in correspondence with Governors prior to the end of the consultation process?</p>	<p>SSGC are an independent organisation and have their own views and policies.</p>