

<b>CABINET</b>	<b>Paper No.  7</b>
<b>Meeting date: 6 January 2009</b>	
<b>From: The Chairman of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel</b>	

## **SCHOOL ORGANISATION – A STRATEGIC APPROACH – THE POTENTIAL ACADEMY FOR BARROW – A SCRUTINY RESPONSE**

### **1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1** *Following a request at its October meeting the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel held a special meeting on 16 December 2008 to consider the nature and outcomes of the recent public consultation process about whether the potential Academy for Barrow should be located on one or two campuses.*
- 1.2** *This report highlights the main comments and views expressed at the Panel meeting and its concluding recommendation to Cabinet.*

### **2.0 STRATEGIC PLANNING AND EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 2.1** *The potential development which this report focuses on involves school organisation change.*
- 2.2** *The basic thrust of the strategic approach to school organisation adopted in 2005 is to safeguard and improve the education and other services to children and their families provided through the County's schools. This is supportive of the Council Plan's themes of "Improving Council Services" and "Life Chances and Well-being of Young People".*

### **3.0 RECOMMENDATION**

- 3.1** *Whilst acknowledging that the views expressed by the majority of parents/grandparents responding to the consultation has been for an Academy in Barrow based on two sites (ie Parkview and Thorncliffe Schools) the Panel believes that, given the overwhelming educational and economic advantages of an Academy based on one site, it*

***recommends that the Cabinet opt for the potential Barrow Academy to be established on one site.***

## **4.0 BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 Panel members are aware of the decision taken by Cabinet in February 2007 for secondary education in Barrow and in particular plans for a potential Academy for the town based on one site at Parkview School. Members share a desire to ensure the provision of excellent educational opportunities for young people in Barrow.
- 4.2 It is acknowledged that concerns have been expressed about the planned Academy and that following consultation with Central Government an opportunity has arisen to consult further on whether it should be established on one or two sites. It is recognised that the views of those consulted need to be taken into consideration when decisions are made on the two options and that as far as possible the support of the local community should be gained.
- 4.3 The Panel accepts that the overwhelming majority of parents and grandparents responding to the consultation have opted for a two-site solution. However it has also noted that, even though this may be broadly in line with other similar exercises, the number of those responding to the consultation document has been very low at 4.7% and may therefore not accurately reflect the views of the local population. It is also noted that by a small majority more staff have favoured a single-site option.
- 4.4 Concerns have been expressed that insufficient information may have been provided in order to enable local people to come to a considered view and on the consequences of each option. It is appreciated that trying to ensure that sufficient relevant information is provided in order to enable consultees to gain a balanced understanding of all the issues involved is not an easy process. There have also been concerns that some potentially spurious information may have been circulated in Barrow in relation to this issue. Teachers Associations have felt that they have not been directly consulted on this recent exercise though it is accepted that staff at relevant secondary schools have been, and those in the primary sector have also had an opportunity to comment.
- 4.5 Whilst fully recognising the right for the local community to express its views considerable concerns have been expressed by many members on the Panel that political considerations may overshadow educational and economic ones in relation to progressing proposals for a potential Academy in Barrow. Many Panel members remain convinced that in order to provide the best opportunities for young people in Barrow in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century the educational and operational advantages of a single-site far outweigh those of an Academy based on two sites. It was also understood that the County Council policy in recent years has been to phase out split site schools.
- 4.6 In times of budgetary constraints it is felt that the resources available for establishing an Academy in Barrow should be concentrated on educational considerations in order to best serve the young people in the area in the

future. The view that a single site would maximise and enrich curriculum choice, provide state of the art facilities and strong pastoral care received broad support within the Panel. A suggestion was made that, accepting that there is some opposition to a single site Academy or even an Academy arrangement at all in Barrow, Cabinet should take a courageous and visionary lead and opt for a single site arrangement as the best one for the young people of Barrow.

- 4.7 Whilst acknowledging concerns expressed about potential increases in traffic congestion, and a desire for the Academy to be located near to people's homes and be available for community usage, members have also borne in mind the potential disadvantages of split site arrangements such as the additional costs involved in terms of both premises, equipment and support staff, management issues and communications and the dangers of there evolving a two site Academy each with its own ethos. It has also been noted that many successful schools and academies are larger than the 1200 places envisaged if a single site Academy is chosen for Barrow.
- 4.8 Whilst accepting that this was not part of the recent and narrowly focused consultation exercise some concerns have also been expressed about the lead-in time for establishing an Academy and that the timescale envisaged is even tighter than has been the case in establishing other academies in the County bearing in mind that the intention for such an academy in Barrow, if agreed, is scheduled to open in September 2009.

## **5.0 CONCLUSIONS**

- 5.1 It is accepted that the views of the majority of parents/grandparents responding to the consultation have favoured a two site solution and that it is important to take the opinions of the local community very seriously in order to gain as much support for any changes as possible.
- 5.2 However after a vote the majority view of the Panel is to recommend to Cabinet that a single site option for the potential Barrow Academy should be adopted on the grounds that the educational and economic benefits of a single site Academy far outweigh those of a split site arrangement. Bearing in mind the fact that voting rights on the Children and Young People's Scrutiny panel is legally restricted to County Councillors, Church and parent representatives, nevertheless the Teacher Association representatives on the Panel have expressed a desire for their support for a single site arrangement to be noted.

**Duncan Fairbairn**  
**Chairman of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel**

***December 2008***

## **APPENDICES**

No Appendices

Electoral Division(s): All Barrow

Executive Decision

Yes*	
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Key Decision

Yes*	
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If a Key Decision, is the proposal published in the current Forward Plan?

Yes*		
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Is the decision exempt from call-in on grounds of urgency?

	No*
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If exempt from call-in, has the agreement of the Chair of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee been sought or obtained?

		N/A*
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Has this matter been considered by Overview and Scrutiny?  
If so, give details below.

Yes*	
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Has an environmental or sustainability impact assessment been undertaken?

	No*	
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Has an equality impact assessment been undertaken?

	No*	
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## **PREVIOUS RELEVANT COUNCIL OR EXECUTIVE DECISIONS**

Cabinet - 7 September 2005  
Cabinet - 28 February 2006  
Cabinet - 28 November 2006  
Cabinet - 5 February 2008  
Cabinet - 1 September 2008

## **CONSIDERATION BY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

This is a report of a meeting of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel held on 16 December 2008.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Report by Corporate Director – Children's Services to Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel held on 16 December 2008 entitled 'School Organisation: A Strategic Approach – The Potential Academy for Barrow'.

## **RESPONSIBLE CABINET MEMBER**

Anne Burns, Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care and Lead Member for Children's Services.

## **REPORT AUTHOR**

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