

Cabinet – 12 April 2006

Rushall Community College: outcome of consultation

Portfolio	Councillor Eddie Hughes, Children's Services
Service Area	Education Walsall
Wards	Rushall/Shelfield
Forward Plan	Yes

Summary of report

This report provides details of the outcome of consultation on the future of the Rushall Community College.

Recommendations

Cabinet approve the publication of a statutory proposal to close Rushall Community College from 31 August 2006.

Resource and legal considerations

Rushall Community College was established on 1 September 2003 as a Fresh Start school in federation with Shelfield Sports and Community College following the closure of Manor Farm School.

These arrangements were based upon the admission of 90 pupils each year to Year 7 at Rushall Community College. Pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 are educated at the Rushall site whilst those in Years 10 and 11 are educated at the Shelfield site.

Over the last 2½ years these arrangements have worked effectively with close collaboration between the two sites and pupils have benefited from accessing the improved facilities at Shelfield where there has been a significant investment over the last few years.

However, the number of pupils on roll at Rushall has decreased since it was set up and in September 2005, only 50% of Year 7 places were taken up. This trend has accelerated and the number of first preferences for places in September 2006 was 15. A year group of this size is not viable educationally, socially or financially and in these circumstances there was no alternative but to make other arrangements for these pupils.

Set in the context of overall decreasing numbers, there is no indication that this trend is likely to be reversed, especially following a year in which no pupils are admitted, and in view of this Cabinet was asked to consider the future of the school.

The proposed closure of Rushall Community College would be subject to the approval of a statutory proposal. This would be published following the Cabinet decision and a six-week representation period would then follow. If no objections are received during this period, the final decision regarding the future of the school would be taken by Cabinet. If any objections are received, the final decision would be taken by the School Organisation Committee. It is anticipated that the final decision would be made in June 2006.

The associated impact on the school's financial position of the fall in pupil numbers and the decision not to admit Year 7 pupils in the 2006/07 school year would have necessitated a reduction in staffing for September 2006. Closure of the school may result in some additional redundancies although every effort would be made to help staff to find alternative suitable jobs at other schools. Some additional staff would be required at Shelfield in order to teach pupils transferring from Rushall: as part of the proposed transitional arrangements, Rushall pupils currently in Years 7 and 8 would be educated at the Rushall site from September 2006 to August 2007.

Citizen impact

The proposed closure of Rushall Community College would remove uncertainty regarding the viability of secondary school provision in the locality. There is every indication that Shelfield will continue to be a viable and popular school in the years to come.

Community safety

If the final decision is to close Rushall Community College, pupils would be offered a place at Shelfield Sports and Community College. Pupils currently in Years 10 and 11 are currently educated at the Shelfield site and pupils in Year 9 are also included in some activities at the Shelfield site. In view of the success of these arrangements and the availability of a one-year transition period, no community safety issues are envisaged.

Environmental impact

There are no environmental considerations arising from this report.

Performance and risk management issues

The proposed closure of Rushall Community College would reduce the number of surplus places in the secondary sector.

Equality implications

The provision of alternative places for Rushall pupils at Shelfield Sports and Community College would enable pupils to receive their entitlement to education in a school which is viable educationally, socially and financially.

Consultation

On 1 March 2006, Cabinet approved the consultation on the future of Rushall Community College. The consultation period commenced on 2 March 2005 and ended on 30 March 2006. A consultation document was circulated to parents, staff and governors at Rushall Community College and Shelfield Sports and Community College and was also made available to the local community. Consultation meetings were held at Rushall on 8 March 2005 and at Shelfield on 9 March. Attendance at these meetings is detailed in the table below.

Table 1 Attendance at Consultation Meetings

School	Parents	Staff	Governors
Rushall Community College	6	26	3* and 2 headteachers
Shelfield Sports and Community College	0	3	

* Meeting of the Federation Governing Body

An earlier meeting had been held with the Chair of the Governing Body and the headteachers about the decline in pupil numbers.

The consultation was on the basis of the proposal approved by Cabinet at the meeting on 1 March 2006. The proposal is to close Rushall Community College from 31 August 2006. The governors are keen to ensure that pupils on roll at Rushall continue to be educated within the federation. The completion of the major schemes to improve facilities at Shelfield means that it will be possible to offer a place at Shelfield to all Rushall pupils although, of course, parents would be free to make other arrangements should they so wish. In order to ensure that the transitional arrangements do not impact adversely on pupils, it is proposed to educate Year 8 and Year 9 pupils on the Rushall site during the 2006/2007 school year and all pupils would transfer to the Shelfield site in September 2007. No additional accommodation requirements are envisaged.

At the time of writing this report, eight consultation responses have been received; details of these are provided in the table below. An update will be provided at the meeting.

Table 2 Consultation Responses

School	Parents	Staff	Governors	Local residents
Rushall Community College	1	5	1	0
Shelfield Sports and Community College	1*	0		1

* Also responded as a local resident

The timescale for implementation of the closure was raised in the consultation, with suggestions that the Rushall site should be vacated this summer; however, on balance it is considered that the transition period offers the best opportunity to support pupils and staff through the change process. Implications for staff at Rushall were also raised and reassurance was given regarding help in finding alternative jobs, which Education Walsall will fulfil. Very few parents attended the meeting, however, those present expressed their support for the school and their dismay at the loss of a 'small' school on

the Rushall site; reassurances about the transition arrangements and the support available at Sheffield were given which parents accepted as appropriate.

In view of the continued fall in pupil numbers, Cabinet is recommended to approve the publication of a statutory proposal to close Rushall Community College from 31 August 2006.

During the intervening period, staff would work closely with parents to identify whether their preference for the future education of their children is at Sheffield and, dependent upon the outcomes of this, will work with them to identify an alternative school if that is what is requested. This may result in a need for additional places at one or more local schools.

Vision 2008

The proposed reorganisation of primary school places in the area would contribute to the delivery of Walsall's vision for 2008 – Section 4 Make Our Schools Great by the provision of a viable and sustainable education service provision for the local community.

Background papers

Cabinet report, 1 March 2006: Rushall Community College
Consultation document
Consultation responses

Contact officer

Susan Lupton
Strategic Leader: School Organisation, Admissions, Capital and Asset Management
Tel 01922 686231
susan.lupton@we.serco.com

Signed:



Executive Director: David Brown

Date: 3 April 2006

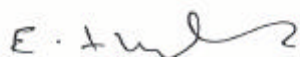
Signed:



Managing Director, Education Walsall

Date: 3 April 2006

Signed:



Portfolio Holder: Councillor E. F. Hughes

Date: 3 April 2006