“Extending the Options”

A Strategic Approach to Surplus Primary School Places

Scrutiny Report No 14

January 2003
Chair's Foreword

This enquiry was undertaken because Scrutiny Members acknowledged that Hull's level of surplus primary school places is an issue that requires decisive action. In common with many other local authorities in the North East, the number of surplus places in Hull has been exacerbated by factors such as population and pupil drift, falling school rolls as a result of a reduction in the city's birth-rate and declining demand for both private and public housing stock. Because of continued outward migration from the city and trends that suggest that the city's birth-rate will continue to decline, the Panel agreed that the aim of the enquiry would be to recommend a forward looking policy that would take these factors into account and provide a range of options.

This report concludes that recent and proposed action by the Local Education Authority (LEA) will reduce the number of surplus places to around 10% thereby removing the immediate problem. However surplus places are likely to be a recurring problem and this report acknowledges that a long-term strategy is required to address this issue.

This presents the LEA with an opportunity to consider the issue of surplus places at a strategic level as part of the urban renaissance agenda that is beginning to be implemented in the city. The report highlights that, as parts of the city are remodelled, consideration needs to be given to the number and location of schools that will be needed in the future. This can then be actively planned for, to ensure that there is an appropriate balance between school places and future demand.

Following consideration of a variety of evidence, the Panel has made a series of recommendations which it believes will allow the issue of surplus places to be addressed in the medium and long term.

When considering the order of priority for its recommendations the Panel concluded that, given government's promotion of extended schools and the additional powers that the Education Act 2002 gives which would facilitate their development, greater emphasis should be placed on the development of extended schools. This new model would place the school at the heart of the community, bring a variety of community services together on one site which would benefit local people through the delivery of efficient services and make use of surplus accommodation.
Where this was not possible, the Panel recommended finding alternative, complementary community uses to take up surplus accommodation. This would be assisted by proposals to centralise the Council's property management functions.

As a last resort, the Panel acknowledged that where none of the above options were viable there may be a need to close schools.

Councillor Waudby
Chair of the Panel
January 2003
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### SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel's detailed conclusions and recommendations are set out in the report, but for ease of reference, the recommendations are set out here.

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11. A Strategic Approach to Surplus Places

11.15 That in acknowledgement of population trends which indicate that falling school rolls will continue to be an issue in the future, the Council and the LEA develop a strategic plan that contains long-term solutions and a number of options that will allow them to respond appropriately to varying situations and circumstances.

11.16 That, in the light of the Audit Commission’s recommendations, the long term strategy should be informed by, and take account of, the Council’s Housing Strategy, the trends affecting private sector housing provision and all issues that have an impact on the sustainability of communities, for example public transport services, employment opportunities and the environmental quality and safety of residential areas.

11.17 That the strategic plan should respond to the challenge set by government for radically changed and improved services by re-evaluating the role of the school and how, with extended schools as one of the options, services can be provided that cut across voluntary and statutory boundaries, tackle deprivation and raise the aspirations and achievement of children, young people, their families and the wider community.

11.18 That the primary task of the long term strategy should be to identify the areas where extended schools could be developed to advantage, for example where neighbourhood renewal programmes are active, where it would not be possible to develop extended schools and whether the maximum potential can be gained by using existing schools or building new ones.

11.19 That, in conjunction with the Council’s Social Inclusion Policy Unit, Learning Services undertakes preliminary research and holds discussions with the Local Government Association and those LEAs that are actively involved in planning extended schools in order to identify how the benefits of these schools can be achieved in Hull.

11.20 That the development of extended schools be approached as a reflection of government’s thinking on modernising local government and the modern LEA and not simply as an expedient to the continuing issue of surplus school accommodation.

11.21 That where the development of extended schools is not viable, the next option in the long-term strategy should be the creative use of surplus school accommodation and a strategic plan should be developed for dealing with surplus accommodation that may become available in the future as the result of falling school rolls.
11.22 That this plan be developed by a group drawn from Head Teachers, governing bodies, trade unions, local communities and the appropriate Property Services staff. The exact membership would have to be determined once it is clear whether Cabinet is able to implement the Financial Management and Audit Commission's recommendation that all property functions be brought together under one senior manager with the transfer of all property from departments, where legally possible, and relevant budgetary provision and personnel.

11.23 That this group be charged with developing a protocol which defines the range and type of services or agencies which, by renting surplus accommodation, could make a positive contribution to the school's core functions and create stronger links with the local community.

11.24 That, to ensure the success of this approach, the LEA actively encourages schools and governing bodies to consider the issue of surplus places and accommodation as a problem that can only be addressed as part of a strategic and city-wide issue.

11.25 That discussions and consultation on creative use of surplus accommodation be linked with and take account of the findings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's review of community centres and community buildings.

11.26 That the long-term strategy referred to at paragraph 11.15 in this report should acknowledge that school closure, although a less desirable course of action, may be the only available option if other approaches have failed to address the issue of surplus places.

11.27 That the strategy should ensure that this option is only recommended as a last resort where, despite careful consideration of alternative options and where every effort has been made to reduce surplus places, the number of pupils on roll continues to decline, the school is becoming non-viable and unlikely to improve.

11.28 That where this option is considered, officers and Members ensure that greater care is taken to ensure that interested groups receive adequate and timely notice of any proposals, that there is full consultation at an early stage and that continuing support and information is given to parents, children, staff and governors in order to allay anxieties, offer support and counter rumour and speculation about the process.

11.29 That in order to reflect the preferences of parents and the community and to remove parental anxiety over the safety of their children, the alternative school offered should be local and the journey to and from it must be safe, simple and straightforward.
ENQUIRY INTO SURPLUS PRIMARY SCHOOL PLACES

Report of the Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel

1. Introduction

1.1 The former Budgets and Best Value Scrutiny Committee began this enquiry in December 2001 and following the reorganisation of Scrutiny in January 2002, the newly formed Learning Overview and Scrutiny Commission continued the enquiry. As a result of the election in May 2002 the enquiry was completed by a Panel drawn from the Commission's membership: Councillors Bird, (Mrs) B. Petch, Waudby (Chair) and co-optees Mr J.E. Gwinnell and Mrs K. Stead. Councillors Collinson and Ross attended the Panel as observers.

1.2 Other Members who took part during the course of the enquiry were: Councillors Bradley, Butterworth, Hewitt, Percy and Toon and former Councillors Lowery, Walker, Doyle and Webster.

2. Terms of Reference

2.1 Aim of the Scrutiny Enquiry

2.1.1 To recommend policy that will address the issue of surplus primary school places in a fair, open and accountable manner.

2.2 Objectives of the Scrutiny Enquiry

2.2.1 To investigate the issue of surplus places in Kingston upon Hull, including factors such as demographic changes, changes to the education system and whether this was an issue before unitary status.

2.2.2 To examine the policy and guidance concerning the removal of surplus places, including consideration of the political context, i.e. the views of central government, Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED) and the District Auditor.

2.2.3 To question the level of support that the authority gives to schools to deal with surplus place removal.

2.2.4 To look at the cost of surplus places to the authority and to schools and the cost to the community with respect to the Council’s duty of well-being.

2.2.5 To research the various options for dealing with surplus places through discussion with stakeholders, other local authorities and through comparative research.
3. Range of Evidence – Verbal and Written

3.1 The Panel received both verbal and written evidence from a range of stakeholders (see Appendix 2) including the perspective of other Local Education Authorities; teaching trade unions; representatives of a parents’ action group; District Audit; OfSTED; the then Portfolio Holders for Young People/Community Education/ Libraries and Schools Development/Learning Services/Personnel; the Group Director, Deputy Director and Assistant Director of Learning Services; Group Director (Community Services) and the Director of Social Services.

4. Background to the issue of Surplus Primary School Places – the National and Local Context

4.1 Introduction

4.1.2 Surplus places are measured by the difference between the physical capacity of a school and the number of pupils on roll. The method of calculating the capacity of a school is prescribed by Government which is placing increasing pressure on local authorities to reduce the number of surplus places in schools.

4.1.3 In common with many other local authorities, surplus places have been an issue for Hull for quite some time and one that has been exacerbated by a number of factors including population and pupil drift, a reduction in the city’s birth-rate and high levels of empty properties within both public and private sector housing stock.

4.2 Population

4.2.1 Statistics show that over the period 1996–2000 Hull’s population fell by about 12,000. Based on these statistics, if it continued to fall at the same rate the population by 2016 would be only 207,000. If this trend does continue it is expected that it will be reflected in the age profile of the city region which will become older with a higher proportion in age groups over 45, especially in the 45-75 age range and markedly fewer children. When combined with the continuing population drift this would further reduce the need for school places. A report to Cabinet in January 2002 showed that children aged 1-4 make up 6.1% of the city’s population (15,000) compared to 7.1% aged 5-9 (18,000). The report notes that, irrespective of the drift to the East Riding, the number of children in Hull Schools will continue to decline and more empty places will result.

4.2.2 In September 2000, DTZ Pieda Consulting was commissioned by the Council to undertake a study of perceived population ‘drift’ and to examine the extent to which pupil mobility and parental attitudes towards education within Hull were factors motivating residents to leave the city. The study aimed to assess whether this perception was correct and if so, the nature and extent of its effect on the city. If depopulation was found to be significant, the study aimed to identify the driving forces behind the movement and whether these were influenced by perception or reality. The potential driving forces that required validation included:
• poor economic performance and prospects
• low quality, low value housing stock
• poor educational performance
• crime and antisocial behaviour/poor reputation of areas and schools

4.2.3 The study’s findings showed that the city’s population has declined fairly consistently since 1960 and that, in common with many other cities, the main component of this loss has been out-migration rather than any natural loss.

4.2.4 The report’s key findings highlight the fact that the driving forces behind the city’s population and pupil drift are tied in with a wide range of issues. These include a lack of diversity in the city’s private sector housing stock that leads to limited choice, the significant level of empty properties within both public and private sector housing stock that allows ease of mobility for tenants, and negative perceptions of crime rates in Hull, despite slight decreases in the recorded crime statistics.

4.2.5 The report emphasises that some of the problems identified by consultees are based on perception rather than real evidence but nevertheless, this does not diminish their negative effect on the city’s existing and potential residents and its social and economic well-being.

4.2.6 Given that a wide range of issues are acting as a driving force behind population and pupil drift, this problem requires joint working and a strategic approach because no one agency or Council directorate can effectively tackle it alone.

4.3 Local Education Authority’s Accountability to Government

4.3.1 Each year Local Education Authorities (LEAs) are required to provide the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) with a statistical return that gives the rolls of all community, foundation and voluntary schools in their area. The return shows the actual number of surplus places in each school and the overall amount of surplus places in each authority. The LEAs are also asked to provide forecasts that show how these numbers could change in the future: over the next four years for primary and over the next seven years for secondary schools.

4.3.2 The quality of this forecasting and the plans for reducing surplus places in each LEA are subject to external audit, with government now wanting LEAs to focus on reducing surplus places in schools that have high surplus levels (25% or more), are under-subscribed by parents and where there are other schools nearby. Government believes that surplus places are a poor use of resources and that their removal allows the LEA to free up funding for priority areas such as books, teacher recruitment and retention.

4.3.3 The results of the survey are reported to MPs and are also used by the DfES to monitor the action that is being taken by LEAs to remove surplus places.

4.3.4 DfES data for each LEA at January 2000 showed that surplus places accounted for 17% of the total number of places in Hull’s primary schools. Sixteen primary schools had a surplus of 25% or more. Surplus places in Hull’s secondary schools
accounted for 12% of the total number of places and three schools had a surplus of 25% or more. However, as a result of the reorganisation of West Hull secondary schools surplus places at secondary level are no longer an issue. The overall level of surplus primary school places is now 11.6%. This is as a result of the LEA agreeing with schools their net capacity. The aim is to reach not more than 10% by September 2003 and the closure of Kinloss Primary School (referred to at 10.24 in this report) will help move the LEA nearer to this target. By this action the LEA hopes to gain some breathing space and enable it to consider school places as part of the Urban Renaissance agenda. The LEA is currently trying to remove surplus places from Hall Road and Francis Askew Primary Schools by relocating the Language Unit and Hearing-Impaired Service respectively. However, the LEA has emphasised that targets will keep moving if the number of children in the city continues to fall.

4.4 OfSTED Inspection of the LEA 1999

4.4.1 Inspection guidance published by OfSTED in February 2002 acknowledges that school organisation and the provision of places is a key issue in most LEAs and one which is context specific. For example, OfSTED and the LEAs expect that over the next 5 years and mainly in the North East there will be a 20% fall in school rolls.

4.4.2 In June 1999 the Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED) carried out an inspection of Hull Schools and raised the following points about the LEA’s management of school places:

(i) the decision not to close primary schools in January 1999 could result in the need for further re-organisation if rolls continued to drop as forecast;

(ii) the LEA must monitor surplus places and take prompt and decisive action where necessary;

(iii) in comparison with national averages, the LEA had a high proportion of surplus places in 1998, particularly in primary schools;

(iv) 47% of primary and 56% of secondary schools had more than 10% surplus places and these figures were projected to increase;

(v) it was noted that the LEA had consulted on a phased school re-organisation plan targeting the areas where schools had less than 75% occupancy and that it aimed to remove 2,400 primary places by the year 2000;

(vi) OfSTED believed that without further school closures it was unlikely that the LEA would meet the District Auditor’s recommendation to remove 2,750 primary and 1,500 secondary places.
4.5 The Calculation of Surplus Places

4.5.1 The formula for measurement of schools and the calculation of the number of pupil places available is set by the DfES. At the beginning of this enquiry schools used the More Open Enrolment (MOE) formula for measuring capacity but this attracted criticism from schools on the grounds that the formula was open to interpretation and created confusion. Government has now replaced MOE with a new Net Capacity Assessment method. Net capacity is intended to provide a single, robust and consistent method of assessment that will be used to measure surplus school places. It will also be used to inform decisions about capital funding to reduce the size of schools; inform statutory proposals; update the School Organisation Plan and inform other plans; indicate a Pupil Admission Number (PAN) and inform decisions on Basic Need Funding such as capital allocations to increase the size of schools.

4.5.2 For primary schools, the net capacity will be calculated on the basis of the number and size of spaces designated as 'classbases' and checked against the total usable space available to ensure that there is neither too much nor too little space available to support core-teaching activities.

4.5.3 School governors may determine parts of the school that are to be used for childcare facilities, family learning rooms, health or social care rooms or adult and community learning facilities. Where these facilities or services are established the LEA can designate them as areas excluded from the Net Capacity Assessment.

4.5.4 In their written evidence to the Panel, the Newland Avenue Parents' Action Group claimed that, following a survey organised by parents and carried out by architects/surveyors, issues arose concerning many of the schools surveyed and some of the baseline calculations that had been made (using the MOE method) were inaccurate. Examples quoted included spaces or classrooms that should have been exempt from the calculations because they were used for music, special education needs classes, libraries or a kids' club.

4.5.5 The report produced by the Newland Parents’ Action Group: “Schools and Community Use”, notes that they found “widespread confusion over interpretation of the government’s formula for calculating school capacity.” The report recommended “immediate checking of all school capacities and recalculation to minimise surplus places.” and states that there were “opportunities for immediate reduction of surplus places in case-study schools.”

4.5.6 In their evidence to the Panel, representatives of the Parents’ Action Group estimated that correct measurement of all primary schools could result in the removal of over 2,000 places. This number was based on the estimate that each primary school had 30 fewer surplus places than were recorded by the LEA.

4.5.7 Head Teachers who had taken part in the survey claimed that they did not receive training on the formula used at the time nor did officers go through the calculations with them. Evidence from the Audit Commission suggests that this is a national problem:

"Information on school capacity is often out of date. This can lead to unnecessary expenditure on the expansion of other schools or poor
management of excess space. Most LEAs rely on individual schools to tell them of changes in capacity. Although schools are responsible for reporting such changes, there is often a poor understanding of capacity measurement at school level. It is not unusual for schools to overlook many of the changes that affect capacity – for example, the change of use of a particular area, or the addition of a mobile classroom, particularly if it has been paid for out of the school’s own funds. Many good practice LEAs have also established procedures to validate school capacities or audit them on a rolling basis." (Trading Places – A Management Handbook on the Supply and Allocation of School Places, Audit Commission, 1997)

4.5.8 The Learning Services Directorate’s response to comments from the Newland Parents Action Group was that the LEA’s database was correct under the old MOE formula.

4.5.9 The Panel concluded that although the DfES has introduced a new method of assessment which it believes will be more consistent and less open to interpretation and confusion, there is still a need for governors and Head Teachers to receive training and support on this formula. The Panel also concluded that the LEA should monitor the capacity of schools on a regular basis in order that it can keep abreast of issues such as change of use.

4.5.10 Recommendations

4.5.11 That the LEA ensures that Head Teachers and governing bodies are offered continued training on the new Net Capacity Assessment.

4.5.12 That instead of relying on schools to inform it of changes of use etc, the LEA keeps abreast of changes within schools by monitoring capacity on a regular basis.

4.5.13 That where monitoring indicates a process of long term decline in school numbers, Head Teachers and governors are closely involved in and consulted on any proposed action.

4.5.14 That governing bodies be asked to include as an agenda item, at least annually, the need to report any change of usage to the LEA.

5. Best Value Review - Young People - Social Inclusion

5.1 Conscious that the enquiry into surplus places would require a strategic and overarching view, the Panel also drew on evidence from the Best Value Review of Young People – Social Inclusion and from the Director of Social Services.

5.2 The Review covered five service areas:

i) Young People’s Support Services
ii) City Psychological Service, Learning Services
iii) Education Welfare Services, Learning Services
iv) Youth Service, Learning Services
5.3 Whilst acknowledging the hard work and achievements of people working in different Council departments, schools, the health sector and voluntary organisations, the Review emphasises the need to remove unnecessary organisational boundaries and to develop integrated practices that offer mutual support to staff, groups and professionals who, although they are undertaking different work, do so often with the same group of children and ultimately the same shared aims.

5.4 The Review makes the point that the deprivation figures for Hull demonstrate the very real challenge faced by the Council and all other organisations within the city. This level of deprivation creates pressure on local services and affects the performance of children in many aspects of their lives, including education, which in turn affects the performance indicators of many other services.

5.5 A general theme that emerged in the Review’s consultation exercises was the need for services to be delivered through multi-agency teams across the city, possibly following the boundaries of the Area Committees.

5.6 The services referred to cut across voluntary and statutory boundaries and included, potentially, the full range of services for children and young people. Of interest to this enquiry into Surplus Primary School Places was feedback regarding the delivery mechanism for these services, ranging from neighbourhood one stop shops to a full range of services based in and around local schools.

5.7 Also of interest was that the people consulted generally wanted to see budgets and resources being pooled to reduce the potential for conflict and duplication and also to see a fairly radical response as opposed to tinkering with the structures and services as they stand.

5.8 The Best Value Review demonstrates that by involving schools in discussions on imaginative approaches to how, when and where services are delivered, the LEA can contribute to the cross cutting approaches that are critical to tackling deprivation and raising the aspirations and attainment of children, young people, their families and communities.

5.9 The Panel concluded that the challenge outlined by the Best Value Review of Young People - Social Inclusion offers immense opportunities, and that now is the time for the LEA and the Council to re-evaluate the provision of schools and the role that they can play in the city’s renaissance.

5.10 The Panel also concluded that from focusing on and dealing with the current task of reducing surplus places the LEA, schools and governing bodies now have the opportunity to move forward to the development of a long term vision that, in common with the Best Value Review, seeks not to ‘tinker’ at the edges of urban decline and its effect on schools but to produce a radical and imaginative response.

6. Pupil Mobility
6.1 In addition to DTZ Pieda’s study on Population and Pupil Drift, referred to at 4.2.2 in this report, the Panel also heard evidence on pupil mobility from the Deputy Director of Learning Services. Apart from the evidence that high levels of pupil mobility can lead to turbulence and have an impact on educational attainment and standards, the Panel was told that national and local research indicates that the performance of children who are more academically able appears to be the most affected when they move frequently. Whether this is the result of circumstances surrounding the reason for the move, the amount of notice given by parents or the efficiency with which schools transfer pupils’ records is not known.

6.2 The Panel acknowledged that pupil mobility has been a long standing problem in the city but concluded that there is no doubt that it is made easier by the high level of surplus places and the fact that the city has the third highest rate of empty houses in England. Reasons given by families for moving house included anti-social behaviour, crime or the fear of crime or the reputation of the area.

6.3 Evidence given by the Cabinet Co-ordinator and the Social Inclusion Policy Manager showed that these interlinked issues were high on the Urban Renaissance agenda for the city, the aim of which is to reverse urban decline. Crucial to the success of this renaissance are the resources that will allow the Council to gain a comprehensive understanding of the health and dynamics of the city; improved co-ordination and co-joined strategies and actions at city-wide and neighbourhood levels, and improved partnership working, culture and practice. The Panel was told that a lack of intelligence-based planning has been a weakness in the past but is a key requirement and will require the collection and evaluation of information from all directorates.

6.4 The Panel also noted that feedback from the Council’s consultation on the Community Strategy indicates that people would prefer community based schools that have lower class sizes and can offer increased out of school activities.

6.5 A report by Power and Munford of the London School of Economics “Urban Abandonment or Urban Renaissance”, shows that in many inner city areas the low demand for housing has generated falling rolls, loss of confidence in the area, a vacuum in social control, anti-social behaviour and intense fear of crime. However, the report notes that there is real potential for repopulating urban areas using measures that include local leadership, services that are innovative and co-ordinated, experimental working between police, housing and residents, marketing of the area and its housing, improved security measures and the development of long term strategies.

6.6 Last but not least, urban neighbourhoods need an over-arching structure and strategies that can orchestrate the changes necessary and ensure that forms of support such as education, police and health services underpin social cohesion. Policy implications will include the need to provide intensive support for low-skilled residents to help them find employment, incentives for brown field development and recycled use of buildings and a high level of environmental care and maintenance together with cheap and easy public transport, better city schools and more secure neighbourhoods.

6.7 Conclusions
6.8 The Panel acknowledged that schools may not be aware of the reasons for some moves and parents are under no obligation to disclose these but concluded that with the co-operation of a small number of carefully chosen schools Head Teachers could monitor pupil mobility over 2-3 terms and report their findings. It would of course be made clear to parents that they would be asked to provide this information on a voluntary and anonymous basis.

6.9 The Panel also concluded that better information about the reasons for high pupil mobility would enable the Council to develop multi-agency models of intervention that could help to combat some of the tensions and problems that can arise between people living in a neighbourhood.

6.10 Recommendations

6.11 That, with the co-operation of a small number of carefully chosen schools which would provide a representative picture, exit interviews are undertaken in liaison with the Admissions Section of the LEA.

6.12 That in order to facilitate this project, the LEA seeks ways to help the schools in question with administrative support.

6.13 That parents/carers are made aware that they are asked to provide information on a voluntary basis and that the data collected will not include information that could lead to their identification.

6.14 That the findings of this monitoring exercise are shared with the appropriate directorates and other agencies in order that they can inform and contribute to intelligence based planning in areas such as crime, disorder and housing.

6.15 That whilst not directly relevant to this enquiry, the monitoring exercise also looks at the amount of time taken by schools to transfer pupils’ records and whether children are affected by delays as the findings of the exercise may help to improve this aspect of schools management.

7. A Long Term Strategy for a Recurring Problem

7.1 The Panel noted OfSTED’s predictions that schools in the North East can expect a 20% fall in school rolls over the next 5 years (referred to at 4.4.1 in this report) and the report to Cabinet in January 2002 (referred to at 4.2.1 in this report) which notes that irrespective of the drift to the East Riding, the number of children in Hull schools will continue to decline and more surplus places will result.

7.2 The Panel was also concerned at the factors that exacerbated the high levels of pupil mobility within the city and the negative effect that pupil mobility can have on educational attainment and standards.

7.3 Based on this evidence the Panel concluded that although the LEA has succeeded in reducing the number of surplus places and the pressure has been eased, the issue of surplus places is likely to be a recurring problem and one that requires a long term strategy that addresses all of the factors that determine the economic
and social wellbeing of communities and their sustainability. The development of this strategy should include full consultation with schools and the community through ward fora as part of the Urban Renaissance agenda. This approach should include consideration of the range of options that are available: alternative or creative use of surplus school accommodation, the development of extended schools and the possibility that some school closure(s) may be unavoidable and inevitable if demographic changes result in significantly fewer children.

8. **Community / Full-service School / Extended Schools**

8.1 The concept of full service schools emerged in America in the 1980s but was slow to flower, although by the 1990s models were being piloted in America and Canada and both countries introduced policies that endorsed and encouraged school boards to expand services and programmes for at-risk children. These schools are based on the principle that no single service or profession can substantially improve the lives of children whereas when services are brought together, they can provide an integrated education, medical and social service that helps to meet the needs of children, young people and their families. The benefits of a stronger relationship between schools and other services are:

i) These schools can offer greater levels of support to children who live in areas of marked poverty or who have low educational aspirations.

ii) Since schools are often the single most stabilising influence on the lives of children and young people, they are the logical site for the delivery of other services that focus on social, emotional and health needs.

iii) The additional support offered by full service or community schools increases children’s capacity to learn and this in turn helps schools to meet their regional and national standards.

8.2 Collaborative working between different agencies is cost effective because they can use school buildings beyond school hours and the integrated service helps them to avoid duplication of effort, lack of joined up working and expensive or ill-targeted short term solutions.

8.3 Research by Newcastle City Council shows that the Full Service School concept is now working extremely well in the United States of America and starting to work in Scotland. Examples quoted by Newcastle are as follows:

i) Improved attendance rates;

ii) Improved early intervention and early warning action;

iii) Better attainment in examinations;

iv) Improved employment prospects;

v) Less drug abuse, and

vi) Fewer teenage pregnancies.

8.4 Full-service schools have also brought benefits to the wider community through:

i) Reduction in crime and violence in the community;
ii) Overall improved health within families;

iii) Better access to services and resources which might not otherwise be readily available to them, and

iv) More productive partnerships between schools, parents and the wider community.

8.5 Newcastle notes that schools too have benefited:

i) There is provision of expert services and counselling in schools which support teachers and pupils through a range of staff working together. This leads to more efficient use of resources.

ii) The ‘one-stop’ school-based service centre has enhanced the role of the school as a central place in the community.

iii) There are improved communications between the school and home.

iv) Parental alienation towards schools and mistrust of parents towards schools and teachers are reduced.

v) Some disaffected young people are drawn back into the school system having used services offered in the schools.

8.6 There are also benefits to the external support and service agencies:

i) There is better and improved communication between these agencies, which results in more efficient, and effective service provision.

ii) This closer collaboration leads to improved effectiveness and better value for money. Agencies are based in or work more closely with schools which allows them to become more involved with their cases, leading to a reduction in time making referrals and in the following up of cases.

8.7 Newcastle City Council’s urban renaissance strategy includes proposals to develop a network of full-service primary schools that offer integrated education and community services to support individuals and families. By doing so the Council aims to raise educational attainment and reverse the trend for families to move out of the city. Newcastle aims to place education at the forefront of regeneration since it believes that a successful school will help to develop a cohesive community.

8.8 In a report to Newcastle City Council’s Cabinet in October 2001, the Education and Libraries Directorate outlined the opportunities that had arisen in Newcastle to develop full-service schools because of the scope for utilising surplus places in schools with spare capacity and the experience gained from the Scottish Community School Model.

8.9 The DfES guidance document: "Extended Schools, Providing Opportunities For All" describes government’s aim to see more schools at the heart of their community, providing learning and cultural experiences for all and offering help and support where it can be easily accessed.
8.10 This document defines an extended school as one that provides a range of services and activities, often beyond the school day, to help meet the needs of its pupils, their families and the wider community. Central to the DfES promotion of extended schools is the acknowledgement that there is no single blueprint for the types of activity that schools might provide or how they could be organised. However the DfES places great emphasis on the need for consultation with key groups to ensure that extended school programmes meet local needs. Although the document stresses that a school’s governing body has ultimate responsibility for deciding whether extended services will be offered and the form that these should take, it emphasises the support, practical expertise, and leadership that can be gained from close working and consultation with LEAs, other local authority departments, Head Teachers, Primary Care Trusts, Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP), Children’s Trusts and Connexions partnerships.

8.11 This consultation would allow LEAs to give governing bodies a strategic view on potential programmes and ensure that they support wider community strategies and individual local authority departments can give advice about specific services. Head Teachers and other staff can bring their school management experience and understanding of the needs of pupils, families and the wider school community to the planning process and can offer practical advice on how additional services might impact on school premises, equipment, timetables and the school community. The Local Strategic Partnerships can provide access to key consultation groups and, in areas where neighbourhood renewal initiatives are active, the LSP can help ensure that a school’s services complement the overall neighbourhood renewal programme. Similarly, close consultation with Children’s Trusts and Connexions partnerships provides an opportunity to co-ordinate services for children and their families and take advantage of Connexions’ human resources and support networks for young people. Consultation with Primary Care Trusts will be essential if an extended school’s services are to include health or social services. Last but not least, the DfES stresses the importance of consulting with and involving parents, children and young people, partner schools and local and national businesses.

8.12 The Government believes that the Education Act 2002 will help governing bodies to develop extended schools because the Act:

i) makes it easier for governing bodies to provide facilities and services directly that benefit pupils, families and the local community;

ii) provides flexibility for governing bodies to enter into agreements with other partners to provide services on school premises, and

iii) enables governing bodies to charge for some services.

8.13 Whilst giving governing bodies these additional rights the Act also provides safeguards to protect pupils’ education and to ensure that services are delivered effectively. Governing bodies will be required to:

i) consult their LEA, the staff of their school, parents, pupils and any other stakeholders they consider appropriate;

ii) have regard to any advice given to them by their LEA;
iii) ensure that any proposed service does not interfere with the main duty to educate pupils and promote high standards of educational achievement at the school, and

iv) take account of guidance from the Secretary of State for Education and Skills.

8.14 In the course of planning extended school services schools will need to review their practical management and may need to develop:

i) more flexible opening hours;
ii) new visitor and school security procedures;
iii) revisions to health and safety policies, and
iv) multi-agency staffing arrangements.

8.15 In addition to the new powers given by the Education Act 2002, the new formula for measuring schools, Net Capacity Assessment, also gives LEAs the opportunity to designate those parts of schools that are for community use. These areas are then excluded from the school's net capacity and schools have the freedom to make permanent changes or modifications to such spaces for their new purpose. School spaces may be excluded from the net capacity if they are used for early years and childcare or for adult learning and skills. Specially resourced facilities may also be excluded if they are used regularly during the school day by either parents or members of the community. Small rooms that are not available to the school during the school day, for example those used for community offices or stores or counselling services, will be included in the net capacity assessment but will not count towards the net capacity of the school.

8.16 Conclusions

8.17 The Panel concluded that full-service or community schools have the potential to address a number of issues that contribute to or result from urban decline, e.g. high levels of pupil mobility and surplus places. The Panel also noted that the English model of extended schools allows the flexibility to develop a range of programmes that reflect the needs of the local community, support local strategies for neighbourhood renewal and service improvement and broader community strategies.

8.18 The Panel also concluded that extended school programmes can play an important role in encouraging community groups and individuals to help shape and develop local services and help build strong and active communities.

8.19 Based on the evidence heard, the Panel concluded that preliminary research should be undertaken by the Learning Services Directorate to explore the progress made by LGA Pathfinders and DfES partners in developing ‘Schools in the Community’ initiatives: Tameside, Sefton, Lincolnshire, Durham, Warwickshire, Newcastle and Gateshead and to identify how extended schools could be of benefit to Hull.

8.20 The Panel concluded that the development of extended or community schools should be seen in terms of a change of culture and a positive choice rather than being simply a means of reducing surplus places.
8.21 Finally, the Panel concluded that it may not always be possible to develop extended or community schools in some areas and where these would not be viable, the Council and the LEA should pursue the creative use of surplus accommodation as an alternative option that could provide some of the benefits of extended schools.

9. Creative Use of Surplus Accommodation

9.1 The Audit Commission believes that finding alternative uses for surplus school accommodation is likely to have greater potential than the practice of “mothballing” parts of a school that are not used. For example, it notes that little savings will be made unless the unused accommodation can be isolated from the school’s heating system and even then, the fabric of buildings will suffer if they are not maintained or do not receive a minimal level of heating.

9.2 However, individual schools may not have the resources to find alternative users and assistance from the LEA is essential. Birmingham City Council has a Surplus Property Working Group with membership drawn from each council department. Representatives bring details of surplus accommodation to this group which then decides if the property/accommodation can be disposed of in-house, used for storage or if it will invite bids from the voluntary sector. Where school accommodation is not physically part of the main school building the group will decide upon the tenant. The decision is left to the school if the accommodation is part of the main school building, with the only proviso being that the school must draw up a proper lease. This ensures that a tenancy can be discontinued if circumstances change or if the tenant proves unsuitable.

9.3 Birmingham City Council has only been able to let accommodation to a few voluntary organisations but has had greater success with recycling. The Council is under great pressure to find additional office accommodation and has relocated Council staff into surplus school accommodation. One school has also been sold for use as a private secondary school for Muslim children.

9.4 Birmingham stresses that potential tenants must be sympathetic to the age range of the school’s pupils and another important consideration is that “tenants” may keep longer hours. This means that flexibility of the school’s caretaking staff will be essential.

9.5 Newland Avenue Parents’ Action Group Strategy for the removal of surplus places includes a proposal to reassign space in some schools for independent use by community organisations.

9.6 Five schools were the subject of individual case studies and of these the group believed that three had the potential for community use, the result of which would be a reduction in the number of surplus places. For example, the group suggested alternative uses at Thoresby Primary could reduce capacity by 90 by dedicating three classrooms to community use.
In order to test the viability of its proposal that surplus school accommodation be used for community use, the Parents' Action Group contacted a number of voluntary organisations and asked for their reaction: Centre 88 Resource Centre which provides meeting facilities, office space and printing services to voluntary organisations, University of Hull Centre for Lifelong Learning, Hull DOC – Developing our Communities and Hull Time Based Arts.

Because of its support role, Centre 88, which is based in the former St Wilfred's RC Primary School, is well placed to comment on the accommodation requirements of the voluntary, charitable and community groups in Hull. It currently provides office accommodation to ten voluntary organisations and training/meeting facilities are used by many other voluntary and community groups throughout the city. In the 10 months prior to November 2001, the centre had seven enquiries from new and existing organisations that wanted office accommodation but due to existing commitments could only accommodate two organisations. And, during the seven years that the current manager has been in post, the Centre has been full and unable to accommodate most of the organisations that were seeking accommodation.

The Centre believes that this demonstrates the need for additional accommodation of the type offered at the former school. It estimates that there are over 2000 voluntary, charitable and community groups throughout the city, ranging from small self-help groups to large organisations that employ paid staff. The Centre believes that it is unlikely that Council officers will have a wide knowledge of the level of activity of most of these organisations or their accommodation requirements.

The response from the University of Hull Centre for Lifelong Learning showed that where school buildings or classrooms can be conveniently separated from the rest of the school, the university would be interested in sharing suitable facilities with similar agencies or renting premises themselves. The University has been expanding community-based lifelong learning provision over the past three years and described the Action Group’s proposal as an imaginative way of turning a problem into an opportunity and enhancing community participation.

Hull DOC’s response was that from their experience, there is a clear demand in Hull for local and affordable accommodation from a range of community/voluntary and other organisations. It believes that by being based in these types of building there are greater opportunities to make contact with residents and work in partnership with the host organisation. Hull DOC also believes that since the government wants regeneration and neighbourhood renewal to be more locally driven, this will lead to more demand for a range of accommodation to suit different purposes.

A similar response was given by Hull Time Based Arts which is expanding its education programme and this might include work in schools through the Arts Council’s Creative Partnership Scheme. Other projects integrate education programmes with commissioned art works and on occasion these will need rented studio/office space. The organisation believes that premises located within or in close proximity to a school would offer a safe and attractive environment for such projects and offer the prospect of a further creative dialogue within the school.
9.13 The Deputy Director of Learning Services told the Panel that the LEA had contacted the organisations referred to at 9.7 in this report but that they had shown no interest in renting accommodation in schools. Despite this the LEA is attempting to broker a number of initiatives that could help resolve the problem of surplus places in West Hull without having to resort to school closure.

9.14 He also told the Panel that if alternative use is to become a viable method of removing surplus accommodation, the LEA will have to address the high levels of anxiety on the part of those Head Teachers and Governors who are concerned about the impact that shared accommodation might have on pupils.

9.15 Because of the difficulty in attracting the interest of other agencies to surplus accommodation and the need to ensure co-ordination, the Panel noted Cabinet's agreement in principle to the recommendation by the Financial Management and Audit Commission that all property functions be brought together under one senior manager with the transfer of all property from departments, where legally possible, and with relevant budgetary provision and personnel.

9.16 Conclusions

9.17 The Panel concluded that any proposals for creative use of surplus accommodation by community groups should link with and take account of the findings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's review of community centres and community buildings. This also applies to the issue of full service schools discussed at 8 in this report.

9.18 The Panel concluded that the safety of children is of paramount importance and that any proposals for vacating part of a school and renting it to other organisations must address issues such as separate access since the safety and security of children must not be compromised.

9.19 The Panel also concluded that this could be addressed more easily if schools are encouraged to review their occupancy of school buildings and where surplus space is spread around the building, consolidate it into one area which could be self-contained and rented out.

9.20 Based on the evidence of other LEAs, the Panel concluded that for these proposals to succeed, the LEA must provide some incentives for schools to identify and release surplus accommodation and make them aware that failure to reduce surplus places would be counter to the recommendations of the Corporate Governance Inspection, OfSTED and the District Auditor.

9.21 The Panel also concluded that the LEA should establish arrangements that help schools to find other users since this is a strategic issue demanding a professional approach to asset management as opposed to ad hoc arrangements on an area basis.

9.22 The Panel also concluded that by involving all directorates and Area Committees in these arrangements, the Council could help external organisations to target their efforts both at areas in most need of the services offered by them and the eight key strategic themes of the Community Strategy which are:
i) Maintaining and improving community safety;
ii) Improving health and social welfare;
iii) Rejuvenating the city's economy;
iv) Protecting and enhancing the environment;
v) Enhancing image and raising aspirations;
vi) Creating a learning city;
vii) Reinvigorating the housing market, and
viii) Improving transport.

9.23 The Panel also concluded that organisations such as the Centre 88 Resource Centre, referred to at 9.8 in this report should be involved since they are likely to have a wide knowledge of voluntary, charitable and community groups in the city and their accommodation needs.

9.24 However, the Panel concluded that the flexibility of school caretaking staff will be essential if these proposals are to succeed, especially where tenants wish to operate outside a school's opening hours. It is essential, therefore, that caretakers and other staff are included in discussions on the rationale behind alternative use of school premises and are aware of the contribution that they can make to the success of these initiatives.

9.25 The Panel also concluded that these principles apply equally to community or full-service schools, which are discussed at 8 in this report.

10. School Closures

10.1 In its management handbook on the supply and allocation of school places the Audit Commission notes that few local authority decisions arouse such strong public feelings as a proposal to close a local school: “Even the most unpopular schools, or those with the worst academic record, will generate extensive community support when threatened with closure.”

10.2 There were mixed reactions from the witnesses who attended the Panel's hearings. The response from representatives of Teaching Unions was that school closure should be a last resort and that it is unacceptable for any LEA to close a school for anything other than sound educational reasons. They stressed that school closure, or its threat, creates trauma and uncertainty for children and parents and has an adverse effect on the morale of staff, making it difficult to recruit teachers and non-teaching assistants. Given that there has been a drift of teaching staff to the East Riding and the teaching population of the city is getting older, they believed school closure would only add to these difficulties.

10.3 For the Unions, school closures represent missed opportunities because additional space can be used to enhance learning by dedicating rooms to activities such as technology, science and music or working with children with special education needs. In one Hull school, surplus space was used successfully by teachers working with pupils who were on the point of exclusion. As a result of this “time out” the pupils could be reintegrated with their classmates. And, since government policy recognises that pupils learn better in smaller groups with room to move, surplus accommodation can contribute to educational achievement.
10.4 Union representatives acknowledged that the LEA is under pressure from OfSTED and the District Auditor to manage surplus places but believed that since school closure appears to be an unpopular approach, the Council should resist school closure by lobbying government.

10.5 In order to address what it describes as a climate of uncertainty and unease, the National Association of School Masters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) also recommended a city-wide review and a creative plan for at least ten years that could be published for consultation and implementation. A further recommendation focussed on the information and building data that is used to identify surplus places. The NASUWT believes that this data should be widely available with a view to schools finding creative solutions for surplus accommodation.

10.6 In contrast, Government believes that a reduction in surplus places, which could be achieved by a number of approaches, one of which is school closure, would help to target funds at priority areas such as attracting and retaining teachers. Government also believes that better targeted funds would result in greater parental choice and good quality education that is provided in the most cost-effective way.

10.7 In its report on the LEA (referred to at 4.4 in this report) OfSTED noted that despite the LEA’s proposals to reduce surplus places, it would be unlikely to meet the District Audit recommendation to remove 2,750 primary places without further school closures.

10.8 In his evidence to the Panel the District Audit representative, Mr Paul Lundy, stressed that the District Auditor’s response to the removal of surplus places is not driven by financial imperatives but by the need to encourage good practice in education management and the effective use of resources. For example, some of the LEA’s schools are in need of maintenance and/or refurbishment and the money spent on maintaining surplus places could be redirected to address the fabric of these schools.

10.9 District Audit acknowledged that the removal of surplus places could be an unpleasant task but nevertheless, stressed that the Council needs to be able to demonstrate to OfSTED that it has a coherent strategy for tackling surplus places.

10.10 During District Audit’s recent discussions with focus and community groups, the overwhelming message was that communities want more facilities for children and young people; this presents the LEA with the opportunity to explore how surplus school accommodation could be used to provide these facilities.

10.11 Evidence from the Assistant Director Finance and Information (Learning Services) showed that an average annual revenue saving of £105,000 can be achieved by school closure and that this revenue saving is recycled to other schools via a funding formula. Because the cost of "mothballing" a school can vary according to factors such as security and could, as in the case of Shaw Park School, cost £1,000 a week, the LEA prefers to find alternative uses/users for empty schools or sell them. The amount of rent that would be charged would depend upon the Council's relationship with an agency and any partnership agreements.
10.12 The Panel also heard that the main source of funding to schools comes from the number of pupils on the school roll so that a primary school with 180 pupils would have a budget of around £480,000. A larger school of 250 pupils might have around £600,000 whilst a large primary school of 600 pupils might have a budget of £1,200,000. As a result larger schools are in a better position to achieve economies of scale because their greater level of funding gives them flexibility with specialist staffing, supply teachers and accommodation and management costs.

10.13 The Panel believed that ways should be found, perhaps by sharing resources or other partnership working, that would allow all schools, regardless of their size, to benefit from economies of scale. The Panel was satisfied that it was evident that for most parents, the proximity of the school to home in terms of ease of access and overall safety is more important than school size.

10.14 In addition to concerns about the impact of actual school closure, the Panel also believed that the manner in which the Council makes known proposals for school closures can cause disruption and distress.

10.15 In their evidence to the Panel, representatives of the Newland Parents Action Group told Members that problems over the proposed closure of Newland Primary School had been caused as a result of the manner in which the LEA’s plans had been announced. For example, brief references in the School Organisation Plan regarding the LEA’s plans for primary schools had been followed one month later by specific proposals in a Cabinet report. The Action Group expressed concern that Newland Primary School parents and staff learned about the proposals from the local press.

10.16 The Group’s representatives also told the Panel that parents did not know the principles or criteria used to inform the LEA’s approach to school closure and that schools should not be chosen at random. They believed that there was an apparent lack of consistency in the LEA’s approach and that when considering school closure, educational standards should be part of the equation.

10.17 In his evidence the Deputy Director of Learning Services, Simon Gardner, told the Panel that the LEA had tried to address OfSTED’s concerns by adopting a number of strategies: school closure, remodelling of school buildings and alternative uses. In adopting this flexible approach, the LEA was then left open to the charge of being inconsistent.

10.18 Conclusions

10.19 The Panel concluded that despite the fact that only three primary schools have been closed since 1988, the public perception is that the LEA opts for school closure as opposed to other measures such as alternative usage (discussed at 9 in this report) or remodelling.

10.20 The Panel also concluded that despite evidence to the contrary, school closures can create trauma for some children and it emphasised that parental anxiety over the safety of their children can also be heightened when children have to travel further to and from their primary school or over a more difficult or dangerous route,
for example one that involves crossing main roads. Based on the evidence heard, the Panel concluded that school closure can result in the loss of good practice and causes disturbance to the efforts made by schools to increase attainment and improve quality.

10.21 Social Inclusion was addressed at the outset of this enquiry and remained a constant theme throughout. Mindful of the impact that school closure could have on individuals and the community, including ethnic groups, the Panel concluded that any future proposals should give careful consideration to the role or potential role of primary schools as community focal points.

10.22 The Panel also concluded that where the Council finds that, following full consultation and appraisal of all available options there is no viable alternative to school closure, officers and Members should avoid delay that prolongs the anxiety of parents, children, staff and governors.

10.23 The Panel concluded that for parents, teachers, governors and pupils to recognise a consistent approach, they must be made aware of the positive and negative indicators that are characteristic of viable and non-viable schools. It concluded therefore that any proposals for school closure must make information available on buildings, pupil projections, the school community, availability of nearby schools, school performance and the school’s budget: all criteria used by the LEA and advocated by the DfES. In addition to this statistical information, the Panel concluded that it would be helpful for parents, children, staff and governors to be aware that changes at a local level are part of a wider strategy and long term vision for the city.

10.24 The Panel concluded that whilst publication of these indicators might not soften the blows of proposed rationalisation, they help to explain the rationale behind the proposals and ensure openness and transparency.

10.25 Finally, the Panel acknowledged the findings of the Bransholme Independent Commission and its recommendation that Kinloss Primary School be closed but concluded that the LEA should aim in principle to be the last school closure and that the way forward is for the Council to plan for the effect of future reductions in the city’s population.

11. A Strategic Approach to Surplus Places

11.1 In his evidence to the Panel, the Deputy Director of Learning Services told Members that OfSTED and District Audit do not look favourably on attempts by LEAs to “tinker” at the edges of this issue. And, whilst Head Teachers, Governors and the Council might argue that because schools have devolved budgets they should be allowed to retain surplus places if they so wish, it is, ultimately, the wishes of central government that take precedence.

11.2 Evidence from Mr Paul Lundy of District Audit stressed that the Council must be seen to be addressing the issue and be able to demonstrate to future inspections that the surplus places issue is part of a coherent policy for addressing education in schools and that there is a reasonable and realistic timetable for implementing
proposals. The Panel was reminded that LEAs that have failed to address the issues raised by OfSTED have been penalised by having the responsibility for education taken away from them.

11.3 The Panel also drew on evidence from the Audit Commission’s Corporate Governance Inspection of Kingston upon Hull City Council which was carried out in March 2002. An area highlighted by the report is the lack of “forward strategy for significant over-provision of Council housing and schools” and it sets out a number of recommendations and timescales for dealing with these issues.

11.4 The report recommends that a public debate should be initiated immediately on the future of the housing stock and that this debate should be linked with the provision of school places and the shape of other services. Within twelve months the report calls for the Council to, “link plans for excess housing, surplus school places and poor transport provision in parts of the city.”

11.5 Within the same timescale the Council should, “agree proposals to balance school places with existing and future demand, and that primary and secondary school places are within 10% of demand overall and there is good local match to need with no school having more than 25% surplus places.”

11.6 Conclusions

11.7 From the evidence presented by witnesses, the Panel concluded that whilst surplus places present the LEA with the difficult task of reconciling the wishes of parents, teachers, governors and unions with the conflicting demands of central government, they also present opportunities for better integration and management of key cross cutting themes such as lifelong learning, regeneration and planning services for children and young people. In reaching this conclusion, the Panel noted that Estelle Morris, as Standards Minister, has acknowledged that “it is not always feasible or appropriate to remove surplus places – for example in rural primary schools or challenging urban areas.” (09.03.01)

11.8 The Panel also concluded that by placing the issue of surplus places in this wider context, the Council can support those community services for which it is not directly responsible but which it wishes to retain by making premises available and, as a consequence, make community services more accessible.

11.9 The Panel also concluded that the loss of school buildings and land could have a detrimental impact upon a wide range of activities associated with schools that often act as centres of community activity. It concluded therefore that the Council should protect this role wherever possible.

11.10 The Panel also concluded that the assessment of surplus places should take into account the impact created by housing developments and whether these might result in a redistribution of the population or generate increased demand for school places. In the case of the former either an increase or reduction in pupil numbers could affect some individual areas.

11.11 The Panel concluded that focusing the resources for education is a key element of the urban renaissance and one that will require the commitment of Head Teachers and Governors.
Finally, the Panel concluded that in acknowledgement of the issues raised during this enquiry and the indication that falling school rolls will continue to be a problem in the future, the Council and the LEA should develop a strategy that contains long term solutions and a number of options that will allow them to tailor a response to varying situations and circumstances. The options identified by the Panel are to develop extended schools and to make creative use of surplus accommodation before considering school closure.

In reaching this conclusion the Panel stressed that the development of extended schools should be the first option to be considered by the Council and the LEA and that where this is not viable, the creative use of surplus accommodation should be the next option for dealing with surplus places. The third option, school closure, should always be the last resort.

**Recommendations**

11.15 That in acknowledgement of population trends which indicate that falling school rolls will continue to be an issue in the future, the Council and the LEA develop a strategic plan that contains long-term solutions and a number of options that will allow them to respond appropriately to varying situations and circumstances.

11.16 That, in the light of the Audit Commission’s recommendations, the long term strategy should be informed by, and take account of, the Council’s Housing Strategy, the trends affecting private sector housing provision and all issues that have an impact on the sustainability of communities, for example public transport services, employment opportunities and the environmental quality and safety of residential areas.

11.17 That the strategic plan should respond to the challenge set by government for radically changed and improved services by re-evaluating the role of the school and how, with extended schools as one of the options, services can be provided that cut across voluntary and statutory boundaries, tackle deprivation and raise the aspirations and achievement of children, young people, their families and the wider community.

11.18 That the primary task of the long term strategy should be to identify the areas where extended schools could be developed to advantage, for example where neighbourhood renewal programmes are active, where it would not be possible to develop extended schools and whether the maximum potential can be gained by using existing schools or building new ones.

11.19 That, in conjunction with the Council’s Social Inclusion Policy Unit, Learning Services undertakes preliminary research and holds discussions with the Local Government Association and those LEAs that are actively involved in planning extended schools in order to identify how the benefits of these schools can be achieved in Hull.

11.20 That the development of extended schools be approached as a reflection of government’s thinking on modernising local government and the modern LEA and not simply as an expedient to the continuing issue of surplus school accommodation.
11.21 That where the development of extended schools is not viable, the next option in the long-term strategy should be the creative use of surplus school accommodation and a strategic plan should be developed for dealing with surplus accommodation that may become available in the future as the result of falling school rolls.

11.22 That this plan be developed by a group drawn from Head Teachers, governing bodies, trade unions, local communities and the appropriate Property Services staff. The exact membership would have to be determined once it is clear whether Cabinet is able to implement the Financial Management and Audit Commission's recommendation that all property functions be brought together under one senior manager with the transfer of all property from departments, where legally possible, and relevant budgetary provision and personnel.

11.23 That this group be charged with developing a protocol which defines the range and type of services or agencies which, by renting surplus accommodation, could make a positive contribution to the school's core functions and create stronger links with the local community.

11.24 That, to ensure the success of this approach, the LEA actively encourages schools and governing bodies to consider the issue of surplus places and accommodation as a problem that can only be addressed as part of a strategic and city-wide issue.

11.25 That discussions and consultation on creative use of surplus accommodation be linked with and take account of the findings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's review of community centres and community buildings.

11.26 That the long-term strategy referred to at paragraph 11.15 in this report should acknowledge that school closure, although a less desirable course of action, may be the only available option if other approaches have failed to address the issue of surplus places.

11.27 That the strategy should ensure that this option is only recommended as a last resort where, despite careful consideration of alternative options and where every effort has been made to reduce surplus places, the number of pupils on roll continues to decline, the school is becoming non-viable and unlikely to improve.

11.28 That where this option is considered, officers and Members ensure that greater care is taken to ensure that interested groups receive adequate and timely notice of any proposals, that there is full consultation at an early stage and that continuing support and information is given to parents, children, staff and governors in order to allay anxieties, offer support and counter rumour and speculation about the process.

11.29 That in order to reflect the preferences of parents and the community and to remove parental anxiety over the safety of their children, the alternative school offered should be local and the journey to and from it must be safe, simple and straightforward.
Appendix 1

Councillors and Co-optees involved in the enquiry:

Councillors: Bird
Collinson
Percy
(Mrs) B. Petch
Ross
Waudby

Mr J E Gwinnell
Mrs K Stead
Appendix 2

Witnesses and contributors to the enquiry

Mr T Hogan,
Group Director, Community Services
Kingston upon Hull City Council

Mr J. Didrichsen,
Director of Social Services
Kingston upon Hull City Council

Mr S Gardner,
Deputy Director, Learning Services
Kingston upon Hull City Council

Mr M Fox, Assistant Director
(Finance and Information), Learning Services
Kingston upon Hull City Council

Mr P Fletcher OBE,
Group Director Learning Services
Kingston upon Hull City Council

Mr D Jennings,
Former Cabinet Co-ordinator
Kingston upon Hull City Council

Ms D. Fellowes,
Social Inclusion Policy Manager
Kingston upon Hull City Council

Councillor Katrina Peat,
then Portfolio Holder for Young People,
Community Education and Libraries
Kingston upon Hull City Council

Councillor Gordon Wilson,
then Portfolio Holder for Schools
Development, Learning Services Personnel
Kingston upon Hull City Council

Mr G Groom,
Head Teacher
Sutton Park Primary School

Mrs E Wilson,
Head Teacher
Coleford Primary School

Mrs D. Turner,
Head Teacher
Newland Primary School

Ms Carole Pullin,
Head of Strategic Planning
Coventry City Council

Mr R. Harvey,
Policy Organisation and Regeneration Manager
Newcastle City Council

Mr M Whale
National Union of Teachers (NUT)
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<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization/Role</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr G Dillon, Divisional Secretary</td>
<td>Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr G. Hailwood, Honorary General Secretary</td>
<td>National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms C. Brandon Jones</td>
<td>Representative of Newland Avenue Primary School Parents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr H Forrest</td>
<td>Representative of Newland Avenue Primary School Parents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr M Hoban, LEA Inspection Division</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr P Lundy</td>
<td>District Audit</td>
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<td>Mr P Wright</td>
<td>District Audit</td>
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Appendix 3

MEETING OF THE CABINET
4th FEBRUARY, 2003
Minute 258 (173)

PRESENT:- Councillor Butterworth in the Chair
Councillors Considine, Gough, Harrison, Jarvis, Minns, Robinson, Toker and Woods.

APOLOGIES:- Councillor Toon

ENQUIRY INTO SURPLUS PRIMARY SCHOOL PLACES – DRAFT FINAL REPORT –
REFERRAL FROM THE LEARNING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION – The
Chief Executive submitted a report by the Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel on the
outcome of the above Enquiry which had been referred to the Cabinet by the Learning
Overview and Scrutiny Commission for consideration. The purpose of the Enquiry had
been to recommending a policy that would address the issue of surplus primary school
places in the City in a fair, open and accountable manner.

At the invitation of the Chair, the Chair of the Commission spoke concerning the
recommendations of the report and the need for the Council to be proactive in planning
future uses for vacated school premises including the possibility of providing extended
schools.

The Group Director for Learning Services spoke concerning the Government guidance
issued in respect of extended schools which would be the subject of a future report to the
Cabinet. He also commented on the progress being made by the Authority in reducing
the level of surplus places and the opportunities this would bring for the Urban
Renaissance of the city.

Members commented on the important role of schools in the community, the need to
consult the Schools’ Council on the development of a strategic plan for dealing with
surplus accommodation in schools, and the action being taken on a number of the
recommendations in the report.

Agreed – In view of the need to deal with the implications of reducing surplus places in
school, the following be approved:

(a) That the report be received and the recommendations be endorsed;

(b) That the Group Director for Learning Services submit to the Cabinet a report setting
out proposals on the opportunities for developing extended schools in the city, and

(c) That the Schools’ Council be included in the consultation process on any initiative to
develop a strategic plan for dealing with surplus accommodation in schools.