

TRANSFORMING LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Cheshire's population statistics show a steady decline in the birth rate and an ageing population emerging over coming years. This has already manifested itself in Cheshire schools where pupil numbers have been falling which is resulting in increasing surplus capacity. The County Council needs to address this issue and has decided this should be done within the wider context of several different emerging agendas. Among these is the Children Act 2004 - at the heart of which is a move to more integrated and effective services for families and children, including the development of Children's Centres where they will be most beneficial.

It is for this reason that the County Council is launching its "Transforming Learning Communities" initiative to shape its organisation of schools within the wider community for the future. Crucial to this will be the engagement of local communities in determining the requirements for education in their area for the 21st century. The TLC title has been chosen to signal from a very early stage that, whilst there is a requirement to manage effectively the resources committed to education within the county, the journey from the current position of surplus capacity to that of significantly reducing this surplus will not be one governed solely by traditional school organisational considerations.

The County Council must, by law, go through proper procedures for any organisational change to the number and type of schools within the county, but it is hoped that clear signals will be sent that vulnerable communities in particular will be given the highest priority in terms of addressing their needs for the future.

Clearly, it will not be possible to review the whole of the county in one exercise. The issues are too large and complex and the resourcing requirements too great for this to happen. It is therefore proposed to phase the review over a period of two to three years, with full implementation of the changes taking up to five years to complete. County Council officers will have the responsibility of keeping key stakeholders and the wider community informed as the process moves on.

The Cheshire Partnership will be asked to consider:

- 1) What features of a "new system" they would like Cheshire County Council to consider?**
- 2) Are there ways that partners currently engage children and young people in their decision-making which could feed into this debate?**
- 3) How might we endeavour to strengthen the relationship between local schools and the local community?**