

Case 5

Newshire School Closure

Topic: Public Sector, Decision Making.

Background

The local residents in Newshire have started a campaign to try and stop the closure of local schools. Councillors claim that their hands are tied and next year there will have to be cuts in the education and social services budgets.

School closure

All of the schools included in this case study are rural schools. Newbridge Primary and Oldbridge Primary were originally 1 form entry schools admitting 33-35 pupils a year with a school roll of approximately 260 pupils. The decision to expand to 1.5 forms of entry was to meet increasing demand for places. As 1.5 form entry schools the maximum class size was reduced to 30 with 45 pupils in each year group. With 1.5 forms of entry the school roll for each school increased to approximately 350 pupils. Blackbridge Primary has always been a 2 form entry school.

Newbridge Primary and Oldbridge Primary report that with fewer applications for places at the schools the headteachers estimate that they will need fewer classes and teachers next year. Blackbridge Primary does not have any concerns over the number of applications next year.

A report has been prepared to discuss the possible closure of one of the schools and the following options are to be considered.

- (i) Newbridge Primary will be closed.
(Oldbridge Primary will become 2 form entry and Blackbridge Primary will not change.)
- (ii) Oldbridge Primary will be closed
(Newbridge Primary will become 2 form entry and Blackbridge Primary will not change)
- (iii) Blackbridge Primary will be closed.
(Newbridge Primary and Oldbridge Primary will become 2 form entry)

Pupils

Forecast school numbers are as follows:

	Current Capacity	Currently on roll (2002-3)	Estimated (2003-4)
Newbridge Primary	350	280	230
Oldbridge Primary	350	255	230

Blackbridge Primary	500	470	480
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Existing staffing

	Head	Deputy head	Assistant teachers	Part-time staff
Newbridge Primary	1	1	11	5
Oldbridge Primary	1	1	11	6
Blackbridge Primary	1	2	16	6

One head is on long term sick leave and she has indicated that her health will not improve and therefore is expected to seek early retirement. Two of the deputy headteachers have applied for posts outside the borough. The headteachers estimate that with a relatively high number of teachers applying for posts elsewhere or seeking early retirements there will be a need to recruit more staff after any of the options are implemented.

Example of possible organisation for schools.

The council has collected examples of typical staffing levels for schools of different sizes.

	Head	Deputy head	Assistant teachers	Numbers of pupils
1 form entry	1	1	7	250
1.5 form entry	1	2	9	350
2 form entry	1	2	15	500

No information is available on the effect of the possible savings from reducing the numbers of full-time staff under the above options. The schools will have to consider the age of the staff and the length of service before any estimates can be prepared. The initial appraisal of the alternatives will not include full-time staff costs.

Expenditure required on schools

The necessary capital would be borrowed with total charges of £100 p.a. per £1,000 borrowed

Cost of providing additional classroom accommodation.

(for 150 pupils - from 350 pupil capacity to 500 pupil capacity)

Newbridge Primary	£200,000
Oldbridge Primary	£250,000

Other expenditure

Newbridge Primary	Major refurbishment	£400,000
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Oldbridge Primary	New heating system	£150,000
Blackbridge Primary	Roof and minor repairs	£80,000

At Newbridge Primary playground space is at a premium. The car park can be utilised and, or a system of split play times might have to be introduced. Extra toilets have not been included in the above costs and may have to be considered.

Educational factors / staff views

The Education Committee has noted that schools with 1.5 form entry are more likely to face opposition from parents who do not understand how the system operates. Most school heads at 1.5 form entry schools want to move to 2 forms of entry to avoid the problems of having a mixed year group class.

Newbridge Primary has recently received a very good OFSTED report. Oldbridge and Blackbridge will be inspected in the near future.

Staff at the schools have indicated that they are not very enthusiastic about increasing the size of schools. Particular concerns are that the size of the halls at Newbridge Primary and Oldbridge Primary are too small. Planning for the mixed age group was obviously very difficult at the beginning but staff feel that they can cope with the system better now.

Cost of relocation for pupils and staff

Any relocated pupils will be able to claim for travel costs. It has been estimated that the average cost will be £300 p.a. per pupil. The travel costs will be available to all pupils at the schools in the future.

Teachers will also be allowed to claim for additional travel costs if their school is closed. The costs have been estimated as follows:

	Travel costs for teachers
Close Newbridge Primary	£15,000
Close Oldbridge Primary	£18,000
Close Blackbridge Primary	£32,000

Capital receipts from the sale of closed schools

To date no estimates have been prepared.

School budgets

(based on current capacity)

The following excludes full-time teaching costs:

	Newbridge Primary	Oldbridge Primary	Blackbridge Primary
Expenditure			
Peripatetic teachers	9,000	9,900	14,000
Supply teachers	8,000	9,000	18,000
Administrative and manual staff	80,000	75,000	111,000
Other	6,000	7,000	9,000
Premises Expenses			
Non-domestic rate	3,000	3,000	4,000
Contents insurance	3,000	3,000	4,000
Supplies and services			
Advertising	2,000	2,000	2,000
Travel	1,500	1,000	1,900
Maintenance contracts	4,000	4,000	5,000
Building insurance	2,800	2,900	3,800
Direct costs			
Educational supplies	18,000	17,900	20,000
Gas / electric	7,000	7,100	9,100
Cleaning supplies	1,100	1,200	1,900
Repairs	4,500	3,300	6,500

Question 1

Compare the cost of keeping all of the schools open and the relevant costs and savings of closing each school and discuss the problems of making a clear recommendation on financial grounds. You should include all workings and assumptions in your answer and identify any other financial information you require.

Question 2

Discuss the importance of non-financial information to decision making in the public sector generally and to the decision to close schools.