SWANSCOMBE
1. Summary

1.1 The Council has received a consultation document from Kent County Council concerning a proposal to merge Swanscombe Infant School with Sweyne Junior School. The views of the Council are requested.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

2.1 That Cabinet note the position with regard to the proposal to merge Swanscombe Infant School with Sweyne Junior School.

3. Background and Discussion

3.1. The Council has received a consultation document, from Kent County Council, concerning the proposed merger of Swanscombe Infant and Sweyne Junior Schools from September 2007.

3.2. The County Council states that the Kent Primary Strategy has been developed by a group of head teachers and county officers to address the priorities for primary education, in Kent, for the twenty first century. The recommendations in the strategy include a stated preference for “all through” primary schools as opposed to separate infant and junior schools. The strategy is also designed to address the issue of surplus primary school places across the County, caused by a falling birth rate.

3.3. The proposal for Swanscombe Infant and Sweyne Junior Schools is part of a package of measures designed to bring surplus capacity in Dartford within government guidelines and County policy, which is to reduce surplus primary capacity to 5%.

3.4. The County Council states that there are 33 primary schools in Dartford. These schools have a combined capacity of 9,807 places. In January 2006 there were 8,622 pupils attending primary schools in Dartford, this amounts to a surplus of 12%.

3.5. The Swanscombe Infant School and the Sweyne Junior School operate from a shared site, although they are in separate buildings, with separate staff and governing bodies. Both schools have had positive Ofsted Reports; however Sweyne Junior School currently has 21.7% unfilled capacity for 2006, whilst Swanscombe Infant School has 40% unfilled capacity for 2006.

3.6. Whilst recognising that the schools offered an effective education to their pupils, and were highly regarded and popular, the County Council believes that there is an opportunity to consider the possible educational benefits of amalgamation.
3.7. The County Council is proposing that the two schools should amalgamate to become a Community Primary School. The existing schools would close at the end of August 2007 with the new school opening in September 2007. In the short to medium term both existing school buildings would continue to be used as neither has the capacity to accommodate the combined school. A new school would be constructed as soon as possible.

3.8. The advantages of amalgamation are seen by the County Council as:

- It is easier for children to move smoothly and confidently from infant to junior classes when they know their teachers, where they are and what is expected of them
- Teachers are more likely to know the pupils and to be aware of their individual needs
- Teachers can more readily plan and monitor learning for the whole primary age range (4 to 11)
- In a larger school staff can share expertise and areas of expertise more widely and can make more flexible use of teaching resources
- Closer contact with parents/carers over a longer period of time is helpful to children’s welfare and progress

3.9. The disadvantages of amalgamation are seen as:

- Separate infant and junior schools can provide a special focus and expertise at each key stage
- Both schools can demonstrate best practice

3.10. A public meeting was held at Sweyne Junior School on the 25 May 2006, and written representations have been invited. The matter will be discussed by the School Organisation Advisory Board on the 24 July 2006, and if the proposal is agreed a Public Notice will be issued which will be in force for a period of six weeks. Statutory Objections may be made to the proposals, during this period, which will be considered by the Kent School Organisation Committee. If no objections are received Kent County Council can implement the proposal.

4. Relationship to the Corporate Plan

Education is a key element of the corporate theme on regeneration
5. Financial, legal, staffing and other administrative implications and risk assessments

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<td>Risk Assessment</td>
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6. Details of Exempt Information Category

   Not applicable

7. Appendices

   None

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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