SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ON SUSTAINABILITY

Introduction

1. A range of services was asked to evaluate their provision, both current and future, taking account of external factors such as central government requirements, potential funding and planning frameworks already in place or being established with partners. This research, which looks at aspects of the review that relate to sustainability of provision, focussed on:

   ▪ Human Resources

   ▪ Admissions

   ▪ Early years and childcare developments

   ▪ Extended schools

   ▪ Every Child Matters – Integrated Services

   ▪ Pastoral care, including

      o Attendance;

      o Bullying;

      o Racist Incidents; and

      o Ofsted evidence

   ▪ Vulnerable children, including

      o Special Educational Needs;

      o Black and Ethnic Minorities;

      o Travellers; and

      o Looked After Children

   ▪ Special Education Provision

   ▪ School size

   ▪ Environmental Impact

2. Services have identified that key cost drivers will be transport, staffing and the availability of appropriate sites/accommodation, particularly if a need for "new build" is identified. These resource implications are examined elsewhere in this Report.

3. Where possible, services have addressed the implications of their research in the context of the five options identified in the Review. However, there are some aspects of the research that are relevant to all options and are therefore referred to later in this section.

Consideration Of Options

Option One – Status Quo

4. A number of services are in the process of delivering new developments and initiatives in the context of the existing mixed three-tier / two-tier system and, depending on the outcome of the Review, will continue to do so. In these cases, initiatives may be already costed, subject to external funding, or working to specific timescales, for example in the case of early years and childcare

developments such as Children's Centres (34 to be in place by March 2008), extended schools (access to services for all schools to be in place by 2010) and expansion of the 14-19 curriculum development. Maintaining the status quo, therefore, would enable these current plans to continue. Opting for no change would be less disruptive as the systems in place may already be known and understood by parents, children and schools. Further information about the impact of school size on pupil performance is provided later in this section, but it is worth noting that currently 20% of children aged 7 in Suffolk are educated in a school with fewer than 120 pupils. At age 11, that figure reduces to 6% of all Suffolk pupils. Currently there is a programme of support for leadership development in small schools in Suffolk as it has been acknowledged that recruiting into headship and middle management roles in small schools can be difficult.

5. Nevertheless, services have identified some key issues that should be considered in relation to the option of "No Change".

<u>Admissions</u>

1. The current procedures for administering admissions of pupils to schools in Suffolk is an effective one. At the beginning of the 2005/06 school year, the Authority was able to meet 98.64% of all first, second and third preferences made by parents for school places. The new draft Code of Practice for admissions indicates that the existing policy will have to change in a number of important ways, for example by making it illegal to continue with the "catchment area guarantee". It is thought that these changes would bring about an increase in administration costs on admissions, irrespective of the option adopted by the Authority as a result of this Review.

2. The "No Change" option will mean that the current, differential, pattern of admissions, where some areas of the County are dealing with three points of transfer, whilst others deal with only two, would continue. Demographic growth in some areas will put some school provision under pressure leading to a shortage of school places in some areas and an increased likelihood of school admission appeals.

<u>Early Years, Childcare, Extended Schools and Integrated Services</u>

3. There are potential difficulties in delivering sustainable childcare and extended schools provision from some sites due to limited demand, inappropriate premises and/or inadequate staffing. This is particularly true for smaller schools in relation to childcare and extended schools and may apply also to the 14-19 curriculum. The Suffolk Advisory Service considers that small schools are well placed to provide the full Every Child Matters agenda but that this is more likely to be successful where they network with other schools and providers. There is likely to be an increased demand for transport as a result of implementing plans within these services.

<u>Key Stage 3 Curriculum</u>

4. Pupil achievement may not improve in line with pupils' potential and the lack of accountability for Key Stage 3 results will continue within the three-tier system. Some middle schools have argued for a move to a two-year Key Stage 3 curriculum to overcome this problem (see section on Consultations). However, it needs to be remembered that Key Stage 3 has been designed to cover a three

year period and although there has a been national pilot of a two year Key Stage 3 curriculum, the full results of this project have not been reported as yet. Within this national pilot, it should also be noted that some schools have only entered pupils for testing a year early in one or two of the core subjects only, rather than in all three. In addition, some schools have only entered some of the more able pupils in Year 8 for the KS3 tests a year early. Implementation of two-year course at KS3 for all pupils across all middle schools would necessarily have to be approached with caution at this stage.

<u>School Transfers</u>

5. Research has demonstrated that the effect of three transfers (as opposed to two) may have a negative impact on the social development and educational achievement on individual children, particularly SEN and/or other vulnerable groups. Local research with Suffolk pupils (see section on Consultation) has identified a statistically significant relationship between how pupils feel about starting a school and the number of times they have changed school. Those who have changed schools only once are far more positive about the process of transfer than those who have transferred schools three or more times. Pupils who were on the point of transferring to their next school were also more negative than others, expressing fears about getting lost in unfamiliar surroundings at their next school, finding the work too difficult and not being able to make friends easily. Views about transferring to another school were also significantly related to the type of school that pupils attended. Pupils attending schools for those aged 3 or 5 to age 11 were the most positive.

<u>Human Resources</u>

6. In the longer term, it is thought that there could be a shortage of teachers trained to meet the needs of middle schools as training places for cross-phase KS2/KS3 teachers reduce nationally. However, a survey with Suffolk schools at the beginning of the autumn term 2006 did not identify a significant problem of recruitment for the KS2/KS3 phase. In total, 229 schools responded to the survey and of these only 27% reported difficulties with recruitment during 2005/06. The main reasons cited for recruitment difficulties were a lack of response to advertising, poor calibre candidates and a lack of experience of candidates. Difficulties were experienced in recruiting teachers for mathematics, Foundation Stage, Key Stage 2, SEN co-ordinators and some middle and senior management posts.

7. Just under a third of Headteachers are due to retire by 2011 (31% primary, 29% middle, 27% secondary). This suggests a potential future recruitment problem for senior managers. A shortage of suitable candidates for headteacher posts suggests that alternative solutions such as collaboration and federation, possibly on a larger scale than at present, would need to be considered.

8. To summarise, while a "no change" option might have advantages in terms of continuity of service delivery, it nevertheless carries with it a number of significant risks.

Option Two – All Two-tier

9. The research indicates that moving to a two-tier system would mitigate some of the problems associated with the current pattern of provision, but it also raises a number of issues.

Admissions

10. Reducing the number of points of transfer to two would provide greater continuity for pupils. Administration costs would be reduced for admissions (although because of the proposed future changes to the Code of Practice on admissions, overheads for this service may still increase).

Early Years, Childcare, Extended Schools and Integrated Services

11. The public consultations highlighted an expressed desire to retain small or village schools. This option assumes that primary schools would be retained, although some would grow in size. The fact that there would be fewer small primary schools suggests that Childcare for primary age children would be more likely to be sustainable because of increased demand and more potential to recruit and retain appropriate staff. There would be greater potential for extended school enhancements. A two-tier system also fits more readily with central government targets both for childcare and extended schools, contained within the Childcare Act and 10-Year Strategy on Extended Schools.

12. There would be fewer overheads for the Integrated Services Team because there would be fewer schools, leading to a reduction in the liaison required with schools and the training required for school leads in the Common Assessment Framework (CAF).

13. At the same time, a move to all two-tier schools may require changes to current planning and patterns of funding at certain locations, if local needs and demands for services change as a result. Transport is still identified as a general problem for the delivery of extended schools and the 14-19 curriculum, although it may be reduced if fewer school sites means less movement of pupils between schools.

Human Resources

14. The recruitment issues identified in the "No Change" option would be minimised in that there would be a bigger pool of appropriately trained NQTs from which to recruit. Although redeployment of Headteachers would have to be addressed, given the number due to retire in the next five years, this retirement issue may in part be offset by the need to redeploy senior staff from schools in the middle sector.

15. There would still be the same funding available in the school system for teachers and teaching assistants. However, there is a potential for overstaffing among some support posts, for example Bursars and ICT technicians, because of the reduced number of schools.

16. There would be a reduction in the number of headteacher posts. For those headteachers who are not due to retire the options available to them under a change to two-tier would include: seeking alternative headships, stepping down and redeployment with salary protection. The costs of significant numbers of redundancies, early payment of pension benefits and/or salary protection could not be met from the existing early retirement and redundancy budget and additional resources would have to be identified within the savings from this option.

17. Resources, especially in terms of additional HR professionals, would be required to manage the redeployment process fairly, effectively and efficiently. A

professional development programme would be needed to equip those teaching staff currently in middle schools to work in alternative schools and appropriate development opportunities for Headteachers and other senior staff.

18. In those areas where a change took place, there would be some disruption to pupils whilst staff levels would experience uncertainty about their future careers. Recruitment and retention in middle schools would be adversely affected in the short/medium term by a decision to move to a two-tier system. However, approaching any reorganisation on a phased basis could offset the uncertainties.

Option Three – All Three-tier

19. This option assumes that the three-tier option already in existence would be rolled out across the County. The implications of this option are identified below. Some of the issues raised reflect what has already been said above in connection with the "No Change" Option, but it is considered that some problems may be exacerbated by this option.

Admissions

20. This option would provide a uniformity of approach for admissions although it would also involve significantly increased workloads in those areas that currently only deal with two points of transfer. This would be at a time when the new draft Code of Practice is also expected to increase workloads in the Authority.

Early Years, Childcare, Extended Schools and Integrated Services

21. This option increases the number of school sites but also results in smaller primary schools. There would be potential improvements to the childcare offer and range of extended school outlets because of the increased number of sites. However, it may also lead to smaller providers and the associated recruitment issues. Some businesses may be unsustainable. More parents would also have to collect from 3 different sites. Experience suggests that older children are often unwilling to attend childcare on first school sites.

22. There would be more headteachers and governing bodies for Extended School Development Officers to deal with and there is a concern that this would reduce service quality and delivery.

Human Resources

23. A larger number of headteachers would be required at a time when headteacher recruitment is becoming more difficult. The pool of teachers qualified to teach within the middle school sector would also need to increase at a time when the number of cross-phase teacher training places is reducing nationally, possibly impacting on the ability of new middle schools to recruit suitably trained staff.

Option Four – New Two-Tier

24. This model assumes that children would be admitted to a first school at either 3 or 5, continue until the end of Key Stage 3 and then transfer to their next school at age 14, remaining in secondary school until age 19.

Admissions

25. In operation, this option has similar implications for the admissions service as Option 2, namely that a significant number of transfers would be removed from the system, thus reducing the administration for the teams. It also creates a uniformity of approach.

Early Years, Childcare, Extended Schools and Integrated Services

26. The option implies larger facilities at fewer sites and therefore has the potential for providing a wider range of opportunities for extended schools. It could improve the childcare offer on larger sites and would better meet the needs of parents with children of differing ages up to 14, therefore improving sustainability as well as recruitment and retention of qualified and trained staff. At the same time, there could be a loss of some childcare facilities if schools were closed or relocated.

27. For the integrated Services and school workforce recruitment and retention are similar to those already identified within the two-tier system described above, namely that there would be fewer overheads because there would be fewer schools.

28. Transport would continue to be an issue, as identified in other options above.

School Transfers

29. The number of school transfers would be reduced. The introduction of 14-19 schools would fit with the 14-19 curriculum and would allow students to plan their learning over this phase without the breakpoint at 16. At the same time, the system may reduce choice and diversity in an area if the new structure led to larger schools.

30. The system would make the "first school" accountable for the Foundation Stage as well as Key Stages 1 to 3 and allow for improved continuity.

Human Resources

31. In the short term, the option could lead to a higher proportion of secondary trained staff working with younger children than may be deemed appropriate. Redeployment might be simplified if staff broadly followed the pupils and continued to work with similar age ranges as before.

32. Problems associated with the potential redeployment of Headteachers and senior staff would be similar to that identified under the more traditional two-tier system.

Option Five – All-Through Schools

33. Depending on the model adopted, all-through schools potentially offer an evolutionary basis for change, based on organic growth, rather than "top-down" imposition of change. The model could provide for a phased approach, thus avoiding political controversy and securing local ownership. The all-through school is seen to have significant advantages but also some important disadvantages.

<u>Admissions</u>

34. There would be a significant reduction in admissions workload in the long term, whilst also impacting on the choice and diversity for parents. A single point of entry or admission at reception could be perceived as potentially reducing parental preference, particularly in oversubscribed schools.

<u>Early Years, Childcare, Extended Schools and Integrated Services</u>

35. A reduction over time in the number of schools in Suffolk would result in a loss of facility, with child care facilities and extended school services removed to more remote locations for many families and increased travelling time. At the same time, there would be the greatest potential for sustainable childcare and extended school activities. The work of the Integrated Services Teams would also be reduced.

<u>School Transfers</u>

36. This option ensures accountability for each child's education across all key stages, reduces points of transition and, therefore, promotes continuity and progression. It potentially provides a unique single identity for communities. Conversely, the particular ethos and character of aided schools might be lost in amalgamation to a single school and individual schools, especially in villages, could be perceived as losing their particular local character and sense of place.

37. A key factor is that the County Council would lose control of its strategic planning function, namely in the planning of school places and school organisation, particularly in sensitive areas such as the potential closure of village schools (with authority ceded to the governing body of the all-through school).

<u>Human Resources</u>

38. The option provides significant benefits for professional development across all phases. The gradual assimilation of teaching and support staff into a single establishment could also have significant benefits, not least in recruitment and retention. However, headteachers, senior staff and other staff, will need considerable support to facilitate the change of role that would be needed to create successful all-through schools.

Other Considerations

39. In addition to the consideration above as they impact on the five options in this review, there are a number of other matters that should be considered under the heading of sustainability, but that do not impact on any one specific option. These are:

- School Size
- Inclusion
- Vulnerable Children
- Special Education Needs and
- Strategic Environmental Assessment.

Each of these is considered in turn below

School Size

<u>Primary Schools</u>

40. At Key Stage 1 20% of pupils are taught in small schools, that is to say schools with a roll of less than 120. At key stage 2 only 6% of pupils are taught in small schools. Research in Suffolk suggests that at KS1 small schools generally outperform large schools, defined as above. However, in the analysis socio-economic factors are not controlled and so direct comparison is not appropriate. Similarly at KS2, while the smaller schools generally outperform larger schools, socio-economic contexts are not similar, so a comparison is difficult. Nevertheless there is evidence to suggest that small schools do outperform larger ones. Since September 2005, a total of 56 primary schools have been inspected and of these around 50% had fewer that 120 pupils on roll. Smaller schools outperformed larger schools in all aspects of the five criterion used by Ofsted to judge schools. No small schools were deemed inadequate, with the exception of attendance at one school.

41. There are few studies elsewhere on the relationship between primary school size and performance and there is no clear evidence that primary school size is related to outcomes for pupils or that there is a size of school for optimum pupil performance.

<u>Secondary Schools</u>

42. The question of optimum secondary school size has received considerable attention in recent years. However, the research has not been able to reach a clear conclusion about the relationship between school size and performance. To suggest that student achievement is higher in smaller schools and that student behaviour is worse in larger schools have been shown to be inconsistent with evidence. The relationship appears to be more complex than this simple linkage.

<u>Sixth Forms</u>

43. National studies on sixth form size suggest that there is an optimum size for a sixth form and that on balance larger sixth forms provide greater benefits. Whilst there is no definitive agreement on an actual number of students, most studies nationally indicate that sixth forms with fewer than 200 students can only become financially viable by reducing the range of courses offered. The quality of student outcomes also appears to be linked to the size of the institution in more than one analysis. In Suffolk, it is worth noting that almost all of the higher performing sixth forms have a larger student number, typically over 200.

44. When reaching a conclusion about sixth form size it is also important to note the additional dimension of access. In Suffolk, a number of smaller sixth forms serve geographically isolated areas. Therefore, it will be important to take into account the rurality factor, local context, travel plans and availability of alternative provision, as well as the optimum size of sixth form, in relation to choice, attainment and value for money.

Inclusion

<u>Introduction</u>

45. As part of the Schools Organisational Review process consideration has been given to several key aspects of inclusion. These are:

- *Exclusions*
- *Attendance*
- *Racist Incident Reporting*
- *Bullying*

46. In this section we ask two questions:

- Is there a discernable difference in terms of outcomes/performance for the above factors between the two and three tier systems?
- Are there implications for the above factors in any or all of the proposed five models being considered in the review?

<u>Exclusions</u>

47. Considerable work has been undertaken over the past 2 years to reduce the historically high level of permanent exclusion in Suffolk. This work has resulted in a significant decrease in permanent exclusions at all phases. This is a testament to the hard work of staff in schools and the services that support them.

48. The level of permanent exclusions is lower in the three-tier system. This is in part due to the continuing significant reduction in permanent exclusion from middle schools. During 2005-06 there was a 59% decrease in permanent exclusions from this phase.

Figure 1
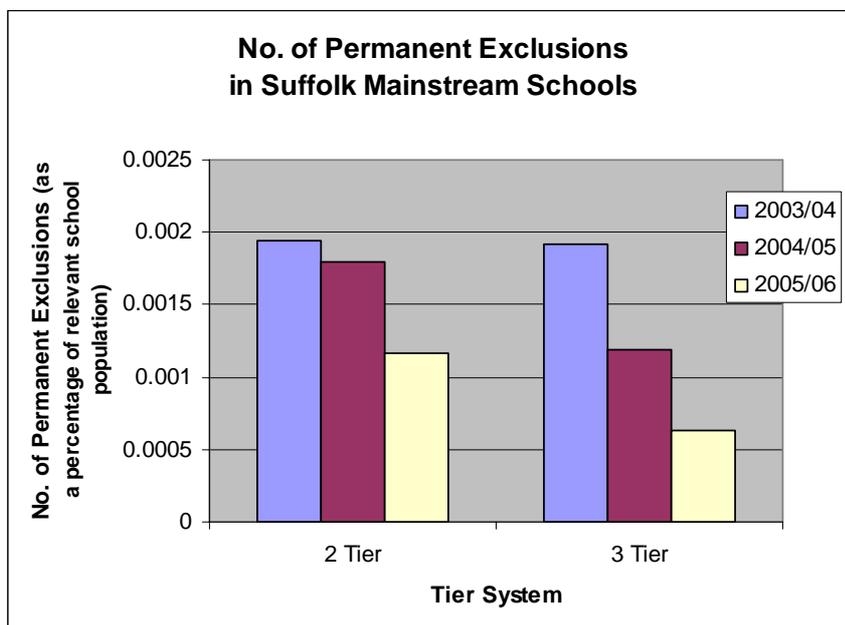
49. The picture for fixed term exclusions is more complex. In 2005-06 there was a 1.4% increase in fixed term exclusions across the county. This is almost certainly the result of headteachers using fixed term exclusions as a sanction to avoid permanently excluding pupils. As the table below illustrates there are noticeable differences in both the levels of fixed term exclusion in the two-tier and three-tier system and in the trend. Given that 93% of fixed term exclusions are at Key Stage 3 and 4, the high level of fixed term exclusions is a secondary school issue.

Figure 2

No. of Fixed Term Exclusions
in Suffolk Mainstream Schools
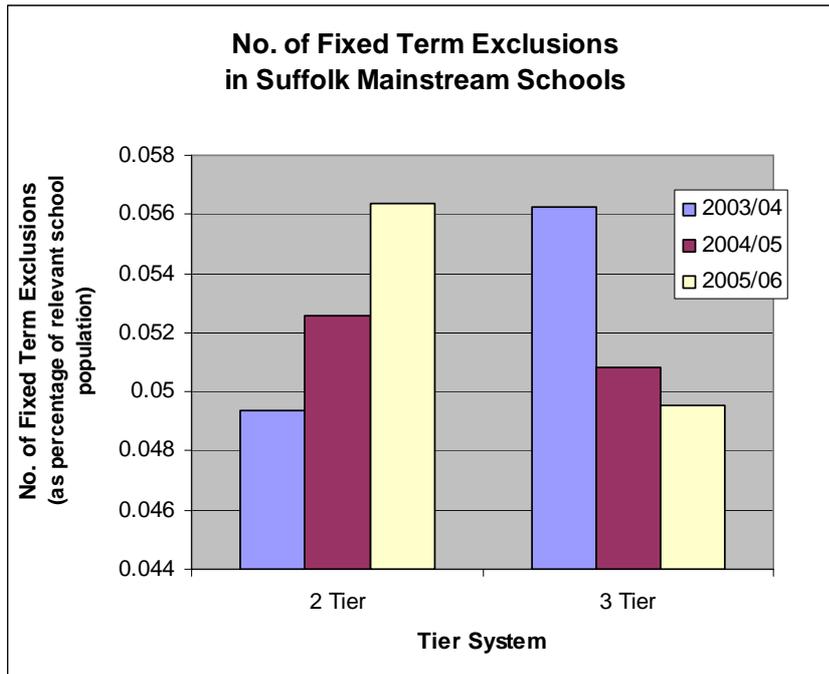
Attendance

50. Attendance in Suffolk schools has traditionally compared favourably with the England average and continues to do so. However, absence data for 2005-06 for all Suffolk schools shows a fall in attendance from the previous school year, putting us behind our DfES trajectory. This fall in attendance is more marked in primary schools. It is believed that much of the increase in absence is attributable to sickness in the spring term of last academic year and this is reflected in similar dips in the performance of our Eastern region neighbours.

51. The tables below show that there is a difference in attendance and absence rates between the two-tier and three-tier systems.

52. Attendance is generally better in the two-tier system than in the three-tier system and has been over the past three years.

Figure 3

Attendance Figures
in Suffolk Mainstream Schools
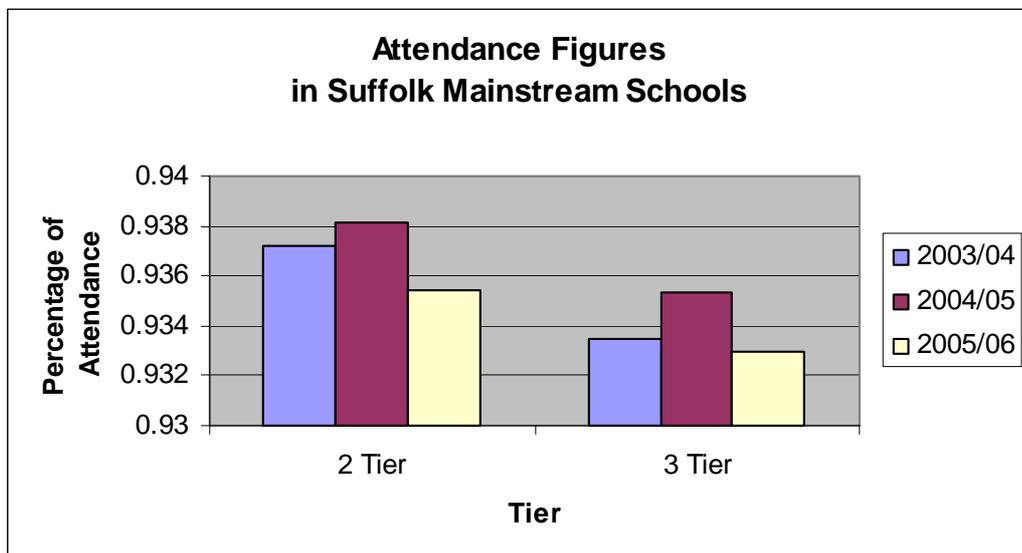
53. There are also differences in the levels of authorised and unauthorised absence as shown in the two tables below. There are greater levels of authorised absence in the three-tier sector as well as slightly higher levels of unauthorised absence.
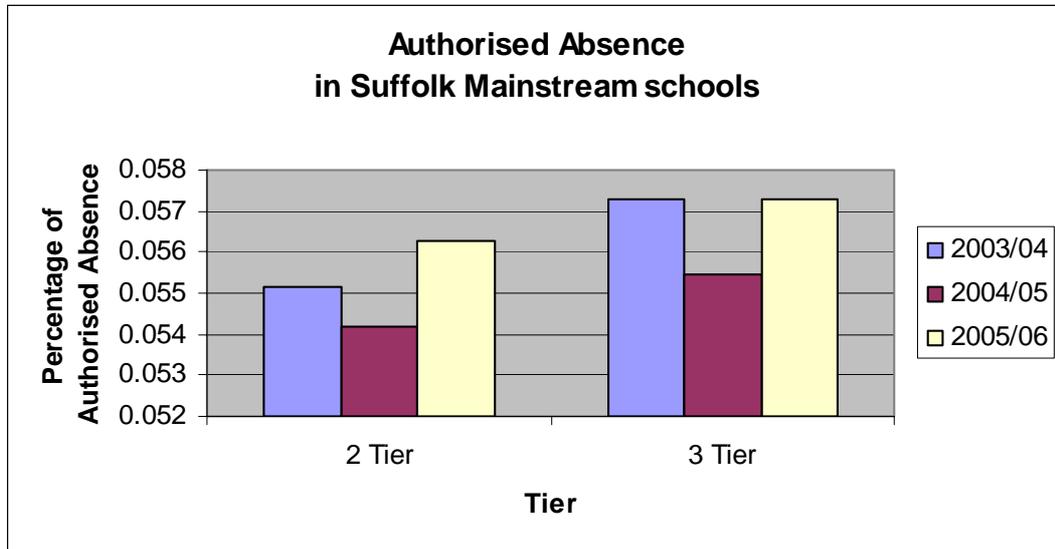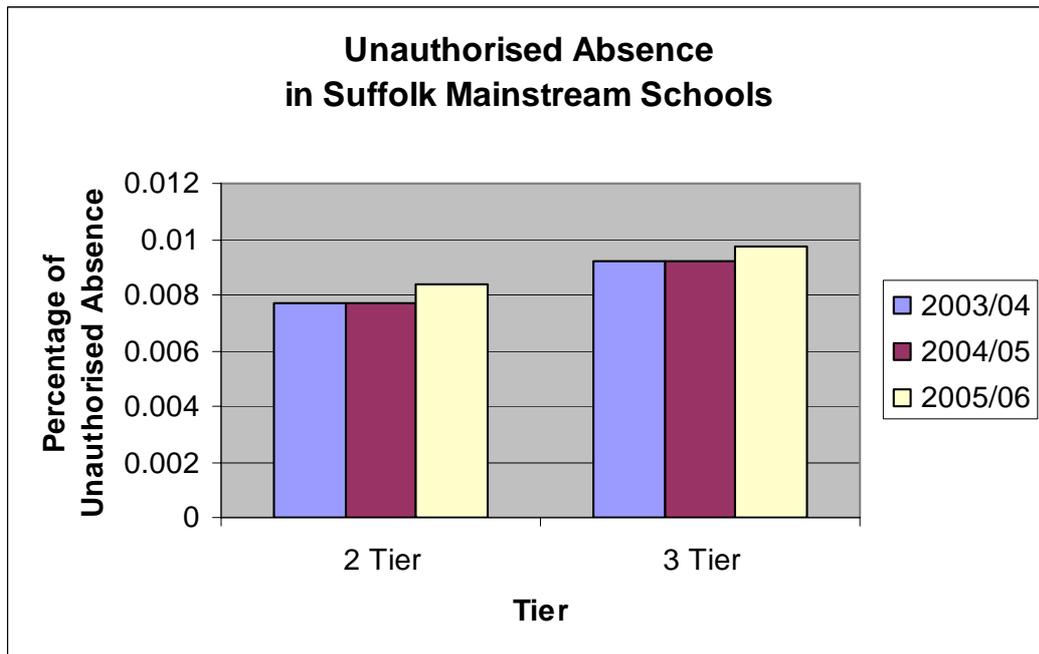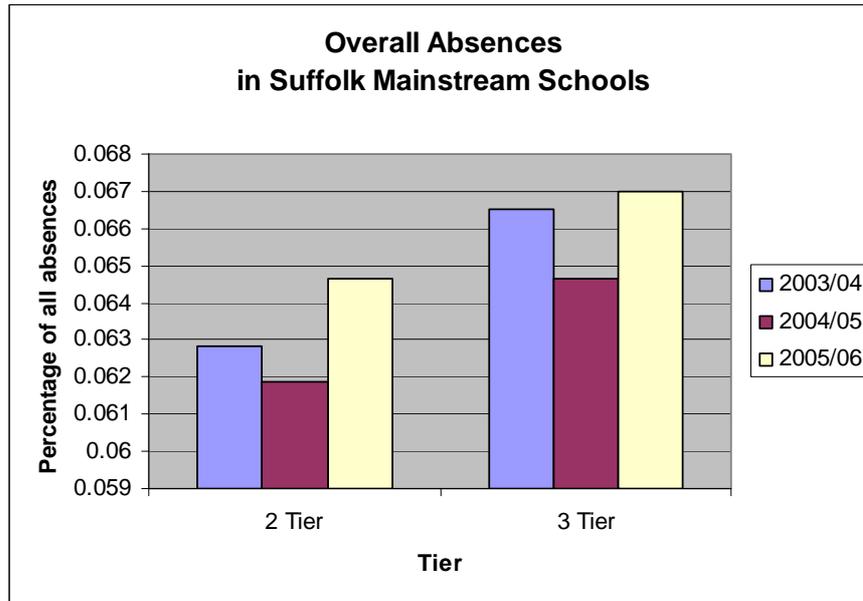
Figure 4

Authorised Absence in Suffolk Mainstream schools

Figure 5

Unauthorised Absence in Suffolk Mainstream Schools

54. When the overall absence from school is considered there is a greater level of absence in the three-tier sector than in the two-tier sector.

Figure 6

**Overall Absences
in Suffolk Mainstream Schools**

Racist Incident Reporting

55. All schools are required to report racist incidents and the County Council keeps and analyses this data. However there is variation in the levels of reporting.

56. The definition of a racist incident is based on perception i.e. 'A racist incident is any incident that is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person'. It is open, therefore, to some individual interpretation.

57. Caution needs to be taken in interpreting this data. The percentage of Black Minority Ethnic (BME) children and young people in the two-tier sector (10.33% of the population) is greater than in the three-tier sector (5.13% of the population). On this basis there is a proportionally higher level of incident reporting in the three-tier sector than in the two-tier sector.

Figure 7

No. of Racist Incidents Reported
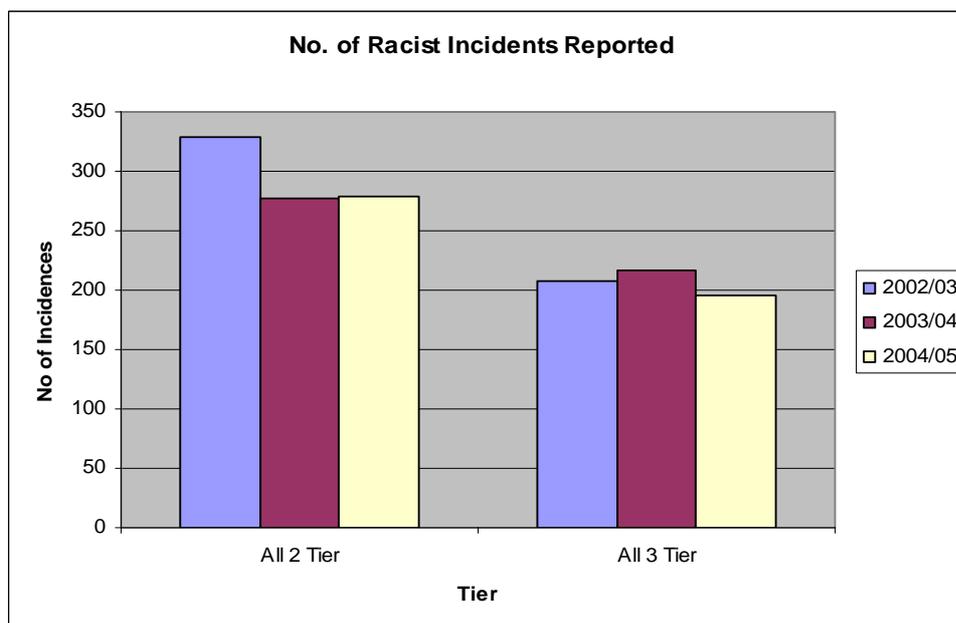
<u>Bullying</u>

58. No data is kept centrally on bullying and like Racist Incident Reporting there can be varying perceptions about bullying.

59. A trawl of Ofsted information suggests strongly that bullying is an issue taken seriously by schools in all phases and in both the two and three tier systems.

60. There is however not enough concrete evidence to identify differences in the two systems.

<u>Implications for the Proposed Models</u>

61. With one caveat, factors such as exclusions, attendance and racist incident reporting do not on their own point to any preferred models.

62. The caveat is around *All Through* schools and exclusions. In that model there are implications for a pupil that is excluded early in their school career. There would need to be a clear policy on what happened to such children and where they continued their education.

63. Generally however the inclusion factors described so far say much more about features that need to be present in any model is adopted by the county to ensure that vulnerable children and young people are included.

64. The following features therefore need to be embedded in whichever model is adopted as a result of the review process.

Attendance

- Strong ethos of good attendance
- Clear links to be made between good attendance and attainment
- Robust schools systems and policies
- Attendance needs to be school development plan priority
- Clear targeted referral approaches to the Education Attendance Service

Exclusions

- Clear policy and practice on managing behaviour
- Learning and behaviour need to be clearly linked
- A core group of trained staff in all school
- Flexible approaches to curriculum delivery that recognise diversity
- A range of effective rewards and sanctions that are shared with pupils, staff and parents
- Robust links with families and the community
- Robust links with partner agencies and services

Reducing Racist Incidents

- All staff know the procedures for reporting racist incidents so there is a consistent pattern of reporting throughout the school
- A clear lead from senior management to staff, pupils and parents that racism will not be tolerated

- A senior member of staff is responsible for the recording and monitoring of incidents
- Pupils encouraged reporting racist incidents and feeling confident to report incidents to school staff.
- Incidents are reported to the parents of perpetrators and victims
- Tackling racism an element in the school development plan

Anti Bullying

- Ethos of trust and honesty
- Meaningful Anti Bullying Policy
- Strong pastoral support mechanisms
- Clear processes for pupils to report bullying
- Engagement with Primary and Secondary Strategy
- Support for victim and perpetrator

Conclusion

65. There are differences between the two and three tier system in terms of performance in regard of the inclusion factors described in the paper.

66. In general, levels of both permanent and fixed term exclusion are lower in the three-tier system.

67. In terms of attendance this is generally better in the two-tier system with lower levels of absence from school

68. Whilst the BME population is lower in the three-tier system there is proportionally a higher level of reporting of racist incidents. However it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions from this given the subjective nature of the reporting process.

69. Inclusion factors do not point to preferred models for patterns of schools. They do however point to principles that need to be embedded in any future pattern of schooling.

Vulnerable Children

70. Because of small numbers and dissimilar patterns of population distribution it would not be valid to compare performance of the various groups of children who are vulnerable to under attainment across the two- and three- tier systems.

Ethnic Minority Groups in Suffolk

71. The small numbers of pupils in each group make year on year results liable to fluctuation.

72. At KS2 in 2005, Chinese and Indian pupils exceeded estimates in English, while Bangladeshi scores reflect the prior attainment profile of this year's cohort. Raising the attainment of African-Caribbean pupils is a priority and Local Area Agreement targets have been negotiated with DfES. Maths remains a priority for all groups and joint work between the Minority Ethnic and Traveller Achievement Team and the Suffolk Advisory Service in supporting schools is progressing well.

73. GCSE performance in 2005 of Chinese and Indian students exceeded our expectations. The Bangladeshi cohort was not expected to sustain the exceptional results of 2004 but exceeded the estimates made for this group, based on prior attainment. African-Caribbean achievement continues to be a priority and Local Area Agreement targets are being negotiated with DfES.

Traveller Children

74. Results are low compared to other ethnic groups but the number of pupils is also low – less than 20 children in Suffolk were assessed - making analysis unreliable. Compared with results for 14 Traveller Education Services in the Eastern and East Midlands for 2004-2005 we do well at KS2. We are 1st for English, 5th for mathematics and 2nd for science.

Attainment of Children with a Statement of Special Educational Need

75. The Fischer Family Trust 3-year value added summary (2004 to 2006) from KS1 to 2 (age 7 to 11) suggests that pupils with statements of special needs performed significantly higher than expected at Level 4 and above in English, mathematics and science. Pupils on School Action showed lower performance than expected and those on School Action Plus were in line with expectations.

76. In 2005 there was an increase in achievement at KS2 for children with a statement of special education need. Children with a statement for difficulties with behaviour, emotional and social development showed significant increases of 9% in English and 11% in mathematics compared to the previous year. There was a similar picture for pupils with statements for disorders that are part of the Autistic Spectrum, where a 3% increase was seen in both subjects.

77. At age 16 the Fischer Family Trust 3-year value added summary (2003 to 2005) from KS2 to KS 4 (age 11 to 16) shows that students with statements of special needs were in line with expectations for 5 or more A* to C grades. For 5 passes at A* to G outcomes were below expectation but with an improving trend relative to other authorities. Progress for students on School Action and School Action Plus was encouraging and for all measures in line with expectations or higher.

Looked After Children

78. At KS2 there was a significant improvement in performance at Level 4 and above for Looked After Children. This is the best performance for 5 years, however the cohort is very small (39 pupils were identified , of whom 11 did not take the test) and there are always fluctuations year on year.

79. At KS4 in 2005 of the cohort of 50 students, 20% achieved 5 GCSE grades at A* to C – a 10% improvement from 2004. This compares well with the national figure of 11%. In total 66% gained at least one GCSE grade and although this has fallen by 5% from 2004 it compares with the national figure of 60%.

Special Educational Needs

80. In total, 2053 students with statements of special educational needs attend mainstream school, including 287 who have places in specialist units, that is Hearing Impairment Units, Speech and Language Units and Specialist Support Centres. A further 789 students with statements attend a special school and 129 students with statements attend out-of-county special schools. The majority of students in mainstream schools with statements have needs in the areas of

Autism, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, Moderate learning Difficulties, Speech and Language and Specific learning Difficulties.

81. These issues will need to be addressed in whatever structure is proposed but they are not specifically related to the five different options under consideration. The challenges for any pattern of provision will be to ensure that service delivery is "joined up" across the Council and that where there are transition points they are seamless so as to reduce risks and underachievement. Ultimately, the future pattern of provision for Suffolk schools should ensure that children and young people attending special and mainstream schools have access to the highest quality of education, resources and support.

82. The review provides the opportunity for special education provision to be reviewed simultaneously with Stage 2 of the review, should it proceed. There would be significant benefits in planning how future provision for special educational needs should be configured as part of the review rather than attempting to do this separately or on different timescales. The authority's vision for special schools should form the basis of the review.

Strategic Environment Assessment

Introduction

83. It has emerged that, during the course of the work associated with the School Organisation Review, the Authority will be obliged to undertake a Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA). In the following sections the requirements of the SEA are considered together with the implications for the School Organisation Review. In particular, the possible timescales involved are mapped out. In putting this information together, the County Solicitor and Director of Environment and Transport have been consulted, along with Northumberland County Council, where a SEA was first undertaken in 2004/2005.

Background

84. Strategic Environment Assessment was the subject of legislation that came into force on 20 July 2004, implementing a European Directive. That legislation requires that environmental impact should be taken into account by authorities during the preparation of "Plans and Programmes" in the field of land use, transport, waste and water management, energy and a range of other sectors.

85. There are two key criteria that determine that a SEA should be carried out, namely that it relates to a "*Plan or Programme*" in the context of the legislation and "*the Plan or Programme sets the framework for future development consent of projects and the authority is under a statutory duty to determine whether the plan or programme is likely to have significant environmental affects*". Before deciding whether to undertake a SEA and the timing of it, the Authority will need to decide that the Review meets these two criteria.

Requirements of a SEA

86. The SEA is a procedure that requires the preparation of an Environmental Report on the likely significant effects of the "Plan or Programme". The authority must consult on the Report (preferably at the same time as the consultation is taking place on the "Plan or Programme") and take the Report and the results of the consultation into account in its decision making. When the "Plan or Programme"

is adopted the authority must show how the results of the environmental assessment have been taken into account.

87. The Environment and Transport Directorate advises that the SEA for a project such as the School Organisation Review requires staff with relevant skills and expertise. In that Directorate, staff are engaged to undertake this specific role, but currently they do not have the resources to allocate to the task that needs to be undertaken for the Review. Their recommendation therefore is that a consultant is engaged for this purpose.

The Northumberland Comparison

88. As a comparison, it is worth noting the experience of Northumberland County Council in this respect. That Authority decided in June 2004 to adopt, in principle, a (two-tier) system of primary and secondary schools. Subsequently, in November 2004, the Council's Executive received a draft strategic plan for education provision that included indicative models for school organisation on an area-by-area basis. The County Council adopted that Plan in December 2004, resolving at the same time to undertake a SEA based on the models contained in the Plan.

89. Northumberland appointed a consultant in December 2004 and the Environmental Report (109 pages) was published in March 2005. The Council decided to undertake the statutory public consultation on the SEA as part of the roll out of its Plan for Education on an area-by-area basis.

The Process In Detail

90. The timeline for producing a SEA includes a period of formal (Statutory) consultation, of a <u>minimum of 5 weeks</u>, with four statutory bodies, namely: Environment Agency, English Nature, Countryside Agency, and English Heritage. This consultation is around the scope and level of detail of the information to be included in the Environmental Report.

91. The Report is prepared after this period of consultation. A second period of consultation must then follow, lasting a <u>minimum of 6 weeks,</u> when the authority should seek the views of organisations more widely and the general public on the Environmental Report.

92. After responses from the consultation have been received from the wider public, the Directive requires them to be taken into account during the preparation of the "Plan or Programme" and before its adoption [or submission to a legislative procedure].

93. In the case of Suffolk, a SEA would clearly need to be prepared to coincide with the timings of the School Organisation Review.

Implications for the School Organisation Review

94. The County Solicitor advises that a SEA should be undertaken on the School Organisation Review in Suffolk. It is clear from the Northumberland experience that the SEA was only commissioned once a decision had been taken on a preferred framework for school organisation in the County. In Suffolk we have yet to reach that stage. The County Solicitor has confirmed that, as there is not currently a Plan or Programme in place on which to base a SEA, it would not be

necessary to undertake the SEA until and if Stage 2 is reached. This would be in line with the approach adopted by Northumberland.

95. The timescales for carrying out the SEA are long and these will need to be carefully meshed in with the timings for the Review. The Authority will also need to consider the appointment of a suitable person to undertake the work on the SEA, most probably a third party or consultant with relevant expertise. Procurement have confirmed that the current framework agreement between Suffolk and a third party contractor would provide a suitable vehicle whereby a consultant could be employed, thus reducing some time that would be required otherwise to tender.

96. The following recommendations are therefore made:

- The Authority should undertake a SEA of the School Organisation Review, should it be agreed to proceed to a second stage;

- The SEA should be based on the approved strategy for the organisation of schools in Suffolk and any implementation plan agreed at stage 2;

- An external consultant should be engaged to carry out the SEA, taking advantage of the framework agreement with a third party contractor;

- Cabinet approval will be required for this approach.