

Bath & North East Somerset Council		
MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	Cabinet	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	11 April 2018	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		E 3032
TITLE:	Determination of the Statutory Notice Proposing the Closure of Camerton Church School	
WARD:	Bathavon West, Bathavon South, Paulton, Peasedown, Radstock, Timsbury	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report:		
Appendix 1 Representation Period Responses Report		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 To consider the rationale behind the proposal to close the school and the representation responses received during the Statutory Notice publication period and decide whether to proceed with the closure of Camerton Church School.

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is asked to;

- 2.1 Agree to the closure of Camerton Church School on 31 August 2018.

3 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

- 3.1 Schools are funded on a per pupil basis and with such small numbers year on year, the revenue budget to operate the school has continued to diminish. It is very difficult for a single teacher to cover the entire curriculum across seven year groups within one class. As a result, it has become difficult for the school to provide a rich and engaging curriculum and opportunities for pupils to achieve high standards in their learning and to develop socially and emotionally by engaging in normal friendship groups.
- 3.2 The Council has a duty of care to ensure children in its schools are able to receive a good education and to access the full curriculum. The school at its current size of seven pupils is not able to do this effectively as it is not financially viable to run and there are significant revenue implications should it remain open.

- 3.3 The school premises are the property of the Diocese of Bath and Wells. The school is currently insured by the Council. Should the school close, the insurance liability would pass to the Diocese. Should the property subsequently be disposed of there would be no capital receipt for the Council.
- 3.4 Under the current Home to School Transport Policy, the Council provides transport for pupils where the school attended is the nearest appropriate one as designated by the Local Authority and where the distance travelled is two miles or more for pupils aged five to seven years and three miles or more for pupils aged eight years and over or if the route is exceptionally hazardous. The Council does not currently provide transport for any pupils living in Camerton. Should the school close, the Council will incur transport costs for the seven pupils currently on roll at Camerton but being educated at Shoscombe C of E Primary school if they choose to remain at Shoscombe. It is also possible that costs for home to school transport could increase in the future for children starting school if they qualify for transport assistance to their preferred school.
- 3.5 One teaching and one support staff post are currently at risk of redundancy, with any costs of redundancy to be met by the Council.
- 3.6 If re-instatement of the leased land occupied by the school car park and field to its original condition was to be required, this would be a cost to the Council.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS AND BASIS FOR PROPOSAL

- 4.1 Equalities, children. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed. Significant issues identified are:
- 4.2 Religion/belief: The school is a Voluntary Controlled Church of England (C of E) school. If it was to close, there would be a reduction in the number of church school places available locally. However there are places available in other C of E schools in the local area to continue to make this option available to local parents.
- 4.3 Socio-economically disadvantaged: Possible impact on low income families living in Camerton who would have to travel outside of the village to access a school place and who do not own a car. If the school closes, parents qualifying under the Low Income Family policy which is part of the Home to School Transport Policy would have transport provided by the Council to access a place at their closest available school.
- 4.4 Rural communities: Camerton is a rural school and if it was to close, the village would no longer have a school. There are projected to be sufficient places available in other local schools to accommodate primary age pupils living in Camerton. The next closest schools would be St Mary's C of E Primary school Timsbury and Peasedown St John Primary school in Peasedown St John. As stated above, under the current policy the Council would provide home to school transport for pupils living in Camerton attending their closest school.
- 4.5 The Council has a statutory duty to secure sufficient schools are available for their area to provide primary and secondary education.

5 THE REPORT

- 5.1 Pupil numbers at Camerton Church School have been falling for several years and for September 2017 only seven pupils in total were on roll. Despite the efforts of the Governing Body over the years to increase pupil numbers through publicity, open days, providing a pre-school nursery on site, working closely with other small schools and eventually becoming part of a federation of three schools, pupil numbers have gradually reduced.
- 5.2 At this size, the Governing Body believes it would be extremely difficult to provide a rounded education that meets the academic, social and emotional needs of the pupils at the school. As schools are funded on a per pupil basis, with such small numbers year on year, the budget to operate the school continues to diminish. This makes it very difficult to provide a rich and engaging curriculum and opportunities for pupils to achieve high standards in their learning and to develop social friendship groups. The Governing Body has therefore concluded that the school is no longer viable either educationally or financially and has taken the difficult decision to propose closing the school.
- 5.3 Whilst the statutory process is being carried out, the Governing Body has put in place interim arrangements for the seven pupils on roll at the school to be educated elsewhere within the Federation at Shoscombe, in order to provide the best possible outcomes for them academically, socially and emotionally. The Governing Body is providing transport for these seven pupils to and from the Shoscombe site.
- 5.4 If Camerton Church School closes, these seven pupils would be able to remain at Shoscombe and formally transfer onto the roll of Shoscombe school should they wish to. From 1 September 2018 responsibility for home to school transport for these seven pupils would transfer to the Local Authority.
- 5.5 Alternatively they would be free to apply to another school. Admission to another school would be subject to available places. If the school is full and parents are refused a place there will be a right of appeal to an Independent Appeal Panel. If the school has room but the number of applications exceeds the spaces available, the school admission criteria will be used to determine the allocation of places.
- 5.6 The Local Authority will provide transport between home and school in line with the current Home to School Transport Policy. Transport would be provided where the school attended is the nearest appropriate one as designated by the Local Authority, and where the distance as measured by the nearest available walking route is two miles or more for pupils aged five to seven years and three miles or more for pupils aged eight years and over or if the nearest available route is exceptionally hazardous. Transport can also be provided if parents qualify under the Low Income Family policy, thus the closure of the school would not have an adverse impact on disadvantaged pupils due to transport costs.
- 5.7 This will reduce the need for individual journeys by private car and for children to have to walk along hazardous routes and will not unreasonably extend journey times and prevent too many children being able to travel to school sustainably.
- 5.8 Members of staff have already been consulted on the proposal to close Camerton, the interim arrangements and the impact of this on individual staff members and their employment rights and options. Further formal consultation would take place as necessary if the school closes.

6 RATIONALE

- 6.1 Appendix 1 contains a report of responses received during the statutory notice publication period. One response was received, in support of the proposal.
- 6.2 The Council has a duty of care to ensure children in its schools are able to receive a good education. At this current size, the school is not educationally or financially viable and it is not possible for the Governing Body to provide pupils with a rounded education that meets their academic, social and emotional needs. Keeping the school open would therefore have a negative impact on raising standards and narrowing the attainment gap and would not be in the best interests of educational provision in the area.
- 6.3 It is not clear why parents have chosen not to send their children to Camerton Church School and there is no evidence that parents aspire to send their children to the school. As there is currently no significant new housing development proposed for Camerton, there is nothing to indicate that numbers of children in Camerton village are likely to increase significantly in the near future, to lead to increased pupil numbers at the school.
- 6.4 There are projected to be sufficient places available in other existing surrounding local primary schools to accommodate future pupils living in Camerton. There are a diverse range of other good quality local schools in the area providing places in Academies, Community, Voluntary Controlled and Voluntary Aided schools. The next closest schools to Camerton are St Mary's C of E Primary in Timsbury and Peasedown St John Primary in Peasedown. In addition to existing available capacity in the area, a feasibility study is currently being carried out to add more places to Peasedown St John Primary.
- 6.5 The closure of the school and the loss of the building as a community facility is not anticipated to have an adverse impact on the local community as the school premises are not used by any groups or organisations to deliver community services for the village.

7 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 7.1 To not proceed with the closure of the school. This option was rejected as the school is not educationally or financially viable at this size and there is not projected to be a significant increase in pupil numbers in the foreseeable future to change this situation.

8 CONSULTATION

- 8.1 The statutory notice and full proposal were published on the consultation section of the Council's website and on the School Strategies, Policies and Planning section.
- 8.2 The statutory notice was posted up at all of the entrances to the school and at a prominent location on the school site (at the main entrance to the school). It was also posted on two Community notice boards in Camerton.
- 8.3 The statutory notice was published in the Midsomer Norton, Radstock and District Journal.

- 8.4 Paper copies of the full proposal were sent to the following schools and Early Years settings for distribution to the individuals as listed below:

All staff and parents at Camerton, Shoscombe and St. Julian's Church Primary schools; all staff and parents at St. Mary's C of E Primary Timsbury; staff and all parents at Timsbury Pre-school; staff and all parents at Timsbury Childcare; staff and all parents at The Learning Tree Day Nursery in Peasedown St John. All parents at Peasedown St John Primary including parents of children at the pre-school received a copy via the school's electronic communication system.

- 8.5 The statutory notice and full proposal were emailed to the Headteacher, Governing Body and Trustees at Camerton, Shoscombe and St. Julian's Church Primary schools; the Headteacher and Governing Body at St. Mary's C of E Primary Timsbury; the Headteacher, Governing Body and staff including at the pre-school at Peasedown St John Primary; the local MP for North East Somerset; the Leader of the Council; the Cabinet Member for Children's Services; the Children and Young People Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel members; Ward Councillors for Bathavon West, Paulton, Peasedown, Radstock and Timsbury wards; the local Parish Council; Trades Unions representing all staff at the school; the Church of England Diocese; the Catholic Diocese; the Headteachers, Governing Bodies and staff at Norton Hill, Somervale and Writhlington secondary schools; the Headteachers, Governing Bodies and staff at High Littleton C of E Primary, Paulton Infant, Paulton Junior and Trinity Church Primary schools; the CEOs of the Dragonfly Education Trust and the Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership; other Council officers.

- 8.6 The documents explained how representations could be submitted to the Council. A four week representation period gave interested stakeholders a final opportunity to comment on the proposal.

9 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 9.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance. Significant risks identified are:

- 9.2 *Keeping the school open and the subsequent negative impact on standards and attainment:* The school is so small with only seven pupils that it is not educationally or financially viable. If the school was kept open, it would not be possible for the school to provide pupils with a rounded education that meets their academic, social and emotional needs and would not be in the best interests of educational provision in the area.

- 9.3 *Closing the school and the impact on home to school transport costs:* Routes to other alternative schools are within the statutory walking distances however they are accessed via routes that are deemed to be exceptionally hazardous. Therefore under the current policy the Council will need to provide home to school transport for children living in Camerton to attend their closest school that has a space.

Contact person	<i>Helen Hoynes 01225 395169</i>
Background	<i>Consultation document</i>

papers	<p>http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/services/schools-colleges-and-learning/school-strategies-policies-planning/proposal-close-camerton</p> <p><i>Statutory Notice and Full Proposal</i></p> <p>www.bathnes.gov.uk/CamertonStatutoryNoticeProposal</p>
<p>Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format</p>	