

Cabinet Meeting Resolution

**Executive
Forward Plan
Reference**

E2181

Consultation on the proposal to close Culverhay School

Date of Meeting	25-Nov-10
The Issue	<p><i>In July 2010 following a public consultation process on proposed changes to some Bath schools Cabinet decided to consult on the proposal to close Culverhay School (Culverhay).</i></p> <p><i>A public consultation exercise has now been completed and this report sets out the results of that consultation and asks cabinet to consider the views expressed before deciding whether it wishes to publish a legal notice for the closure of Culverhay.</i></p>
The decision	<p>On a motion from Councillor Chris Watt, seconded by Councillor Malcolm Hanney, it was RESOLVED (unanimously):</p> <p>(1) To AGREE that its policy is to close Culverhay school, with no further admissions to year 7 in September 2012 and beyond;</p> <p>(2) To AUTHORISE the publication of the necessary statutory notice of closure, open for public representation for 6 weeks;</p> <p>(3) To DELEGATE to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services the process of implementation and to determine the relevant statutory notices.</p> <p>(4) To NOTE the potential funding implications in respect of transport and school uniforms arising out of this decision and ask the Director and Cabinet Member to investigate options for mitigating transitional costs in consultation with the Schools Forum.</p>
Rationale for decision	<p>The rationale for closing one of our secondary schools as part of the overall plan for Bath, together with the separate proposals that the Council has already supported - i.e. for the federation of St Mark's Church of England School with St Gregory's Catholic College and for Oldfield to become co-educational - is that this is the best way to address the key challenges identified through the course of the review process. In particular it would:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the total number of schools from seven to six, removing surplus places and reflecting the current and future need in Bath. • Reduce the number of single sex places, whilst providing more co-educational places to meet parental demand. • Facilitate the creation of schools which are of a more viable size to be educationally and financially secure. • Retain the balance of provision of church school places. • Retain one single sex girls school and one single sex boys school to provide choice for parents. <p>In selecting Culverhay as the school proposed for closure, it should be noted that despite the achievements of the school, the level of local support during this consultation and its good Ofsted rating:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It has the lowest level of attainment in Bath secondary schools. • It is a National Challenge School with a relatively low percentage of students gaining 5 A*-C with English and Maths.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It has a large number of surplus places. • Two out of three boys who live closer to Culverhay than any other school already choose schools further away. • The community is relatively close to alternative schools. • The cost of educating each pupil is high. <p>The main factors on which the final recommendation is based are set out in more detail in this report, i.e. raising educational standards; maintaining choice and diversity; enabling young people to access a local school as far as possible and reducing travel; support from parents and wider stakeholders expressed during various consultations; more effective and efficient use of resources through reducing surplus places.</p>
<p>Other options considered</p>	<p>The consultation document asked parents and other consultees to suggest other options for delivering the plan for Bath without closing Culverhay. Two options were proposed one from a parent group and the other from Culverhay School itself and these have been considered and evaluated against the following key criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How they would contribute to improving educational standards. • The extent to which they maintain choice and diversity but meet parental demand for church and co-educational places. • Whether proposals would enable young people to access a local school and reduce travel across the city. • The level of support expressed by parents and wider stakeholders. • Whether it will lead to a more efficient use of resources including a reduction in surplus places. <p>Option 1 Retain seven schools and achieve a reduction in surplus places by reducing the Planned Admission Numbers (PAN) at all Bath secondary schools to 160 except Culverhay and St Mark's which would remain at 102. Culverhay and Oldfield would be co-educational schools.</p> <p>Advantages It is clear from the well presented and argued submission from the parent group that a considerable amount of thought and effort has gone into the preparation of the proposal document, copies of which has been provided to the cabinet. The proposal would achieve some reduction in surplus places (a reduction from 1,073 places for admissions in 2011 to 1,004 would result in 69 less places per year group) but without removing a school from its local community. The proposers have undertaken a survey of parents at 6 local primary schools to identify the support for Culverhay becoming co-educational and have suggested that this shows that a potential 535 pupils would attend Culverhay if it was co-educational, although it was not possible to accurately identify the children's ages and therefore the number who might attend at any one time.</p> <p>Retaining seven schools with both Culverhay and Oldfield as co-educational schools would meet parental demand for o-educational places whilst choice and diversity would be maintained through the continued availability of single sex places at Hayesfield and Beechen Cliff with St Gregory's Catholic College and St Mark's Church of England School as church schools.</p> <p>There is the potential to improve standards through the introduction of girls who currently do not have this choice and traditionally perform better than boys, which could have a positive impact on standards overall at the school. The proposal also argues that although it would become co-educational, Culverhay, by retaining a PAN of 102 would remain a small school enabling 'every child to be looked after individually' with a positive</p>

effect on achievement and attainment. However whilst remaining a small school the increased numbers at the school if admissions were in line with the proposed PAN of 102 would reduce the need for 'small school' financial support currently received by Culverhay under the funding formula contributing to the efficient use of resources.

Finally, the retention of Culverhay together with a co-educational Oldfield would reduce travel by providing a local co-educational option for pupils from north west and south west Bath who currently have to travel from these areas.

It has been clear during the consultation processes that people feel strongly about the retention of their local school when it appears to under threat of closure. This has been evident in all affected areas but most particularly within the communities of South West Bath in the latest consultation.

Disadvantages

It can be seen that this option does in part meet some of the criteria set out above but it is based on the principle of reducing surplus places by reducing pupil numbers at other schools. The Council proposal following the closure of Culverhay would provide 953 places at six schools which is assessed to be sufficient to meet projected need for the next 10 years. This allows a level of surplus in the short term which is not excessive but is sufficient to meet additional demand that may arise including from new housing. The alternative proposal therefore needs to be assessed in the context of a projected requirement for 953 places in Bath.

It is notable that the parent group argue that, whilst proposing a uniform PAN of 160 for other schools and maintaining that a co-educational Culverhay would be very popular and meet local demand, they propose retaining a PAN of 102 with a similar PAN at St Mark's Church of England School. This would be lower than the minimum desirable size of 120 for a secondary school, as set out in the Council's School Organisation Plan which provides the framework for pupil place planning. If it is accepted that both Culverhay and St Mark's Church of England School should therefore have minimum PANs of 120 this would leave 713 (953 – 240) places to be shared equally between the remaining 5 schools meaning a PAN of 143 rather than 160 would be required for Beechen Cliff, St Gregory's, Hayesfield, Oldfield and Ralph Allen.

Whilst the cabinet can take the decision to retain seven schools, the Council cannot reduce PANs at foundation or voluntary aided church schools without the agreement of the governors. All of the schools which would have a reduced PAN are in this category and the governing bodies of these schools were asked for their views on the likelihood that they would accept a) a reduced PAN of 160 as suggested by the parent group and b) a reduced PAN of 143 as would be required if sufficient surplus places are to be removed in line with the Council plan.

Responses from the governing bodies are unanimous in indicating that any proposal to reduce PANs in this way would not deliver on the overall aims of the strategy and would not be supported.

The proposal to reduce surplus places by reducing PANs at other Bath schools is not supported by the other schools. The level of reduction in PANs required to achieve the planned reduction in surplus places could lead to financial difficulties for those schools potentially leading to staff redundancies. In addition any reduction would mean reducing parental choice and suppressing access to popular and successful schools with high educational standards. The proposal does not reflect the views of parents expressed during the initial

consultation on the plan for Bath which showed that 72% were in favour of reducing from seven schools to six to remove surplus places. Culverhay would remain a small school with the associated issues regarding the range of opportunities available to students, cost per pupil, etc. The proposal is also contrary to recent Government announcements on the need to expand popular and high performing schools.

The price of retaining seven schools would be less efficient use of resources, removing the opportunities for re-investing schools funding to improve standards across the area.

Ultimately it is not evident that retaining seven schools with reduced PANs is achievable, nor that it would ensure that they are all financially and educationally robust in the medium/longer term.

Option 2

Retain Culverhay as a co-educational academy in partnership with Bath Spa University with the possibility of an all through school for age range 2-19

This proposal from the school builds on its long standing relationship with Bath Spa University which has leased a teaching block on the school site for some years. The proposal would extend and develop the existing partnership which sees the school and the University working collaboratively as part of their student PGCE's teacher training. The school proposes that the site could be reconfigured so that the University would be at the heart of the campus rather than in an isolated block. The proposal states 'In partnership we would develop classroom environments which would be shared accommodation, equipped to the highest specification with the technology to deliver outstanding, specialist secondary education. This accommodation would benefit BSU teachers, as they learn the skills of the classroom and the children and young people who come to learn at the academy.'

This option also suggests the possibility of an 'all through' school which would see a local primary relocate to the Culverhay site which 'if the nursery already on site were incorporated, would create an academy serving children from 2 to 19.

This development would potentially allow BSU to deliver their PGCE programmes at primary and secondary levels from the heart of the school, transforming opportunities for children and young people.'

Finally, Culverhay is also developing an educational partnership with the Cabot Learning Federation (CLF) in Bristol. The proposal identifies that the CLF has a track record of driving up standards and has the potential to make a significant improvement in standards at Culverhay replicating its success in Bristol.

This proposal assumes that the school would be successful in achieving academy status, which would be dependent on Department for Education approval.

Advantages

As with Option 1 the proposal does have the capacity to meet some of the key criteria of the plan for Bath. It could contribute to a reduction in surplus places if it is assumed that the school is proposing a PAN of 102 for secondary pupils. It would offer more co-educational places whilst maintaining choice and diversity, should have a positive effect on standards at Culverhay, reduce small school financial support and reduce travel by providing a local co-educational school for the community around Culverhay. It is an innovative proposal as there are less than 40 'all through' schools in England, the majority of which are academies. 9.22 Bath Spa University have indicated an interest in continuing to develop their partnership with the school. The proposal has the support of

Culverhay's governors and, by developing a co-educational school on the site, fits with the views expressed by many local families.

Disadvantages

The proposal sets out broad principles and aims but does not necessarily provide detail of how these would be achieved. It does not provide an alternative proposal for a school closure and so relies on the same scenario described in Option 1 above for reduced PANs across Bath.

There is no evidence of governing body support for this proposal from a local primary school. Southdown Infant and Southdown Junior schools, which are closest to Culverhay, could be invited to propose a new primary school on the Culverhay site which would replace these schools. A feasibility study would be required to assess whether the Culverhay site is large enough to accommodate a primary school, a co-educational secondary school with additional pupils if admissions are at the level of the PAN, as well as expansion by the university. There is no indication as to how the building of a new primary school would be funded but presumably the sale of the Southdown sites could be considered to generate a capital receipt. There would be a borrowing requirement on the Council in advance of this as the site could not be sold until the schools had relocated to new accommodation on the Culverhay site.

Although the school's proposal for academy status and partnerships to create a 2-19 campus adds some additional benefits to the basic proposal for reduced PANs across the city, the same advantages and disadvantages largely apply, as described under option 1 above.

Whilst the cabinet can choose not to close Culverhay, there would be a number of further processes and decisions required to achieve the school's vision, requiring the agreement of other schools and organisations. Whilst some have expressed support in principle, it is not evident that there is sign up for the local primary school changes required and the other secondary schools have indicated that they would not agree to reduced PANs.

Although this proposal could provide an alternative way to address standards and surplus places at Culverhay itself and would be a locally popular solution with increased choice and reduced impact on travel, it would not address efficient use of resources across the city or provide the same opportunities for re-investing schools funding to improve standards across the area.

It is not evident that retaining seven schools with reduced PANs is achievable, nor that it would ensure that they are all financially and educationally robust in the medium/longer term.

The Decision is subject to Call-In within 5 working days of publication of the decision