

## Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	<b>Children and Young People Policy Development &amp; Scrutiny Panel</b>	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	<b>21 November 2017</b>	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
TITLE:	<b>Consultation on the Proposal to Close Camerton Church School</b>	
WARD:	Bathavon West, Paulton, Peasedown, Radstock, Timsbury	
<b>AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM</b>		

### 1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 The Governing Body of Camerton Church School has asked the Council to consult on the closure of the school due to very low pupil numbers and the resulting negative educational and social impact on the remaining pupils at the school. The consultation process commenced on 18 September and ended on 5 November 2017.

### 2 RECOMMENDATION

The Panel is asked to;

- 2.1 Note the proposal to close Camerton Church School and the resulting consultation process being undertaken.
- 2.2 Consider if there are any comments or points they wish to raise, to be taken into consideration by the Cabinet Member and Cabinet when they meet on 6 December.

### 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 if 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.

#### **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 ensure that there are sufficient school places available in their area to meet demand.

#### **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 are expected to be 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.
- 5.3 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. They have asked the Council to commence the statutory process that must be followed when it is proposed to close a school, the first stage of which is a period of public consultation.
- 5.4 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.
- 5.5 If it was decided to close the school, 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.
- 5.6 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.
- 5.7 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.
- 5.8 Should Camerton Church School close, there are projected to be sufficient places available in other existing surrounding local primary schools to accommodate future pupils in the area. In addition, a feasibility study is currently being carried out to add more places to Peasedown St John Primary school.
- 5.9 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. Transport can also be

provided if the nearest available route is exceptionally hazardous or parents qualify under the Low Income Family policy.

- 5.10 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. If it was decided to close the school, then any further formal consultation would take place as necessary.
- 5.11 At the Cabinet meeting on 6 December 2017 the Cabinet will consider all consultation responses received during the consultation period and the rationale behind the proposal to close the school and decide whether to publish a statutory notice proposing the closure of Camerton Church School.
- 5.12 If the Cabinet decides to proceed, the statutory notice and complete proposal would be published at the beginning of February 2018. There would then be a further representation period of four weeks, during which interested parties will have a final opportunity to comment on the proposal before a final decision is made at the 11 April 2018 Cabinet meeting.
- 5.13 If the decision was made to go ahead with the closure, the implementation date would be 31 August 2018.

## **6 RATIONALE**

- 6.1 The school is currently not viable with only seven pupils and therefore the Governing Body has asked the Council to consult on the closure of the school.

## **7 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 7.1 None

## **8 CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 The consultation and consultation document were published on the consultation section of the Council's website.
- 8.2 Paper copies of the consultation document were sent to the following schools for distribution to the individuals as listed below:

Headteacher, Governing Body, staff and all parents at Camerton, Shoscombe and St. Julian's Church Primary schools; Headteacher, Governing Body, staff and all parents at St. Mary's C of E Primary Timsbury; Headteacher, Governing Body, staff and all parents including parents of children at the pre-school at Peasedown St John Primary; Manager, staff and all parents at Timsbury Pre-school.

- 8.3 The consultation document was emailed to 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, Headteacher and Governing Body of Norton Hill, Somervale and Writhlington secondary schools, Headteacher and Governing Body of High

Littleton C of E Primary, Paulton Infant, Paulton Junior and Trinity Church Primary schools, other Council officers.

8.4 The document explained how comments could be submitted to the Council. A seven week consultation period gave interested stakeholders an opportunity to comment on the proposal.

8.5 Consultation with Camerton Church School pupils being educated at Shoscombe will form part of the consultation.

8.6 A public consultation meeting held at the school will form part of the consultation.

8.7 All consultation responses received will be made available to the Cabinet at their meeting on 6 December 2017.

## 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 The school is so small with only seven pupils that it is not educationally or financially viable. As a result, it is not possible to provide pupils with a rounded education that meets their academic, social and emotional needs.

9.3 Routes to other alternative schools are within the statutory walking distances however they are accessed via hazardous routes. Therefore under the current policy the Council will need to provide home to school transport for children living in Camerton to attend other local schools if Camerton school closes. However this will reduce the need for individual journeys by private car and for children to have to walk along hazardous routes.

<b>Contact person</b>	<i>Helen Hoynes 01225 395169</i>
<b>Background papers</b>	<i>Consultation document</i> <a href="http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/camertonconsultation">www.bathnes.gov.uk/camertonconsultation</a>
<b>Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format</b>	