

REPORT

3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

There are sufficient school places in the three schools that form the Hope Worthen Westbury Trinity federation to accommodate the pupils affected by the closure of the Hope and Westbury sites with some expansion of the Worthen site. The revised transport arrangements for these pupils may lead to an increase in traffic and carbon emissions in the area.

The communities of Hope, Worthen and Westbury – together with interested parties in neighbouring communities - will be given the opportunity to comment on the formal proposal to close the Hope and Westbury sites and enlarge provision on the Worthen site, as part of the statutory consultation process if approved by Cabinet. This statutory consultation has to include consideration of risk management, human rights, equalities, community and environmental consequences.

4. Financial Implications

Continuing to run schools that, in both Ofsted and local authority assessment terms, are failing to provide a good standard of education for their pupils does not provide value for money. The majority of school revenue funding is pupil-led which means that the funding for the pupils resulting from the closure of the Hope and Westbury sites will be retained by the remaining school at Worthen or follow any pupils transferring to other Shropshire schools. The consolidation of provision at Worthen will make the single school more financially viable and sustainable than the three separate schools.

In the statutory guidance for opening and closing maintained schools, the proposal is an amalgamation, comprising of the closure of one school (or more) and the enlargement of an existing school to accommodate displaced pupils.

The redistribution of income, which will largely be retained within the remaining school in Worthen, means that there is no direct saving to the local authority or to the overall Shropshire schools' budget.

It is anticipated that the cost of transport will increase. The federation is currently funding the transport costs for the interim arrangements they have implemented for the financial year 2016-17 (see section 7). These are estimated, in a full year, to be £30,000. These costs will have to be met by the Council from the academic year 2017-18 onwards in the event that the amalgamation is approved.

The school buildings are owned by the Diocese of Hereford, while the school land at Hope is owned by Shropshire Council and at Westbury is leased from the Westbury Playing Fields Trustees. Capital works will be required on the Worthen site. Local authority officers will be undertaking a feasibility study on any potential expansion works on the Worthen site in the event that the closures go ahead.

The funding of any potential capital works would have to be determined and confirmed prior to the Cabinet meeting in November and the publication of the notice for closure proposals (see timetable in section 10). The disposal of school land and buildings and the use of any resultant capital receipts are subject to statutory guidelines, in particular through Section 77 of the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998 and Schedule 1 to the Academies Act.

Diocesan officers have been actively involved and supportive in the collaborative working with the governing body. Their continued involvement, particularly in respect of identifying and securing funding for any capital works will be an essential and key requirement.

5. Background

The Hope Worthen Westbury Trinity - A Federation of CE Primary Schools was established in May 2016. The names and categories of schools in the federation are:

Name	Category
Hope Church of England Primary School	Voluntary Controlled (Diocese of Hereford)
Worthen Church of England Primary School	Voluntary Controlled (Diocese of Hereford)
St Mary's Church of England Primary School Westbury	Voluntary Aided (Diocese of Hereford)

The rationale for federation included a number of perceived benefits:

- the recruitment and retention of a headteacher - this is an issue for the vast majority of small rural schools as teaching headship is a particularly challenging role
- other leadership and professional development benefits for teachers
- the sharing of expertise and mentoring benefits for other staff
- collaborative working for staff
- managing the impact of falling numbers of pupils in each school
- improving educational and social opportunities for pupils
- greater ability to meet the challenge of maintaining educational standards
- securing the long term sustainability of education
- the similar backgrounds of all three schools, including religious ethos

- sharing teaching and learning resources.

The governing body secured the leadership of the federation through the permanent appointment of a headteacher in July 2016.

The governors have committed to a vision for the longer term future of education within their communities:

'We will actively explore the benefits of bringing the children together on one site. As pupil numbers are predicted to remain low at all three schools well into the future and therefore funding for our schools continues to be greatly reduced, we will investigate whether the children will receive a higher quality of education, care and social interaction in one school.'

The governors have recognised that their vision cannot be achieved with the current organisational structures and so are prepared to consider an alternative arrangement, based on consolidating provision onto a single site. Their expressed priority is to secure good or better education, focussing on delivering the best educational outcomes for the pupils while not being constrained by maintaining provision in specific locations.

Responses from the pupils, parents, staff and the wider community to the federation of the schools and the consolidation of provision onto a single site have been largely positive. Some parents have expressed common concerns and raised questions regarding transport, uniforms, parking and wrap-around care. The local authority has engaged with the community and supported the governing body is addressing these concerns.

Some support staff have raised concerns about the future of their jobs. These issues will be covered in more detail in the proposal document that will be made available to all stakeholders at the commencement of the consultation process.

6. Performance

St. Mary's CE Primary School Westbury received a 'Requires Improvement' judgement from Ofsted in February 2014. The school is due for re-inspection in the near future and in the judgement of the headteacher and the local authority this assessment is likely to remain the same.

Worthen CE Primary School received a 'Requires Improvement' judgement from Ofsted in November 2015. The school is due for re-inspection before the end of April 2017. Although standards have improved, there have been many staffing changes and fluctuations in pupil numbers which mean outcomes for pupils are volatile. The headteacher and local authority currently judge overall standards as still requiring improvement.

Hope CE Primary School was last inspected by Ofsted in October 2013 and received a 'Good' judgement. The school is due for re-inspection in October 2016 and although its overall effectiveness is currently judged as 'Good' by the school itself, the local authority is more cautious and the school is vulnerable to an unfavourable Ofsted outcome, given the rapidly declining pupil numbers, the impact on their budget and the difficulty in maintaining the current staffing levels.

All of the schools are currently receiving a medium level of challenge and support from the local authority via the school performance monitoring arrangements for maintained schools. The rationalisation of provision on to a single site will increase the capacity of senior leaders - especially the executive headteacher – to secure improvement. The move to a single site will also result in greater flexibility of deployment of staff to secure good and better outcomes for pupils.

The table below summarises the key data related to the current capacities of the schools, number on roll (NOR) as at January 2016 school census, the numbers on roll reported by the headteacher as at the end of the summer term and the percentage surplus places based on these latest numbers.

	Capacity	Numbers on Roll (Jan. 16)	Numbers on Roll (Jul. 16)	Surplus Places (Jul. 16)
Hope Church of England Primary School	56	35	17	69.6%
St Mary's Church of England Primary School Westbury	84	33	32	61.9%
Worthen Church of England Primary School	77	46	38	50.6%

The three schools have collectively lost significant pupils, going back as far as September 2015. Pupil numbers are anticipated to continue to fall, as cohort sizes are so small and parents cite this as their main reason for removing children. With pupil numbers being the key basis on which schools receive their annual funding, this means that revenue is falling and budgets are, and will become increasingly more difficult to balance.

7. Interim Operational Changes

In exploring the benefits of their vision, the governing body is implementing operational changes from September 2016, following consultation with parents. This is in direct response to the need to address the current uncertainty and rapidly declining pupil numbers, requiring direct and positive action by the governing body to secure ongoing education provision. Children from Reception to Year 6 will

therefore be taught on the Worthen site for the academic year 2016-17. The local authority and Diocese have fully backed these positive interim measures, providing the necessary support and advice to the governors and headteacher.

The Worthen site was chosen by the governing body because it can accommodate the current pupils with no immediate building work and means the shortest journey times for pupils from Westbury and Hope. However, this can only be a temporary arrangement – a more permanent and sustainable arrangement will require expansion of the Worthen site and capital investment in the event that amalgamation is approved.

The local authority, through the Passenger Transport Commissioning Group, has liaised with the federation to arrange transport from September 2016 for the pupils who live in the Hope and Westbury catchments and who currently attend those schools. In the academic year 2016-17 the federation will meet the additional costs of transporting pupils to Worthen. This is estimated to cost in the region of £30,000.

The local authority is also arranging the transport of pupils who live in Powys and currently attend Hope CE Primary School. This is paid for by Powys County Council and they have confirmed that this arrangement will continue.

8. Governing Body Decision

At a meeting of the federation governing body on 6 July 2016, a formal decision was taken to consult on the closure of Hope CE Primary School and St Mary's CE Primary School Westbury in September 2017, consolidating education provision on the current site of Worthen CE Primary School. As indicated above the closure of two sites and enlargement onto a single site is an amalgamation.

In coming to their decision the governing body had received and analysed information provided by the local authority for each of the individual sites in terms of ownership, capacity, site provision and potential for expansion.

It is, however, Shropshire Council that has to formally agree to undertake the statutory consultation on the closure and enlargement of maintained schools, hence the reason for this paper coming to Cabinet.

The Department for Education statutory guidance states that there is no prescribed timescale for implementation following any final decision by Cabinet to close a maintained school. While the target date is September 2017, there will need to be further discussions with the key stakeholders to confirm the actual date for implementation, with account taken of any requirements relating to, for example, the statutory consultation and determination of admissions arrangements, dissolution

of the current federation and any other necessary permissions. The recommendation in the report is that implementation takes place in the academic year 2017/18, at the earliest possible date.

Hope CE Primary School and St Mary's Church of England Primary School Westbury are designated by the Department for Education as rural schools and therefore any case for closure has to be strong and a proposal clearly in the best interests of education in the area. As required, the full consultation proposal will give detailed consideration to:

- the likely effect of the discontinuance of the schools on the local community
- the availability, and the likely cost to the local authority, of transport to other schools
- any increase in the use of motor vehicles which is likely to result from the discontinuance of the schools
- the likely effects of any such increase and any alternatives to the discontinuance of the schools.

If the decision is taken to close the schools at Hope and Westbury, the Council would work with the staff, governing body and trades unions to secure the ongoing employment of the current workforce, which for the majority will be at Worthen. Staff will have their own meeting during the consultation period at which they will be provided with additional information and will have the opportunity to ask further questions. Staff will be provided with personal support in the event that a decision is taken to close the schools.

9. The Three Schools Sites

Hope is a voluntary controlled Church of England school. The school buildings are owned by the Diocese of Hereford, whilst the playing fields are owned by Shropshire Council. It has capacity for a maximum of 56 pupils. The site is the smallest of the three at 0.49 hectares and could provide a 3 class primary school. The school has good quality early years provision as part of the school, operating from classroom provision within the main school building.

Westbury is a voluntary aided Church of England school. The buildings are owned by the Diocese of Hereford, whilst the playing fields are leased to Shropshire Council by Westbury Playing Fields Trustees. It has capacity for a maximum of 84 pupils. The site is 0.71 hectares and could provide a 6 class primary school. The school has good quality early years provision as part of the school, operating from classroom provision within the main school building.

Worthen is a voluntary controlled Church of England School. The school buildings are owned by the Diocese of Hereford, whilst the playing fields are owned by Shropshire Council. It has capacity for a maximum of 77 pupils. The site is the largest of the three at 1.02 hectares and could provide a 9 class primary school. Pre-school

provision at Worthen is currently a registered charity, managed by a committee. It operates from the village hall and is a ‘pack away’ setting. The provision is good and well attended. Governors and pre-school leaders have been working together to take responsibility for the pre-school, as at Hope and Westbury.

It is proposed that the pre-school provision will be consolidated on the Worthen site from September 2017. The consultation document will detail the proposed arrangements for this provision and the wider impacts, including transport.

Basic valuations for the Hope and Westbury sites have been determined, however more detailed research would be required to come to an accurate valuation before any decisions are taken over the future use of the sites.

As indicated earlier in the report capital works will be required on the Worthen site in the event that a decision is taken to amalgamate the schools. Local authority officers will be undertaking a feasibility study on the required expansion of the site and the estimated cost. The funding of any required works will need to be determined and confirmed and will form part of the Cabinet decision on 9 November 2016 to publish closure proposals – see timetable below. Engagement with officers from the Diocese of Hereford will be essential and potentially critical in identifying and securing capital resources.

10. Timetable

If the proposed closures continue through the various stages the timetable to a final decision would be as follows:

Wednesday 14 September 2016	Cabinet decision to consult on closures
Thursday 22 September – Wednesday 2 November 2016	6 week statutory consultation
Wednesday 21 December 2017	Cabinet decision to publish closure proposals
Thursday 12 January 2017	Publication of notice of closure proposals
Thursday 12 January 2017 – Wednesday 8 February 2017	4 week statutory representation period
Wednesday 1 March 2017	Cabinet decision on proposals to close schools

11. Conclusions

The governing body of Hope Worthen Westbury Trinity federation, with support from local authority and Diocesan officers, have concluded that the securing of good and better education for the children in the communities of Hope, Worthen and Westbury into the future will be achieved by consolidating education provision onto one of the federation's three sites. They have determined that this should be Worthen, which will result in the potential closure of the current Hope and Westbury sites.

Cabinet are asked to support the governors by approving the commencement of a statutory school closure process for the maintained schools at Hope and Westbury and the consolidation of education provision on the enlarged Worthen site.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)
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David Minnery

Local Members

Heather Kidd – Chirbury & Worthen

David Roberts - Loton

Appendices
