

Amalgamation of Hope CE Primary School, Worthen CE Primary School and St Mary's CE Primary School Westbury

Responsible Officer Karen Bradshaw – Director of Children's Services

e-mail: karen.bradshaw@shropshire.gov.uk Tel: 01743 254201

Summary

This paper reports on the outcomes from the statutory period of representation on the proposal to close Hope CE Primary School and St Mary's CE Primary School Westbury and consolidating provision on an enlarged site at Worthen CE Primary School.

Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

- a. note the outcomes from the statutory representation period
- b. agree to close Hope CE Primary School and St Mary's CE Primary School Westbury, effective from 1 September 2017, consolidating provision on an enlarged site at Worthen CE Primary School.

REPORT

1. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 1.1 There are no identifiable risk management issues involved in this proposal. School places will be made available at Worthen CE Primary for pupils displaced should Hope CE Primary and St Mary's CE Primary Westbury close. There are no known human rights issues resulting from this proposal.
- 1.2 The revised transport arrangements for those pupils displaced may lead to an increase in traffic and carbon emissions in the area of the Worthen CE Primary School and may result in some congestion outside the school site at key times of the day.

- 1.3 The communities serving all of the three schools, together with those in neighbouring areas, have been given the opportunity to comment on the proposal at two stages in the statutory consultation process - during the first consultation stage between 22 September and 2 November 2016, and the second representation stage between 12 January and 8 February 2017. These statutory consultations are required to include consideration of risk management, human rights, equalities, community and environmental consequences.
- 1.4 There may be a requirement for the Council to cashflow this project in the short/medium term. Capital works will be required at the school in order to accommodate the consolidation of pupils onto one site prior to the disposal of the surplus sites. Whilst the Diocese of Hereford has confirmed that the receipts generated from the disposals will be made available to support the project there will be a transitional period, between works commencing and capital receipts being generated.

2. Financial Implications

- 2.1 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 an enlarged Worthen site will make the single school more financially viable and sustainable than operating the three separate schools.
- 2.2 It is anticipated that the cost of transport will increase in the event that the provision is consolidated on a single site. The costs for entitled pupils will have to be met by the Council from September 2017 onwards in the event that the closures are approved, as prescribed within the Council's School Transport Policy. The estimated cost is £20,000 per academic year.
- 2.3 Capital works will be required on the Worthen site to accommodate the pupils from the three schools and to allow for growth in pupil numbers to recover the numbers lost in the last year. Local authority officers are developing plans for the required expansion works on the Worthen site in the event that the closures go ahead.
- 2.4 The Diocese of Hereford have confirmed that the receipts from the disposals of the Hope and Westbury sites will be made available to support the funding of remodelling works at the Worthen site. This funding will be required for the capital works at Worthen. The letter attached at Appendix 1 confirms the commitment from the Diocese to passport the capital receipts.

3. Background

- 3.1 On 14 September 2016, Cabinet considered and approved a proposal to consult on the amalgamation of Hope CE Primary School, Worthen CE Primary School and St Mary's CE Primary School Westbury. The subsequent consultation ran for a six week period from 22 September to 2 November 2016.
- 3.2 On 21 December 2016, Cabinet considered the outcomes of the first stage of consultation and agreed to proceed to the publication of closure proposals for Hope CE Primary School and St Mary's CE Primary School, with a target date of 1 September 2017, consolidating provision on an enlarged site at Worthen CE Primary School. The representation ran for a four week period from 12 January to 8 February 2017.

4. Outcomes of the Statutory Period of Representation

- 4.1 On Thursday 12 January 2017, the Council began a statutory four week period of formal consultation, known as the representation period. This was a final opportunity for any person to make comments or object to the proposal.
- 4.2 A consultation document was published and signposted to all prescribed and recommended consultees and posted on the Council's consultation web portal. The proposal document is attached for reference at Appendix 2a, together with the list of formal consultees at Appendix 2b.
- 4.3 A public notice was published in the Shropshire Star, and posted at prominent positions on the three school sites throughout the representation period. A copy of the public notice is attached at Appendix 2c.
- 4.4 The four week representation period finished on Wednesday 8 February 2017. No responses to the consultation were received during this period. The first consultation period in the early autumn only received five email responses and one letter. This community-led proposal, initiated by the governing body of the Hope Worthen Westbury Trinity – A Federation of CE Primary Schools with wide support from the respective communities, may explain the low levels of response.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 Cabinet have received and considered two detailed reports on the amalgamation proposals, on 14 September 2016 and 21 December 2016. They have considered the key issues and factors, namely:
- standards of education
 - local communities
 - equal opportunities and community cohesion
 - diversity of provision
 - demography and population
 - finances
 - staffing.

They are satisfied that these issues have been given full and proper consideration as part of the decision making process.

- 5.2 The responses received from all stakeholders during the two statutory periods of consultation have been minimal and generally supportive. This particular proposal is unique in that it has been initiated and promoted by the federation governing the three schools, with the support of their community, the Diocese of Hereford and the officers and local members of Shropshire Council.
- 5.3 The federation have a clear vision for the longer term future of education in their communities. They have recognised that their vision cannot be achieved with the current organisational structures and so, with great courage and commitment, have been prepared to consider consolidating provision onto a single site. Their expressed priority has been to secure good and better education, focussing on delivering the best educational outcomes for the pupils while not being constrained by maintaining provision on specific locations.
- 5.4 On this basis, the recommendation of the Director of Children's Services is to proceed to the closure of Hope CE Primary School and St Mary's CE Primary School Westbury, effective from 1 September 2017, and the consolidation of provision on an enlarged site at Worthen CE Primary School.

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

David Minnery

Local Member

Heather Kidd – Chirbury & Worthen

David Roberts – Loton

Appendices

1. Letter from Diocese of Hereford
- 2a. Proposal document
- 2b. List of consultees
- 2c. Public notice

Previous Reports

1. Cabinet – 14 September 2016 - <http://shropshire.gov.uk/committee-services/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=130&MId=3255&Ver=4>
2. Cabinet – 21 December 2016 - <http://shropshire.gov.uk/committee-services/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=130&MId=3260&Ver=4>