There is a need to secure sustainable primary education provision in South Camberley. Surrey County Council, in partnership with the governing bodies of Bristow Infant School and Nursery and Sure Start Children's Centre, Camberley Infant and Nursery School and The Watchetts Junior School, have consulted on the proposal to amalgamate the three schools.

The decision

The Cabinet Member is asked to consider whether to approve publication of statutory notices such that:

- Bristow Infant School, Camberley Infant School and The Watchetts Junior School, will amalgamate to become a new split site primary school from September 2012
- the Infant Published Admission Number (PAN) of the new school will be 110, with
  - 50 pupils at the Bristow site
  - 60 pupils at the Camberley Infant site
- the tie-breaker for allocation to each site will be the straight line distance from the child's home to the site:
  - up to 50 nearest children to the Bristow site would be allocated there
  - up to 60 nearest children to the Camberley Infant site would be allocated there
- the new primary school will have no separate junior PAN
  - infant pupils attending the Bristow site and the Camberley Infant site will automatically move on to junior places in the new primary school unless parents/carers choose to apply for a place at another school (transfer forms will not be automatically sent out to them)

The Children’s Centre would continue to operate on the Bristow Site, which would become one of the sites of the newly amalgamated Primary School.

All three current sites will remain in use, catering for the same age groups as they do now – there is no proposal to remove educational provision from any of the current three sites.

The process will be:

- Bristow Infant and Nursery School will expand on 1 September 2012 to become a split site community primary school that will include the existing Camberley Infant and Nursery School and The Watchetts Junior School
• Camberley Infant and Nursery School will close as a separate school on 31 August 2012 and become part of the amalgamated community primary school
  o all the Camberley children will then be on roll at the new amalgamated primary school
• The Watchetts Junior School will close as a separate school on 31 August 2012 and become part of the amalgamated community primary school
  o all the Watchetts children will then be on roll at the new amalgamated primary school
• the Camberley Infant site and the Watchetts site will become part of the new amalgamated primary school along with the Bristow site
• the name of the new amalgamated primary school will be determined by the Amalgamation Committee in consultation with parents/carers, pupils and staff of the 3 schools.

**DETAILS:**

**Issues**
1. The primary provision in this area is planned so that Bristow Infant School, Camberley Infant and Nursery School and The Watchetts Junior School all serve this area of Camberley.
2. Children historically progressed from both Bristow and Camberley Infant Schools onto The Watchetts Junior School, although in recent years very few pupils have transferred from Camberley Infant School. The majority of the pupils from Bristow Infant School continue to progress onto The Watchetts Junior School.
3. Creating a primary school in this part of Camberley will stabilise provision and serve the communities in this area.

**Advantages**
4. Separate infant and junior schools can and do provide a good quality education. However, a primary school has the following advantages:
• a seamless transition from Key Stage 1 (Infants) to Key Stage 2 (Juniors)
• greater opportunities for curriculum development
• greater opportunities for staff development
• greater flexibility with a larger budget to deploy staff and curriculum resources effectively
• greater opportunities for staff recruitment
• it is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit headteachers, particularly to small schools, and the range of teaching and leadership opportunities in the larger primary school will be more likely to attract aspiring headteachers in future.

**Sustainability**
5. Sustainability would be enhanced through becoming a larger primary school:
• a larger budget would enable a primary school to manage fluctuations in pupil numbers more readily than the smaller schools could do separately
• a larger school, with a larger budget, will be more able to cope with potential future reductions in pupil funding and hence have greater long term viability
• the range of teaching and leadership opportunities in a primary school are more likely to attract candidates for senior posts.
6. Experience across Surrey and nationally shows that it is difficult to recruit permanent Headteachers to smaller schools, particularly infant schools. Therefore it is likely that all the schools would encounter difficulties in recruiting a head in future if they remained as they are. The proposed amalgamated school would be more likely to recruit a head in future.

7. The opportunity for more distributive leadership in a split site school would facilitate succession planning through the development of future leaders via these roles. This would enable staff to progress to senior leadership roles within the larger school which would otherwise not be available. Being the teacher in charge of one of the sites within a larger school would provide a stepping stone to more senior roles including headship as well as access to the increasing number of executive headteacher roles.

8. The heads of the two infant schools and the Acting Head of the junior school are working together very effectively.

Viability of smaller schools

9. School funding is largely based on the number of pupils at a school. The more pupils at a school, the more funding a school receives. The highest proportion of a school's funding is used for staff costs. The highest individual staff cost is for a headteacher. The larger a school, the more staff it can afford.

10. Smaller schools are more likely to encounter long-term viability issues than larger schools as their income is lower and some fixed costs are difficult to reduce. The funding formula enhances the long-term viability of small schools by additional funding not provided to larger schools, thus increasing the funding relative to larger schools. This enables small schools to be able to afford a minimum level of staffing without going into deficit. This means that the typical cost per pupil in smaller schools is higher than that for larger schools.

11. Smaller schools are also more likely to encounter short-term viability issues than larger schools as their lower budget means they are less able to cope with changes in funding owing to fluctuations in pupil numbers.

12. Schools are now facing greater financial constraints than has been the case in recent years. It is likely that future funding will be tighter than it is now. If this is the case, the smaller schools are the most likely to become unviable. Moreover, it would be the case for any primary school that it would increase its viability were it to become a larger school.

Community Cohesion

13. The schools serve the same area of Camberley. There will be an enhancement in community cohesion were the schools to become a community primary school rather than remain separate infant and junior schools.

Pupil Numbers in the area

14. The number of births in the South Camberley planning area decreased to a minimum around the millennium, as happened elsewhere across Surrey. This led to fewer children starting school in Reception (YR) and a reduction in the Numbers on Roll (NOR) in all the primary schools.

15. The changes in numbers of births has been more pronounced in the South Camberley planning area than in the borough of Surrey Heath as a whole. The number of births in Surrey Heath, including South Camberley has recovered, although growth is slower than in other parts of Surrey. This increase in birth rate is leading to more children starting school and increasing NOR in primary schools across Surrey Heath.
16. Numbers at Camberley Infant School have remained consistently high over the years. Numbers at Bristow, however, fell, subsequent to The Watchetts having been judged to require special measures by Ofsted, but then recovered significantly. Numbers at Bristow fell again after The Watchetts was judged to require special measures for the second time. Nevertheless, numbers entering reception at the two infant schools indicate an underlying increasing trend. Numbers at The Watchetts fell after its adverse inspections although the numbers now appear to have stabilised.

17. This proposal would keep the number of infant and junior places at the schools the same. Numbers in the planning area are forecast to increase slowly. Therefore, keeping the current number of places is appropriate until it becomes necessary to increase the number of places available at the proposed amalgamated school.

Educational issues

18. On 7 November 2008 Ofsted judged Bristow Infant School to be a good school that enables its pupils to achieve well in both their academic and personal development.

19. On 26 November 2008 Ofsted judged Camberley Infant School to be a good school.

20. On 24 November 2003 Ofsted judged The Watchetts Junior School to require special measures. The Watchetts Junior School requiring special measures had an impact on the infant schools that fed into it as progression into junior provision is a factor of interest to parents/carers of infant pupils. In particular, the numbers at Bristow Infant School, which feeds into The Watchetts Junior School, dropped.

21. An action plan was put into places and standards at The Watchetts improved. On 7 and 8 March 2006 HMI carried out a monitoring visit judged that The Watchetts Junior School no longer required special measures and was placed in the Notice to Improve category. On 12 and 13 June 2007 was judged to be a satisfactory school and no longer required a notice to improve. On 26 March 2009 Ofsted carried out an inspection of the subject mathematics at The Watchetts and judged the overall effectiveness of the subject mathematics to be satisfactory.

22. On 23 and 24 June 2010 Ofsted judged The Watchetts Junior School to require special measures. SCC has put in significant investment into an intervention programme. The Watchetts has been partnered with a school in Buckinghamshire, which is a National Support School. The Head of the partner school, who is a National Leader of Education, was appointed Executive Headteacher and an Associate Headteacher from the partner school was appointed and they are providing intensive support.

23. On 18 January 2011 HMI carried out a monitoring visit and judged the school to be making satisfactory progress. It noted that the senior leadership team has implemented swift actions to promote a culture of rapid improvement and this culture is being shared by all staff. The school has a culture of high expectation of pupils and it is anticipated that the school will soon be judged no longer to require special measures, and, moreover, continue to make improvements in order to become a good school.

The area served by the schools

24. The schools are located in Camberley. Bristow School is about 250 m (0.16 miles) south of The Watchetts School and Camberley Infant School is about 1.3 km (0.8 miles) to the north, although the travelling distance is further. Bristow Infant School feeds into The Watchetts whilst Camberley Infant
pupils progress onto a range of schools, including The Watchetts. The distances given below are straight line distances.

25. The home addresses of pupils attending Bristow School are mostly distributed across South Camberley, with about half of pupils living within 1.0 km of the school, and nearly all pupils living within 1.5 km of the school. A small number of pupils live in the Kings Ride area, north of the A30 and to the east of the Royal Military Academy, and small number of pupils live on the Old Dean estate to the north east of that. Some pupils live south of the M3 in the Frimley area to the south east of the school. Some pupils live as far away as the Mytchett area to the south.

26. The home addresses of pupils attending Camberley Infant School are mainly distributed across South Camberley, with about half of pupils living within 1.0 km of the school, and nearly all pupils living within 1.5 km of the school. A large number of pupils live in the Kings Ride area, north of the A30 and to the east of the Royal Military Academy, and small number of pupils live on the Old Dean estate to the north east of that.

27. The home addresses of pupils attending The Watchetts School are distributed similarly to those at both Bristow and Camberley Infant Schools. Most pupils live in the South Camberley area. A small number of pupils live in the Kings Ride area, north of the A30 and to the east of the Royal Military Academy, and small number of pupils live on the Old Dean estate to the north east of that. Some pupils live south of the M3 in the Frimley area to the south east of the school and also some in the Farnborough Green area to the south of the school.

28. Therefore, the pupils that currently attend the schools mainly live close to each other in the same communities.

Options

No change

29. Bristow and Camberley Infant Schools would continue as they are.

30. The Watchetts Junior School would be likely to continue to improve at a satisfactory rate. Improvements in standards would be likely to result in an increase in popularity.

31. All three schools would be likely to encounter difficulties in recruiting a head teacher in the future.

32. Provision of an enhanced educational experience for the children in the communities served by the schools an amalgamated community primary school would not be achieved.

Amalgamate Camberley Infant School with Bristow Infant and The Watchetts Junior schools

33. There would be advantages if the schools were amalgamated to become a primary school. Amalgamation would also enhance the viability of the education provision in the area.

34. A primary school has educational and organisational advantages which would be of benefit to the children at the schools involved, as well as to the schools themselves.

35. The increased budget of a primary school, and its greater financial stability as well as resources would increase the sustainability of primary provision in the area served by the current schools.

36. Therefore, by offering parents/carers greater continuity, and as primary pupil numbers are rising, it appears likely that there would be a high performing and full amalgamated community primary school in the forthcoming years.
This would be beneficial to the children in the area served by the current schools.

**Financial and value for money implications**

37. Under the current Surrey funding formula the funding allocated to an amalgamated school would be less than that for the separate schools recognising that there would be a saving on the costs for one headteacher, and a saving in certain other fixed costs, but with an additional split site school element where the amalgamated school is a split site school. Since April 2011 there is an element of transition funding when schools amalgamate. Schools receive in the first year transition funding equivalent to 100% of the loss in flat rate/small school subsidy compared with that which would be given to the separate schools, 2/3 of this loss in the second year and 1/3 in the third year. In this case the schools have been guaranteed transition funding equivalent to 100% of the total funding that would be given to the separate schools, 80% in the second year and 60% in the third year. But any funding arrangements for 2012/13 must be subject to the council retaining control over the formula funding of Surrey schools. Any such commitments will require review should a national school level funding formula be introduced. There has recently been a consultation on introducing such a formula.

38. Where the amalgamated school's budget is less than the combined budgets of the schools which are amalgamated, there would, however, be no direct savings to SCC, as any difference in funding would be distributed throughout all schools.

39. It is anticipated that the amalgamated community primary school would increase in popularity, and therefore the pupil numbers would increase. This would increase the funding available to the school.

40. The implementation of the amalgamation proposal does not require any capital.

41. The proposed amalgamation would provide the most effective long-term provision to meet the needs of local children.

**Consultation**

42. There was wide-ranging consultation, including all those persons who are required to be consulted according to statutory requirements. The following were consulted: the governing body of all three school; the families of pupils, teachers and other staff at the school; the trade unions who represent staff in Surrey schools; all primary schools in the Borough of Surrey Heath; the Church of England and Roman Catholic Dioceses in which the school is located; the local MP; the local SCC Members; local borough councillors; SCC Early Years and Childcare Service.

43. There was extensive consultation over the proposal to amalgamate the three schools to form a split site community primary school. Initial discussions took place with the governing bodies of the three schools. The staff of the three schools were consulted and then wider consultation took place with the issuing of a Consultation Booklet.

44. Two public meetings were held at each of the three schools, one in the afternoon and one in the evening. These public meetings were not well attended.

45. A relatively small number of response forms were received.

**Consultation Response analysis**

46. There were 48 responses received by the deadline for submitting responses. Of these 41 were parents/carers of a child at one of the schools. There are
about 660 pupils at the schools, so this is a response rate of about 6% of the parents/carers of children at the schools depending on whether each child has one or two parents/carers and the number of children in the families. This is a low response rate.

47. The figures for percentages may not add up to 100% owing to rounding errors or where either more than one response was made, or where no response was made by respondents.

48. Of the total respondents, 56% supported the amalgamation proposal, 10% neither supported nor opposed the proposal, and 31% of respondents opposed the proposal.

49. The preferred process that Bristow Infant School would expand to become a primary school and both Camberley Infant and The Watchetts Junior Schools would close to become part of the primary school was less well supported. 50% of respondents supported the proposal to amalgamate the schools via the expansion of Bristow and the closure of Camberley Infant and The Watchetts, 17% neither supported nor opposed the process, and 29% opposed the process.

50. There was strong consensus that SCC should not hold a competition to find a sponsor for a new primary school. 4% of respondents supported holding a competition, 19% neither supported nor opposed holding a competition, and 73% opposed holding a competition.

51. Of those respondents with a child at a Bristow, 73% supported the amalgamation proposal, 9% neither supported nor opposed the proposal, and 18% of respondents opposed the proposal.

52. Of those respondents with a child at a Camberley Infant, 33% supported the amalgamation proposal, 0% neither supported nor opposed the proposal, and 67% of respondents opposed the proposal.

53. Of those respondents with a child at a The Watchetts, 60% supported the amalgamation proposal, 10% neither supported nor opposed the proposal, and 30% of respondents opposed the proposal.

54. Details are provided in the document "Proposed Camberley Primary Amalgamation Consultation Analysis", but the responses are summarised below with SCC’s observations upon them are given below.

**Particular Points**

**Point 1**

55. There was concern about the performance of The Watchetts

- the amalgamation should take place only after The Watchetts has improved
- the infant schools should not be used to improve The Watchetts
- the amalgamation would be detrimental to standards
- the amalgamated school should have extensive external monitoring to ensure standards do not fall back.

56. The Watchetts has a culture of high expectation and is making satisfactory progress. It is anticipated that it will no longer require Special Measures by Autumn 2011.

57. Sharing of good practice is beneficial to all parties. It leads to a raising of standards in both the donor and recipient school. The act of passing on good practice reinforces this practice in the one coaching or giving training as well as the recipient of the coaching or training. The current team working of the two heads of the infant schools and the acting head of the junior school is already proving beneficial to all three schools.
58. The amalgamated community primary school would be subject to Ofsted inspections in the normal way. Excessive external monitoring may not be the most effective way of ensuring sustained standards when a school has a strong culture of high expectations. The Shadow Amalgamation Committee is considering the issue of accountability and communication to parents/carers and if the amalgamation takes place they will take steps to deal with this issue.

**Point 2**

59. There was concern that having separate sites would cause issues:
- it is difficult to have the same culture across three sites
- children would experience transition when they move from an infant site to the junior site.

60. Having distributive leadership at a school is very effective. The headteacher does not have to be present at all times to be an effective leader of a school. The two current heads of the infant schools and the assistant head of the junior school are already working effectively together as a team. This good practice continuing would be beneficial to the schools.

61. The leadership team will work together to achieve a common culture of high expectation and to enhance the educational experience of pupils at the three sites.

**Point 3**

62. There is concern regarding the admission arrangements and the site which a child would attend:
- will a child attend the same site as their sibling?
- would it be possible to attend a site which is not the closest to the home address?
- will a child currently at a school be moved from one site to another site if that site is closer to their home address?

63. The initial admission process will be to apply for a place at the school, and then the site at which the child attends will be decided. Distance is the tie breaker, but the normal admissions criteria would apply before the tie-breaker is applied.

64. The headteacher of the school would have ultimate discretion over which site a child attends. It would, however, not be prudent to determine the admission arrangements to include this provision as it can lead to legal complications. A parent/carer would have the right of appeal if they were not allocated a place at the school as a whole, but not regarding the site at which their child would be educated.

65. Infant children already on roll at the schools will remain at the infant site that they currently attend (unless they are moving up into the junior section) and there is no proposal to move them to the site closest to their home address.

**Equalities implications**

66. The proposal would, if successful, lead to the formation of a community primary school. This would enhance educational provision for all children in the community served by the schools involved. Sustainable school provision to serve the communities currently served by the schools involved would enhance community cohesion to the benefit of all in the wider community. Some of the children are vulnerable children. Enhanced sustainability of provision would be of benefit to these young, vulnerable children and their families.
67. The proposal is for a process that should lead to the formation of a split site community primary school. The range of employment opportunities would be enhanced by the schools becoming a primary school, rather than remain separate infant and junior schools. Also, there would be greater professional development opportunities in a primary school compared with an infant school or junior school.

68. There would only be one headteacher at a primary school, reducing the number of headteacher posts available. However, this is to be viewed against the backdrop of the continuing shortage of headteachers. The two current heads of the infant schools would continue in posts as Leaders of the sites, which are senior management posts required for the split site primary school.

69. With an amalgamation it is possible that there would be a reduction in some posts, particularly ancillary or administrative posts in order to avoid duplication, and thus achieve best value. Surrey County Council (SCC) would work with staff to find alternative suitable employment, were this to be the case.

Risk management implications
60. It is possible that the proposed amalgamation would not be successful. either in terms of raising of standards or numbers of pupils.

61. SCC is confident that there would be effective strong leadership for the proposed amalgamated community primary school.

62. Numbers in the area are increasing. Moreover, numbers in the adjacent areas are increasing and so there will be more pressure on places generally, leading to increased numbers of pupils in schools in Camberley.

Implications for the Council’s Community Strategy priorities
63. The provision of sufficient school places contributes to the children and young people strand of the Community Strategy. Enabling local children to attend local schools enhances community cohesion, contributing towards safe and stronger communities.

64. The provision of sufficient school places where current parents/carers want them near to pupils’ homes reduces the need for car journeys, thus enabling more children to walk or cycle to school, promoting health and well being.

Climate change/carbon emissions implications
65. The County Council attaches great importance to being environmentally aware and wishes to show leadership in cutting carbon emissions and tackling climate change.

66. This proposal should be carbon neutral as it is proposed that the education provision at the three sites would continue. Therefore, there would not be an increase in car journeys which would increase carbon emissions.

67. As the school gains in popularity, some children would no longer be travelling to schools at a greater distance from their home addresses for their junior education. This would lead to a decrease in car journeys, leading to a reduction in carbon emissions.

Legal implications/legislative requirements
68. Section 1 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 inserts section 13A into the Education Act 1996, which places a duty on local education authorities (i.e. Local Authorities with responsibility for the functions of education in their area) to promote high standards and the fulfilment of potential. A local education authority shall exercise its functions with a view to promoting high standards, ensuring fair access to educational opportunity, and promoting
the fulfilment by every child concerned of his educational potential. The duty of promotion means a local education authority should be proactive in the discharge of its functions.

79. Section 13 of the Education Act 1996 places a general duty on local education authorities to secure that efficient primary education is available to meet the needs of the population of their area. Section 14 of the Education Act 1996 places a duty on local education authorities to secure that sufficient schools for providing primary education are available in their area. Section 5 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 places a duty to promote high standards. Therefore, there is a duty to provide efficient education and sufficient schools to do so.

80. Section 38 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 also places a duty on governing bodies of maintained schools in England to promote community cohesion. These proposals would support this duty by enabling children in the local community to attend a local community primary school.

Corporate Parenting/Looked After Children implications

81. This proposal would provide sustainable, viable primary education and enhance community cohesion. It would also lead to certainty of progression through school and improved performance, and so would be of benefit to the children and young people in the communities served by the schools. This means it would, therefore, also be of benefit to any looked after children who currently attend the three schools and would attend the amalgamated community primary school.

Section 151 Officer commentary

82. The Section 151 Officer confirms that all material financial and business issues have been taken into account in this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that the Cabinet Member authorises the publication of statutory notices such that Bristow Infant School, Camberley Infant School and The Watchetts Junior School, will amalgamate to become a new split site primary school from September 2012. The process will be:

- Camberley Infant and Nursery School will close as a separate school on 31 August 2012 and become part of the amalgamated community primary school
  - all children attending Camberley Infant will then be on roll at the new amalgamated community primary school
- The Watchetts Junior School will close as a separate school on 31 August 2012 and become part of the amalgamated community primary school
  - all children attending Watchetts children will then be on roll at the new amalgamated community primary school
- Bristow Infant and Nursery School will expand on 1 September 2012 to become a split site community primary school that will include the existing Camberley Infant and Nursery School and The Watchetts Junior School
- the Infant Published Admission Number (PAN) of the new school will be 110, with
  - 50 pupils at the Bristow site
  - 60 pupils at the Camberley Infant site
• the normal Surry admissions policy will operate, with the tie-breaker for allocation to each site will be the straight line distance from the child's home to the site:
  o up to 50 nearest children to the Bristow site would be allocated there
  o up to 60 nearest children to the Camberley Infant site would be allocated there

• the new primary school will have no separate junior PAN
  o infant pupils attending the Bristow site and the Camberley Infant site will automatically move on to junior places in the new primary school unless parents/carers choose to apply for a place at another school (transfer forms will not be automatically sent out to them)

The Children’s Centre would continue to operate on the Bristow Site, which would become one of the sites of the newly amalgamated Primary School. All three current sites will remain in use, catering for the same age groups as they do now.

**REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Provision of sustainable, viable primary education will be of benefit to the children and young people in the area served by the schools, leading to certainty of progression through school and improved performance.

**WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:**

Subject to Cabinet Member approval, Statutory Notices would be published. There will be a six week representation period. After the expiration of the six week representation period, the Cabinet Member will act as decision maker and determine the proposal. As the proposal entails closure of schools, the Leader will make the final decision, unless the Leader delegates to the Cabinet Member for Children and Learning the final decision regarding the closure of the schools.

**Contact Officer:**
Mark Burton, School Place Planning Manager, tel 020 8541 9142

**Consulted:**
Andrew Povey, Leader of the Council
Tim Hall, Cabinet Member for Change and Efficiency
Denis Fuller, County Councillor for Camberley West
Nick Wilson, Strategic Director – Children Schools & Families
Julie Fisher, Strategic Director – Change & Efficiency.

**Informed:**
Finance
Legal Services
Sources/background papers:
Consultation Booklet regarding the proposal to close Camberley Infant School
Camberley Infant Consultation analysis.