

CABINET MEMBER DECISION

Decision:

Public Questions

Details of decision

There were six questions received from members of the public.

As these all related to Item 6, Proposal to close Ripley CofE Primary School, the Cabinet Member took these questions as part of Item 6. The questions and responses are annexed to this decision sheet.

Decision taken by:

- (i) **Name:** Mrs Mary Lewis
- (ii) **Portfolio:** Cabinet Member for Education

Date of Decision: 08 May 2018

Date of Publication of Record of Decision: 09 May 2018

Date decision effective: 09 May 2018

CABINET MEMBER DECISION

Decision:

PROPOSAL TO CLOSE GREEN OAK CofE PRIMARY SCHOOL AND NURSERY

- (i) **Details of decision**

RESOLVED:

It was agreed that:

1. Statutory notices to close are not published.
2. The proposal to close the school is halted whilst further options that have arisen during the informal consultation process are fully explored.

- (ii) **Reasons for decision**

1. During the informal consultation, further options for the future of the school have arisen which require further time to be fully explored.
2. Outcomes for children at the school are improving. This is demonstrated through year 6 2017 outcomes comparative to 2016, the intervening Ofsted Monitoring Report and progress so far in the current academic year.
3. The numbers of children on roll at the school will help to maintain its future viability.

4. The places are required to meet future demand for school places. Closing the school would result in a significant capital cost to the Council for re-providing the places at alternative settings.

(iii) Details of any alternative options considered and rejected

None

(iv) Details of any consultation and representations received not included in the published report

None

Conflicts of Interest and any Dispensations Granted

(Any conflict of interest declared by any other Cabinet Member consulted in relation to the decision to be recorded and any dispensations granted by the Audit and Governance Committee): None

Decision taken by:

- (i) Name:** Mrs Mary Lewis
- (ii) Portfolio:** Cabinet Member for Education

Date of Decision: 08 May 2018

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Date decision effective (i.e. 5 working days after date of publication of record of decision unless subject to call-in by the Children and Education Select Committee):
17 May 2018

CABINET MEMBER DECISION

Decision:

PROPOSAL TO CLOSE RIPLEY CofE PRIMARY SCHOOL

(i) Details of decision

RESOLVED:

It was agreed that statutory notices to close are published.

(ii) Reasons for decision

1. No appropriate options for the future of the school have arisen during the informal consultation.
2. Outcomes for children at the school are being affected by the very low number of children on roll and the quality of teaching is variable.
3. The numbers of children currently on roll at the school (41) are problematic for future viability.

4. Projections for future need for school places indicate that future cohorts can be accommodated in adjacent areas.

(iii) Details of any alternative options considered and rejected

None

(iv) Details of any consultation and representations received not included in the published report

None

Conflicts of Interest and any Dispensations Granted

(Any conflict of interest declared by any other Cabinet Member consulted in relation to the decision to be recorded and any dispensations granted by the Audit and Governance Committee): None

Decision taken by:

- (i) **Name:** Mrs Mary Lewis
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Annex - Public Questions and Responses, submitted by Catherine Bremford

Q1. Can you provide evidence that the full consideration was given to Ripley Primary Schools special status as a rural school?

Accepting that the school has a designated rural status we can confirm as stated in the report, there are 2 schools that are less than 2 miles from Ripley primary school and a further 10 within 3 miles and therefore no students would be expected to travel more than a reasonable distance should Ripley close.

Under half of children remaining on roll at Ripley in years R to 5 reside in the village and will need to travel from the village for school. SCC is aware of its obligations to transport students where necessary as stated in the report.

Q2. Do you accept that neither SCC, the RSC nor the Diocese have fully explored all other alternatives (other than GST) to closing the school?

The Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) together with the Diocese are responsible for identifying and agree a suitable multi-academy trust (MAT) to take on the school. The Council understands that some MATs have approached the RSC, but none so far have been considered appropriate, for example, due to not being able to protect the religious character of the school.

Federations and amalgamations have also been options that the Governing Body have had open to them over recent years. The Council have encouraged these options to be explored but so far none have been deemed viable.

Q3. How does SCC ensure that all stakeholders such as Parish Councils, Borough/District Councils and Councillors and parents and residents at neighbouring schools are consulted? Please provide evidence that Ripley Parish Council, Guildford Borough Council and Councillors, and resident and parents at neighbouring schools and other stakeholders were consulted in the case of Ripley Primary School.

The aim of an informal consultation is to gather people's thoughts on the proposal. Local county councillors for whom education lies within their remit were fully briefed by the Cabinet Member. Notification of the consultation was sent to a wide range of stakeholders on 5th March 2018, including the Parish Council and Guildford Borough Council. A public meeting was held on 13th March at which representatives of the Parish Council were in attendance. The published minutes of the Parish Council meeting on 15th March state that notification of the consultation was received and a copy of the notification is included in the appendices to the minutes.

Maintained schools within 3 miles of the school were notified of the consultation and asked to circulate details to parents and carers. 185 local residents and 45 parents of children attending other schools responded to the consultation, as stated in the report for this meeting.

The report summarises the responses to the consultation. Responses will also be available for the Cabinet Member to refer to at the meeting. Only 121 respondents were current or future users of the schools. Although we recognise the community support for the school, it is not viable with such small take up of places.

If the proposal moves forward to statutory consultation, public notices will be placed in local press to ensure all are aware. Please do advise of any specific email addresses for notification of the statutory consultation, if that would be helpful.

Q4. If information presented proves that figures in the recommendation report are misleading/inaccurate, would you discard these inaccurate figures? Do you accept that the LA pupil planning forecast figures and the housing plans (2017-18) were grossly inaccurate (refer to accurate figures in Long Term GBC future housing forecast in the latest Local Plan)? Do you therefore accept that these figures should not be the basis for the decision about the future need for the school and Ripley CofE should be given more time to explore options?

School place planning has to be looked at across the county and not one area in isolation alone. Across the county projections are within 1% accuracy. However, these are estimates and they are estimates that change regularly as updated data on demographics, housing and pupil migration comes forward.

In the associated paragraph regarding this question (5), the enquirer's basis for inaccuracy of the figures is based on the number of children taking up places in Send and Ripley in September 2017. It should be noted that not only children from Send and Ripley joined the schools in that year, but also children from outside of the area.

A point widely raised in both responses received and at public meetings has concerned the identification of additional housing in the area that will have consequent implications for the demand for school places in the area.

Irrespective of the outcome of the consultation the Council retains the statutory duty to ensure a sufficiency of school places within its boundaries, and this includes providing places to meet the demand of additional housing in an area. If school places were required in the future in the locality, new provision at the existing school site could be explored. As the site has an education covenant its future uses are limited to that extent.

The Council is fully aware of the Wisley development which may come forward, subject to planning permission being granted. As stated in the report for this meeting, the development at Wisley would include a primary school if the development were to proceed. The same is applicable to the potential strategic development Gosden.

Q5. How can a school be issued with a Warning Notice for poor leadership and management and leadership when the LA (in this case SCC/Education Consultants such as Babcock), are responsible for failing to provide the adequate support?

A local Governing Body of any school is responsible for its management. In the case of Ripley school the chair of governors was told a Formal Warning Notice may be issued due to concerns around these duties not being fulfilled adequately and therefore a strategic direction for the school not being established.

Q6. Hypothetically, if a school is under threat of closure and the Diocese refuses to allow a MAT to take the school on, is there anything that the DfE or a local body could do to prevent the school from closing, or does the Church have the final say?

There is a memorandum of understanding between the National Society (Church of England) and the DfE. Within this Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) is obliged to consult with the Diocese with regard to any proposed academy sponsor to safeguard the religious character of schools.

Ripley School, as a CofE school within the Diocese of Guildford, falls under these arrangements. The MOU states that there may be circumstances where the RSC or the Diocese regard closure of a school (LA maintained or academy) as the only viable option.

Mrs Mary Lewis
Cabinet Member for Education
8 May 2018