

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**DENISE TURNER- STEWART, CABINET MEMBER FOR
EDUCATION AND LEARNING****DATE: 6 July 2021****LEAD OFFICER: RACHAEL WARDELL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR
CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LIFELONG LEARNING****SUBJECT: PROPOSAL TO CLOSE THE SIXTH FORM AT THE PRIORY CHURCH
OF ENGLAND (AIDED) SCHOOL, DORKING****SURREY**

ORGANISATION Growing A Sustainable Economy So Everyone Can Benefit/Empowering
STRATEGY Communities
PRIORITY AREA:

SUMMARY OF ISSUE:

The Governing Body of Priory Church of England (Aided) School proposed, in conjunction with Surrey County Council and the Diocese of Guildford, to close the sixth form provision at The Priory Church of England (Aided) School in Dorking from September 2022. The proposal will change the age range in the school from 11-18 years, to 11-16 years. In accordance with The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013 and the statutory guidance for proposers and decision-makers - 'Making significant changes ('prescribed alterations') to maintained schools', the local authority is the decision maker.

Current National Curriculum Year 12 students would complete their education at The Priory and the proposed closure would have no impact on the current National Curriculum Year 13 students.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that:

The Cabinet Member for Education and Learning determines the statutory notice published thereby bringing into effect the formal commencement of the proposals.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Learning may:

1. reject a proposal
2. approve a proposal without modification
3. approve a proposal with modifications, having consulted the LA and/or Governing Body (as appropriate)
4. approve a proposal, with or without modification – subject to certain conditions (such as the granting of planning permission) being met.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Over the last seven years, The Priory Church of England (Aided) School has seen a decline in the number of students attending the sixth form provision at the school. The school has a capacity of 200 places for post-16 pupils and as of January 2021 school census, only had 45 pupils on roll. Low sixth form numbers place a considerable financial burden on the overall school budget. The provision is underutilised and not sustainable to operate, therefore the Governing Body proposed, in conjunction with Surrey County Council and the Diocese of Guildford, that the sixth form provision be removed from September 2022.

DETAILS:

1. The Priory Church of England (Aided) School is a six-form entry secondary school with a current published admission number (PAN) of 180 places and a capacity of 900 places for pupils aged 11-16 years. In addition, the school has a sixth form (post-16) provision with a capacity of 200 places across National Curriculum Years 12-13 for pupils aged 16 to 18 years. The school is rated Good by Ofsted (March 2019).
2. The Department for Education guidance states that any new sixth form provision should provide at least 200 places and there should be sufficient demand for those places. Whilst The Priory Church of England (Aided) School has capacity for 200 places, Table 1 below shows a consistent decrease in occupancy. In 2016/17 occupancy was only at 56.5% of capacity and since then, demand for places has decreased by a further 34%. Sixth form occupancy in the current 2020/2021 academic year is at 22.5%.

Academic Year	Numbers on role	Capacity (200) levels
2016/17	113	56.5%
2017/18	73	36.5%
2018/19	45	22.5%
2019/20	49	24.5%
2020/21	45	22.5%

3. Of the current Year 12 cohort, only 18 pupils have chosen to remain at The Priory Church of England (VA) School for Year 13 in September 2021. These pupils will complete their sixth form education at The Priory Church of England (Aided) School for the academic year 2021/22.

4. There were only eight applications for Year 12 in September 2021 and it would not be financially viable to offer the range of courses required at year 12 with such low numbers. The school have worked with each pupil who had applied for Year 12 to secure alternative sixth form provision.
5. Funding for sixth form provision is provided by the Education and Skills Funding Agency on a formula basis that provides a national funding rate of £4,000 per student. However, delivering a meaningful breadth of provision and providing the range of options required to prepare students for their chosen university and career paths, is currently costing the school approximately £11,000 per student. It therefore continues to be a challenge for the school to offer a wide range of courses that are viable both educationally and economically on such low levels of students.
6. Benchmark data shows that viable sixth form provision should offer approximately 27 subjects to meet student demand. The school currently offers a total of 25 subjects. The current National Curriculum Year 12 were offered 25 subjects and are studying a range of 17. The current National Curriculum Year 13 were offered 25 subjects and are studying a range of 15. As a sixth form running under capacity, this is placing financial burden on the whole school as funding continues to be insufficient to cover the cost of delivery.
7. The Priory is committed to completing all sixth form courses already started and proposes to continue to provide high quality teaching and support, for all students who have embarked on their two-year A level course. Current National Curriculum Year 12 students would complete their education at The Priory in July 2022 and these students would receive a more personalised educational experience with academic and pastoral mentoring to ensure they achieve the best possible outcomes and secure excellent destination choices at the end of their studies. The proposed closure would have no impact on current National Curriculum Year 13 students.
8. As part of the existing careers provision, all National Curriculum Year 11 students are provided with the information and support required to make a positive transition from senior school to the next stage in their education, whether that is sixth form education at another school or college, vocational training or apprenticeships. Every National Curriculum Year 11 student will continue to be supported in securing the appropriate pathway that is right for them, and which closely matches their ambitions and aspirations.
9. The Priory Church of England (VA) School already has an established relationship with local feeder colleges including Reigate, East Surrey and The College of Richard Collyer (Collyers) which are a popular choice for National Curriculum Year 11 pupils. There are four other secondary schools with a post-16 provision, one in Dorking, two in Leatherhead and one in Effingham. There is sufficient capacity available to provide for the chosen pathways of each student across local schools and colleges listed for September 2021 and future years.
10. To continue with the retention of a small and unviable sixth form provision at The Priory Church of England (Aided) School would create an unsustainable financial burden on the school. The sixth form would have to be significantly subsidised by the funding received for younger students which, in turn, would

impact on the level of investment into the education of pupils from National Curriculum Years 7-11.

CONSULTATION:

11. The statutory process for making significant changes ('Prescribed Alterations') requires an informal period of consultation followed by the publication of statutory notices for four weeks during term time. The following people have been made aware of the proposals: parents/carers of children attending the school; employees and Governors of the school; relevant seven unions; local residents; other local schools; local borough and county councillors; and the School Admissions Forum.
12. The Surrey County Council published an informal consultation on www.surreysays.co.uk from 22 February 2021 to 19 April 2021. An online public meeting was offered on 10 March at 6pm but there were no requests to attend and the meeting was cancelled. 43 people responded to the consultation. There were 11 (26%) respondents who agreed with the proposal, 30 (70%) who disagreed with the proposal and two (4%) who did not know.
13. 17 of the 43 respondents left comments with the main concerns relating to the impact the closure might have on children and young people or any families on low incomes. Other respondents raised concerns about the impact on the profile of the school in the local community. Respondents who agreed with the proposal felt the closure would benefit the school financially and that a smaller school may be a benefit to some pupils.
14. Statutory notices were published on www.surreysays.co.uk from 16 May to 21 June 2021. The long notice is attached as **Annex 1**. The notice was published in the local paper on 13 May. Four people responded to the consultation. All four respondents disagreed with the proposal.
15. The full consultation analysis report is attached as **Annex 2**.

RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:

16. Continuation of the sixth form provision would place the school at serious risk of financial deficit. Budget projections show the school is unable to sustain current spending levels which if not addressed could see the school falling into an increasing deficit across the next three years. Detailed analysis of spending patterns has identified much of this deficit would be caused by the low pupil numbers attracting sixth form funding against the high cost of delivering a wide and engaging level of course options. Current provision is subsidised by both the main delegated funding received for its 11 to 16 years old provision and surplus balances held from previous years. The use of all surplus balances to sustain the sixth form provision is a short-term fix but

risks the school having no reserves to support planned replacement and maintenance of such areas as ICT or premises related improvements.

17. The proposed closure of the sixth form would provide the school with a net saving of £270k per annum. This can be utilised to enhance teaching and learning across its 11 to 16 age range. To achieve these savings, the School will need to undertake a staffing restructure which may need to include a provision for redundancy. However, many staff work across both the 11 to 16 age and post 16 provision, and it is anticipated that the timescales set for the proposed closure will be providing opportunities for staff to access other roles that may arise within the school itself or in other local settings.

Financial and value for money implications:

18. The proposed closure may result in some redundancy costs if opportunities for redeployment are limited which would need to be met by the Council and can be funded from existing budgets.
19. There are no direct costs associated with this action for the school. The closure of the sixth form would see an in-year adjustment to ESFA grant funding. This is expected to be more than offset by the reduction in costs resulting in significant budget savings which demonstrate the school can deliver a sustainable balanced budget in future years.

Section 151 Officer commentary:

20. Although significant progress has been made over the last twelve months to improve the Council's financial position, the medium-term financial outlook beyond 2021/22 remains uncertain. The public health crisis has resulted in increased costs which may not be fully funded. With uncertainty about the ongoing impact of this and no clarity on the extent to which both central and local funding sources might be affected in the medium term, our working assumption is that financial resources will continue to be constrained, as they have been for the majority of the past decade. This places an onus on the Council to continue to consider issues of financial sustainability as a priority in order to ensure stable provision of services in the medium term. These proposals will not impact on the Council's financial position but could help the financial stability of The Priory Church of England (Aided) School and as such The Section 151 Officer supports the proposal.

Legal implications – Monitoring Officer:

21. Admission authorities are permitted to make an alteration of upper or lower age range by three or more years by following the statutory process.
22. The Governing Body of the Priory Church of England (Aided) School is the admissions authority and consequently the Proposer of this alteration because the school is a foundation category school.
23. The Governing Body has carried out a statutory process which complies with the legislation (*The Education and Inspections Act 2006* and *The School*

Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013) and the Statutory Guidance on prescribed alterations in maintained schools.

24. The best value duty is contained in s3 of the Local Government Act 1999 as a result of which the Council is under a duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. The relevant guidance states that Councils should consider overall value, including economic, environmental and social value when reviewing service provision.

Equalities and diversity:

25. The Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) for the proposal is attached to this report as **Annex 3**.

Corporate Parenting/Looked After Children implications:

26. No significant implications arising from this report

Safeguarding responsibilities for vulnerable children and adults implications:

27. Safeguarding vulnerable children is a high priority in all Surrey schools. Schools have considerable expertise in safeguarding vulnerable children and adhere to robust procedures. The school will continue to apply good practise in the area of safeguarding as they do currently. In addition, safeguarding is a key area for monitoring when Ofsted carries out inspections.

Environmental sustainability implications:

28. No significant implications arising from this report.

Public Health implications:

29. No significant implications arising from this report.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

30. Subject to the Cabinet Member determining the statutory notices the Governing Body of The Priory Church of England (Aided) School, in co-operation with Surrey County Council and Diocese of Guildford will proceed to implement the proposal for September 2022.

Contact Officer:

Lisa Way, Commissioning Manager.

Consulted:

Headteacher The Priory CE (Aided) School
Governing Body of The Priory CE (Aided) School

Staff of The Priory CE (Aided) School
Parents/carers of children attending The Priory CE (Aided) School
Diocese of Guildford
Other diocesan representatives
Local primary and secondary schools
Cllr Julie Iles, Former Cabinet Member for All Age Learning
Cllr Denise Turner Stewart, Cabinet Member for Education and Learning
County and Borough Councillors
Mayor of Mole Valley
Schools Forum
Family Voice
Union representatives
Surrey Bulletin
Rachael Wardell, Executive Director
Liz Mills, Director Education and Lifelong Learning
Jane Edwards, Assistant Director Education
Department for Education

Annexes:

Annexe 1 – Statutory Notice (long version)
Annexe 2 - Consultation Analysis
Annexe 3 – Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

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