

North Somerset Council

REPORT TO THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES POLICY AND SCRUTINY PANEL

DATE OF MEETING: 12 SEPTEMBER 2014

SUBJECT OF REPORT: PROPOSED CHANGES AT ST NICHOLAS CHANTRY C OF E PRIMARY SCHOOL, CLEVEDON

TOWN OR PARISH: CLEVEDON

OFFICER/MEMBER PRESENTING: SHEILA SMITH, DIRECTOR OF PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

KEY DECISION: YES

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the CYPS Policy and Scrutiny Panel recommends that the Executive Member for Children & Young People's Services approves the publication of a Statutory Notice to expand the provision at the St Nicholas Chantry C of E Primary School from a 315 to a 420-place primary school formally with effect from 1 September 2015.

1. SUMMARY OF REPORT

- 1.1 The Executive Member for Children & Young People's Services gave his approval to commence the statutory consultation process to make changes at St Nicholas Chantry C of E Primary School (St Nicholas Chantry) on 29 April 2014.
- 1.2 Stage 1 of the three-stage School Organisation process commenced on Monday 2 June 2014 and ended on 11 July 2014. This included an on-line consultation, the distribution of 500 paper questionnaires, including 200 questionnaires to homes neighbouring the school, and two public meetings. A total of 41 responses were received (29 paper and 12 via the Council's on-line consultation facility (Econsult)). This represented a 5.8% response rate for paper questionnaires. Comments about the proposal were recorded at the public meetings.

Of the 41 written responses received, 28 (68.3%) supported the changes proposed, 12 (29.3%) were against the proposal and 1 (2.4%) expressed no view.

Two public meetings were held on the afternoon and evening of 2 July 2014. Whilst those present indicated overall support to the proposals, they raised concerns in respect of traffic and transport issues.

- 1.3 The aim of the changes at St Nicholas Chantry is to provide additional school places for the town of Clevedon and to enhance the school's learning environment.
- 1.4 The Council's Executive Committee approved, at their meeting on 15 April 2014, a c£1.5m capital scheme to make the necessary changes at St Nicholas Chantry. Work is progressing on a scheme that will replace two of the existing twelve classrooms

and create four new classrooms (taking the school to 14 class bases in total), some additional toilets and new group rooms. Enhancements to the corridor at the back of the school will also be made.

A planning application for changes at the school was submitted on 7 August 2014 (14/P/1752/F) with a consultation expiry date of 18 September 2014. A decision by North Somerset Council to the scheme is expected by October 2014.

- 1.5 The decisions as to whether or not to progress the scheme are dependant on two separate approvals. Before a final school place expansion decision is made, agreement to the physical increases of the school buildings will need to be determined as part of the planning approval process. If agreed, a final decision as to whether or not to expand the school will be made by the Council's Executive. They will consider the benefits and opportunities of the proposal for the whole community when compared with the any risks and any opposition to the scheme.

2. POLICY

- 2.1 The Council's agreed Education Provision in North Somerset ~ A Commissioning Strategy 2012 – 2015 is the policy base for any local decisions.
- 2.2 Regulations 4 and 5 of the Prescribed Alterations Regulations 2013 set out the prescribed alterations that can be made by governing bodies and by Local Authorities (LAs) in respect of each type of school.

Governing Bodies of Voluntary Schools (VC) can expand their school without following a statutory process.

The Local Authorities (LAs) can expand the same VC school but must follow a statutory process if:

- The proposed enlargement is permanent and it would increase the capacity (physical enlargement) of the school by:
 - a. more than 30 pupils; **and**
 - b. by 25% or 200 pupils (whichever is the lesser)
- The proposal involves making permanent a temporary enlargement that meets the above thresholds.

- 2.3 LAs are under a statutory duty to ensure that there are sufficient school places in their area, promote high educational standards, ensure fair access to educational opportunity and promote the fulfilment of every child's educational potential. They must also promote diversity and increase parental choice.
- 2.4 The Council will not normally expand a popular school that admits a significant percentage of its pupil population from outside of its local area or where significant vacancies exist at neighbouring schools (within 2 miles for a primary school and 3 miles for a secondary school). When reviewing demand for school places it will consider the numbers of pupils in and around the locality of the school as well as demand for school places and act in the interests of all schools and all parents in the community to provide Best Value school places.
- 2.5 Schools are considered for expansion when the following can be shown:

- good or outstanding Ofsted outcomes
- a proven demand for places
- that the site can accommodate at least an extra 105 pupils from current published admission levels with the resulting increased buildings and resources
- where any building works will increase capacity but also enhance the current site and assist to resolve condition issues
- where the increase fits with the Council's strategic principles as outlined in its commissioning strategy

3. DETAILS

- 3.1 Legislation dictates the interested parties who should be consulted about changes in school organisation. This includes groups such as the pupils, staff, parents Governors, all schools in the surrounding area, the school's local MP and Councillors, Clevedon Town Council, the Diocese of Clifton and Diocese of Bath & Wells, Staff Professional Associations, Early Years Providers and other members of the general public. A consultation questionnaire was sent to all necessary consultees. In addition, consultation documentation was also published on the Council's Website. A summary of responses is given in section 4 of this report.
- 3.2 It is acknowledged there is a need to provide extra primary school places for the residents of Clevedon. North Somerset Council only has resources currently to expand one existing school. Working to the principles of its latest Commissioning Strategy, an expansion of St Nicholas Chantry will enhance the numbers of places in Clevedon available at a school rated by Ofsted as a 'good' school; it will create extra places at a school that consistently is unable to meet the demand for its places; it will enhance the provision available to new and other pupils at the school; and the changes are capable of being accommodated on the site without compromise to the standards and facilities needed to provide effective education.
- 3.3 The changes at St Nicholas Chantry are the only viable recommendation being made by the Council as part of a solution to create extra school places from September 2015. A request has been made for the Council to look into creating a new school building on a specified new site. Regrettably the investigations undertaken to date show that whilst in Council ownership, the significant planning matters that would need to be overcome to obtain planning permission are such that this site is not suitable for school provision and should not be promoted as a potential school site as a matter of course.
- 3.4 Some have asked why changes are not to be progressed at two other local schools. Regrettably these schools do not currently meet the requirements for expansion set out by the Department for Education (DfE) and the Council's Commissioning Strategy.
- 3.5 The staff and governors of St Nicholas Chantry have also been consultees in relation to the proposed changes at their school. Within this remit they have been working closely with officers to look to see how the proposed changes at their school could be progressed. The Governing Body formally gave their support to the changes following a vote at their meeting in June 2014.
- 3.6 Educationally it is felt that the changes proposed at St Nicolas Chantry will benefit new and existing pupils. The size of the proposed four new class bases are almost twice that of the two current classrooms that will be replaced as part of the proposed

building upgrades. These class bases will be re-used as much needed group rooms. This will enhance the facilities for existing and additional pupils. There will be an emphasis within the build design of what will work best to support children's learning and enjoyment of school.

- 3.7 A bigger school will have a larger number of staff that, in turn, can result in a greater number of specialist teachers and staff.

420-place primary schools are considered to be an optimum size for a primary school. As with all schools, their success is based on good quality leadership and management and their ability to ensure effectiveness in all areas of school life. A larger school should not impact on the special relationship a child has with their own class teacher.

The school will not increase to a 420-place school instantly, but will grow over time.

- 3.8 To meet the September 2015 deadline for extra new school places, a planning application has been submitted. Those who wish to make comments about the planning application are encouraged to do so via the Council's on-line comments facility at <http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Environment/planning/searchandsubmit/> Travel and traffic considerations and possible solutions form part of the planning application and, whilst shown below, are not considered in detail in this report.

- 3.9 There is significant concern in Clevedon that the changes proposed at the school will have a detrimental affect on the transport infrastructure of the town and on the safety of a child's walking journey to school. Concerns were concentrated on:

- The impact that extra vehicle journeys to the school will have on the infrastructures surrounding the school
- Safety and access to the site by pupils and parents/carers

All schools experience some issues with traffic on and around the school site at the start and end of the school day. The Council is aware of the concerns of parents and residents. Increasing the numbers of places available at the school will increase the numbers of pupils requiring access to the site.

The latest travel survey for St Nicholas Chantry shows that 50% of pupils walk to school, 22% car share their journey to school and 24% are driven alone by their parent/carer to school. Whilst the school's promotion of car sharing is the 3rd best within the district, too many local pupils are still being transported to school by unsustainable transport methods.

- 3.10 A Traffic Assessment was undertaken in April 2014 as part of the planning application research. The assessment took into account the flow of traffic to the school and factored in changes to this to account for different seasons and weather conditions. The findings showed that the proposed school expansion might result in an additional 6 cars arriving to drop off and collect children for each additional 15 pupils that could attend the school. This may increase incrementally each year so that by the time the school had up to 420 pupils, an additional 35 cars may want access to the site over the 30 minutes at the start and end of the school day.

- 3.11 The site and land restrictions surrounding St Nicholas Chantry mean that there is no easy solution to address transport concerns. The only way to resolve many of the issues experienced by parents and residents is to encourage those who can use more sustainable forms of travel to school to do so. The school now has an established 'Transport to School' Group that includes parents and local residents.

Together this school group has and will continue to explore the potential to reduce congestion, traffic speeds and improve the safety of the school environment through effective traffic management measures.

The School's Updated School Traffic Plan aims to:

- Provide for safe access and arrival when pupils travel to school
- Manage safe access for pedestrians, especially at the school's main entrance in Highdale Avenue
- Encourage good neighbourly on-street parking to support walking to school within a 10 minute walking zone
- Manage a strict staff and visitor car parking policy
- Also manage a strict 'stop and drop' policy on the school's horse-shoe entrance on Highdale Avenue
- Increase levels of walking, scooting and cycling to school
- Maintain awareness of safe travel issues and the travel plan through the work of the school Pupil Council

3.12 Some of the actions to be addressed by the school's new School Travel Plan are as below:

Within 12 months

- Publish a 3-fold 'Travel to School' leaflet advising families on how to access the school and informing on car parking and 'park and drop' policies
- Promote car sharing for all school staff
- Introduce a strict 'stop and drop' policy on school entrance drive on Highdale Avenue
- Introduce a strict car parking policy for full/part time staff
- Review and refresh all School Keep Clear (SKC) highway markings which have Traffic Road Order (TRO) enforcement plates on Highdale Avenue and Highdale Road
- Maintain the cut back of green hedging typically on Highdale Road and at Highdale Farm boundary on Highdale Avenue
- Publish a 'Safe route to school' map to include 10 minute walk zone on routes to school, to be developed by pupils in class/school council/by school champions
- Review traffic management issues of adjacent roads, with the expectation of continued support from North Somerset Council
- Carry out a survey of the Chapel Hill junction
- Further investigate the option of creating a drop-off zone on Highdale Road

Within 2 years

- All school information for new parents will include a travel to school leaflet, highlighting the school's travel policy
- Pupil/class walk/scoot school incentive schemes will be introduced to celebrate success e.g. distance walked, car share buddies, champion in each year group
- Regular class travel surveys
- A Years 5 and 6 walk to school ambassadors/buddy scheme will be in place

- Develop a calendar programme of travel related initiatives and events; e.g., Walk on Wednesday
- Review cycle and scooter on-site storage

Within 3 years

- Review impact of informal on-street parking on residential roads maintaining ‘good neighbours’ scheme with residents
- Research and develop Thackeray Road ‘park and stride’ scheme for footpath route through Fir Wood. Look at opportunities to improve community access
- Review traffic management issues of adjacent roads, with the expectation of continued support from North Somerset Council

3.13 St Nicholas Chantry was last inspected in June 2011 when it was found to be an Ofsted rated ‘good school’. An Interim Assessment took place in March 2014. The interim assessment showed that the school’s performance had been sustained and that the next full inspection had been deferred until the summer term 2015.

4. CONSULTATION

4.1 A consultation questionnaire was sent to all necessary consultees. In addition, consultation documentation was also published on the Council’s Website and advertised by the school communities.

Public Responses

4.2 500 paper questionnaires were sent to stakeholders of the school including 200 to close neighbours. Consultees were asked if they were supportive of the proposed change and given the opportunity to provide comments. At the end of the consultation, a total of 29 paper and 12 electronic responses (total of 41) were received. Details of the responses are given below:

	Yes	No	No View	Total
Based on the information you have been given, do you agree with the proposals to increase the size of St Nicholas Chantry School from its current capacity of 315 pupils to a capacity of 420 pupils with effect from September 2015	28 (68.3%)	12 (29.3%)	1 (2.4%)	41 (100%)

Full details of the responses received can be found at:
<http://consult.n-somerset.gov.uk/consult.ti/StNick/consultationHome>

Those in favour of the change mainly cited the need for more local school places and improved school buildings. Those against the change (mostly local residents) were predominately against the expansion as they have concerns about the potential increase in traffic outside the school at drop-off and collection times. There were also some concerns about the proposed size of school.

Over 70% of all responses received expressed concerns about the increase in traffic and parking (inappropriate parking and drop off and pick up times).

- 4.3 Two public meetings were held on the afternoon and evening of 2 July 2014. Attendance was as below:

	Afternoon Meeting	Evening Meeting
Parents	2	2
Future Pupils	1	-
Governors	4	8
Total	7	10

A number of parents (10) who did not attend the public meeting but were collecting their children from school came to speak to officers after the afternoon meeting. They viewed the plans.

Overall there was support for the changes with some concerns around the implications for traffic in and around Highdale Avenue.

At a stakeholder's request, officers have further investigated the possibility of a safe crossing at Hill Road/Chapel Hill. After investigations, officers were advised that due to the setting of the local roads and junctions the site is not suited to a formal crossing. Drop kerbs and tactile paving has been recently installed to try and direct pedestrians to a safer road crossing point so that visibility is improved. Regrettably the locality is not suited to a zebra crossing. Although an official audit has not been undertaken, it is known that footfall is well below minimum requirements. A crossing at this location is unlikely to be used for most of the day apart from school run times and would give a false message to motorists that pedestrians do not use this crossing.

- 4.4 Residents of Highdale Avenue, Highdale Road and Old Street (around 150+ households) were invited to a pre-consultation meeting on 1 July 2014 where draft plans for the expansion of the school were also shared. Eight residents attended the meeting. Plans for the site, options to reduce the traffic concerns, the consultation process and timelines were shared. In general, the expansion was supported with the caveat that traffic and transport matters would continue to need to be considered and, wherever possible, mitigated.
- 4.5 In addition to the formal consultation questionnaires, Clevedon Town Council responded with some questions about alternative schools/sites and traffic mitigation. These have been addressed by officers. The response to their queries mirrors the contents of sections 3.2 and 3.9 – 3.12 above.

Pupil responses

- 4.6 A meeting was held on 9 July 2014 between a Council officer and the St Nicholas Chantry Pupil Council. The pupils received further details of the proposed expansion of their school from its current 315 to 420 pupil places.

The pupils observed that one of the benefits of the change was that the school would be made bigger. If there were more local applicants wanting places in the future, with the extra places these pupils were more likely to have a school place within the town.

The pupils were pleased to note that whilst doing the expansion work, other improvement works would be undertaken that would be of benefit to the whole school.

The Pupil Council was supportive of the proposed changes but felt that the following issues needed to be addressed:

- Neighbours concerns
- Mitigation if, as a result of the increase in pupil numbers, there are more cars and increased traffic congestion on Highdale Road and Highdale Avenue

The pupils thought a poster campaign encouraging pupils and parents to use more sustainable and considerate means of transport might help. Actions that might be highlighted in the campaign could include the fact that the vast majority of pupils at St Nicholas Chantry live within a 10 minute walk of the school; pupils should cycle/scoot home as well as to school; dropping pupils off further away from the school (with older pupils being dropped even further) so they can walk part of the way to school; sharing a detailed knowledge of the area to encourage parents to 'park and stride'; and pupils getting recognised for walking/scooting/cycling to school via the 'merit' scheme getting more merits each time they didn't travel in a car.

Staff responses

- 4.7 All staff were provided with copies of the consultation material and invited to attend the consultation events. As the school is to be expanded there should be opportunities for the changes to offer greater opportunities for professional development and career advancement. In accordance with legislation where changes in staff contracts are necessary, these will only be progressed (if appropriate) following an appropriate period of consultation.

The one member of staff against the proposal expressed concerns about traffic and transport around the school, together with the amount of hard standing play space.

General comments

- 4.8 Some responses highlighted the removal of denomination transport as a possible reason for the projected shortfall of places in Clevedon. The right to free home to school transport for those wishing to attend a particular school because of their faith was removed as an entitlement from September 2008 onwards. The 'catchment area' for pupils attending faith schools, particularly Catholic schools, covers a wider geographical area than single towns and villages. In supporting 'local schools for local children' the Council is expanding the opportunity for all pupils in Clevedon, irrespective of their religious beliefs, to be able to attend a Clevedon School. Parental preferences in relation to their school choices are a matter for individual families to determine.

- 4.9 The community had full opportunities to make its views clear during the consultation process. All responses are available on the Council's web site at:

<http://consult.n-somerset.gov.uk/consult.ti/StNick/consultationHome>

- 4.10 The School Organisation Scrutiny Group met on 28 August 2014 and reviewed the consultation responses. The Group was supportive of the consultation being progressed to the next stage.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Schools delegated budget shares are mainly based on their pupil numbers as at October preceding the financial year. Additional funding is available to schools that

have a significant pupil growth during the financial year. One of the triggers for being eligible for this additional funding is lowered from 5 to 2% when schools are increasing their intake number by 15 or more at the request of the Local Authority. This would apply to St Nicholas Chantry until the point that the changes have filtered through each of the year groups in the school.

- 5.2 This proposal will have some impact on the individual schools' revenue budgets (as detailed in above) and the overall schools budget, funded by the dedicated schools grant through the strategic schools forum. There are no school-base revenue implications for the Council.
- 5.3 A budget of c£1.5m has been set aside to cover the cost of the necessary capital works at the school. The works will take place (if agreed) from early in 2015, with the final changes in place by September 2015 at the latest.
- 5.4 The cost of transporting pupils to schools outside of Clevedon is estimated to be in the region of £25k pa per year group. This revenue cost would cover a period of up to 7 years per cohort

6. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 6.1 If there are no changes made the status quo will be retained. Some children living in Clevedon may need to be offered school places at schools some distance from their homes. Such allocations could lead to an increase in the Council's home-to school transport budget as there would be no local school available for these pupils.
- 6.2 Should there be planning objections to the scheme further approvals may be required. This would increase the risks of delivery of the project, although there is a presumption in planning law that schemes for school projects should be approved unless the changes proposed would have a significant detrimental impact on the local community. It is hoped that this is not the case for this scheme.
- 6.3 The support of the community to this scheme is partly dependant on there being better transport options for parents accessing the site. It will never be possible for the school or Council to stop pupils travelling to school by car, or to ensure that inconsiderate parking is not an issue around any school site. It is recognised that further work with the community is needed to ensure that the routes to school by vehicles or other methods of transport is as safe and considerate as possible. This process is ongoing.
- 6.4 The application process for new school starters for the 2015/16 school year will commence in mid-September 2014. Offers are due to be made on 16 April 2015. The Starting School ~ Guide for Parents 2015 may need to state that the increase in places at St Nicholas Chantry is subject to the completion of the 3-stage consultation process that includes a final approval by the Council's Executive Committee. A request for a decision by the Executive Committee is provisionally expected to be made by February 2015 at the latest. This would only be progressed at that time if planning permission is granted.

7. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The change in school organisation structure should have no affect on equality issues. It should enable more school places to be available in Clevedon and so aid parental choice for the majority of residents

7.2 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and is available on request.

8. CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Council policy is to support the provision of local schools for local children.

8.2 Officers from the People & Communities and the Development and Environment directorates have been working together to see how the concerns of the Highways Authority and residents in relation to planning and transport issues might be addressed. The 'Transport to School' Group will work to mitigate any transport issues as much as possible within the resources available. It has been recognised that reasonable endeavours to attempt to mitigate the impact of the expansion have been made.

8.3 The Council will need to balance its statutory requirements to provide sufficient school places against its duty to follow planning regulations and make its determinations accordingly.

9. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

9.1.1 To expand other schools within Clevedon. St Nicholas Chantry best meets the criteria for expansion detailed in the Council's approved Education Provision in North Somerset ~ A Commissioning Strategy 2012 – 2015.

9.2 To look to build a new school. Regrettably no suitable new site is available within Clevedon's current settlement boundary.

AUTHOR

Sally Varley
Service Leader - CYPS Planning & Access Service
Children & Young People's Services
North Somerset Council

Tel: 01275 884 857

Mobile: 07917 587280

Fax: 01275 884168

Post: Town Hall, Walliscote Grove Road, Weston-super-Mare, BS23 1UJ

Web: www.n-somerset.gov.uk

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- CYPS Policy and Scrutiny Panel ~ 28 March 2014
- Decision Sheet CS28 ~ 29 April 2014
- Education Provision in North Somerset ~ A Commissioning Strategy 2012 - 2015