

## **REPORT TO THE CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE POLICY & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**DATE OF MEETING: 14 JULY 2016**

**SUBJECT OF REPORT: EXPANSION OF FLAX BOURTON C OF E PRIMARY SCHOOL, FLAX BOURTON**

**TOWN OR PARISH: FLAX BOURTON**

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

**KEY DECISION: NO**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the CYPS Policy and Scrutiny Panel supports a recommendation to be submitted to the Executive Member for Children & Young People's Services to approve the commencement of the statutory process and the publication, if appropriate, of a Statutory Notice by the Council to expand the provision at the Flax Bourton C of E Primary School. If approved, the school would expand from a 105 to a 210-place primary school formally with effect from 1 September 2018.

#### **1. SUMMARY OF REPORT**

- 1.1 There is a projected growth in demand for primary school places in and around the village of Flax Bourton. This was confirmed with the demand for places in September 2016 that exceeded supply. Projections from 2017 onwards support this excess in demand for currently available places.
- 1.2 This report seeks support to permanently increase the capacity of Flax Bourton C of E Primary School (Flax Bourton School) to meet the projected growth in demand in school places formally from September 2018, although if a physical expansion could be in place earlier, the school may accept additional pupils into its reception year group from September 2017 at the very earliest. This increase in provision is to support the extra demand from the village of Flax Bourton and other nearby villages/hamlets in this part of the Backwell cluster.

#### **POLICY**

- 2.1 The Council's agreed Education Provision in North Somerset [~ A Commissioning Strategy 2015 – 2018](#) is the policy base for any local decisions.

2.2 Local Authorities (LAs) are under a statutory duty to ensure there are sufficient school places in their area. The Prescribed Alterations Regulations 2016 state that a statutory process must be followed if:

- the proposed enlargement of the premises of a school is permanent (longer than three years) and would increase the capacity of a 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.

The changes at Flax Bourton School will increase pupil numbers by 105 pupils (more than 30 pupils and by 50%).

Governing Bodies of all categories of mainstream schools and LAs can propose smaller expansions that do not meet the above thresholds without the need to follow a formal process. Often this can be achieved solely by increasing the school's published admission number (PAN). A formal process must, however, be followed on this occasion.

2.3 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.

2.4 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 At the time of submitting this report, Flax Bourton C of E Primary School (Flax Bourton School) had 117 pupils on roll for their 105 places. The school's Planned Admission Number (PAN) that sets the numbers of pupils that should join the school in the reception class each year, is officially set at 15 pupils per cohort. In 2016 it is expected that 30 new YR pupils will enter the school, resulting in an increase to 134 pupils on roll. The school accepted 15 additional YR pupils (30 in total) in 2015 and the increases in 2016 will be the 2<sup>nd</sup> time in 2 consecutive years that Flax Bourton School will have 'breached' their PAN. It is anticipated that demand for new reception classes

(YR intake) between 2017 – 2019 will continue to exceed the school’s current admission level.

- 3.2 Flax Bourton School meets the local criteria for being considered for an increase in pupil places, being judged an outstanding school in March 2015.
- 3.3 The Council has been working with senior staff and governors at Flax Bourton School to determine whether a permanent increase in provision should be made. The Council’s Education Provision in North Somerset ~ A Commissioning Strategy 2015 – 2018 promotes the aim of local children being able to access a school place at their nearest school. The Council funded and delivered an extra permanent classroom and an expansion to the school’s staff room in the 2015/16 school year to enable the school to accommodate the additional pupils currently and to be on roll from September 2016. This additional accommodation brings the school’s classroom capacity up to 5. Plans about how to physically expand the school to accommodate an additional 2 class bases, relocate the reception and staff office and expand the school’s hall and kitchen is currently being discussed.
- 3.4 The Council reviews its pupil projections on an annual basis. The latest published projections for new intakes into the schools in the Backwell A cluster are as below:

|   | 2016 provisional PAN | 2016 projected demand | 2016 diff to PAN | 2017 provisional PAN | 2017 projected demand | 2017 diff to PAN | 2018 provisional PAN | 2018 projected demand | 2018 diff to PAN | 2019 provisional PAN | 2019 projected demand | 2019 diff to PAN |
|---|----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| <b>Projected Reception pupil numbers 2016-2019 excluding pupils from new housing.</b> |                      |                       |                  |                      |                       |                  |                      |                       |                  |                      |                       |                  |
| <b>Backwell</b>   |                      |                       |                  |                      |                       |                  |                      |                       |                  |                      |                       |                  |
| <b>Backwell A (Long Ashton &amp; Flax Bourton)</b>                                    |                      |                       |                  |                      |                       |                  |                      |                       |                  |                      |                       |                  |
| Birdwell Primary  | 60                   | 59                    | 1                | 60                   | 60                    | 0                | 60                   | 56                    | 4                | 60                   | 58                    | 2                |
| Flax Bourton CE Primary School  | 15                   | 16                    | -1               | 15                   | 17                    | -2               | 15                   | 14                    | 1                | 15                   | 16                    | -1               |
| Northleaze VC Primary School  | 30                   | 29                    | 1                | 30                   | 31                    | -1               | 30                   | 28                    | 2                | 30                   | 30                    | 0                |
| <b>Backwell A total</b>   | <b>105</b>           | <b>104</b>            | <b>1</b>         | <b>105</b>           | <b>108</b>            | <b>-3</b>        | <b>105</b>           | <b>98</b>             | <b>7</b>         | <b>105</b>           | <b>104</b>            | <b>1</b>         |

Flax Bourton is a very popular school, and this has been reflected in the actual numbers of first preferences for this cluster for September 2016 admissions as shown below:

|                                    | Admission Level | No of 1 <sup>st</sup> preferences |            |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|------------|
|                                    |                 | 2016                              |            |
|                                    |                 | 1 <sup>st</sup> preferences       | +/-        |
| <b>Birdwell Primary</b>            | 60              | 54                                | 6          |
| <b>Flax Bourton C of E Primary</b> | 15              | 29                                | -14        |
| <b>Northleaze C of E Primary</b>   | 30              | 38                                | -8         |
| <b>Totals</b>                      | <b>105</b>      | <b>121</b>                        | <b>-16</b> |

- 3.5 Increasing the admission level of Flax Bourton Primary to 30 would increase the numbers of permanent available places per year group setting in the cluster to 120. This would enable the cluster to be better able to meet demand.
- 3.6 Local Authorities need to balance the need for new places against the over-provision of places in other year group settings. Whilst the Council maintains the duty to provide sufficient school places this no longer comes with guaranteed funding allocations. Overall there are sufficient primary and secondary school places across the district to meet current pupil growth, although the supply of some primary school places is not geographically located within the areas of excess pupil demand.

When aiming to secure external capital resources the DfE and developers will compare the demand for school places against the capacities of schools and academies across the district. Where there are schools/academies with spare capacity the DfE will expect pupils to be transported to these schools. Too much spare capacity, irrespective of whether or not it is in the correct year group setting or location, reduces the Council's ability to attract funds from developers and affects basic need allocations. The Council aspires to have a surplus of around 5% of places (in line with national audit recommendations) to allow for some capacity for those families who move into an area outside of the normal admissions round. This would relate to 3 places per cohort in this area and provides some resilience without providing over-capacity.

- 3.7 Within the Local Authority categorisation of schools, Flax Bourton School is judged to be outstanding. The school was last inspected by Ofsted in March 2015 and its overall effectiveness was also judged to be outstanding.
- 3.8 Consultations about the Admission Arrangements for the 2017/8 school year commenced in December 2015 and were agreed in March 2016. It is likely that formally these will not be changed, although reference to the future expansion will be flagged in the Starting School in North Somerset ~ A Guide for Parents, with the caveat that any change is subject to full approval. An increase in provision in 2017 would only be possible if the building changes can be delivered in time for the September 2017 new intake. As work to consider the expansion of the school is still progressing, it is not possible to make or not make this recommendation at the current time.

In terms of admissions, it has been agreed with the school, in principle, that any increase in pupil placements will be incremental with a year on year increase as opposed to a wholesale change in capacity (i.e. 30 admissions number for the year of entry to cascade through the school over up to 6 years). This is to support the stability of places across other schools in the region. This could be reviewed subject to demand and the ability of the school to fund whole classes within their revenue allocations.

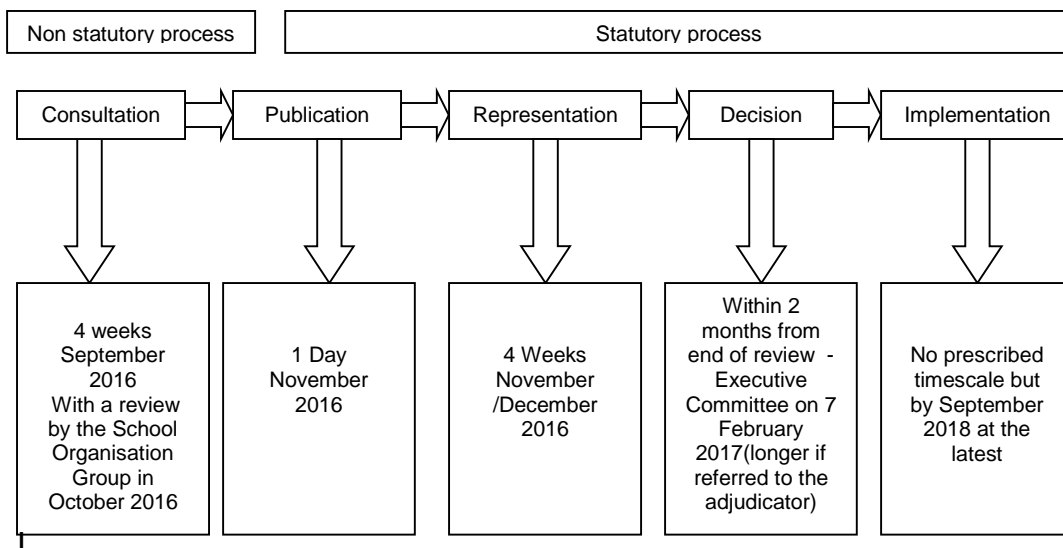
## **4. CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 Since early 2015, officers from the Local Authority have been in discussions with senior staff at the school about it increasing to a 210-place school. Until now the funding to support the larger increase was not available. School representatives and LA officers agree it is now time to consult together with parents and the wider community on these aspects of change.  
At the time of writing this report and for the first stage of the consultation it will be proposed that the changes should be in place for September 2018, with an aspiration to enable earlier admissions if at all possible. Hopefully by the time a statutory notice

could be published (November 2016), greater clarity on the physical changes should be known and an earlier date may (or may not) be considered. Consultees will be updated about these options throughout this stage of the consultation process.

- 4.2 The ‘Making Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools ~ Statutory Guidance for Proposers and Decision Makers – April 2016’ requires LAs to consult interested parties when developing proposals prior to the formal publication of any proposals. For a significant change such as the one being recommended, this would include holding consultations and public meetings during term time.

For the LA to progress any change at Flax Bourton School, the following consultation process would be followed:



- 4.4 If the Council continues to recommend the growth of Flax Bourton School, the Council’s Executive will make the final decision as to whether the school should be expanded. The local Diocesan Bodies, School Trustees and the school’s Governing Body are the only organisations that have the right to appeal to the School’s Adjudicator against the Council’s decision.
- 4.4 Consultees will be: Stakeholders of the school i.e. families of children of the school; pupils of the school; any other school affected by the change; the governing body/staff of the school and other schools affected by the change; trade unions; the local MP; Flax Bourton Parish Council; the Diocese of Bath & Wells; Diocese of Clifton; Early Years Stakeholders; neighbours of the school and other members of the general public.

## 5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Additional funding is available to schools that have a significant pupil growth during the financial year. Exceptional Pupil Growth Funding would be available in this case if the school were to satisfy the three following criteria:
- The increase has been made at the request of the LA
  - There will be an increase in pupil numbers of 2% or more between the October in the preceding year and the October headcount in the year of entry

with the higher admission figures – it is hard to predict exact numbers for 2017 or 2018 at this stage

- c) The school's notional class bases would need to increase by one (or more) between the October in the preceding year and the October headcount in the year of entry with the higher admission figures – i.e. based on data as at today, the school would need to trigger the need for 6+ notional classes of 30

5.2 This proposal will, due to increasing pupil numbers, have an 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 revenue implications for the Council.

5.3 Any recommendations for an increase in the numbers of pupils to attend the school will be subject to appropriate capital funding being made available to support the physical changes needed. Approval was requested and given at the Executive meeting on 2 February 2016 for £500,000 in the 2016/17 financial year and a further £500,000 in the 2017/18 financial year to be made available to enable a 2-class extension, reception relocation and hall expansion to be funded.

Following a further review of the school site, it is likely that the physical changes to enable an expansion of the school buildings to be possible will necessitate the relocation of the school's demountable buildings or the re-provision of these 2 class bases in new accommodation. This will add to the cost of the changes by around £500 – 800k, although detailed costings have yet to be completed.

It would be preferable for pre-planning discussions to take place with the local community showing the possible plans for the physical expansion of the school alongside this school organisational change.

The Council would expect any developer contributions from new housing in this area to contribute to this scheme.

5.4 Representatives of the Governing Body and officers are working together to further advance any building plans in time for implementation by September 2018 at the latest, although the governing body are open to an earlier implementation if possible.

## **6. RISK MANAGEMENT**

6.1 If there are no changes made the status quo will be retained. It is likely that some children living in Flax Bourton and the villages supported by Flax Bourton Primary 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 could be no local school available for these pupils.

6.2 The changes at the school are subject to the successful completion of this statutory process and planning permission for any extensions to the site.

The risk of not receiving planning permission is deemed to be low to medium, mainly due to transport concerns, although the logistics of providing new buildings on a live school site will have its challenges. Local parents will need to show they are committed to walk to school to ensure that undue pressure on the road infrastructures surrounding the site and the need for considerable increases in parking requirements does not detract from the budgets needed to provide education provision. Regardless

of this, it cannot be presumed that planning permission will be granted. Officers will work with the Planning and Highways Authorities to ensure that any required planning considerations are incorporated into the scheme, although the extent of these and the delivery of the whole scheme is subject to funding limitations.

- 6.3 If the changes are not approved the school could not admit extra pupils indefinitely. Whilst schools are able to 'breach' their admission numbers to meet demand, it is good practice to be transparent about future demand and the availability of places. Where the local authority is the admission authority for a school (as is the case with Voluntary Controlled schools such as Flax Bourton School), the Council is required to consult with the governing body of the school if it wishes to increase provision and the school's Planned Admission Number (PAN).
- 6.4 It would not be possible to expand the organisation of the classes across the school site year on year without an expanded building. Any such move could compromise education provision and be potentially detrimental to the education provided to current pupils.

## **7. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The change in school organisation structure should enable more pupils to be able to attend their local schools and therefore enhance equality opportunities. An EIA is available on request.

## **8. CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

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

## **9. OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 9.1 Offer places at other schools outside of these pupils normal admissions area. This has a considerable revenue implications for the Council that would be required to meet the transport costs of all those who live in excess of 2 miles (as a safe walking route) from the school who are aged under 8 and 3 miles (as a safe walking route) for all those aged 8 and over.

## **AUTHOR**

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## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- Education Provision in North Somerset ~ A Commissioning Strategy 2015 – 2018

- CYPS Policy and Scrutiny School Organisation Group Papers ~ 20 April 2016