

REPORT TO THE CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE POLICY & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE OF MEETING: 18 NOVEMBER 2016

SUBJECT OF REPORT: POSSIBLE 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 DIRECTORATE

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 publication, if appropriate, of a Statutory Notice by the Council to expand the provision at the Flax Bourton C of E Primary School 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 2015 and 2016 that exceeded supply. Projections from 2017 onwards support this excess in demand for currently available places.
- 1.2 A consultation has taken place seeking the views of local stakeholders to the expansion of the school. Overall, there were 124 formal responses to the consultation of which 113 (91%) support the changes proposed, 10 (8%) oppose the changes and one (1%) was undecided. In addition, a further 17 comments were made at the public consultation events, although their preference for expansion was not stated.

In most responses, including those in support of the changes, concerns were expressed about parking around the school and the overall impact on the increased traffic both now and in the future. A previously discussed traffic infrastructure scheme has been designed and will, subject to Executive Member approval, be delivered as part of the 2017/18 Highways Works Programme. Further reviews are ongoing.

- 1.3 This report seeks support to permanently increase the capacity of Flax Bourton C of E Primary School to meet the projected growth in demand in school places from

September 2018 onwards for the village of Flax Bourton and other nearby villages and hamlets in this part of North Somerset.

2. 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.

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).

The changes at Flax Bourton, if approved, will increase pupil intake numbers from 15 to 30 pupils per year group (105 to 210 places overall) permanently with effect from 1 September 2018. In considering the requirements listed above, a formal process must be followed by the Council to achieve this change.

- 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 The Council has been working with senior staff and governors at Flax Bourton C of E Primary School (Flax Bourton School) to determine whether a permanent increase in the numbers of school places should be progressed. Currently the school physically has the necessary accommodation (5 class bases) to be able to admit up to 150 pupils. This is possible following the provision of a new classroom extension in 2016 that provided extra facilities so the school could take a breach class in the 2016/17 school year. At the time of writing this report there are 132 pupils on Flax Bourton's school roll.
- 3.2 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. Based on current pupil numbers, at the end of the 2016/17 school year 12 pupils currently in Year 6 will leave the school. In September 2017 it is expected that at least 15 new reception-aged pupils will enter the school, resulting in an increase to 135 pupils on roll.

The school regularly receives more applications for places than there are places available.

For 2015 admissions the preferences for the school were as below:

PAN	1 st preferences	2 nd preferences	3 rd preferences	Total
15	23	29	62	114

The school accepted additional reception-aged pupils in 2015.

For 2016 admissions, the preferences for the school were as below:

PAN	1 st preferences	2 nd preferences	3 rd preferences	Total
15	29	50	56	135

The school accepted additional reception-aged pupils in 2016.

The increases in 2016 was the second time in three years that Flax Bourton School has 'breached' its PAN. The school may consider a further breach in its intake admissions should the numbers of applications for the September 2017 intake exceed the places available.

- 3.3 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. It is hoped that by increasing the schools capacity to a 210-place school (subject to all approvals) most local children will be able access their local school.
- 3.4 The Council reviews its pupil projections on an annual basis. On the whole, local authorities are good at forecasting their pupil growth. Locally our accuracy for predicting primary school places in 2015 was 99.72%. The latest published projections for new reception-aged places in the Backwell A Cluster (Long Ashton and Flax Bourton), excluding new housing developments, is as below:

Projected Reception pupil numbers 2016-2020 excluding pupils from new housing.	2016 Admission Level		2016 allocations at 2nd June 2016		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		2020 provisional PAN		2020 projected demand		2020 diff to PAN	
	Backwell A (Long Ashton & Flax Bourton)																													
Birdwell Primary	60	57	3	60	60	0	60	59	1	60	57	3	60	58	2															
Flax Bourton CE Primary School	30	30	0	15	21	-6	15	20	-5	15	18	-3	15	19	-4															
Northleaze VC Primary School	30	29	1	30	30	0	30	29	1	30	28	2	30	28	2															
Backwell A total	120	116	4	105	111	-6	105	108	-3	105	103	2	105	105	0															

- 3.5 Increasing the PAN of Flax Bourton School to 30 would increase the numbers of permanent available places per year group setting in the cluster to 45 and provide a small element of flexibility to meet any future needs. This should 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 school places across the district to meet current pupil growth, although the supply of some places are not geographically located within the areas of excess pupil demand.

When aiming to secure external capital resources, the Department for Education (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 it is considered pupils could 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 three places per cohort in this area and provides some resilience without providing over-capacity.

The Council will expect developer funds from nearby housing developments to contribute to this scheme.

- 3.7 Within the Local Authority categorisation of schools Flax Bourton School is judged to be outstanding. The school was last inspected by Ofsted on 11 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. The changes proposed in this paper were not included in this consultation as only smaller changes are permitted through the School Admissions Consultation process. Details of this potential change has been flagged in the Starting School in North Somerset ~ A Guide for Parents for 2017 admissions. This comes with a caveat that any increase is subject to full approval.

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 pupils for each new cohort year of entry to cascade through the school). This is to support the stability of places across other schools in surrounding villages. This could be reviewed subject to demand and the ability of the school to fund whole classes within their revenue allocations.

- 3.8 Flax Bourton School is in support of the proposal, stating that:

”Governors fully support the expansion of our outstanding school in order to meet the increasing demand for school places for children who live in Flax Bourton and the surrounding villages.”

Jane Bennett, Headteacher, Flax Bourton C of E Primary School

This proposal also has the support of the Diocese of Bath & Wells and the Flax Bourton Parish Council

“The Diocese of Bath & Wells, site trustees for Flax Bourton Church of England Primary School, are very happy to support the decision of the governing body of Flax Bourton Church of England School to increase the capacity of their school to 210 places. It is clear that the population is growing in the area, and it is important for all local children to have the option to attend a local school.”

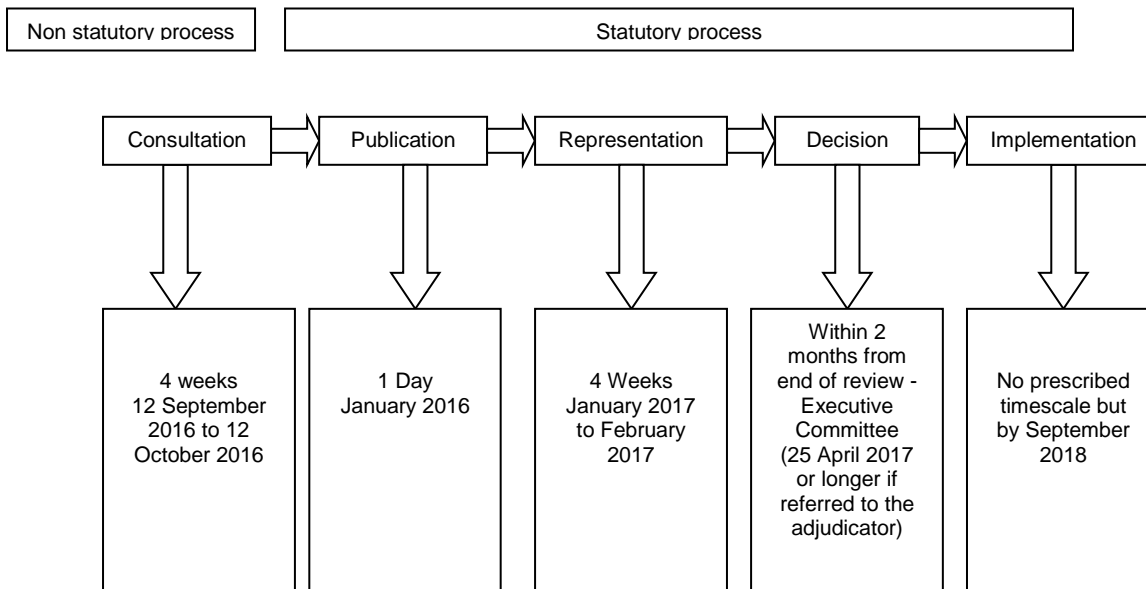
Tess Gale, Director of Education, Diocese of Bath & Wells

“The Parish Council is very supportive of the enlargement of the school to 210 places from 1 September 2018. However, it wishes to request that during the planning process North Somerset Council ensures that concerns raised by immediately neighbouring residents regarding traffic flow and parking be fully considered.”

Clerk to Flax Bourton Parish Council

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 To progress the change at Flax Bourton School, the following consultation process is being followed:



4.2 Consultees throughout this process have and 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; Flax Bourton Parish Council; the Diocese of Bath & Wells; neighbours of the school and other members of the general public.

4.3 A consultation questionnaire was made available to consultees as part 1 of this statutory process. In addition, consultation documentation was also published on the Council's website and advertised by the school community. The consultation period ran from 12 September to 12 October 2016. The consultation document is available on the Council's website at <http://consult-ldf.n-somerset.gov.uk/consult.ti>

Public Responses

4.4 150 paper questionnaires were offered to stakeholders of the school including 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 seven paper, one postal, 116 electronic responses and one telephone call (total of 124) 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 Flax Bourton School from its current capacity of 105 pupils to a capacity of 210 pupils with effect from September 2018	113 (91%)	10 (8%)	1 (1%)	124 (100%)

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

Those in favour of the change (mainly parents/carers) cited the need for more local school places and believed that Flax Bourton School would benefit from the expansion.

Those against the expansion (mostly members of the local community) expressed concerns about increased traffic in the village and lack of parking in and around the school.

At this time there are no confirmed designs for the expanded school. Officers committed to provide these for public review as part of the pre-planning processes to be followed before submitting any final applications for planning approval (if and when appropriate).

- 4.5 Two public meetings were held on the afternoon and evening of Wednesday 21 September 2016. The afternoon meeting was attended by 15 people, predominately parents with governors and neighbours. The evening meeting saw nine people attend from the community.

Overall there was support for the changes caveated with concerns raised around the implications of traffic and parking around the school site. The comments captured at these meetings are included in the consultation responses located on the Council's website:

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

- 4.6 In response to parking concerns, Flax Bourton School introduced "flexible drop-off" for parents in the morning and are exploring further options given the success of this trial and feedback from stakeholders. The school has a Travel Plan, the goal of the which is to promote healthy lifestyles by maintaining and improving the current percentage (31.2%) of parents and children who walk to school; raising parent and child awareness of benefits of healthy eating linked with active lifestyles including walking, scooting and cycling to school; discouraging the use of cars for travelling to school especially when pupils live within walking thresholds.

In most responses, including those in support of the changes, concerns were expressed about parking around the school and the overall impact on the increased traffic both now and in the future. A traffic infrastructure scheme has been designed and will be delivered, subject to Executive Member approval, as part of next year's Highways Works Programme. This would be ahead of the normal programming for changes that can take up to three years. The planning application will need to conform to the Parking Standards Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and in addition to the above, other options may also need to be considered (some of which would need community agreement). These would work in tandem with the School's Travel Plan to help to mitigate any issues the proposed expansion may cause.

- 4.8 Pupils at the school were asked for their feelings about the proposed expansion of their school:

- KS1:
 - "I would like more people to make more friends"
 - "We would have to give up a bit of the field which could be a bit sad"
 - "At lunch and at worship there won't be enough space"
 - "It works well when the classes come in at different times for lunch"
 - "We could build where the tepee is"
 - "It would be exciting to see a new classroom"
 - "It would be fun to have a new classroom"
- KS2:
 - "It will be easier for learning to be all from one year group"

- “It might take away some of our playing field”
- “It will be better as it will give us more friends to play with”
- “If there are less levels in learning then teachers don’t need to prepare so many different activities for each Maths lesson”
- “People who are friends with other year groups might not play as much with each other, but they might get new friends”
- “If it’s really wet we don’t have enough tarmac space to play if there are more kids”

4.9 The Headteacher shared the consultation documentation with all staff. All are in favour of the expansion. If the school is to be expanded there should be opportunities for the changes to offer greater opportunities for professional development and career advancement.

4.10 “Staff and Governors fully support the expansion of our outstanding school in order to meet the increasing demand for school places for children who live in Flax Bourton and the surrounding villages.”

Jane Bennett, Headteacher, Flax Bourton C of E Primary School

4.11 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/Flax/consultationHome>

4.12 The Children and Young People’s Services (CYPS) School Organisation Group, a sub-group of the CYPS Policy and Scrutiny Panel, met on 17 October 2016 to consider the responses to stage 1 of this consultation process. The group were supportive of the publication of a public notice as the next stage of consultation. They shared the concerns of many consultees about any impact of the expansion on the safety of pupils travelling to and from school, noting that travel considerations will form part of any planning submission.

4.13 If permission is granted to publish a statutory proposals to expand the school, this will enable stakeholders of the school to provide further comments about the changes proposed. Within two months from the end date of the published proposal (if agreed), 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 at that time.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Strategic Schools Forum are currently consulting on their Exceptional Pupil Growth Funding formula to support exceptional growth in schools. At the time of writing this report the funding available to Flax Bourton School from September 2018 if they were to have significant pupil growth during the financial year 2017/18 is based on them meeting the following three criteria:

- a) The increase has been made at the request of the LA;
- b) There will be an increase in pupil numbers of 2% or more between the October 2017 and October 2018 headcounts; and

c) The school's notional class bases would need to increase by one

5.2 This proposal will, due to increasing pupil numbers, 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 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 two-class extension, reception relocation and extra hall/group space 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 an increase in the size of the school hall/a 2nd smaller hall and the re-provision of school administrative facilities. This will add to the cost of the changes by around £500 – 800k, although detailed costings have yet to be completed. A further funding allocation, to be forward funded from the 2018/19 basic need allocation, was requested and approved at the Council's Executive meeting on 18 October 2016.

5.4 Before a statutory proposal to expand the school can be published, funding and approval to expand the school buildings must be in place. Whilst the school expansion and planning application processes are run in parallel, decisions on each application should be made independently. It is hoped that a planning application to physically expand the school will be submitted for approval in December 2016. The outcome of any application is unknown at this stage, but would need to be in place before a final decision is to be made (if appropriate) in April 2017.

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 the villages supported by Flax Bourton School 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.

Due to the location of the proposed expansion, the risk of not receiving planning permission is deemed to be medium to low due to the location of the school site at the edge of the village. In addition the logistics of providing new buildings with limited access to the 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 increases in parking requirements does not detract from the budgets needed to provide extra education accommodation. Regardless of this, it cannot be presumed that planning permission will be granted. Officers will be worked with the Planning and Highways Authorities to ensure that, as much as possible, any required planning considerations will be incorporated into the scheme.

- 6.3 It would not be possible to expand the organisation of the classes across the school site without an expanded building. Any such move could compromise education provision and be potentially detrimental to the education provided to current pupils. Whilst it is not possible for the expanded buildings to be in place for September 2017, it is hoped that if planning permission for new buildings is approved, consequently an expanded school site should be available for school use from September 2018.

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 Equality Implications Assessment (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 To do nothing. Pupils unable to secure a local school place be offered an alternative placement at the nearest school with a vacancy. This may be some distance from their home address.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Education Provision in North Somerset ~ A Commissioning Strategy 2015 – 2018
- Scrutiny Working Group – 20 April 2016
- CYPS People & Communities Policy & Scrutiny Committee Report – 14 July 2016 at <http://apps.n-somerset.gov.uk/cairo/docs/doc27487.pdf>
- Decision Sheet PC18 -
- <http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/16-17-PC-18.pdf>