

# **NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

## **THE EXECUTIVE**

**22 February 2022**

### **PROPOSALS TO AMALGAMATE GROVE ROAD AND WOODFIELD COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOLS, HARROGATE**

**Report by the Corporate Director – Children and Young People’s Service**

#### **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 This report details the outcome of the public consultation carried out by North Yorkshire County Council on the proposals to amalgamate Grove Road and Woodfield Community Primary Schools in Harrogate from 1 September 2022. It asks the Executive to consider the responses to the consultation, to authorise the publication of statutory proposals, and to schedule taking a final decision on the proposals on 19 April 2022.

#### **2.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 2.1 Under his delegated decision making powers in the Officers’ Delegation Scheme in the Council’s Constitution, the Chief Executive Officer has power, in cases of emergency, to take any decision which could be taken by the Council, the Executive or a committee. Following on from the expiry of the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020, which allowed for committee meetings to be held remotely, the County Council resolved at its meeting on 5 May 2021 that, for the present time, in light of the continuing Covid-19 pandemic circumstances, remote live-broadcast committee meetings should continue (as informal meetings of the Committee Members), with any formal decisions required being taken by the Chief Executive Officer under his emergency decision making powers and after consultation with other Officers and Members as appropriate and after taking into account any views of the relevant Committee Members. This approach will be reviewed again in February 2022.
- 2.2 On 23 November 2021 the Executive Member for Education and Skills gave approval for consultation on proposals to amalgamate Grove Road and Woodfield Community Primary Schools in Harrogate. A report providing the full background is attached as Appendix 1.
- 2.3 The proposals are that the amalgamation would be achieved through the technical closure of Woodfield Community Primary School as a separate entity from 31 August 2022, and the enlargement of premises of Grove Road Community Primary School by expansion onto the Woodfield site from 1 September 2022.
- 2.4 The consultation commenced on 2 December 2021 and closed on 28 January 2022. This report details the responses to the consultation and asks the Executive to consider authorising the publication of proposals and statutory notices, and to schedule taking a final decision on the proposals on 19 April 2022.

#### **3.0 BACKGROUND AND CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN**

- 3.1 Woodfield Community Primary School was inspected by Ofsted in January 2020, who found the overall effectiveness to be inadequate and the school became subject to special measures. Any maintained school that is judged inadequate by Ofsted is required to become a sponsored academy. The Regional Schools Commissioner has been unable to

secure an Academy Trust to sponsor Woodfield School due to viability concerns. Where a school would not be viable as an academy, it is expected the local authority will close the school and that the Secretary of State can direct them to do so if necessary.

- 3.2 Since January 2020, there have been considerable changes in staffing at Woodfield School. Ofsted made a second monitoring visit to Woodfield School in November 2021. This repeated the judgement made in an earlier monitoring visit in June 2021 that that school leaders and those responsible for governance were taking effective action towards the removal of special measures. However, the current leadership arrangements can only be temporary and the absence of an academy sponsor means that Woodfield School faces an uncertain future.
- 3.3 Work began earlier in 2021 to assess how education provision within the Woodfield community could be preserved. The current proposals for amalgamation have been developed by members of the school governing bodies and LA officers. The two governing bodies carefully considered the proposals before autumn half term 2021, and both agreed to ask the County Council to start this consultation on the amalgamation of Woodfield and Grove Road Community Primary Schools. This request was approved by the Executive Member for Education and Skills on 23 November 2021.
- 3.4 Consultation documents (Appendix 2) were distributed to the lists of consultees (Appendix 3). The documents were published on the websites of Woodfield and Grove Road Primary Schools and on the County Council website. The consultation period ran 2 December 2021 to 28 January 2022.
- 3.5 Two public meetings were held on 10 and 17 January 2022. In the interests of safety to reduce the risk of transmission of coronavirus, both these meetings were held as virtual (online) public meetings. Records of the meetings are attached as Appendix 4.
- 3.6 By the closing date, 12 consultation responses had been received for the proposal and these are shown in full in Appendix 5.
- 3.7 The issues raised during the consultation included:
- Transition arrangements and potential disruption to children
  - Difficulties for parents dropping off/collecting children at both sites
  - Leadership arrangements across the two sites
  - Provision for children with Special Educational Needs
  - Use of the Woodfield school site

#### **4.0 RESPONSES TO THE CONSULTATION AND OTHER KEY ISSUES**

- 4.1 Transition arrangements and potential disruption to children  
While it is acknowledged that the proposed closure of Woodfield Community Primary School will cause uncertainty and disruption for pupils, parents and staff, Grove Road School would work closely with parents, as both schools do now, to meet the needs of individual children. It would not be practical or cost effective for Grove Road School to continue to run separate classes for children currently at Woodfield School to stay there until they leave at the end of Year 6. Transition activities are being planned involving the two schools during the summer term, should the proposal proceed. There will be handovers between key personnel in school. The existing Thrive provision at Grove Road School will support emotional welfare. Grove Road School has invited parents, children and staff from Woodfield to visit the school.
- 4.2 Difficulties for parents dropping off/collecting children at both sites

Consultees raised particular concerns about the practicalities of drop off and collection for families with children at both sites. Grove Road School already operate staggered start and finish times and provide intervals of transition time at the start and end of the school day. They provide wrap-around provision with breakfast and after school clubs, provided free of charge to children receiving free school meals. These will help parents who are dropping off or collecting children from the two sites.

4.3 Grove Road School also propose to put a walking bus in place between the two school sites using the Nidderdale Greenway cycle route over the Iron Bridge and re-opening a rear entrance to the Woodfield School site. The expertise of the existing school crossing patrol officer would be used for crossing Skipton Road. This will provide a largely traffic-free walking route between the two school sites. Parents will be able to drop their child at either school and children who need to would be able to walk safely to the other school accompanied by school staff. There would be opportunities to access better parking provision on the Woodfield site. Parents' ideas and views on these arrangements are being sought as part of the consultation process.

4.4 Leadership arrangements across the two sites

Grove Road has moved to an interim co-headship model. In terms of the amalgamation, school leaders believe that this arrangement would offer sufficient leadership capacity across the two sites and the scope for staff to grow into positions of middle and senior leadership. The school operates IRIS connect, a video-enabled professional development package for teachers. This includes in-ear coaching and the ability to observe and review teaching.

4.5 Provision for children with Special Educational Needs

The school would ensure early identification of needs and appropriate support in school and with partner agencies and services as required. Grove Road School has a full-time Special Needs Co-ordinator and expertise and capacity to support children, and will also build on the existing strengths and expertise at Woodfield. Grove Road School has a significant percentage of their children on the special needs register. Support staff would be allocated according to pupil numbers and need, as they are currently.

4.6 Use of the Woodfield school site

The plans are that from September 2022, all nursery children would be based at the current Woodfield site (Grove Road Nursery); all Year Reception to Year 6 pupils would be based at the current Grove Road site. From September 2023, all Nursery and Reception pupils (2023 cohort) would be based at the current Woodfield site (Grove Road Early Years); all Year 1 to Year 6 pupils would be based at the Grove Road site. Growth is expected to continue so that eventually all Grove Road Early Years and Grove Road Key Stage 1 would be located at the current Woodfield site and Grove Road Key Stage 2 would be accommodated at the current Grove Road site.

4.7 Several consultees have noted the benefits of the Woodfield site including the large grassed area not available at Grove Road. Grove Road School propose to use the open space at the Woodfield site for Forest Schools and potentially an urban farm. Classrooms that are not used initially for teaching may be utilised as breakout spaces and intervention rooms. It is proposed that the additional space freed up at the Grove Road site will be developed into specialist provision, intervention areas and library spaces.

4.8 School pupil numbers and school budget updates

Since the report in November, pupil numbers have changed from 49 to 41 at Woodfield. Woodfield Community Primary School's revised cumulative budget deficit has fallen from £98k to £75k and Grove Road Community Primary School's revised cumulative budget deficit has increased from £158k to £213k in the financial year 2021/22. The increased

accumulated deficit at Grove Road has arisen from additional support for pupils with high needs and additional supply cover costs resulting from Covid. This will impact on the school's ability to return to an overall budget surplus position and the school and County Council will continue to monitor this closely. The school's ongoing financial position will be largely dependent on pupil numbers and the level of staffing. However, the school will be required to develop a financial recovery plan to achieve a balanced and sustainable financial position.

## **5.0 PROPOSALS**

5.1 The proposals are to amalgamate Grove Road and Woodfield Community Primary Schools, through the technical closure of Woodfield Community Primary School as a separate entity from 31 August 2022, and the enlargement of premises of Grove Road Community Primary School by expansion onto the Woodfield site from 1 September 2022. The full statutory proposals are set out in Appendix 8. The following school organisation proposals are required, which will all be linked:

Part 1 – Woodfield Community Primary School – technical closure of the school as a separate entity

Part 2 – Grove Road Community Primary School – enlargement by expansion on to an additional site.

5.2 The proposed timetable would be:

3 March 2022	Publication of Statutory Proposals
31 March 2022	Closing date for representations (4 weeks as prescribed in regulations and cannot be shortened or lengthened)
19 April 2022	Final decision by Executive
	31 August 2022 Proposed closure of Woodfield Community Primary School as a separate entity
1 September 2022	Proposed enlargement and expansion of Grove Road Primary School onto the Woodfield School site.

## **6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

### **6.1 Revenue and Capital Funding**

The implications for revenue and capital funding were set out in the report to Executive Members on 23 November 2021 attached as Appendix 1 with updates in paragraph 4.8 above.

## **7.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 The Education and Inspections Act and School Organisation regulations and guidance<sup>1</sup> apply to the processes involved in publishing proposals. Careful regard has been had to these provisions. The proposals are in accordance with the statutory requirements.

## **8.0 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 There are no Human Rights issues in relation to this decision.

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<sup>1</sup> School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013; The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013 and Department for Education statutory guidance Opening and closing maintained schools (November 2019) and Making significant changes ('prescribed alterations') to maintained schools (October 2018).

## **9.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken in respect of these proposals and is attached (Appendix 6).

## **10.0 NEXT STEPS**

- 10.1 It is proposed to publish proposals and the statutory notice on 3 March 2022 (Appendices 7 and 8). The proposals would be published on the County Council's website and the statutory notice would be published in a local newspaper and displayed at the main entrances to the schools. These would provide four weeks for representations to be made to the Local Authority, by 31 March 2022.
- 10.2 The Executive agreed a model for decision-making on school organisation proposals on 25 September 2007. If approval is given to publish statutory proposals and notices, it is proposed that a final decision on these proposals is taken on 19 April 2022 by the Executive, or if there are no objections to the statutory proposals, by the Executive Member for Education and Skills.

## **11.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 11.1 Executive Members are asked to recommend to the Chief Executive Officer that using his emergency delegated powers he approve that:
- i. Statutory proposals and a statutory notice be published on 3 March 2022 proposing to amalgamate Grove Road and Woodfield Community Primary Schools, through the technical closure of Woodfield Community Primary School as a separate entity from 31 August 2022, and the enlargement of premises and expansion onto the Woodfield site of Grove Road Community Primary School from 1 September 2022.
  - ii. A final decision on the proposals be scheduled for the Executive on 19 April 2022.

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### List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Report of Corporate Director Meeting with Executive Members –23 November 2021  
Appendix 2: Published consultation documents  
Appendix 3: List of consultees  
Appendix 4: Notes of the public consultation meetings  
Appendix 5: Responses to the consultation documents  
Appendix 6: Equality Impact Assessment  
Appendix 7: Draft statutory notice  
Appendix 8: Draft statutory proposals