

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

THE EXECUTIVE

19 April 2022

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

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide the Executive with information upon which to make a decision on proposals published by North Yorkshire County Council to amalgamate Grove Road and Woodfield Community Primary Schools in Harrogate from 1 September 2022.

2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 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, following requests from the governing bodies of Grove Road and Woodfield schools. The consultation commenced on 2 December 2021 and closed on 28 January 2022.
- 2.2 The proposals were to amalgamate the two 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.
- 2.3 The Executive met on 22 February 2022 and considered the outcome of the consultation. They agreed to publish statutory proposals on 3 March giving 4 weeks until 31 March for representations to be made. There was one objection to the statutory notice. On 31 March the governing body of Grove Road Community Primary School informed Local Authority officers that they had decided to withdraw their support for the proposal.

3 CURRENT POSITION

- 3.1 On 31 March, members of the governing body of Grove Road Community Primary School decided to withdraw their support for the amalgamation proposal, providing the following message to Local Authority Officers:

I am writing to inform you that after careful consideration it is with regret that the governing body of Grove Road Community Primary School wish to withdraw their support of the proposed amalgamation with Woodfield Community Primary School. We have had lengthy discussions and have come to this conclusion for the good of Grove Road, which is our responsibility as governors.

We have considered the following reasons in our decision-making process:

- The increased financial risk from the forecast reduction in pupil numbers
- Uncertainty of new leadership structure

- Capacity within the financial constraints to manage both sites effectively
- Long term COVID legacy
- Lack of parent support

We appreciate that there has been a considerable amount of work and effort towards a successful amalgamation which we were hopeful would benefit the wider community, however, our priority first and foremost has to be the educational offer and staff wellbeing at Grove Road.

- 3.2 The proposals for amalgamation had been developed by members of the school governing bodies and LA officers. The two governing bodies had carefully considered the proposals before autumn half term, and both agreed to ask the County Council to start a consultation. Given the weight that must be attached to the withdrawal of support by the governing body of Grove Road School, it is now recommended that the proposal for amalgamation is rejected.

4 RESPONSES TO THE STATUTORY PROPOSALS

- 4.1 The Statutory Proposals were published on 3 March with a representation period of 4 weeks (Appendix 1). One objection to the statutory proposals was received (Appendix 2). The objection, from a parent at Woodfield School, raised concerns about the suitability of Grove Road School, including access to the building for children with mobility issues, fencing, lack of green space, traffic congestion, and safety issues relating to the proposed walking bus. The parent subsequently confirmed that they would like their response to be formally put forward in the decision making.

- 4.2 Grove Road School advised in relation to the points raised in the objection that they could make adjustments for any pupil with mobility issues who wished to attend the school. The school would change the classroom arrangements so that any child with mobility issues was taught in a classroom on the ground floor, regardless of age and stage. This would mean that they were able to access the front of school and the school playground via a ramp, with access to toilets also on the ground floor. Meals could also be made available. They also advised that the low fencing referred to in the objection was replaced in 2018 and the playground is now enclosed on two sides by a stone wall and on the Skipton Road side by fencing that is 1.8m high on top of the existing stone wall.

5 NEXT STEPS

- 5.1 The proposal and consultation process has set out the challenging position that Woodfield Primary School faces. Following the withdrawal of support by the governing body of Grove Road School, officers will now reflect on the situation with professional stakeholders, including the Regional Schools Commissioner, before making any further proposals for Woodfield Community Primary School.

6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The financial implications of the proposal remain as set out in the report to Executive on 22 February.

7 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

REGULATIONS AND GUIDANCE

- 7.1 The consideration and determination of school organisation proposals by the Local Authority is set out in regulations and in guidance (Appendix 3) produced by the Department for Education. Careful regard has been had to these provisions.

PRELIMINARY CHECKS

- 7.2 The guidance requires that the Decision Maker must consider, on receipt of each proposal, whether any information is missing; whether the published notice of the proposal complies with statutory requirements; whether the statutory consultation has been carried out prior to the publication of the notice; and whether the proposal is related to other published proposals.
- 7.3 Having undertaken an audit of these preliminary checks, the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Democratic Services) advises that:
- all information required has been supplied;
 - the published notice complies with statutory requirements;
 - statutory consultation has been carried out prior to publication of the notice;
 - and that the preliminary points for consideration have been dealt with sufficiently to permit the Executive to proceed to determine this proposal.

TYPES OF DECISION THAT CAN BE MADE

- 7.4 In considering proposals for making changes to school provision, the Executive, as Decision Maker can decide to:
- reject the proposals;
 - approve the proposals;
 - approve the proposals with a modification;
 - approve the proposals subject to them meeting a specific condition (these conditions are set out in paragraph 8 of Schedule 3 to the Prescribed Alterations Regulations, and are not considered applicable to this proposal).

8 PROCEDURE FOR THE MEETING

- 8.1 The Executive agreed on 25 September 2007 that in making a decision on school organisation proposals:
- (a) The Executive must have regard to decision makers' guidance published by the DfE and to the Executive Procedure Rules laid down in the North Yorkshire County Council Constitution.
- (b) All decisions must give reasons for the decision, indicating the main factors/criteria for the decision.

9 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

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

10 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 That having undertaken the required preliminary checks, the Executive resolve that the four key issues listed above in paragraph 7.3 have been satisfied and there can be a determination of the proposals.
- 10.2 The Executive are recommended to reject the proposal to amalgamate Grove Road and Woodfield Community Primary Schools, as this proposal is no longer supported by the governing body of Grove Road School.

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Report prepared by John Lee, Strategic Planning Team.

List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Statutory Notice and Statutory Proposal
Appendix 2: Objection to the Statutory Proposal
Appendix 3: School Organisation Guidance for Decision Makers