

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICE
CORPORATE DIRECTOR MEETING WITH EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

24 May 2022

**PROPOSAL TO CLOSE WOODFIELD COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL,
HARROGATE**

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek Member approval to consult publicly on a proposal to close Woodfield Community Primary School in Harrogate from 31 December 2022.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Woodfield Community Primary School is subject to a Directive Academy Order following an Inadequate Ofsted judgement from an inspection in January 2020. Any maintained school that is judged inadequate by Ofsted is required to become a sponsored academy or, if an academy sponsor cannot be found, a school judged inadequate usually has to close. 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 that the Local Authority will close the school and the Secretary of State can direct them to do so if necessary.
- 2.2 Since January 2020, there have been considerable changes in staffing at Woodfield School. The current acting executive headteacher took up leadership at the start of the summer term 2020. Monitoring visits by Ofsted to Woodfield School in June and November 2021 found that leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures and the local authority's statement of action and the school's action plan are both fit for purpose. While it is important to recognise the efforts of all those who have been involved in this improvement journey, the current arrangements can only be temporary and the absence of an academy sponsor means the school faces an uncertain future.
- 2.3 The Governing Bodies of Woodfield Community Primary and Grove Road Community Primary explored with Local Authority Officers combining the two schools in order to share the benefits of both school sites. The move would have meant Woodfield School would technically close and become part of Grove Road from September 2022. An extensive consultation process was undertaken involving public meetings and gathering the views of parents and the local community during December 2021 and January 2022. After careful consideration Grove Road Community Primary School decided in March, with regret, to withdraw its support for the amalgamation. In light of this, the County Council's Executive decided to reject the amalgamation proposal at its meeting on 19 April 2022.
- 2.4 Following this, the Governing Body of Woodfield Community Primary School has looked again at what options are available for the school, and concluded that they have now exhausted all options. They have therefore had to request that the County Council undertake a consultation on a proposal that the school should close.

3.0 SCHOOL PLACE SUFFICIENCY

3.1 As at 12 May 2022 there were 37 pupils of mainstream school age at Woodfield Community Primary School. Current pupil numbers in each year group (as at 12 May) are set out below.

Year group 2021-22	Woodfield School
Reception	4
Year 1	1
Year 2	7
Year 3	2
Year 4	8
Year 5	4
Year 6	11
Total	37

The school also offers nursery provision for children aged 3 and 4, and there are nine children in nursery.

- 3.2 Children living in the Woodfield school catchment area attend a range of primary schools, reflecting the choice of schools available nearby. There were 349 primary-aged pupils living in the Woodfield School catchment area in October 2020 and only 6% attended Woodfield School. Children also attended a range of other schools, including Richard Taylor CE (24%), Bilton Grange (22%) and Grove Road (16%).
- 3.3 Woodfield School has capacity for 150 pupils, although the school has been operating with fewer pupils than this for a number of years. There are no significant housing permissions within the Woodfield School catchment area, although there are several housing developments underway or planned in neighbouring school catchment areas. If the closure proposal went ahead, there would be a reduction of 150 primary school places available in the local area. Appendix 1 provides further details on pupil forecasts. Given current forecasts, including the likely demand from new housing, and current patterns of parental preference, there would appear to be sufficient primary places available in the local area, should the closure of Woodfield School be approved, as overall birth rates are falling in Harrogate district, and pupils living in the Woodfield School catchment area already attend a wide variety of primary schools.
- 3.4 There are a range of primary schools close to Woodfield. Across the local area there are places available for all the pupils currently at Woodfield Community Primary School, although some schools will be fuller than others in some year groups. The most recent admissions round, for entry to the reception year group in September 2022, continued the recent trend of general surplus capacity with the majority of local schools undersubscribed for the normal year of entry.
- 3.5 The Local Authority and the School have agreed that, subject to the Executive Member agreeing to start the consultation process, an admissions preference exercise should be undertaken for parents of pupils currently attending the school. Through this exercise parents/carers would be asked to apply for the preferred school that they would like their child to transfer to in the event of closure, or earlier if that is their wish. Once the full picture of all preferences is known, the LA would liaise with the schools regarding potential allocations, and seek to meet the highest stated preferences wherever possible. The overall intention would be to ensure fairness

around the school transfer process in the event that a decision is ultimately taken to close the School. It would allow the Local Authority to apply consideration of admissions criteria to each request and avoid first come first served. Applying this co-ordinated preference exercise approach would achieve that, provide parents/carers with the support that has been requested, and reduce the period of uncertainty for families.

3.6 The catchment area of an existing school or schools would, in the event of closure, need to be extended to include the current Woodfield Community Primary School catchment area. Views on which school or schools would be most appropriate will be invited during the consultation period. Options for consideration could include:

- The whole of the current Woodfield School catchment area to become part of the catchment area for Grove Road Primary School
- The whole of the current Woodfield School catchment area to become part of the catchment area for Bilton Grange Primary School
- Some form of shared or split arrangement involving both Grove Road and Bilton Grange Schools.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Pupil numbers determine the level of funding that a school receives. Woodfield School has projected in-year budget deficits of £96.8k in the financial year 2021/22, £66.3k in 2022/23 and £86.8k in 2023/24, and a forecast cumulative budget deficit of £75.8k in 2021/22, £142.1k in 2022/23, and £228.9k in 2023/24.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 These proposals would follow the DfE's statutory guidance for proposers and decision makers.¹

5.2 Under the schools causing concern guidance and related legislation,² any maintained school like Woodfield that has been 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 the Secretary of State considers that a school would not be viable as an academy, it is expected the local authority will close the school and the Secretary of State can direct them to do so if necessary. An academy order can also be revoked where a school has been re-inspected by Ofsted and judged Good or Outstanding, and the Secretary of State is satisfied that the improvement can be sustained without the support of a strong sponsor. As noted above, while Ofsted has recognised the improvements that have been made at Woodfield, the current leadership arrangements can only be temporary.

¹ DfE, *Making significant changes ('prescribed alterations') to maintained schools Statutory guidance for proposers and decision-makers* (Oct 2018) and *Opening and closing maintained schools Statutory guidance for proposers and decision-makers* (Nov 2019).

² DfE, *Schools causing concern Guidance for local authorities and Regional Schools Commissioners on how to work with schools to support improvements to educational performance, and on using their intervention powers* (March 2022).

6.0 PROPOSED CONSULTATION PROCESS AND TIMESCALES

6.1 A draft consultation document is being prepared, and will be presented at the meeting.

6.2 The closure proposal would follow the timescale below:

Executive Member approval to consult	Tues 24 May 2022
Call in period ends	1 June
Consultation period including public meetings	Mon 6 June – 4 July 2022 (4 weeks in term time)
Executive decision to publish statutory notices (If approved the following timetable would apply)	Tues 19 July 2022
Call in period ends	27 July 2022
Statutory Notices published (4 weeks for representations to be made)	Thurs 8 September (Harrogate Advertiser published on Thursdays)
Representation period starts	Thurs 8 September
Representation period ends	Thurs 6 October
Final decision by County Council's Executive (or by the Executive Member if there are no objections to the statutory proposals)	Tuesday 18 October
Call in period ends	26 October
Implementation of proposals	31 December 2022

6.3 Given the urgency of the position and the need to provide as much clarity as possible to parents before the summer holidays, it is proposed to conduct a public consultation for four weeks during term time rather than the conventional six week period usually followed by the County Council. A shorter consultation period is also considered appropriate in this case as the challenges facing Woodfield School have recently been set out during consultation on the rejected amalgamation proposal. The DfE statutory guidance on Opening and Closing Schools does not prescribe a timescale for this consultation and states 'It is for the proposer to determine the nature and length of the consultation'.

6.4 The County Council is the employer for staff at Woodfield Community Primary School and a separate HR consultation process for staff and their professional associations will follow.

6.5 Parents at Woodfield School were notified on 12 May 2022 of the decision by the governing body to ask the County Council to consult on a closure proposal. A set of frequently asked questions will be issued by Local Authority Officers to help answer general queries about the proposal.

6.6 The County Council owns the school site, which also accommodates Bilton and Woodfield Community Library, Harrogate Bilton children and family hub, and Oak

Beck House. Decisions about the future use of the school premises will be taken after the closure proposal has been determined.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 The Executive Member for Education and Skills is recommended to give approval to consult publicly on:

- proposals to close Woodfield Community Primary School in Harrogate from 31 December 2022
- the potential catchment area arrangements that would apply from January 2023 in the event of closure

STUART CARLTON
CORPORATE DIRECTOR – CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICE.

Report prepared by John Lee, Strategic Planning Officer

Appendix 1: Pupil forecasts

Background papers:

Report to CYPS Executive Members 23 November 2021

Report to Executive 22 February 2022

Report to Executive 19 April 2022

Appendix 1: Pupil forecasts

Pupil forecasts

					Forecast based on January 2022 NOR							Housing					
Schools	Net Capacity	Max Workplaces	NOR 2022 - Jan	Current +/- Capacity	22/23	23/24	24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28	31/32	Outstanding Permissions	Pupil Yield*	Anticipated Position 31/32	LDF Proposals where known	Pupil Yield*	Anticipated Position 31/32
Bilton Grange Primary	310	310	323	-13	315	309	302	297	291	293	270	2	1	40	0	0	40
Grove Road CP	280	298	293	-13	286	274	266	259	253	250	237	265	66	-23	198	50	-73
Richard Taylor CE Primary	263	263	275	-12	275	269	266	264	258	254	242	0	0	21	0	0	21
St. Robert's Catholic Primary	280	300	279	1	276	278	272	271	266	259	250	0	0	30	0	0	30
Woodfield Primary	150	150	37	113	27	24	19	19	16	16	15	5	1	134	0	0	134
	1283	1321	1207	76	1179	1154	1125	1110	1084	1072	1014	272	68	201	198	50	152

*Based on 1 primary-aged pupil from every 4 houses