

North Yorkshire Council

Executive

Extract of the Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 19th May 2024 commencing at 11.00am.

424 Fountains Earth, Lofthouse CE Endowed Primary School – School Closure Proposal

Considered – A report of the Corporate Director – Children and Young People’s Service providing information upon which to determine the proposal to cease to maintain Fountains Earth, Lofthouse CE Endowed Primary School with effect from 31 March 2024, together with the future arrangements for the school’s current catchment area.

Councillor Annabel Wilkinson introduced the report and advised that on 23 January the Executive had approved proposals to close the school with effect from 31 March 2024 following consideration of responses to a consultation carried out by the Children’s and Young People’s Service. Statutory proposals had been published on 1 February 2024 giving four weeks until 29 February for representations to be made. A petition had been presented to the Skipton and Ripon Area Constituency Committee on 7 March.

The school currently had no children on roll and there had been no highest preference applications to join the school in September 2024. As there was no realistic prospect of the school having any pupils the school would receive no pupil led funding for the next academic year and the local authority was not able to approve any additional funding. For these reasons it was recommended that the Council proceed with the closure process.

Councillor Andrew Murday, division member for Pateley Bridge and Upper Nidderdale, attended the meeting and made a statement to the Executive. He reported that when he was first elected in May 2022 the school received a good Ofsted report, however two months later there was an application from the governors to close the school. Over the subsequent months a number of discussions took place within the community, parents and the parish council and this included two public meetings. Councillor Murday felt there were issues of communication between the community, the governors of the Upper Nidderdale federation and staff; and it was his view that if the issues of governance were resolved children would return to the school. He referred to the petition taken to the ACC which requested an assessment of the governance of the federation by Overview and Scrutiny and requested that any decision to close the school be deferred until after an investigation had taken place.

The Assistant Chief Executive Legal and Democratic Services (ACELDS) referred to the request that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee investigate the governance of

the school federation and advised that school leadership was delegated to school governors and that local authorities had limited powers with regards to governing bodies. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee did not have the power to start investigating individual decisions, though it could look at wider issues in relation to governance matters. The ACELDS advised that the Executive needed to consider whether it had sufficient information to make a decision at this meeting.

In response to a question from Councillor Gareth Dadd on what the financial implications would be of deferring a decision, the Assistant Director Resources advised that a school would not get any funding if it had no pupils. Keeping the school open would require funds for running the building and staffing, which would need to come from reserves which would require Schools Forum support.

The Assistant Director Education and Skills (ADES) referred to previous difficulties recruiting teachers to the school, and advised that funding a teacher at the school would divert resource away from the other schools in the federation. The ADES reported on the declining numbers of children in the school catchment area and provided further information on the issues within schools with very small numbers of children.

In moving the motion Councillor Annabel Wilkinson advised that the challenges faced by such small schools were continually being reviewed, and closing a small school was a difficult decision.

Resolved (unanimously) – That:

- (a) having undertaken the required preliminary checks, the Executive resolve that the issues listed above in section 9 have been satisfied and there can be a determination of the proposals.
- (b) the following proposal be determined:
 - i) To cease to maintain Fountains Earth, Lofthouse CE Endowed Primary School with effect from 31 March 2024
 - ii) To extend the catchment area of St Cuthbert's Church of England Primary School, Pateley Bridge with effect from 1 April 2024 to include the area currently served by Fountains Earth, Lofthouse CE Endowed Primary School.