

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

**8 SEPTEMBER 2021**

### **NOTTINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S CONSULTATION ON THE OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF NORTH CLIFTON PRIMARY SCHOOL – NEWARK & SHERWOOD DISTRICT COUNCIL'S FORMAL RESPONSE**

#### **1.0 Purpose of Report**

1.1 To provide Members with an overview of Nottinghamshire County Council's (NCC) consultation on the options for the future of North Clifton Primary School and NSDC's formal response.

#### **2.0 Background Information**

2.1 On 23/06/2021 NCC launched consultation to seek the views of interested parties regarding the future of North Clifton Primary School.

2.2 The consultation, which closed on 23/07/2021, represents the first stage of the procedural requirements prescribed in the Department for Education's (DfE) statutory guidance<sup>1</sup> for proposers and decision-makers on the opening and closing of maintained schools.

2.3 North Clifton Primary School primarily serves the small villages of North and South Clifton. The next nearest Nottinghamshire school is Dunham on Trent Primary, which is 4.3 miles away by car, within Bassetlaw District.

2.4 North Clifton Primary School is a small school with a Published Admission Number (PAN) of 8, maintained by Nottinghamshire County Council. The last Ofsted inspection of the school (January 2018) rated the school as 'Good'.

2.5 NCC has significant concerns about declining pupil numbers at the school:

- Over the past five years have seen the number of children on the school roll reduce from 36 to 26;
- In October 2020, only 3 pupils were in the school's Reception year, despite a Published Admission Number (PAN) of 8;
- This number is expected to reduce to 2 Reception pupils for academic year 2021/22 in September 2021;
- While schools are required to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum the projected numbers on roll will render this very difficult to achieve in the future, particularly if the school can only offer a single class of children aged 4 to 11 (i.e. YR1 - Y6) in 2021/22;
- The reduction in roll numbers means the school has seen a reduction in the funding it receives to run the school, resulting in significant financial challenges. Although measures have been taken to improve the financial position, including a reduction to two primary classes and introduction of an executive Head Teacher shared with another school, the school ended 2019/20 with a small revenue balance deficit. However, this deficit increased significantly by the end of the 2020/21;

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- The low number of teaching staff employed by the school, presents a safeguarding challenge insofar as it has become very difficult to cover absences occurring due to unforeseen circumstances.

2.6 On 21 June 2021, NCC's Children and Young People's Committee approved the undertaking of an initial statutory consultation to explore options for North Clifton Primary School including possible closure.

### **3.0 Proposals**

#### *Options Under Consideration*

3.1 NCC has identified five options for consideration.

3.2 **Option 1: Continue with no change.**

3.3 **Option 2: Academisation** – DfE and Local Authority are not able to insist that the school joins a Multi Academy Trust (MAT). Although no approach has been made for the school to do so as yet, it is highly likely that the MAT would wish to change the way the school operates in accordance with its own core values.

3.4 **Option 3: Federation** – schools operating in collaboration with each other, sharing senior staff and possibly governing bodies, optimising good educational practice, while achieving economies of scale. This option requires engaging with the Local Authority to identify another school that would see the benefits in federation, including deeming it viable.

3.5 **Option 4: Amalgamation** – effectively closing and reforming as part of a new and bigger entity (i.e. a new amalgamated school). For practical reasons, an amalgamation would need to be with another school within reasonable travelling distance. Only one other Nottinghamshire school is identified within this category – Dunham on Trent.

3.6 **Option 5: Closure.**

#### *NSDC consultation response summary*

3.7 In preparing our response to the County Council, local ward members were notified and observations were sought from different Business Units on the potential implications associated with each of the options. For completeness, a copy of the full response has been appended to this report. However, to summarise, the key issues raised in our response include:

- Recognition of the challenges associated with delivering and maintaining services in rural areas;
- Planning constraints and provision of other services locally affecting (limiting) the potential for growth and therefore population increase in this area;
- Whilst mindful of the resource implications for NCC, the District Council's priority at this stage is to work with relevant stakeholders to find a solution to maintain the school and to sustain it over the long term; and
- Identifying challenges for the community that may emerge in the event of closure, including potential costs and logistical issues.

3.8 The aforementioned prescribed stages for determining the future of the school include wider publication of the formal options consultation commencing in mid-September, with opportunity for any person or organisation to make representations on the proposals. Objections and comments received during this period will be compiled to help inform a final decision in Spring 2022, following which a statutory notice outlining the decision will be published and the course of action implemented in Summer 2022.

3.9 The Council's response appended as **Appendix 1** makes clear our commitment to working with NCC, the school's governing body and other stakeholders to find a sustainable solution, noting however the time period for roll out of any proposed changes to the operation of the school may not align with above decision-making timescales.

#### **4.0 Equalities Implications**

4.1 Although the prospect of closure of North Clifton Primary School has a myriad of potential equalities implications that NSDC must contend with as future plans develop, at present there are no direct equalities implications for this report

#### **5.0 Digital Implications**

5.1 No digital implications identified for this committee.

#### **6.0 Financial Implications**

6.1 **Comments from finance:** No financial impact identified at this stage. The potential financial impact on NSDC would be if there were to be a closure, the Council would no longer be in receipt of the business rates from the school.

#### **7.0 Community Plan – Alignment to Objectives**

7.1 **Create vibrant and self-sufficient local communities where residents look out for each other and actively contribute to the local area:** loss of an existing essential service will conflict with this objective.

7.2 **Enhance and protect the district's natural environment:** maintaining existing local services is critical for reducing car dependent travel and lowering CO2 emissions. Closure of North Clifton School would result in an increase in journeys to the nearest alternative school(s) and reduced frequency of walking and cycling trips.

#### **8.0 RECOMMENDATION**

**That the Council continue to engage with NCC, the school's governing body and other stakeholders to identify a sustainable solution for the future of the school.**

#### **Reason for Recommendation**

**To seek a cost effective and sustainable solution for all parties.**

Background Papers

Options for the future of North Clifton Primary School (letter dated 23/07/2021)

For further information please contact Tim Dawson on Ext 5769

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