

Report Title:	PHASE 1 PUPIL PLACE PLANNING – CONSULTATION FEEDBACK
Report of:	Assistant Director: Education

REPORT SUMMARY

The purpose of the report is to outline the consultation feedback arising from phase 1 of the pupil place planning review.

In March 2021, the Children Young People and Education Committee endorsed the Pupil Place Planning Strategy 2021 -2026. This Strategy set out a planned framework for the review of school places in both primary and secondary mainstream schools over the next 5 years.

At the March 2022 Children, Young People and Education committee, a consultation was approved in relation to recommendation 6, that the Diocese of Shrewsbury amalgamate St Peter's Catholic Primary School and St Paul's Catholic Primary School recommendation 7, to amalgamate Hillside Primary and Manor Primary schools.

As part of the committee report and consultation process it was made clear any alternative proposal arising from consultation would need to achieve a sustainable educational outcome within the local area.

Fundamental to the work has been adherence to the principles outlined. These are the drivers for change and are intrinsically aligned to the 'Brighter Futures' priority in the Wirral Plan 2021 - 2026. The work has already been captured as a strategic driver within the Plan and this report and recommendations form part of its delivery.

This is a key decision as it affects residents from two or more wards.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Assistant Director for Education is recommended to:

1. Note the Pupil Place Planning Consultation Report
2. Support the alternative proposal put forward by the Diocese of Shrewsbury in relation to St Peter's and St Paul' RC Primary Schools as articulated in paragraph 3.16 of the report.
3. Support the alternative proposal put forward by Hillside Primary School as articulated in paragraph 3.17 of the report.
4. Support the alternative proposal put forward by Manor Primary School as articulated in paragraph 3.18 of the report.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 It is important that the Council demonstrates its support for the work and proposals considered and agreed by the Diocesan who are important partners in supporting education outcomes for Wirral children.
- 1.2 The outcome of the Pupils Place Planning consultation makes clear the significant opposition by the local community to the possibility of amalgamation of the schools within the recommendations from the previous committee report.
- 1.3 The alternative proposals that have been put forward by the Diocese of Salford in relation to St Peter's and St Pauls RC Primary Schools and the alternative proposals put forward by Manor and Hillside Primary Schools have considered the importance of securing the long-term viability of each schools and are supportive of positive educational outcomes for young people.
- 1.4 The Officer Decision that has been made, in relation to this report is due to its time sensitive nature and allowing schools to communicate the outcome of the consultation process to parents/carers and the local community.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

2.1 Continue with the previous proposals outlined in the March 2022 committee.

The Pupil Place Planning consultation report articulates very little support for either proposal. Feedback highlighted concerns in relation disruption to pupils who would have to move schools; The travel distance between the schools that would amalgamate; Concerns in relation to tensions between the two neighbouring areas; The availability of local public transport and support for young people with SEND.

- 2.2 As requested at the previous committee when the consultation was approved, a request was made to include the provision across the schools for Early Years provision. Analysis has identified across the school's that a strong uptake of pre-F2 provision exists.
- 2.3 In relation to the viability of the schools in relation to finance, all schools currently have a positive budget position. This allows all schools covered within the consultation to plan effectively in relation to school budgets and manage changing pupil numbers over time.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Pupil Place Planning Strategy 2021-2026 was approved in March by the Children, Young People and Education Committee. This Strategy set out the vision and principles "to ensure that Wirral's children attend local schools that provide high quality education, are efficient, viable and provide the best possible educational standards to meet their needs".
- 3.2 The principles outlined are intended to guide much of the work and approach to a series of pupil place planning reviews as outlined in the Strategy. These are:

1. We will be fair, thorough, and respectful in our approach to Pupil Place planning reviews
 2. We will follow and adhere to all legal requirements, seeking relevant advice and guidance where this is applicable
 3. We will work with partners, and involve key stakeholders in pupil place planning where this is relevant and necessary
 4. We will consult with schools, parents, and local communities as part of the pupil place planning process
 5. We will utilise robust insight, intelligence, and data to underpin a robust methodology and analysis
 6. We will always consider how our efforts will improve educational outcomes for children and young people
 7. We will consider the efficiency and effectiveness of education provisions as part of pupil place planning
 8. We will prioritise and focus on inclusion, ensuring that children with special educational needs and disabilities are at the forefront of considerations throughout
- 3.3 Phase 1 of the review cycle has considered schools in and around the area of Birkenhead. For primary schools, the review is organised around several small planning areas. These are: Beechwood; Central Birkenhead; North Birkenhead; South Birkenhead; Noctorum; Prenton.
- 3.4 As part of the committee report in March, several other schools' part of phase 1 of the Pupil Place Planning review have taken steps or will be consulting on steps to address spare capacity within their establishments. The schools included within recommendations 6 and 7 of the previous committee report, did not have ability to reduce their PAN any further. Therefore, the recommendations put forward have been shared for consultation.
- 3.4 Pupil Place Planning Consultation feedback**
- 3.5 The consultation was carried out between the 17th May and 28th June 2022. The online 'Have your say' consultation portal was used. This included the relevant Pupil Place Plannings Findings Report and map covering catchment areas. An online questionnaire was used to engage with residents, with the capability to submit additional comments via a dedicated email address. Following the closure of the consultation the questionnaire responses were collated. In relation to free text comments, a text coding approach was used based on reoccurring themes and the collated.
- 3.6 To raise awareness of the consultation, public meetings, Drop-in sessions with affected schools, Easy read questionnaires and a dedicated Schools Consultation email inbox. In addition, the service collated paper copies and responses and direct engagement with schools.
- 3.7** The questionnaire had 421 responses, 265 through the online portal and 156 using paper copies. In addition to the questionnaire, 104 direct representations have been received and a petition specific to Manor Primary school from 238 individuals objecting to the proposal being consulted.
- 3.8 The most represented wards were Bidston St James (43.7%) and Claughton (22.0%), All 4 schools impacted reside in these two wards. In addition, 73.8% of

respondent's classes themselves as a local resident. In addition, 59.8% of respondents said they were a parent/guardian.

- 3.9 In relation to question 3 of the questionnaire, relating to the amalgamation of St Peter's and St Paul's RC Primary Schools, 84.6% of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the recommendations, with a significant proportion strongly disagreeing.
- 3.10 In relation to question 5 of the questionnaire, relating to the amalgamation of the Manor and Hillside Primary School, 89.2% of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the recommendation, with a significant proportion strongly disagreeing.
- 3.11 In relation to further comments made through the questionnaire the following key areas were identified. Concerns in relation safety across the neighbouring estates – this was in relation friction between the two communities, this raised concerns in regarding the safety of children.
- 3.12 In addition, many respondents commented on the distance pupils would have to travel and the increased challenge during the winter months. This is made more challenging with concerns raised regarding the availability of public transport, the cost of transport and the impact on the environment.
- 3.13 Finally, respondents raised concerns in relation the disruption of pupils, especially pupils with SEND. This will be more challenging given the impact of COVID-19 and this would be a further disruption. The schools involved in the consultation are seen as the heart of the community and respondents to the questionnaire stated losing the schools would be detrimental to local people.

3.14 **SUMMARY OF ALTERNATIVE PROPOSAL**

- 3.15 The local authority has received a written response in relation to the consultation from the Diocese of Shrewsbury. As Voluntary Aided schools, the governing bodies of St Peter's and St Paul's RC Primary Schools are the employers at the school. The Diocese have responded with the following position; they do not support the proposal to amalgamate St Peter's and St Paul's RC Primary Schools, this is based on the current numbers of early years pupils attending the two schools, the recent 'good' OFSTED inspections at both schools, the differences that have been articulated between the two communities and the concerns raised in relation to distance between the two schools.
- 3.16 The Diocese have articulated the following alternative, In the immediate, maintain the schools as is. Moving forward look at greater collaboration between both schools, sharing of resources and at an opportune time look to either a soft federation (each school retains its governing body but there is a shared leadership structure) or a hard federation (the school has one governing body but operates as two separate schools)
- 3.17 In relation to Hillside Primary School, the school have shared an alternative proposal and have made an application to the DFE, in relation to joining the Co-op Multi Academy Trust (MAT). Senior officers from the local authority have met with the CEO of the Co-op MAT, they have confirmed that given the expected pupil numbers that will attend the school in medium/long term they can support Hillside

Primary School in remaining viable. This can be achieved through additional support they are willing to offer the school as part of the trust.

3.18 In relation to Manor Primary School, they have shared an alternative proposal in relation to receiving continued support from the Leading Learners Trust. Senior Officers from the local authority have met with the CEO of the Leading Learners Trust. The school have been receiving support from the trust in relation to school improvement for the last 12 months. They have articulated with a continued partnership the school can be supported to remain viable in the future.

3.19 The following alternative proposals support the school's approach to securing a viable future for the individual schools and support educational outcomes within the local area. Senior officers will continue to engage with individual schools regarding the alternative proposals if they are supported by committee.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are several financial considerations in relation to the impact of changing pupil numbers overtime. However, it is important to note that there is no financial motivation for undertaking this work. The rationale for the pupil place planning review is aligned with the local authorities responsibility to ensure school sufficiency to the correct level and make sure the provision is viable moving forward.

4.2 All schools involved within the consultation currently have a viable budget and have a carry forward in relation to their school revenue budget. The positive budget will be beneficial if pupil numbers change, in addition, the alternative proposals articulated have identified ways to make sure the schools are viable with a change in pupil number over time.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The local authority has a legal duty to ensure sufficiency of school places for children. Statutory guidance sets out formal process for consultation and approval of significant decisions such as to make prescribed changes to maintained schools or to close/open schools. These will guide the activity and approval of the proposals.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

6.1 Recommendations relating to the Diocese will be implemented within their own resources. However, the local authority will continue to offer support and guidance in relation to delivery of agreed recommendations.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

7.1 There is a risk that the proposals outlined could lead to the school struggling if pupils fall to an unsustainable number. We will continue to support the schools covered in the consultation closely over the next number of years to make sure they remain viable.

7.2 There is a risk that the projections may be inaccurate and activity taking place at the schools to address changing pupil numbers could lead to challenge. The risk will be mitigated through a year review of pupil numbers against school provision across Wirral.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 As outlined in the feedback from the consultation significant engagement has taken place with schools, parents/carers, residents and relevant local organisations. Feedback captured in the consultation has been invaluable in articulating the way forward in this report.
- 8.2 The report has been shared with Chair and Spokes of the Children's, Families and Education committee who are supportive of the recommendations for each school outlined in the report.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for the Pupil Place Planning Strategy 2021-2026 - [Link](#)

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Environmental concerns have been raised as part of the school travel distances and this has been reported as part of the consultation.
- 10.2 The content of this report is expected to have a neutral impact on carbon emissions.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 Concerns in relation to the school's role in the local community have been highlighted and this has been noted as part of the consultation feedback.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Pupil Place Planning Consultation Feedback

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Pupil Place Planning Strategy 2021-2026

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Children, Young People and Education Committee	March 2021
Children , Young People and Education Committee	March 2022