



Purpose: For Decision

Cabinet Report

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| Date | 13 JULY 2023 |
| Title | AMALGAMATION OF CHILLERTON AND ROOKLEY PRIMARY SCHOOL WITH GODSHILL PRIMARY SCHOOL |
| Report of | CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDRENS SERVICES, EDUCATION AND LIFELONG SKILLS |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Stenbury Federation (the Governing Body for Chillerton and Rookley and Godshill Primary Schools) wrote to the Isle of Wight Council on 19 January 2021 requesting that an amalgamation of Chillerton and Rookley and Godshill Primary Schools be consulted upon. An initial public consultation commenced on the 29 January 2021 and concluded on the 19 March 2021.
2. Cabinet took the decision to undertake a further period of consultation on a range of options and this period of consultation commenced on the 5 November and concluded on the 17 December 2021.
3. Cabinet reviewed the outcome of this consultation on the 10 February 2022 and took the decision to defer the decision pending a further review into options other than closure.
4. Further options have been considered, but due to continuing very low numbers on roll at the school, only 9 children, and governors being unable to recruit to a vacant teaching post the decision was taken by the Governing Body, supported by the IoW Council and in discussion with the impacted families to educate all children across the Federation on the Godshill Primary School site from 1 January 2023.
5. This report sets out the recommendations on next steps and associated timeframe.

RECOMMENDATION

That Cabinet approves the publication of a Public Notice that achieves the amalgamation of Godshill Primary School and Chillerton and Rookley Primary School through the closure of Chillerton & Rookley Primary School with effect from the 31 December 2023.

BACKGROUND

6. The Council received a letter from the Stenbury Federation (the Governing Body for Chillerton and Rookley and Godshill Primary Schools) on 19 January 2021 requesting that an amalgamation of Chillerton and Rookley and Godshill Primary Schools be consulted upon. On 22 January 2021, an officer delegated decision was taken to approve a pre-publication consultation on the future of Chillerton and Rookley Primary School, part of the Stenbury Federation with Godshill Primary School.
7. A pre-publication consultation commenced on 29 January 2021 and ran until 19 March 2021. It was informed by a number of issues that the governors explained are compromising the viability and educational provision at Chillerton and Rookley Primary school.
8. The consultation was an on-line consultation with no public meetings able to be held due to the coronavirus pandemic. People consulted included the parents of the pupils attending Chillerton and Rookley and Godshill Primary Schools, the Member of Parliament, Parish Councils, local councillors, Trade Unions, and residents. In total 110 responses were received from different sources with some people making more than one response.
9. Following a change in the Council's political administration after the local government elections in May 2021 the new administration took a decision to undertake a further period of public consultation that included a range of alternative options. This was to provide an opportunity for all stakeholders to comment on a broad range of options and bring forward alternate proposals should they wish.
10. This second period of consultation commenced on 5 November 2021 and ran until 17 December 2021.
11. An on-line consultation and two public meetings were held, one at Chillerton and Rookley and one at Godshill Primary School. People and groups consulted included the parents of the pupils attending Chillerton and Rookley and Godshill Primary School, the Member of Parliament, Parish Councils, local councillors, Trade Unions, and residents. In total 233 responses were received from different sources with some people making more than one response.
12. In February 2022, Cabinet took the decision to defer the decision to proceed with the publication of a Public Notice to achieve the proposed amalgamation of Godshill Primary School and Chillerton and Rookley Primary School through the closure of Chillerton & Rookley Primary School with effect from the 31 August 2022, in order for further options to be explored.
13. Further options were considered as requested by Cabinet, but with a sustained decline in children attending the school, and the governors being unable to appoint a teacher to work at the school, Cabinet should now reconsider the school's future.
14. The number of children attending the school has fallen steadily over the last few years, with 9 on roll as of June 2023. The school has a capacity of 91 places. This contrasts with 85 pupils on roll in the 2017/18 academic year. Of the 9 pupils on roll only 2 pupils live in Chillerton, and 3 in Rookley. The school has a Published Admission Number (PAN) of 13.

15. From the 1 January 2023 all the children on roll at Chillerton & Rookley, in agreement with their parents have been taught at the Godshill site. This has ensured they have access to the full primary curriculum, participate in extra-curricular activities and develop wider social and emotional skills with their peer groups.
16. Schools are mainly funded based upon the number of pupils on roll. Low and falling pupil numbers has a significant impact on a school's budget.
17. It is recommended that Cabinet approve the publication of the Public Notice to achieve the proposed amalgamation of Godshill Primary School and Chillerton and Rookley Primary School through the closure of Chillerton & Rookley Primary School with effect from the 1 January 2024.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

18. The recommendation in this report directly links to the Corporate Plan 2021-25 priority which is to work with local communities to maintain and ensure appropriate local school provision. In addition to this it supports the commitment that through ongoing business of the council we will work with and challenge schools' performance to ensure that all are good or outstanding, and to ensure work is undertaken to challenge schools in financial deficit to secure a more sustainable position for the schools and the council.

Responding to climate change and enhancing the biosphere

19. Godshill Primary School is a more energy efficient building than Chillerton & Rookley Primary School.
20. Subject to the availability of funding heat decarbonisation plans will be commissioned in the near future for all Local Authority owned school buildings. The recommendation in this report will assist in the submission of applications for future funding and ultimately support the IWCs target to be carbon neutral by 2035.

Economic Recovery and Reducing Poverty

21. As set out within the corporate plan this report demonstrates the council's commitment to work with local communities to maintain and ensure appropriate local school provision, providing the best possible outcomes for children on the Island. In addition to this it supports the commitment that through the ongoing business of the council it will work with and challenge schools' performance to ensure that all are good or outstanding, and to ensure work is undertaken to challenge schools in financial deficit to secure a more sustainable position for the schools and the council.

Impact on Young People and Future Generations

22. The decisions the Council makes now not only affect current residents, but may have long term impacts, both positive and negative, on young people and future generations. These impacts may not immediately be fully apparent or may not emerge for a number of years or decades. Impacts will be interrelated across the various domains of young people's lives from housing, employment or training, health and the environment.

23. The consultation undertaken to date on the proposed amalgamation of Chillerton and Rookley Primary School and Godshill Primary School through the closure of Chillerton & Rookley Primary School invited those young people and their families to provide their views and suggestions. This information forms part of the final decision making process.

Corporate Aims

24. The recommendation in this report directly links to the Corporate Plan 2021-25 priority which is to work with local communities to maintain and ensure appropriate local school provision. In addition to this it supports the commitment that through ongoing business of the council we will work with and challenge schools' performance to ensure that all are good or outstanding, and to ensure work is undertaken to challenge schools in financial deficit to secure a more sustainable position for the schools and the council.

FINANCIAL / BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

25. Schools are funded through the ring-fenced dedicated schools grant (DSG) using a local funding formula, that mirrors the Department for Education's (DfE) national funding formula. The ability to deviate from the national formula has significantly reduced in recent years and will cease altogether by 2027/28 at the latest. The revenue funding passed through the local authority for maintained schools is strictly controlled by operational guidance supplied by the DfE. Most of the funding to schools is based upon the number of pupils on roll. Therefore, when the overall pupil numbers in the school reduce, then the funding allocation is reduced on a per pupil basis.
26. Under the current local and National Funding Formula school budgets are heavily linked to the number of pupils on roll. The age-weighted pupil unit (AWPU) is the basic funding that all pupils attract. The current AWPU funding amount is £3,442 for primary pupils and this illustrates how critical pupil numbers are to the funding of each school's provision. Schools with fewer pupils than expected can result in pressures that may affect standards, outcomes for children and therefore the overall viability of the school. A balanced budget is one that will lead neither to an excessive surplus at the end of the year nor to a deficit. A budget is well-informed when it takes account of the best available information on all variables, such as pupil numbers and staffing changes. Setting an annual budget is an absolute requirement as part of the local authority's budgeting arrangement as set out in the Schemes for Financing schools. Under school funding regulations, individual maintained schools must have devolved funding and individual responsibility to ensure expenditure does not exceed income. This is monitored and will lead to intervention to ensure financial viability if budget planning shows a future or continued deficit.
27. The pupil forecast for Chillerton and Rookley shows a continued fall in pupil numbers based on the historic trend of recruitment for reception year pupils. The school had 11 pupils on roll at the January 2023 census. This includes those pupils on roll at Chillerton and Rookley but being educated on the Godshill site for operational reasons.
28. The financial position of Chillerton and Rookley Primary School has remained unresolved since 2016/17 and for the financial year 2022/23 the cumulative deficit is now at £74,372. The school is currently under the Notice of Concern, which is

required to be issued to schools that are more than 5 years in deficit. The school budget share for 2022/23 was £266,000 with over £194,000 (73%) of this spent on staffing. The 2022/23 deficit is significant and an equivalent of 38% of the school's annual core funding.

29. Godshill Primary School was issued with the Notice of concern in June 2022, following confirmation of the outturn position for 2021/22 and the required submission of three-year budget plan in May 2022. The school successfully came out of deficit in 2022/23 and is currently predicting to be in surplus in the 2023/24 financial year. In comparison, the school budget share for 2023/24 for Godshill is £700,000, two and a half times larger, making it better placed to make the necessary efficiencies and structural changes to continue being affordable going forward.
30. Under the Isle of Wight Scheme for Financing Schools, the final balance of any closing schools reverts to the Council and therefore, the financial risk to the local authority needs to be closely monitored to minimise any future deficit should the school be closed.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

31. Decision-makers will need to bear in mind at this stage that some changes to maintained schools are considered 'prescribed alterations', which will require a specific statutory process to be followed for their correct implementation. This process is set out in the statutory guidance 'Making significant changes ('prescribed alterations') to maintained schools' updated in January 2023. Additionally, any proposal that requires a school to close (including a closure to amalgamate) will need to consider the statutory guidance 'Opening and closing maintained schools' updated in January 2023. Both Godshill Primary School and Chillerton and Rookley Primary School are designated as rural primary schools, the closure of which requires additional consultation and due consideration by decision-makers.
32. The guidance states that the Council should adopt a presumption against the closure of rural schools. However, this does not mean that a rural school will never close, but the case for closure should be strong and a proposal must be clearly in the best interests of educational provision in the area. When producing a proposal to close a rural primary school, the proposer must consider:
 - *the likely effect of the closure of the school on the local community*; the closure of Chillerton and Rookley Primary School can be mitigated by the proposed relocation of pupils to Godshill Primary School if parents wish to have their children educated at that school.
 - *the proportion of pupils attending the school from within the local community, i.e. is the school being used by the local community*; Chillerton and Rookley Primary School is not the school of choice by the majority of its community. As at June 2023 of the 9 primary age pupils who had Chillerton in their address only two attend Chillerton and Rookley Primary School.
 - *educational standards at the school and the likely effect on standards at neighbouring schools*; To ensure that the 9 pupils on roll at Chillerton & Rookley receive the very best educational, social, and emotional opportunities they have since January 2023 been taught on the Godshill site. This has ensured they have access to all the elements of the national curriculum, and a wide range of extra-curricular activities.

- The decision, in agreement with their parents to move them to the Godshill site was required as no teacher could be recruited to teach them on the Chillerton & Rookley site.
- This move to Godshill and the proposed closure of Chillerton & Rookley has and will have no impact on any neighbouring schools. Godshill have been able to accommodate all the required children from Chillerton & Rookley.
- *whether the school is now surplus to requirements (e.g. because there are surplus places elsewhere in the local area which can accommodate displaced pupils, and there is no predicted demand for the school in the medium or long term)*; there are sufficient surplus places within the planning area at Godshill Primary School to accommodate the displaced pupils currently on roll at Chillerton and Rookley Primary School.
- *any increase in the use of motor vehicles which is likely to result from the closure of the school, and the likely effects of any such increases*; In November 2020 of the thirty-four pupils on roll at Chillerton and Rookley Primary, Godshill Primary was the nearest for eight of those pupils, and twelve travelled from out of area. The closure of Chillerton and Rookley Primary School and the subsequent relocation of pupils to Godshill Primary School will therefore not necessarily increase the overall use of the motor vehicle for the school run as parents drive their children to Godshill instead of Chillerton.
- *any alternatives to the closure of the school (including academy conversion, federation, or extending the school to provide local community facilities)*; As noted within this report a number of alternatives have been considered and the local authority believes the closure of Chillerton and Rookley Primary School provides the best opportunity to stabilise the educational offer in that part of the Island.
- *transport implications i.e., the availability, and likely cost of transport to other schools and sustainability issues*; Chillerton resident pupils will be entitled to local authority funded transport if they are eligible under the Home to School Transport Policy, to what becomes their nearest school if Chillerton and Rookley Primary School closes. A previous paragraph provides further detail.
- *the size of the school and whether it puts the children at an educational disadvantage e.g., in terms of breadth of curriculum or resources available*; with a possible number on roll of 15 for the 2022/23 academic year the school was likely to be able to run only two classes, one for Key stage 1 pupils and the other for Key Stage 2 pupils. Running one class across three (KS1) or four (KS2) years impacts on the breadth of curriculum that can be offered at the school.
- *the overall and long-term impact on the local community of the closure of the village school and of the loss of the building as a community facility*; no decision has been made about the future of the Chillerton and Rookley Primary School site. The School building has been listed as an Asset of Community Value at the request of the local community.
- *wider school organisation and capacity of good schools in the area to accommodate displaced pupils*; pupil numbers in the area are forecast to fall over the next few years so it is anticipated that there will be places available at good schools in the area.

33. The proposed option to amalgamate Chillerton and Rookley Primary School with Godshill Primary School to be achieved through the closure of Chillerton and Rookley Primary School will require consideration of the statutory guidance in respect of rural school closures.
34. Any closure of a rural primary school requires consultation with: the parents of registered pupils; the governing body; the pupils; the teachers and other staff, the governing bodies, teachers and other staff of any other affected school(s); the parents of any pupils at other schools who may be affected; trade unions; the MP and any other interested organisation.
35. Making prescribed alterations requires a four-stage process to be followed prior to implementation, which includes a period of formal consultation. While there is no statutory pre-publication consultation period for this type of change, the statutory guidance makes it clear that there is a 'strong expectation' that schools and Local Authorities will consult all interested parties in developing their proposal prior to publication, to take into account all relevant considerations.
36. A prescribed alteration relevant to this proposal is the enlargement of premises (expansion). The prescribed alterations' statutory process must be followed to enlarge premises if the proposed enlargement is permanent (longer than 3 years) and would increase the capacity of the school by more than 30 pupils and the lesser of 25% or 200 pupils. The statutory process for prescribed alterations does not need to be followed for expansions falling short of this threshold.
37. The prescribed alterations guidance also suggests that local authorities are not expected to propose expansion of underperforming schools unless there is a strong case that this would help to raise standards. Where there is a proposal to expand a school that is rated inadequate, the guidance requires the local authority to send a copy of the proposal to the relevant Regional Director.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

38. Consideration must be given as to whether there are any sex, race, or disability discrimination issues that arise from the changes being proposed. The proposal being put forward by the council in this report; The future of Chillerton & Rookley Primary School will have no negative impact on equality and diversity.
39. The policies of the Council in relation to equal opportunities and eliminating discrimination will continue to apply should a change be approved.
40. Council officers will work closely with the headteacher and governing body to assess any support that might be required by students and their families / carers should any proposed changes be approved.

PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

41. No decision has been made about the longer-term use of the Chillerton & Rookley Primary School site should a decision be taken to close the school. However, concerns have been raised by consultees around the legal position of the Chillerton & Rookley Primary School site, should the decision be taken to cease educational use on it.

42. The school land is held on-trust by the council. If the school is closed the property (or any proceeds of sale) could revert to the beneficiaries of the estate of the original owner.
43. The proceeds of sale could be used to fund the purchase or improvement of alternative school premises. Alternatively, the council could apply to the Charity Commission to set up a scheme for a similar charitable purpose which would extinguish the trust.

OPTIONS

44. The options that the Council have considered and consulted upon prior to deciding on its preferred option are:
 - i) To approve the publication of a Public Notice that achieves the amalgamation of Godshill Primary School and Chillerton and Rookley Primary School through the closure of Chillerton & Rookley Primary School with effect from the 31 December 2023 as set out in the report.
 - ii) To not approve the publication of a Public Notice to amalgamate Chillerton and Rookley Primary School with Godshill Primary School to be achieved through the closure of Chillerton and Rookley Primary School with effect from the 31 December 2023.

PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

45. Staffing implications will be considered subject to the outcome of this consultation. However, with the actions already taken to move the children on roll at Chillerton & Rookley to Godshill it is unlikely that any further alterations to the staffing structure will be required. If any are required, they will be undertaken in accordance with the Council's Restructuring, Redundancy and Redeployment Policy, including the duty to consult with those staff potentially affected by any proposed school closure. Details of any staff consultation will be set out, including the timetable for formal consultation with staff and unions.

RISK MANAGEMENT

46. Financial risks have been reviewed and considered by the Senior Finance Business Partner and further information can be reviewed in the Finance section of this report.
47. An implementation group will be formed if required to take forward the final recommendation. It will meet on a monthly basis or more regularly if required; it will be chaired by a senior education and inclusion officer. Representatives will include governors, headteacher and local authority officers with expertise in governance, property, HR, finance, admissions, and school improvement. They will ensure that risks associated with the final recommendation are identified and mitigated.

EVALUATION

48. The recommendation in this report to amalgamate Chillerton and Rookley Primary School with Godshill Primary School to be achieved through the closure of Chillerton

and Rookley Primary School has been carefully considered. It has taken into account many different factors and fully considered all the feedback received during both consultation periods. The recommendation will reduce the number of surplus places in the area and support the on-going provision of high quality education across Godshill and Chillerton & Rookley and the Island.

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