

Purpose: For Decision

Cabinet Report

Date	9 NOVEMBER 2023
Title	THE FUTURE OF CHILLERTON & ROOKLEY PRIMARY SCHOOL
Report of	CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDRENS SERVICES, EDUCATION AND CORPORATE FUNCTIONS

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, this period of consultation commenced on the 5 November and concluded on the 17 December 2021.
3. Cabinet considered the outcome of this consultation on the 10 February 2022 and took a decision to defer a final decision pending a further review into options other than closure.
4. Further options were 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. Cabinet approved the publication of a Public Notice on 13 July 2023 that recommended the amalgamation of Godshill Primary School and Chillerton and Rookley Primary School through the closure of Chillerton and Rookley Primary School with effect from the 31 December 2023. This notice was published on 15 September and concluded on 27 October 2023.
6. This report sets out the outcome of this statutory consultation period, recommended next steps and associated timeframe.

RECOMMENDATION

That Cabinet approves the amalgamation of Godshill Primary School and Chillerton and Rookley Primary School through the closure of Chillerton and Rookley Primary School with effect from the 31 December 2023.

BACKGROUND

7. 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.
8. 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.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. This second period of consultation commenced on 5 November 2021 and ran until 17 December 2021.
12. 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.
13. In February 2022, Cabinet took the decision to defer a 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, for further options to be explored.

14. 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 was asked to reconsider the future of the school.
15. Cabinet approved the publication of a Public Notice on 13 July 2023 that proposed 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. This notice was published on 15 September and concluded on 27 October 2023.
16. The consultation was an on-line consultation. 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, Department for Education, and residents. In total 25 responses were received during the Public Notice period, 23 were in support of the recommendation to amalgamate Godshill Primary School and Chillerton and Rookley Primary School through the closure of Chillerton and Rookley Primary School, 1 respondent opposed the recommendation, and 1 respondent sort to show an interest in acquiring the site should the Council take a future decision to dispose of it. All the responses to the Public Notice are attached at Appendix 1.
17. The number of children attending the school has fallen steadily over the last few years, and the school has had no children registered on roll since the 4 October 2023. The school has a capacity of 91 places. This contrasts with 85 pupils on roll in the 2017/18 academic year. The school has a Published Admission Number (PAN) of 13.
18. 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.
19. 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.
20. It is recommended that Cabinet approve 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 December 2023.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

21. 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

22. A climate and sustainable development impact assessment has been undertaken and is detailed below. This demonstrates the impacts of the proposed decision to the environmental and socio-economic conditions of the Island. The wheel is made up of two different distinct sections. The outer wheel focuses on socio-economic factors, which could impact communities across the Island. The inner wheel focuses on the delivery of net zero emissions to meet the councils 2030 target. There are 17 outer socio-economic segments and 6 inner environmental segments, and these are scored from 1 (long-lasting or severe negative impact) to 5 (long-lasting or extensive positive impact). Overall, the assessment demonstrates no long-lasting or severe negative impacts if the proposed option is approved.



23. By closing one school site it could result in additional children needing to be transported to school. However, in this circumstance given the very low numbers of children involved, closing the Chillerton and Rookley site will have overall benefits for the environment as it will reduce the impact of building emissions. Schools do regularly promote active travel to school which will continue to support the reduction of emissions created from transporting children to school by car.
24. Godshill Primary School is a more energy efficient building than Chillerton & Rookley Primary School.
25. 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

26. 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

27. 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.
28. The United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989, in particular article 12, places a duty for children and young people to have an active voice in decision making on matters that affect them. We value the views of our young people. Incorporating coproduction and consultation with young people into our decision-making process is a robust way of ensuring young people's views are taken into consideration. Participation workers experienced in coproduction can support engagement with the Youth Council, our Island children and wider groups of young people to ensure the voice of young people is sought, heard and acted upon on important matters that will affect them.

FINANCIAL / BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

FINANCE

29. 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.
30. 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 9 pupils on roll at the June 2023 census. This includes those pupils on roll at Chillerton and Rookley but being educated on the Godshill site for operational reasons.
31. 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 £74,372. The school is currently under a Notice of Concern, which is required to be issued to schools that are more than 5 years in deficit. The latest May 2023 3-year

budget plan shows an expected balanced position, but on review by the Education Finance team a reduced residual potential deficit in the region of £20,000 may remain. An updated position will be provided by the school on receipt of mid-year budget updates from all schools at the end of November 2023. The school continues to work with the local authority to ensure any deficit risk is minimised where possible.

32. 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. In comparison, the school budget share for 2022/23 for Godshill is £708,000, two and a half times larger, making it better placed to make the necessary efficiencies and structural changes going forward.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

33. 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.
34. 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 relocation of pupils to Godshill and other local primary schools.
 - *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 of November 2023, there are no children on roll at the school.
 - *educational standards at the school and the likely effect on standards at neighbouring schools;*
 - From January 2023 to October 2023 all pupils that remained on roll of Chillerton & Rookley Primary were educated at the Godshill site to ensure they received the very best educational, social, and emotional opportunities. This 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 and due to declining birth rates there is no predicted demand for school places in the long term. No pupils are currently on roll of the school and therefore there will not be any impact on displaced children
- *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;*
 - As at June 2023 of the 9 primary age pupils who had Chillerton in their address only two attend Chillerton and Rookley Primary School. 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 children will be transported 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.
- *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;*
 - The school currently has no children on roll therefore this is not currently relative. However, to note previously the school had a total number on roll of 15 for the 2022/23 academic year and 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. However, from September 2023 the Primary Behaviour Support service has been making use of parts of the school site. Should a decision be taken to close the school this site may be considered for the long term location of the service. The school building has also 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 planning area are forecast to reduce in the next few years so it is anticipated that there will be places available at good schools in the area.
35. Consideration has been given to the statutory guidance in respect of rural school closures. This includes 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.
36. 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.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

37. 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.
38. The policies of the Council in relation to equal opportunities and eliminating discrimination will continue to apply should a change be approved.
39. Council staff 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

40. Since September 2023 the Primary Behavioural Support Service has occupied part of the school site. Should a decision be taken to close Chillerton & Rookley Primary School this may be considered a suitable longer-term use.
41. Concerns have previously been raised by consultees around the legal position of the Chillerton & Rookley Primary School site, should a decision be taken to cease educational use on it. 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. Alternatively, if the site was to be disposed of the proceeds of sale could be used to fund the purchase or improvement of alternative school premises or, the council could apply to the Charity Commission to set up a scheme for a similar charitable purpose which would extinguish the existing Trust.
42. The longer-term use of the site will be considered in detail and, as required consulted upon once a final decision has been taken on the future of Chillerton & Rookley Primary School.

OPTIONS

43. The options that the Council have considered and consulted upon prior to deciding on its preferred option are:
- (1) To approve the amalgamation of Godshill Primary School and Chillerton and Rookley Primary School to be achieved through the closure of Chillerton & Rookley Primary School with effect from the 31 December 2023 as set out in the report.
 - (2) To not approve the amalgamation of 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

44. Staffing implications will be considered subject to the outcome of this consultation. However, with the children previously on roll at Chillerton & Rookley now relocated 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

45. 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.
46. 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

47. 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 all 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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