



Purpose: For Decision

Cabinet report

Date **14 OCTOBER 2021**

Title **CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE OF CHILLERTON AND ROOKLEY PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Report of **CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION AND LIFELONG SKILLS**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Stenbury Federation (the Governing Body for Chillerton and Rookley and Godshill Primary Schools) on 19 January 2021 wrote to the Isle of Wight Council requesting that an amalgamation of Chillerton and Rookley and Godshill Primary Schools be consulted upon. A public consultation commenced on the 29 January and concluded on the 19 March 2021.
2. A decision is now being sought from Cabinet to undertake a further period of public consultation on a range of options as set-out in section 22 of this report. This will provide an opportunity for all stakeholders to comment on a broad range of options, and bring forward alternate proposals should they wish.
3. Following the closure of this consultation period a report will be brought to Cabinet in Spring 2022 setting out the outcomes of the consultation period, including recommendations on next steps and associated timeframe.

RECOMMENDATION

4. That Cabinet approve a period of an open six-week public consultation on all the options set-out above during the autumn term 2021.
5. A report is brought to Cabinet in spring 2022 setting out the outcomes of the public consultation period, including recommendations on next steps and associated timeframe.

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 told us, are compromising the viability and educational provision at Chillerton and Rookley Primary school.
8. The consultation was an on-line consultation with no public meeting able to be held owing 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 local residents. In total 110 responses were received from different sources with some people making more than one response.
9. The number of pupils attending Chillerton and Rookley Primary School has fallen steadily over the last few years and the number on roll at census day in October 2020 was 36 against a capacity at the school of 91 places. At that time, of the 36 pupils on roll only 11 pupils lived in Chillerton and Rookley. This contrasts with the number of pupils on roll in the 2017/18 academic year which was 85. The school has a Published Admission Number of 13 and received one, late, application for a place in Year R for the 2021/22 academic year. This child has been offered a place at the school. Surplus places, as a result of falling numbers, have a significant impact on school budgets.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10. Schools are funded through the ring-fenced dedicated schools grant (DSG) using a local funding formula, heavily linked to the Department for Education's (DfE) national funding formula. 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.
11. 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 £3,167 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 (LA's) budgeting arrangement as set out in schemes for financing schools. This is monitored and will lead to intervention to ensure financial viability if budget planning shows a future deficit.
12. 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 headteacher reports that the school had 22 pupils on roll at the start of the autumn

term 2021. This includes those pupils on roll at Chillerton and Rookley but being educated on the Godshill site for operational reasons.

13. The financial position of Chillerton and Rookley Primary School has remained unresolved since 2016/17 and for the financial year 2020/21 the cumulative deficit is now at £80,374. The school took some mitigations during 2020/21 which has led to a recent budget submission where the deficit doesn't increase in 2021/22. However, the forecast fall in pupil numbers and the lagged funding based on the previous October census means the school is forecasting the deficit further increasing to £118,057 over the period to 2022/23 financial year. The school budget share for 2021/22 is £300,000 with over £228,000 (76%) of this spent on staffing. The current deficit is significant and an equivalent of 27% of the school's annual core funding. Running one classroom on the Chillerton site will lead to an increase in the in-year budget deficit that will continue to grow in subsequent years, based on reasonable projections of pupil numbers.
14. Godshill Primary School has also remained in deficit at the end of the 2020/21 financial year resulting in a cumulative outturn deficit of £136,052, but in the following two financial years this deficit reduces to under £100,000 as the number on roll at the school increases. This position does not include any additional Chillerton and Rookley Primary School pupils that may access their education at Godshill, as they remain on roll at Chillerton and Rookley unless they transfer through normal admissions requests by parents and carers. In comparison, the school budget share for Godshill is over £627,000 making it better placed to make the necessary efficiencies and structural changes to become affordable going forward.
15. 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.

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

16. In 2012, Godshill Primary School was inspected by Ofsted and inspectors concluded that the quality of education being provided was of a good quality. The following year, in 2013, Chillerton and Rookley Primary School was also judged to be good by an Ofsted inspection team. Both schools were able to set a balanced budget until the financial year 2017/18. In 2017, Ofsted reinspected Godshill Primary School and concluded that the quality of education required improvement. The inspection team concluded "Leadership capacity has been weakened during a period of turbulence. Consequently, leaders have not maintained previously good standards of teaching, learning and assessment across the school". In 2018, Chillerton and Rookley Primary School had a short inspection from Ofsted (Ofsted had by this time adopted a new 'short' inspection for schools previously judged to be good) during which priorities for improvement were clearly identified.
17. In 2018 a new Executive Headteacher and Chair of Governors were appointed. In September 2018, shortly after these appointments, Ofsted reinspected Chillerton and Rookley and determined that the school required improvement. They noted that a good start had been made in tackling the priorities for improvement and stated 'Governors have taken determined action to improve their own effectiveness. They have sensible plans to tackle the biggest challenges facing the school. The

determined actions of the local authority have kept the school safe during a period of instability. Strong interim leadership has ensured that the necessary improvements to teaching, learning and assessment have been started'. In September 2019, Godshill Primary School was also judged to be requiring improvement, however leadership was judged to be good with Ofsted concluding 'After many changes in a short space of time, the school is now well led'.

18. Both Chillerton and Rookley and Godshill Primary Schools are on a strong trajectory to come out of the Ofsted category of 'Requires Improvement'. Godshill Primary School has had two monitoring visits during the Covid-19 pandemic and on both occasions Ofsted has judged the school to be taking 'effective action'.
19. Despite the improvements being made at Chillerton and Rookley Primary School numbers have continued to decline. The lack of pupils at Chillerton and Rookley restricts the budget available to ensure sufficient leadership staffing and time, professional development for staff and access to high quality external support that are essential to ongoing school improvement.
20. When Chillerton and Rookley Primary School was last inspected in September 2018, inspectors found the school to be a safe and happy place where children felt well looked after. However, Ofsted judged that, in particular, pupils did not make enough progress in Key Stage 1, and that outcomes in mathematics were weak across the school (Ofsted report at this link: <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50029816>)
21. The school was given an action to increase the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standards in reading, writing and maths. The school has made significant progress in addressing these issues. The decision to combine some of the cohorts including Year 6 from the Godshill and Chillerton and Rookley schools for lessons has created an opportunity to enhance the progress of these children. The larger combined cohort has increased the positive impact of peer-to-peer learning and modelling, enhanced social and emotional development, and enabled focused teaching in similar attainment groups. This is evidenced by end of year teacher assessments and student voice feedback.

OPTIONS

22. The purpose of this paper is to set out a range of options for the future of Chillerton and Rookley Primary School that can be considered against the context outlined above, to determine the most appropriate approach that ensures sustainable educational provision for the local community. This paper attempts to incorporate all suggestions that have been made so far through the informal consultation process. These are:
 - (a) To leave both schools open and federated, meaning the status quo remains
 - (b) The amalgamation of Chillerton and Rookley Primary School with Godshill Primary School to be achieved through the closure of Chillerton and Rookley Primary School
 - (c) The amalgamation of Chillerton and Rookley Primary School with Godshill Primary School to be achieved through the closure of Godshill Primary School

- (d) To seek an academy/free school sponsor for Chillerton and Rookley Primary School and, if successful, to defederate the school from the Stenbury Federation
- (e) To defederate Chillerton & Rookley from the Stenbury Federation and re-form it as a stand-alone primary school
- (f) To seek another local maintained school to federate with Chillerton and Rookley Primary School
- (g) To set up provision for flexi-schooling on the Chillerton and Rookley site to sit alongside full-time provision

In addition to the above options, the Isle of Wight Council would welcome any other suggestions from stakeholders during the proposed additional consultation process set out within the recommendation of this report. Any other viable options would be fully considered prior to further decision making.

23. Taking each proposal in turn:

(a) To leave both schools open and federated, meaning the status quo remains.

Merits

- Enables both schools to remain open, for at least the short-term, so maintains a local school within the village
- Stability for pupils currently accessing provision at the Chillerton and Rookley site and also those accessing provision at the Godshill site
- Reduces transport costs and environmental impact for those parents/carers that currently are able to walk their children to Chillerton and Rookley School (as of July 2021 school records show this to be four parents/carers)
- Allows the Stenbury Federation to seek additional pupils to make the school financially sustainable
- Continues to allow the spread of the cost of the Headteacher across both schools in the federation. The current cost of the Headteacher is shared across the two schools in the federation together with Barton Primary

Demerits

- The budget forecast will show a growing deficit budget for Chillerton and Rookley as set out above
- Pupil forecasts for the schools do not show either school recruiting significant numbers of additional pupils going forward
- Neither school will be financially sustainable without a significant growth in pupil numbers

(b) The amalgamation of Chillerton and Rookley Primary School with Godshill Primary School to be achieved through the closure of Chillerton and Rookley Primary School.

Merits

- All pupils at Chillerton & Rookley can, at the current time, be offered a place at Godshill Primary School
- Larger cohort of pupils will allow a more varied and stronger educational offer to be made
- Longer term financial stability for the amalgamated school is more likely to be achieved
- Overall environmental and fiscal benefits of only maintaining one site for total pupil numbers
- Total resulting environmental and fiscal energy costs less than Godshill closure as Godshill is a more energy efficient building than Chillerton and Rookley

Demerits

- Pupils that live in the village of Chillerton and Rookley will have to travel to Godshill for their education. Currently the children of four families walk to school, so there would be transport and environmental implications that may well include increased car use for these
- Loss of a local school within Chillerton and Rookley
- No readily accessible public transport from Chillerton & Rookley to Godshill

(c) The amalgamation of Chillerton and Rookley Primary School with Godshill Primary School to be achieved through the closure of Godshill Primary School.

Merits

- All pupils at Godshill will be offered a place at Chillerton and Rookley Primary School
- Will allow the existing pre-school to remain financially viable
- Larger cohort of pupils will allow a more varied and stronger educational offer to be made
- Longer term financial stability for the school will be achieved
- Environmental and fiscal benefits of only maintaining one site for total pupil numbers

Demerits

- Will require expansion of Chillerton and Rookley building to accommodate all pupils if they transfer from Godshill with unbudgeted capital requirements
- Pupils from Godshill will have to travel to Chillerton and Rookley for their education
- Loss of a local school within Godshill
- Environmental and fiscal costs greater than Chillerton and Rookley closure as Chillerton and Rookley a less energy efficient building than Godshill
- Will require transport to be provided for some pupils, most likely their eligibility will be to Wroxall Primary School
- Could see an increased use of the car by parents
- No readily accessible public transport from Godshill to Chillerton and Rookley

(d) To seek an academy/free school sponsor for Chillerton and Rookley Primary School and, if successful, to defederate the school from the Stenbury Federation

Merits

- Provides additional support and resources through an established academy/free school trust
- Enables the sponsor to promote the school with the intention of attracting more pupils
- Maintains a local school within the village

Demerits

- Without additional pupils joining the school this option would not make the school financially sustainable and this is likely to be a key consideration in the due diligence undertaken by any potential sponsor
- The current low number of pupils means the school will not be able to afford the staffing of a full-time Headteacher, or full-time members of other key staff such as caretaker and school business manager risking a strain on the resources of the sponsor, that may not be an attractive proposition
- Recent enquiries of the DfE indicate that it is very unlikely that a sponsor can be found who is prepared to take on a small rural school with a significant financial deficit and forecast pupil numbers that show no growth over the coming years. The current deficit would transfer to the academy / free school sponsor

- The defederation of both schools has the potential to put both Chillerton & Rookley and Godshill at future risk of closure.
- Any significant shift in pupils in the area could put financial pressure onto other local schools and may affect viability elsewhere

(e) To defederate Chillerton & Rookley from the Stenbury Federation and re-form it as a stand-alone primary school

Merits

- Enables the formation of a new Governing Body that would seek to promote the school and its attractiveness to additional pupils through forming a new strategic vision
- Maintains a local school within the village

Demerits

- With the low number of pupils, the school will not have the financial resources to afford a full-time Headteacher or full-time members of other key staff such as caretakers and school business manager, as was the original consideration in forming a federation. The pupil number and financial factors that informed that decision remain a context
- Without significant additional pupils joining the school this option is currently financially unsustainable
- The defederation of both schools has the potential to put both Chillerton and Rookley and Godshill at future risk of closure.
- Would require pupils to leave existing provision, therefore putting financial pressure on to other local schools

(f) To seek another local maintained school to federate Chillerton and Rookley Primary School with.

Merits

- Maintains a local school within the village
- Allow the Governing Body of the new federation to promote the school in order to attract more pupils
- Shares the cost of a headteacher

Demerits

- Unless additional pupils are recruited on to the school roll the forecast for the budget shows a growing deficit
- Unlikely to find a school willing to take on such a small school with a significant deficit and declining pupil numbers forecast. The current deficit would remain with the school and transfer to the new federation
- Not financially sustainable without a significant growth in pupil numbers
- Would require pupils to leave existing federation provision, therefore putting financial pressure onto the other school in the Stenbury Federation who benefit from the shared resources and staffing.

(g) To set up provision for flexi-schooling on the Chillerton and Rookley site to sit alongside full-time provision. Flexi-schooling is not the same as home schooling/Elective Home Education (EHE). Parent/ carers who request flexi-attendance are asking for a pattern of provision which will involve both attendance at school, as well as times when the child will receive educational provision at home. Whilst EHE is the legal right of a parent, the decision on whether to approve a request for flexi-schooling must be made by the Headteacher of the school who has received the request.

Merits

- Maintains a local school within the village
- The school will receive funding for each pupil on roll (pupils being flexi-schooled must be registered on the school roll), so if this does attract additional pupils then it will increase the funding coming into the school on a per pupil basis

Demerits

- The school is accountable for the safeguarding and academic standards of the pupils but without having the pupils in the school every day.
- Without a permanent growth in the number of pupils on roll this is a financially unsustainable model
- EHE parents would not be able to use the facility without signing their children up to the roll of the school and following whatever pattern and directives the school would choose to use to implement any flexi-schooling model

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

24. Consideration must be given as to whether there are any sex, race or disability discrimination issues that arise from the changes being proposed.
25. The policies of the Council in relation to equal opportunities and eliminating discrimination will continue to apply should a change be approved.
26. 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

27. No decision has been made on the longer-term future of any site. However, any property implications will be fully considered by the IW Council.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

28. 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 October 2018. 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 November 2019. 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.

29. The proposed options above will require consideration of the statutory guidance as follows:

Option	Relevant guidance
(a)	None
(b)	Rural school closure, prescribed alteration: expansion*
(c)	Rural school closure, prescribed alteration: expansion*
(d)	None
(e)	None
(f)	None
(g)	None

*where the intake of new pupils requires a permanent enlargement that would increase the capacity of the school by more than 30 pupils **and** the lesser of 25% or 200 pupils.

30. 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. Closure of rural schools requires the decision-maker to provide evidence that they have considered a number of additional factors, including alternatives to closure, transport implications, impact on the pupils, impact on the local community and wider school organisational issues.
31. 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.
32. Any other further option raised for consideration that involves a school closure, expansion, or any other prescribed alteration would require the above consultation process to be followed.

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