

21st June 2021

Agenda Item: 15

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, EDUCATION, LEARNING AND
SKILLS****PROPOSED CONSULTATIONS ON OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF NORTH
CLIFTON PRIMARY SCHOOL AND THE ALTERNATIVE USE OF THE
MANNERS SUTTON PRIMARY SCHOOL SITE****Purpose of the Report**

1. This report seeks Committee approval to undertake an initial statutory consultation in order to explore options for North Clifton Primary School, Newark, including possible closure.
2. This report also seeks Committee approval for the Council's officers to investigate options for the future use of the Manners Sutton Primary School site and to undertake a statutory consultation on proposals.

Information**North Clifton Primary School**

3. North Clifton Primary School is a small rural school in the Newark and Sherwood district. The school has a published admission number of eight and the school building has the capacity to educate 56 pupils. At the last Ofsted inspection, in March 2018, the school was rated as 'good'.
4. North Clifton Primary School primarily serves the small villages of North Clifton and South Clifton and is alone in a rural planning area. The school is isolated; the next nearest Nottinghamshire school is Dunham on Trent Primary which is 4.3 miles away by car.
5. There are significant concerns about declining pupil numbers at North Clifton Primary School. Recent years have seen the number of children on the roll of the school reduce from 36 to 26. In October 2020, only three pupils were in the school's Reception year, despite a Published Admission Number of eight. This number is expected to reduce to two Reception pupils for academic year 2021/22.

Table 1: Number on roll (NOR) at North Clifton Primary School on October census date

| Year | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| NOR | 36 | 31 | 29 | 24 | 26 |

6. There is no housing proposed for the immediate area in the Newark Local Plan. It is therefore not expected that admission numbers will increase in future years.
7. With such low numbers on roll, the school's Governing Body, Headteacher and Council officers have serious concerns as to the school's viability with such small cohorts in the future.

Table 2: Numbers on roll of North Clifton Primary School by year group

| Year | Yr R | Yr 1 | Yr 2 | Yr 3 | Yr 4 | Yr 5 | Yr 6 |
|------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| NOR | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 6 | 4 | 2 |

The school also currently has four non statutory school aged (early years) children on roll

8. The school ended the 2019/20 financial year with a small deficit revenue balance. However, this deficit increased significantly by the end of the 2020/21 financial year.
9. Following a meeting between North Clifton Primary School's Governing Body, Executive Headteacher and Council officers to discuss concerns over the sustainability of the school, it is recommended that options for the future of North Clifton Primary School should be explored. This could include amalgamation, federation or closure.
10. If it is decided that closure should be explored, then the consultation recommended in this report would constitute the first stage of the statutory process for closure, as set out in the Department for Education's guidance document; 'Opening and closing maintained schools, statutory guidance for proposers and decision-makers' (November 2019).

Manners Sutton Primary School

11. In March 2021, Children and Young People's Committee approved a recommendation for the closure of Manners Sutton Primary School with effect from August 2021. The decision was predicated by the low and falling numbers on roll at the school in recent years. The school has had no pupils on roll for the 2020/21 academic year.
12. Manners Sutton Primary School operates from a site of 0.47 hectares and has a building consisting primarily of three classrooms and a larger school hall.
13. Due to increasing demands on the Council's services, the Council would like to explore options for the reconfiguration of the school site for alternative uses.

Other Options Considered

14. The initial consultation on options for the future of North Clifton Primary School will include the exploration of other options including federation with another maintained school, amalgamation with another maintained school, academisation and closure.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

15. The Council has a statutory responsibility to work with the governing body to address their concerns regarding sustainability, viability and the capacity to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum.

16. The Council is unable to financially support its schools which are required to provide high quality education within the allocated schools budget. The low number of pupils on roll is impacting on North Clifton Primary School's ability to set a balanced budget in the future.
17. The reconfiguration of the Manners Sutton Primary School site for alternative use will assist the Council in meeting the increase in demands for services for the benefit of the population of Nottinghamshire.

Statutory and Policy Implications

18. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

19. Where a school reports a deficit the Children & Families finance team work with the school to develop a three year deficit recovery plan. The expectation is that the deficit will be recovered from future years funding and efficiencies where necessary. The scope for the deficit to be addressed would be an increasing challenge where there is a projected ongoing reduction in pupil numbers and consequently funding.
20. The Local Authority Scheme for Financing Schools stipulates that the local authority cannot write off the deficit balance of any school. Any financial support should be from the overall schools budget from a contingency specifically held for this purpose and agreed by the Schools Forum. Currently no such contingency has been agreed with the Schools Forum and if one is created this could reduce resources available to other schools.
21. It is anticipated that there will not be any costs for the consultation, but if there are they will be minimal and contained within the service's allocated budget and centrally via the Council's Communications team.

Human Resources Implications

22. The decision on the future of North Clifton Primary School may result in changes to the staffing structure of the school.

Implications for Service Users

23. There are currently 26 statutory school aged children on the roll of North Clifton Primary School.
24. Should it be decided, following consultation, that North Clifton Primary School should amalgamate or federate with another school or join a multi academy trust then the impact on service users will be minimal.

25. Should it be decided, following consultation, that the Council should further investigate closure, pupils on the roll of North Clifton Primary School may be required to continue their education at another school or academy in the future.

RECOMMENDATION/S

That:

- 1) Committee approval is given to undertake an initial statutory consultation in order to explore options for North Clifton Primary School, Newark, including possible closure.
- 2) Committee approval is given for Council officers to investigate options for the future use of the Manners Sutton Primary School site and undertake a statutory consultation on proposals.

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Constitutional Comments (CEH 07/06/21)

26. The recommendations fall within the remit of Children and Young People's Committee under its terms of reference.

Financial Comments (MDN 08/06/21)

27. Where a school reports a deficit the Children & Families finance team work with the school to develop a three year deficit recovery plan. The expectation is that the deficit will be recovered from future years funding and efficiencies where necessary. The scope for the deficit to be addressed would be an increasing challenge where there is a projected ongoing reduction in pupil numbers and consequently funding.
28. The Local Authority Scheme for Financing Schools stipulates that the local authority cannot write off the deficit balance of any school. Any financial support should be from the overall schools budget from a contingency specifically held for this purpose and agreed by the Schools Forum. Currently no such contingency has been agreed with the Schools Forum and if one is created this could reduce resources available to other schools.
29. It is anticipated that there will not be any costs for the consultation, but if there are they will be minimal and contained within the service's allocated budget and centrally via the Council's Communications team.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Opening and closing maintained schools, statutory guidance for proposers and decision-makers (Department for Education; November 2019)

[Manners Sutton Primary School, Averham, Newark – outcome of consultation on proposal for closure: report to Children and Young People’s Committee on 15th March 2021](#)

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

C1475