



CABINET

13th DECEMBER 2016

DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES & EDUCATION: LESLEY HAGGER

**CABINET MEMBER WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHILDREN’S SERVICES:
COUNCILLOR MATTHEW GOLBY**

Subject:	School organisational changes: Proposal to amalgamate Earls Barton Infant and Junior Schools and form an all-through primary school; Proposal to amalgamate Whitefriars Infant and Junior Schools (Rushden), and form an all-through primary school.
Recommendations:	Cabinet is asked to; <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Approve the ‘technical’ closure of Earls Barton Junior School in relation to the proposed amalgamation; 2. Approve the extension of age-range from 4-7 to 4-11 years of age at Earls Barton Infant School, to create a new, ‘all-through’ primary school; 3. Delegates to the Director of Children, Families and Education, in consultation with the respective Cabinet member for Children and Education all necessary authority to effect the above; 4. Notes that a final decision on the proposal to amalgamate Whitefriars Infant and Junior Schools (Rushden) will be made at the Cabinet meeting scheduled in February 2017.

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To provide Cabinet members with all the necessary information and a summary of the feedback received during the statutory four week period of representation, to make a fully informed decision on the recommendations listed above.

2. How this decision contributes to the Council Plan

The Council’s vision is to make Northamptonshire a great place to live and work. This is achieved through increasing the wellbeing of your county’s communities and/or safeguarding the county’s communities.

This initiative specifically delivers increased wellbeing and/or safeguarding by ensuring that:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People of all ages are safe, protected from harm and able to live happy, healthy and independent lives in our communities. • Resources are utilised effectively and efficiently, in coordination with partners and providers.

3. Background

- 3.1 The manner in which a local authority can amalgamate a linked infant and junior school is prescribed in the DfE guidance documents, 'The School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013' and the Department for Education (DfE) 'Opening and Closing Maintained Schools (April 2016)' guidance document, which govern school organisational changes of this nature.
- 3.2 The documents named above specify that the amalgamation of linked infant and junior schools must be achieved through the 'technical' closure of one of the schools involved and the extension in age-range of the other, which would then become a school with full 'primary' status.
- 3.3 A Cabinet Member decision was taken on 9th August 2016 to begin the commencement of the statutory consultation process in relation to the proposal to amalgamate Earls Barton Infant and Junior Schools. The decision was taken in response to a formal request from the respective Governing Bodies of the schools for the County Council to begin the required process. The reasons for this request and the benefits the proposal is expected to deliver are detailed in full in Section 3.9 of this report.
- 3.4 Following the initial six week period of consultation, a further Cabinet Member decision was taken on 1st November 2016, to issue the relevant statutory notices associated with this proposal; the statutory notice of closure for Earls Barton Junior School and the statutory notice relating to the extension in age-range of Earls Barton Infant School, from 4-7 to 4-11 years of age.
- 3.5 Following the publication of the statutory notices relating to this proposal, a four week period of representation was conducted between 10th November and 8th December 2016.
- 3.6 Should approval for the proposed amalgamation be approved, Earls Barton Junior School would be discontinued with effect from 31st December 2016. Earls Barton Infant School would extend its age-range and become a full, 'all-through' primary school with effect from 1st January 2017.
- 3.7 Should the decision be taken to amalgamate the two schools, the new primary school would continue to operate from the existing accommodation of the infant and junior schools, which currently share the same school site, located on Broad Street, Earls Barton.
- 3.8 It is anticipated that all current pupils attending either; Earls Barton Infant and Junior School at the time of the proposed amalgamation, would transfer to the newly amalgamated primary school, should the proposal proceed.
- 3.9 It is the belief of the Northamptonshire County Council that the proposal would deliver the following benefits:
 - A seamless transition between Key Stage 1 (infants) and Key Stage 2 (juniors) - national data indicates that pupils educated in schools with full primary status record higher levels of attainment and progress.
 - Greater capacity to track pupils between Key Stages.

- All-through primary schools are more attractive to prospective members of staff, allowing the school to attract the highest quality possible candidates for future roles.
- More development opportunities for staff, including shared training and an understanding of all Key Stages across the primary phase of education that will ultimately benefit pupils.
- Increased time for relationship between pupils, staff and parents to develop, allowing the school to better understand each individual child's needs.
- Increased financial viability in the longer term.

3.10 Please note that a separate report relating to the proposal to amalgamate Whitefriars Infant and Junior Schools, Rushden, will be taken to Cabinet at a later date.

4. Consultation and Scrutiny

4.1 As the proposal to amalgamate any two schools necessitates the 'technical' closure of one of the schools involved, the consultation process that must be followed is prescribed in the DfE guidance document 'Opening and closing maintained schools' and is specified below:

Stage	Description	Timescales
1	Consultation	Six weeks: 5 th September – 17 th October 2016
2	Publication of Statutory Notices	10 th November 2016 (Cabinet Member approval granted on 1 st November)
3	Period of representation	Four weeks: 10 th November – 8 th December 2016
4	Final Decision	Made at full NCC Cabinet meeting: 13 th December 2016
5	Implementation (if approved)	1 st January 2017

4.2 A full analysis of all the feedback received during the initial six week period of consultation was attached to the Cabinet Member report of 1st November 2016, as Appendix 1. 95% of all stakeholders who responded during the initial period of consultation stated they were in favour of the proposed amalgamation of the two schools;

4.3 The mitigating actions NCC will undertake to address the concerns raised by the 5% of respondents who expressed their opposition to the proposal are detailed in full in Section 4 of the Cabinet Member report of 1st November 2016;

4.4 Two formal representations was received during the statutory 4 week period of representation that was conducted between the dates specified above. One formal representation expressed support for the proposal, whilst the other opposed the proposal. Both representations are included in full as Appendix 1 to this report.

4.5 One respondent expressed support for the proposal for the following reasons:

- That the proposal would ensure a smoother transition between KS1 and KS2 for pupils;
- Economies of scale could be realised in an 'all-through' primary school as opposed to the current arrangements.

4.6 The respondent expressed concerns about the proposed amalgamation on the following grounds, stating:

- Firstly, that the Junior School was undergoing a process of school improvement and so the amalgamation was not necessary and;
- Secondly, the respondent had concerns relating to the process for the appointment of the new head teacher for the primary school.

4.7 It is the belief of the NCC's School Effectiveness Team that the proposed amalgamation will deliver the required improvement at Earls Barton Junior School in the most effective and efficient manner possible, for the reasons given in section 3.9 above.

4.8 The appointment of a new Headteacher for the new primary school is solely at the discretion of the respective Governing Bodies of the current Infant and Junior School. The appointment is dependent on the final decision made as to whether or not the two schools will amalgamate and form a new, 'all-through' primary school and will only take effect if the amalgamation occurs. The appointment process has been transparent and conducted in full accordance with all applicable HR procedures.

4.9 It is recommended that Cabinet approve the proposal to amalgamate Earls Barton Infant and Junior Schools and form a new, 'all-through' primary school, for the following reasons;

- The proposal received high levels of support from stakeholders during the initial period of consultation;
- Mitigating actions will be taken by NCC in relation to the concerns raised during the initial consultation period;
- Mitigating actions have been taken by NCC in response to the concerns raised in the one formal representation received;
- The Governing Bodies of both schools are in favour of the proposed amalgamation;
- It is the belief of NCC that the proposal would deliver the benefits specified in full in the Cabinet Member report of 9th August 2016.

5. Equality Screening

Reason that no EqIA is required	as appropriate
The paper is for information only	
The proposal/activity/decision has no impact on customers or the service they receive	
The proposal impacts upon staff but the proposed staffing changes will not affect the service that customers receive*	
Other (please explain further)	

* where a proposal affects staff, the appropriate HR processes will be followed, which have already been subject to the EqIA process and will be compliant with HR legislation

6. Alternative Options Considered

6.1 Do nothing. This option was not progressed as it would have ignored the formal requests of the respective Governing Bodies of the schools involved to begin consultation on possible amalgamation. It is also the belief of the County Council that attending an 'all-through' primary school, as opposed to separate infant and junior schools provides the best possible educational outcomes for the schools and for pupils.

7. Financial Implications

7.1 The proposal to amalgamate the two schools will be cost neutral to the County Council. Under the schools current organisational arrangement the Infant and Junior School each receive a lump sum per academic year (currently set at £125,000) from the Schools Block of the Designated Schools Grant (DSG). Should the proposal be approved, the newly amalgamated primary school would receive 85% of two lump sums in the financial year following the amalgamation. In each financial year thereafter the school would receive one lump sum. Any savings realised by the proposed amalgamation would be recycled back into the Schools Block of the DSG. This money is ring-fenced for school use only and cannot be used for any other purpose.

8. Risk and Business Continuity Management

a) Risk(s) associated with the proposal

Risk	Mitigation	Residual Risk
Proposal not supported by stakeholders	Initial six week period of consultation has been conducted with all relevant stakeholders. Feedback received during this consultation has been positive in favour of the proposed amalgamation. A further four week period of representation was conducted to allow further opportunity for stakeholders to express their opinions on the either proposal. No feedback was received during this period.	Green

b) Risk(s) associated with not undertaking the proposal

Risk	Risk Rating
Lack of pupil progression and accountability between Key Stages 1 and 2, resulting from separate infant and junior schools being responsible for individual Key Stages, rather than one 'all-through' school being responsible for pupil progression across the entire primary phase of education.	Red
Failure to amalgamate impacts upon the school improvement plan identified for Earls Barton Junior School	Red

The linked infant and junior school convert to academy status with different academy sponsors, exacerbating the problems outlined above and increasing the chance of a pupil attending two schools with completely a different ethos and methods of curriculum delivery, which could impact adversely upon pupils' levels of attainment.	Amber
--	-------

Author:	Name: Chris Wickens Team: Strategic Planning
Contact details:	Tel: 01604 366341 Fax: 01604 237011 Email: cwickens@northamptonshire.gov.uk
Background Papers:	Cabinet Member report: 9 th August 2016 Cabinet Member report: 1 st November 2016
Does the report propose a key decision is taken?	YES
If yes, is the decision in the Forward Plan?	YES
Will further decisions be required? If so, please outline the timetable here	NO
Does the report include delegated decisions? If so, please outline the timetable here	N/A
Is this report proposing an amendment to the budget and/or policy framework?	NO
Have the financial implications been cleared by the Strategic Finance Manager (SFM)? Have any capital spend implications been cleared by the Capital Investment Board (CIB)	NO – no financial implications Name of SFM: Jon Lee NO – as above
Has the report been cleared by the relevant Director?	YES Name of Director: Lesley Hagger
Has the relevant Cabinet Member been consulted?	YES Cabinet Member: Cllr Matt Golby
Has the relevant scrutiny committee been consulted?	NO Scrutiny Committee: N/A
Has the report been cleared by Legal Services?	YES Name of solicitor: Duncan Bisatt
	Solicitor's comments:
Have any communications issues been cleared by Communications and Marketing?	YES Name of officer: Joni Ager
Have any property issues been cleared by Property and Asset Management?	YES Name of officer: Rob Scott
Are there any community safety implications?	NO
Are there any environmental implications:	NO
Are there any Health & Safety Implications:	NO
Are there any Human Resources	YES

Implications:	Should the proposal proceed there may be a possible restructure of Senior Leadership positions at the newly amalgamated school. However, this process will be managed by the Governing Body of the new primary school with the advice of their HR provider.
Are there any human rights implications:	NO
Constituency Interest:	Cllr Paul Bell (Earls Barton)