

Children and Young People's Services Select Committee

9 January 2020

Small Schools: Report from the Task and Finish Group

Report by Chairman of the Small Schools Task and Finish Group

Summary

The Children and Young People's Services Select Committee agreed at its meeting on 11 September 2019, that a Small Schools TFG should be set up, in order to assist the scrutiny of potential proposals for changes to five small schools in West Sussex. The TFG met three times between September and December 2019 to inform the Committee's scrutiny of any proposals which may arise for the Cabinet to determine.

The focus for scrutiny

The Children and Young People's Services Select Committee are asked to consider and discuss the recommendations of the TFG set out in 2.1 in relation to action to address the current process and 2.2 in relation to any future process and prepare a response from the Committee to the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, prior to any decision by the Cabinet on 14 January 2020.

The Chairman will summarise the output of the debate for consideration by the Committee in order to formalise its response to the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills.

Proposal

1. Background and Context

- 1.1 At its meeting on 11 September 2019 the Children and Young People's Services Select Committee (CYPSSC) agreed to establish the Small Schools Scrutiny Task and Finish Group.
- 1.2 The Task and Finish Group met three times; on 18 September 2019, 24 October 2019 and 4 December 2019 with the following purpose:
 - To maintain contact with the Cabinet Member and the Director of Education and Skills in relation to the work on any future proposals.
 - To consider and review the approach of the County Council to the selection of schools and identified options for future proposals in relation to potential changes of arrangements for small schools.
 - To receive and consider representations from relevant stakeholders

- To obtain and consider such additional evidence and advice as it may determine.
- To make such recommendations as it considers appropriate arising from its deliberations.

1.3 The TFG heard from a range of witnesses in person and written representations in order to help its deliberations. These included representatives from all five schools affected, executive heads, The Schools Forum, the West Sussex Governors Association and the Diocese of Chichester.

2. Output

2.1 The Task and Finish Group considered the evidence provided to them. The recommendations made during the process of the TFG are set out below together with relevant responses.

- The consultation process should include a 'do nothing' option as a possible recommendation from the process. This was agreed and implemented as part of the consultation.
- The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills should reflect upon and consider all representations received before any decision is taken and review all options carefully so that TFG are assured that the Cabinet Member is fully informed.
- Provide the TFG with a breakdown of data by respondent type. This was presented at the final meeting on 4 December 2019.
- Officers, as a matter of urgency, were to check all data on the consultation website to ensure accuracy and make sure the source and date of the data is supplied. This was completed.
- The consultation be altered to make it clear that respondents can provide comments outside the specific questions. The consultation portal was updated to reflect this.

2.2 The following recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills were agreed at the final meeting of the TFG on 4 December 2019 to go forward to a meeting of Children and Young People's Services Select Committee on 9 January 2020, for consideration alongside the proposals for consideration by the Cabinet:

- That there is improved communication between the County Council and named schools in future consultations, including early conversations.
- That training on school viability should be provided to school governors, as well as risk management in relation to viability in order to ensure that governors have a good level of support.
- That any potential future consultations concerning schools include a clear context as part of the consultation papers.

- That the quality of data provided as part of any consultation process is thoroughly checked with any schools concerned to ensure accuracy, and that any data produced is received and understood by the school.
- That the timeline for any future consultation is carefully considered alongside school holidays and other timelines, such as admissions, that affect schools.
- That future consultations are considered in a more strategic and geographical area context.
- That County Councillors are encouraged to have regular contact with the schools within their division.

3. Resources

- 3.1 It is not anticipated that the recommendations contained within this report would incur any additional direct costs or resource implications.

Factors taken into account

4. Issues for consideration by the Select Committee

- 4.1 The Children and Young People's Services Select Committee are asked to consider and discuss the recommendations of the TFG (set out in 2.2) and agree a response from the Committee to the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, prior to decision by Cabinet on 14 January 2020.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 The TFG consulted a number of witnesses, as outlined in 1.3.

6. Risk Implications and Mitigations

- 6.1 Risks will be considered as part of the wider discussion on any draft proposals for decision by the Cabinet.

7. Other Options Considered

- 7.1 Information on other options will be included in the draft proposals for decision by the Cabinet.

8. Equality Duty

- 8.1 Further detail on the impact of the equality duty will be detailed in the draft proposals for decision by the Cabinet.

9. Social Value

- 9.1 N/A

10. Crime and Disorder Implications

- 10.1 N/A

11. Human Rights Implications

- 11.1 N/A

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Appendices: None

Background Papers : [18 September 2019 Notes](#)

[24 October 2019 Notes](#)

[4 December 2019 Notes](#)