

Committee:	<b>Lead Cabinet Members for Children's Services</b>
Date:	<b>8 July 2013</b>
By:	<b>Interim Director of Children's Services</b>
Title of the report:	<b>Primary School Places in East Sussex</b>
Purpose of Report:	<b>To seek Lead Members' approval to consult on the proposed closure of Mountfield &amp; Whatlington CE Primary School</b>

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**Recommendation:**

**Lead Members are recommended to approve the commencement of a statutory consultation process in relation to a proposal to close Mountfield & Whatlington CE Primary School by September 2014.**

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**1. Financial Appraisal:**

1.1 Revenue: It is possible that there will be revenue costs associated with redundancy payments to staff at the school. Upon closure of Mountfield & Whatlington, the school's balance of resources (be that a surplus or deficit) would transfer back to the Local Authority. It would be for the Authority to decide how any balance would be managed.

1.2 Capital: It is unlikely that any capital costs would be incurred by the Council as a result of this proposal. The land and buildings are owned by the Church of England Diocese of Chichester. The Local Authority has indicated to the Diocese that there would be an expectation that capital receipts from any sale of land / premises should be reinvested in provision of primary school places in the local area. The Diocese has acknowledged and is sympathetic to this position, however it would be for the Diocese to decide how any proceeds from sale of the land would be re-invested.

**2. Background:**

2.1 In April 2012, Mountfield & Whatlington CE Primary School went into the Ofsted category Special Measures. It is currently under the leadership of an Interim Executive Board (IEB) and Executive Headteacher who is the Headteacher from Netherfield CE Primary School.

2.2 The Council is concerned about the long term sustainability of the school with regard to standards, pupil numbers and declining popularity. The Church of England Diocese of Chichester, the Chair of the IEB and the Executive Headteacher share this concern. For this reason all parties agree that the Council should consult with key stakeholders about the proposed closure of the school.

2.3 In recent years pupil numbers at the school have fallen quite markedly and at the January 2013 census there were only 54 on roll against a capacity of 84. The last time the school reached its capacity was in 2005/06.

2.4 Of the 54 children attending Mountfield & Whatlington in January 2013, only 26% lived in the community area, 33% lived in Hastings and St Leonards and 20% lived in Battle. The remaining 21% were spread across other towns and villages. The school is not actually situated in either Mountfield or Whatlington villages, being located off a roundabout on the A21 and most children travel to the school by car.

2.5 In the last year a number of parents have decided to move their children to other local schools. In fact, of the 50 children of primary school age living in the Mountfield & Whatlington community area only 14 attend the school. The remaining 36 children attend schools in the local area, for example, Netherfield CE Primary School, Salehurst CE Primary School, Sedlescombe CE Primary School, Battle & Langton CE Primary School and Staplecross Methodist Primary School. These schools were all rated as 'Good' by Ofsted at their last inspections.

2.6 At the time of writing this report only five children have been allocated a place at the school in reception year for September 2013. None of the children to be offered a place live in the Mountfield & Whatlington community area. Three live in Battle, one in St Leonards and one in Kent. Pupil numbers for the start of the 2013/14 academic year could be as low as 43.

2.7 It is recommended that the Mountfield & Whatlington community area is merged with the Salehurst community area. The children currently living in the community area and attending Mountfield & Whatlington could all be accommodated at Salehurst Primary school if that is the parents' preference. There is public transport already available should this be required. Spare places also exist at other schools in the surrounding area. The Council believes that all children displaced by the closure of Mountfield & Whatlington could be accommodated without the immediate need to provide additional places at other local schools.

2.8 Should, following the consultation, a decision be taken to close the school the target date for closure would be 31 August 2014. **Appendix A** sets out a proposed timeline for achieving the target date.

### **3. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendations:**

3.1 The Council is concerned about the long term sustainability of the school on the grounds of standards, pupil numbers and declining popularity. The Church of England Diocese of Chichester, the Chair of the IEB and the Executive Headteacher share this concern. For this reason Lead Members are recommended to:

- Approve the commencement of a statutory consultation process in relation to a proposal to close Mountfield & Whatlington CE Primary School by September 2014.

#### **GED ROWNEY**

Interim Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Gary Langford, School Place Planning Manager, CSD

Local Members: Councillor Kathryn Field

Background Documents: None

## PROPOSED TIMELINE FOR CLOSING MOUNTFIELD &amp; WHATLINGTON CE PRIMARY SCHOOL

<b>Key Milestones</b>	
Lead Member approval to consult on proposals	8 July 2013
Consultation begins	13 September 2013
Consultation period (6 weeks) to include a public meeting	13 September to 25 October 2013
Consultation ends	25 October 2013
Lead Member approval to publish statutory notices	11 November 2013
Publication of statutory notices	22 November 2013
Representation period (6 weeks)	22 November 2013 to 3 January 2014
Representation period ends	3 January 2014
Lead Member determination of notices (final decision)	January 2014 (date to be confirmed)
Mountfield & Whatlington closes	31 August 2014

Note

All dates are indicative at this stage and subject to confirmation and change