

LEAD MEMBER FOR EDUCATION AND INCLUSION, SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITY

DECISIONS made by the Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability, Councillor Bob Standley, on 24 June 2019 at County Hall, Lewes

Councillors Galley and Field spoke on item 4 (see minute 8)

7 DECISIONS MADE BY THE LEAD CABINET MEMBER ON 3 JUNE 2019

7.1 The Lead Member approved as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 3 June 2019.

8 DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

8.1 Councillor Standley declared a personal non prejudicial interest in item 4 as a member of Wealden District Council and as a member of Wealden District Council's Local Plan Sub-Committee.

8.2 Councillor Galley declared a personal non prejudicial interest in item 4 as a member of Wealden District Council

9 REPORTS

9.1 A copy of the report referred to below is included in the minute book

10 AREA REVIEW OF RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOL PROVISION

10.1 The Lead Member considered a report by the Director of Children's Services regarding a review of rural primary schools in East Sussex.

10.2 The Lead Member RESOLVED to –

1) agree that the local authority takes forward a statutory process to consult on the closure of Broad Oak Community Primary School by 31 August 2020;

2) agree that the Local Authority takes forward a statutory process to consult on the closure of Fletching CE Primary School by 31 August 2020; and

3) agree that the consultations on the proposals would begin on 5 July 2019 and run until 11 October 2019

Reason

10.3 The Local Authority has a statutory duty, included as part of its Core Offer, to ensure there is the right number of school places in the right areas. It also has a duty to ensure that schools can offer a viable, high quality education to their pupils. An increasing number of small schools in East Sussex face uncertainty in terms of their ability to deliver a high quality education that meets the needs of their local community and that is financially viable. As the body responsible for school organisation the Local Authority has a duty to take a strategic view of the school landscape. The number of schools facing financial challenges, and coming to the Children's Services Department and Orbis for support means that it cannot ignore the issues they are facing. Taking action now to rationalise provision in a number of areas would provide

the remaining schools with more certainty over their pupil numbers, enabling them to operate more effectively and efficiently in terms of financial performance and with less surplus places.

10.4 Taking action at Broad Oak and Fletching now will reduce the risk to the Local Authority of managing financial deficits and quality of education provision in these very small schools which impacts directly on children and their families. Doing nothing at this time is not an option – it would simply exacerbate the situation and place more small schools at risk of closure in the coming years as a greater number of schools would become unviable. There is a reputational risk to the Local Authority if appropriate action is not taken in a timely, controlled manner now which is then required at a future date.

10.5 The area review has been a thorough process, fully supported by the Diocese of Chichester, and has involved engagement and dialogue with a number of rural schools. The Children's Services Department has listened carefully to what schools have told it throughout the process and, in some cases, this has resulted in changes to its proposals and in other cases confirmed its initial thinking. For some schools the review has generated opportunities which provide them with a potential solution to the challenges they face.

10.6 The proposals would ensure the Local Authority is able to fulfil its statutory obligations and ensure a sustainable network of rural schools in East Sussex that offer the highest quality of education