

**Report to:** Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability

**Date of meeting:** 21 March 2016

**By:** Director of Children's Services

**Title:** Heathfield Area Review of Primary School Places

**Purpose:** To note the outcome of the Heathfield Area Review of Primary School Places and the resulting recommendations.

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Lead Member is recommended to agree that:

- 1) Five Ashes CE Primary School forms a federation with Mayfield CE Primary School;**
  - 2) All Saints' and St Richard's CE Primary School works with the Diocese of Chichester and the Local Authority to form a federation with a local school;**
  - 3) The local authority works with the Diocese of Chichester to explore a possible Free School for the area linked to the emerging housing plans for the Heathfield area; and**
  - 4) Schools and early years providers should further develop the Village Approach to support transition.**
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## **1 Background**

1.1 In October 2014 the Lead Member agreed that a review of primary schools should be undertaken in the Heathfield area. This was in the context of the Council's principles for planning the provision of education places in East Sussex as set out in the *Education Commissioning Plan 2014 – 2018*, and, the Council's strategy for school improvement *Excellence for All*; to ensure that there is sufficient provision to meet the predicted demand for places in the Heathfield area, and also to look more widely at the organisation of schools in the area to make sure they are well placed to deliver a high quality education to their local communities.

## **2 Supporting information**

2.1 The area review process involved the preparation of data packs between autumn and spring 2015 and the holding of internal meetings with Officers and Diocesan colleagues in the spring of 2015 and of stakeholder meetings in June 2015.

2.2 This process identified two schools, Five Ashes CE Primary School (Five Ashes) and All Saints' and St Richard's CE Primary School (All Saints' and St Richard's), where the information and evidence from the review suggested that the schools often struggle to meet their pupil admission number which impacts on the ability of the schools to secure financial stability and good outcomes for pupils. Further discussion took place with Five Ashes and All Saints' and St Richard's during Terms 1 and 2 to explore options of federation or closure. The emerging final recommendations for the schools and Heathfield as a whole are detailed in the Heathfield Area Review – Final Report, attached at **Appendix 1**.

2.3 A major consideration in formulating these recommendations has been Wealden District Council's emerging Local Plan which puts forward plans for significant new housing across the Heathfield area in the period to 2037. In this context it is felt that the closure of any schools in this area cannot be taken forward because of the risk of future pressure on

places that could arise as a result of the new housing. In the circumstances, it is considered that a federation option for each school is a more appropriate solution and would help the schools to be more sustainable in terms of leadership and financial sustainability.

Federation is a formal arrangement defined in law under the 'Federation Regulations 2007' whereby there is one governing body for all the schools. Federations provide a number of opportunities for schools to use their resources more effectively and to work together for the benefit of all pupils.

2.4 Should there be a requirement in the future to provide additional school places as a result of the emerging housing plans for the Heathfield area, it should be noted that under current legislation any new schools would have to be established as academies or free schools. The Diocese of Chichester, through its Academy Trust, can apply to set up a Free School and the Local Authority will work closely with them to explore this option linked to a possible reconfiguration of schools in Heathfield to provide a sustainable model of provision which meets the needs of the local community.

2.5 One of the benefits of closer collaboration through federation is the opportunity to work in different ways with local early year providers to aid the transition between pre-school and reception. The Council has an expectation that all early years provision on school sites work in close partnership together, under the 'Early Years Foundation Stage Village Project' approach, to achieve the best outcomes for children in the foundation stage. There is strong evidence that this approach benefits children in nursery and reception with good transitions being a key element of its success. We believe this is an approach that should be further developed by all schools in the Heathfield area.

### **3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations**

3.1 The Lead Member is invited to note the outcome of the Heathfield Area Review and to consider the following recommendations.

- **Recommendation 1: Five Ashes CE Primary School – The school forms a federation with Mayfield CE Primary School**  
The school is already in a collaboration with Mayfield CE Primary School and the recommendation is that the two schools quickly move to a formal federation. The federation would help Five Ashes become more sustainable, to recruit and retain staff and to secure strong leadership.
- **Recommendation 2: All Saints' and St Richard's CE Primary School - The school works with the Diocese of Chichester and the Local Authority to form a federation with a local school**  
It is recommended that the school moves quickly to a formal federation with a local school. A number of schools are now exploring federation and the local authority will work with the school to establish a federation by the end of 2016. The federation would help the school become more sustainable, to recruit and retain staff and to secure strong leadership. The school should also explore the development of early years provision and/or other uses of the building that would benefit the community or local schools.
- **Recommendation 3: The local authority works with the Diocese of Chichester to explore a possible Free School for the area linked to the emerging housing plans for the Heathfield area**  
The local authority should continue to monitor the impact on school places of the emerging housing plans in the Wealden District Council Local Plan and consider the reconfiguration of schools in the area through a Free School which could establish provision that is more sustainable and in better equipped school buildings. The local authority should work closely with the Diocese of Chichester to explore this option.
- **Recommendation 4: Schools and early years providers should further develop the Village Approach to support transition**  
Schools should work with local early years providers to further develop the Early

Years Foundation Stage Village approach in the area with the aim of achieving better outcomes for children by improving the transition between pre-school and reception.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

Councillors Chris Dowling, Bob Standley and Rupert Simmons

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Heathfield Area Review – Final Report