

Cabinet

Dorset County Council



Date of Meeting	2 May 2018
Officer	Director for Children's Services
Subject of Report	Closure of the Maintained Nursery Unit at Somerford Primary School
Executive Summary	<p>The Goslings Nursery is a Local Authority Maintained nursery at the Somerford Primary School.</p> <p>Despite efforts of the nursery setting and the quality of the provision, the number of children accessing the nursery has dropped to 19 children.</p> <p>The setting needs at least 30 children to be able to break even and currently the Somerford Primary School subsidises the nursery by £30,000 per year from its maintained budget for statutory aged school children.</p> <p>The closure of a nursery provision or the removal of 1 year group from a maintained school does require a full statutory consultation in accordance with the DFE Guidance on prescribed alterations to a maintained school – April 2016.</p> <p>Somerford Primary School undertook a consultation for the closure of the nursery ending in February 2018. They contacted stakeholders and held public meetings and responded to queries during the process.</p> <p>As the Somerford Primary School and the LA Maintained Nursery are under the authority of the LA, The Local Authority is the decision maker in this case.</p> <p>The proposal is thus before Cabinet for a decision.</p>
Impact Assessment:	Equalities Impact Assessment:

Closure of the Maintained Nursery Unit at Somerford Primary School

	<p>The school has considered the full range of criteria as it relates to the stakeholders in question. Though the closure will require families to seek out new providers, no single cohort will be significantly more effected by the closure.</p> <p>Use of Evidence:</p> <p>The school has reviewed all the financial details pertaining to the nursery viability. They have researched further nursery availability in the area and have consulted with those settings in order to ensure that there is local provision. The LA is satisfied that there is sufficient provision in the area.</p> <p>Budget:</p> <p>The closure of the nursery will ensure that the £30,000 per year cross subsidy from the Somerford Primary School will be used to deliver services to the statutory aged children for whom it is provided.</p> <p>Risk Assessment:</p> <p>Having considered the risks associated with this decision using the County Council’s approved risk management methodology, the level of risk has been identified as:</p> <p>Current Risk: LOW Residual Risk LOW</p> <p>Other Implications:</p> <p>None</p>
<p>Recommendation</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That The Cabinet formally agrees to the closure of the Local Authority Maintained nursery unit at the Somerford Primary School. 2. That The Cabinet formally agrees to the reduction in the aged range of the Somerford Primary School from 3-11 to 4-11 provision.
<p>Reason for Recommendation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An appropriately constituted consultation has taken place under the Department for Education - ‘Making Prescribed Alterations to maintained schools’ – April 2016. • An assessment of sufficiency has determined that there are sufficient places in the area. • The Local Authority is satisfied that the provision as constituted is not viable financially.
<p>Appendices</p>	<p>Appendix 1: - The Somerford Nursery Closure Proposal Documents Appendix 2: - Responses to the Somerford Closure Consultation</p>

Closure of the Maintained Nursery Unit at Somerford Primary School

Background Papers	
Officer Contact	Name: Steve Webberley Tel: 01305 228470 Email: s.webberley@dorsetcc.gov.uk Ed Denham 01305 221939 e.denham@dorsetcc.gov.uk

Closure of the Maintained Nursery Unit at Somerford Primary School

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Somerford Primary School in Christchurch has a Local Authority maintained nursery as part of its provision.
- 1.2 The Governors of the Somerford Primary School approached the Local Authority asking that a review of the need for the provision be undertaken with a view to closing.
- 1.3 The Local Authority agreed that a statutory consultation be undertaken (managed by the school) with a view to closing the provision and changing the age range of Somerford Primary School, from 3-11 to 4-11.

2. The Proposal and the reasons why.

- 2.1 The Goslings nursery provision is a Local Authority maintained nursery and has to operate under certain parameters.
- 2.2 The nursery is required to employ a Qualified Teacher due to its status of a LA maintained nursery.
- 2.3 The nursery currently has a £10,000 per term shortfall between the income generated by the 15 hours and 30 hours funding it receives and the cost of the provision.
- 2.4 The numbers within the nursery have dropped from a high of 52 in April 2014 to a current low of 19 in the January 2018 intake.
- 2.5 The nursery has to have at least 30 children on roll in order to operate at a viable level. The school has worked hard in the local community to promote the nursery but the level of uptake has not been sufficient to suggest that the nursery will be able to return to a balanced budget.
- 2.6 The school has to subsidise the costs of the provision with the funds being provided for the statutory 4-11 aged children in the school. Given the demographic within the school, this is a significant pressure on the school's budget.
- 2.7 The nursery is unable to provide care over the lunch hour so families are having to collect children at the end of the morning session and return them for the afternoon session. The nursery has looked at providing lunch cover but this would increase costs while the income remains static. This has been identified by some parents as a reason why they have moved provider to another setting.
- 2.8 The nursery is also a term time only provider and again this has been cited by families as a shortcoming of the provision.

3. Statutory Legal Process

- 3.1 The closing of a Nursery Unit and altering the age range of a school is subject to the 'Making prescribed alteration to Maintained schools' Guidance from the Department for Education – April 2016.
- 3.2 In order for a Community Maintained school to alter its age range by 1 year or more and to open or close nursery provision, a full Statutory process has to be undertaken.

Closure of the Maintained Nursery Unit at Somerford Primary School

- 3.3 The process is described in the Guidance as a 'Part 5' Statutory Process: prescribed alterations needs to be undertaken which includes the publication of a notice and a formal consultation period of a minimum 4 weeks.
- 3.4 The Somerford Primary School, after an initial pre-consultation with parents, then started the formal 4 week process.
- 3.5 This process involved the circulation of a clear proposal to parents & stakeholders about the closure, the reasons and the timelines and published notices in the local press.
- 3.6 Public meetings were held with parents and other local providers. During the pre-consultation on the 7 December 2017 there were two meetings with a total participation of 7 parents and nursery providers. There was a further formal consultation meeting on the 7 Feb 2018 and the records show that 2 parents and 1 nursery provider attended the meeting.
- 3.7 There were 9 written responses to the proposal all in opposition to the closure. These were gathered both during the pre-consultation and during the formal consultation process. The written submissions are attached to this report.
- 3.8 There is also an online petition which has to date generated 134 signatures at the time of writing this report.

4. The responses to the Consultation

- 4.1 There was significant support for the quality of the provision and its location within the community.
- 4.2 A question was raised about the reasons for the declining numbers and what steps had been taken to address this issue. The nursery acknowledged that the neighbouring nursery had gained an 'outstanding' OFSTED rating that had meant families had moved provision or new families had taken up places at that neighbouring setting. As mentioned previously, families also wanted the holiday and lunch cover provision which the Goslings can't provide (see 2.7). The nursery has worked with the LA in looking at options to increase take up of places and have advertised in local magazines.
- 4.3 Concerns were also raised about alternative provision in the area. The nursery has undertaken research with the neighbouring settings and of the 11 settings within a 3 mile radius, 6 have immediate availability, onwards, a further setting will have spaces in September 2018. A new pre-school is planning to open in the immediate area shortly.
- 4.4 The nursery/school were challenged on whether the potential decrease in mainstream funding for Somerford Primary was the driver for the closure. The nursery in response assured the consultee that this was not the case, though the school did have to use its maintained school budget to subsidise the nursery provision and it was about ensuring that at whatever level the Primary School is funded, that those funds are used for the statutory aged children.
- 4.5 The issue was also raised of the new housing that is due to be built on the Roeshott Development. It is confirmed that this may generate an additional 14 children overall in the 3-4 year group and though there is mention of 24 months for these houses to come on line, it is unlikely that such a development will be fully built out in less than 7-8

Closure of the Maintained Nursery Unit at Somerford Primary School

years and thus the amount of children generated will not be sufficient nor be generated quickly enough to help sustain the nursery provision.

5. Recommendation

- a) That The Cabinet formally agrees to the closure of the Local Authority Maintained nursery unit at the Somerford Primary School known as the Goslings.
- b) That The Cabinet formally agrees to the reduction in the age range of the Somerford Primary School from 3-11 to 4-11 provision.

Nick Jarman
Director for Children's Services
April 2018