North Somerset Council

REPORT TO THE EXECUTIVE

DATE OF MEETING: 5 DECEMBER 2017

SUBJECT OF REPORT: PROPOSED EXPANSION OF FLAX BOURTON C OF E PRIMARY SCHOOL

TOWN OR PARISH: FLAX BOURTON

OFFICER/MEMBER PRESENTING: CLLR JAN BARBER, EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE’S SERVICES

KEY DECISION: YES

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive approves the expansion of Flax Bourton C of E Primary School from a 105-place to a 210-place school with effect from 1 September 2019.

1. SUMMARY OF REPORT

1.1 The report summarises the findings of a consultation to enlarge Flax Bourton C of E Primary School and seeks approval to implement the proposed expansion with effect from 1 September 2019.

2. POLICY

2.1 The Council’s agreed Education Provision in North Somerset ~ A Commissioning Strategy 2015 – 2018 is the local policy base for any decisions.

2.2 Local Authorities are under a statutory duty to ensure that there are sufficient school places in their area, promote high educational standards, ensure fair access to educational opportunity and promote the fulfilment of every child’s educational potential. They must also promote diversity and increase parental choice.

2.3 The Council will not normally expand a popular school that admits a significant percentage of its pupil population from outside of its local area or where significant vacancies exist at neighbouring schools (within 2 miles for a primary school and 3 miles for a secondary school). When reviewing demand for school places it will consider the numbers of pupils in and around the locality of the school as well as demand for school places and act in the interests of all schools and all parents in the community to provide Best Value school places.

2.4 Schools are considered for expansion when the following can be shown:
- good or outstanding Ofsted outcomes
- a proven demand for places
- that the site can accommodate at least an extra 105 pupils from current published admission levels with the resulting increased buildings and resources
- where any building works will increase capacity but also enhance the current site and assist to resolve condition issues
- where the increase fits with the Council’s strategic principles as outlined in its commissioning strategy

3. **DETAILS**

3.1 Council officers have been working with senior staff and governors at Flax Bourton C of E Primary School (Flax Bourton School) to determine whether a permanent increase in the numbers of school places should be progressed. Currently the school physically has the necessary accommodation (5 class bases) to be able to admit up to 150 pupils. This is possible following the provision of a new classroom extension in 2015 that provided extra facilities so the school could take breach classes in the 2015/16 and 2016/17 school years. At the time of writing this report (November 2017) there are 144 pupils on Flax Bourton’s school roll.

Whilst every effort will be made to secure extra places by September 2018, it is requested that any formal increase takes place from September 2019. This is because there needs to be certainty in delivery before school places can be offered at this higher level in perpetuity.

3.2 In terms of admissions, it has been agreed with the school, in principle, that any increase in pupil placements will be incremental with a year on year increase as opposed to a wholesale change in capacity (i.e. 30 pupils for each new cohort year of entry to cascade through the school). This is to support the stability of places across other schools in surrounding villages. This could be reviewed subject to demand and the ability of the school to fund whole classes within their revenue allocations. It is hoped the school should be admitting up to 30 pupils into each cohort by September 2021.

3.3 Flax Bourton C of E Primary School was judged by Ofsted in April 2015 to be Outstanding. The school has been over-subscribed for some time, receiving more applications than there are place available. The projections for the Backwell cluster of schools, of which Flax Bourton is a member for pupil place planning purposes, shows a deficit of places each year for the new intake for planning period September 2018 – September 2021.

Table 1 shows the projected reception-aged pupil numbers between the period September 2017 to September 2021, excluding pupils from new housing.

Table 2 shows the projected whole-school primary-aged pupil numbers between the period September 2017 to September 2021, including pupils from new housing.
### Table 1: Projected Reception pupil numbers 2017-2021 excluding pupils from new housing.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Backwell</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Backwell A (Long Ashton &amp; Flax Bourton)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Birdwell Primary</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flax Bourton CE Primary School</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>-7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northleaze VC Primary School</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Backwell A total</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>86</td>
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<td><strong>Backwell B (Yatton)</strong></td>
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The site is capable of expansion and the changes proposed will enhance provision across the whole school.

Overall, the school meets the criteria for expansion as contained in the Education Provision in North Somerset ~ A Commissioning Strategy 2015 – 2018.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2 Primary School Projections including housing gain.</th>
<th>School Places</th>
<th>Projected demand</th>
<th>Predicted empty places (negative values = shortfall, please also refer to 2017-2021 Year R Pupil Projections sheet)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birdwell Primary Academy</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>420</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flax Bourton C of E VC Primary *</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northleaze Primary</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year R not specifically allocated (excluding new housing)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated Year R pupils from new housing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated Years 1-6 pupils from new housing and previously unallocated YR</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group total</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>770</td>
<td>770</td>
</tr>
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</table>
3.6 Whilst the school expansion and planning application processes are run in parallel, decisions on each application are made independently.

4. CONSULTATION

4.1 The Executive Member for Children & Young People’s Services gave approval on 14 July 2016 to commence the statutory consultation process to make changes at Flax Bourton C of E Primary School (Flax Bourton School). The ‘informal’ stage 1 consultation that forms part of the three-stage School Organisation process commenced on Monday 12 September 2016 and ended on Wednesday 12 October 2016. In brief:

- All statutory consultees were consulted. A total of 124 formal responses were received (seven paper, one telephone and 116 electronic (E.consult or Email). Of these, 113 (91%) supported the changes proposed, 10 (8%) were against the proposal and 1 (1%) expressed no view.

- 22 comments about the proposal were also recorded at two meetings with school stakeholders and neighbours held on the afternoon and evening of 21 September 2016. Whilst those present indicated general support, concerns were raised in respect of traffic and parking around the school site and whether the demand for school places was all from local pupils.

- Pupils at the school were asked for their thoughts about the proposed expansion. The pupils felt that single-aged classes may have advantages, that they could have new classrooms and that there would be opportunities to make more friends. They had concerns that there may not be enough space for dining, worship and play.

- The Headteacher shared the consultation documentation with all staff. All were in favour of the expansion. If the school is to be expanded there should be opportunities for the changes to offer greater opportunities for professional development and career advancement.

This proposal also has the support of the Diocese of Bath & Wells and Flax Bourton Parish Council.

The comments captured at the above meetings and in formal responses are included in the consultation responses located on the Council’s website: http://consult.n-somerset.gov.uk/consult.ti/Flax/consultationHome

4.2 The Children and Young People’s Services (CYPS) School Organisation Task and Finish Group, a sub-group of the CYPS Policy and Scrutiny Panel, met on 17 October 2016 to consider the responses to stage 1 of this consultation process. The group were supportive of the publication of a public notice as the next stage of consultation. They shared the concerns of many consultees about any impact of the expansion on the safety of pupils travelling to and from school, noting that travel considerations will form part of any planning submission.

The findings of this engagement were reported to the CYPS Policy and Scrutiny Panel on 18 November 2016 - http://apps.n-somerset.gov.uk/cairo/docs/doc27754.pdf
The aim of the changes at Flax Bourton School are to provide additional school places for the village and surrounding area of Flax Bourton and to enhance the school’s learning environment.

4.3 Since September 2016 officers have been working with local stakeholders to develop plans to physically enhance the school buildings so that extra pupils can be accommodated. A draft design of the new school buildings was shown to stakeholders at an informal pre-planning event on 6 December 2016. Officers also attended an extraordinary meeting of Flax Bourton Parish Council on 15 August 2017 when the planning submission for changes to the site was discussed formally. The Parish Council supported the application, with caveats around road safety.

In addition to changes to the school buildings, a land purchase to facilitate increases in the parking available to the school has been completed. Agreement has also been made to introduce traffic calming measures outside the school site; to introduce a new 20 mph speed limit adjacent to the school; and to undertake a review of the speed limit on the rural section of Station Road (one of the country roads leading to Station Road that facilitates the entrance to the school).

The site has arboriculture, habitat and species complexities. The need to have detailed information to obtain a low impact bat licence and related surveys delayed the submission of a planning application. Planning permission was granted on 22 September 2017.

4.4 Further permission to publish a statutory proposal to expand the school was granted by the Executive Member for Children & Young People’s Services on 6 June 2017. A public notice was published on 21 September 2017 giving stakeholders an additional 4-week formal consultation period to provide further comments about the changes proposed. At the closing date no comments have been received.

4.5 To adhere to regulations, a decision about this proposal must be made within two months from the end date of the published proposal. The local Diocesan Bodies, School Trustees and the school’s Governing Body are the only organisations that have the right to appeal to the School’s Adjudicator against the Council’s decision.

5. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

**Costs**

5.1 Revenue funding for schools is overseen by the Strategic Schools Forum. Exceptional Pupil Growth Funding is paid to expanding schools via a formula that supports exceptional growth in schools. At the time of writing this report the funding available to Flax Bourton School for increases in pupil numbers in September 2018 and 2019, are based on them meeting the following three criteria:

a) The increase has been made at the request of the LA;

b) There will be an increase in pupil numbers of 2% or more between the October preceding the financial year and the October headcount during the financial year; and

c) The school’s notional class bases would need to increase by one
The above is subject to change for 2019/20 if nationally or locally proposed changes make it a necessity.

5.2 Any recommendations for an increase in the numbers of pupils to attend the school was subject to appropriate capital funding being made available to support the physical changes needed. Approval was requested and given at the Executive meeting on 2 February 2016 for £500,000 in the 2016/17 financial year and a further £500,000 in the 2017/18 financial year to be made available to enable a 2-class extension, reception relocation and hall expansion to be funded.

Following a further review of the school site, the physical changes to enable an expansion of the school buildings to be possible and enable the provision to meet the needs of a 210-place school has necessitated a reconfiguration of the school site. This has resulted in a solution providing three new class bases, the availability of a flexible multi-use space and the re-provision of school administrative facilities, a building extension and upgrade of equipment to provide a new production kitchen, new boiler plant, plus the purchase of land to increase parking provision and the upgrading of the public highway. The final scheme has added to the cost of the changes and a further funding allocation, secured from the 2018/19 basic need allocation, of £1,000,000 was approval at the Council's Executive at their meeting on 18 October 2016.

**Funding**

5.3 This proposal will, due to increasing pupil numbers, have some impact on the individual schools’ revenue budgets (as detailed in 5.1 above) and the overall schools budget, funded by the dedicated schools grant through the strategic schools forum. There are no revenue implications for the Council.

5.4 The capital costs for the changes, as outlined in 5.2 above, has been met from the government’s Basic Need grant allocation to the Council with a final budget cost of £2m.

**6. LEGAL POWERS AND IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 Regulations 4 and 5 of the Prescribed Alterations Regulations 2013 set out the prescribed alterations that can be made by governing bodies and by Local Authorities (LAs) in respect of each type of school.

Governing Bodies of Voluntary Schools (VC) can expand their school without following a statutory process.

The Local Authorities (LAs) can expand the same VC school but must follow a statutory process if:

- The proposed enlargement is permanent and it would increase the capacity (physical enlargement) of the school by:
  - more than 30 pupils; **and**
  - by 25% or 200 pupils (whichever is the lesser)
- The proposal involves making permanent a temporary enlargement that meets the above thresholds.
It was deemed appropriate for the LA to oversee the statutory process on this occasion.

7. **RISK MANAGEMENT**

7.1 The changes at the school are subject to the successful completion of this statutory process and planning permission for any extensions to the site. Due to the location of the proposed expansion, the risk of not receiving planning permission was deemed to be medium to low, although the logistics of providing new buildings on a live school site will always need careful planning and delivery. The natural environment around the school posed significant challenges and these now have strategies or changes in/to be put in place to enable them to be overcome. Planning permission has now been secured. The safety of pupils and adults on any school site is paramount and a segregation of the capital works from the school where practicable will be in place.

7.2 Local parents will need to show they are committed to walk to school to limit undue pressure on the road infrastructures surrounding the site. Officers have worked with the Planning and Highways Authorities to ensure that, as much as possible, any required highways planning considerations have been incorporated into the scheme.

7.3 It would not be possible to expand the organisation of the classes across the school site without an expanded building. Any such move without supporting new accommodation could compromise education provision and be potentially detrimental to the education provided to current pupils. Whilst every effort will be made to have parts of the expanded school in place for September 2018, this and the availability of all of the new site cannot be guaranteed for that date. Consequently it is requested that the approval to formally expand the school site is requested from September 2019.

8. **EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 The change in school organisation structure should enable more pupils to be able to attend their local schools and therefore enhance equality opportunities. An EIA is available on request.

9. **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 Council policy is to support the provision of local schools for local children.

10. **OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

10.1 To do nothing. It is likely that some children living in the villages supported by Flax Bourton School would need to be offered school places at schools some distance from their homes. Such allocations could lead to an increase in the Council’s home-to school transport budget as there could be no local school available for these pupils.

**AUTHOR**

Sally Varley
Service Leader - CYPS Strategic Planning & Governance
Children & Young People's Services
BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Public Notice dated 22 September 2017 –