

Report to:	Cabinet	Date of Meeting:	Thursday 3 February 2022
Subject:	St Teresa's Catholic Infant School - Outcome of Consultation		
Report of:	Head of Education	Wards Affected:	Birkdale and adjoining wards where pupils reside
Portfolio:	Cabinet Member - Education		
Is this a Key Decision:	Yes	Included in Forward Plan:	Yes
Exempt / Confidential Report:	No		

Summary:

Stage One of the consultation process has now been completed following the request from the Governing Body of St Teresa's Catholic Infant School that the Council begin the formal process to close the school as they confirmed that they have exhausted all options to address the pupil numbers and financial situation at the school.

Recommendation(s):

- (1) That the contents of the report are noted
- (2) Members agree to proceed to publication of the statutory notice to close the school with effect from 31st August 2022

Reasons for the Recommendation(s):

The Local Authority has the power to consider all options including closing a maintained school following the statutory process detailed in the report.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected: (including any Risk Implications)

Alternative options have been explored by the governing body with support from Officers prior to the governing body making their request.

What will it cost and how will it be financed?

(A) Revenue Costs

The financial deficit at 31st March 2022 is projected as -£134,500 and the deficit position at the 31st August 2022 is expected to be higher than this because of closure costs identified in paragraph 3.3. However, some of these are unknown currently and further work will be needed to identify these costs. There is also the potential for some pro rata DSG school formula funding allocation to offset the final deficit position.

There will also be a loss of funding for Education functions to maintained schools (£500), the loss of Traded Service income (£34,450) and reductions to the amounts de-delegated funding towards specific central functions (£3,100).

The Council has sufficient provision assigned to cover the closing deficit, however losses in income from Traded Services will need to be met from with appropriate Service Department budgets. The overall financial position of the school will be carefully monitored up to the point of closure and will be reported to members when this is known. This will be a more financially favourable option for the council than the school remaining open and the deficit increasing which will have an impact on the overall Council finances.

(B) Capital Costs
N/A

Implications of the Proposals:

Resource Implications (Financial, IT, Staffing and Assets): Staff from Corporate Finance and Corporate Personnel together with Business Support have continued to provide support to the Governors and Leadership Team of St Teresa’s Infant School over the last 18 months	
Legal Implications: Any proposal to close the school will follow the requirements of the School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulation 2013 and statutory guidance.	
Equality Implications: There are no equality implications.	
Climate Emergency Implications: The recommendations within this report will	
Have a positive impact	Y
Have a neutral impact	N
Have a negative impact	N
The Author has undertaken the Climate Emergency training for report authors	Y
The school building is not being used to its full capacity and heating and lighting are still required for a small number of staff and pupils. This proposal will mean less use of energy and will also impact on car use in the area.	

Contribution to the Council's Core Purpose:

Protect the most vulnerable: All children will still be able to attend a Catholic school.
Facilitate confident and resilient communities: All children will be able to attend the school which they would normally move to in KS2. (This school is an infant school).
Commission, broker and provide core services: All children will be able to attend a Catholic school in the catchment area.
Place – leadership and influencer: N/A
Drivers of change and reform: N/A
Facilitate sustainable economic prosperity: N/A
Greater income for social investment: N/A
Cleaner Greener: N/A

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

(A) Internal Consultations

The Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services (FD.6662/22) and the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD.4862/22) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

(B) External Consultations

Stage One consultation on the proposal has taken place in accordance with statutory requirements. As part of the consultation process meetings were held with governors, parents of pupils and staff in the school and their trade union representatives.

Implementation Date for the Decision

Following the expiry of the “call-in” period for the Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting

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Appendices:

The following appendices are attached to this report:

Annex A Consultation Leaflet – St Teresa’s
Annex B. Draft Statutory Notice and Complete Proposal

Background Papers:

Opening and closing maintained schools: statutory guidance for proposers and decision makers, November 2019, Department for Education.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-organisation-maintained-schools>

1. Introduction/Background

- 1.1 The background to this consultation was detailed in the report to Cabinet dated 4th November 2021.
- 1.2 Cabinet agreed to begin the formal consultation process on the closure of St Teresa’s Catholic Infant School.

2. Consultation Process

- 2.1 In accordance with Section 16(3) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 a proposer of a school closure must have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State. The following bodies and individuals were consulted:

Parents/carers of pupils at St Teresa’s Infant School
Parents of pupils who had applied for places at the school at the start of the consultation period
Staff at St Teresa’s Infant School
Governing body of St Teresa’s Infant School
Trade Union Representatives
Sefton schools
Ward Councillors
Directors of neighbouring local authorities
Local MP
Archdiocese of Liverpool
General consultation invites on Sefton’s website

- 2.2 Letters and a copy of the consultation document at Annex A were sent to all bodies and individuals listed above. The consultation also consisted of meetings with staff, governors, and parents/carers, and provided the opportunity for discussion and written representation.

- 2.3 During the consultation process applications were made by parents for 13 pupils to move to other schools as of 1st January 2022, leaving two children in the school.

3. Outcome of the consultation

- 3.1 The Stage One consultation period ran from 22nd November 2021 until 17th December 2021.

- 3.2 Consultation meetings were held with staff, governors, and parents/carers on the evening of 30th November 2021. The Head of Education explained the background to the consultation and opportunities were given for staff, governors, and parents to ask questions. These were mainly about the next steps in the process and what support would be given to governors and staff should the closure go ahead. Three parents and one of the Birkdale ward Councillors attended the parents meeting. Several parents had already arranged for places at alternative schools for their children and when the meeting took place there were only two pupils remaining. Concern was expressed that parents were under the impression that the decision to close had already been made.

3.3 Responses to the consultation

Sefton's Head of Education received a letter from Lancashire's Interim Director of Education which acknowledged the receipt of Sefton's consultation letter dated 19th November and noted that the consultation period ended on 17th December.

There were no other responses received during the consultation period.

4. Financial Position

- 4.1 St Teresa's Catholic Infant School has been struggling financially for several years and the Governing Body has worked hard to reduce costs but have unfortunately not been able to set a balanced budget since 2018/19.
- 4.2 The school ended the 2020/21 financial year with a deficit of -£55,316 and although the Governing Body has made several staffing adjustments in August 2021 the current budget shows the deficit rising to -£134,466 by the end of the current financial year.
- 4.3 There will continue to be staffing and running costs in 2022/23, if the school continues to operate until 31st August 2022. When the school closes there will be closure costs associated with the discontinuation of the site along with any potential contractual liabilities that are still outstanding and severance costs for displaced staff. Many of these costs are unknown at this time but will add to the identified deficit position at 31st March 2022. There may be some residual School funding from 2022/23 to offset some of the additional costs but, again, this cannot be calculated at this time.
- 4.4 Maintained schools pay a contribution from their delegated budget each year to the Local Authority towards the costs of meeting its statutory education functions

and central services to maintained schools. The amount St Teresa's currently pays for this is £3,600 and this income will be lost when the school closes.

- 4.5 St Teresa's Infant School also buys into many traded services from the Council which will cease when the school closes and this will mean a further reduction in income to the Council of approximately £34,500.

5. Pupil Places

- 5.1 St Teresa's Catholic Infant School has 90 places and there were 15 pupils on roll at the time of the School Census in October 2021 which meant they had 83.3% surplus places. However, once the consultation for closure was announced parents started to make enquiries about moving their children to other schools.

6. Statutory Notice

- 6.1 If Cabinet wish to proceed with the next stage of the proposal a copy of the statutory notice and detailed proposal will be published. A copy of this is attached at Annex B.
- 6.2 Following publication of this notice, subject to Cabinet approval, there will be a four-week statutory period for representations to be made which will be considered at a future Cabinet.