

# Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Agenda  
Item No.

Report of Executive Director (Children & Public Health)

to  
**Cabinet**

on

**15th September 2020**

Report prepared by:  
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Service

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**Proposal to seek permission to consult on a potential amalgamation of Chalkwell Hall  
Infants School and Chalkwell Hall Junior School**

**People Scrutiny Committee**  
**Executive Councillor: Councillor Anne Jones**  
Part 1 (Public Agenda Item)

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## **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to set out the current situation regarding Chalkwell Hall Junior and Infants schools.
- 1.2. Should Cabinet decide to proceed to consult on a potential amalgamation, subsequent decision papers will be brought back later in the year on the outcomes of the consultation, which in turn may lead to a subsequent decision to proceed with an amalgamation, or not.

## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1. **Cabinet is asked to decide if they would wish to proceed to a formal consultation on the potential amalgamation of Chalkwell Infants School and Chalkwell Junior School.**

## **3. Background**

- 3.1. Chalkwell Hall Infants and Chalkwell Hall Junior schools are both Local Authority (LA) maintained schools, co-located on a single site, and both are currently judged by OFSTED as "good". The current numbers for the two schools are 360 and 480 respectively. The shared site is very compact, especially in the shared playground and external spaces. The Headteacher of the Junior School has resigned with effect from the start of the Autumn Term 2020. There is currently a Headteacher at the infant school, and the junior school will put interim leadership arrangements in place during any transition period, supported by the LA.
- 3.2. As with any change in leadership of a LA maintained school, the recent resignation of the Head Teacher of Chalkwell Hall Junior School triggered a review of the potential leadership options going forward by the LA, including whether the potential amalgamation of both schools should be considered, in the best interests of the pupils and community.

- 3.3. The current Council policy (2012) indicates that wherever possible, where separate infant and junior schools are co-located on the same site, they should be amalgamated. In the vast majority of similar circumstances, it is considered beneficial for pupils and families to proceed with amalgamation for the reasons set out below (3.6), although the sensitivities of the process are recognised.
- 3.4. Following the resignation, the LA approached and asked both Governing Bodies for their views on a potential amalgamation. In addition views were sought from both the Cabinet Member for Children and Public Health, the Shadow Portfolio Holder and the three ward members.
- 3.5. It should be noted that these discussions were undertaken to assess the initial views of both schools on the potential amalgamation, as prescribed in the Department for Education's Statutory guidance on 'School organisation: local-authority-maintained schools'. These discussions do not form part of or replace any formal consultation process.

3.6. **Benefits of a potential amalgamation**

The benefits of amalgamation fall into two main areas: that of benefits to pupils/families and school organisation and efficiency

**Pupil/family level benefits**

- There is clear evidence that by minimising the points of transition between two schools (amalgamation), outcomes for pupils improves over time. This is as a direct result of strengthened opportunities for a consistent curriculum progression and continuity of teaching practices.
- Under a single and unified new Governing Body, vision, policy and practice would be uniform across the primary school
- Parents at the end of year two will no longer need to apply for admission to the junior school

**Organisation and efficiency**

- There would be expected efficiencies of staffing and resources across the single school, leading to enhanced opportunities for teaching and learning
- Expertise currently in the schools could be better targeted across the full primary age range, allowing for greater career progression for staff

In recognising the benefits to pupils and families, the process of consultation can inevitably create a period of uncertainty within the community and for staff.

## 4. Process for Consultation

4.1 **Consultation process for amalgamation.** Officers are seeking Councils agreement to consult on the amalgamation of Chalkwell Hall Infant and Chalkwell Hall Junior Schools. This involves the closure of one school, and increasing the establishment age range of the other school to become a primary school serving children from 5-11years.

4.2 The **first stage** would be to consult the community and relevant parties in the local area. The consultation must contain sufficient information (as outlined in statutory guidance), for interested parties to make a decision on whether to support the proposed change. This consultation would be over a four week period during term time in November 2020.

4.3 A report would then be brought back to Cabinet (January) with an evaluation of the consultation and a recommendation to Council to either continue as is with a separate infant and junior school and make no changes; or proceed to **stage two** (publication), publish the local authorities proposal to amalgamate the schools and publish a statutory notice.

- 4.4 Within one week of the date of publication on the website, a copy of the proposal and the information set out above is also sent to the Secretary of State, both Governing bodies and any other appropriate body.
- 4.5 During this period, the local authority would consult the parents, prospective parents, staff, trade unions and interested members of the local area (**stage three** representation). Links to the proposal and consultation portal would be shared on the two schools websites. In previous amalgamations representation has been organised through LA led meetings held at the two schools. Due to COVID 19 and social distancing an alternative virtual platform may need to be used for this process. The representation period must last for at least 4 weeks during term time. It is envisaged that this would commence in January 2021 should Council decide to proceed.
- 4.6 No final decision on amalgamation would be made until the wider representation feedback has been evaluated and reported back to Cabinet for their final decision (February 2021).
- 4.7 **Stage four** (decision). The Local Authority MUST make a decision on the proposal to amalgamate within two months of the end of the representation period. The closing of a community infant and junior school and the establishment of a new community primary school is the decision schools adjudicator. Notification of the decision and reasons for it, are sent within one week of making a determination to the LA and the Secretary of State.
- 4.8 In addition, consideration would need to be given to the recruitment to the substantive Headteacher role. The Infant school has a current serving Headteacher who would be eligible to apply for the all through Primary School. This may or may not involve external recruitment depending on circumstances. The recruitment and transfer phase cannot start until the final decision to amalgamate has been made, which in turn will take approximately an additional three months at the earliest.
- 4.9 In reality, if everything falls into line, the new, unified, amalgamated all through primary school under the leadership of a new Headteacher will in all likelihood be up and running for September 2021.

## 5 Other Options

- 5.1 The two schools could remain separate entities with their own separate DfE numbers and separate governing bodies as currently constituted.
- 5.2 The schools could consider academy status.

## 6 Reasons for Recommendations

- 6.1 It is the Council's policy that Infant and Junior Schools on the same site should consider potential amalgamation when an appropriate opportunity arises. For the reasons stated above, the benefits to pupils and families at this stage warrant further consideration of amalgamation through the consultation.

## 7 Corporate Implications

- 7.1 **Contribution to the Southend 2050 Road Map**  
An amalgamation will strengthen improved pupil outcomes for pupils and fits well into the ambition of opportunity and prosperity that our children are school and life ready and young people are ready for further education, training or employment.

## 7.2 Financial Implications

Individual school delegated budgets are allocated by the local authorities locally agreed formula. This budget is calculated mainly through an allocation linked to the number of pupils in the school. Included in the formula are also a number of specific lump-sum allocations. When schools amalgamate, the previous system of separate budgets for each of the former school ceases and the amalgamated school is allocated one delegated budget. The amalgamation of separate infants and junior schools into primary school would result in a reduction in leadership costs due to the amalgamated school having one Head Teacher post. There may be redundancy costs incurred if the current head teacher of the infant school were not successful in being appointed as the new primary school head teacher.

## 7.3 Legal Implications

The consultation when considering the amalgamation of schools is a statutory requirement. Statutory guidance sets out what local authorities must do to comply with the law.

## 7.4 People Implications

All staff, parents and the local area will have an opportunity to contribute to the consultation and have their views considered.

## 7.5 Property Implications

Both schools are Local authority maintained schools and as such there is no change to the ownership of the school buildings.

## 7.6 Consultation

The local authority (as the admission authority for community schools) must consult where it proposes to amalgamate schools as outlined above.

## 7.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications

Any formal consultation will be carried out in line with the Equality Act 2010, ensuring that there is no discrimination to any of the protected characteristics.

## 7.8 Risk Assessment

An equality impact assessment will be scheduled as part of the consultation process

## 7.9 Value for Money

Amalgamation is likely to see a reduction in overall staffing costs, allowing greater use of budgets to be spent on achieving better outcomes for children

## 7.10 Community Safety Implications

None envisaged.

## 7.11 Environmental Impact

None envisaged

## 8 Background Papers

None

## 9 Appendices

None