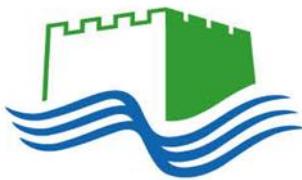


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| Cabinet |  TOWER HAMLETS |
| 21 October 2020 | Classification: Unrestricted |
| Report of Corporate Director Children's and Culture | Outcome of the consultation on the proposal for the closure of Shapla Primary School |

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| Lead Member | Councillor Danny Hassell, Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for Children's and Culture Services |
| Originating Officer(s) | Terry Bryan, Service Head for Pupil Access and School Sufficiency and Ikwi Mkparu, School Organisation Manager. |
| Wards affected | All Wards |
| Key Decision? | Yes |
| Forward Plan Notice Published | 7 th July 2020 |
| Reason for Key Decision | Impact on Wards |
| Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome | A better deal for children and young people: aspiration, education and skills |

Executive Summary

Formal consultation has been carried out on the proposal to close Shapla Primary School, with effect from 31st August 2021. The consultation process was carried out during the period 8th June to 17th July 2020 and a Consultation Report, which describes the findings, is attached as Appendix 1 and has also been published on the Council website. It makes recommendation to move to the publication of a statutory notice in respect of the proposal to close Shapla Primary School. During that statutory notice period, legal objections can be set by any consultee, which would need to be considered before any final determination is taken.

Recommendations:

The Mayor in Cabinet is recommended to:

1. The recommendation is to move to the publication of a statutory notice for 28 days, in respect of the proposal to close Shapla Primary School. This will take effect from 31st August 2021, with the displaced pupils admitted to other nearby schools.
2. To note the Equalities Assessment set out in Section 4 and attached as Appendix 2.

1 REASONS FOR THE DECISION

- 1.1 The recommendation is made in order to determine the Council's response to the proposal for the closure of Shapla Primary School.
- 1.2 The decision to propose the closure of Shapla Primary School has reluctantly been taken due to a significant decline in its pupil numbers. Pupil numbers in Tower Hamlets schools are currently falling, particularly in the West of the borough where Shapla School is situated. This means that Shapla School, along with other schools, has not had sufficient children to fill its classes. All year groups are now operating at classes well below their planned capacity of 30.
- 1.3 The fall in pupil numbers has adversely affected this small school's budget to the extent that protecting the quality of education has led to Shapla having significant financial difficulty and needing to apply to the Local Authority for a licensed deficit. In accordance with school funding regulations, this deficit must be repaid within the required three-year timeframe. Where a deficit cannot be repaid it is incumbent upon the School and the Local Authority to consider options for the School's future viability, including school closure.
- 1.4 Having considered the School's position and the limited options available it was necessary to consult on the proposal for Shapla to close, whilst ensuring that the displaced children can be accommodated in other nearby schools.
- 1.5 The proposal is for the closure to take effect from the 31st August 2021 and the process is therefore being undertaken in accordance with Department for Education (DfE) Guidance on 'Opening and Closing Maintained Schools'. So far, an initial public consultation has been undertaken, and a report on the outcome of the consultation has been published on the Council and School website.
- 1.6 This Consultation Report, at Appendix 1, includes feedback on the representations received following the first publication of the proposals on the 8th June 2020.

2 OPTIONS AVAILABLE

- 2.1 **Option 1:** to move to the publication of a statutory notice for 28 days, which is the next stage in the statutory consultation process. This will provide further opportunity for consultees to have their say and set legal objections against the proposal.
- 2.2 **Option 2:** not to move to the publication of a statutory notice, but to cease the proposal after the formal consultation period, this would mean not concluding the full statutory consultation process in order to take the decision to close the School.
- 2.3 Option 1 is preferred as it takes the proposal to the next stage in the full statutory consultation process. It allows all consultees to fully consider the proposal for the School to close during an additional 28 day period and before the Mayor (in Cabinet) is required to make a final determination in March of next year.

3 DETAILS OF THE REPORT

- 3.1 Following a formal consultation period from the 8th June to the 17th July 2020, it was appropriate to publish a Consultation Report on the findings and after full consideration to take a decision whether to move to the next stage of the school organisation process, which is to publish a statutory notice (Appendix 5). A copy of the Consultation Report is attached at Appendix 1.
- 3.2 Due to coronavirus it was not possible to hold the preferred method of public and parents' meetings regarding the consultation. However, several alternative methods were offered (in line with the Tower Hamlets consultation processes during coronavirus guidance for schools' consultations) and these methods along with the type of responses are explained in the Consultation Report.
- 3.3 The Consultation Report provides a detailed analysis of the responses and opinions expressed. It is evident that the respondents understood the proposal and its impact and the reason why the closure is being considered, although the majority were either saddened or did not agree with the proposal.
- 3.4 Based on the feedback and whilst acknowledging the reluctant views expressed during the initial consultation, it is still recommended for the Council to move to the next stage of the process by issuing a statutory notice, with the support of the School's Governing Body. This will enable a further opportunity to obtain the views of the public and other interested parties before a decision can be reached.

4 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 When making decisions the Council must act reasonably and rationally. It must consider only the relevant information and consult those affected, taking into account their views, before final decisions are made. It must also comply with its legal duties, including relating to equalities.

- 4.2 The Equality Act 2010 requires the LA, when exercising its functions, to have due regard to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation; advance equality of opportunity; and to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not (“the Public Sector Equality Duty”).
- 4.3 An Equalities Assessment has been conducted by the LA and is attached at Appendix 2. It will continue to be updated in view of the responses to the statutory notice and its representations. This assessment must be considered in detail when the Cabinet considers the matters above, as part of its decision on whether Shapla Primary School should close.
- 4.4 Governors and LA officers have considered carefully whether changes may affect groups disproportionately. They will continue to work with Trade Unions to ensure that planning for any staff changes are fair and equitable and in line with agreed policies, including the Council’s School Organisational Change Procedure attached as Appendix 4.
- 4.5 The equalities assessment to date has found that there is a risk that a disproportionately negative impact could exist to one or more groups of people who share a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. This risk will be removed or reduced through the implementation of the actions detailed within the ‘Action Planning’ section of Equalities Assessment (Appendix 2).

5 OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

(i) Managing the Impact of Proposed Closure on School Staff

- 5.1 The LA and School Governing Body is working together to support the School staff through this change. A formal staff consultation will only take place once the final decision has been made on the schools’ closure. If the final decision is for the school to close staff will be supported through further training, coaching and workshops to find redeployment opportunities at other local schools.

(ii) Best Value Implications

- 5.2 The Local Authority has a duty to ensure that schools are fulfilling their duties and that value for public money is achieved, whilst standards are maintained. They must ensure that they do not fall into financial deficit so that they are unable to sustain an offer of quality education for children. This proposal is being considered in view of concerns over the School’s viability and therefore its ability to sustain high quality education for its children.
- 5.3 The proposal presents significant mainstream revenue and capital implications for the Council. When a school closes its finances (and any surplus or deficit) is returned to the LA. In the case of this proposal, the Statutory Notice will make clear that the deficit balance will transfer to the Council.

- 5.4 Closure of Shapla School will remove the requirement for additional funding from the Dedicated School's Grant, (DSG). This money reduces the pressure on the DSG that is caused by having a number of schools requiring licensed deficits and ensures a more efficient use of resources across the school estate.

(iii) Environmental (including air quality)

- 5.5 There are no environmental issues arising from this proposal.

(iv) Risk Management

5.6 School Closure Proposal

| Risk | Impact of Risk if it occurs* (H/M/L) | Probability of risk occurring (H/M/L) | What is the Council doing or what has it done to avoid the risk or reduce its effect | Who is responsible for dealing with the risk? |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| Failure to move to statutory notice | H (see revenue implications below) | L | This risk is low as it will be mitigated by ensuring that a full and public statutory consultation is being undertaken, including the earlier 39 day informal consultation before moving to publication of a statutory notice for 28 days | Director of Children and Culture (Service Head for Pupil Access and School Sufficiency) |

- 5.7 If this recommendation is agreed, continuation of the statutory consultation process will be carefully managed and evaluated in line with statutory guidance, taking account of the further views of stakeholders and thoroughly addressing the findings from the Equalities Assessment.

- 5.8 It is proposed to close the School for September 2021. This timescale will allow further opportunity to ensure that children, parents and staff are aware of the proposal and its implications and are supported through the change process over the course of the remainder of the current school year.

(v) Safeguarding

- 5.9 The report deals with the Council's approach to managing the supply of school places for the local population. The efficient supply of school places contributes to the safeguarding of children by ensuring their early access to 'good quality' and sustainable education provision.

(vi) Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment

- 5.10 The proposals presented in this report have followed an initial and formal public consultation using a variety of mechanisms. All responses received through these mechanisms or made directly to Council officers or members have been included in the analysis of the feedback received. These responses have only been used to assess the community's view of the proposals and not for any other purpose.
- 5.11 The Council handles information in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 2018 and is the data controller for the purposes of the Data Protection Act 2018. For more information, the privacy notice for Pupil Services can be accessed [here](#).

6 COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 6.1 At March 2020 Shapla School reported a provisional deficit position of £455k. The school has forecast a worsening of this position by the end of 2021/22 with a cumulative deficit estimated to be £525k. As per the Scheme for Financing Schools, when a school closes its balances (and any surplus or deficit) reverts to the LA. In addition to the deficit balance any redundancy costs would also need to be borne by the LA, although some of this may be managed from the DSG contingency, but will need to be confirmed.
- 6.2 As the school is due to close on the 31st August 2021, 7/12th of the budget share will revert to the LA and will help to mitigate some of the deficit.
- 6.3 To ensure that the deficit position is managed before the closure, a Licensed Deficit Agreement must be agreed with the school and any proposals that would otherwise increase the deficit must be avoided.

7 COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 7.1 Section 14 of the Education Act 1996 requires local authorities to secure that sufficient schools providing primary and secondary education are available for their area .
- 7.2 The School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013 and the statutory guidance 'Opening and Closing Maintained Schools' (November 2019) set out the procedure for closing a school.
- 7.3 When carrying out its duties under the above legislation the local authority must be mindful of its duties under the Equalities Act 2010, and of its duty under section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- 7.4 The proposals set out in this report comply with the above legislation and guidance.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

None

Appendices

- Appendix 1 Consultation Report on the Responses to the Proposal for the Closure of Shapla Primary School
- Appendix 2 Equalities Assessment
- Appendix 3 Consultation Document on the Proposal for the closure of Shapla Primary School
- Appendix 4 Council's HR Organisational Change Procedure
- Appendix 5 Draft Statutory Notice for the closure of Shapla School (to follow)

Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012

None

Officer contact details for documents:

N/A