

Decision Pathway – Report



PURPOSE: Key decision

MEETING: Cabinet

DATE: 25 February 2021

TITLE	Reorganisation of C of E Primary School Provision in Bristol City Centre		
Ward(s)	Central, Hotwells & Harbourside		
Author: Ian Bell	Job title: Place Planning Manager		
Cabinet lead: Councillor Anna Keen	Executive Director lead: Jacqui Jensen		
Proposal origin: BCC Staff			
Decision maker: Cabinet Member			
Decision forum: Cabinet			
Purpose of Report:			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Approve the closure of St Michael’s on the Mount and St George C of E Primary Schools and establish a new school on the site of St Michael’s. The Local Authority is both the ‘Proposer’ and ‘Decision Maker’ as set out in Department for Education Statutory Guidance. 			
Evidence Base:			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Council has been working with the school governors and the Diocese of Bristol to consider the future of Church of England (C of E) primary school provision in Bristol city centre .St Michael’s and St George Primary Schools have been operating at well below their capacity for a number of years. In order to address the sustainability issues facing both schools, the council, in agreement with the school governors and Diocese of Bristol, is proposing to reorganise the C of E primary school provision in the area. 2. The proposal is to amalgamate St Michael’s on the Mount and St George C of E Primary Schools into one Primary School for pupils age 4-11 on the site of St Michael’s on the Mount from 1 September 2021. 3. The new school would have capacity to accommodate up to 210 pupils (30 per year group) although initially pupil numbers would be below this. 4. Although there are 3 separate proposals (the closure of 2 schools and the opening of a school) these are ‘related’ and were therefore published together. 5. St Michael’s can accommodate up to 210 pupils and St George up to 115. There are currently fewer than 150 pupils in total in the schools. 6. Cost saving measures have already been taken including sharing a headteacher and combining a number of year groups so that they can share a teacher. Governors have not been able to find any other savings that would be sufficient to keep both school sites operational. School budgets are directly related to the number of children on roll and it is inevitable that the school budgets will continue to shrink with lower pupil numbers. 7. Governors have considered the issues and options available and do not feel able to provide an appropriate standard of education for local children at both school sites. Moving to one site is the only option available for a school which could be sustainable in the longer term. 			
Cabinet Member / Officer Recommendations:			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the decision maker approves the closure of St Michael’s on the Mount and St George C of E Primary Schools 2. That the decision maker approves the establishment of a new school on the site of St Michael’s. 			
Corporate Strategy alignment:			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. These proposals will help to improve educational outcomes to help the city become Fair and inclusive 			
City Benefits:			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The schools are financially unsustainable with very low pupil numbers and costs associated with maintaining 2 sites. The proposals will help to secure primary school provision in the city centre for the short to medium 			

term.

Consultation Details:

1. The proposals were the subject of consultation with school governors, parents, staff and the C of E Diocese prior to publication of the full proposals. This included online meetings with parents and staff.
2. As required in the statutory guidance the full proposals were published on the Council website, with a shorter version published in the Bristol Post. The proposals were also sent to Department for Education and others as required by the guidance.
3. No responses were received from the statutory consultees.
4. The main point raised in consultation responses and at meetings concerned the reason for a lack of pupils. There was a belief that governors had not done enough to promote, particularly St George and that other schools had opened or been allowed to expand. Respondents also felt that the current COVID situation should be considered as this would make it more difficult for those children moving to a different school site.
5. Responses received are summarised in appendix B.

Background Documents

1. Opening and closing maintained schools - Statutory guidance for proposers and decision-makers (Department for Education, November 2019) [Opening and closing maintained schools1012.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/84122/opening-and-closing-maintained-schools-1012.pdf)
2. Education and Inspections Act 2006 (As amended by the Education Act 2011) [Education and Inspections Act 2006 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/25/section/1)
3. School Organisation (Establishments and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013 [The School Organisation \(Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools\) Regulations 2013 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2013/1251/section/1)
4. Full Proposal and Public Notice [Revised Consultation on Future Provision at St Michael's on the Mount and St George Primary Schools - Bristol - Citizen Space](#)

Revenue Cost	£	Source of Revenue Funding	
Capital Cost	£	Source of Capital Funding	n/a
One off cost <input type="checkbox"/>	Ongoing cost <input type="checkbox"/>	Saving Proposal <input type="checkbox"/>	Income generation proposal <input type="checkbox"/>

Required information to be completed by Financial/Legal/ICT/ HR partners:

1. Finance Advice: At the end of 2019/20 St George Primary had a deficit balance of £28k and is forecasting to end 2020/21 with an increased deficit of £62k. St Michael's on the Mount primary had a surplus balance of £102k at the end of 2019/20 but are forecasting to fall into a £28k deficit by the end of 2020/21. Both schools are experiencing a decline in pupil numbers and the financial effect of this is that funding for 2021/22 is due to reduce by £52k for St George and £79k for St Michael on the Mount (taking into account teachers pay and pension grant funding). Unless pupil numbers significantly increase or substantial savings are made the financial situation is not sustainable as schools cannot operate with a deficit. The proposal to close both schools will mean that the deficit balances will return to the LA, there is a reserve for Education Conversions of £1.4m that will cover this, the final amount of deficits will not be known until the closure date is confirmed and cost of any redundancies are known.

The new school to be opened will also be under significant financial pressure if pupil numbers do not increase from the current combined total.

Finance Business Partner: Graham Booth – Finance Manager, Children & Education 27 January 2021.

2. Legal Advice: Section 11 of Education and Inspections Act empowers the local authority to propose to establish a new school which is to replace one or more foundation or voluntary schools which have a religious character which is the case here. Section 15 of the same Act empowers the local authority to publish proposals to discontinue schools following the statutory process as detailed in appendix A. The School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013 specify how the proposals are to be publicised, which bodies are to

receive copies and a statutory consultation period. The consultation detailed in Appendix B complies with the specified requirements in the Regulations. The proposals were consulted on prior to the statutory consultation and then again as part of the statutory consultations. The responses are summarised in Appendix B. The responses must be taken into account by Cabinet when taking the decision. The equalities impact assessment at Appendix E will assist Cabinet in complying with the public sector equality duty when making this decision.

Legal Team Leader: Sarah Sharland Team Leader Litigation Regulatory Team 16th February 2021

3. Implications on IT: No anticipated impact on IT Services.

IT Team Leader: Simon Oliver, 4 January 2021

4. HR Advice: The governors are working with advice from the LA to effect the closure of St Michael's and St George's, (and the subsequent opening of a new school), and will follow the council's protocol for school amalgamations. Any staff with two or more years' service who do not get a job in the new school, or elsewhere within the authority (or an employer covered by the Redundancy Payments Modifications Order) will be entitled to a redundancy payment, calculated in accordance with the school's severance policy (which is based on the council's). All severance costs will fall to the budgets of the closing schools.

HR Partner: Jan Mackenzie, 21 January 2021

EDM Sign-off	Jacqui Jensen	9 th January 2021
Cabinet Member sign-off	Councillor Anna Keen	27 th January 2021
For Key Decisions - Mayor's Office sign-off	Mayor's Office	27 th January 2021

Appendix A – Further essential background / detail on the proposal A (i) – Full Proposal and Statutory Notice A (ii) – Background Information	YES
Appendix B – Summary of Responses to Consultation	YES
Appendix C – Summary of any engagement with scrutiny	NO
Appendix D – Risk assessment	NO
Appendix E – Equalities screening / impact assessment of proposal – to follow	YES
Appendix F – Eco-impact screening/ impact assessment of proposal	YES
Appendix G – Financial Advice	NO
Appendix H – Legal Advice	NO
Appendix I – Exempt Information	NO
Appendix J – HR advice	NO
Appendix K – ICT	NO
Appendix L – Procurement	NO