

<b>COUNTY COUNCIL LOCAL COMMITTEE FOR BARROW</b>
<b>Meeting date: 6 March 2020</b>
<b>From: Executive Director – People (Deputy Chief Executive) – John Readman</b>

## **POTENTIAL CLOSURE OF NURSERY PROVISION AT BRAM LONGSTAFFE**

### **1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**1.1 This report is to inform members that a consultation on the potential closure of Bram Longstaffe Nursery School is being undertaken. It provides an opportunity for the Local Committee to express a view on the potential closure to the Cabinet before next steps are decided.**

**1.2 It should be noted that a much wider range of community services is provided from the Bram Longstaffe building, but that the current closure consultation relates only to the nursery school services provided there. It is the county council's intention that the building and the Bram Longstaffe name be retained, and community services continue to operate on the site.**

### **2.0 STRATEGIC PLANNING AND EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

- **To safeguard children, and ensure that Cumbria is a great place to be a child and grow up.**
- **To be a modern and efficient council.**

### **3.0 RECOMMENDATION**

**3.1 Members are asked to note the consultation, and respond as they feel appropriate. The outcome of the consultation will be taken into account by the Cabinet before further decisions are taken on next steps.**

### **4.0 BACKGROUND**

**4.1 Bram Longstaffe Nursery School was inspected by Ofsted in December 2019 and received a 'Special Measures' rating. This means that Ofsted judged the school to be "failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing**

are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school". For the sake of clarity, Ofsted only reviewed the nursery school element of the wider services provided from the Bram Longstaffe building; Ofsted's view that Special Measures are required does not extend to the rest of the services being provided from the site.

- 4.2 The previous Ofsted inspection, in October 2017, had concluded that the school 'Requires Improvement'; unfortunately, it is clear from the latest inspection that, rather than improving, the quality of provision has further declined, and is not up to the standard required to provide local children with the best start in life.
- 4.3 The school has struggled to balance its budget for a number of years. Schools are not usually allowed to operate with a deficit, but the county council, recognising the service that Bram Longstaffe has provided to the local community over many years, has continued to support the school in seeking to return to a balanced budget position. Costs have been reduced, but the school's deficit currently stands at £486,271. It is forecast that this position will increase to £514,205 by the end of 2019/20.
- 4.4 School budgets are largely based on the number of children attending. Pupil numbers have fallen at Bram Longstaffe over recent years, from 60 on roll in 2015, there were only 29 in September 2019. There seems to be little prospect that they will recover in the near future, particularly given the current Ofsted rating. There is, therefore, no realistic prospect of the school's budget being balanced in the foreseeable future, which makes recovering from a 'Special Measures' verdict much more difficult.
- 4.5 The county council has supported the school over recent years, with additional funding delivered via the School Improvement service, and intensive support provided in an attempt to raise standards. This cannot carry on indefinitely, however. Despite the best efforts of the county council and, in particular, the staff and governors at Bram Longstaffe, it has simply not been possible to return it to the thriving, successful school it once was. With no prospect of recovery either financially or in terms of educational standards, the county council feels that the only realistic option now remaining is closure.
- 4.6 To that end, a public consultation exercise is being undertaken setting out the plans to potentially close the nursery school element of the wider services provided from the Bram Longstaffe building, and seeking local views. The consultation involves a public meeting to which parents are invited, a meeting with staff and governors, and a consultation document setting out the proposals has been circulated. Issues raised at the meetings will be documented, and these will be reported to the Cabinet along with an analysis of written responses before decisions are taken on next steps. The Local Committee's view on the school closure plans will also be reported to the Cabinet, and taken into account alongside others received.

- 4.7 It should be noted that the county council is committed to retaining the building for community use. Barrow Local Committee has previously identified Barrow Island as one of the priority areas they wish to focus on, building on existing partnership working, and focussing on challenges and opportunities for the community. Following the Barrow Island Residents meeting in June 2019, the Barrow Island Partnership Group has been established, and regular partnership and residents meetings and activities to engage the community are now taking place, along with targeted intervention work.
- 4.8 A co-produced action plan has also been developed and the Community Development Team have been working with residents, businesses and partners to develop a programme of activity for the coming year. As part of this work opportunities to provide a more joined up service provision around a hub model have also been explored.
- 4.9 Whilst it is recognised that there are existing facilities and activities taking place on Barrow Island – for example, at Cavendish Park – informal feedback has indicated that there is a need for a family and wellbeing hub on Barrow Island, in particular providing cross organisational support to children and families. It is felt that Bram Longstaffe would be an ideal setting for this hub both in terms of its location and also the regard with which it is held within the community. Whilst the hub would continue to develop over time some of the following activities / services may benefit from being delivered from Bram:
- some maternity services
  - staff base for the mental health trailblazer activity
  - Private/Voluntary/Independent nursery/early years provision
  - Children’s Centre activity
  - drop in/surgeries for partners including, health, police, borough council and county council
  - third sector delivered programmes/activities
  - availability of rooms to let for ad hoc activities both for the community, third sector and business
  - heart start courses from the fire services
  - potential to run community skills and learning courses
  - potential for County Council to use the site for service activity, both back office and meeting with service users

**Other nursery facilities in the area**

- 4.10 Government guidelines on school closures include a presumption against the closure of nursery schools. That is not to say that closures should never happen, but rather that the case for closure should be strong and that there should be alternative provision in the area.
- 4.11 There are 33 other nursery providers within a 2 mile radius of Bram Longstaffe Nursery School (listed in the consultation document); some cater for 3 year olds and above and others take in 2 year olds and above. These include childminders, voluntary groups, private nurseries and primary schools with nurseries.

## **5.0 OPTIONS**

- 5.1 Local Committees are not the decision maker on proposals for changes to schools, but clearly it is important for them to be consulted on changes affecting their area, and that their views are taken into account. Members may, of course, respond to the consultation with their own view, but this paper provides an opportunity for the Local Committee as a whole to express a view. It has the option not to express a view should it so wish.

## **6.0 RESOURCE AND VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Bram Longstaffe has been in deficit to varying degrees for a number of years. As at 31 March 2019 the deficit stood at £486,271 and is forecast to increase to £514,205 by 31 March 2020. This is despite support from the County Council to help the school to manage its budget. Closure of the nursery school will result in the deficit being met from the School Contingency Fund as agreed by Cumbria Schools Forum. Any potential redundancy costs would also have to be met from this fund. In 2020/21, the School Contingency Fund budget is £665,527. Using this budget to meet the deficit from Bram Longstaffe and possible redundancy costs may result in an overspend on the Schools Contingency Fund, dependent on other calls on the fund during the year, which will result in an increased deficit on the central Dedicated Schools Grant reserve.
- 6.2 Development of the existing building into a community hub may require both revenue and capital funding but this cannot be quantified until the nature of the services available at the hub, and the specific requirements of these services is finalised.

## **7.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 As per part 2D 5.1.1 (d) (i) of the terms of reference for Local Committees, Members are able to note the content of this report and make a consultation response to Cabinet if they wish.
- 7.2 Section 6 of the Childcare Act 2006 places a duty on all English Local Authorities to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the provision of childcare is sufficient to meet the requirements of parents in their area who require childcare in order to enable them to take up, or remain in, work or to undertake education or training which could reasonably be expected to assist them to obtain work.
- 7.3 As per paragraph 4.10 of this report there is a presumption against the closure of maintained nursery schools. Where a proposal is for the closure of a maintained nursery school, the proposer should set out:
- plans to develop alternative early years provision clearly demonstrating that it will be at least equal in quantity and quality to the provision provided by the nursery school with no loss of expertise and specialism; and
  - replacement provision is more accessible and more convenient for local parents.

- 7.4 As per section 6 of this report there will be substantial resource implications if Bram Longstaffe is closed and the site redeveloped.
- 7.5 As per section 8 below, a statutory process is required to close a maintained nursery school. Any collective consultation redundancy process would need to be run alongside this process.

## 8.0 CONCLUSION

- 8.1 This consultation is the first step in the statutory process required to make changes to schools. Views gathered at this stage will be reported to the county council's Cabinet, which will decide in April 2020 whether to publish formal closure proposals.
- 8.2 The publication of formal proposals would trigger a mandatory, 4-week 'representation period', offering a further opportunity for views to be expressed. Any representations would be reported to the Cabinet in full at its meeting in July 2020, at which a final decision on the proposed closure would be made.
- 8.3 Should the Cabinet decide to close the school, this would be effective from 31 August 2020.

**John Readman**  
**Executive Director -People**

*February 2020*

## APPENDICES

***Appendix 1 – Consultation Document***  
***Appendix 2 – Equality Impact Assessment***

Electoral Division: Old Barrow

Executive Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	No
Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
If a Key Decision, is the proposal published in the current Forward Plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
Is the decision exempt from call-in on grounds of urgency?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	No
If exempt from call-in, has the agreement of the Chair of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee been sought or obtained?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	N/A
Has this matter been considered by Overview and Scrutiny? If so, give details below.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	No
Has an environmental or sustainability impact assessment been undertaken?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	N/A

Has an equality impact assessment been undertaken?

Yes		
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***N.B. If an executive decision is made, then a decision cannot be implemented until the expiry of the eighth working day after the date of the meeting – unless the decision is urgent and exempt from call-in and necessary approvals have been obtained.***

**PREVIOUS RELEVANT COUNCIL OR EXECUTIVE DECISIONS**  
***[including Local Committees]***

***No previous relevant decisions.***

**CONSIDERATION BY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

***Not considered by Overview and Scrutiny***

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

***No background papers***

**REPORT AUTHOR**

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