

Iminster and Crewkerne School Structure Change Proposals

1. A Cabinet paper proposing a formal consultation on change to school structures in the Iminster Crewkerne area will be considered on 21 October. These papers will be public from 14 October. This document describes what we will be proposing to Cabinet for the consultation that would take place in November.
2. These proposals follow on from the 2019 review of education provision in the Iminster and Crewkerne area, which was carried out by Futures for Somerset and commissioned by Somerset County Council (SCC). The review identified a number of possible structural solutions to issues faced by schools in the area. There was an informal online consultation process with the schools' communities undertaken in the second half of the summer term 2019 (see Appendix A).
3. Julian Wooster, Director of Children's Services, wrote to school leaders in the area towards the end of the 2020 summer term and committed to bring forward a statutory consultation document for consideration by Somerset County Council Cabinet in October 2020.
4. If approved at that meeting, there will then be a period of statutory consultation which will seek views on the five proposals from the wider community. The proposal is that there be a four-week formal consultation period. We will reflect on the outcome of this consultation and then publish statutory notices. Members of the public will be able to make formal representation to the council in response to these notices during a further four-week period. All responses will be considered before returning to Cabinet in January for a final decision.

Summary of Proposals

5. There are five proposals which will form the basis of the Cabinet paper:

Proposal 1: The school structure in the area would become two-tier with a single secondary school for the area which would be Wadham School.

Proposal 2: Primary education in Iminster would be provided by a new split-site primary school. Reception and KS1 would be located on the current site of Greenfylde Church of England First School and KS2 on the current site of Swanmead Community School.

Proposal 3: In the area north of Crewkerne, Merriott First School and Haselbury Plucknett Church of England First School would become primary schools.

Proposal 4: In Crewkerne, Ashlands Church of England First School, Maiden Beech Academy and St Bartholomew's Church of England First School would become primary schools. Misterton Church of England First School would close.

Proposal 5: These changes would happen starting in September 2022. We would work closely with schools and parents to use the time until then to plan carefully to create the least disruption possible to children's educations.

Principles underpinning the proposals

6. The most important factor behind making these changes is so that the children and young people of Ilminster and Crewkerne can be give a high-quality education long into the future. At present, that is at risk because the current system is unaffordable.
7. All schools in Somerset are now in receipt of the National Funding Formula, which is the same funding formula used across England. This structural change is designed to ensure that high-quality education can be delivered in Ilminster and Crewkerne at that level of funding, without overspending, and to provide every school with a stable and efficient allocation of pupils so that they can plan effectively and flourish as a school.
8. The response to the informal consultation on the Futures for Somerset report did not show a consensus on a single model (see Appendix A). Therefore, in creating these proposals we have taken into account where feedback was most strongly negative or positive. We have also identified principles which have guided our choice of model:
 - a. There is a presumption to retain village schools, recognising that in some circumstances this may not be possible
 - b. The structure should ensure sufficiency of places meet the future needs of the area
 - c. The structure should provide pupil numbers which, wherever possible, support efficient pupil / teacher ratios so that every school can educate sustainably
 - d. The option to choose a church school should be retained in each locality
 - e. The structure must consider the condition and suitability of the school estate
 - f. The structure should avoid significantly increasing travel to school times where this can be avoided

Proposal 1 - Overall System Structure and Secondary Provision

9. The Futures for Somerset review found that the current structure of schools in the area is not sustainable and the local authority accepts this view. There are not enough pupils in the area to support an upper school and the current 6th form numbers mean that it is not viable.
10. Having decided to undertake a structural change, we are not putting forward another three-tier system. It is possible to maintain a flourishing system with a greater number of transition points. However, every transition point presents a risk for vulnerable pupils, and therefore there is merit in reducing transitions as 8. part of this change project.
11. The only school with the facilities and capacity to provide secondary provision for the current number of secondary aged pupils in the area and with the site capacity to expand and take more pupils when required is Wadham School.
12. Proposal 1 is therefore that the structure of schools in the area should move to a two-tier model from the current three-tier model and that Wadham would become the secondary school for the area.

Proposal 2 - Ilminster

13. There are currently two schools in the Ilminster town area that would be affected by reorganisation: Swanmead Community School and Greenfylde Church of England First School. Neither school site is large enough to accommodate all the primary-aged pupils in Ilminster and the two schools are very close to each other (0.3 miles walking distance).
14. The proposal is to amalgamate the two schools into one Church of England primary school that would operate on two sites, one site for Reception and KS1 (currently Greenfylde) and the other site for KS2 (currently Swanmead) with an average intended intake of 75. The proposal to amalgamate reflects the fact that a new school building project may be required in coming years and creating a single school is a step towards that outcome.
15. The proposal is to create a wholly new school for Ilminster through amalgamation of Swanmead and Greenfylde. The new school would have a new name, chosen by pupils. The new school would continue to operate the pre-schools that are part of Greenfylde at present.
16. Every effort would be made to retain existing staff in comparable posts within the area (see Next Steps below). The new school would require a new structure and there would be an open and

transparent process for appointing staff within that structure. Where fairness requires that the process be competitive, this would be the case.

Proposal 3 – Village Schools Around Crewkerne

17. There are four village first schools around Crewkerne which would be affected by the reorganisation:
- a. Merriott First School and Haselbury Plucknett Church of England First School, which are federated. Both of these first schools would become primary schools.
 - b. A further primary school is in the immediate area (Hinton St. George Church of England First School). No structure change would be made to this school but they would be considered as part of any changes to ensure all schools receive a sustainable proportion of the total cohort.
 - c. Misterton Church of England First School. Misterton is federated with Ashlands in Crewkerne and is considered under proposal 4.
18. One of the objectives of this structural change is to secure the future of schools in the area by ensuring a more stable and predictable number of pupils. We would work with schools to model how they will use their space and staff team and through this confirm the number of pupils needed to secure their future.
19. All three village schools would be very small primaries and therefore we would be seeking consideration of means to strengthen and expand federations or access additional capacity through a multi-academy trust.

Proposal 4 – Crewkerne and Misterton

20. There are currently three schools in Crewkerne other than Wadham which would be affected by the reorganisation (Ashlands and St Bartholomew's Church of England First Schools and Maiden Beech Academy) and one village primary which is very close to Crewkerne (Misterton Church of England First School).
21. Misterton is a very small school and is located only 1.2 miles from St Bart's. At present, there are not enough pupils in the area to keep the Misterton site in use and so this school would close. This would not happen before September 2022. In the two years up to that date all efforts would be made to maintain stability and a high-quality education for every pupil in that school. Every pupil and family in Misterton would be supported with an effective transition plan to help them choose a new school environment for the end of the two year planning period.

22. The school building is also important to the community. In the consultation we would seek views about the best way to keep the building in operation, either for some other educational purpose or for community use.
23. The other three schools would become primary schools. One of the objectives of this structural change is to secure the future of schools in the area by ensuring a more stable and predictable number of pupils. We would work with schools to model how they will use their space and staff team and through this confirm the number of pupils needed to secure their future.
24. There is planned and prospective housing development in the town that, subject to delivery, will create growth in pupil numbers in the town in future years. This model would have excess capacity to meet future housing need. The Ashlands and Misterton federation is particularly likely to be affected by development that would increase pupil numbers. We would work closely with the Ashlands and Misterton federation as information about development becomes available.
25. The church schools would be very small primaries and therefore we would be seeking consideration of means to strengthen and expand federations or access additional capacity through a multi-academy trust.

Proposal 5 – Timeline for Implementation

26. The highest priority is to maintain stability in each school during the transition period. Where it is helpful to progress changes quickly then we would do so. However, we would work with all schools to consider the best way to maintain stability of pupil numbers and finances as much as possible through transition. This may mean changes happening in different schools at different times, where this works best for children, families and schools.
27. We would aim for the first new year groups to start in September 2022. This would be the date for pupil transition out of Misterton and into other local schools.
28. The most significant impact on a school site would be Maiden Beech. It is not currently suitable for an intake of reception-aged pupils and would require adjustment to its accommodation. Some refurbishment may be required in other schools. We would work with all schools to assess the current accommodation and develop a plan to reorganise spaces as needed.
29. A workforce reorganisation process would commence in Summer 2021. The aim would be for existing staff to be ringfenced in the first instance for roles in other schools (see Next Steps below).

Next Steps

30. We are informally sharing proposals with governing bodies, school staff, parents and pupils from week commencing 5 October. These have not yet been agreed by Somerset County Council's Cabinet. If the Cabinet approves the proposals for consultation, then all consultation documents will be published online. We will hold online Q&A webinars so that staff and members of the public can put their questions to Somerset County Council directly.
31. Somerset County Council has proposed financial principles to guide collaboration between the local authority, the Diocese of Bath and Wells, Bridgwater and Taunton College Trust, and affected schools (See Appendix B).
32. We have established a joint Steering Group which will support organisations with a key role in delivering the change to coordinate their delivery projects. The Steering Group is not a decision-making body. All decisions about structural change will be made by Somerset County Council's Cabinet as the body with the legal obligation to plan efficient education in the area.
33. The membership of the Group is drawn from Somerset County Council, The Diocese of Bath and Wells, The Office of the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Bridgwater and Taunton College Trust. At present there are no other trusts who have an interest in the affected schools. Should this change and a school's governing body resolve to pursue incorporation into a trust, that MAT would be included in the Steering Group.
34. The aim of the group will be to:
 - Oversee the process for delivering the restructure ensuring that appropriate actions are identified and moved forward
 - Ensure that actions required by their respective organisations are identified and actioned in a timely way to support the delivery of the new structure
 - Ensure that communications within and between their organisations are effective and support the delivery of the new structure
35. There would be a need to reorganise staffing in schools to deliver the new structure. Every effort would be made to retain existing staff in comparable posts within the area. The expectation is that each governing body and MAT would collaborate on the appointment of redeployed staff from the area to suitable vacancies in their schools without going to a wider recruitment process. The detailed arrangements for restructuring staffing as a result of the reorganisation would be determined through a set of HR Principles which would be developed with school leaders and the Steering Group. The Steering Group would work closely with Trade

Unions and affected schools to design a process that reassures staff and retains them within the area.

36. Because of the sensitivities and complexities of this work, we have created a voluntary code of conduct for school leaders, to provide a context for joint working and public engagement. The code of conduct will also be used to make transparent where individuals in affected organisations, or the organisations involved in the Steering Group, have interests outside their organisation.

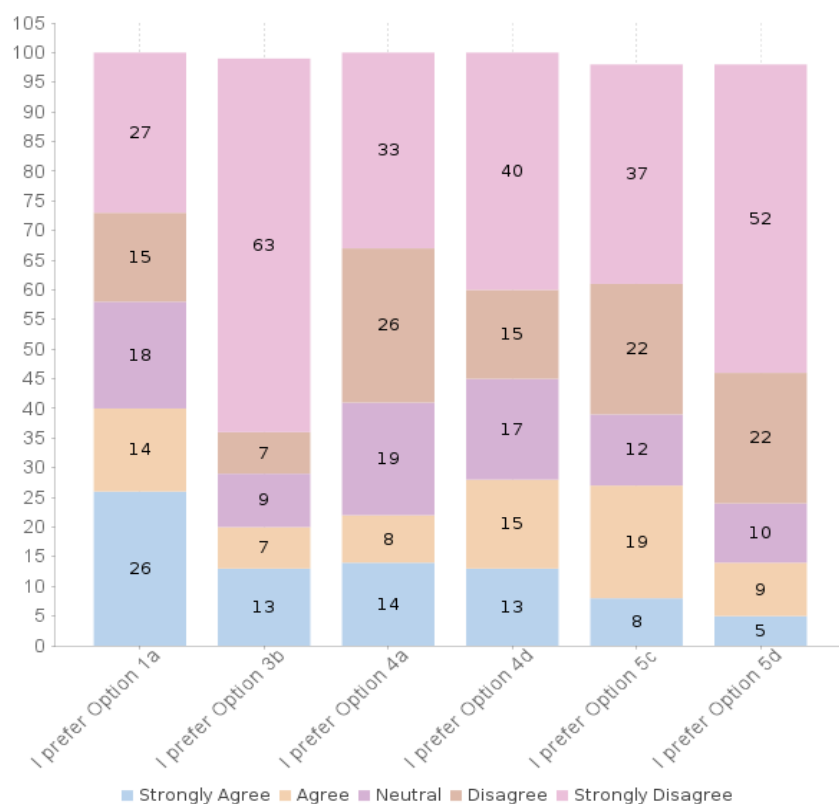
Appendix A - Outcome of Summer 2019 Consultation

In the second half of the summer term 2019 the Futures for Somerset report and options were published online. Governors, staff and parents were invited to comment on the various options that had been identified.

The options that were considered were as follows:

- **1A** - Do nothing / minimum requirement – showing existing 3 tier system with development for required growth to establish a base line against which other options could be assessed
- **3B** - 2 tier model utilising consolidated primary schools only – secondary provision from middle/upper schools
- **4A & 4D** - 2 tier model utilising both split infant and junior and primary schools – secondary provision from middle / upper schools
- **5C & D** - Hybrid 3 tier model – retain existing first school structure and consolidate middle & upper schools

The graph below summarises the outcome of the consultation process:



As can be seen the outcome with the highest proportion of positive responses was the 'no change' option. However, the report found that the current system was not sustainable. The least positive responses were for a hybrid 3 tier model whilst a consolidated primary model had the most negative responses.

In the consultation process respondents were also asked to note the three things that were most important to them in relation to school organisation. The following were the most common factors:

- avoiding long journeys to and excess traffic around schools
- the importance of high-quality education for all
- the key role played in communities by village schools
- any changes to result in sustainable schools with the right capacity
- support for the needs of children caught up in change
- clarity about teaching cohorts in complete key stages
- mitigating or removing the negative effects of two school transfers
- taking account of previous building investment and condition
- ensuring a safe environment on and around school sites for children

Appendix B – DRAFT Financial Principles

Background

There has been a need to address ongoing issues in Ilminster and Crewkerne relating to school organisation for over a decade. A review was undertaken by Futures for Somerset to evaluate the options for structural change. This was subject to an informal consultation with the community. The Director of Children’s Services, Julian Wooster, committed to bring forward a statutory consultation document for consideration by Somerset County Council in October 2020.

This document sets out financial principles to underpin the change process.

Basis for the principles

Once agreed, these principles would form the basis of an ongoing commitment between Somerset County Council and affected parties, specifically:

- Ashlands Church of England First School
- Bridgwater and Taunton College Trust including Maiden Beech Academy
- Diocese of Bath and Wells
- Greenfylde Church of England First School
- Haselbury Plucknett Church of England First School
- Hinton St George
- Merriott First School
- Misterton Church of England First School
- St Bartholomew’s Church of England First School
- Swanmead Community School
- Wadham School

Financial principles

Overarching

The structural change has arisen as a result of Somerset County Council undertaking its statutory obligation to secure efficient education within the local area, and as such, the local authority recognises its obligations to facilitate this process financially.

Principle 1: Where costs are unavoidable and would not have arisen except as a result of the decision to undergo reorganisation, those costs will be met by Somerset County Council.

Workforce

The rationale for the structural change is to make the system more sustainable for the future, however, the change is not for the purpose of reducing the workforce. Therefore, the reorganisation project will establish criteria for workforce reorganisation that are based on the assumption that existing staff will be re-deployed within the Ilminster/Crewkerne area.

Principle 2: Complete school staffing structures and baseline staffing costs will be shared with the Somerset County Council team at the point of project initiation.

Principle 3: Where redundancy arises because the alternative would be a new school structure that was significantly unaffordable or would be detrimental to pupil outcomes, then those costs will be considered unavoidable.

Principle 4: Where redundancy arises because there is no reasonably appropriate post in any organisation within the Ilminster/Crewkerne area, those costs will be considered unavoidable. However, if an organisation chooses not to appoint where the appointment is reasonable, this will not be considered unavoidable costs and the organisation that has taken the decision not to appoint will be expected to meet the costs of redundancy, even though they are not the current employer.

Refurbishment

A number of school buildings affected by reorganisation also have condition issues, therefore, in the interests of efficiency, it may be more beneficial in the longer-term to undertake refurbishment beyond what is strictly required for structural change. The local authority undertakes a regular programme of building condition improvement for LA-maintained and voluntary controlled schools, which comprise all affected schools apart from Maiden Beech Academy. The building condition needs in affected schools within the implementation period up to September 2022 is £2.6 million.

Principle 5: Somerset County Council will commission an independent assessment of the unavoidable costs of refurbishment in each school to accommodate age-range changes in each school. This assessment will not take into account condition amelioration that would otherwise be required.

Principle 6: The unavoidable costs of refurbishment will be paid to Bridgwater College Trust with the expectation that refurbishment be contracted by the trust.

Principle 6: Where refurbishment has been identified as necessary to accommodate age-range changes in an LA-maintained or voluntary controlled school, an assessment will be made of the added value that could be secured by undertaking building condition works in conjunction with refurbishment. Where additional funds are available to support this work in schools reserves there would be an expectation of a proportionate contribution to the overall cost of the programme. In the event that capital receipts are realised as a result of this re-organisation it is anticipated that these would be reinvested in other schools in the area.

The local authority is under obligation to increase recycling and decrease waste in the local area. For this reason, the structural change project will seek to redeploy equipment across the local area where it becomes redundant because of changes of age range or where classrooms are no longer required due to reduced pupil numbers.

Principle 5: Schools will be expected to identify equipment that have become redundant. These will be pooled and redistributed according to need where they meet minimum standards of suitability and condition. Where equipment have been made available this will be considered to mitigate unavoidable costs. Where redeployment is not possible then the costs of equipment will be considered unavoidable and will be included in the overall refurbishment assessment.

October 2020