

**Division: Leys**

Also of interest to Rose Hill & Littlemore and across the County due to special school intake.

**CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & FAMILIES -  
8 DECEMBER 2014**

**FINAL REPORT ON THE PROPOSED CLOSURE OF THE  
BOARDING FACILITY KNOWN AS THE HOSTEL AT NORTHFIELD  
SCHOOL, OXFORD**

**Report by Director for Children's Services**

**Introduction**

1. This report follows a local consultation and a subsequent statutory notice period relating to the County Council's proposal to close the boarding facility known as the hostel at Northfield School from 1 January 2015.
2. The local consultation ran from 10 September 2014 – 8 October 2014. The consultation leaflet is attached at Annex 1 and was circulated to all parents of pupils at the school, County Council teams and other groups.
3. The statutory notice (attached at Annex 2) was published by the Local Authority, in the Oxford Mail on 13 October 2014 and expired following 4 weeks of formal consultation on 10 November 2014. In accordance with legislation the notice was also posted at the school entrances and sent to the local library. A copy of the full proposal (attached at Annex 3) and the notices were sent to the governing body, local councillors from Parish, District and County level, Headteachers and the local Library. They were also made available on the Oxfordshire County Council website.
4. The decision-making power in terms of determining the notice lies with the Cabinet or can be delegated to the Cabinet Member for Children, Education & Families. In meeting as 'decision-maker' the Cabinet or Cabinet Member must have regard to government guidance and statutory timescales otherwise a decision can be referred to the independent Schools' Adjudicator for reconsideration. The decision must be made within 2 months of the close of the notice period; as a consequence, it is necessary for the Chairman of the Council to determine that the decision cannot be subject to 'call-in' as this would, in most cases, prevent a decision being finalised within the required timescale and mean that the Cabinet's role would be negated by referral to the Schools' Adjudicator.

**The Proposal**

5. The proposal is to formally close the boarding facility run by the County Council as part of Northfield School. The facility is known as the "hostel" and is on a separate site to the main school buildings. Use of Northfield School's hostel was suspended in April 2014 following the results of a Health and

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Safety survey. The issues identified were too serious to allow the hostel to remain open. The repairs and capital costs to make the building safe and fit for use are estimated to be approximately £1.5m.

6. The currently vacant building could be sold, and funds used to enhance facilities at the Northfield School site. The accommodation at Northfield School itself is in need of repair and improvement. If this proposal is agreed, some of the receipt from the sale of the hostel site would be used to improve the facilities at Northfield School, particularly the sports facilities. This would help the school develop extended school day activities on site and the facilities would be available to the community all year round.
7. In April 2014 the maximum number of children using the hostel was 9 per night. Overall 16 children were benefitting from the provision, with some spending four nights a week there and others staying for a couple of nights at a time.
8. To compensate for the closure of the hostel the school has been operating an extended day for 8 children per night until 8pm, 4 days a week, term time only. Due to the limited suitable facilities at the school, the children are generally taken off site to locations in Oxford. The children have been responding positively to the new extended day and most are managing well without the need for the residential facility.
9. Oxfordshire's Placement Strategy for children in and on the edge of care focuses on increasing Oxfordshire County Council's residential provision through the construction of four new 4-bed homes. The aim is to keep our riskiest and most vulnerable children closest to their local area. The new homes will provide support all year round rather than term time only and the homes will not be linked to one specific school. The new provision will be small homes rather than a single hostel. The homes will be able to support any of the most vulnerable children at Northfield to prevent them from being taken into care.
10. The hostel was assessed as a possible building to support the Placement Strategy, however the accommodation is not considered suitable.

#### **Representations**

11. During the earlier local consultation three responses were received. Two were in agreement with the proposal to close the hostel. One was made by a parent of a child at Northfield School who expressed support for the receipt of the sale of the site to be spent in improving the school facilities.
12. One response was from the Governing Body of Northfield School (attached at Annex 4) expressing concern over the future arrangements for pupils that would have used the hostel, and outlining the expense to the school already incurred in previous maintenance works to the hostel. The letter also recognised the fact that the hostel has been assessed as beyond economic repair, and the desire that receipts of its sale would be augmented by the County Council and spent on maintenance of the school's buildings.

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13. The letter was responded to by Children, Education & Families and the response is attached at Annex 5.
14. During the statutory notice period only one representation was made. This was in opposition to the proposed closure, but no reason was given for this view, and the respondent is unknown.

### **Legal background**

15. The removal of boarding provision is subject to statutory procedures, as set out in "School Organisation: Maintained Schools. Guidance for proposers and decision-makers" (The Guidance) published January 2014. When reaching a decision, Cabinet Member must have regard to The Guidance.
16. In terms of reaching a decision all proposals should be considered on their merits but the following factors should be borne in mind but are not considered to be exhaustive. The Decision Maker should consider the views of all those affected. Details of the consultation should be included in the proposals. The Decision Maker must be satisfied that the consultation meets statutory requirements. If the requirements have not been met, the Decision Maker may judge the proposals to be invalid and should consider whether they can make a decision on the proposals. Alternatively the Decision Maker may take into account the sufficiency and quality of the consultation as part of their overall judgement of the proposals as a whole.
17. **The effect on standards, school improvement and diversity.** In making a decision on a proposal to remove boarding provision from a school that is not closing, the decision-maker should consider whether there are satisfactory alternative boarding arrangements for those currently in the school and those may need boarding places in the foreseeable future, as set out in "School Organisation Maintained Schools, Annex B: Guidance for Decision-makers" (January 2014). The Decision-maker should refer in particular to section 39 of this Annex B Guidance relating to "the SEN improvement test".
18. **School characteristics.** The Decision Maker should consider whether there are any sex, race or disability discrimination issues that arise and whether there is supporting evidence. The Decision Maker needs to consider the accessibility of provision for disadvantaged groups as the provision should not unduly extend journey times or cost.
19. **Need for places.** The Decision Maker should consider whether there is a need for the proposal and should consider the evidence presented for the proposal.
20. **Funding and land.** The Decision Maker should be satisfied that any land, premises and capital required to implement the proposals will be available.

### **Financial and Staff Implications**

21. There will be no financial cost to the Local Authority as a result of these proposals. There are seven staff posts in the hostel. Since the temporary

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closure of the hostel members of staff have wherever possible been temporarily deployed to work in Northfield School. As a result of natural wastage three posts are currently not occupied. If the hostel is closed the associated posts will be redundant and the redundancy procedure will be followed. Where possible consideration will be given to redeployment of the remaining staff.

### **Equality and Inclusion Implications**

22. The proposal affects boys aged 11 to 18 on the roll at Northfield School, a special school for boys with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, who accessed the boarding facility known as the hostel. Alternative arrangements, through extended day provision and the Placement Strategy, have minimised the impact of the proposal on the small number of boys that have been using the hostel.

### **Decision**

27. In considering the proposals for a school expansion, the Decision Maker can decide to:
- Reject the proposals;
  - Approve the proposals;
  - Approve the proposals with a modification (e.g. the implementation date); or
  - Approve the proposals subject to them meeting a specific condition (see the Guidance).

### **RECOMMENDATION**

28. **The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Families is RECOMMENDED to approve the proposal to close the boarding facility at Northfield School.**

#### **JIM LEIVERS**

Director for Children's Services

Annexes:                           Annex 1: Consultation leaflet  
  Annex 2: Statutory proposal  
  Annex 3: Full proposal document  
  Annex 4: Representation from the Governing Body  
  Annex 5: Response to the Governing Body

Contact Officer:                 Diane Cameron – School Organisation Officer, School  
  Organisation & Planning, CEF. Tel: 01865 816445

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