

Division(s): **Shrivenham**  
Also affecting: **Faringdon**

## **CABINET – 16 JULY 2013**

### **PROPOSAL TO EXPAND WATCHFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL**

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

##### **Introduction**

1. Watchfield Primary School is located in the Vale of the White Horse, in the Faringdon partnership of schools. Its published Admission Number is 45. The school is characterised as serving a high proportion of forces families, who typically live in Watchfield for only a year or two while attending the National Defence Academy located in the village and adjacent to the school. There is therefore a high turnover of pupils at Watchfield Primary School year on year, with numbers fluctuating especially in the older year groups.

##### **Need for pupil places**

2. The Education Act 1996 (Section 14) places a statutory duty on local authorities to secure sufficient school places in their area. To allow for fluctuation in demand, in-year movement and effective operation of parental preference, it is judged that 12% spare places are required across a rural area.
3. To assess the need for future school places, forecasts of pupil numbers are revised each year, based on ward-level population forecasts, which are calculated from census population data, fertility/mortality data, Census migration data and housing net completions data.
4. There is new housing planned in Watchfield, so numbers of pupils will rise from within the local population.
5. The latest forecast for pupil numbers across the Faringdon partnership at primary age is shown below:

<b>Faringdon</b>	<b>YrR</b>	<b>Yr1</b>	<b>Yr2</b>	<b>Yr3</b>	<b>Yr4</b>	<b>Yr5</b>	<b>Yr6</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2013-14</b>	260	261	234	225	213	233	188	1614
<b>2014-15</b>	240	264	262	231	231	221	236	1686
<b>2015-16</b>	250	244	264	257	237	240	224	1717
<b>2016-17</b>	250	254	244	261	263	245	243	1760

## **The proposal**

6. The proposal is to expand Watchfield Primary School to become a 2 form entry school with an Admission Number of 60 on a permanent basis from 2014. This would gradually bring the number of children on roll at the school up to a maximum of 420 children in Reception to Year 6 by September 2020. Class sizes in Reception and Key Stage 1 (Yrs 1 and 2) will be limited to 30 children as now.
7. To accommodate this growth in pupil numbers, there would need to be adaptation and extension of the school's buildings, and a feasibility study will investigate the options for how to achieve this. All options would be subject to Planning regulations and approval, including those in consideration of traffic and Highways. OCC Development Control and Transport have been involved at an early stage.

## **Representations**

8. During the consultation phase (1 May 2013 – 12 June 2013) an informal drop-in session was held at the school on 16 May to give parents of children at the school the opportunity to raise queries about the proposed enlargement of the school with a county council officer. However, no parents attended the session, but some staff from the school attended and the issues raised were mainly confined to the potential increase in traffic and parking issues on the site.
9. A consultation leaflet (Annex 1) was sent to parents of children at Watchfield Primary School, as well as to local councillors, partnership schools and early years providers including childminders in the area, libraries and other stakeholders. It was also available on the OCC public website, together with full details of the various ways of responding. Additionally, the school highlighted the consultation in its newsletter to parents.
10. 18 responses to the consultation were received:
  - 9 respondents supported the proposal in principle,
  - 9 respondents were opposed to the proposal.
11. The reasons given for supporting the proposal were:
  - Clear need for additional pupil places in the area.
  - It is a good and popular school, and that therefore more children should have the opportunity to attend it, if parents prefer it.
12. The reasons given for opposing the proposal were:
  - Traffic and parking concerns
  - Concern over impact on outdoor play areas
  - No plans of proposed new buildings available

13. Concerns raised in opposition were significantly focused on the increase in traffic resulting from parents who choose to drive their children to school, instead of walking or cycling. OCC Highways & Transport staff have been in contact with the school leadership team to discuss ways of dealing with and improving the situation. The vast majority of pupils attending Watchfield Primary live well within reasonable walking distance. In addition, there are drop-off lay-bys near the school and potential to liaise with the MoD in arranging parents' use of local car parks at the beginning and end of the school day. The focus of the county council in any discussions relating to travel to school is always to promote walking, cycling/scooting wherever possible and to support schools in implementing initiatives to increase green methods of transport. Any capital expansion of the buildings will be subject to the Planning process in the usual way, which includes scrutiny of traffic / highways impact.

As part of the option appraisal work to establish the accommodation needs, should the school expand, the county council will work with the school in reviewing the sufficiency and suitability of both the internal and external spaces, taking into account the increased number of children on the site. The existing provision will be considered against guidelines for the provision of external spaces and where necessary the opportunity to address shortfalls in provision will be explored.

As the option appraisal work is not completed, and the proposed expansion is still open to consultation, no final agreed building scheme has yet been agreed so the stage has not yet been reached where plans of new buildings can be made available to parents to view. Options are being explored. This consultation fulfils part of the county council's statutory obligations in proposing an expansion and is asking for views on the principle of increasing the numbers of pupils that could attend Watchfield Primary School. If the proposal is approved, the option appraisal work will in time arrive at a recommended building scheme and any new construction work would be subject to the usual Planning regulations. During the Planning permission process anyone may view the proposed scheme and comment in the normal way.

14. As objections in relation to the proposal have been raised, the decision on whether to proceed to publish a formal statutory proposal is referred to OCC Cabinet, rather than the Cabinet Member for Education.

### **Making a Decision**

15. There are five statutory stages for a proposal to expand a school:
- i. Consultation;
  - ii. publication of a statutory notice;
  - iii. representation;
  - iv. decision;
  - v. implementation.

This proposal has completed the first consultation stage, and a decision is now sought as to whether to proceed to publication of a statutory notice and representation.

16. Sections 18 to 24 of the Education & Inspections Act 2006 and The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools)(England) Regulations 2007 (as amended) ["the Prescribed Alterations Regulations"] establish the procedures that must be followed when enlarging school premises. Local authorities also have a duty to have regard to statutory guidance, in this particular case 'Expanding a Maintained Mainstream School by Enlargement or Adding a Sixth Form: A Guide for Local Authorities and Governing Bodies ("the Guidance")'.
17. The Prescribed Alterations Regulations require proposers to consult interested parties and the Guidance lists these at paragraph 1.3. The Cabinet must be satisfied that the statutory consultation has been properly carried out prior to the publication of the notice. Annex 2 provides details of the county council's consultation with interested parties that are required to be consulted with under the Prescribed Alterations Regulations. The period of consultation is not prescribed by legislation, although the Guidance recommends a minimum of 4 weeks. The consultation period was in line with the Guidance having run from 1 May 2013 – 12 June 2013, thereby exceeding the four week minimum requirement. The consultation was therefore carried out in accordance with the Prescribed Alterations Regulations.
18. A decision is now required as to whether to publish formal proposals for this proposed expansion. If approved, a statutory notice would be published, followed by a formal representation period of four weeks. The decision-making power in terms of determining the notice will lie with the Cabinet or the Cabinet Member for Education, and a report will be put to Cabinet if objections in principle are received, for a final decision in due course.

### **Equality and Inclusion Implications**

19. Equality Impact Assessment of Oxfordshire's Pupil Place Plan (February 2013) identified that increasing school places at the heart of their communities has a positive impact on equalities through promoting social inclusion and minimising barriers to accessing education.

### **Financial and Staff Implications**

20. The direct financial implication of this report is the cost of the statutory process recommended, which is planned for and met within the normal Children Education & Families budget provision. There are no significant financial implications or risks at this stage. If the proposal proceeds, following statutory

consultation there would be another report to Cabinet in due course seeking a final decision on whether to expand the school.

21. The financial implications of this report are linked to the capital works that will be carried out should the proposal be approved. Publication of a statutory proposal to expand the school requires confirmation from the county council that funds will be made available for the necessary capital costs.
22. There will also be on-costs to the school for additional staff and for increased maintenance requirements. The day to day revenue costs for repair and maintenance and staffing costs must be met through the school's delegated budget as part of the Council's Fair Funding arrangements.
23. Resources for School Budget Shares are provided by government through the Dedicated Schools Grant, which will increase proportionately to increases in overall pupil numbers in Oxfordshire. Additional pupils will be reflected in an adjustment in the school's funding formula which applies numbers of pupils on roll and their characteristics.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to approve the publication of a statutory notice for the expansion of Watchfield Primary School.**

JIM LEIVERS  
Director for Children's Services

Contact Officer: Diane Cameron, School Organisation Officer, 01865 816445

**June 2013**

Annex 1 Consultation leaflet  
Annex 2 List of interested parties consulted