

Decision Number: 64 (2014/15)

## **Portfolio Holder Executive Decision Statement**

The Local Authority (Executive Arrangements)(Meetings and Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012

**Subject: Sevenoaks District Council's response to KCC's public consultation related to its proposal to close Furness Special School**

### **Details of Decision taken**

Approval of the corporate response to the public consultation by KCC relating to the proposed closure of Furness Special School

### **Reason for Decision**

To approve the consultation response set out below:

While KCC are stating that the proposed closure of Furness Special School is not a foregone conclusion, Sevenoaks District Council recognises that it may not be financially viable to keep the school open given the £1.6million budget deficit set out in the consultation papers and the low school roll numbers. The District Council would like to set out the following points for consideration:

- We appreciate that there will be an option to transfer to new autistic spectrum (ASD) provisions at Huge Christie in Tonbridge or the Wilmington Academy, which will aim to integrate ASD pupils into the mainstream. However, we are concerned about the removal of Special School provision in West Kent, particularly as it doesn't have an equivalent of the oversubscribed provision for pupils on the autistic spectrum (ASD) at the Laleham Gap School in East Kent.
- Other provision in the county identified by KCC is also oversubscribed; this includes unit provision (Tydeman at The Malling (West Malling), The Nick Hornby Centre at Meopham, Spectrum at Longfield and special school provision at Broomhill Bank and Grange Park. In Sevenoaks this leaves only New School with other provision in Tonbridge (Meadows), Paddock Wood (Quest), Rochester (Trinity) and Bromley (Browns and Baston Schools).
- We appreciated that the final notification of closure coincides with the term timetable published by KCC for term 6 (1 June -24 July). We support a consultation timeframe which enables pupils to complete their term and cause the minimum disruption.
- Sevenoaks District Council wishes to emphasise the duty of care which KCC has towards pupils affected by the closure. This includes consideration and support of emotional and wellbeing issues which may arise from change in provision among ASD pupils. For parents/carers and pupils, we wish to stress the importance for transport provision to be considered on an individual pupil basis and to ensure that parents/carers are supported with additional transport costs.
- We note and appreciate that parents/carers are being offered support to identify the most suitable provision for their child or child in their care. We would expect this support to be on a 1:1 basis.
- We note that experienced staff who work at the school will be affected by the

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Decision Number: 64 (2014/15)

proposed closure. We would expect staff to be fully supported and consulted about redundancy. This involves ensuring that agencies such as Job Centre Plus are in a position to support staff as appropriate.

- We would hope that KCC will continue to use the site for educational provision.

As part of our response, we asked Hextable Parish Council whether they wished us to include their response which is given below:

“Hextable does not have any pupils at the school but a couple of staff live in the village. It is with regret that the Parish Council is informed of the consultation regarding a possible closure of Furness School but not unexpected.

The Parish Council is publicising the consultation and members and residents are being encouraged to respond direct to the consultation. The front field of Furness School was once part of the village green and it is hoped this will be something that can be reinstated if the school closes”

#### **All Documents considered:**

- Consultation on the Future of Furness School – KCC (Appendix A)
- KCC – Equalities Impact Assessment in relation to the closed closure of Furness School (Appendix B)

#### **Details of any alternative options considered and rejected by the Member when making the Decision:**

N/A

#### **Financial implications**

No financial implications for the District Council

#### **Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement**

No legal implications

#### **Equality Impacts** (Consideration of impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty)

The decision recommended through this paper has a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

It should be noted that KCC have prepared a Risk and Equalities Impact Assessment in relation to the proposal to closure Furness School

Decision Number: 64 (2014/15)

**Local Member (s), other Portfolio Holders and/or Directors/Heads of Service Consulted**

- Cllr Mrs Lowe – Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Safety
- Cllr Mrs D Morris
- Cllr Mrs B Ayres

**Details of any conflicts of interest**

**a) declared by any executive member who is consulted by the Decision Taker**

N/A

**b) and any details of dispensations granted by the Chief Executive in respect of any declared conflict**

<b>Decision taken by:</b>	Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Safety [REDACTED]
<b>Signed by Portfolio Holder</b>	[REDACTED]
<b>Date of Decision</b>	17 March 2015
<b>Record made by:</b>	George Lewis
<b>Date of record:</b>	19 March 2015

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