

Appendix D

Report to Council's Executive 27May 2014

Appendix D – Frequently asked questions published on the Council's website

FAQ's for website

Information for parents of children attending Ashton CofE VA Middle School, Brewers Hill Middle School and Streetfield Middle School

Original list -

<p>Does this mean that Ashton Middle/Brewers Hill Middle/Streetfield Middle will close?</p>	<p>No. The Executive have approved the commencement of the consultation on the proposal to close Ashton, Brewers Hill and Streetfield. The consultation will last for 6 weeks and commence on the 24 February and end on the 7 April. Meetings will be held within this period for parents to express their views and ask questions on. Details for the public meetings (one at each of the three schools), are as follows:</p> <p>Ashton Voluntary Aided Middle School – 7pm, Monday 3 March Brewers Hill Middle School – 7pm, Tuesday 4 March Streetfield Middle School – 7pm, Wednesday 5 March</p> <p>There is no requirement to book a place for these meetings.</p>
<p>What happens at the end of the consultation?</p>	<p>The responses to the consultation will then be considered on 7 May by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and at an Executive meeting on the 27 May including any viable alternatives to closure. If a decision is made to proceed to the second stage of the consultation and publish statutory notices for the proposed closure, these will be published from 9 June to 7 July.</p>
<p>What happens next after statutory notices are published?</p>	<p>All interested parties have an opportunity to respond within this period to make their views known to the Council on whether they support the proposal to close or express any comments or concerns they may have. This last for 4 weeks from 9 June to 7 July.</p>
<p>When is the decision taken to either keep the school open or close it?</p>	<p>The Council's Executive will consider representations made (responses, comments, concerns) as part of the statutory notice period and determine whether to keep the schools open or close them. This will be determined at an Executive meeting on the 19 August 2014.</p>
<p>My child is due to transfer into one of the Middle schools this September from their Lower school – what does this now mean for my son/daughter?</p>	<p>All children who are due to start a Middle school in September this year will still have the opportunity to take up their place. If the decision is made to close the School, then your child will need to make an application in September 2015 for a place at a Secondary school in Year 7 in September 2016 as the Middle school would be closed by the end of the academic year in the summer of</p>

	2016.
My child is currently attending Ashton/Brewers Hill/Streetfield – what does this mean for him/her?	<p>If the decision is made to close the school then the following will apply:</p> <p>Child is currently in Year 5 -Can continue at the school and make an application in September 2014 when in Year 6 to transfer to Secondary school in September 2015. Alternatively child could continue into Year 7 in September 2015 but would need to make an in-year application in the summer of 2016 to transfer into Year 8 at an alternative school i.e. Secondary or Priory Academy or Barnfield Vale.</p> <p>Child is currently in Year 6 - Would need to make either a late application for Secondary to start Year 7 in September 2014 or apply in-year for a place in Year 8 in the summer of 2015 to start Year 8 in September 2015.</p> <p>Child is currently in Year 7 - Can continue at the school and make application in September 2014 when Year 8 to transfer to Upper school as normal for September 2015 or make an in-year application for a place in a Secondary school either to start in the academic year of 2014/15 as a Year 7 pupil or at the end of Year 7 to start in Year 8 at a Secondary school.</p> <p>Child is currently in Year 8 - Will transfer to Upper school in September 2014 as per usual process.</p>

Updated 20 March 2014

Generic questions & concerns raised & responses given at staff & public meetings

Regarding the projected number of year 4 pupils who are due to transfer into the school in September 2014, have the second preferences been taken into account?	Admission preferences indicate that every child who has requested a place at a Dunstable Middle School will get their first preference so second preferences will not need to be considered
What are the Council's pupil numbers based upon?	The forecast numbers for year 5 from September 2014 are based upon the number of applications we have received for transfer. Based upon these numbers, forecasts have been made for subsequent years. It is these low numbers that have impacted upon the schools budget from September 2014
The Council is scaring parents by saying that the school will close. Parents want to keep their children at a middle school but do not know what to do. It is very unsettling,	The Council is not saying that the school will close. This is a consultation and the decisions made regarding the proposed closure will consider the results of the consultation and all of the responses received

having this hanging over the schools	
Are the primary schools undersubscribed?	Some lower schools that have converted to primary are predicted to have lower numbers for year 5 in September 2014. This is a trend seen elsewhere in the first few years of a school's transition to a new age range but we expect numbers to rise in subsequent years as parents grow in confidence.
Could just one middle school remain open?	There is a 65% surplus of places within the area in years 5-8. There is no demographic demand for these places to be retained in the area
What about the additional places that will be needed for the older children under the Governments 'raising the participation age'?	Not all will remain in school – young people will have a choice about how they continue in education or training post-16, which could be through college, a training provider, work, volunteering or an apprenticeship. Where new places are required to meet demand for post 16 education in schools these will be commissioned through upper and secondary schools
What about the new provision that will be needed in Houghton Regis for the new development?	This will be provided either within or adjacent to that development, providing school places local to the new communities in north Houghton Regis, when they are required.
Why has the Council decided to change to a 2 tier provision?	Academies and schools within Dunstable and Houghton Regis have brought forward their own proposals to change their age ranges. They were able to justify these proposals and show evidence of parental support to the Council who is the decision maker for Council maintained schools and to the Department for Education for academies
Did the Council consider the over supply of places when it approved the change of age ranges for the Dunstable and Houghton Regis schools?	The Council allowed maintained schools to bring forward proposals to change their age range in order to give those schools the same opportunities as were available to academies within the area. The supply of places was one of the factors that was considered when decisions were made by the Secretary of State (for academies) and by the Council (for maintained schools).
Are academies allowed to do what they like?	Academies appear unaccountable and Council maintained schools are therefore at a disadvantage Academies are accountable to the Secretary of State who will intervene in any that are underperforming or are significantly undersubscribed and therefore unviable.

Updated 7 April 2014

If the school is to close, can parents reappraise their choices?	Yes, parents can change their preference and submit a late application
Parents throughout the town were not aware of the various consultations that were being	All of the schools carried out consultations regarding their proposed changes. They published consultation documents and held meetings, as required by the DfE.

<p>undertaken by the lower schools when they were looking to convert to primary. We now have a mish-mash of provision with the children stuck in the middle. All of the schools used to work together but not any longer.</p>	<p>The consultations were advertised via the local press and the Council's website. All of the schools in Dunstable and Houghton Regis were aware of the consultations.</p>
<p>Why has the Council not driven all of the changes? Academies are competing for our children. Feeder schools are in partnership with other schools. The mess within the town is due to the lack of partnership working between schools.</p>	<p>The Council is no longer able to drive system wide change and schools are now largely in control of their own destinies. The Council has not been the decision maker for the changes that have happened in academies, but the Council decided to give our maintained schools the same freedoms that were available to academies. Following recent changes to school regulations by the Department for Education, all maintained schools can now change their age range by up to 2 years without any recourse to the Council. The Council retains responsibility for ensuring the provision of school places.</p>
<p>Why were the parents of year 4 children not advised of this proposal before they were asked to submit their choice for year 5?</p>	<p>Figures from the admission process, which closed on 15 January 2014, were used to confirm the numbers of pupils that were due to move to the school in September. This then gave us the information we needed regarding the future viability of the school.</p>
<p>Vandyke is being expanded – is this to accommodate Dunstable children?</p>	<p>No, Vandyke is an academy and is carrying out this expansion to accommodate pupils as a result of existing housing development in the Leighton Buzzard area.</p>
<p>You are taking away our choice. By forcing children into bigger schools, with much older children, you are forcing them to grow up too quickly.</p>	<p>All of the schools that have proposed an extension to their age range have had to demonstrate how they will manage the increased age range and provide the pupils with a good education. If we have any concerns about a maintained schools ability to subsequently do this, we will intervene. If we have any such concerns about an academy we can take these to the DfE's Regional Commissioner.</p>
<p>The Council's School Organisation Plan is out of date and does not take future generations into account</p>	<p>The School Organisation Plan covers a five year period and is updated each year to reflect changes in school organisation. It looks at trends and likely future demand for school places based upon census data, pre-school aged children in the area and housing development</p>
<p>The rational for the proposed closure is the falling numbers which is affecting the schools financial viability. This fall in numbers is due to the letter that was sent out by the Council. Some</p>	<p>The role of the School Admissions Service is to advise parents when a transfer point is removed. The co-ordinated year 9 transfer point from middle to upper will not be available for current year 6 pupils after September 2015. The Council's letter to parents was clear and provided</p>

parents have chosen not to request a middle school place because of the uncertainty.	contact details for further advice should it be required.
Are there enough school places throughout the town?	There are sufficient places across the Town in all year groups. And this will be the situation for at least the next 2 years based upon a forecast of 840 places per year group. This figure of 840 includes an allowance of 10% to allow for parental preferences.
Can the upper/secondary schools accommodate such a large increase in number of pupils?	Where schools have expanded, the Governing Bodies are legally required to provide the number of place's that they have committed to provide.
If parents want a Church of England faith based school, what would be their alternative?	Ashton St Peters Lower and Manshead Upper School are both faith based provisions. All Saints Academy doesn't give priority to pupils based on faith but is sponsored by the Diocese of St. Albans. Manshead School is a voluntary aided Church of England school and gives priority to children on the basis of their parents' faith as part of their admissions criteria.
Lower school parents are not being consulted.	There has been a large amount of publicity regarding the proposals and everybody has been encouraged to respond to the consultations.
You are making my child move from a middle school to a secondary school.	There is still a mix of 2 tier and 3 tier provision in the town. Priory Academy is a Middle combined Secondary school that has an intake at Year 5 and is working in partnership with Dunstable Icknield, Watling and Studham Lower schools; there is also Barnfield Vale who currently has a Middle intake. If the decision is made to close the Middle school, options are available to transfer to alternative schools as part of the annual admissions round or in-year.
Does the Council consider the financial viability of all schools?	The Council reviews the finances of all maintained schools on an annual basis. Schools budgets for 2014/15 have recently been set and sent out to the schools. The funding follows the child therefore those schools that are affected by the loss of year 5 pupils are seeing a decrease in their budget.
The upper/secondary schools are too big. Queensbury has 1200 children. Leave the children in the middle schools where numbers are lower	Schools budgets are determined by the numbers on roll. The budget impacts on the staffing structure and other resources that can be afforded by the school and therefore their ability to deliver the full curriculum. All schools whatever their size are accountable for the progress that their children make. There are very successful large schools in Central Bedfordshire.
Will the Council force the lower schools that have not converted to primaries to close?	No. Dunstable Icknield, Watling and Studham lower schools in the area are working with Priory Academy and other lower schools will consider their options.

<p>This school nurtures its children - they will not get this in a large upper/secondary.</p>	<p>All schools are judged on the full range of provision that they make which includes their pastoral support for pupils. Large upper/secondary schools have a range of ways in which they provide this pastoral support.</p>
<p>Can we wait until all of the changes in the Town settle down and see what happens?</p>	<p>The proposal is based upon the viability of the school both currently and for the foreseeable future.</p>
<p>Why are Councillors not at this meeting?</p>	<p>The Members of the Council's Executive approved the launch of the consultations on 4 February. It is the role of Council Officers to carry out the consultations and report the findings, and all of the responses received, back to the Executive. The Executive Members are the decision makers.</p>
<p>Is this a cost saving exercise? How much would the Council save if the school closes?</p>	<p>The Council would not make a saving -it would incur either an element of or all of the redundancy costs. School funding is ring-fenced for all schools and therefore all money is redistributed among all schools.</p>
<p>Are other areas within Central Bedfordshire going over to 2 tier?</p>	<p>The rest of Central Bedfordshire currently remains as 3 tier but we have had approaches from various schools who have wanted to discuss pupil numbers. If schools want to consider changes, they would need to follow due process either as an Academy or as a maintained school as set out in the new School Organisation legislation</p>
<p>Can the lower schools, that have changed their age range, provide the facilities that are needed for the curriculum e.g. science labs?</p>	<p>At the meetings held during the lower school consultations many parents asked whether the lower schools would be able to deliver the full primary curriculum. The schools were able to assure them that they would.</p>
<p>Are the primary schools undersubscribed? Will any of them be closed?</p>	<p>Some lower schools that have converted to primary are predicted to have lower numbers for year 5 in September 2014. This is a trend seen elsewhere in the first few years of a school's transition to a new age range but we expect numbers to rise in subsequent years as parents grow in confidence.</p>
<p>The letters that have been sent out to parents of current year 6 students regarding admissions have been misleading and parents have raised their concerns with staff. If the letter had been properly written we would not be losing so many pupils. The school should have been privy to any letters that were due to be sent out to our parents.</p>	<p>The School Admissions service has a duty to advise parents of a change to a transfer point. We therefore needed to advise parents that there will be no coordinated year 9 transfer into Manshead or Queensbury from September 2016.</p> <p>The letters invited parents to contact the Admissions helpline. Many did contact us and we were able to assist them.</p>
<p>If the decision is made to close the school, can the Governing Body</p>	<p>The Governing Body, Trustees and CofE Diocese can appeal to the Schools Adjudicator within four weeks of the</p>

appeal the decision?	decision being made in relation to Ashton CofE VA Middle School. There is no right of appeal on the determination made by the Schools Adjudicator. The Governing Bodies of Brewers Hill Middle and Streetfield Middle Schools, as community Schools, have no right of appeal.
If the decision is made to close the school, and the teachers all leave, who would support the children and what would happen to their education?	The Council would work in partnership with the school to support the process and to provide support to the children. The Council would also commission any additional support that is required.
What would happen to the staff if the school closes?	With the reduced budget that the school have for 2014/15, the school's Governing Body will have to consider its staffing budget with effect from September 2014, irrespective of the outcome of the closure proposal. If the school faces closure, the Council will provide HR support to the school and to the staff.
How will the decision be made regarding the proposal? What will be the criteria?	The Council is required to follow the guidance produced by the Department for Education for decision makers. This includes consideration of all of the responses to the consultation.
What would happen if the schools that are extending their age ranges are not able to provide the places that they have committed to provide?	The Council would hold the Governing Body to account to provide the places.
Historically, the Council has a poor record of forecasting pupil numbers. How accurate is the current forecast?	The forecast for pupil numbers is key to the Council's proposal. The forecast numbers for year 5 from September 2014 are based upon the number of applications we have received for transfer. Based upon these numbers, forecasts have been made for subsequent years. It is these low numbers that have impacted upon the schools budget from September 2014.
Have all of the schools in Dunstable been subjected to the same level of financial scrutiny?	The Council reviews the finances of all maintained schools on an annual basis. Schools budgets for 2014/15 have recently been set and sent out to the schools. The funding follows the child therefore those schools that are affected by the loss of year 5 pupils are seeing a decrease in their budget.
Will a decision be made on the proposal to close all 3 Dunstable Middle Schools at the same time?	A separate consultation is being carried out for each of the 3 Dunstable Middle Schools. A separate decision will be made for each proposal.
Can the school come forward with an alternative proposal?	The Council will consider an alternative proposal however it will need to be viable and be able to demonstrate demand from potential future parents.
Did the Council require other	All schools were required to show a level of parental

schools, which were proposing a change of age range, to provide the same level of support?	support.
Could the final decision regarding the proposed closure be delayed until September?	The national offer day for middle school places in 16 April. Children will start year 5 on 3 September. There is no ideal time to carry out this process and we cannot delay the decision beyond August.
What would happen to the redundant school site? Would it be used for housing?	No discussion has been had regarding the future use of the site. The Council would be required to get permission from the Secretary of State if it wished to dispose of the site. The site would also have to be offered as possible site for a 'free school'
Has the decision already been made to close the 3 middle schools? Is there a political agenda to rid the Council of their control of all schools?	<p>No decision has been made; this is the consultation stage for the proposal.</p> <p>There is no plan to rid the Council of its control. The Council has not been the decision maker for the changes that have happened in academies, but the Council decided to give our maintained schools the same freedoms that were available to academies.</p>
Are middle schools in other areas of Central Bedfordshire still viable?	The changes that have happened in Dunstable and Houghton Regis have not happened in other areas of Central Bedfordshire. For example, Robert Bloomfield Academy is a 840 place middle school in Shefford that is full and there are no concerns regarding its viability.
Will all of the views that are being put forward be considered by the Members?	The Council is capturing the views from both the staff and the public meetings and all of these, plus the responses to the consultations, will be considered by the Committee Members.
Who came up with the proposal to close the middle schools?	The Council monitors the viability of all maintained schools in Central Bedfordshire. Council officers put forward the option for consulting on closure to the Council's Executive.
Why have you given so much support to the new primaries?	<p>The Council gives support to all of its maintained schools. Academies are answerable to the Secretary of State.</p> <p>Academies and schools within Dunstable and Houghton Regis have brought forward their own proposals to change their age ranges. They were able to justify these proposals and show evidence of parental support to the Council who is the decision maker for Council maintained schools and to the Department for Education for academies.</p> <p>However, following recent changes to school regulations by the Department for Education, all maintained schools can now change their age range by up to 2 years without any recourse to the Council.</p> <p>The Council retains responsibility for ensuring the provision of school places.</p>

<p>You are using our children as guinea pigs, they will get lost in the system if the middle schools close.</p>	<p>If the middle schools close the Council will work with the schools to support them as they transfer.</p>
<p>You should not close the school until 2018, which would allow the children who come into the school at year 5 in September 2014 to complete their middle school education.</p>	<p>It will be up to Members to determine whether the school should close, and if so, the date of the closure.</p>
<p>If, after the closure of the 3 middle schools, there were not enough school places in Dunstable, would the Council provide transport to schools outside of the town?</p>	<p>There are sufficient places in all of the year groups.</p>