

Iminster and Crewkerne School Structure Change Proposals

1. A Cabinet paper proposing a formal consultation on change to school structures in the Iminster and Crewkerne area was considered on 21 October. These papers were available publicly from 14 October. This document describes what we proposed to Cabinet for the consultation that will 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. The Council's Cabinet approved to progress to consultation at that meeting. There will now a period of consultation to seek views from the wider community on the proposals. An initial four-week pre-publication consultation period will be followed by a period of reflection on the outcome of this consultation and then publication of 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 for a final decision in February 2021.

Summary of proposals

5. Five proposals formed 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 Ilminster 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 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. These schools are currently registered as two

schools. In order to amalgamate them, it would be necessary to close the registration of one school. This is because only one registration would be needed for a combined school. While one school would close in this technical sense, in reality both schools would continue, with both school buildings occupied and delivering education continuously into the future, with the sole change that they have become one organisation.

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 near to 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 like to hear 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. The consultation includes

proposals for how pupil numbers would be distributed across schools in a way that takes account of classroom organisation and financial efficiency.

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 interested to hear views on ways that these schools could be strengthened through expanding federations or accessing 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. In September 2022, the first Year 5 pupils would start classes in new primary schools, and the first Year 7 pupils would start classes in new secondary schools. This consultation includes a chart which shows year by year when pupils would move from primary schools into a secondary school. September 2022 would also

be the date for pupil transition out of Misterton and into Ashlands or 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. An initial assessment of refurbishment need has been completed. We would work with all schools to assess the current accommodation in greater detail 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). HR principles that would guide a reorganisation process have been agreed by all employers and form part of this consultation.

Next Steps

30. We informally shared proposals with governing bodies, school staff, parents and pupils from week commencing 5 October. These were then approved by Somerset County Council's Cabinet on 21 October. All consultation documents will be published online on 12 November. 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, the Bridgwater and Taunton College Trust, and the Bath and Wells MAT.
34. The aim of the group is 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 form part of this consultation. 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 makes transparent where individuals in affected organisations, or the organisations involved in the Steering Group, have interests outside their organisation.

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