

**Notes of Consultation Event held on 15 June 2018 at Winterton Primary School –
2.15pm**

Present

50 members of public (staff, parents and residents)

Martin White – Interim Headteacher

John Organ, Chair of Winterton Primary's Interim Executive Board

NCC: Karen Hutchison, Neil Campbell, Caroline Money, Anne Isaacson (Note Taker)

Karen Hutchison introduced herself and explained the purposes of the meeting - to help people form a view and reply to the consultation and understand what the next steps are. This meeting was for people to express views, concerns and ask questions. A question and answer format will be used. No formal decision has been made at present time.

Introduction to the panel

John Organ, Chairman, Interim Executive Board

Caroline Money, School Organisation Manager

Neil Campbell - Intervention Adviser

Karen Hutchinson, Senior Adviser, Strategy and Partnership

John Organ – It has been difficult for the IEB to make the decision to ask NCC to consult on closure of the school. – we were being looked at by some MATs until up to half term. We were then informed that following discussions there was no longer any viable solution for the school to join a partnership arrangement. This was a devastating outcome. We then had to look at how we could stand alone. We looked at school budgets and to establish a permanent headteacher. It is incredibly expensive. The budget was totally untenable with the small number of pupils we will have. We have looked at staffing adjustments as we could not maintain the current three class structure but this was not going to give an acceptable level of education and, so we reluctantly asked NCC to consult on closure.

From September 2018, even before the consultation, we are looking at only having about 52 statutory aged children and 6/7 in the nursery.

Caroline Money then outlined the proposal – we are at the informal consultation stage on the proposal to close the school, which runs until 24 July 2018. Over the summer we will collate responses and write a report for the Executive Director of Children's Services. They will decide if we are to proceed to the statutory stage, which runs for 4 weeks. Only after that 4 weeks will a decision be made. This is the opportunity to have a say now.

Issues raised by audience

Why would you look at closing in December – what is the logic behind this, why can't you tell us now if it is to close?

We have to go through a statutory process. We are trying to get information out as early as possible. This situation only became apparent just before half term.

Would you advise us to keep children here in September –

The decision to close the school has not been made, we are just starting the consultation.

Are you telling us that in September if there are only 20 children will you say we are going to shut now?

We can't make a decision before the public consultation has closed. There are 2 stages – informal and statutory stages of consultation. It is not fixed according to the school year.

When the school closes what is happening about transport? There is no safe walking way to schools in area, coach companies are closing, bad roads, Hemsby school advised that children had to go to Winterton. Expected to walk along main road. Martham is oversubscribed.

Each case is assessed separately. Free transport will be provided for pupils at the nearest or catchment school over 2 miles. When reorganisation takes place such as school closure the NCC will consider where transport can be provided for affected pupils. Will assess walking route. This is assessed at the time the decision is made. Until decision to close is made NCC can't make any decisions. Even if it is under 2 miles – other factors can then trigger the fact that school transport can be provided.

How has it got this point since 2016 – not been explored by NCC – what has failed? Pupil numbers is the main problem – there will be only 52 children in the school in September. Looked at other schools around Norfolk, Winterton will be the smallest school in Norfolk that does not have a partnership arrangement.

Are you blaming the staff and leadership – it's the fault of the NCC – they are dire with education. Can't we put more resources in the school?

Not at all. This is not the fault of staff who have impressed the IEB on how they have been addressing improvement in the school.

I have tried to speak to people – my son has learning difficulties – I have been told to keep him here until a decision has been made – his friends are moving school in September. I have been told the school may be closed by then.
This is not the case.

Will there be problems with staffing if some have left before September – concerned about staff at present.

Staff are at risk. They will be having 1 to 1 meetings with HR next week. Though there may be redeployment opportunities some staff are likely to be made redundant if there is a decision to close the school. They may have to look for jobs earlier than a decision has been made whether to close the school. The school may have to get some supply staff in.

Can we have answers before summer holidays? Can we not stop the closure of the school – get more children to come here from other areas?

It is down to parental preference. There have been attempts to do this.

They are building new houses at Martham and Hemsby. How can they shut a primary school when the population is going to increase?

NCC has a statutory duty to ensure there are sufficient pupil places. They publish a local growth investment plan – based on children and housing – they are aware of housing planned. They work closely with district council colleagues. We don't know what type of housing it is and not all housing will generate children. There is a formula which we use. We have enough spaces for children across the area. There are places in Martham and Ormesby and Caister. We can't give the exact number – this changes on a daily basis. There are enough places in the local schools. If there is a decision to close the school, there is an admissions process where we look at choices and look at siblings to match with places.

What if we can't match siblings at same place, want reassurance –

We will try to avoid that. We can't answer specifically but we will come back to you about this.

Other rural schools stay open, why can't Winterton

There are 51 children expected at Winterton in September – this is one of the smallest schools which doesn't have a partnership arrangement. Hickling although smaller are in a federation – and works with 2 other schools. We have exhausted all possibilities – at the moment, we haven't been able to secure the position. Things have changed. The other schools do not want to work with Winterton.

Transport – if we take children out before September will they get free transport

Free school transport is considered for pupils affected by school organisation such as school closure, once the decision to close has been made. However we will check this.

We have had a bad ofsted – why is the head still here?

The head has only been here since Christmas.

Some of us have been here as pupils – no surprise people are cross – is there any point to meeting or has a decision been made – what are the options? How can we save the school?

We need to find a partnership arrangement. Cannot see one out there. If there is one we will grab it. It is the DfE who approaches academies – all have been considered in the local area and there are now none identified as wanting to consider it.

Specialist school? – has this been looked into –

No it hasn't. This would not solve the problem.

Can't we have a shared head?

The DfE policy states schools in special measures would be directed and will have a trust to take them on. Need to look at long term sustainability. The budget at the moment doesn't support this. NB; Winterton Primary School is judged Requires Improvement and not Special Measures.

Why have we only just found out?

This information was only available on 16 May. We have been exploring potential options.

How many children to keep school open?

We realistically need a minimum of 70 -75 children. 40% increase in children.

Don't want to change school – Martham have space now but we don't want to wait until December. Don't want to lose the space –

We can't tell you at present what will happen because of the consultation.

Admissions/transport –

We know that there are enough places in the local area. Transport – will take each case into consideration and look at preference. Will be assessed individually. We have talked to admissions to ensure enough places.

No decision has been made.

For 18 months there was no permanent head teacher – parents taking children out – why didn't the education board take action on this and take on a permanent head.

We were looking at heads to support – support was put in – an IEB was put in. We were looking at all the options.

Why didn't we appoint a new headteacher?

We tried to do this.

We were promised an academy –
We want to make it clear we did not promise this.

Why did the other schools pull out?

The decision was made between the Trusts and the DfE. It was not an NCC decision. They do due diligence and decided not to. We don't have the information as to why this happened. We will ask the DfE if they want to issue a statement. They don't have to tell us. Only on 16 May we were told there were no other options. Up until then it was positive. John advised that it is highly likely that this is associated with no sustainable leadership or budget due to the pupil numbers at the schools and therefore it would be difficult for them to deliver and sustain quality education for children now and in the future. John recognised that parents wanted confirmation of the reasons and said he would specifically ask the question on their behalf and report back, if he received a response.

My children are upset by this news, they told me the school was closed before I read the letter

We only informed children a day after you had the letter.

As a Department how many schools have we saved?

John Organ advised he had done 3 IEBs. The first two were saved Valley Primary and Thurlton Primary, this is the third going to consultation and things are not going the right way.

Meeting closed at 3.15pm with one to one questions if required.