

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>OBJECTION REPORT CONCERNING THE PROPOSAL TO CLOSE MOUNTON HOUSE SPECIAL SCHOOL</b>
<b>MEETING:</b>	<b>CABINET</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>8<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2020</b>

**1. PURPOSE:**

- 1.1 This report seeks to conclude the statutory process relating to the proposed closure of Mounton House Special School.
- 1.2 Following the publication of statutory notices, this report also seeks to provide members with the details of any statutory objections received against the proposals to close Mounton House Special School

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 That Members review the full content of this report and agree to the closure of Mounton House Special School with effect from 31<sup>st</sup> August 2020.

**3. KEY ISSUES:**

- 3.1 On 6<sup>th</sup> March 2019, Cabinet gave approval for the Council to engage in a statutory consultation process proposing the closure of Mounton House Special School.
- 3.2 The consultation process opened on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2019 for a period of 6 weeks (20 school days) concluding on 29<sup>th</sup> April 2019. A consultation report was produced summarising the comments and concerns raised during the consultation period, along with the Council's response.
- 3.3 On 18<sup>th</sup> September 2019, Cabinet received the consultation report and took the difficult decision to proceed to the next stages of the statutory process, namely the publication of Statutory Notices.
- 3.4 On 7<sup>th</sup> October 2019, the Council opened the Statutory Objection period through publication of Statutory Notices, a copy of which can be found within appendix 1 (Objection Report).
- 3.5 Copies of the Statutory Notices were published on or near the main entrance of Mounton House Special School, published on the Council's website, and either circulated electronically or posted to all statutory consultees / interested parties.

- 3.6 All statutory consultees and interested parties were advised of the 28 day window to submit a statutory objection as well as the means to do so. Consultees were reminded that any concerns raised at the consultation stage of this process would not be carried forward as statutory objections, as a separate submission is required during the 28 day objection period.
- 3.7 The window for submission of statutory objections closed on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2019 (28 days from date of publication) where 5 statutory objections were recorded as being received by the Council. To ensure compliance with the School Standards and Organisation Act 2013, an Objection Report has been produced and is attached under appendix 1. This report offers details of the statutory objections received along with the Council's response to these objections.
- 3.8 The summary of responses received during the consultation stage of this process alongside the 5 statutory objections received during the Objection Period shows some clear opposition to the Councils' proposals to close Mounton House Special School.
- 3.9 However, the Council continues to draw some clear recognition that the provision offered at Mounton House Special school in its current form is only meeting the needs of a small number of Monmouthshire learners and is therefore unsustainable.

#### **4. OPTIONS APPRAISAL**

- 4.1 Cabinet has two options available to it
- (a) To proceed with the closure for Mounton House Special School whilst ensuring appropriate provision for displaced pupils.
- (b) To reject the recommendations contained within this report and maintain the status quo in Mounton House Special School
- 4.2 The preferred option is option (a). The reasons set out below conclude that the status quo is not a reasonable option given the very low number of Monmouthshire children accessing the school and that the predominant need in Monmouthshire is now to support children with complex, neurodevelopmental challenges.
- 4.3 The future of Mounton House Special School has been unresolved for too long (as pointed out by the Governing Body in their consultation response) a further deferment will only prolong uncertainty and not provide clarity to the children, parents & families and placing authorities that is required at this juncture.

## **5. REASONS:**

- 5.1 Any decision to close a school is a difficult decision. In this instance and despite the response to the consultation exercise it is the right option to take at this time. Mounton House Special School has been in existence since 1970, its history has been as a Gwent resource and asset, created for an authority with a population of circa 600,000. Today it serves a Monmouthshire population of circa 100,000. Its scale and remit are no longer compatible with the needs of Monmouthshire. The four remaining Gwent authorities have all established and / or expanded their own provision in the recent past.
- 5.2 As set out above the needs of children in Monmouthshire are becoming increasingly complex. The provision that is required in Monmouthshire needs to offer greater flexibility and offer the capacity to provide bespoke service design. This complexity moves beyond the designations of ASD and SEBD and presents a challenge to all working with children and young people with additional learning needs. That said any presumption that Mounton House Special School could simply change its designation and accommodate pupils with a diagnosis of ASD simply because staff have experience of supporting children who present with challenging behaviour is not valid. The root causes of the behaviour manifest from different underlying conditions, one social and the other neurodevelopmental. These different origins of a presenting need require greater levels of training, experience and expertise.
- 5.3 The recent recovery of the school from being in need of significant improvement to being categorised as yellow is rightly recognised, as is the commitment that staff have shown to the pupils in the school. However, as a local authority we have a duty to provide support and an education to all of our pupils. The continued provision at Mounton House Special School is too limited to support the needs of the broad spectrum of Monmouthshire's vulnerable learners.
- 5.4 The costs associated with renewing Mounton House Special School are currently prohibitive. At this stage, and following recent discussions with the Welsh Government, the Band B Programme is closed to extensions from local authorities. If Cabinet were minded to include the renewal of Mounton House in the current Band B proposals at this moment in time it would necessitate a re-prioritisation of the Strategic Outline Programme and the movement of resource away from the Abergavenny proposal. Similarly, in order to achieve affordability in Band C investment in Mounton House would be weighed alongside any required investment in Chepstow School.

## **6. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:**

- 6.1 The potential closure of Mounton House Special School will have financial implications for Monmouthshire. There will be a financial benefit of the closure however; there are several ongoing costs that will offset that potential benefit.

	Financial Year 19-20	Financial Year 20-21	Financial Year 21-22
Annual Delegated Budget 2019/20 Mounton House	1,260,020	525,008	0
Budgeted Recoupment	(518,786)	(216,161)	0
Net cost of provision	<b>741,234</b>	<b>308,847</b>	<b>0</b>
Future Costs of provision for KS3 & KS4 pupils – Max costs		156,112	232,727
Less: recoupment		(68,168)	(34,539)
<b>Total cost KS3 &amp; 4</b>		<b>93,944</b>	<b>198,188</b>
Secondary School Behaviour Support	<b>111,742</b>	<b>291,470</b>	<b>291,470</b>
Draw on invest to save reserve	(111,742)		
Repayment of Reserve funding		<b>46,973</b>	<b>64,769</b>
<b>Cost of proposal</b>	<b>£741,234</b>	<b>741,234</b>	<b>554,427</b>
<b>Current cost of Provision</b>	<b>£741,234</b>	<b>741,234</b>	<b>741,234</b>
<b>Net Financial Benefit</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>186,807</b>

6.2 The benefit would also include the retention of any surplus budget held at the school. The projected year-end position for 2019/20 is £74,555.

6.3 The investment in the four secondary schools is to start in September 2019 as per the December 2018 Cabinet decision. In the current financial year, there will be a cost of £111,742. This paper requests that this is reserve funded from the 'invest to save reserve'. The funds will be replenished following the potential closure of Mounton House Special School or if necessary from a re-alignment of other CYP budgets.

6.4 There is the potential requirement for redundancies if the school closes. The Directorate will follow the Authority's protection of employment policy to ensure that all staff are afforded the maximum protection. The Directorate holds a central redundancy reserve of £300,000 and this will be used in the first instance to meet any costs associated with the closure of the school.

## **7. WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS IMPLICATIONS (INCORPORATING EQUALITIES, SUSTAINABILITY, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):**

This is included in appendix 2.

## **8. CONSULTTEES:**

Senior Leadership Team  
Departmental Management Team  
Employee services  
Cabinet

**9. BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

Pupil Data  
School and corporate budgets  
School Organisation Code

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