

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>Consultation Report concerning the proposal to close Mounton House Special School</b>
<b>MEETING:</b>	<b>CABINET</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>18<sup>th</sup> September 2019</b>
<b>DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:</b>	<b>All</b>

## **1. PURPOSE:**

- 1.1 Over the last two years, officers in the Children and Young People's Directorate have worked with colleagues across Monmouthshire schools and within the authority to put in place effective provision to support our vulnerable learners. A particular facet of that work has been to focus on needs of children who present with challenging behaviour.
- 1.2 Following the consultation on the closure of Mounton House Special School the purpose of this report is to present the consultation report to Cabinet and to seek their approval to proceed to the next stage in the closure of Mounton House Special School and publish statutory notices.
- 1.3 This paper will provide detail for decision makers about how the local authority plans to support students currently at Mounton House following the 31<sup>st</sup> August 2020.

## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 To agree to publish notices for the closure of Mounton House Special School.
- 2.2 Cabinet agrees the use of invest to save reserve funding to support the extended Pupil Referral Service (PRS) for the remainder of this financial year. This will be repaid in the next two financial year.

## **3. KEY ISSUES:**

### **Context**

- 3.1 Mounton House Special School is a boys' school (with a residential capacity) with a designation of pupils with Social Emotional Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) aged 11 – 16 established in the 1970s under Gwent County Council. The school has a capacity of fifty-eight places of which forty-two could be residential. There are currently sixteen boys in the school with no residential students. Of those sixteen pupils, eight either reside in Monmouthshire or are Monmouthshire's responsibility as the Corporate Parent. As of August 2020, the number of pupils that reside in Monmouthshire or are Monmouthshire's responsibility to secure educational provision is expected to reduce to five. Two of the children resident are Monmouthshire are placed here by neighbouring authorities.
- 3.2 The designation of Mounton House is to provide an education to those children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. This diagnosis currently accounts for only 13% of the total statemented population in Monmouthshire.

- 3.3 The consultation exercise was conducted in an open and transparent manner and garnered a significant amount of interest. There were 123 written responses to the consultation process with 109 against the proposed closure of Mounton House (88%). Throughout the consultation report officers of the authority have responded to the concerns of those objecting to the closure. This report will set out those responses alongside the original rationale for proceeding with the consultation exercise.

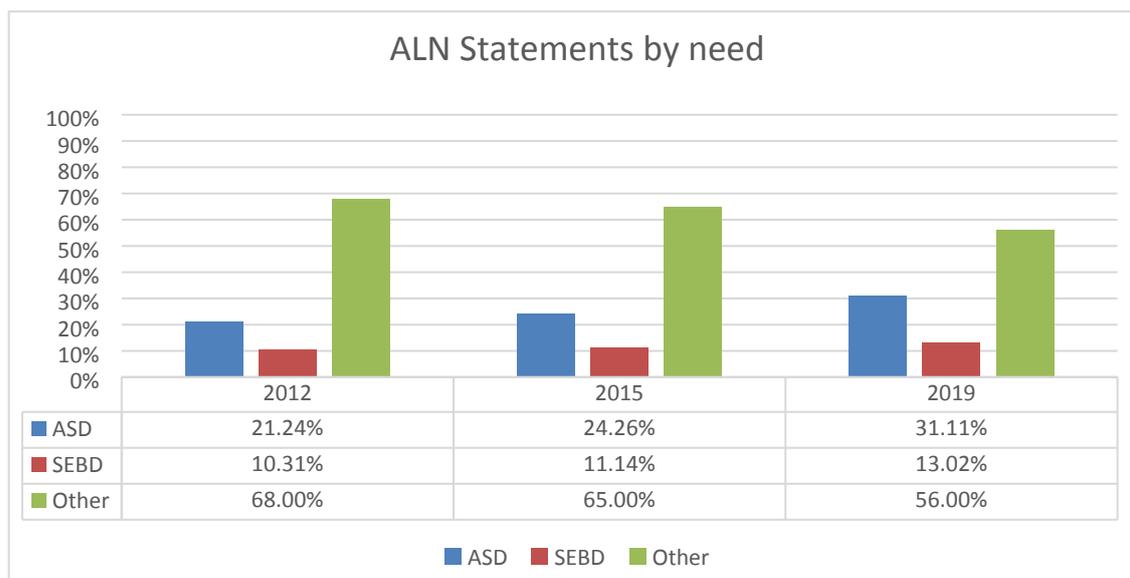
### **Background**

- 3.4 In recent times, Mounton House has been on an important recovery journey. Estyn placed it in Significant Improvement in 2015. As a result, the school was categorised as a red school i.e. a school requiring the highest levels of support. The school, its staff and partners have worked hard to address areas in need of improvement and as a result, the school was removed from the list of schools requiring significant improvement in November 2017. Since that time, the school continued its journey of improvement and has moved to the yellow category, in the last two years as it now needs significantly lower levels of support.
- 3.5 Last year Cabinet agreed to consult on a series of reforms to Monmouthshire's Additional Learning Needs (ALN) provision. At the heart of these was the ambition to recreate Mounton House Special School as a broad range Special School and utilise the Mounton House site as a hub for pupils with SEBD and Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) across the county serving both boys and girls of all ages from seven to 16 (or potentially 19).
- 3.6 Cabinet did not progress the development of an overarching special school following the previous consultation exercise. There were two reasons for this: the management structure of the proposed new special school was the first of these reasons. The consultation exercise *'highlighted a significant level of concern from some consultees towards the proposals to place the management of the SNRB centres with the new special school. The concerns focussed around governance arrangements, responsibilities and a risk of causing segregation of our children and young people on these sites.'*
- 3.7 Furthermore, the capital costs associated with that transformation were far in excess of the cost envelope that had been identified in the business planning process. The final design costs were circa £6.4m compared to a prudential borrowing planning expectation of approximately £2m. The costs were calculated by Monmouthshire County Council's property services team using the existing floor area of the school and a median cost as provided by the Building Costs Information Service (BCIS) (Royal Chartered Institute Surveyors' (RCIS)) for the renewal or conversion of special schools. The current quality of the fixed asset is not at an acceptable level in mainstream education.

### **Strategic**

- 3.8 The needs of students are becoming increasingly complex; the broad heading of SEBD covers a multitude of contributing conditions. We now better understand attachment disorder, the impact and consequences of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and the consequences of childhood traumas and their impact on children and young people.
- 3.9 At the same time, developments in neuroscience are helping us to understand why children present and behave in certain ways. Within this group of pupils with neurodevelopmental conditions, there are a growing number with a diagnosis of ASD within Monmouthshire, for whom suitable provision needs to be found.

3.10 The chart below shows the increasing prevalence of ASD as the predominant need for children with a statement of Special Educational Needs:



3.11 The provision in MHSS is, due to its current designation, too narrowly focused on boys alone and those children of a secondary age. This means we are unable to meet the needs of many of our children with additional needs and vulnerabilities. We currently place the majority of girls and younger pupils who present with challenging behaviour because of their identified need in out of county placements; these can be costly (both in terms of the placement and additional transportation costs). Furthermore, 'out of county' placements mean that children are educated away from their own community and friendship groups.

3.12 The challenge has been and continues to be the low levels of referrals from Monmouthshire itself.

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
<b>Total Referrals</b>	38	24	29	37	19
<b>Monmouthshire Referrals</b>	2	2	2	5	3

3.13 The number of girls with the diagnosis of SEBD is markedly lower than the number of boys. As at July 2019, within the total population there were only six girls with an SEBD diagnosis compared to 35 boys. Even assuming that all future needs of all children with a diagnosis of SEBD could be met in Mouton House could be met (as a provision it may not be suitable for all children and it may not be the parental preference) there would be a need for an additional twenty places in the coming seven years compared to a need for forty-one places for children with an ASD diagnosis.

**Financial:**

3.14 Pupils attending Mouton House from other authorities pay a placement cost of £45,265 for a day placement and £77,938 for a residential placement, however, this does not recover the whole cost of running the school which has resulted in Monmouthshire County Council having to heavily subsidise these places over time.

- 3.15 The financial cost of running Mounon House in the financial year was 2019/20 is £1,260,020, the forecast level of recoupment is £471,638 (against a budget of £518,786) resulting in a net cost to Monmouthshire County Council in year of £788,382. The low numbers of Monmouthshire pupils in the school means that the residual cost to the Authority for our own pupils for the current academic year is currently £131,397 per head. If the school were to remain open for the next academic year, this unit cost will rise to £262,794 in September 2020.
- 3.16 In comparison, the unit costs for Monmouthshire pupils are higher in Mounon House Special School than in other providers in the market place where an annual placement in Headlands Special School is £45,000 and Tallocher, an independent school in Monmouthshire is circa £65,000.

### **Economic:**

- 3.17 Over the last seven years, the number of pupils on roll in Mounon House has reduced significantly; in January 2015, there were 42 pupils on roll and today the current number on roll is 16. Currently, there are no pupils accessing the residential provision. Of these 16 pupils, eight either reside in Monmouthshire or are Monmouthshire's responsibility, six of whom are Monmouthshire pupils.
- 3.18 The economic case asks us to consider whether this provides the authority with value for money. The numbers cited above lead to the conclusion that currently the school does not offer Monmouthshire County Council value for money. A number of factors have contributed to this; the decline in other authorities placing to the school, the decline in the use of the large scale residential provision for vulnerable children with complex needs in light of the emergence of new models of intervention and the relative reduction in the number of children with SEBD in Monmouthshire as a percentage. These factors have curtailed the number of children on roll whilst the running costs for the school have remained relatively high.
- 3.19 The population of children with special educational needs in Monmouthshire is growing and bears a considerable pressure in both teaching and financial resource. The costs associated with Mounon House Special School are disproportionately focused towards a very small group of pupils. Monmouthshire has a clear commitment to support all our pupils in order that the 'have the best possible start in life'. This concentration of resources simply does not allow that.

### **The Consultation Exercise**

- 3.20 The Consultation exercise was well responded to by a range of stakeholders. The most significant view was that Mounon House should be retained with 88% of respondents expressing this view. The full response to the issues raised in the consultation can be found in the accompanying report and all responses can be found in the Members' library.
- 3.21 The table below sets out the four key themes that emerged in the consultation process.

Theme 1	Local Authority mitigating response
A concern that the children and young people will not cope in mainstream education, and that the education of those already in mainstream will be disrupted.	The Council has confirmed through this report that the children on roll at Mounon House Special school will not be returned to mainstream education should the proposals to close the school proceed.

	<p>The children and young people concerned are in receipt of a statement of special educational needs which determines the specialist provision required to meet individual needs. This may, or may not, be delivered in a special school. The annual review of a statement will continue to determine the type of provision required, including the support needed to ensure that the child or young person can participate in education successfully.</p>
<p><b>Theme 2</b></p>	<p><b>Local Authority Response</b></p>
<p>A concern that there is no other alternative provision that is suitable for the children and young people at the school</p>	<p>Should proposals to close Mounton House Special School proceed, Monmouthshire will work with the relevant Local Authorities, parents and pupils affected by the proposed closure to ensure continuity of provision. This could be placement at another special school or a bespoke learning pathway.</p> <p>Annual Review meetings will identify individual pupil needs and make recommendations for alternative provision.</p> <p>For those attending KS4 provision (year 10 and 11 from September 2020), the Council proposes to maintain local provision supported by the Pupil Referral Service to ensure any disruption to children and young people is minimised at this critical time. However, this is not a mandatory provision and parents / children concerned will be consulted on options for future provision should proposals proceed.</p>
<p><b>Theme 3</b></p>	<p><b>Local Authority Response</b></p>
<p>A view that the council needs to maintain special provision due to a growing demand for appropriate support for children with additional needs</p>	<p>The consultation on the closure of Mounton House Special School has been brought forward through an ongoing review of provision for ALN and Inclusion services across the County. This review has identified that the provision currently offered at Mounton House Special School is meeting the needs of only a very small number of Monmouthshire learners. At the same time, we are using a greater number of placements in out of County settings due to the lack of local provision. In a period of challenging resources the Local Authority needs to be able to draw upon its full resource to support its full range of children with ALN.</p> <p>The proposals to close Mounton House would not be implemented to bring forward financial savings, but to reinvest in provision that meets a wider range of needs; this would</p>

	include those with SEBD as well as the full range of other needs such as ASD.
<b>Theme 4</b>	<b>Local Authority Response</b>
A view that the Council should invest in Mounton House Special school to develop a provision that meets the future needs of our community	<p>In 2018, the Council consulted on extending the provision at Mounton House Special School to meet a wider range of additional needs. The proposal included providing provision for both boys and girls and the full age range.</p> <p>Cabinet did not progress the development of an overarching special school following the previous consultation exercise. There were two reasons for this: the management structure of the proposed new special school. The consultation <i>'highlighted a significant level of concern from some consultees towards the proposals to place the management of the SNRB centres with the new special school. The concerns focussed around governance arrangements, responsibilities and a risk of causing segregation of our children and young people on these sites.'</i></p> <p>Secondly, the feasibility works undertaken identified that the site / building would require significant investment (circa £6.4 million) to enable the implementation of this proposal. Therefore, this option was not taken forward through the political process. It was agreed that this would be recast and this is the subsequent consultation.</p>

3.22 If Cabinet agree to the publication of statutory notices for the closure of Mounton House there would be a very small cohort of young people who will continue to require appropriate educational provision to meet their identified needs.

3.23 The current distribution of pupil numbers as of September 1<sup>st</sup> 2019 is as follows:-

Year	7	8	9	10	11
Number of Pupils	1	5	1	3	6

3.24 From 1 September 2019, there are six year 11 pupils returning to the school to complete their education by the end of the academic year 2019 - 2020.

3.25 Should the proposal proceed on 31 August 2020 there would be a total number of 10 pupils affected by the closure distributed across years 8, 9, 10 and 11 as in the table below:

	<b>Key Stage 3</b>	<b>Key Stage 4</b>
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Year	7	8	9	10	11
Number of Pupils	0	1	5	1	3

- 3.26 Based on these numbers, we do not expect there to be any year 7 pupils attending the school from 1 September 2020.
- 3.27 Of the six Key Stage 3 pupils remaining, only a very small minority will be Monmouthshire pupils (two), with a further two place in Monmouth by other Local Authorities. In order to secure appropriate provision for these pupils the Local Authority will work closely with other partners to place the pupils in appropriate specialist provision. This provision will be determined through the review of statement of Special Educational Needs process and will involve children, parents, placing authorities, if relevant, and wider agencies where appropriate.
- 3.28 The Local Authority will utilise the PRU / PRS to meet the needs of the five pupils in Key Stage 4 until they complete their courses (two of whom are Monmouthshire pupils). Staff in the PRU are experienced and skilled in effectively supporting pupils presenting with challenging behaviour and have established strong strategic partnerships between the PRS, local schools and colleges that enable pupils to access courses and specialist teaching facilities elsewhere in the community. This will allow for the provision of bespoke packages to deliver a broad and appropriate curriculum to meet the needs of these pupils and would be delivered using the model outlined below:

#### **Key Stage 4 Model of Delivery**

- 3.29 The Pupil Referral Service Coordinator would oversee the development of bespoke and flexible learning plans to meet the identified needs of each pupil. The plans would be used to identify the most appropriate provision, which may be delivered or commissioned by the PRS on a number of sites including the PRU, part of the Mounton House site and colleges, work experiences and other suitable sites.

#### **What would the delivery look like?**

- 3.30 These bespoke, flexible packages of education would take place using existing Local Authority provision wherever possible and appropriate. Staff experienced in working with disaffected pupils would deliver these individual learning programmes. These staff would have experience of delivering bespoke learning programmes to pupils displaying similar behaviours to those children in Mounton House Special School. All bespoke learning programmes would be reviewed regularly and in line with current ALN Code of Practice and Inclusion Guidance. (203/216) and the draft ALN Code of Practice (2019).

#### **Management of delivery of these programmes**

- 3.31 The Pupil Referral Service Coordinator would oversee the delivery of these bespoke programmes for pupils in Key Stage 4. The Pupil Referral Service Coordinator would ensure that individual pupil's identified needs are met and that pupils are safeguarded in line with Monmouthshire policy.

#### **Actions required to facilitate the delivery of individual programmes**

- 3.32 Reviews of formal paperwork would need to take place for each of the affected pupils. Colleagues in Monmouthshire's Additional Learning Needs team would liaise with placing local authorities and arrange annual review meetings in line with the SEN Code of Practice

to discuss the proposed provision and enable the statutory paperwork to be amended by Monmouthshire.

- 3.33 Parents and pupils would need to be consulted on any proposed changes to the delivery of the provision and they would be provided with support, guidance and advocacy through SNAP, the regional parent partnership service.
- 3.34 For Monmouthshire pupils, colleagues in Monmouthshire's Additional Learning Needs team would undertake a similar approach and liaise with Monmouthshire parents and pupils and arrange meetings in line with the Code of Practice to enable the statutory paperwork to be amended to reflect the proposed provision. The Pupil Referral Service Coordinator would then meet with parents and colleagues in Monmouthshire's Additional Learning Needs team to formally agree programmes and develop appropriate documentation.

### **Resources allocated to this proposal**

- 3.35 To deliver these proposals, the following staffing/commissioned provision would be required and this is broken down as follows:-
- 0.4 teacher to enhance capacity of the Pupil Referral Service to allow for Coordination of the delivery
  - 1 teacher to work with the cohort of 5 pupils
  - 1 Teaching assistant to provide support to class teacher
  - 2 Pupil Engagement Officers to provide vocational learning opportunities
  - College provision as required
  - 0.1 Educational Psychologist to provide professional advice to staff and pupils

These are costed below:-

Staffing/commissioned provision	Cost
0.4 teacher with Teaching Learning Responsibility allowance	£ 21,870
1.0 teacher	£ 55,596
1.0 teaching assistant	£ 21,974
2.0 Pupil Engagement Officers	£ 55,896
College courses as required	£ 15,000
0.1 Educational Psychologist	£ 7,285
	£177,621

- 3.36 The unit cost of a placement would therefore be £35,524.20. The cost to Monmouthshire would therefore be £71,048.40 for the two Monmouthshire pupils in Key Stage 4. Monmouthshire would be able to reclaim remaining costs from other placing Local Authorities.
- 3.37 The PRU currently works from two satellite bases, one in Abergavenny and one in Chepstow. It is our proposal that the PRU would use a part of the Mounton House site from September 2020.

### **Key Stage 3 curriculum options**

- 3.38 In September 2020, the minority of Key Stage 3 students in September 2020 would be from Monmouthshire.
- 3.39 Pupils in Key Stage 3 (Years 7, 8 and 9) would still require access to specialist SEBD provision. There would therefore be a requirement for the commissioning of 6 Key Stage places from an independent provider. The only costs attributable to Monmouthshire would

be the costs associated with the two pupils. The rest would be recouped from placing authorities.

### **What would the delivery look like?**

- 3.40 These pupils would have access to specialist SEBD provision, which would be delivered by a teacher and support staff within a special school.

### **Longer-term provision**

- 3.41 We will develop provision in Monmouthshire to offer education to children and young people aged 7-19, who have difficulty in learning because of a range of significant and complex additional needs. These would include children and young people with neurodevelopmental conditions e.g. Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and social, emotional and mental health difficulties, which would include issues relating to attachment and adverse childhood experiences (ACES). Children and young people accessing this provision would be highly likely to have co-occurring conditions and to have presented with significant difficulties in mainstream school settings.
- 3.42 The school would provide a specialist environment and structured personalised learning, care and therapy programmes, delivered by expert staff rigorously trained in specific approaches relevant to neurodevelopmental and associated conditions. Staff would have an in-depth understanding of these conditions and the ways in which they can affect a child /young person, both academically and socially. There would be a strong focus on providing quality education with opportunities to achieve nationally recognised qualifications and accreditations alongside developing social and independence skills.

## **4. OPTIONS APPRAISAL**

- 4.1 Cabinet has two options available to it:
- (a) To proceed and publish notices of 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 Mounon 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 Mounon 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 Mounon 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 Mounon 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 Mounon House would be weighed alongside any required investment in Chepstow School.

## 6. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

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

	Financial Year 19-20	Financial Year 20-21	Financial Year 21-22
Annual Delegated Budget 2019/20 Mounon 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		150,279	222,727
Less: recoupment		(62,168)	(34,539)
<b>Total cost KS3 &amp; 4</b>		<b>88,111</b>	<b>188,188</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>52,806</b>	<b>58,936</b>
<b>Cost of proposal</b>	<b>£741,234</b>	<b>741,234</b>	<b>538,594</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>202,640</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 £66,517.
- 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):**

- 7.1 This is included in appendix 3 of the consultation document.

**8. CONSULTEES:**

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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