

# **MINUTES OF THE MEETING Cabinet Member Signing HELD ON Monday, 14th April, 2025, 11:00 - 11:10am**

## **PRESENT:**

**Councillors: Zena Brabazon**

**ALSO ATTENDING: Kodi Sprott, Principal Committee Coordinator, Jane Edwards, Director of Schools & Learning**

### **1. FILMING AT MEETINGS**

The Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Families referred to the notice of filming at meetings and this information was noted.

### **2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

### **3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **4. URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of urgent business.

### **5. DEPUTATIONS / PETITIONS / QUESTIONS**

There were none.

### **6. DETERMINATION OF THE STATUTORY NOTICE PROPOSING THE CLOSURE OF TIVERTON PRIMARY SCHOOL**

The purpose of this signing was to provide the Cabinet Member for Children, Schools & Families with a factual summary of the proposal and any representations received, to enable the Cabinet Member to make a final decision on the proposal to close Tiverton Primary School.

There were a number of reasons under which proposers were permitted to pursue the closure of a maintained school. Two of the four reasons set out on page 23 of the DfE guidance were relevant to this proposal:

- There were surplus places elsewhere in the local area which could accommodate displaced pupils and there was no predicted demand for the school in the medium to long term;

- it was no longer considered viable;

It was noted that within the report, south grove was listed as a ward within the borough; this was incorrect.

## **RESOLVED**

### **Recommendations**

It was recommended that the Cabinet member:

#### **Note**

- that no comments or objections were received during the 4-week representation period despite consulting widely with all relevant stakeholders
- the school was currently in deficit and the revenue budget to operate successfully in future whilst maintaining the delivery of a good quality of education for pupils was severely diminished by the school's very low pupil numbers.
- Many families had already transferred their children to other local schools; Tiverton Primary currently has 130 pupils on roll (as of week ending 28 March 2025), 29 of which were year 6 pupils that will be transferring to secondary school in September 2025. A significant number have also secured places at other local schools to start following the Easter holidays.

#### **Approve**

- the proposal to discontinue the school from 31 August 2025 with displaced pupils transferring to other local schools.

Alternative options considered and not favoured –

The following options were considered and presented to stakeholders as part of the pre-publication consultation carried out in November and December 2024:

- No change i.e. continuation of current strategy for school improvement without any further action to address falling local rolls
- Federation
- Amalgamation resulting in the closure of Tiverton Primary School with the displaced pupils being accommodated by another community school
- Whether South Grove Primary as the nearest community school with the same type and characteristics as Tiverton Primary could be the best option for an amalgamation/merger. South Grove Primary was previously known as South Grove Primary and changed its name from January 2025.
- Closure

#### **No change and continuation of current strategy**

- This was a highly cost-inefficient option and not sustainable. The school had a deficit budget and there was a significant risk that the deficit balance would increase at a greater rate due to falling rolls. The Council had a responsibility to ensure the efficient use of public money.
- A school with falling rolls would have significantly less funding and this directly affected staffing numbers (both teaching and support staff), resources, equipment, expenditure, maintenance work and extracurricular activities for children. In time, a school affected by income loss will almost inevitably see performance and standards fall. It was the duty of the Council to ensure that the quality of education for children, and stability for

teaching and support staff, take priority. The operational challenges affecting schools with falling rolls would continue to increase with a negative impact on pupils and no systemic solution.

- This option was not preferred as it does not provide a long-term sustainable solution to falling local demand, and further, leaves other local schools vulnerable because of the current and projected surplus of places across PA3. Furthermore, taking no action to the issues affecting a school with falling rolls is not an acceptable option available to the Council.

## **Federation**

- In considering federation, there must be clear benefits that such an arrangement would bring for children including, but not limited to raising standards, improving the breadth and depth of education delivery and increasing opportunities for outstanding outcomes. Federated schools operated in collaboration with each other, sharing senior staff and possibly governing bodies, which allowed them to maximise good educational practice, while achieving economies of scale.
- Federation would require full commitment from the schools involved and a shared vision for the development of the federation. For this option to be feasible, Tiverton Primary School would be required to work with the local authority to identify another school that would see the benefits in federation. With low numbers of pupils on roll and uncertainty regarding its future, it was highly unlikely that another school would deem it viable to federate with Tiverton Primary School. To date, there had been no interest expressed by any school to federate with Tiverton Primary School.
- Although the Council had a role in supporting schools to explore federation, federation was ultimately a decision made independently by the governing bodies of schools. This option was rejected because under a federation, schools would remain as separate organisations, and this would not address the decline in numbers on roll at Tiverton Primary or the risk of financial unviability.

## **Amalgamation – closure of Tiverton Primary with displaced pupils being accommodated by another school such as South Grove Primary School**

- An amalgamation could only be achieved by closing one or more schools and providing spaces for displaced children in another 'host' school. This option would involve the host school retaining its original DfE school number as it is not technically considered a new school. However, following the amalgamation process, governors have the option to rename the school to create a new identity for the merged schools.
- The report presented to Cabinet in October 2024 explored the option of an amalgamation with South Grove Primary (previously known as South Grove) due to the similar type and characteristics of the two community schools located in close proximity to one other, minimising travel disruption, but also due to both schools having a high surplus as well as high unused capacity in their buildings. It was important to note that only South Grove Primary had expressed an interest in an amalgamation; no other primary school has come forward.
- An amalgamation between Tiverton Primary and South Grove on the South Grove site was initially proposed based on pupil numbers at the time and the fabric of the building which was in better condition. South Grove appears to have been able to accommodate all pupils from Tiverton Primary school.
- The drop in pupil numbers experienced by both schools in recent years made this option feasible in terms of pupil numbers, however this is no longer favoured due to the financial position of both schools. Currently, Tiverton Primary School and South Grove have both budgeted for a deficit position at the close of 2024/25.

- It was important to note that when a maintained school closes, any outstanding deficit falls to the Council to be written off. However, when two schools are amalgamated, the newly formed school inherits the school deficit. Due to falling rolls in PA3, there is a risk that the school deficit balances could increase at a greater rate for both schools and have an impact on school funding and cause greater pressure on in-year budgets up to the point of a merger and beyond. This would ultimately result in increased financial liability for the Council as schools at risk move toward or increase their deficit position.
- An amalgamation was also not considered a viable option as it was unlikely to lead to sufficiently stabilising numbers of pupils at the newly amalgamated school. Since June 2024 the vast majority of families leaving Tiverton Primary School have opted to transfer to other local schools near their home address. Our records show that most leavers (19 pupils) have transferred to Woodberry Down Community School in Hackney. A small number of families expressed an interest in South Grove and a significant number of pupils have successfully transferred to alternative Haringey schools.
- Although the short distance (0.6 miles away from South Grove), which was a 13 minute walk between the two schools was one of the key reasons a merger was explored, based on the recent evidence of pupil movement, there was no guarantee that families would opt to transfer their child(ren) to South Grove. The trend so far pointed to pupils transferring elsewhere and we know there are sufficient places at other local schools to accommodate pupils.
- The option of an amalgamation with South Grove is therefore rejected based on the reasons outlined above. To date, no other school had expressed an interest in an amalgamation with Tiverton Primary, and there were none located near enough with the sufficient places to accommodate all displaced pupils.

#### **Full and immediate closure**

- This was the option recommended. The local authority had a statutory duty to ensure the efficient use of resources. Maintaining a school with a declining roll could not be considered efficient given that there are surplus places in other local schools. The DfE advised that school closure decisions should be taken when there is no demand for the school in the medium to long term and there were sufficient places elsewhere to accommodate displaced children.
- There were sufficient primary school places in the local area that could provide a suitable alternative for displaced pupils. A high surplus of primary school places in the local area meant that other alternatives could be offered for pupils at Tiverton that wish to go elsewhere.
- All children presently attending Tiverton Primary and all applicants to Reception for September 2025 could be accommodated in alternative schools within a reasonable distance. On analysing in-year vacancy information of schools in and immediately bordering PA3 where Tiverton is located, there were currently more than sufficient vacant places across all year groups (reception to Year 6) across 12 Haringey schools within 1 mile of the school.

CHAIR:

Signed by Chair .....

Date .....