

200/14 Receipt of Petitions

A petition with 1,426 signatures opposing the proposed closure of Castle Nursery school was received on 13 April 2015. This was confirmed at the meeting.

206/14 Castle Nursery School – Closure Proposal

The Council Cabinet considered a report on Castle Nursery School – Closure Proposal. Castle Nursery School was one of eight maintained nursery schools within the City, located on the outskirts of the Arboretum ward. It had an 'outstanding' Ofsted judgement and delivered funded places for three and four year olds. The future viability of Castle Nursery was a concern due to static low numbers on roll over the last eight years, with only 25 children currently accessing a place at the nursery. Castle Nursery had the capacity to accommodate 80 children so the current vacant occupancy level based on this, would be 69%. However, the nursery for a number of years had operationally looked to deliver 52 funded places so the more realistic vacant occupancy level was 52%.

Both initial consultation and statutory consultation had now taken place on the proposal to close Castle Nursery School from 31 August 2015. The responses to the initial consultation were reported to Council Cabinet at the meeting on 18 February 2015. Through this initial consultation, a total of 63 responses were received opposing closure from a variety of stakeholders, together with a 1,708 signature petition opposing any closure. The petition included 489 signatures from individuals who resided outside the City. Two e-petitions opposing any closure were also received, one with 238 signatures, and one with 68 signatures.

Council Cabinet, at a meeting on 18 February 2015, approved the publication of a legal notice on the proposal to close Castle Nursery School. The publication of this notice marked the start of a further four week statutory consultation period which ran from 3 March 2015 to 31 March 2015. A copy of the legal notice on the proposal was attached as Appendix 3 to the report. A total of ten responses were received objecting to the proposal to close Castle Nursery School. A summary of responses received during the statutory consultation period was set out within Appendix 2 to the report. In view of the sustained low occupancy levels and very high operating costs at Castle Nursery, the proposal was for Council Cabinet to consider closing Castle Nursery School from 31 August 2015. Appendix 4 to the report set out the equality impact assessment.

It was important to note that 18 of the current 25 children on roll were due to transfer to school in September 2015, which was likely to leave only 7 children on roll in September. However, this did not include any summer intake, should the school be allowed to admit new starters in the summer term.

It was reported that several petitions had been received calling for Castle Nursery School to remain open. The first petition contain 1,708 names, the second petition had been validated and contained 1426 valid entries. There was an on-line petition

Change.org e petition which contained 238 entries. We had also been made aware by the lead petitioner that the online petition, through 38degrees.org.uk now had 241 entries. Members took account of all the petitions whilst considering the report.

Options Considered

No other options had been considered.

Decision

To approve the closure of Castle Nursery School from 31 August 2015.

Reasons

Statutory consultation had now been carried out on the proposal to close Castle Nursery school due to static low numbers on roll over the last eight years. The Council was committed to delivering and funding services that evidenced value for money. However, the current cost per place at Castle Nursery was significantly higher than that of the other nursery schools. There was the potential for a minimum £100,000 saving per annum to the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).