

## **REVIEW OF MAINTAINED NURSERY SCHOOLS**

*To:* **Cambridgeshire Schools Forum**

*Date:* **12 July 2019**

*From:* **Hazel Belchamber**

*Purpose:* **To advise Schools Forum of the identified need to undertake a review of the Authority's maintained nursery school provision in response to funding challenges**

### **Recommendation:**

**To note and comment on the contents of the report.**

<b>1.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>
1.1	The Childcare Act 2006 formalised the important strategic role that all Local Authorities play in the planning and commissioning of early years provision.
1.2	<p>Early Years provision is a universal entitlement for all children from the term following their third birthday until they enter Reception year at school (in the year of their fifth birthday). To fulfil its statutory responsibility, the Council funds part-time education places for 2, 3 and 4 year olds in settings under the management of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voluntary management committees</li> <li>• Private businesses, including private schools</li> <li>• Maintained schools</li> <li>• Academies and free schools</li> <li>• Home-based childcare providers (accredited networked childminders).</li> </ul> <p>The majority of provision in Cambridgeshire is run and managed by providers in the private, voluntary and independent sectors (PVI). There are 7 maintained nursery schools in the County together with a number of schools with nursery classes.</p>
1.3	<p>There are 7 maintained nursery schools in Cambridgeshire, five of which are in the City:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brunswick</li> <li>• Colleges</li> <li>• Homerton</li> <li>• King's Hedges</li> <li>• The Fields</li> </ul> <p>The other two nurseries are:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Histon</li> <li>• Huntingdon</li> </ul> <p>Brunswick and Colleges are federated. They are led and managed by a single governing body and Headteacher.</p> <p>King's Hedges is federated with King's Hedges Primary School.</p>
1.4	Whilst nursery schools are not statutory provision they are, nevertheless, required to operate to the same standards as schools with regard to employing a Headteacher and qualified teachers. They are also legally required to have an accredited Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo). In addition, they are subject to a different inspection framework than PVI providers.
1.5	All 7 maintained nursery schools offer high quality early years education, they have been judged by the Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED) to be either good or outstanding. They all play an important role in ensuring that the Council is able to meet its statutory responsibilities. They are valued for the provision they offer and their knowledge and expertise developed over many years.
1.6	All Local Authorities were required by the Department for Education (DfE) to develop a funding formula for early years provision by April 2011. Following consultation on proposed changes in autumn 2016, the Government implemented a new national funding formula in April 2017. The Government's key objective in doing so was to ensure that all provider types would be paid the same universal base rate by 2019/20 at the latest.
<b>2.</b>	<b>MAIN ISSUES</b>
2.1	Through its childcare sufficiency processes, the Council keeps all early years provision under review, following principles of sustainability and securing a range of provision offering a quality educational and care experience to children and families within a local area to enable parents to work or train.
2.2	It expects all early years provision to be of high quality. It funds provision on the basis of compliance with conditions on quality, national conditions set out in the relevant Code of Practice, and on actual take-up of places, measured annually
2.3	Other than the change of status of King's Hedges (this was formerly a nursery class), and the more recent federation between Brunswick and Colleges, the pattern of maintained nursery school provision in the county has remained unchanged for over 30 years.
2.4	When the DfE introduced the new national funding formula for early years provision in April 2017, it initially provided all nursery schools with additional transitional funding for the 2017/18 and 2018/19 financial years with the clear expectation that over this period they would explore ways to become more sustainable.
2.3	In the intervening period, in recognition of the contribution which maintained nursery

	<p>schools make to the provision of early years and childcare provision, the Government has extended the interim additional funding period for these schools until the end of the summer 2020. To date, despite statements made by Nadhim Zahawi (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families) in support of nursery schools and that he was optimistic about longer-term funding for them, there is no guarantee of future funding beyond this date.</p>
2.4	<p>Between them the 7 maintained nursery schools will receive a total of £1,110,768 as a result of the additional funding awarded by government for the 2019/20 financial year. The three components of the funding are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An extra 0.75p per child per hour that they are registered to attend the nursery school above the base rate of £4.05 for all other early years providers who are registered with the Council to offer the free and extended early years entitlement</li> <li>• A lump sum ranging between £105,487 and £123,087</li> <li>• Rates.</li> </ul>
2.5	<p>Whilst Nadhim Zahawi “urged Local Authorities not to make over hasty decisions about the future of maintained nursery schools in advance of the spending review” in an interview in July 2018, in the absence of any commitment or guarantee of funding from the Government, the Council has no option other than to consider alternative options now in order to provide sufficient lead-in time for implementation of any changes by September 2020.</p>
2.6	<p>Regrettably, without the additional funding currently provided by the Government, the Council’s financial position means that it is unable to ‘underwrite’ the costs of maintaining the current level of provision even in the short-term.</p>
2.7	<p>Whilst finance is a key driver for change, consideration also needs to be given to the historical imbalance of provision across the County. As will be evident from the list of schools set out in section 1.3, there is a concentration of provision in the City. There are no maintained nursery schools in East Cambridgeshire or Fenland. It is the right time, therefore, to consider changes to the Council’s maintained nursery provision.</p>
2.8	<p>In response to these challenges and the need for change, outline options have been identified and shared with the Head teachers and governors of the 7 schools and financial modelling work commissioned to inform next steps. Any proposals for change need to be tested against the DfE’s Statutory Guidance for Decision-Makers on the Opening and Closing of Maintained Schools November 2018 states:</p> <p><i>Under Section 15 of the Education Inspections Act 2006, a Local Authority can propose the closure of all categories of maintained school.</i></p> <p><i>Decision-makers should adopt a presumption against the closure of nursery schools. This does not mean that a nursery school will never close, but the case for closure should be strong and the proposal should demonstrate that:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>plans to develop alternative early years provision clearly demonstrate that it</i></li> </ul>

	<p><i>will be at least equal in quantity to the provision provided by the nursery school with no loss of expertise and specialism; and</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>replacement provision is more accessible and more convenient for local parents</i></li> </ul>
2.9	<p>The Children and Young People's (CDYP) Committee will receive a report on the review at their meeting on 10 September. Further meetings with Headteachers and governor representatives are in the process of being scheduled to take place in the autumn term.</p>