

To: **Executive**  
**21 May 2024**

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**Consultation on the closure of College Hall Pupil Referral Unit**  
**Executive Director: People**

**1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1. This reports the results of the consultation on the potential closure of the College Hall Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and seeks approval to commence closure of the facility.

**2. Recommendation**

That the Executive;

- 2.1. Notes the pre-consultation feedback and outcomes of the public consultation on the potential closure of College Hall Pupil Referral Unit.
- 2.2. Subject to the DfE agreeing to revoke the Academy Order, agrees the closure of College Hall PRU following the public consultation, for the reasons summarised in paragraphs 5.40 – 5.44 of this report.

**3. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 3.1. The council's invitation to join the Department for Education's Safety Valve Intervention Programme in July 2023 led to a detailed review of all areas of expenditure within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), which includes the High Needs Block. This was undertaken by the council working together with local headteachers and other stakeholders including parent and carer representatives. The potential closure of College Hall PRU emerged as an option for the council to consider in Autumn 2023, supported by various factors including an inadequate Ofsted inspection in July 2023 and consensus among headteachers and other stakeholders that it was no longer fit for purpose. From a financial perspective, the current operating model for the PRU is no longer sustainable. In December 2023 College Hall's Management Committee considered the likely implications of a material reduction in its funding due to lower pupil admissions and concluded that this would make the facility unviable.
- 3.2. Should the Executive agree to the closure of College Hall PRU, the site will be disposed of, and the proceeds earmarked to help fund new provision within the borough for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities. These facilities include a new special school for secondary pupils with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs and two new secondary special resource provisions for pupils with autism and communication and interaction needs (CiN).

**4. Alternative Options Considered**

- 4.1. The council's ability to consult on potential closure of the PRU is dependent on the Department for Education (DfE) decision to revoke the academy order which was placed on College Hall following its Ofsted inspection. A request to the DfE to take this action has been submitted by the College Hall Management Committee. If this request is not granted, Bracknell Forest Council will reduce the number of funded places and top up additions to reflect the level of provision required to support

children and young people under Section 19 duty i.e., for those children and young people who have been permanently excluded.

## **5. Supporting Information**

- 5.1. Bracknell Forest Council was invited to participate in the Safety Valve Intervention Programme in July 2023 due to its large and rising High Needs Block (HNB) deficit (the funding used to support children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)).
- 5.2. This situation has primarily been caused by a large growth in pupils with Education, Health, and Care plans (EHCPs), mirroring the situation across the country, with the local implication of placing significant reliance on expensive provision outside the borough. This is necessary since the council's highly regarded Kennel Lane Special School has been at full capacity for many years. There is a planning restriction which prevents the school expanding numbers and it is moving towards academy status in 2024. While several specialist resource provisions (SRPs) have been created in local schools, they are insufficient to cope with the scale and complexity of need being experienced.
- 5.3. It has therefore been recognised that a key element of the council's strategy to address the needs of local pupils and young people will be to create more local capacity, and the council is investing significantly in new provision. As such, it is important to consider the proposal to close College Hall PRU in the context of the wider plans to develop and improve specialist provision within the borough. The intention is to ensure that the overall SEND system best meets the needs of pupils and schools and identify areas where current expenditure is not felt to demonstrate value for money. The potential closure of College Hall PRU emerged through workshop sessions as a key element in this broader strategy to improve outcomes for pupils while at the same time reducing costs over time.
- 5.4. The council's bid for a new school for pupils with autism was approved by the DfE earlier in 2023 and is planned to open in September 2026.
- 5.5. At its meeting on 10 January 2024, full Council agreed capital funding of £13m to fund delivery of a new SEMH school in the borough. A site has been identified for the new school and a feasibility study has been carried out. Should College Hall PRU be closed, the income generated by the sale of the site would be earmarked to help meet the capital cost of the new SEMH school. The new SEMH school is planned to open in September 2025 for an initial 8 students working towards 50 places when full.
- 5.6. Work is also underway to build two new secondary specialist resource provisions (SRPs) in the borough, the first of which is due to open in September 2024.

## **Ofsted inspection findings**

- 5.7. The Ofsted inspection conducted in July 2023 rated College Hall PRU as inadequate, citing poor outcomes for children and young people. The inspection report highlights serious concerns regarding the quality of provision, indicating a clear need for intervention to address the identified shortcomings.

## **Financial non-viability**

- 5.8. Until 2022-23, College Hall's financial position was stable and had resulted in a surplus budget in each of the 3 years from 2019-20 to 2021-22 of between £0.023m and £0.047m. However, 2022-23 saw challenges in terms of management capacity which significantly impacted on financial performance with the year-end accounts over spending by £0.016m. For 2023-24 a new operating model was agreed with the Management Committee with additional growth funds of £0.332m added to the budget. However, latest forecasts indicate a further potential over spending against this increased budget of £0.150m.
- 5.9. Funding is currently allocated at £1.554m for 56 funded places, which adding the forecast overspending for 2023-24 equates to circa £31k per place. With the current number on roll being below 30, with half dual registered, maintaining the existing funding level would equate to around £57k per pupil which is substantially above expected levels and not a sustainable funding position.
- 5.10. College Hall abides with the Department for Education's revised guidance on managed moves, in that the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) does not accommodate such transfers; however, it has historically accepted dual registered intervention placements. These often became open-ended placements, and children did not return to their main rolled school. It is anticipated that there will be a decrease in demand for places as the scrutiny of this practice has increased and specific timeframes are established in a service level agreement for intervention placements of 12 weeks maximum where capacity allows. Consequently, a new funding model will be implemented, reducing planned places to 29 with effect from 1 April 2024, with a further reduction to 11 planned places and associated funding adjustments scheduled for 1 September 2024. This shift aligns with the funding approach of special schools, transitioning to a per-pupil basis. Therefore, future budget allocations would be more closely linked to expected pupil numbers and would likely reduce to closer to an annual allocation of £0.850m if funded for around 30 places, reducing to around £0.420m if funded at 15 places. An allocation for pupil numbers expected in 2024-25 of 30 from April 2024, reducing to 11 from September would amount to around £0.520m.
- 5.11. Based on the new funding model, College Hall PRU is no longer financially viable, as confirmed by the management committee's decision to request the Department for Education (DfE) to revoke the academy order in place. This decision reflects the acknowledgment that the financial resources allocated to College Hall could be better utilised to enhance the overall educational landscape in the local area.

## **Stakeholder engagement and pre-publication consultation**

- 5.12. Workshops conducted with headteachers in Autumn 2023 to co-produce the council's Safety Valve proposals, revealed unanimous agreement that College Hall PRU is no longer fit for purpose given the current needs of children and young people in the borough. The consensus among education professionals emphasises the need for a more effective alternative to better meet the needs of local children and young people with SEND.
- 5.13. During the development of the council's Safety Valve proposal, regular engagement sessions were held with headteachers, chairs of governors and the Parent Carer Forum, which demonstrated widespread support for consulting on the closure of College Hall PRU. Furthermore, a letter from all secondary headteachers supporting the closure and advocating for the opening of a new Social, Emotional,

and Mental Health (SEMH) school reinforces the consensus among educational stakeholders (Appendix A).

- 5.14. The plan to consult on the closure of College Hall PRU formed part of the council's Safety Valve proposals which were submitted to the Department for Education on 12 January 2024 with unanimous support from full Council at its 10 January meeting. These proposals include financial savings that could be achieved from alternative provision for pupils that would ordinarily have been placed at the PRU, emphasising the strategic importance of redirecting resources to more effective and sustainable educational initiatives.
- 5.15. At the College Hall management meeting on 12 December 2023, the College Hall management committee agreed unanimously that the provision was no longer financially viable, given the proposed new funding model. As such, the management committee wrote to the DfE to request revocation of the academy order to enable the local authority to consult on its possible closure.
- 5.16. As part of the pre-publication consultation phase, a meeting was held with College Hall staff in December 2023 advising them that the potential closure of College Hall was one of the options that had emerged through stakeholder engagement sessions during the development of the council's Safety Valve programme. A letter was subsequently sent to staff on 31 January 2024 outlining the current and expected future financial position of the school and the management committee's decision to write to the DfE to request the revocation of the academy order due to non-viability of the school. In this letter, staff were invited to submit consultation responses on how any potential changes would impact them. There were eleven written responses submitted by College Hall staff members.
- 5.17. The responses received during the pre-publication consultation period on the potential closure of College Hall PRU underscored several concerns raised by staff regarding the school's financial challenges and the factors contributing to its poor Ofsted rating. Staff members highlighted various reasons for the school's budgetary overspending in recent years, along with potential factors influencing its inadequate inspection outcome. While the council acknowledges many of these concerns, the responses predominantly concentrated on past issues, overlooking the proposed changes to the funding model and the anticipated decrease in demand following the introduction of more robust oversight and management of dual-registered intervention placements. It is essential to note that the decision by the management committee to consider closure was primarily driven by the recognition of future financial viability issues, rather than focusing on historical budgetary shortcomings or exceptional time-limited costs that have been incurred.
- 5.18. On 31 January 2024, a joint letter from the headteacher of College Hall and the council's Assistant Director for Education and Learning, was sent to the parents and carers of children and young people who are currently attending College Hall PRU. The letter outlined the financial position of the school and advised that the management committee was in agreement with the local authority to communicate with parents and carers as part of the pre-publication consultation period. Families were advised they had the opportunity to provide feedback on how the possible closure of College Hall would impact them and their children, either in writing or at a face-to-face meeting. No responses were received from family members during the pre-publication consultation period.

- 5.19. The Executive decision to proceed with the formal consultation ensured that all interested parties had the opportunity to have their say on the proposal through the pre-publication consultation stage.

### **Public consultation**

- 5.20. A public consultation on the proposal to close College Hall PRU was held between 19 February 2024 and 24 April 2024. Responses to the consultation could be submitted via the council's online consultation portal, via paper copies of the proposal and questions at Time Square and College Hall PRU, or by attending one of the two public consultation meetings.
- 5.21. A total of 67 responses were submitted via the online portal and no paper copies were received. Of these responses, 31 agreed with the proposal to close College Hall, 3 neither agreed nor disagreed and 34 disagreed. There were also 5 duplicate submissions.
- 5.22. Of the 31 respondents who **agreed** with the proposal to close College Hall, 13 were from school representatives, 9 were from local residents, 2 were from staff members at College Hall, 2 were from previous staff members at College Hall, 2 were from parents/carers, 1 was from a student, 1 was from a councillor and 1 preferred not to say.
- 5.23. The formal public consultation reinforced the position expressed by school leaders during the pre-publication consultation phase. All but two of the responses received from school representatives supported the proposal to close College Hall PRU.
- 5.24. Responses in agreement to close College Hall PRU, support the points laid out in the proposal, stating it is no longer fit for purpose nor provide value for money. Comments can be summarised into the following key themes:
- a) College Hall PRU is no longer financially viable, and funds should be redirected to more effective services.
  - b) There is a low quality of provision and as outlined in the poor OFSTED rating it is has not effectively supporting students to achieve good outcomes.
  - c) Whilst College Hall is not suitable, there is still a need for alternative provision to support the students. Suitable and high-quality alternatives need to be put in place.
- 5.25. Of the 34 respondents who **disagreed** with the proposal to close College Hall, 2 were from school representatives, 20 were from local residents, 4 were from staff members at College Hall, 2 were from parents/carers, 1 was from a student, 3 preferred not to say and 2 identified as "other".
- 5.26. The comments from those who disagreed with the proposal can be summarised into the following key themes:
- a) The PRU shouldn't be closed as there is a desperate need for more SEND provision in the borough.
  - b) There is a lack of suitable alternative provision available for students.
  - c) There will be no provision for children and young people who are permanently excluded and do not have an EHCP.
  - d) What will happen to the children who are currently attending College Hall PRU?

- 5.27. In response to point a) above, the council agrees that there is a need for additional specialist SEND provision in the borough. As outlined in points 5.3 to 5.6 of this report, the council has started work on developing/building four new provisions in the borough, the first of which is due to open in September 2024. College Hall PRU has previously been funded at a flat amount to accommodate 56 places, regardless of the number of pupils on roll. As numbers on roll at College Hall PRU have fallen, this is no longer considered by the council to be a good use of public money. As such, a new funding model has been implemented based on actual and expected pupil numbers, which aligns with the funding model for special schools. This will mean the council is no longer funding empty places, freeing up this funding to support other children and young people with SEND. This change in funding approach led the College Hall management committee to determine that College Hall PRU is no longer financially viable.
- 5.28. In response to point b) above, the local authority is committed to ensuring all students have access to appropriate support and is actively working with established and new alternative provision providers to develop options that address the specific needs identified. This process, sometimes called "shaping the market," aims to create a wider range of high-quality placements. To ensure quality, a robust care governance board is in place, along with dedicated local authority officers who rigorously monitor the providers. This two-pronged approach helps identify areas for improvement and maintain high standards across all alternative provision options.
- 5.29. In response to point c) above, the Fair Access Protocol (FAP) plays a crucial role in supporting the return of permanently excluded students to an appropriate educational setting. This could include a mainstream school, a specialist resource provision, or a special school. The panel who administers the FAP works to ensure these students have the appropriate support in place for a successful reintegration into education. The minimum timeframe for reintegration via the FAP will be 30 days (see 30-day reintegration plan below). A number of pupils have successfully returned to mainstream schools this academic year. In some cases, this involved additional support through alternative providers working alongside the mainstream school. This demonstrates that with the right approach, reintegration into education is achievable for the vast majority of pupils. However, where children and young people cannot be reintegrated within the timeframe above, an individualised approach will be adopted. Education Otherwise Than at School provision (EOTAS) will be put in place, which could consist of online tuition, use of AV1 robots, 1:1 tuition, alternative providers. This will offer greater value for money, and a more individualised approach, compared to the current 56-place provision at College Hall.
- 5.30. In response to point d) above, there are 26 children and young people currently on roll at College Hall. In recognition of the potential impact of the closure of College Hall on the children and young people currently placed there, the council is proactively taking steps to ensure a smooth transition and to minimise any potential disadvantages. The council recognises that it is essential that every effort is made to safeguard the educational needs and well-being of these individuals.
- 5.31. For the students who are currently in Year 11 at College Hall, there will be no disruption to their education. They will complete their secondary education at College Hall and the council will work with them to develop personalised plans for post-16 education, whether it be vocational training, further education, or employment, to facilitate a seamless transition into the next phase of their lives.
- 5.32. The council will continue to work with College Hall staff to reintegrate children and young people back into appropriate educational provision. There are several young

people with an EHCP currently attending College Hall. The council is currently having conversations with the parents and carers regarding parental preferences and is consulting with appropriate providers. The expectation is that these students will be accessing appropriate provision by beginning of the new academic year.

- 5.33. This will leave under five children and young people without an EHCP on roll at College Hall, some of whom will shortly be in the process of reintegrating into appropriate educational provision. Recognising the diverse needs of any children and young people without EHCPs, the council intends to take an individualised approach. This includes the commissioning of bespoke packages of education. In all cases, the process will involve collaboration with the young people, their parents and carers, and the staff currently working with them at College Hall. This personalised approach aims to address individual needs, ensuring a continuation of education and support tailored to each student's requirements.
- 5.34. By implementing these measures, the council is committed to mitigating any potential disadvantages resulting from the closure of College Hall PRU and ensuring that every child and young person affected receives the support needed for a successful and positive educational journey.
- 5.35. Of the 3 respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal to close College Hall, 2 were local residents and 1 was the parent of a former student.
- 5.36. In addition to the online consultation responses, two public consultation meetings were held on 28 March 2024. A total of 17 people attended these public meetings, including 8 members of College Hall staff, 4 parents/carers, 3 students from College Hall PRU, 1 union representative, 1 ex-governor from College Hall PRU.
- 5.37. At the public meetings, the council's Assistant Director for Education and Learning gave a presentation outlining the reasons behind the proposal followed by an opportunity for questions and answers. Many of the themes that came up during this consultation meeting were aligned with the comments submitted via the online portal. There were staff from College Hall present at the public meetings who raised questions related to their own employment. These questions should be addressed at the redundancy consultation meetings. Additional points of discussion included:
  - e) Was the academisation of College Hall an option that could be considered?
- 5.38. In response to point e) above, the DfE placed an Academy Order on College Hall PRU following its inadequate Ofsted inspection in July 2023. In December 2023 the College Hall management committee wrote to the DfE advising them that the school was no longer financially viable and requesting they revoke the Academy Order. If the DfE decides not to revoke the Academy Order, then they will seek to identify an academy trust to run the school.

### **Alternative arrangements for current students**

- 5.39. The council is not required to operate a Pupil Referral Unit but recognises that, should College Hall be closed, it will need to ensure alternative arrangements are in place to meet its statutory duties under Section 19 Education Act 1996. This section requires LAs to make suitable arrangements for children of compulsory school age who, because of exclusion, illness, or other reasons, would not receive suitable education without such provision. S19 provision will be put in place by day 6 of the 30-Day Reintegration Plan outlined below (earlier where possible).

| Day     | Action                                | 30 Day Reintegration Plan   |
|---------|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1 - 5   | Assessment and Planning               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Assessment: Conduct a thorough assessment of the reasons for the student's exclusion, including academic, behavioural, and social factors.</li> <li>b) Utilise existing Local Authority Support Teams (SEMH &amp; Inclusion, Autism Outreach, Support for Learning, Childrens Social Care, Early Help and external professionals if necessary): to form a dedicated support team</li> <li>c) Call 'extraordinary' Fair Access Panel Meeting for Day 16</li> </ul> |
| 5       | Temporary Alternative Placement       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Provide Temporary Alternative Placement for student to receive additional support and intervention.</li> <li>b) Implement a specialised curriculum focused on core subjects and social-emotional development</li> </ul>   |
| 6 - 10  | Individualised Support Plan           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Develop an Individualised Support Plan (ISP): Create a tailored plan addressing the specific needs and challenges of the student.</li> <li>b) Set Clear Goals and Objectives: Clearly outline measurable goals and objectives for the student's academic and behavioural improvement.</li> </ul>  |
| 10      | Communicate with Parents/ Guardians   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Hold a Meeting: Arrange a meeting with the parents/guardians to discuss the ISP, goals, and expectations.</li> <li>b) Gain Parental Support: Ensure parents understand their role in supporting their child's reintegration and academic success.</li> </ul>  |
| 10 - 20 | Intensive Support                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Intervention Strategies: Implement targeted interventions, such as counselling, mentoring, and academic support.</li> <li>b) Regular Monitoring: Establish a system for monitoring the student's progress closely and making necessary adjustments to the ISP.</li> </ul>   |
| 16      | Fair Access Panel Meeting             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Hold FAP Meeting: identify school that could best meet the needs of the pupil based on parental preference, previous FAP admissions, current cohort etc.</li> </ul>   |
| 21 - 23 | Teacher Training and Awareness        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>b) Professional Development: Conduct workshops or briefing sessions for teachers to equip them with the skills and knowledge needed to support the reintegrated student.</li> <li>c) Raise Awareness: Foster a positive and supportive environment by raising awareness among staff and students about the reintegration process.</li> </ul>   |
| 24 - 27 | Regular Check-ins and Feedback        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Regular Check-ins: Schedule regular check-ins with the student, parents, and teachers to assess progress and address any concerns.</li> <li>b) Provide Feedback: Offer constructive feedback to the student and acknowledge improvements.</li> </ul>  |
| 28 - 30 | Reintegration into Mainstream Classes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Gradual Reintegration: Gradually reintegrate the student into mainstream classes, based in ISP and intelligence from alternative placement and professionals.</li> <li>b) Ongoing Support: Continue providing support within the mainstream setting, ensuring the student feels supported and included.</li> </ul>  |
| 30+     | Post-Reintegration Support            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Continued Monitoring: Maintain regular check-ins and monitoring even after the initial 30 days to ensure sustained success.</li> <li>b) Adjustments as Needed: Make necessary adjustments to the support plan based on ongoing assessments and feedback.</li> </ul>   |

5.40. As outlined in paragraph 5.29 above, where reintegration is not achievable within 30 days, alternative arrangements will be put in place.

## Conclusion

5.41. During the stage one pre-publication period, there was overwhelming support for the closure of College Hall PRU demonstrated. Through extensive consultations and engagement sessions, it has become evident that (except for College Hall staff) key stakeholders, including headteachers, chairs of governors and the Parent Carer Forum, unanimously agreed that the PRU is not the model of provision that Bracknell Forest requires to meet future needs.



- 5.42. The outcome of the public consultation demonstrates both support for, and disagreement with, the proposal to close College Hall. However, where there is disagreement, the proposed arrangements outlined in this report respond to the concerns raised.
- 5.43. The collective voice of all secondary headteachers in favour of closing College Hall and establishing a new SEMH school, along with other new provision, underscores the shared belief that the closure of College Hall is not only essential but also represents a critical step towards providing improved educational opportunities for children and young people in the community. The sector's resounding endorsement reflects a commitment to fostering positive educational outcomes and redirecting resources toward initiatives that are better aligned with the evolving needs of the student population.
- 5.44. The recommendation to close College Hall PRU will enable the council to address its identified inadequacies, improve outcomes for children and young people, and ensure the efficient use of financial resources within the education sector.
- 5.45. Appendix B outlines the statutory process for closing a maintained school and Appendix C outlines the timetable for consulting on the proposal to close College Hall PRU in line with this guidance. Any staffing implications will be managed in accordance with the Council's HR policies.

## **6 Consultation and Other Considerations**

### Legal advice

- 6.1 The relevant legal provisions (Section 19) are addressed within the body of this report. The Borough Solicitor's office has provided legal advice throughout the process and commented on the content of this report. Particularly on the requirements for consultation. The Council has followed the 4 Gunning Principles established in R V London Borough of Brent ex parte Gunning 1985 which was coincidentally about a school closure. Judge Sedley said that the consultation process must contain the following 4 components:
- i. When the consultation commences the proposals must still be at a formative stage so a final decision has not been made or pre-determined by those who will make the decision.
  - ii. There is sufficient information provided to allow consultees to intelligently consider the proposals. This means the consultation must be intelligible and accessible so as to allow an informed response by consultees.
  - iii. There is adequate time for consideration and response. This requires time for the consultees to be able to participate in the consultation process. There is no set time limit. In this case the timetable is expansive save in one respect we would usually give 4 weeks, where we have compressed the time to 3 weeks due to a half term holiday. However, those immediately affected by the consultation namely those children or young people who could still be on roll post September 2024 are only few in number and the Council is going to offer each of the parents of these children an opportunity to meet with the council face to face to discuss the proposals. This slight compression of time which includes half term was necessary if a proposal is to get to the Executive in May, in time for a decision this year.

- iv. Conscientious consideration must be given to the consultation responses before a decision is made. That process of consideration and finalising the decision can commence when the consultation closes.

#### Human Resources advice

- 6.2 These proposals have complex implications for the workforce. To close College Hall as of 31 August 2024 and for the timescales to be achieved for the redundancy procedures, it has been necessary to start the staffing redundancy procedures. Whilst this is not an ideal position, should the procedures need to be withdrawn this can be done at any stage. Meetings have been held with trade unions to discuss this position.

Beginning this process will enable the council to explore redeployment options across the education service. This includes discussing relevant school-based opportunities with headteachers.

#### Financial advice

- 6.5 Benchmarking activity that was undertaken on 2018 figures and adjusted to account for inflationary pressures and pay awards over a five-year period, indicate the equivalent average cost per pupil attending a PRU for 2023-24 is likely to be in the region of £22,800. The cost of an individual child on the reduced numbers at College Hall equates to approximately £57,000, which is significantly higher than the average cost as indicated by the benchmarking activity.

#### Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.5 The level of the deficit on the Dedicated Schools Grant due to rising costs in recent years of SEND services represents the most serious financial threat the Council faces. The invitation to Bracknell Forest from the Department for Education to participate in its Safety Valve Intervention Programme has provided the impetus to address this through the identification of mitigations that both bring spend in line with budget and maintain a focus on educational outcomes. The proposal to consult on the closure of College Hall Pupil Referral Unit has arisen through discussions with school leaders and stakeholders on the Council's response to Safety Valve.

#### Climate Change and Ecological Impacts

- 6.6 The recommendations in Section 2 above are expected to:

Reduce emissions of CO<sub>2</sub>.

This is because the council will be able to reduce the amount of home to school transport as the setting of College Hall being in a rural environment at the very edge of the borough on a busy main road which is unsafe to walk along means every child attending College Hall is in receipt of home to school transport. The new proposals should potentially significantly reduce the dependency on transportation.

#### Health & Wellbeing Considerations

- 6.7 The Council's recently approved SEND strategy includes a focus on providing additional school places within Bracknell Forest, which would significantly reduce travelling time for children who require specialist places whose needs cannot currently be met within the Borough. In most instances this will have a positive impact on the health and well-being of those pupils.

Contact for further information

Duane Chappell, Assistant Director Education and Learning - 01344 351720  
[Duane.chappell@bracknell-forest](mailto:Duane.chappell@bracknell-forest).

## **Appendix A – Supporting letter from secondary headteachers**

1 December 2023

**Confidential**

Grainne Siggins  
Executive Director: People

Dear Grainne

I hope this letter finds you well.

We are writing to express our support for the proposed closure of College Hall, the Council's Pupil Referral Unit, and the relocation of the current provision for Children and Young People (CYP) who are permanently excluded in Bracknell Forest to a Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) school, as this might better meet the needs of pupils currently attending the provision.

We believe that this strategic decision aligns with the paramount goal of ensuring that the outcomes for children are good or better and will ultimately prove to be a cost-effective measure for our community.

The closure of College Hall is a significant step towards enhancing the overall educational landscape in Bracknell Forest. The move to a SEMH school is well-founded, considering the unique needs of CYP who have been permanently excluded. SEMH schools are specifically equipped to provide tailored support for individuals facing social, emotional, and mental health challenges, creating an environment conducive to their academic and personal development.

Here are several reasons why this transition is essential for the betterment of outcomes for these children and why it represents value for money:

**Specialised Support:** SEMH schools are designed to offer specialised support for students dealing with emotional and behavioural difficulties. This targeted approach is more likely to result in positive outcomes for CYP who have faced challenges leading to permanent exclusion.

**Holistic Development:** The SEMH school setting allows for a more holistic approach to education, addressing not only academic needs but also focusing on social and emotional

development. This approach is crucial for creating well-rounded individuals capable of navigating the challenges they may face.

**Professional Collaboration:** The move to a SEMH school, facilitates collaboration between educators, mental health professionals, and support staff. This multidisciplinary approach ensures that the diverse needs of these students are met effectively, fostering a supportive and nurturing learning environment.

**Reduced Long-term Costs:** Investing in the early intervention and tailored support provided by SEMH schools can potentially reduce long-term costs associated with addressing issues that may arise from unmet social and emotional needs. This preventive strategy is a wise investment in the well-being and future success of these students.

**Enhanced Community Integration:** Placing the provision for permanently excluded CYP within a SEMH school aligns with a community-based approach to education. It facilitates better integration of these students into the local community, breaking down barriers and promoting inclusivity.

We understand that any decision involving the closure of an educational institution requires careful consideration. However, we believe that this proposed change is a positive step forward in providing the best possible outcomes for our children and ensuring that our resources are utilised efficiently.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. We trust that, with thoughtful consideration, the proposed closure and relocation will be seen as a strategic move towards a more inclusive and effective educational system in Bracknell Forest.

Signed

Secondary Headteachers Bracknell Forest:

Bhavin Tailor, Headteacher Brakenhale School  
Stuart Matthews, Headteacher Edgbarrow School  
Keith Grainger, Headteacher, Garth Hill College  
Katie Moore, Headteacher King's Academy Binfield  
Liz Cook, King's Academy Easthampstead Park  
Gareth Croxon, Headteacher Sandhurst School  
Timothy Griffith, Headteacher Ranelagh School

cc. Duane Chappell, Head of SEND and Specialist Support

## **Appendix B – statutory process for closing a maintained school**

A local authority proposing the closure of a maintained school must follow the DfE's statutory guidance.

Reasons for closing a maintained school include, but are not limited to, where:

- a) there are surplus places elsewhere in the local area which can accommodate displaced pupils and there is no predicted demand for the school in the medium to long term;
- b) it is to be amalgamated with another school;
- c) it has been judged inadequate by Ofsted and the Secretary of State has revoked the academy order;**
- d) it is no longer considered viable;**
- e) it is being replaced by a new school

### **Stage one: consultation**

It is a statutory requirement to consult any parties the proposer thinks appropriate before publishing proposals under section 15 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 – proposals to close a maintained school.

It is for the council to determine the nature and length of the pre-publication consultation. It is best practice for consultations to be carried out in term time to allow the maximum number of people to respond.

### **Stage two: publication**

Stage two is the statutory proposal and must contain the following information:

- Contact details – for the local authority publishing the proposals
- Implementation – the date on which it is proposed to close the school
- Reason for closure – statement explaining reasons why closure is considered necessary
- Pupil numbers and admissions – numbers for whom provision is currently made at the school
- Displaced pupils – evidence that there is sufficient capacity to accommodate displaced pupils
- Impact on the community – statement of impact and mitigating measures
- Special educational needs provision

- Travel – details of length and journeys to alternative provision

The proposal must stipulate how copies of the proposal can be obtained, that these can be objected to by anyone, the end date for representation and the address for representations. A brief notice containing the website address of the full proposal must be published in a local newspaper. The council must send a copy of the proposal to the Secretary of State and the governing body.

### **Stage three: representation**

The council should consult organisations, groups and individuals it feels to be appropriate during the representation period. The representation period starts on the date of publication of the statutory proposal and must last for a minimum of 4 weeks. During this period, any person or organisation can submit comments on the proposal, to the local authority, to be taken into account by the decision maker.

The decision maker will need to be satisfied that the proposer has had regard for the statutory process and must consider all the views submitted during the representation period, including all support for, objections to, and comments on the proposal.

### **Stage four: decision**

The local authority will be the decision maker on a school closure proposal (unless the closure proposal is 'related' to another proposal that is to be decided by the Schools Adjudicator, which is not the case for College Hall).

The Schools Adjudicator will be the decision maker in any case where the local authority does not make a decision within a period of two months of the end of the representation period.

The local authority, as decision maker, can reject the proposal or approve it, with or without modifications. The decision must be published within a week, along with reasons for the decision, and all relevant organisations notified.

### **Stage five: implementation**

There is no maximum limit on the time between the publication of a proposal and its proposed date of implementation.

### Appendix C – proposed timeline for consultation on closure of College Hall

| Date                                 | Activity   |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| November 2023 January 2024           | <b>Stage one</b> pre-publication consultation with College Hall management committee and staff, headteachers, chairs of governors, Parent Carer Forum representatives and councillors. |
| 14 December 2023                     | College Hall management committee agrees unanimously that provision is no longer financially viable and seeks revocation of academy order.   |
| 10 January 2024                      | Full Council unanimously endorses the council’s Safety Valve proposals   |
| 29 January 2024 to 9 February 2024   | <b>Stage one</b> pre-publication consultation for a period of 3 weeks with staff and parents and carers of current College Hall students (first two weeks before half term).           |
| 12 February to 16 February           | Half term  |
| 19 February 2024 to 23 February 2024 | <b>Stage one</b> pre-publication consultation for a period of 3 weeks (third week after half term)   |
| 11 March 2024                        | <b>Stage two</b> publication of statutory proposal   |
| 11 March 2024 to 29 March 2024       | <b>Stage three</b> representation for a period of 4 weeks (first three weeks before Easter holidays)   |
| 29 March to 12 April                 | Easter holidays  |
| 15 April 2024 to 24 April 2024       | <b>Stage three</b> representation for a period of 4 weeks (fourth week after Easter holidays)  |
| 29 April 2024                        | Consultation responses considered by Corporate Management Team   |
| w/c 29 April 2024                    | Consultation responses considered at Member briefings  |
| 7 May 2024                           | Consultation responses considered at Executive Briefing  |
| 21 May 2024                          | <b>Stage four</b> decision made by Executive   |

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| 27 May to 31 May | Half term   |
| 28 May 2024      | Call in period for Executive decision ends and decision can be published (note: this is during half term) |
| 23 July 2024     | Term ends   |