

Informal consultation on the Future for Maintained Nursery Schools in Croydon

Consultation period: 19 September 2023 to 17 October 2023

Questions and answers (Q & As)

Q1 - What is the consultation about?

To consider whether to reduce, in principle, the number of MNS within the borough via closure or amalgamation.

Q2 - What is the aim of the consultation?

The aim of the consultation is to tell you about the proposed change under consideration and to hear your views about how it may affect you, your family, or friends. The feedback gathered throughout the consultation will help inform decision on the proposed change to MNS provision in the future.

Q3 - What is the rationale for the proposal?

The proposal has been developed as the majority of its five MNS have a rising accrued deficit totalling £560,760 despite having a recovery plan to reduce ongoing costs and set a balanced budget. Without intervention, their cumulative financial debt will increase, putting their future at a greater risk.

Q4 - Have you taken into account the presumption against the closure of MNS?

Yes. In the statutory guidance for proposers and decision makers – Opening and closing maintained schools, January 2023, there is a presumption against the closure of nursery schools. However, this does not mean that a maintained nursery school will never close, but that the case for closure should be strong.

At this stage, the council is only thinking about making changes to the MNS and before deciding in principle whether and how to proceed, it is first seeking the views of partners / stakeholders, including parents/carers, staff, providers and other interested parties. If it decides to proceed, a legal process will be followed including formally consulting on specific proposals and making a final decision before any changes are made.

Q5 - Have you considered the potential impact of the Chancellor's Spring budget announcement, including the extension of the free childcare for working parents of two-year-olds from April 2024?

Currently we have diverse and sufficient early years provision. We are currently looking at data to get an indication of the impact of these changes in terms of supply and demand.

The measures announced by the Chancellor do not resolve the issue of the historical deficit.

Q6 - Where can I find information about the MNS finances?

The financial information for the nurseries is publicly accessible via [Schools Financial Benchmarking – GOV.UK \(schools-financial-benchmarking.service.gov.uk\)](https://schoolsfinancialbenchmarking.service.gov.uk)- external site

Q7 - Why don't the MNS have enough money?

Funding for MNS comes from central government. MNS have higher costs than other early years providers, as they are required to employ qualified teachers, Special Educational Needs Coordinator and a headteacher and meet the same standards and requirements as other schools. To address the higher costs faced by MNS, the Government provided supplementary funding per annum to local authorities in respect of MNS. However, the funding the MNS receives has not been sufficient to cover their costs. This has resulted in a cumulative budget deficit which has been increasing year on year for most of MNS This an issue which has existed for a number of years

Q8 - Are you thinking about making changes to save money?

Most of the MNS have a deficit budget and there is an urgent need to act as the current model is not financially sustainable.

The reason why the council is thinking about making changes to MNS is because doing nothing is not a viable option and runs the risk of increasing debt burdens and unmanaged school closures.

The proposal is about looking at the provision and considering how the council can make the best use of available resources.

Q9 - Why hasn't more been done to make the MNS financially viable?

Council Officers have been and will continue to work with and support the MNS with deficit budget to identify opportunities and/or alternative delivery models for savings/income to return to a balanced budget position. In addition, the Department for Education School Resource Management Advisers have offered free independent support to the relevant MNS to look at the underlying reasons for the deficit position and support the school to develop strategies to return the school to financial stability. However, the budgets for most of the MNS are still in deficit.

Q10 - Why not ask central government for more money?

A lot of lobbying government have been done over the years which has resulted in more funding. However, it is still not enough to make the current model of MNS sustainable and does not deal with the historical deficit.

Q11 - Have alternative options to closure or amalgamation been considered?

Yes, the council have considered other options for the future of its MNS, including Federate the Maintained Nursery Schools under one leadership model; and reprovision of one MNS into Early Years SEND setting. Although these options would bring benefits, these options have not been deemed feasible as they would not address the historical deficit.

Q12 - Can I make alternative suggestions for consideration?

Yes. We welcome your suggestions or new ideas on what other steps could be taken

to make MNS financially viable, including how to deal with the historical deficit as part of this consultation. But do nothing is not an option.

Q13- Who is being consulted?

We welcome views from anyone with an interest in or will be affected by the proposal, including parents/carers who use the service or may use it in the future, providers, and staff. The consultation is public and therefore open to anyone to respond.

Q14 - Will you be running consultation events and what format will these take?

Yes. We are planning to hold consultation events – face to face – and online. The events will be open to everyone. We will inform those with an interest in advance of the dates and locations of the events.

At each event there will be a short presentation about the rationale for the proposal. Attendees will be given the opportunity to ask questions, make comments / suggestions.

The virtual event will provide the same information and opportunity to ask questions, but through an online format.

Q15 - What is the closing date for the consultation?

The closing date for responding to consultation is **17 October 2023**.

Q16 - Do I need to find an alternative nursery provision for my child now?

No. There is no need to find an alternative nursery for your child now as this is an informal consultation on whether and, if so, how to reduce the number of MNS within the borough and there are no specific proposals about individual schools. . If there is a decision in principle to explore the proposal further, specific proposals will be published and will be the subject of another but this time statutory consultation process.

Q17 - How do I know that my views have been taken into consideration?

We would value your views on the proposal to reduce the MNS within the borough via closure or amalgamation; and any other feasible option/s that you may wish to suggest for the future sustainability of the MNS, and how to deal with the historical deficit. All feedback will form part of the consultation outcomes report to help with the decision-making process.

Any decision will be made based on feedback from the public consultation and all other relevant information will also be considered.

Q18- Will responses to the questionnaire be anonymised?

Yes. All responses are anonymous. Your comments / feedback may be included in the consultation outcomes report. Please let us know if you are responding on behalf of an organisation.

Q19 - What if most of the respondents to the consultation object to the proposed change?

The consultation is not a vote, it is about listening to what residents think about the proposal and the impact that any of the options would have on them and their family.

The analysis of the consultation responses is primarily a qualitative rather than a quantitative exercise. The value of this feedback will not be measured by the volume of responses, but rather against assessment criteria, for example, any provision must be deliverable in the funding provided by central government and take care of the deficit. All views will be taken into consideration as part of the decision-making process. This will also help inform what plans the council need to put in place to help lessen any negative impact that any final decision may have on our residents and partners.

Q20 - What happens at the end of the consultation?

At the end of this consultation period, all feedback will be collated and analysed. A consultation outcomes report will be produced which will be published on the council's website. This report will form part of a report to the Executive Mayor in Cabinet which will decide on whether to proceed to the next stage – identification of and consultation on the proposed MNS to be closed or amalgamated.

If the decision is to proceed to the next stage, a statutory notice will be published in the local newspaper which will start an additional four-week representation period which allows anyone who wishes to object to, supportive of, or make comments on the proposal MNS to be closed or amalgamated.

Q21 - Which of the MNS is proposed to be closed or amalgamated?

None of the five MNS have been identified for amalgamation or closure at this stage.

The council is only consulting on whether to reduce, in principle, the number of MNS via closure or amalgamation. If the proposal is agreed, a statutory notice will be published which will start another four-week representation period when the MNS proposed to be closed or amalgamated will be named.

At the end of the representation period the outcome will be considered by the Council – the Executive Mayor in Cabinet - which will make the final decision on the proposal within 2 months of the end of the representation period.

Q22 - Is it possible that one or more of the MNS will not be affected by the outcome of this consultation?

We are seeking views on the proposed change as well as suggestions of possible alternative solutions. It might be that suggestions come forward for one or more of the MNS that could make them viable. Do nothing is not an option.

Q23 - Has a date been set when the decision will be made on this proposal?

No. A decision on whether to explore the proposal further will not be made until after the consultation has concluded; responses analysed and an outcome report drafted and submitted to the Executive Mayor to decide on next steps. However, we are working towards December 2023 for the initial decision on the proposal. Subject to the Executive Mayor's approval, another period of consultation will take place in 2024.

Q24 - Who is the decision maker on the proposed change?

Croydon Council's Executive Mayor is responsible for deciding on the proposed change following the consultation period subject to consultation responses.

Q25 - How will I be informed about the decision?

A report will be available on the council's website once the responses have been analysed and a decision made.

Q26 - When will a final decision be made?

It is difficult to provide a time estimate for this at this stage as it will be subject to the Executive Mayor's in principle decision on whether to proceed to the next stage. However, if the decision is to undertake another period of consultation, a decision must be made within 2 months of the end of the consultation period, or the proposal must be referred to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator.

Q27 - How do I respond to the consultation?

We welcome your views on whether and, if so, how to reduce the number of Maintained Nursery Schools (MNS) within the borough via closure or amalgamation.

To help us analyse the responses please use the online system wherever possible. Visit: www.getinvolved.croydon.gov.uk/mns to submit your response.

If for exceptional reasons you are unable to use the online system, you can request a Word document version of the form and email or post it.

Or, if you require the consultation in a different format, please contact us:

By email: CHILD.CARE@croydon.gov.uk

By post: Croydon Council, School Place Planning Team, 2nd Floor Zone D, Bernard Weatherill House, 8 Mint Walk, Croydon CR0 1EA.

Enquiries

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of this consultation, you can contact the team at: CHILD.CARE@croydon.gov.uk

Q28 – What is the deadline to respond to the consultation?

The consultation closes at 11.59pm on 17 October 2023.

Thank you for providing your views on the proposal to reduce the number of MNS within the borough via closure or amalgamation.

All responses will be considered after the consultation ends.

Q29 – What do we mean by financially sustainable?

Where the Maintained Nursery Schools can provide a high quality service, balance their books and not incur debt.

We will continue to add to this thread, so keep checking back.