	Cabinet 5 February 2024
	Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People
	Lead Member Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools (Councillor Gwen Grahl)
Outcome of informal consultation on school organisation proposals for Leopold Primary School in Primary Planning Area 4	

Wards Affected:	Stonebridge & Roundwood
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Key
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
List of Appendices:	Three Appendix 1: Informal consultation document Appendix 2: Concerns and alternative proposals raised during informal consultation Appendix 3: Equalities Impact Assessment
Background Papers:	None
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1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides Cabinet with a summary of the informal consultation undertaken between 1 November 2023 and 13 December 2023 on the proposal

to implement a phased closure of the Gwenneth Rickus site of Leopold Primary School.

- 1.2 The report recommends a move to formal consultation, through publication of a statutory notice, on a phased closure of the provision on the Leopold Primary School Gwenneth Rickus site and a variation to the Published Admission Number of Leopold Primary School from 120 to 60 to take effect from the 2025/26 academic year. A phased closure of the provision would mean no admissions to the Reception cohort at the Gwenneth Rickus site from September 2025 with children in older year groups remaining on the site until the end of July 2027.

2.0 Recommendations

That Cabinet:

- 2.1 Approves a period of formal consultation, through publication of a statutory notice, on proposals to:
- Seek a variation to reduce Leopold Primary School's Published Admission Number (PAN) from 120 to 60 from September 2025;
 - Implement a phased closure of provision on the Gwenneth Rickus site of Leopold Primary School between September 2025 and the end of July 2027.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Cabinet Member Foreword:

- 3.1.1 Borough-wide projections indicate that demand for Reception school places will continue to fall over the next 5 years. Planning Area 4 has the greatest number and percentage of spare places of all the six Primary Planning Areas in Brent. Schools in the area have been managing the impact of falling rolls for several years with the support of the Local Authority. The proposal to reduce capacity at Leopold Primary School is aimed at ensuring the long-term sustainability of all schools in the area.
- 3.1.2 School place planning supports the Borough Plan Strategic Priority 4: The Best Start in Life, by ensuring there are sufficient school places for children and young people in Brent and supporting every child and young person to access high quality education in the borough.

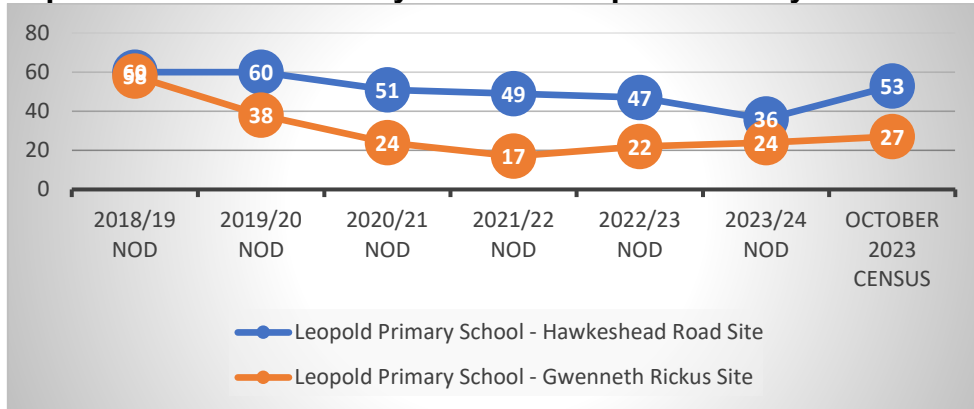
3.2 Background

- 3.2.1 Between 2012-2021 there was a 17% decrease of the birth rate in London, which is a reduction of 23,225 live births across the capital. As a result the GLA has predicted a 7.6% decrease in reception pupil numbers across London from 2022-23 to 2026-27 (from 96,424 pupils to 89,121 pupils over this period). This roughly equates to a decrease of 243 classes of children. The falling birth rate is compounded by Brexit and migration patterns following the pandemic. In

response, a number of local authorities across London have consulted on closing local primary school provision or are planning to do so. The impact on falling demand in Brent is reflected in the updated School Place Planning Strategy 2024-2028 approved by Cabinet in October 2023.

- 3.2.2 The number of children applying for primary school places in the borough has been reducing since a peak in 2017. The most recent population forecasts (underpinned by 2021 census data) at ward level indicate this trend will continue for the next few years. As detailed in the Brent School Place Planning Strategy 2024-28, (Primary Planning Area 4 which covers the wards of Roundwood, Stonebridge and Harlesden and Kensal Green has very high levels of surplus places. The latest projections indicate a further reduction in demand in this planning area.
- 3.2.3 The local authority has been working with schools to manage the detrimental impacts of falling demand. A series of reorganisation strategies are currently being deployed including PAN reductions, federations arrangements and a potential amalgamation.
- 3.2.4 Leopold Primary School operates as one school with one leadership team and governing body across two sites. Leopold Primary School is situated on Hawkshead Road within the Roundwood ward. The Gwenneth Rickus site of Leopold Primary School is situated on Brentfield Road within the Stonebridge ward. The Leopold Gwenneth Rickus site was opened in September 2013 in response to increasing demand for primary school places in Brent. The site was previously used by the borough as a school improvement centre running courses for education professionals. Currently children attending each of Leopold Primary School's two sites receive all of their education exclusively at that site. Each of Leopold Primary School's site can accommodate two forms of entry, but the Gwenneth Rickus site currently operates an informal cap of one form entry in Reception, Year One, Year Two and Year Four. The school achieves good outcomes for pupils at or above national averages at all key stages and was rated by Ofsted as 'Good' in June 2022.
- 3.2.5 For the purposes of admissions when applying for a place at Leopold Primary School, parents can make a preference for either the Hawkshead Road site or the Gwenneth Rickus site on Brentfield Road. As shown in graph 1 below, the number of children applying for and receiving an offer of a place at the Gwenneth Rickus site through Reception co-ordination has been at a consistently lower rate since 2019 than the number choosing the Hawkshead Road site.

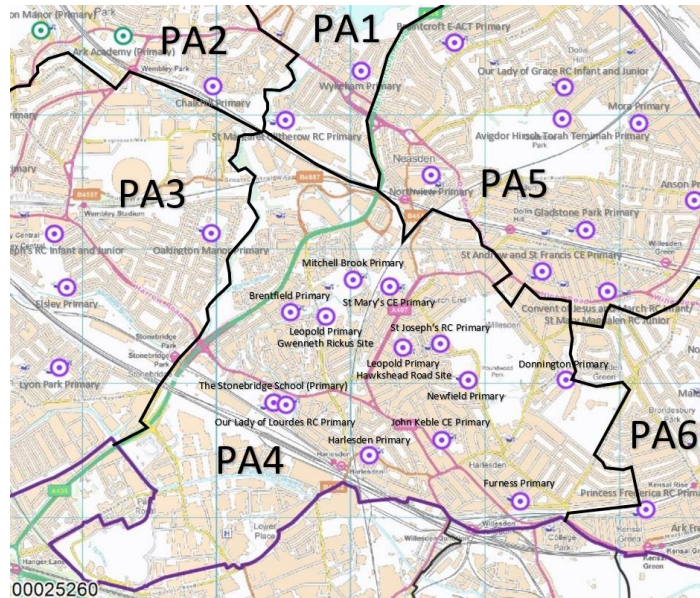
Graph 1: National Offer Day offers at Leopold Primary School



National Offer Day occurs from 16 April each year. October Census data also included for 2023/24

3.2.6 In the context of falling demand, there is no longer a need for Leopold Primary school to be split across two sites as there are sufficient spare places on both the Leopold Primary School Hawkshhead Road site and in other local schools to accommodate future demand for primary provision in the area. The Gwenneth Rickus Leopold site is less than one mile to seven other Primary schools, including Brentfield, Mitchell Brook and Stonebridge Primary Schools as seen in the map below.

Map 1 – Map of Primary Planning Area Four schools



3.2.7 Within this context, on 16 October 2023, Cabinet was informed of the intention to undertake informal consultation on the future provision on the Gwenneth Rickus site of Leopold Primary School in response to falling demand for places in the area.

3.3. The consultation process

- 3.3.1 A period of informal consultation was carried out between 1 November 2023 and 13 December 2023. An informal consultation document (Appendix 1) was made available in hard and electronic form that outlined proposals and relevant background information. Hard copies were made available in English, Arabic and Somali and were distributed to parents and carers with children at Leopold Primary School with an accompanying letter in the same three languages. The governing board and staff were also provided with the consultation document in electronic format.
- 3.3.2 The consultation and a survey about the proposals was included on the 'Have your say' consultation portal on the Brent Council website and a separate webpage was created on the Council's education webpages which could translate consultation information into multiple other languages.
- 3.3.3 Letters providing information about the consultation and how to attend public meetings were made available and distributed in English, Arabic, Gujarati, Pashto, Polish, Romanian, Somalian, Ukrainian and Urdu as key languages advised by the school. Leaflets with information about the consultation were sent to residents living nearby to both school sites. Both the letters and the leaflets gave details of how to access the website to translate the consultation document into other languages.
- 3.3.4 Eight consultation meetings were hosted by Local Authority Officers that provided parents/carers, staff, governors and the public the opportunity to comment on and ask questions about the proposals. Six meetings with the public were held over 14th and 15th November at both school sites, a staff meeting was held on 20th November at the Gwenneth Rickus site and a Governors meeting was held on 27th November on Zoom.
- 3.3.5 Stakeholders were invited to respond to the consultation using the reply form that was included with the consultation document. Submissions could be posted, submitted online or e-mailed to a dedicated e-mail address. Appendix 2 provides details of issues raised during the consultation process with officer comments.

3.4. Responses from the consultation process

- 3.4.1 A total of 173 written response forms were submitted to the local authority (one by e-mail and 172 via Brent Council's 'Have Your Say' online consultation portal). The local authority also received an electronic written response from the Chair of Governors of Leopold Primary School on behalf of the Governing Board.
- 3.4.2. Table 1 below details all of the consultation responses received.

Table 1: Summary of Response Forms

Views on proposal to cease provision on Gwenneth Rickus site	Number of responses received	Percentage of response overall
Agree with proposal	23	13.3%
Disagree with proposal	150	86.7%
Total responses	173	100.0%
Views on how a closure should happen	Number of responses received	Percentage of response overall
Phased closure	104	61.9%
At a fixed point in time	14	8.3%
A different approach	50	29.8%
Total responses	168	100%

3.4.3 The majority of responses received (86.7%) were opposed to the proposal to cease provision on the Gwenneth Rickus site. The majority of responses to a question about how the school should be closed if the closure was to proceed indicated support for a phased closure (61.9%). 29.8% of respondents suggested there should be a different approach, but they tended not to provide suggestions of alternative proposals choosing instead to provide information on why they disagreed with the closure proposal.

3.4.4 During the consultation period, a number of concerns were raised that can be grouped as follows:

- Why Leopold Primary School has been chosen as it is one of the better performing schools in the area and why not a school with fewer pupils / budget pressures and / or a lower Ofsted rating.
- Parents attending the Gwenneth Rickus site consider it to be a standalone school and have little connection to the Hawkshead Road site of the school.
- Travel to Hawkshead Road would be difficult and inconvenient for some parents, especially those with more than one child / large families.
- Families with siblings of children at the Gwenneth Rickus site are assuming their children will be able to attend the same school. There are several large families who will be impacted.
- Any decision to close the site will lead to instability of both pupil numbers and staffing. This will impact on the previous work of the leadership team to address budget issues.
- Concerns that the council is not supporting the local community in terms of regeneration and housing developments.

3.4.5 Appendix 2 details officers' responses to these concerns and if and how they can be mitigated with the closure of the Gwenneth Rickus site.

3.4.6 During the consultation period, some alternative suggestions and proposals were made (see Appendix 2). These suggested that the local authority should:

- Continue to monitor pupil numbers.
- Reduce all schools in Brent to one form entry.
- Cap the Pupil Admission Numbers (PANs) of all schools in Brent.
- Reduce the number of pupils of both Gwenneth Rickus and Hawkshead Road site and keep both open
- Keep Gwenneth Rickus site open and use the empty space to open a special school/ use for other educational purposes or sell parts of the building.
- Move all children from the Hawkshead Road site into the Gwenneth Rickus site.
- Close/amalgamate with another school on both of the Leopold Primary sites.

3.4.7 During the public consultation meetings, it was made clear by parents to officers that Leopold Primary School was a school which operated from two sites with common leadership and governance. However, it was also made clear that parents view each site as a separate school serving its own community.

3.5. Proposal

3.5.1. Having taken the informal consultation into account the intention is to proceed with the next stage of the statutory process to close the Gwenneth Rickus site. Officers do not consider there is sufficient evidence to indicate that one of the alternative proposals suggested during the consultation, as set out in paragraph 3.4.6 and in Appendix 2, should be pursued. The informal consultation has highlighted a number of concerns from parents, carers and governors as set out in paragraph 3.4.4 and in detail in Appendix 2. The Local Authority remains of the view that the proposal is required to address the level of spare places in the local area. While concerns raised by parents would need to be taken into consideration if the proposal was implemented, officers are of the view that the Council should move to consult formally on the proposal to cease provision on the Gwenneth Rickus site of Leopold Primary School.

3.5.2. The Local Authority is seeking to implement a phased closure of the Gwenneth Rickus site of Leopold Primary School by

- a) Proposing a variation to reduce Leopold Primary School's Published Admission Number (PAN) from 120 to 60 from September 2025;
- b) Closing the site for educational provision no later than the end of July 2027

3.5.3. In order to reduce the Published Admission Number for Leopold Primary School it is necessary to propose a variation of the Brent Community School Admission Arrangements 2025/26. Approval must be sought from the Schools Adjudicator and appropriate bodies notified.

3.5.4. Following the reduction of the PAN, no further co-ordinated Reception admissions will be made at the Gwenneth Rickus site. Any children offered a reception place at Leopold Primary School through co-ordination would only be admitted onto the Hawkshead Road site. There would be no barrier to parents

making in-year applications for their children to attend all other year groups at the Gwenneth Rickus site. However, it is anticipated the number of in-year applications would reduce as a result of the forthcoming closure.

3.5.5. Table 2 shows the number of children on roll in 2023/24 moving through each of the year groups until the children currently in reception finish Year 6 on the Gwenneth Rickus site. This table assumes there is a 10% reduction in on-roll numbers each year as some parents may choose to move their children due to the closure proposal. If this reduction does not materialise then by 2027/28 there could be 110 pupils on the Gwenneth Rickus site.

3.5.6 Two closure options were considered - a phased closure and closure at a fixed point in time. Officers are proposing a phased closure with provision ceasing at the end of the academic year 2026/2027, when there is estimated to be between 75 and 110 pupils across year groups 3-6 who would need to move to the Hawkshead Road site to complete their education or an alternative school, if this is what parents would prefer. This would allow all pupils attending Gwenneth Rickus site in 2024/25 to complete their current key stage on the site. An alternative would be to keep the site open until September 2028 when there is estimated to be between 44 and 65 pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6 on the Gwenneth Rickus site at this point in time. The local authority is concerned that keeping the school site open beyond September 2027 would create financial pressure for the school and difficulties in staff management.

Table 2: Number of children on roll in 2023/24 if all completed their education on the Gwenneth Rickus site.

Year	Rec	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Total
2023/24	27	26	37	28	42	35	54	249
2024/25	20*	24	23	33	25	38	32	196
2025/26	-	18	22	21	30	23	34	148
2026/27	-	-	16	20	19	27	20	102
2027/28	-	-	-	15	18	17	24	74
2028/29	-	-	-	-	13	16	15	44
2029/30	-	-	-	-	-	12	14	26
2030/31	-	-	-	-	-	-	11	11

**estimate of reception admissions Assumes a 10% reduction in on-roll numbers each year*

3.5.7 The children directly affected by this proposal are those currently in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2, as well as those children who will be admitted to the Gwenneth Rickus site in Reception in September 2024. The local authority would work with the leadership team of Leopold Primary School to develop plans for how these pupils could be accommodated on the Hawkshead Road site from September 2027. Currently there are vacancies in most year groups on the Hawkshead Road site (Table 3). The School Admissions Team would support any parents who want to make an application for an alternative school.

Table 3: Number of children currently on roll at the Hawkshead Road site.

Year	Rec	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Total
2023/24	53	48	42	55	50	42	40	330
2024/25	50	53	48	42	55	50	42	340
2025/26	47	50	53	48	42	55	50	345
2026/27	48	47	50	53	48	42	55	343
2027/28	48	48	47	50	53	48	42	336
2028/29	51	48	48	47	50	53	48	345
2029/30	53	51	48	48	47	50	53	350
2030/31	55	53	51	48	48	47	50	352
2031/32	58	55	53	51	48	48	47	360

3.5.8 Table 4 shows the combined projected numbers on roll at the Hawkshead Road site and the Gwenneth Rickus site from September 2027. Red text shows the year groups that would have a combined intake from both sites with 2027/28 and 2028/29 being the two academic years where there would be the most pressure on space.

Table 4: Projected numbers on roll - Hawkshead Road site from September 2027

Year	Rec	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Total
2027/28	48	48	47	65	71	65	66	410
2028/29	51	48	48	47	63	69	63	389
2029/30	53	51	48	48	47	62	67	376
2030/31	55	53	51	48	48	47	61	363
2031/32	58	55	53	51	48	48	47	360

4.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

- 4.1. An informal consultation was held from 1 November to 13 December 2023 which enabled staff, governors, parents, carers and local residents the opportunity to comment on and ask questions about the proposal to close the Gwenneth Rickus site of Leopold Primary School.
- 4.2. In advance of the informal consultation process, local ward members were briefed about school place planning issues in all planning areas including Planning Area 4. Officers also met members to update them on the consultation process.

5.0 Financial Considerations

- 5.1 School funding received via the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) is driven by pupil numbers, and vacant school places cause a financial pressure for schools as they will need to operate with reduced budgets. A small number of schools have applied for a licensed deficit and several schools in the primary phase remain at risk due to the knock-on effect of falling rolls in Brent and across

London. A licenced deficit enables a school to hold a deficit balance for a period of three years while implementing an agreed plan on how to return to a balanced position at the end of the three-year period. This approach becomes increasingly difficult as pupil numbers continue to fall leading schools to undertake staff restructures which have a financial cost arising from redundancies and will not be sustainable.

- 5.2 Leopold Primary school's main source of income is from the Dedicated Schools' Grant (DSG). The school reported a surplus reserves balance of £0.926m as at end of March 2023 and estimates to use half of its reserves by the end of the current financial year 2023/24, with almost all of the balance spent by March 2025/26 on goods and services including some planned capital works. The school undertook a restructure in 2022/23, to match staff numbers to pupil numbers due to continued falling rolls across the two sites and to ensure financial viability. The restructure cost absorbed by the school was £0.250m.
- 5.3 The school receives a per pupil funding rate of £6,205 and with approximately 634 pupils, this equates to £3.9m DSG funding, inclusive of £0.224m split site funding allocation. This compares to an average of £6k per primary pupil across the borough. The closure of the site will lead to a more efficient use of the DSG as spare places in other schools are utilised for new cohorts of children. There may be support required towards redundancy payments.
- 5.4 There would be general fund cost implications to maintain the Gwenneth Rickus site if it remained vacant, including utilities and any security provisions that officers felt were required. The costs and the budget required are yet to be confirmed but could be in the region of £20,000 per site per annum, depending on the level of resources involved to look after the site.

6.0 Legal Considerations

- 6.1 The authority has the power to consider and determine proposals published under Section 19 of The Education and Inspections Act 2006, pursuant to Section 21 (2) (f) of the Act and in accordance with Schedule 3 paragraph 3 of The School Organisation Regulations 2013.
- 6.2 Under sections 13 and 14 of The Education Act 1996, as amended by The Education and Inspections Act 2006, a local education authority has a general statutory duty to ensure that there are sufficient school places available to meet the needs of the population in its area. The local authority must promote high educational standards, ensure fair access to educational opportunity and promote the fulfilment of every child's educational potential. They must also ensure that there are sufficient schools in their area and promote diversity and increase parental choice. To discharge this duty, the LA has to undertake a planning function to ensure that the supply of school places balances the demand for them.
- 6.3 If the proposals which form the basis of the proposed formal consultation were eventually to be implemented, then this would have the potential effect of the need to consider redundancies for staff.

6.4 Although not part of the considerations for the site proposed to be closed, any change of use from Education use and/or disposal requires the permission from the Secretary of State for Education under Section 77 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 and Schedule 1 of the Academies Act.

7.0 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

7.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires the Local Authority when exercising its functions to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who have a protected characteristic and those who do not share that protected characteristic. The protected characteristics covered under the Act are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership (only in respect of eliminating unlawful discrimination) pregnancy and maternity, race (this includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality) religion or belief (this includes lack of belief) sex and sexual orientation. Due regard means giving relevant and proportionate consideration to the duty, in that whenever significant decisions are being made consideration must be given to the impact/affect that implementing a particular decision will have in relation to equality before making that decision. Brent Council also has a policy of considering Human Rights and socio-economic impact.

7.2 An Equality Analysis has been carried out on the proposals set out in this report and is attached as Appendix 3 to this report. It is not anticipated there will be any negative impact from these proposals on the basis of disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership (only in respect of eliminating unlawful discrimination) pregnancy and maternity, race (this includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality) religion or belief (this includes lack of belief) sex and sexual orientation.

7.3 Pupil-level data suggest that the intake at the Leopold Primary School Gwenneth Rickus site is similar to other local schools in terms of ethnic diversity, children on free school meals and the number of children with special needs and disabilities (SEND). This proposal could have a negative impact on individual children depending on their individual needs if they were required to move schools. However, based on current information other local schools would provide a suitable alternative and would support children to settle.

7.4 The top three ethnic groups attending Leopold Primary School match the top three ethnic groups across Primary Planning Area 4, although the proportion of each group is higher in Leopold Primary School. The proportion of children receiving benefits related Free School Meals at the school is 32.8% compared to 33.2% for the whole planning area. The proportion of children at Leopold Primary School with an EHCP is 1.5% compared to 3.7% across the whole planning area. The proportion of children at Leopold Primary School receiving SEN Support is 9.2% compared to 18.1% across the whole planning area.

8.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

- 8.1 School place planning and admissions policies aim to ensure that primary children can attend a local school and therefore can walk to school or take public transport. This approach underpins these proposals. All schools in Brent can access support to develop a sustainable travel plan.

9.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations

- 9.1 Implementation of the proposal to close the Leopold Primary School Gwenneth Rickus site would be likely to impact on the required staffing for Leopold Primary School, as it would lead to a reduction in overall staffing levels. This could therefore result in the possibility for the need to consider redundancies and/or relocation of staff to the Hawkshead Road site. The number of staff affected would depend on the nature of a phased closure. The school, supported by the Local Authority and the school's HR provider, would need to follow the Managing Change in Schools policy and Procedure including consultation with affected staff and trade unions to effect the changes in due course. The Local Authority would work with the governing boards of local schools to see if affected staff could find local re-employment.
- 9.2 Should a decision be made to close the Gwenneth Rickus site of Leopold Primary School, then the building and site would become surplus to requirements for mainstream primary school use. At that time the Council will review its priorities and potential future uses for the site, but the expectation is that the site is retained for educational use given the need for other forms of local educational provision, for example for children and young people with SEND or for children accessing alternative provision.

10.0 Communication Considerations

- 10.1 Formal consultation to change the provision is required under the statutory process for making 'prescribed alterations' to maintained schools (Statutory Guidance for Proposers and Decision-makers, Department for Education, January 2023). As the admission authority for the school, the local authority would lead this process. The statutory consultation process for significant changes to school provision has four stages - Stage 1 Publication of a Statutory Notice, Stage 2 Representation (formal consultation for a period of 4 weeks), Stage 3 Decision and Stage 4 Implementation.
- 10.2 Cabinet is asked to approve publication of a statutory notice to commence the formal consultation process to:
- vary Leopold Primary School's Published Admission Number (PAN) from 120 to 60 from September 2025.
 - implement a phased closure of provision on the Gwenneth Rickus site of Leopold Primary School with no new Reception cohorts from September 2025 and a final closure no later than the end of July 2027.

- 10.3 Subject to Cabinet approval, the statutory notice would be published in the Brent and Kilburn Times, on the Brent website, and notices would also be displayed on the school gate at both sites (Hawkshead Road and Brentfield Road). Stakeholders would be invited to submit written representations that set out their views and comments on the proposals.
- 10.4 Following the formal representation period, Cabinet is required to make a decision on this proposal within two months. The anticipated milestone dates following a decision by the Cabinet to approve the formal consultation to close the Gwenneth Rickus site of Leopold Primary School are set out in the timetable below.

Table 5: Statutory Process and Implementation Milestones

Date	Action
19 February 2024	Publication of statutory proposal notice and formal consultation
18 March 2024	Formal consultation closes
28 May 2024	Final decision by Cabinet*
1 July 2024	Submission of variation proposal the Schools Adjudicator to reduce school's PAN to 60 from September 2025
1 September 2025	Phased closure commences with no intakes into Reception
31 July 2027	Gwenneth Rickus site closes. All pupils on roll at the time of closure would move to the Hawkshead Road site or other schools in September 2027.

**The table assumes the May 2024 Cabinet still goes ahead despite elections*

Related document(s) for reference

Review of Primary School Places in Primary Planning Area 4 – Cabinet Report 16 October 202

Report sign off

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director Children and Young People