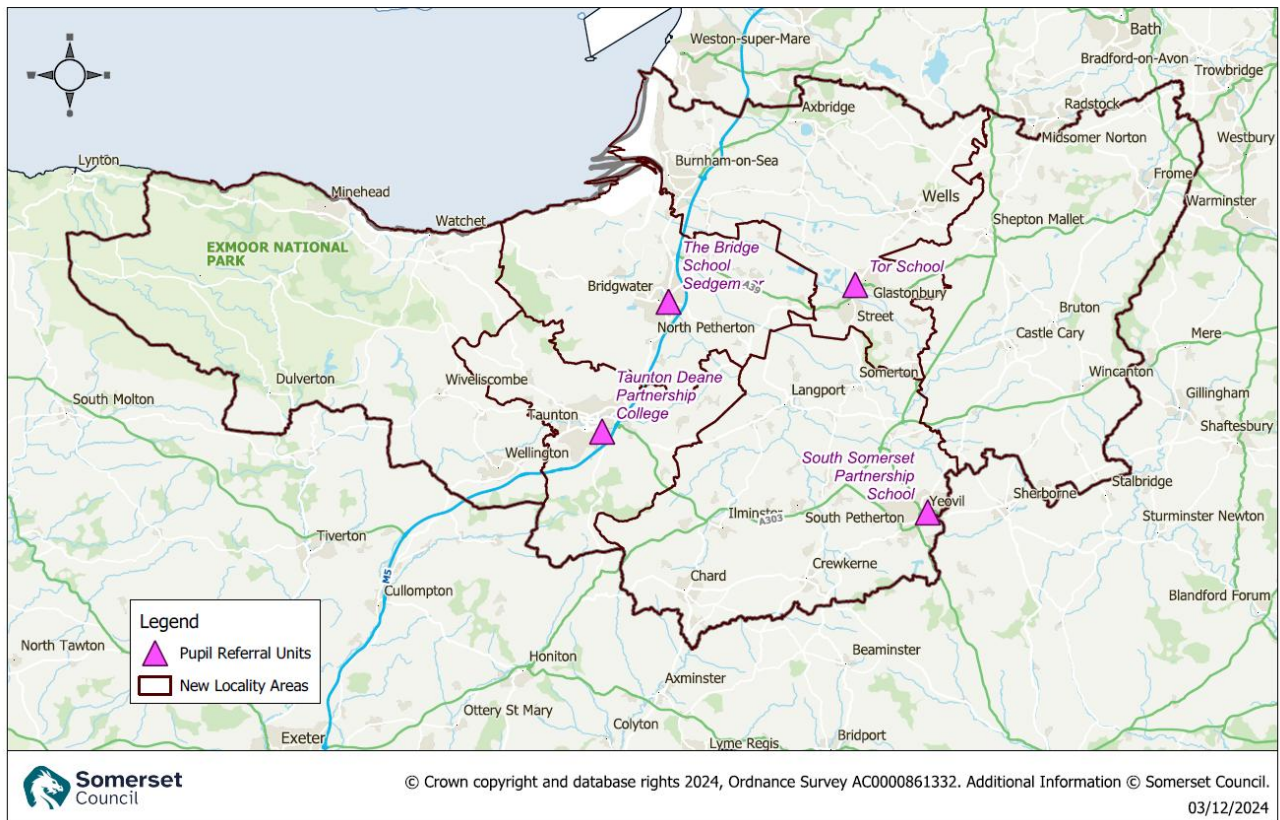


Statutory Consultation on Proposed Changes to the Pupil Referral Units in Somerset

This document outlines Somerset Council's proposed changes to the Pupil Referral Units in Somerset and sets out how members of the public and organisations can provide their views on the proposals.

Pupil Referral Units in Somerset



Background

Somerset currently operates four Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and two Behaviour Partnerships (BPs) all with varying levels of built provision, staff resource and funding.

This inevitably leads to an inconsistent service offer across the county and, in turn, inconsistent outcomes for the children and young people.

In order to address these inconsistencies and ensure there is an equitable offer available across the county, Somerset Council is considering consolidating the existing PRUs.

Somerset Council has produced an initial proposal, following design workshops with PRU leaders and BP representatives, and an informal consultation with staff teams. It now wishes to formally consult with members of the public and organisations on the proposed changes.

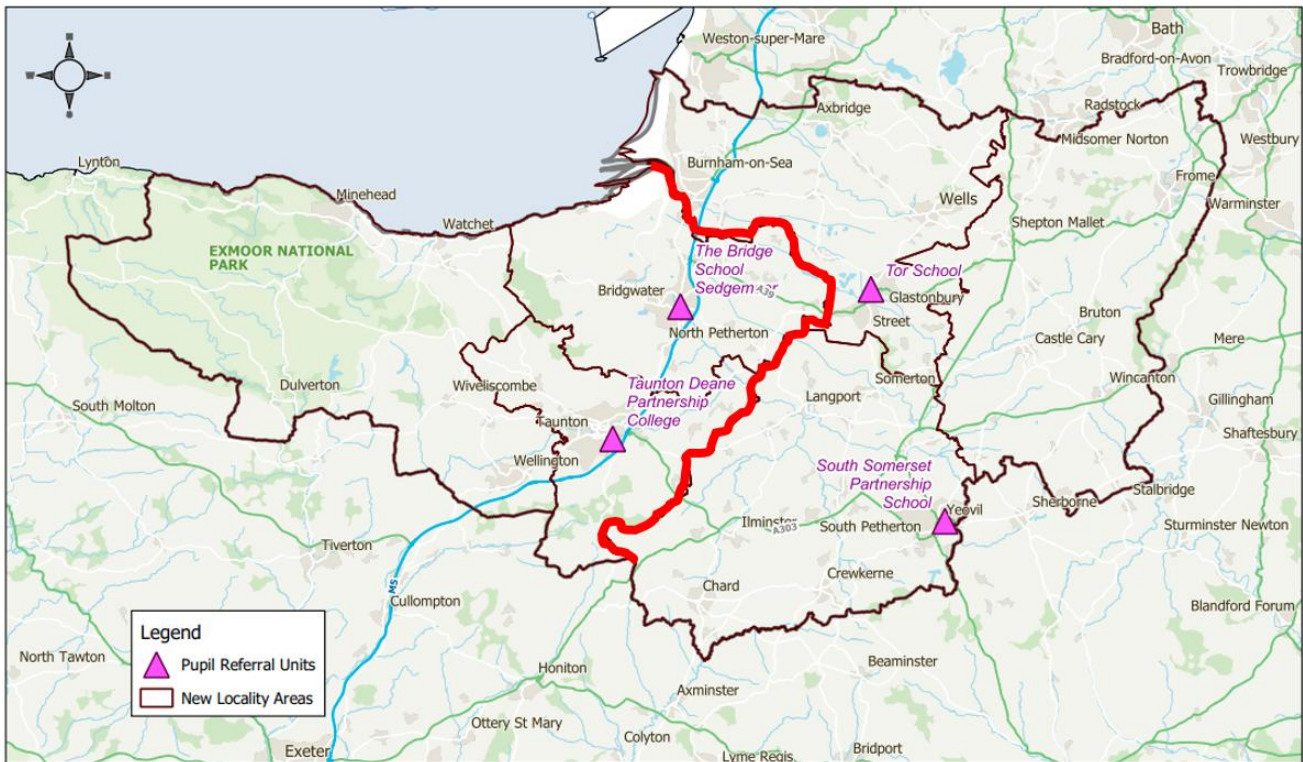
This paper is designed to set out the proposal, and explain how feedback from key stakeholders can be provided.

Somerset Council believes the following proposals will:

- Provide a greater level of consistency of provision across the County
- Address the historic lack of physical provision in the Frome and West Somerset
- Create opportunities for expansion of additional Locality Hubs across the County and deliver the Flexible Education model
- Enable 'Children Not In School' to be placed on a school roll when initially engaging with the Flexible Education model
- Streamline and improve governance and commissioning activities
- Improve outcomes for children and young people

The Proposal set out below is the first phase of a wider consolidation exercise relating to the Pupil Referral Units and Behaviour Partnerships.

The Proposal



Summary

Somerset Council proposes the amalgamation of the existing four PRUs into two PRUs, with each one responsible for either the east or west area, effective from 1st April 2026.

Although the process could be seen as mergers, technically, two of the PRUs would close, and the remaining two would be enlarged and renamed. Children will continue to attend, and staff will continue to work at their current school sites.

The two remaining PRUs would each have a Headteacher and would enter into a Partnership Agreement with each other which ensured consistency across the two PRUs and the provision they deliver across the County.

The Partnership Agreement would also set out how an Executive Headteacher function would be introduced to provide support to both Headteachers, monitor the effectiveness of the Partnership Agreement and lead on strategic engagement with the Local Authority and other partners.

This Executive Headteacher Function is considered a key element and directly supports the Council's aims of ensuring consistency of provision, offer and outcomes across the two remaining PRUs.

The Executive Headteacher would report directly to a small Strategic Board, made up of Chairs and Vice Chairs of the two PRU Management Committees, the Chair and Vice Chair of the body providing the Executive Headteacher function and a senior Local Authority officer.

Detailed Proposed Changes and Impact

South Somerset Partnership School would close, and Tor School would be expanded to include the sites from which South Somerset Partnership School currently operates.

Tor School would be renamed. Its Management Committee would be expanded to include members from South Somerset Partnership School's Management Committee. This change would take effect on 31st March 2026.

Taunton Deane Partnership College would close, and The Bridge School would be expanded to include the sites from which Taunton Deane Partnership College currently operates.

The Bridge School would be renamed. Its Management Committee would be expanded to include members from Taunton Deane Partnership College's Management Committee. This change would take effect on 31st March 2026.

The three substantive Headteachers currently in post in South Somerset Partnership School, Taunton Deane Partnership College and Tor School would be put at risk of redundancy but ringfenced for the two remaining Headteacher posts. The Bridge School does not currently have a substantive Headteacher.

The Executive Headteacher function would be secured from a third-party provider (Federation or Multi Academy Trust), which would also be party to the Partnership Agreement. The Partnership Agreement could also be extended to secure other support from the third-party provider, over time.

Financial Impact

There is minimal financial outlay associated with the statutory consultation process which is allowed by this decision. The cost is estimated to be around £800 and is associated with placing statutory notices in local papers.

The four PRUs have a combined annual operating budget of circa £7.654m in the 2025/26 financial year. The operating budget for 2024/25 for PRUs was £7.604m, with a final outturn figure of £7.898m, an overspend of £0.147m.

The operating budget is funded from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) High Needs Block. The DSG updated forecast following the 2024/25 financial outturn is a cumulative deficit of £96.796m by 31st March 2026, presenting a strategic financial risk to the Council's financial sustainability. Addressing the deficit is the focus of the forthcoming Deficit Management Plan which is required by the DfE and will be considered by the Executive in August 2025.

The Deficit Management Plan will review all areas of High Needs Block spend, including the operational budgets of the PRUs. While this Proposal is not designed to produce savings, the high-level consolidation it would facilitate is likely to present opportunities to reduce some operating costs in the future and the Deficit Management Plan will need to consider this.

The key financial impact from this Proposal, should it be implemented following a Key Decision, is the potential costs relating to the redundancy of one of the 3 substantive headteachers.

Estimates indicate that the maximum redundancy costs will be £0.028m (figures subject to Pay Award) depending on which member of staff is made redundant.

This cost will be met from the 2025/26 Schools Redundancy Budget which is funded via the Core Offer.

Timeline

The proposed timeline for the amalgamation of the PRUs and the recruitment of the Headteacher posts, is as follows:

Proposal is formalised and published	10 July 2025
Formal representation period	10 July to 12 September 2025
Feedback is considered	15 to 19 September 2025
Decision taken to implement proposal	10 October 2025

New Headteachers start in post	01 January 2026
Transition to new model (i.e. two new expanded PRUs)	01 January to 31 March 2026

New school model starts	01 April 2026
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Stakeholder Consultation

What feedback is being requested in the consultation?

Somerset Council wishes to know whether people would support the proposal, and whether stakeholders have any feedback they would wish to be considered.

Who can respond to this consultation?

Any member of the public or organisation is welcome to submit their comments.

Somerset Council would particularly wish to hear from stakeholders likely to be affected by the proposal, or anyone with an interest in education provision in the area.

Can I object to the proposal?

Yes, you can object or comment on the proposal.

What if I require additional information before providing my feedback?

Please contact us if you require any additional information before submitting your feedback. The e-mail to use is lewis.andrews@somerset.gov.uk

We will endeavour to respond promptly to any questions received.

How long does the consultation run? When is the deadline for submitting views?

The consultation period is from Thursday 10 July to Friday 12 September 2025.

The deadline is 5.00pm on Friday 12 September 2025. Any views received after this time may not be able to be taken into account.

How can I provide my views?

Please complete the questionnaire at the following website:

<https://sومersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/childrens-services/pupil-referral-unit-consolidation-consultation>

Will you respond to my feedback?

Individual queries received during the consultation period will receive an acknowledgment and/or response and will be considered with all other responses.

What will happen to my feedback?

All responses to this consultation will be collated and presented to the decision maker at the end of the consultation period for consideration.

What happens after the consultation?

The decision maker will need to consider all feedback, and decide whether or not to implement either, both or neither of the proposals. The timescale will be as follows:

Deadline for feedback	Friday 12 September 2025
Consideration of feedback	Monday 15 September to Friday 19 September 2025
Final decision is taken	Friday 10 October 2025

Who will take the decisions?

The decision will be taken by Cllr Heather Shearer in her capacity as Executive Lead Member for Children, Families and Education.

What will the Executive Lead Member decide?

For each proposal, there are four possible options available to the decision-maker.

The Lead Member can decide to:

- Reject the proposals
- Approve them without modification
- Approve them with some modifications, or
- Approve them subject to certain conditions being met.

How will the Lead Member arrive at a decision?

The Lead Member will need to balance the needs of local children and young people with any views received during the consultation process.

She will not simply take account of the numbers of people expressing a particular view, but will afford the greatest weight to responses from stakeholders likely to be most affected by the proposals.

How will the decision outcome be made available?

A copy of the consultation report will be appended to the eventual key decision paper in October 2025 which will be published online at <http://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/>.

We will also confirm the position on the schools' websites.

Please contact Somerset Council if you require any assistance accessing the decision. The e-mail to use is Lewis.Andrews@somerset.gov.uk

Thank you for considering our proposal, and we look forward to hearing your views.