

CABINET – 17 DECEMBER 2013

New Schools for Didcot: report on selection process for approved providers and approval of Preferred Option

Report by Director for Childrens' Services

Introduction

1. The Cabinet meeting of 18 September 2012 approved a process for the identification of sponsors for new academies to meet the needs of population growth such as the one at Great Western Park, Didcot.
2. The approved specification for Didcot sought providers for the following schools:
 - Primary School 1, to open September 2015, growing to 2 forms of entry.
 - Primary School 2, to open September 2017 subject to the progress of the housing development and population growth, growing to 2 forms of entry.
 - A co-educational 11-16 secondary school, to open September 2017 subject to the progress of the housing development and population growth, growing to approximately 1200 places, with 7 forms of entry in Key Stage 3 and a probable 6 forms of entry in Key Stage 4 (reflecting the expected movement of some Key Stage 4 students to the University Technical College (UTC)).
3. The specification did not impose restrictions on the nature of provider – e.g. faith organisations, or existing providers – given that the local consultation was inconclusive on these issues.
4. The specification invited interest from providers able and willing to work with the county council in enhancing Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision through integrated or co-located facilities, but did not specify these in detail. Potential providers were asked to identify where SEN provision could be included in their plans, given the site and financial constraints of the new schools.

Background

5. The agreed process has now completed the following stages:
 - i. Assess expressions of interest and then invite detailed bids from three or fewer providers to show clear plans of how they will contribute to the raising of education standards, add diversity of choice and which best fits the local requirements and meets the needs of those within groups offered specific protection under s149 Equality Act 2010.
 - ii. Assess bids against criteria and rank in order of preference. Agree a preferred option to be approved by Lead Member for Children, Education

and Families or Cabinet as appropriate. As this is the first time this process has been applied it has been brought to Cabinet.

6. 10 expressions of interest were received. These were assessed according to criteria derived from Department for Education (DfE) Academy / Free school presumption paper July 2013 and also from the council's specification document for Didcot previously agreed by Cabinet. A scoring system was used to assess the strongest applications. Initially a shortlist of 3 had been expected, however, as 4 providers all achieved a high score at this initial stage all 4 were taken through to the shortlist.

7. The four shortlisted providers were:

Barnfield Schole Academy Trust

Barnfield FE College sponsored 2 secondary schools in 2007 and set up the Academy Trust based in Hertfordshire. In the last 2 years it has added 5 primary schools.

It made an application for running all 3 schools or any combination thereof.

Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth

The Diocese currently has 77 schools across 13 Local Authorities including the Channel Islands.

It made an application to run the secondary and Primary School 2 as an all-through school.

GEMS Learning Trust

GEMS runs 46 schools. 30 of them are in the United Arab Emirates. 5 are independent schools in the South of England (2 primary phase and 3 all through).

It made an application to run both primary schools.

Glyn Learning Foundation (GLF schools)

Glyn was founded with an Ofsted rated outstanding secondary boys' school which converted in 2011 and now has 4 other primaries in Surrey. It has recently been chosen to sponsor 3 schools in Wokingham.

It made an application to run all 3 schools.

8. The 4 shortlisted providers were asked to complete a more detailed application form and make a presentation to a panel consisting of officers and the Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Families. The providers were again scored against specified criteria.
9. The 2 highest scoring providers were GLF and GEMS.
10. GLF. Their application was to provide all 3 schools in an all through 4-16 school on 3 sites. The panel considered that this would be an innovative approach and was convinced that the provider has the experience and expertise to deliver high quality places. The panel considered that this was

their preferred provider for the secondary and at least one of the primaries. The panel recognised that by having both primary schools this would provide a larger number of primary children with a seamless transition into secondary school. This approach would also have the advantage of providing consistency in the project management, as officers would be working with only one provider so there would be efficiencies in time and systems that would be advantageous to the council.

11. GEMS. This organisation specialises in primary provision and applied to provide both the primary schools. The panel considered that they provided a distinctive approach reflecting their international background. The panel recognised that recommending GEMS to provide one of the primary schools would provide a greater diversity of choice for the community of Didcot.
12. The panel agreed that two alternatives would meet the council's specification and provide a high degree of confidence that additional good or outstanding educational provision would be made in Didcot.

Alternative A

13. GLF to provide all 3 schools
Advantages: There are greater opportunities for efficiencies and economies of scale in having one provider for all 3 schools. The council will have only one point of contact for all three schools. There is likely to be greater flexibility in planning for the growth of the housing which will be influenced by factors outside the council's control including district council planning decisions. This is the preferred choice of the provider, although they indicated they would accept any combination of the schools. Their preferred alternative if only one primary was offered with the Secondary would be Primary School 1 rather than Primary School 2.

Disadvantages: Having one provider will limit the opportunity for diversity of choice at primary level. It will put maximum pressure on the provider's project management capacity.

Alternative B

14. GLF to provide the Secondary School and one of the primary schools.
GEMS to provide one of the primary schools.

Advantages: Providing greater diversity of choice at primary level within Didcot

Disadvantages: The council would have to liaise with two organisations. As GEMS' preferred option is for both schools, there is a risk they would not accept one school.

Financial and Staff Implications

15. There are none arising directly from this report. However once an approved sponsor (or sponsors) have been confirmed by the Secretary of State there will be a need for significant and on-going liaison with council officers.

RECOMMENDATION

16. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to select one of the following options to be submitted to the Secretary of State for Education for final agreement:**

Option 1

To recommend GLF Academy Trust to provide all three of the schools to be run as an all-through school which will make provision for pupils from 4 to 16 on three sites on the Great Western Park development

Option 2a

To recommend GLF Academy Trust to provide the Secondary school and Primary School 1 to be run as an all through 4-16 school.
To recommend GEMS Trust provides Primary School 2.

Option 2b

To recommend GLF Academy Trust to provide the Secondary School and Primary School 2 to be run as an all through 4-16 school.
To recommend GEMS Trust provides Primary School 1.

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Background papers: Cabinet paper – 21 May 2013

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