

Division(s): All Witney divisions

CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION & CULTURAL SERVICES – 14 NOVEMBER 2018

NEW PRIMARY SCHOOL FOR WEST WITNEY: REPORT ON SELECTION PROCESS FOR APPROVED PROVIDERS AND APPROVAL OF PREFERRED OPTION

Report by Director for Children's Services

Introduction

1. The Cabinet meeting of 4 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 west Witney. This was amended in the Cabinet meeting of 15th July 2014 to give the decision to the Cabinet member unless there are special circumstances. There are no special circumstances in this case.
2. The approved specification for west Witney sought providers for a new primary school. The school will be a 1.5 form entry 2-11 age range primary school, with an Admission Number of 45. The site area secured is sufficient should the school need to grow to 2 form entry.
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 includes 8 places reserved for specialist resourced provision for children with communication and interaction needs (autism and speech and language difficulties), physical or sensory needs.

Exempt Information

5. The Department for Education has instructed that any recommendation should not be made public until the Secretary of State has made a final decision on this matter.

Background

6. The agreed process has now completed the following stages:
 - a. Assess expressions of interest and then invite detailed bids from short-listed 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.

- b. Assess bids against criteria and rank in order of preference. Agree a preferred option to be approved by Lead Member responsible for Education.
7. Four expressions of interest were received. These were assessed according to criteria derived from the Department for Education (DfE) Free School Presumption advice February 2016 and also from the council's specification document for the new school at west Witney previously agreed by the Cabinet Member. A scoring system was used to assess the applications.
8. The applicants were:
 - a. **GLF Schools:** GLF consists of 30 schools across a number of local authorities; in Oxfordshire they currently operate in Didcot and Banbury, including William Morris Primary School and the recently opened Longford Park Primary School in Banbury, and The Aureus (secondary) School in Didcot, and Aureus Primary School which opened in September 2018.
 - b. **Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust:** Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust consists of 33 church and community primary schools, across Oxfordshire and Berkshire. In Witney, these include The Batt CE Primary School, The Blake CE Primary School, and St Mary's CE Infant School.
 - c. **River Learning Trust:** River Learning Trust consists of 17 primary and secondary schools across Oxfordshire, in Witney, Wheatley and Oxford amongst others. Schools include The Cherwell School, and in Witney, Tower Hill Primary School, Madley Brook Primary School and Witney Community Primary School. They have also been selected as the academy sponsor for the new secondary school in Oxford – The Swan School – which is due to open in September 2019.
 - d. **The Mill Academy:** The Mill Academy was established in October 2015 and currently consists of 3 schools in the Witney area; Henry Box (Secondary) School, Queen Emma's Primary School and Finstock CE Primary School.
9. The County Council's standard practice is to short-list up to three providers. Of the four providers that submitted expressions of interest, three were asked to complete a more detailed application form. The providers selected to provide detailed applications were GLF Schools, Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust and River Learning Trust, who in addition were asked to make a presentation to a panel consisting of officers and the Cabinet member for Education & Cultural Services. Both parts of the detailed application were then scored against specified criteria, taking into account information provided by the DfE about each's trust's current performance.

10. Based on the applications and presentations, a preferred sponsor has been identified. As the Department for Education requires that this be confidential until the Secretary of State has confirmed the approved sponsor, the preferred sponsor will be reported verbally at the meeting.

Financial and Staff Implications

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

RECOMMENDATION

12. **The Cabinet Member for Education & Cultural Services is RECOMMENDED to approve the preferred provider to be submitted to the Secretary of State for Education for final agreement.**

LUCY BUTLER

Director for Children's Services

Contact Officer: Barbara Chillman, Pupil Place Planning Manager (07554103418)

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