

CABINET 15 SEPTEMBER 2009

OXFORD SCHOOL – FEASIBILITY STUDY INTO REPLACING IT WITH AN ACADEMY

Report by Director for Children, Young People & Families

Introduction

1. Oxford School is a 'National Challenge' school because its headline GCSE results fall below the national minimum threshold of 30% of its students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades (including English & mathematics). County Council staff have been working closely with the school to improve standards and the forecasts for this year indicate the school will be closer to the 30% threshold than it was in 2008.
2. Where, with additional support, a 'National Challenge' school fails to demonstrate that it has the capacity to exceed sustainably the 30% threshold from 2011 onwards, Local Authorities are expected to consider more radical options, including replacing the school with an academy. Oxford School is characterised by a declining attainment profile of students entering Year 7 and has experienced difficulties in recruiting and retaining the best teachers. Therefore County Council is now actively considering the academy option.

Expression of Interest

3. The first stage in the possible replacement of a school by an academy is for a Local Authority to submit an 'Expression of Interest' (EoI) to the Department for Children, Schools & Families (DCSF). This sets out the key features of the proposal (age range, size, location etc. of the academy); details of the school it would replace (pupil attainment, numbers on roll, turnover, levels of socio-economic deprivation etc.); the sponsor(s) of the academy and potential educational partners (higher performing schools or other educational institutions such as colleges or universities); and an undertaking to comply with key national codes of practice, including admissions.
4. An EoI in respect of Oxford School was submitted to the DCSF in August 2009. A copy is attached as Annex 1. DCSF officials in the 'Operations Board' have considered the EoI and passed it to the Schools Minister for his approval. The outcome, if known, will be reported orally to the Cabinet meeting.
5. If the EoI receives ministerial approval the next stage will be to undertake a detailed 'Feasibility Study' which will look at the viability of the academy proposal, including the capital investment that would be needed to create appropriate modern accommodation. As part of the study the views of a wide range of stakeholders will be sought about the proposal to replace Oxford

School with an academy. Potential equality and diversity issues will be considered at this stage.

6. As Oxford City is experiencing increased demand for primary school places (forecast to continue for at least the next 6 years), consideration will be given to whether this can be addressed, in part, through the academy's age range being extended downwards to create a primary 'wing'.

Financial and Staff Implications

7. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report. If approval is given to undertake the 'Feasibility Study' this will require County Council staff to commit time to this. The activities to be undertaken as part of the study will involve staff from Children, Young People & Families (mainly Raising Achievement and School Organisation & Planning), Shared Services (Finance and Human Resources), Environment & Economy (Property Services) and the Corporate Core (Legal Services and Transformation). It would be appropriate to establish a project team.

RECOMMENDATION

8. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to:**
 - (a) **note the content of the Expression of Interest;**
 - (b) **agree to proceed with the 'Feasibility Study; and**
 - (c) **request officers to bring a further report on the outcomes of consultations undertaken as part of the 'Feasibility Study'.**

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Background papers: Nil

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