

BUILDING SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE – THE COUNTY SCHOOL (FENLAND LEARNING BASE) STAGE 0 SUBMISSION

To: Cabinet

Date: 13th December 2011

From: Executive Director: Children & Young People's Services

Electoral division(s): Chatteris, March East, March North, March West, Roman Bank and Peckover, Waldersey, Whittlesey North, Whittlesey South, Wisbech North, Wisbech South

Forward Plan ref: N/a *Key decision:* No

Purpose: To update Cabinet with progress in respect of the Stage 0 Submission for the County School (Fenland Learning Base)

To seek Cabinet endorsement for the timetable, resourcing, affordability and risk implications associated with progressing this project under the Building Schools for the Future programme

Recommendation: Cabinet is recommended to:

- a) Note recent developments with progressing the County School (Fenland Learning Base) project;
- b) Note the implications and principal risks set out in section 4 of this report; and
- c) Confirm the Authority's commitment to proceed with the County School (Fenland Learning Base) project by endorsing the timetable, resourcing and affordability implications set out in section 2 this report.

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme in Cambridgeshire includes £2.5m of Government funding to modernise the former Fenland Junction Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). The PRU's current premises in March are time-expired and not fit for purpose. The BSF Outline Business Case (OBC) proposed relocating the unit to a new, purpose-built facility in Wisbech or March.
- 1.2 The Fenland Junction PRU has since closed and re-opened on 1st September 2011 as part of The County School. The County School provides educational support for Key Stage 4 students from three Learning Bases in Fenland, Cambridge and Huntingdon offering 35, 45 and 40 places respectively.
- 1.3 The national BSF programme was stopped in July 2010 and Partnerships for Schools is due to be disbanded in March 2012. Written confirmation was received from Partnerships for Schools in February 2011 that 100% of the original funding (£2.5m) has been agreed for this project subject to 'Stage 0' and Final Business Case approval in due course.
- 1.4 On 27th September 2011 Cabinet agreed that part of a County Council owned site at Somers Road in Wisbech could be made available for the development of the County School (Fenland Learning Base).
- 1.5 This report updates Cabinet with recent developments in respect of the County School (Fenland Learning Base) project and seeks Cabinet endorsement for the timetable, resourcing, affordability and risk implications associated with progressing this project (Phase 2b) under the Building Schools for the Future programme.

2. MAIN ISSUES

Stage 0 Approval

- 2.1 Stage 0 is the process by which Partnerships for Schools formally confirms the funding for Non-Sample school projects. In order to secure the necessary funding commitment from Partnerships for Schools, the Local Authority is required to demonstrate, among other things, that:
 - the project is not materially different in scope from that approved at the Outline Business Case stage;
 - the project is affordable and the Authority is committed to resourcing the programme appropriately;
 - major risks have been considered and mitigated; and
 - (where appropriate) commitments are in place in respect of school contributions for Information & Communication Technology (ICT) and Facilities Management (FM) services.
- 2.2 A letter from the Authority's Accounting Officer¹ ("S151 Officer") is required to be submitted with the Stage 0 submission setting out the affordability and

¹ Corporate Director of Finance, Property and Performance

resourcing implications for the project in detail. The Stage 0 submission also requires evidence that the Authority's Cabinet is content to proceed with the project.

2.3 In summary:

- whilst there are inevitably cost pressures, the County School project is considered to be affordable on the basis of the expected capital grant available from Partnerships for Schools;
- the project scope is not materially different to the Outline Business Case which proposed a new build facility on a new site;
- arrangements for ICT and FM services are being put in place which are appropriate to the circumstances of the County School which operates out of three sites, two of which do not benefit from BSF investment;
- an appropriately experienced and resourced client side team is in place to manage this project through to completion;
- planning risk is being mitigated through local consultation and submission of a full planning application at the beginning of 2012, rather earlier in the Partnerships for Schools approval process than would typically be the case;
- a project plan is in place in which the new facility is planned to be open by September 2013.

3. ALIGNMENT WITH PRIORITIES AND WAYS OF WORKING

3.1 Supporting and protecting vulnerable people when they need it most

There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.2 Helping people live healthy and independent lives in their communities

There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.3 Developing the local economy for the benefit of all

The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- A currently vacant plot close to the centre of Wisbech would be developed for the provision of an important educational facility for the Fenland community

3.4 Ways of Working

The following bullet points set out implications identified by officers for working together:

- A Local Education Partnership joint venture company (Cambridgeshire Learning and Community Partnerships) has been established to deliver the BSF projects in Fenland. Building on the successful delivery of these projects to date, this vehicle has the potential to deliver other schools and non-schools capital projects in the future.

4. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Resource and Performance Implications

The following bullet points set out implications identified by officers:

- Funding for this project will not be subject to further indexation. Any significant delay in progressing this project would be an Authority risk in the sense that while costs can be expected to rise in the future, the funding would not.
- The Authority is looking to simplify the ICT and FM services associated with this contract in view of the fact that:
 - This is a relatively small project; and
 - These services need to integrate effectively with the other centres operated by the County School which are not subject to BSF investment
- Value for money and risk transfer have been tested through use of the BSF Local Education Partnership delivery vehicle, use of standard form contracts with agreed derogations where a better balance of risk and price can be achieved locally and benchmarking costs against the Phase 1 and Phase 2a projects and other local and national benchmarks.
- The standard form contracts on which the Cambridgeshire BSF contracts are based envisage some risk being retained by the Authority. These include risks associated with title, planning and compensation events in certain circumstances. Some contingency is being held against these risks.

4.2 Statutory, Risk and Legal Implications

The following bullet points set out details of significant risks identified by officers:

- Funding for the County School project could be withdrawn by Partnerships for Schools. The best way to mitigate this risk is to be in a position to confirm an appropriately consented site as soon as possible.
- The funding provided by Partnerships for Schools for the project may be insufficient to meet the costs of developing the facility on the Somers Road site. The design work completed to date suggests that this is a relatively low risk. Nevertheless, the quicker the project is progressed the further the funding will go.
- Planning permission may not be secured for the site. Development of the Somers Road site will be subject to the normal Town and Country Planning process. A robust planning application will need to be prepared to support development on this site.

4.3 Equality and Diversity Implications

The unit provides an important extension to educational provision within Fenland by providing an alternative to mainstream secondary school for some Key Stage 4 students who require additional support.

4.4 Engagement and Consultation

Two public consultation events have been held to explain the proposed development and seek feedback from the local community in Wisbech. Further details of community involvement, including how the scheme has been adapted in response, will be set out in the planning application in due course.

Source Documents	Location
Previous Cabinet Reports	Room 114 Shire Hall Cambridge