

Called-In Decision: Review Of Secondary Educational Provision In St Neots

*To:* Cabinet

*Date:* 23 February 2010

*From:* Corporate Director: People, Policy and Law

*Electoral division(s):* Little Paxton and St Neots North  
St Neots/Eaton Socon and Eynesbury  
Brampton and Kimbolton  
Buckden/Gransden and the Offords

*Forward Plan ref:* 2010/008 *Key decision:* Yes

*Purpose:*

1. To inform the Cabinet of the Children and Young People's Services (CYPS) Scrutiny Committee's decision in relation to the St. Neots secondary education call-in; and
2. Pursuant to the decision, to report to the Cabinet the comments of the Committee.

*Recommendation:* In relation to the call-in, the Cabinet are asked note:

1. The decision of the CYPS Scrutiny Committee to not object to the implementation of the Cabinet's decision, but to comment upon it; and
2. The comments made by the CYPS Scrutiny Committee in relation to Cabinet's decision.

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**1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 The meeting of the Cabinet held on 26 January 2010 considered the review of secondary educational provision in St Neots and agreed to:

- i) Note the consultation undertaken in St Neots in the autumn of 2009 on the structural options identified as a potential response to a range of challenges faced by St Neots Community College;
- ii) Note the discussions which have taken place with the Office of the School Commissioner at the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and the views expressed; and
- iii) Endorse the proposals that the Authority should work with the governing bodies of Longsands College and St Neots Community College to:
  - Establish a federation between the schools to be operational from 1 September 2010; and
  - Change the status of St Neots Community College from a community to a foundation school to be effective from 1 September 2010.

1.2 Four members of the CYPS Scrutiny Committee subsequently called-in the Cabinet's decision. The reasons given for the call-in are as follow:

- a. The Cabinet made the decision without having received evidence of a thorough investigation of the options and, specifically:
  - They have no detailed understanding of how a federation might improve pupils' outcomes at St. Neots CC;
  - They do not know how this can be achieved without reducing performance at Longsands; and
  - They have not thoroughly investigated the option of National Challenge Trust status for St. Neots Community College
- b. The consultation process was loaded from the outset to support the Council's preference and the strength of feeling against the federation has not been given due consideration.

1.3 In accordance with procedural requirements, the CYPS Scrutiny Committee met promptly to discuss the call-in, with a reserve meeting date (18 February 2010) utilised for the purpose. The Committee welcomed the following people to the session to answer members' questions:

- The Cabinet Member for Children, Councillor Martin Curtis
- The Cabinet Member for Learning, Councillor David Harty
- The Executive Director: CYPS, Gordon Jeyes
- The Service Director: Strategy and Commissioning, CYPS, Adrian Loades
- The Head of Infrastructure: Education Planning, Hazel Belchamber.

1.4 The following were invited to attend as witnesses:

- The Chairman of Governors of Longsands College, Tony Hyde
- The Principal of Longsands College, Rob Whatmough
- The Chairman of Governors of St Neots Community College, John Duley
- The Principal of St Neots Community College, Eueth Forrester.

1.5 Procedures dictate that one of the following options may be agreed by the Scrutiny Committee receiving the call-in:

- Decide that having considered the decision and the reasons for it that no further action is warranted, in which case the decision may proceed.
- Decide not to object to the implementation of the decision but may comment upon it. The Cabinet may take account of these observations when implementing the decision, but is under no obligation to do so and may proceed.
- Have unresolved concerns about the decision and may refer it back to the Cabinet for reconsideration, setting out the nature of its concerns. (Note: the more detail and/or recommendations that a Scrutiny Committee selecting this option is able to provide, the more helpful this will be for Cabinet when reconsidering the decision.)
- Refer the matter to full Council if it considers that the decision is not in accordance with the agreed budget or policy framework [Not applicable in this instance].

1.6 Upon hearing evidence and following deliberation of the subject from the standpoints of procedural issues and educational outcomes, the Committee decided that option 2 was most appropriate. Pursuant to this decision, the Committee would like to exercise its right to comment to the Cabinet

## **2. CYPs SCRUTINY COMMITTEE COMMENTS**

2.1 The Committee wishes to express gratitude to all who contributed to the call-in session, with particular thanks to the Principals and Chairmen of Governors of the two secondary schools. Documentary evidence and the input of all concerned informed Committee deliberations and led to several conclusions.

2.2 Committee members are of the view that the initial report received by the Cabinet on 26 January 2010 was insufficient in terms of content. Specifically, the emphasis on structural options for the two schools was at the expense of an outcome focussed appraisal of the subject. A more holistic approach to reporting the subject from the outset would have mitigated non-executive member concerns around vital topics such as pupil outcomes. The Committee recommends that future Cabinet reports should address this imbalance.

2.3 Following the call-in meeting, the Committee has recognised that key

stakeholders are fully supportive of the decision to federate, of their own volition, although this fact was not stated as explicitly as is desirable in the Cabinet report. Consideration should be given to the fact that the wider audience of a Cabinet report will not necessarily be aware of stakeholder views to the same extent as the Cabinet and relevant officers.

- 2.4 The Committee was of the view that the Service Director: Learning should have contributed to the Cabinet report.
- 2.5 In relation to final decision-making on this topic, the Committee was of the view that in the relevant meeting of Cabinet insufficient debate of officer recommendations, or wider options, took place. The Committee would in future expect greater deliberation by the executive on matters of such importance.
- 2.6 Committee members would like to add their concerns at the way in which the Department for Children, Schools and Families changed its stance with regard to the eligibility of Longsands College as a National Challenge partner. This confused the issue and exacerbated existing pressures on the Governors and Principal of St. Neots Community College in particular.

<b>Source Documents</b>	<b>Location</b>
Report and minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 26 January 2010	Room 114 Shire Hall Cambridge