

CAPITAL INVESTMENT FOR SAWTRY VILLAGE ACADEMY

To: Children and Young People's Committee

Meeting Date: 5 December 2017

From: Executive Director, People and Communities

Electoral division(s): Sawtry

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

Purpose: To consider and seek approval for a proposal to make a one-off capital investment of £2m for Sawtry Village Academy (SVA) to address serious health, safety and wellbeing issues resulting from the condition of the school's accommodation arising from exceptional circumstances.

Recommendation:

- a) To allocate £2m capital funding as a contribution to Phase One of **Sawtry** Village Academy's redevelopment programme.
- b) To support the Academy's petition to the Department for Education (DfE) and Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) for funding to enable Phases One and Two of the redevelopment programme to commence simultaneously.

<i>Officer contact:</i>		<i>Member contacts:</i>	
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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Sawtry Village Academy (SVA) is an 11-18 school which serves Alconbury, Folksworth, Great Gidding, Holme, Sawtry and Stilton. It is also serving the development at Alconbury Weald until the opening of the new secondary school.
- 1.2 It was one of the first schools to opt to become a grant maintained school operating independently of the Council under the provisions of the 1988 Education Reform Act. As with all grant maintained schools it was required to re-join the maintained sector following a change in legislation in 1998. The school became an Academy, independent of the Council, on 1 August 2011.
- 1.3 In June 2014 the school failed its Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) inspection and was placed in 'special measures'. Whistleblowing by staff during the inspection led to an Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) investigation. The Principal, Mr Jim Stewart, left the school immediately before the findings were presented to the Governing Body.
- 1.4 A lengthy criminal investigation followed that resulted in Mr Stewart being sentenced in October 2017 to four years in prison for fraud and misconduct in public office, and the former Vice Principal, Mr Alan Stevens, being sentenced to 24 weeks in prison, suspended for 12 months, having pleaded guilty to two counts of fraud.
- 1.5 Prior to the school becoming an academy, the local authority had serious concerns about the school's leadership, and met and corresponded with the chair of governors. After the school became an Academy the local authority raised concerns about the school's leadership with Ofsted and the Regional Schools Commissioner, writing to Ofsted prior to the 2014 inspection.
- 1.6 In April 2015 the site and buildings were transferred to Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust (CMAT), which became responsible for the running of the school.

2.0 MAIN ISSUES

- 2.1 Local Authority Officers are in no doubt that the condition of the buildings has been seriously affected by the failings in school leadership. Since the school became grant maintained, and then a foundation school and academy, it has been responsible for its own buildings, including condition surveys. In 2008 the school was identified as being in Wave 4 of 8 of the Building Schools for the Future programme, 17th in order of priority out of the 47 eligible schools across the county; that is, it was in need of attention but was not the highest priority. The decline to its current state of repair reflects the rapid decline in leadership between 2008 and 2014 evidenced in inspection reports and in the findings of the court case.
- 2.2 In 2014, prior to taking on the responsibility for running and managing the school, CMAT commissioned a mechanical and electrical engineering report from David Bedwell & Partners as part of their due diligence arrangements. This report highlighted serious health and safety (H&S) concerns relating to the poor condition of the Village Academy buildings.

- 2.3 In 2015, CMAT submitted a bid to the Education Funding Agency (EFA) seeking funding to address the issues identified in the report and to replace the existing accommodation with a new building. Despite the strong case made for investment in new accommodation, the bid was unsuccessful because it did not address all of the site issues. As a result, CMAT found it necessary to undertake work to a value of £1.5 million to address the most urgent and high priority condition deficiencies, including totally failed fire safety compliance.
- 2.4 In 2017, CMAT appointed the Oakleaf Group to provide a detailed report to determine the priorities and anticipated cost of further improvement work. The report concluded 49% of the building was category D, which is the lowest grade under the assessment system used and concludes the highest risk to protection of building and life. Further condition issues have been identified since this inspection was carried out.
- 2.5 CMAT has developed a two phase solution to addressing these condition issues. The total estimated cost of which is £5 million. Phase One is building a new teaching block with eighteen classrooms, for which planning permission has already been secured, at a cost of £3.5 million. Phase Two is a considerable refurbishment of the rest of the school with an estimated cost of £1.5 million, which will address the majority, although not all, of the condition issues.
- 2.6 Local Authorities are not funded to meet the condition needs of academies. However, the Council has a responsibility for the health, safety and wellbeing of all children and it has an important role as a champion for all children when they are let down by the system that should be supporting them. Also, the failings in leadership and the decline in the quality of the buildings began before the school became an academy.
- 2.7 Given the exceptional circumstances that have led to the situation Sawtry Village Academy finds itself in, the Council's responsibilities for all children and that we are already investing in the community, Officers consider that there is a compelling case for the Council to support the health, safety and wellbeing of Sawtry's secondary aged children by making a major contribution of £2 million to Sawtry Village Academy's much needed redevelopment.
- 2.8 The Local Authority is investing significantly in the capital infrastructure of Sawtry's early years, infant and junior school provision to meet basic need arising from population growth, with £6.592 million allocated in the capital programme. These children move on to Sawtry Village Academy and their continued progress depends on access to a quality built environment.
- 2.9 With the proposed capital investment, supported by an appropriate transfer agreement, officers are confident that CMAT will be able to address the major health and safety concerns raised by independent consultants and offer an improved learning environment which will support the continued improvement of educational standards at Sawtry Village Academy and build on those already secured by CMAT as the sponsor.
- 2.10 There is a big advantage to the children of Sawtry Village Academy, and also opportunities to secure scale economies and reduce disruption, if Phases One and Two can commence simultaneously. This would be possible if the ESFA agrees to

support CMAT with additional funding of at least £1.5 million because the Trust would be able to fund the Phase 2 refurbishment using its Trust-wide SCA (School Capital Allocation) funding. Officers propose that the Local Authority supports the Trust's petition for funding to the DfE and ESFA.

3. ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES

3.1 Developing the local economy for the benefit of all

- 3.1.1 A good quality learning environment enhances educational outcomes, which in turn provides a more highly skilled workforce

A key factor in major companies' decisions to move to Cambridgeshire is access to good and outstanding schools for their workforce.

3.2 Helping people live healthy and independent lives

- 3.2.1 Good quality school buildings are essential to health, safety and wellbeing.

3.3 Supporting and protecting vulnerable people

- 3.3.1 Through its commissioning role, the Council is committed to ensuring that children and young people have access to high quality education within their catchment area.

Through its commissioning role, the Council is committed to ensuring that children and young people are educated in accommodation fit for purpose and safe to use.

The Council is committed to championing the rights of children and young people.

4. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Resource Implications

- 4.1.1 Officers are proposing to allocate £2m capital funding as a contribution to Phase One of Sawtry Village Academy's redevelopment programme. This will have no significant impact on the overall 2018/19 Capital Programme due to re-profiling other schemes.

4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications

- 4.2.2 There are no significant implications within this category.

4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications

- 4.3.1 Through its statutory duty as commissioner of places, the Council has the responsibility to ensure sufficient and suitable school accommodation to meet basic need.

4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 4.4.1 All children, regardless of their age and where they live in the county, should have access to good quality school buildings.

4.5 Engagement and Communications Implications

- 4.5.1 CMAT have held regular meetings with members and officers to highlight:
- health and safety concerns

4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

- 4.6.1 CMAT have held regular meetings with members and officers to highlight:
- health and safety concerns

4.7 Public Health Implications

- 4.7.1 Good quality school buildings are essential to health, safety and wellbeing.

Implications	Officer Clearance
Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance?	Yes Name of Financial Officer: Chris Malyon
Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by Finance?	No Name of Financial Officer: Paul White
Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by LGSS Law?	No Name of Legal Officer:
Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your Service Contact?	Yes Name of Officer: Keith Grimwade
Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications?	No Name of Officer:
Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact?	Yes Name of Officer: Keith Grimwade
Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health	No Name of Officer:

Source Documents	Location
None	