

THE PROVISION OF ADDITIONAL SECONDARY SCHOOL PLACES IN WISBECH

To: The Children and Young People Committee

Meeting Date: 22 May 2018

From: Executive Director People and Communities

Electoral division(s): All County Council electoral divisions in the Fenland District Council area.

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

Purpose: To review the decision taken in January 2017 to establish a new secondary school in Wisbech in response to an alternative proposal from the Brooke Weston Trust (the sponsor) to expand the number of secondary school places at the Thomas Clarkson Academy in Wisbech.

Recommendation: The Committee is requested to:

- a) re-affirm the decision it made at the conclusion of the review of secondary school provision in Fenland in January 2017 to establish a new secondary school in Wisbech;
- b) authorise officers to launch a competition under the academy presumption process to invite proposals from potential sponsors to establish and run the new school; and
- c) support a continued dialogue with the Brooke Weston Trust to ensure the most effective management of the period of transition from one to two secondary schools in Wisbech town.

Officer contact:		Member contacts:	
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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Council concluded a two stage review of secondary school provision in Fenland in January 2017, culminating in a report to the Children and Young People (CYP) Committee. The review was undertaken in response to the rising number of children in the primary schools in the area and the housing growth proposed in Fenland District Council's (FDC's) adopted Local Plan. Key stakeholders including the Brooke Weston Trust (BWT) and Thomas Clarkson Academy (TCA) were consulted during the review. TCA currently operates as an 8 forms of entry (FE) school providing 1200 places for pupils aged 11-16. The school also operates a small 6th form with 104 pupils on roll. However, the school was rebuilt under the Building Schools for the Future Programme and has the physical capacity to accommodate between 10 and 11FE or 1500 to 1650 pupils aged 11-16 in good quality, modern accommodation. Based on that feedback, recommendations were prepared on the basis that TCA would continue to operate as an 8FE (1200 place) secondary school.
- 1.2 The CYP Committee on 17 January 2017 endorsed proposals to:
- Provide a new secondary school in Wisbech (initially 4FE or 600 places with the potential for future expansion) to open in 2020
 - Expand both Cromwell Community College in Chatteris and Sir Harry Smith Community College in Whittlesey by a form of entry (150 places).
- 1.3 Links are provided below to the two reports considered by the CYP Committee in February 2016 and January 2017 respectively:
- <https://cmis.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/ccclive/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/391/Committee/4/Default.aspx>
- <https://cmis.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/ccclive/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/162/Committee/4/Default.aspx>
- 1.4 The Chairman, Vice-Chairman and lead members of the CYP Committee received an invite from Dr Andrew Campbell, the Chief Executive of the BWT to visit the TCA on Wednesday 21st March. The invite was extended, at the request of the Chairman, to local members representing divisions in Wisbech.
- 1.5 The BWT used the meeting to explain to members the approach being taken to securing improvements in attainment at TCA and the leadership and financial resources being deployed by the Trust to achieve this. The BWT believed that the provision of a new secondary school had the potential to undermine the progress made to date. The BWT asked members to consider a proposal to expand TCA in response to the need for additional secondary school places in the Town.
- 1.6 TCA is located in the southern part of Wisbech. The TCA catchment area includes the whole of the Town and the surrounding rural villages of Leverington, Murrow, Elm, Parson Drove, Friday Bridge, Wisbech St Mary and Tydd St Giles.
- 1.7 Any proposal from BWT to increase TCA's published admission number (PAN) from its current 8FE would have implications for the Council's proposals for a new secondary school to be established to the west of the Town.

2. MAIN ISSUES

2.1 Securing a Sufficient Number of Places

2.1.1 The Council will require additional secondary school capacity in Wisbech based upon the latest catchment forecast for the TCA. Numbers peak at 12.5 forms of entry and even an expanded TCA could not accommodate all catchment children if required to do so. The 'catchment' forecast methodology does not include all possible children within the forecast, rather those that will probably attend state schools excluding those at special schools. Taken this into account the following are the forecast totals for children aged 11 to 15 (years 7 – 11) for the Thomas Clarkson (Wisbech area) catchment.

Year	11 year olds	FE at 11	Total 11 - 15s
2017	345	11.5	1,720
2018	335	11.2	1,672
2020	348	11.6	1,692
2021	375	12.5	1,737
2022	375	12.5	1,759
2023	375	12.5	1,774
2024	375	12.5	1,792
2025	375	12.5	1,808
2026	375	12.5	1,813
2027	357	11.9	1,795
2028	331	11.0	1,672

In preparing the catchment forecast a very cautious view of house building levels has been taken. Housebuilding in Wisbech has averaged 80 units for the last 5 years. This is the rate of build reflected in the forecasting model. While housing sites allocated in the Local Plan show that the area could accommodate a significant increase in the building rate, particularly beyond 2021, no change to the forecasting model has been made because of the uncertainty around timing. The current concept of the Wisbech Garden Town has not been included in the modelling for similar reasons.

2.1.2 Numbers attending TCA are much lower than the overall number of children within the catchment area. The pupil forecasting model for Thomas Clarkson Academy recognises a long-term trend for significant numbers of children attending feeder primary schools to seek secondary education elsewhere. Over the previous three years, there has been an average of 420 children per year group in feeder primary schools (14 forms of entry) whereas numbers entering Thomas Clarkson have averaged around 230 (7.6 forms of entry). Analysis of parental choice shows an even distribution of children between the various alternatives.

- Within Cambridgeshire the main choice is into Neale Wade Academy in March which has 148 children attending from the Thomas Clarkson Academy catchment, approximately 1 form of entry.

- A further 53 children of secondary age attend either Meadowgate or Octavia (AP) Schools (special school / alternative provision).
- Data from previous Cambridgeshire's Independent Schools surveys show numbers at secondary level for Wisbech Grammar School as high as two forms of entry at secondary level (although these children will be drawn from a wider area).
- Data from both Norfolk and Lincolnshire County Councils show that between 1 and 1.5 forms of entry of children attend secondary school in each of their areas (mainly either Marshland High School, Norfolk or Peele Community College, Long Sutton).

2.13 The trend based forecast for TCA, which assumes the current pattern of parental preference, does forecast a rise in the year 7 intakes into TCA from 246 in September 2018 to 274 in September 2019. Intakes at TCA are then forecast to remain above 270 thereafter through to 2023/4. This occurs as it is assumed that TCA will continue to attract a fixed percentage of an increasing year 7 pupil cohort within Wisbech.

2.1.4 The Council would need to ask TCA to over-admit to meet in catchment demand ahead of any new school being established. Should TCA agree, the Council would continue to carry some risk. There are significantly more pupils within the catchment area than places available (paragraph 2.1.1) but, as previously stated, many currently attend schools elsewhere. If TCA achieves the good Ofsted rating it is seeking, it could have a significant impact upon the preferences of parents within the catchment area. If TCA were oversubscribed pupils would be allocated other schools but the Council would be required to provide home to school transport and incur the cost.

2.1.5 In terms of the ability of pupils to access places elsewhere, forecasts suggest that the option of attending Neale Wade Academy (NWA) will no longer be available after September 2022. Year 7 cohorts are rising and will be at, or slightly above, the NWA PAN of 300 from this point. March is also a town where provision for substantial housing growth is made in the Local Plan. In addition, changes to commercial bus services in Wisbech could make it more difficult for children in the town to attend Marshland High School, Norfolk in the future.

2.1.6 The Council also needs to consider, in the long term, the impact of major housing growth. Although development of the major Local Plan sites has been slow to come forward in Wisbech, a planning application for a site of 1500 homes in the east of the Town is now being prepared for submission. At some point, a second school will be required to meet the demand for places arising from the high levels of growth planned for the Town as it would not be possible to accommodate forecast pupil numbers in a single school.

2.2 Impact on the Thomas Clarkson Academy

2.2.1 The introduction of a new secondary school into any community will have a significant impact and can be disruptive. The BWT is concerned that a new school will have a significant impact on future numbers at TCA and undermine the work it has undertaken on school improvement since it became the school's sponsor. The Council will need to work with the BWT to mitigate any impact and continue to support the school.

2.2.2 However, the potential impact of a new secondary school on future numbers at TCA may be overstated for the following reasons:

- A trend based pupil forecast for the TCA academy, assuming the current pattern of parental preference continues, shows numbers increasing from 1204 11-16 year olds in 2017/18 to 1469 in 2023/24. As a new school is unlikely to be opened before September 2021, by that stage TCA will be operating from a higher base in terms of pupil numbers than it currently has on roll.
- The Council's practice when opening a new school in an existing community is to limit admission to the first year of entry only and then add a year group in each of the following years until the school is operating at its planned capacity. The Council would establish this requirement as part of the commissioning process for a new school. In this way, if the school opened in 2021, it would not be operating at its full capacity until 2025. This approach limits any potential for an exodus of pupils from existing schools while the overall number of 11-16 year olds in Wisbech continues to rise as housing development comes forward.
- There are more pupils living in the catchment area of the Thomas Clarkson Academy than attend the school (see paragraph 2.1.2) However, at present a significant number of parents choose places at schools elsewhere. A new school has the potential to impact upon this current trend and retain more of the future pupil cohorts within Wisbech. In addition, the location of the new school to the west of Wisbech represents an opportunity to realign catchment areas with a view to minimising travel distances and journey times for students a more accessible option than TCA for those villages to the north and west of the Town and which are currently part of the TCA catchment area. It is from these areas that some of the outflow of pupils to other schools is greatest.
- The TCA is seeking to achieve a good Ofsted rating. This, in itself, may further impact upon the preferences of parents and retention of existing pupils within Wisbech.

2.3 Educational, Standards, Choice and Diversity

2.3.1 The BWT became the sponsor of the TCA in 2012. During that time the school has been inspected by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) twice, in 2014 and the Autumn of 2017 respectively. On both occasions the Ofsted judgement was that the school required improvement. The Trust continues to devote considerable resources to TCA with the aim of it becoming a good school and these plans formed part of the Chief Executive's discussion with members on 21st March 2018. Whatever the approach to place planning, the Council will want to support the Trust to achieve a good Ofsted rating.

2.3.2 Within this overall Ofsted rating the BWT referred to a significant improvement in exam results over the last 2 years. Results have improved but remain below the national and County Council average.

2.3.3 There was concern expressed during the consultation on the review of provision about TCA being the sole provider of secondary education in the Town, particularly if it were to become much larger than at present. Those supporting this view believed that a better performing school would offer more choice to parents and help staunch the long-established flow of pupils seeking to undertake their secondary education outside Wisbech. This historical trend long pre-dates BWT's involvement with the school.

2.4 Social and Economic Regeneration

2.4.1 Together with Fenland District Council, the Council has ambitions to promote the social and economic regeneration of Wisbech. These are embodied in the Wisbech 20/20 vision, the adopted Local Plan which identifies large strategic sites within the Town for both housing and employment, and the Wisbech Garden Town proposal. The development of a secondary school on the preferred site identified in the west could play a major part in contributing to the future social and economic regeneration of the Town. The site sits within the area identified for the westward expansion of the Town and in the long-term is well aligned with the housing growth identified in the Local Plan.

2.5 Commissioning a New School

2.5.1 The Department for Education (DfE) have been in discussion with the St Bede's Academy in Cambridge about promoting the new secondary school in Wisbech as a free school as part of wave 12 of the national Free Schools programme. St Bede's had originally applied to promote a new secondary school in Waterbeach but this school is not needed until the middle of the next decade, well beyond the timeframe of the current Free Schools programme. The DfE then offered St Bede's, as an approved sponsor, the opportunity to promote the Wisbech Secondary School instead. The governing trust of St Bede's has declined this opportunity as it did not feel that a two school trust spread over such a large geographical area was a viable business model for them.

2.5.2 Now that the DfE has confirmed that the school will not be promoted as a Free School, any new secondary school in Wisbech would be promoted by the Council under the academy presumption process. This will involve the Council running a "competition" and recommending a preferred sponsor for the new school to the Secretary of State. This is important in terms of the proposal now being made by BWT in that a decision on whether to proceed with the commissioning of a new secondary school in Wisbech is now one for the Council and the CYP Committee.

2.5.3 There has yet to be a formal announcement by DfE, but officers are aware that a further wave of the Free School programme (wave 13) is being considered. There could be a particular focus in this wave on providing new schools in Education Opportunity Areas. The Fenland and East Cambridgeshire areas of the County is an opportunity area. Irrespective of the Council's own decision, a new school in Wisbech could come forward as a proposal in wave 13, particularly given the previous efforts of the DfE to encourage the St Bede's Academy to establish a free school in Wisbech.

2.6 Timing of the BWT Proposal

2.6.1 Since the decision by the CYP Committee on 17th January 2017 to support the provision of a new secondary school in Wisbech, officers have been working to secure the

implementation of this proposal. A series of site search exercises have been undertaken leading to the commissioning feasibility work and preparation of layout concepts for the preferred site on County farms land to the west of the Town. There have also been lengthy discussions with key stakeholders, particularly FDC, to ensure the proposal has the support of the local planning authority. This has meant that the County Council has already devoted time and resources to the delivery of the new school.

- 2.6.2 The proposal has further evolved so that the secondary school will form part of an education campus. The site can also accommodate a primary school as it is well located to meet the demand for these places when major housing development to the west of the Town takes place. In addition, the campus will accommodate the relocation of the Wisbech site of Unity School to purpose-built accommodation for secondary-aged pupils with Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) with identified Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs. The school's current accommodation and site is leased by the Council at an annual rent of £36,000 and itself would require significant investment if it were to continue to be occupied by the Unity School.
- 2.6.3 The building issues were a contributory factor in TBAP, the sponsors of the Unity School, consulting recently on a proposal to re-locate this provision to its other facility/campus in St Neots.

2.7 Capital and Revenue Costs

- 2.7.1 The capital and revenue funding implications are considered in section 4.1 of the report

2.8 Conclusion

- 2.8.1 The potential to use the additional capacity at TCA might allow the deferral of the opening of a new secondary school. However, the capital cost and associated borrowing would only be deferred. In addition, capital costs will increase with any delay as a result of general inflation within the building sector and anticipated changes to building standards.
- 2.8.2 There are a sufficient number of children within the current catchment area of the TCA, without taking into consideration the impact of any housing growth in the coming years, to support two popular and successful secondary schools. The Council should be undertaking its long term planning of school places on the basis that the standards of education are such that parents in Wisbech do not seek to access secondary school places further afield in such large numbers.
- 2.8.3 The early provision of a secondary school in the west of the Town is in the right strategic location to support the future growth and regeneration of Wisbech. It also provides an opportunity to create an education campus which will also encompass primary school provision and a much needed relocation of the TBAP facility.

3. ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES

3.1 Developing the local economy for the benefit of all

3.1.1 Providing access to local and high quality mainstream education will enhance the skills of the local workforce. In particular, the Council and its partners have a strong focus on the regeneration of Wisbech.

3.2 Helping people live healthy and independent lives

3.2.1 If pupils have access to local schools and associated services, they are more likely to attend them by either cycling or walking rather than through Local Authority provided transport or car. They will also be able to more readily access out of school activities such as sport and homework clubs and develop friendship groups within their own community. This will contribute to the development of both healthier and more independent lifestyles.

3.3 Supporting and protecting vulnerable people

3.3.1 Providing a local school will ensure that services can be accessed by families in the greatest need within its designated area.

4. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Resource Implications

Financial implication of deferring New School in Wisbech

4.1.1 In the approved 2018/19 capital plan £23m has been allocated for a Wisbech Secondary School.

4.1.2 Based on the current indices from the Building Construction Information service (BCIS) the predicted increase on prices from 2020-2022 is between 4-6% per annum. Therefore an average inflation rate of 5% per annum on the tender price of £23,000k has been applied to give an indicative annual cost increase. The indicative cost of delaying the Wisbech new secondary school would be as follows;

- 1 Year Delay £1,150,000
- 2 Year Delay £2,358,000
- 3 Year Delay £3,625,000

4.1.3 There would be other financial implications which are more difficult to quantify. The 2018/19 approved capital plan assumes that £21,467,000 of the total cost would be funded by borrowing. At this time it is not possible to predict whether by delaying the scheme this would have a positive or negative impact on the cost of borrowing. However, if the current rate of interest is applied the additional costs set out above will have the following additional borrowing costs;

- 1 Year Delay £540,385
- 2 Year Delay £1,108,024

- 3 Year Delay £1,703,388

4.1.4 If TCA is expanded parts of the current accommodation may need to be remodelled. Some specialist 6th form accommodation may also be required. No costing of this work has been undertaken at this stage.

4.1.5 The rebuilding of TCA was a project undertaken using the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). The PFI contract was structured on the basis that there would be 1870 pupils at the school. Operating at current numbers the annual charges cannot be funded from the TCA budget. There is a shortfall of approximately £200,000 per annum based on current numbers at the school. At present this is funded by the Council by top slicing the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). If TCA admits more pupils the level of subsidy required will diminish

4.1.6 As a result of a current Department for Education review of funding for pupil growth and new schools there is also uncertainty around how new schools will be funded in the future, including any potential impact on existing Cambridgeshire Schools. At present the additional revenue support required by new schools is funded via a top slice from the Schools Funding Formula for funding growth or new school places.

4.1.7 The financial risks relating to PFI and the opening of a new school do not have a direct impact upon the Council's overall financial position and are not specific to the cost of delaying the construction of a new school. However, increasing the PAN at Thomas Clarkson and delaying the opening of a new school would probably mean less of a subsidy would be required from other Cambridgeshire Schools in the shorter term.

4.1.8 Although beyond the time frame of this financial appraisal, a decision not to use the spare capacity at TCA now does not rule out this option forever. If the growth planned for Wisbech is delivered a further expansion of secondary school places would be required. The options available would be to either expand TCA by using the spare capacity which exists or to expand the new school opened in 2020 by building a second phase. This situation might present a clearer financial choice than at present where only a deferral of capital expenditure is being considered.

4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications

4.2.1 The new school buildings on the campus to the west of Wisbech will be procured through the Council's existing framework contracts. These framework contracts were re-tendered as recently as 2017.

4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications

Providing a Sufficient Number of School Places

4.3.1 There will be a need to guarantee that the additional places proposed at TCA would be available when required to ensure that the Council can meet its statutory duty to provide a school place in the state-funded sector for every child whose parents want one. The Council has had difficulty in the past, following the decision of TCA to reduce its Published Admission Number (PAN) from 270 to 240 for entry into year 7. In September 2016 this decision resulted in the Council having to provide and fund home to school transport to the

Neale Wade Academy in March for children within the catchment area of TCA but who were unable to obtain a place at the school in Year 7. Prior to providing transport, the Council had discussions with TCA about over admitting into year 7 in the knowledge that it had the physical capacity to do so, but no agreement could be reached. TCA believed that the school was vulnerable and wanted to ensure that recent changes and anticipated improvements became embedded before it considered expanding.

- 4.3.2 While it is accepted, and understood, that an academy trust will take decisions in what it considers to be its own best interests, it is the view of officers that a firm commitment from the BWT to a more collaborative approach with the Council, which also takes into account the needs of the community served by the Trust's schools, is required going forward. Without a change of approach, the Council will be exposed to a significant risk that it will not have a sufficient number of secondary school places in the Town should it be wholly reliant on utilising the additional capacity available at TCA.

Commissioning a new School

- 4.3.3 When the time is right, the Council would use its agreed commissioning process to identify its preferred sponsor for the new secondary school in Wisbech. This process meets the statutory requirements of the Education Act 2011. Under the legislation, the Regional Schools' Commissioner makes a recommendation to the Secretary of State for Education on who should be granted a funding agreement to sponsor the school and may, or may not, accept the Council's stated preference.
- 4.3.4 If a potential sponsor were to submit an application to establish the new school under the national Free School programme, before the Council has launched its own commissioning process, then the Council would not proceed any further until a decision has been made on the Free School application.
- 4.3.5 The Council has the freehold of the site as it is currently part of the County Farms Estate. To achieve vacant possession it will be necessary to terminate the existing tenants' lease. The Council would then grant standard 125 year Academy leases to the respective school sponsors for the part of the site they will occupy based on the model lease prepared by the DfE. This protects the Council's interest by ensuring that:
- The land and buildings are returned to the Council when the lease ends
 - Use is restricted to education purposes only
 - The Academy Trust is only able to transfer the lease to another educational establishment provided it has the Council's consent
 - The Academy Trust is only able to sublet part of the site with approval from the Council

4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 4.4.1 The Council is committed to ensuring that children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are able to attend their local mainstream school where possible, with only those children with the most complex and challenging needs requiring places at specialist provision.
- 4.4.2 The accommodation provided will fully comply with the requirements of the

Public Sector Equality Duty and current Council standards.

4.5 Engagement and Communications Implications

- 4.5.1 The Council has undertaken two separate stages of consultation during the District-wide review of secondary school provision. The consultation process, its participants and the outcomes are covered in the reports previously considered by members.
- 4.5.2 The Council's process for commissioning a new school will include an open day for potential sponsors where members of the local community can view proposals and ask questions.

4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

- 4.6.1 Local members were consulted during the two stage review of secondary school provision. Members representing wards in Wisbech were invited to attend the meeting at the TCA on 21st March to discuss the proposal made by the BWT. Councillors Hoy and Tierney joined the Chairman and Lead members at the meeting.

4.7 Public Health Implications

- 4.7.1 The school will be accessible to pupils as either pedestrians or cyclists. If children had to attend secondary schools some distance away (more than 3 miles) they would be provided with free transport by the Council in accordance with its statutory duty.

Implications	Officer Clearance
Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance?	Yes Name of Financial Officer: Martin Wade
Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the LGSS Head of Procurement?	Yes Name of Officer: Paul White
Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by LGSS Law?	Yes or No Name of Legal Officer: Fiona McMillan
Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your Service Contact?	Yes Name of Officer: Tamar Oviatt-Ham
Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications?	Yes Name of Officer: Jo Dickson

Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact?	Yes Name of Officer: Jonathan Lewis
Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health	Yes Name of Officer: Tess Campbell

SOURCE DOCUMENTS GUIDANCE

Source Documents	Location
<p>Demographic Forecasts 2016 – CCC Research Group</p> <p>Milestone 1 report – Secondary School Campus in Wisbech</p> <p>Fenland Local Plan 2014</p> <p>CYP Committee reports – February 2016 and January 2017</p>	<p>Octagon (2) Shire Hall, Cambridge CB3 0AP</p> <p>https://cmis.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/ccclive/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/391/Committee/4/Default.aspx</p> <p>https://cmis.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/ccclive/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/162/Committee/4/Default.aspx</p>