At a meeting of Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in Priory House Council Chamber on 07 October 2019 from 10am

Present: Cllr D Shelvey (Chair)

Members: Cllrs D Bowater, M Versallion Cllrs A Ryan, M Smith

Parental Co-optees: V Hopkinson, L King

Church of England Co-optee: D Morton

Apologies: Cllrs M Foster, J Andrews Cllrs M Liddiard, K Minor

Substitutes None

Absent: Roman Catholic Co-optee D Main Cllrs R Berry

Members in Attendance: Cllrs S Clark Cllrs T Stock

Cllrs S Goodchild

Officers in Attendance: P Fraser V Wan R Preen Assistant Director - Children’s Services Head of School Organisation and Capital Planning Scrutiny Policy Adviser

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1. Members’ Interests

Church of England Co-optee Mr D Morton declared an interest as a member of All Saints Academy, Dunstable which was adjacent to the school relating to item 9.

2. Chairman’s Announcement and Communications
None

3. **Petitions**

None.

4. **Questions, Statements or Deputations**

None.

5. **Call-In**

None.

6. **Requested Items**

None.

7. **Executive Members’ Update**

None

8. **Schools for the Future - commissioning of a new 10 forms of entry (FE) secondary school on the Kingsland Campus, Houghton Regis, through the Free Schools Presumption process.**

The Executive Member for Children, Education and Families delivered a report which set out the need for a new school to be built on the Kingsland Campus, Houghton Regis which was necessary in order to meet future housing growth in the area. The process had been accelerated by the Local Academy Trust’s desire to close Houghton Regis Academy which, if a new school was not forthcoming would leave a shortage of school places in the area. The Council was clear in its desire that the current school remain open until 2022 in order to ensure the smooth transition of children to the new site and prevent the need to transport them out of the area.

The Assistant Director (AD) confirmed that Section 106 funding had been secured for school places in the area, with 6 forms of entry being delivered in the first phase, increasing to 10 forms of entry as the need arose. Funds would be gradually released by the developer between 2022 and 2032 and so it was necessary for the local authority to make up any shortfall in the interim period, recovering those monies as they were released by developers.

In light of the report Members discussed the following in summary:-
• That Houghton Regis was one of the most deprived areas in Central Bedfordshire and educational attainment in the region had been historically poor.

• A need for lessons learned to be applied in future to avoid the closure of failing schools and to ensure that the new school delivered the educational outcomes the young people in Houghton Regis deserved.

• That the Council had twice offered to take back the school under the local authority’s maintained school structure but that the Academy Trust had rejected the support.

• That the Department for Education (DfE) no longer encouraged trusts to take on schools from outside of their local areas, appreciating that it often led to a disjointed approach in managing schools and the need for any new sponsor to understand the demography and educational needs of the area.

• Whether there was a plan to accommodate the children if the current school closed prior to the opening of the new school. The AD confirmed that all parties must agree to the plan prior to the commencement of a public consultation and supported the Committee’s view that the directorate continue to liaise with the RSC and the DfE in order that the school remain open until such time that the new site was ready to accommodate the children.

• The need for the new school to recruit and retain quality teaching staff.

• Concerns that the RSC did not have enough resource given the very large area they were required to cover.

• That pupil numbers had been calculated based on the rate of housing growth and completion in the area, with the Council using the national scorecard formula on predictions with a high degree of accuracy.

• That the Schools for the Future programme would consider special needs provision as part of the wider project.

Following the discussion the Ward Member for Houghton Regis delivered an impact statement on behalf of pupils from Houghton Regis Academy which set out their concerns for the future of the school and their long term educational attainment.

RECOMMENDED:-

1. That the Committee support the process to seek a new provider under the Free School Presumption process for the provision of a new 10 FE (forms of entry), 1500 place secondary school to provide the school places that are required in Houghton Regis. These are required to meet the Council’s statutory duty under The Education and Inspections Act 2006.

2. That the Committee note the Council’s feasibility study which is assessing how the Kingsland campus in Houghton Regis can accommodate a new secondary school by September 2022 alongside a range of new services for the community.

3. That the Committee support the Executive to authorise the Director of Children’s Services, in consultation with the Executive Member for families, Education and Children and the Director of Community Services to enter into all appropriate legal documentation to implement the scheme, including the
approval of the new sponsor, building contract and ancillary documents, funding agreement, development agreement, Academy lease and all contracts required to secure delivery and operation of the new school.

4. That the Committee recommend to Council an additional net £8.2m of Council funding in the Capital Programme, to enable the commencement of capital expenditure as set out in this report, subject to DfE basic need capital contributions, and approval from the Secretary of State and the granting of planning permissions under Part 3 of the Town and Country Planning Act.

5. That the Committee note the additional revenue costs of capital financing in relation to the forward funding of the new build costs and the net contribution from Council funds, as set out in paragraph 62.

6. That the Committee note the Secretary of State’s decision for the closure of Houghton Regis Academy.

7. That the Council and the Regional Schools Commissioner work together to ensure that the new sponsor demonstrates its appreciation of the local demography in order to meet the educational needs of the children and young people living in Houghton Regis, ensuring a focus on staff resourcing, the retention of quality teachers and the overall management of the new school site.

8. That the Committee support the Executive Member’s view that it would be unacceptable to close the current school before the new site was open to pupils, therefore the Council needed to work closely with the Department for Education and the Regional Schools Commissioner in order to ensure that the current school remained open until 2022.

9. That pupil impact statements submitted via the Ward Member for Houghton Regis be shared with the current school’s trust and the Department for Education.

9. Exclusion of Press and Public

RESOLVED to exclude the press and public from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that its consideration was likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972

10. Schools for the Future - Commissioning of new school places to serve Central Bedfordshire residents in the Wixams housing development, in the ward of Houghton Conquest.

The Committee considered a report from the Executive Member for Families, Education and Children that sought approval for a capital commitment towards school places to serve Central Bedfordshire residents within the Wixams development area.
RECOMMENDED:-

1. Noted that an additional allocation, as set out in the exempt Executive report, be included within the Capital Programme, to secure new school places for Central Bedfordshire Residents within the Wixams development. The actual amount of Council funding to depend on the outcome of the renegotiation of the Section 106 agreement for the Wixams development, which was to be agreed at a joint Development Management Committee.

2. That the Committee note the additional revenue costs as set out in paragraph 55 of the Executive report.

3. That the expenditure of capital secured through the Section 106 Agreement, as set out in the exempt report, be supported.

4. That the Executive ensure the implementation of robust legal agreements and that the Council be involved in every stage of the process in parity and close partnership with Bedford Borough Council.

Chair ...................................................

Dated ....................................................