

WYEBRIDGE SPORTS COLLEGE: ACADEMY PROJECT

PORTFOLIO RESPONSIBILITY:

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLES SERVICES

CABINET

6TH SEPTEMBER 2007

Wards Affected

Belmont, Hollington and St Martins and Hinton

Purpose

To confirm the size of the school as an academy, and to agree in principle to the Council's role in delivering the academy, namely the grant of 125-year lease to the sponsors, the formal closure of Wyebridge Sports College as a Community High School, and the procurement of the new academy capital project.

Key Decision

This is a Key Decision because it is likely to result in the Council incurring expenditure above agreed budgets for the service or function (shown as a line in the budget book) to which the decision relates but allowing for virements between budget heads and savings within budget heads of up to £500,000; and also because it is likely to be significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in Herefordshire in an area comprising one or more wards.

Recommendations

That Cabinet approve in principle:

- (a) **Wyebridge Sports College becoming an academy to serve 900 11-16 students with up to an additional 200 post -16 places.**
- (b) **Granting a 125 year lease to the sponsors on terms to be agreed, if the current feasibility stage concludes with an outcome satisfactory to DCSF, Sponsors and Local Authority, and**
- (c) **Issuing the necessary public notices to close Wyebridge Sports College and create an Academy at the appropriate time, if the feasibility study concludes with an outcome satisfactorily to DCSF, Sponsors and Local Authority.**

Reasons

1. At a time of falling rolls, significant investment is needed to ensure the long-term success of Wyebridge Sports College. In the absence of other funding sources the Academy initiative offers the means to achieve this. For the school to serve its community, a capacity of 900 is sought to provide sufficient space, allowing for the continued operation of parental preference. Post 16 provision is needed to achieve greater participation in education and training, and its provision, on which DCSF is

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
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insisting, as part of the National Academy Programme.

2. DCSF require at this feasibility stage, an 'in-principle' commitment from the Local Authority, the Local Authority will play its part, and take the necessary steps to transfer land, issue notices and manage the procurement of new accommodation for the academy.

Considerations

1. As the table in paragraph 4 shows, the number of students on roll at Wyebridge Sports College has fallen, despite the fact that the numbers of children in the area is not falling. This is a result of more spaces being available in other schools, where there are falling numbers in their catchment areas. As numbers continue to reduce this does become a greater risk to Wyebridge Sports College. The major factor in any school's popularity is its academic success. Wyebridge Sports College has made tremendous progress in improving the results of its pupils, but this has been despite the buildings and not because of them. To sustain the success of the school, and to secure for the long-term a strong High School in the South Wye area, the current school buildings need to be replaced at a cost of £20,000,000 elsewhere it is unlikely that any alternative source of funding will be available.
2. In the absence of any other funding the Government's Academy programme is a way to achieve what is required. In January 2007 DCSF agreed to place Wyebridge Sports College into the feasibility stage of the Academy programme, with the Sponsors being the Diocese of Hereford. The authority already enjoys a close working partnership with the Diocese, there being 19 Church of England Aided Primary Schools, 17 Voluntary Controlled Primary Schools and one aided Church of England High School. The Sponsors are at the point of issuing their vision for the school as an academy. Views on this vision will be sought by the Sponsors during September.
3. One element of this vision is that the school should continue to serve the local area, which it has in the past, and admission policies will not change. The catchment area is shown on the attached plan. In this area the numbers of children under the age of 11, in each year cohort vary between 234 and 344. South Wye is one area in the County where no significant fall in the numbers of children is projected.
4. The number of students attending Wyebridge Sports College in previous years is set out in the table below:

WYEBRIDGE SPORTS COLLEGE	
	TOTAL ON ROLL EXCLUDING SIXTH FORM
January 2002	822
January 2003	892
January 2004	942
January 2005	912
January 2006	837
January 2007	745

148 students have been offered places for admission in September 2007.

There has always been an outflow of children from this area to other schools although this has reduced in the past two years. The figures for admissions to schools for those living in the South Wye area in September 2007 are as follows:

Wyebridge Sports College	148
Kingstone High School	56
Bishops of Hereford Bluecoat High School	14
St Mary's RC High School	30
Aylestone high School	23
Other Schools including independent	29
Total	<u>294</u>

Investment in the Academy is likely to provide what parents are seeking, and therefore there is likely to be fewer students seeking places at other schools.

5. The DCSF expect and plan for a staying-on rate of at least 80% in all academies. Given this, they require post-16 provision for 200 students. They argue this could be achieved without detriment to existing colleges as an overall staying on rate at 80% would involve 288 students.
6. There has been discussion with the Sponsor over the future of the "2XL" Youth Provision and the South Wye Learning Centre. The Sponsor supports the concept of community use. There will be further discussion over the means of achieving the continuation of this use, particularly around the capital and revenue consequences of retaining this broader provision.
7. The Governors and Headteacher support the academy proposal in principle. There are issues to be resolved during the feasibility stage, particularly on the vision and curriculum offer. The Headteacher is adamant that the school should be built for 900 pupils. There are constraints in the size of the site and in terms of organisation. The Headteacher would be concerned if a larger institution were proposed.
8. The timetable for the academy set by the DCSF requires the feasibility to be completed in November 2007 with a view that subsequent approvals will confirm the opening of the Academy in September 2009.

Financial Implications

The DCSF offer the total costs of fees, construction, furniture and equipment. An allocation of £20,100,000 has been offered by the DCSF. A separate bid has been made for £252,000 to support the Local Authority's cost in design work to the stage that a contract is awarded. Partnerships for Schools have indicated that the bid will be approved, less costs of ICT advice, which is being funded by the DCSF from elsewhere.

On completion, the asset of land and building would be transferred under a 125-year lease to the Sponsor, i.e. Trustees appointed by the Diocese of Hereford. The academy is directly funded by the DCSF in revenue terms and the transfer from Dedicated Schools Grant will be equal to the delegated budget for the school that the authority would have calculated through its local formula, had the school stayed in the maintained sector. The higher the number of students attending the Academy, the lower the numbers will be that attend other nearby schools and thereby reducing their total funding by a sum equivalent to the value of the loss of pupils. All other factors being equal this simply reflects the financial consequences of the changing popularity of schools.

Risk Management

The £20,100,000 for the major project and the additional £252,000 for the initial design work is sufficient to build a 900 place school with 200 post 16 places, on the information currently available. If the decision by the DCSF to proceed with an academy is delayed additional costs may be incurred.

The transfer of land under lease arrangement is the DCSF way of ensuring that if the Academy changes status or function the land will revert to the Local Authority.

Alternative Options

The Academy proposal could be abandoned but the need to invest in new buildings would remain.

The size of the Academy could change, but a smaller school is unlikely to be able to serve its community, and a larger one would be more difficult to manage.

Consultees

John Shepherd, Head Teacher Wyebridge Academy

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Wyebridge Map

Background Papers

None identified.