

FUTURE OF CHESHUNT SCHOOL

Report of the Director of Children's Services

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Executive Member: Terry Douris, Education, Libraries and Localism

Local Members: Robert Gordon, Dave Hewitt, Dee Hart, Paul Mason.

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To update the Panel on the proposal that Cheshunt School join the Goffs 'Generations' Multi-Academy Trust (MAT), including updated financial information relating to it (details contained in the Part II report).
- 1.2 For the Panel to comment on whether to continue to support the proposal for this arrangement, in light of this updated information.

2. Summary

- 2.1 Cheshunt School is running at a considerable budget deficit, with no identifiable route to recovery without intervention. Following exploration of potential options, officers identified Goffs School as a potential sponsor, given its strong local reputation and geographic proximity to Cheshunt School. The Goffs 'Generations' Multi Academy Trust (MAT) agreed to sponsor the school, on condition that various financial contributions were underwritten by the County Council.
- 2.2 On 13 March 2017 Cabinet received a report on the future of Cheshunt School, recommending that Cheshunt should be sponsored by Goffs Generations.
<http://cmis.hertfordshire.gov.uk/hertfordshire/Calendarofcouncilmeetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/509/Committee/8/Default.aspx>.
- 2.3 This proposal was supported, as opposed to the closure of the school, on the basis that; the cost of the two options was broadly similar; the closure of the school would result in a deficit of places locally; and sponsorship presented an excellent opportunity to rebrand the school under the

strong Goffs 'brand'.

- 2.4 While undergoing their due diligence process Goff's Generations contacted the County Council to request an increase in the previously proposed level of financial support for the sponsorship process. Significant work has been undertaken by officers to assess and challenge Goffs' underlying assumptions and it has been concluded that an increase in the level of revenue support is reasonable, along with some increase to the pre-conversion costs previously reported. It also remains comparable with the estimated cost of closure of the school.
- 2.5 Given this increase in cost, it is necessary to seek approval for and increased financial allocation from Cabinet in order to conclude negotiations with Goffs. It is the view of officers that this arrangement with Goffs MAT continues to present the best long term value for money solution and will lead to the best educational outcome for current and future pupils in the Cheshunt area.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 The Panel is invited to recommend to Cabinet that the County Council conclude an agreement with the Goffs 'Generations' Multi-Academy Trust around the sponsorship of Cheshunt School with the final details of the financial contributions required to be agreed by the Director of Resources, in consultation with the Director of Children's Services and the Executive Members for Resources, Property and the Economy and Education, Libraries and Localism, within the parameters set out in the Part II report.

4. Background

- 4.1 On 13 March 2017 Cabinet received a report on the future of Cheshunt School.
<http://cmis.hertfordshire.gov.uk/hertfordshire/Calendarofcouncilmeetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/509/Committee/8/Default.aspx>.
- 4.2 This included detail on the unsustainable financial position of Cheshunt School and potential options for its future, essentially either brokering a sponsorship arrangement with another school/MAT or closure.
- 4.3 Although approaches were made to other schools/MATs, Goffs Academy Trust was the only one which expressed an interest in working with Cheshunt School.
- 4.4 Its proposal outlined a complete re-brand and new identity for Cheshunt School as part of its MAT, whilst seeking to retain the existing strengths of Cheshunt School. Goffs School is significantly over-subscribed and has a strong reputation locally. The geographic proximity of the two

schools was considered to be of significant advantage, enabling the realisation of a number of efficiencies across the MAT.

- 4.5 The closure of the school was considered problematic in a number of respects:
- The potential impact on standards for pupils during the period of closure
 - The costs of the closure process
 - The immediate shortfall of year 7 places, should Cheshunt School close
 - The need to find places for displaced pupils
 - The need to ensure the future availability of the Cheshunt site for school provision in the medium term future – or to secure a new site at potentially very high cost
- 4.6 Given the significant disruption to the education of current pupils that would result from closure and the potential for rapid school improvement facilitated by the economies of joining a MAT, the educational benefits of the Goffs proposal relative to closure were considered to be significant.
- 4.7 A cost comparison exercise indicated that the estimated cost of supporting the Goffs proposal, are broadly comparable to the short-term costs of closing Cheshunt School.
- 4.8 The report therefore concluded that entering an arrangement with Goffs Academy Trust to sponsor Cheshunt School offered the best educational outcome, presented the least financial risk (and was broadly comparable in cost terms) and continued to offer school places where they are needed now and in the longer term.
- 4.9 The approved recommendation authorised officers to seek to conclude an agreement with the Goffs 'Generations' Multi-Academy Trust around the sponsorship of Cheshunt School as described below, with the final details of the financial contributions required to be agreed by the Director of Resources, in consultation with the Director of Children's Services and the Executive Members for Resources and for Enterprise, Education and Skills (These portfolios are now known as Resources, Property and the Economy and Education, Libraries and Localism).
- 5. Updated position**
- 5.1 Since publication of the March 2017 Cabinet report, the arrangement with Goffs has been well received by parents, staff and the local community. Goffs and Cheshunt Schools are working in partnership to prepare for changes for the start of the coming academic year (September 2017), including a staff restructure and other rebranding such as a new school name and uniform. There is considerable local momentum.

- 5.2 While undergoing their due diligence process Goff's Generations contacted the County Council to request an increase in the previously proposed level of financial support for the sponsorship process. This increase is based on a reduction pupil numbers, changed assumptions around the impact of the National Funding Formula (NFF) and expected expenditure.
- 5.3 Significant work has been undertaken by officers to assess and challenge Goff's Generations' underlying assumptions and we have concluded that an increase in the level of revenue support is reasonable and necessary in order to enter an agreement with Goffs.
- 5.4 Additional work has also identified an unavoidable increase to the pre-conversion costs previously reported. This relates to the cost to write-off the deficit of the school at the point of conversion and costs relating to the staffing restructure which is now underway at Cheshunt School.
- 5.5 The estimated costs relating to the proposal remain comparable with the estimated cost of closure of the school.
- 5.6 It therefore remains the view of officers that pursuing this arrangement with Goffs Generations continues to present the best educational outcome for the current and future pupils in the Cheshunt area and represents fewer financial (and other) risks.
- 5.7 The part II Cabinet report contains details on the costs and financial implications for the County Council.

6. Timetable and approvals required

- 6.1 Subject to timely conclusion of the due diligence process and agreement round Goffs sponsorship of Cheshunt School, September 2017 is the target date for the conversion of Cheshunt School. This timescale has been put at risk by the 'Academy conversion freeze' throughout the pre-election period, but all parties remain committed to achieving this date, or as soon as possible thereafter.
- 6.2 Approvals are still required from the regional; Schools Commissioner and Department for Education. Both schools have written to the Regional Schools Commissioner requesting that Cheshunt is sponsored by the Goffs 'Generations' MAT.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 Revenue support, in addition to that sought from Cabinet in March 2017, is required to reach an agreement with Goffs MAT. Details of the estimated cost of entering an agreement with Goffs MAT and comparable cost of closure are contained in the Part II report.

8. Equalities

- 8.1 When considering proposals placed before Members it is important that they are fully aware of, and have themselves rigorously considered the Equality implications of the decision that they are making.
- 8.2 Rigorous consideration will ensure that proper appreciation of any potential impact of that decision on the County Council's statutory obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty. As a minimum this requires decision makers to read and carefully consider the content of any Equalities Impact Assessment (EQiA) produced by officers.
- 8.3 The Equality Act 2010 requires the County Council when exercising its functions to have due regard to the need to (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 8.4 An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed and is attached as Appendix A. It will also be made available for Members in the Members' Lounge prior to the Cabinet meeting in order that Members are fully aware of any equality issues arising from the proposal. Consideration has been given to the likely impact of the proposal, and current assessments conclude that it is not anticipated that people with protected characteristics will be affected disproportionately. The EqIA will be continued to be reviewed and updated as necessary.

Background Information

Appendix A - Equalities Impact Assessment