

Oakfield Project Report

Schools Forum

Date: 5th December 2017

Author:	Head of Education
Wards:	All wards
Locality Affected:	All locality areas
Parishes Affected:	All parish areas

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 The report aims to update schools forum on the position regarding the Oakfield Project provision and the funding needed to ensure that the Oakfield project is able to continue to provide a service to Swindon secondary schools.

2. Recommendations

- a) The Committee is recommended to note the report and agree that the Oakfield project receives additional funding as identified in the report to ensure that the project has no budget deficit for the financial year 2017/18.
- b) The Committee is recommended to agree that the Oakfield project will receive additional funding to ensure that the project has no financial deficit until the end of term 6, 2018.
- c) The Committee is recommended to agree that a further report on the future funding of Oakfield is provided for schools forum in May 2018 with a view to moving Oakfield to an agreed funding model within EOTAS.

Detail – Background & Context

- 2.1 The Oakfield project has been a successful Key Stage 4 pre-exclusion setting which has provided for between 30 to 35 pupils at risk of exclusion. It was due to close in 2010 as the local authority felt it could no longer run the provision on financial grounds. At the time though, secondary schools felt that it should continue and took over the management of the project in the belief that they could reduce costs and still run it effectively. No legal agreements were signed at the time between the local authority and schools or between the secondary schools involved in the Oakfield management committee.
- 2.2 The staff are still employed by the local authority but the finances and running of the project have been led by the schools. The financial lead has been through St Joseph's College with the Head of Commonweal chairing and organising the management committee. The Head of the Tuition Service has had nominal management responsibility for the project.
- 2.3 With the changes to secondary schools in terms of academization and MATS and with the considerable financial challenges faced by schools in recent years,

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schools have been less willing to commit to funding places. In the past, schools would commit to buying a block of places at the start of the financial year which would provide financial security to the project. This is no longer the case and in fact only Commonweal and St Joseph's have been involved recently in the management of the project. Schools such as Dorcan, Lydiard Park and Churchfields have all left the management committee – and if they buy places it is on an ad hoc basis. Places cost £10,000 if a school block buys or £12,000 if individual places are bought.

- 2.4 Furthermore, when the Oakfield project was taken over by schools in 2010, they were not charged the costs of renting the building or maintenance costs. This changed in 2014 bringing in additional costs of about £44K per year. In September 2016, the head of Oakfield moved to working three days a week (phased retirement) and an assistant head from Commonweal has been working at Oakfield since then on 3 days a week to support the management of the project. This has increased leadership costs.

3 Current position

- 3.1 Since September 1st 2017, the local authority have taken control of the management of Oakfield and a management committee has been put in place. Finances have been reviewed relating to past unpaid invoices and costs and also to the current position for the rest of the financial year.
- 3.2 The project has currently 31 pupils. Pupils at the project remain on the roll of the school and these pupils come from St Joseph's, Kingsdown, EOTAS, Lawn Manor, Lydiard Park, Abbey Park and Commonweal. The UTC, Nova Hreod, Swindon Academy, Ridgeway and Warneford have no pupils at the project. Income brought in by these pupils is somewhere between £260K and £280K.
- 3.3 The current deficit in the budget is £120,000 per year in terms of income received against service running costs. This deficit needs to be addressed and the costs of the project reduced where possible and this is being looked at by the borough finance team with the Oakfield management team.
- 3.4 Because of the deficit in the project's finances, consideration has been given to closing the project and returning the pupils to their schools. Pupils attend Oakfield, however, because they are at risk of permanent exclusion and this would then be a serious risk if they returned to mainstream education. The cost of a PEX provision is in the range of £18-20,000 and so the cost of closing the provision could be much higher to the High Needs budget than keeping the provision open. For example, if all the pupils at Oakfield were permanently excluded then the cost would be in the region of £600,000 to the High Needs budget.
- 3.5 There is also an historic deficit of up to £160,000 which has accumulated over the past three years while the project was being managed by the schools. It is

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unclear at the moment as to how this deficit will be paid and work is continuing with St Joseph's School (the previous budget holder) to try to find a resolution.

- 3.6 The Oakfield project is outside any local authority or school/academy structures and thus it is also proposed that while pupils would still be dual rolled, its funding and overall management would come into EOTAS by September 2018 or soon after.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 An alternative option is to close the project either as soon as possible or at the end of the academic year 2018. This would incur redundancy costs and there would still be the historic deficit to pay. It would, however, ensure that no further losses would be incurred. There would be a considerable danger though that the young people at the project would be permanently excluded from their schools as there is no similar pre-exclusion provision within Swindon – this would mean that there would be further pressures on the High Needs budget.

5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

- 5.1 There is a risk of pressure to the High Needs budget as has been indicated. Part of the risk management is to try to secure savings from the day to day running costs of the Oakfield project.

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.2 The financial implications are set out in the body of the report

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.3 There are no direct legal implications.

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.4 There are no other implications

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.5 Available from author. No adverse impact identified if project is agreed.

Risk Management

- 5.6 Risk is being managed by regular financial monitoring by the borough finance team and through the Oakfield management committee which meets monthly.

6. Consultees

- 6.1 The Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

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7. Background Papers

7.1 Alternative Provision Review.

8. Appendices

None.