

Free Schools – Wave 11 update

Cabinet

Date: 16th March 2016

Author:	Cabinet Member for Children Services Head of Education
Wards:	All
Locality Affected:	All
Parishes Affected:	All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to update Cabinet on the applications for new free schools that were submitted by 2nd March 2016.
- 1.2 The report brings together information from a range of education providers for new primary school, special school and alternative provision.
- 1.3 This report supports the Priority Two of the Vision to “Offer education opportunities that lead to the right skills and right jobs in the right places” and in specifically pledge 15 “in addition to two new Free secondary schools, build one secondary and 12 primary schools to meet the needs of our increasing population”.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1 Note the four applications submitted in wave 11 for education provision opening from September 2017 and later and two applications for wave 12 for education provision opening in September 2018 and later;
- 2.2 Authorise the Head of Education to support the applications from Great Western Academy, Diocese of Bristol Academies Trust, The White Horse Federation, Uplands School and Schools Company;

3. Detail

- 3.1 It is the Local Authority’s statutory duty to ensure there are sufficient school places in Swindon.
- 3.2 In September 2015. Swindon has had two successful bids for secondary free schools, they are the Great Western Academy opening in north Swindon for September 2018 and The Swindon Church of England Academy opening in Wichelstowe also for September 2018.
- 3.3 The Department for Education runs a process that has two application “waves” per year for sponsors wishing to set up a new free school. This process is determined by the Department for Education and is outside of Local Authority

Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Gareth Cheal, Direct Dial 01793 465802, gcheal@swindon.gov.uk.

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control. The current Wave (11) closed on 2nd March 2016, for schools opening in September 2017 at the earliest.

- 3.4 Once an application from a sponsor has been submitted, it is assessed by the government on the need for places it meets. The sponsor is invited to interview and an announcement on approved new schools is expected in June/July 2016.
- 3.5 Swindon has adopted an approach to work with education providers to identify need for places and support free school applications with access to data. On the 10th November 2015, the Local Authority hosted an event at the University Technical College Swindon to advertise to potential academy and free school sponsors the characteristics of Swindon, the education strategy and our place planning pressures. The event was attended by about 40 providers and representatives from the Regional Schools Commissioners office
- 3.6 As a result of the engagement work that has been conducted there have been four free school applications submitted during the recently closed wave and two expected in the next wave (September 2016). These are summarised below.

Diocese of Bristol Academies Trust (DBAT)

- 3.7 DBAT submitted a successful application for a secondary free school to open for September 2018 in Wichelstowe. The Swindon School Place Planning update identified a need for additional primary schools Wichelstowe and the New Eastern Villages.
- 3.8 DBAT are planning to submit two applications in wave 11, they are:
 - 3.8.1 A Church of England primary school and nursery located in Middle Wichel required as part of the new housing development, which will be partnered with St Mary's Church of England Primary School in Purton.
 - 3.8.2 A Church of England primary school and nursery located in the New Eastern Villages required as part of the new housing development, which will be partnered with St Francis Church of England Primary School in Taw Hill.

Uplands School

- 3.9 Uplands School is an 11 to 19 generic special school in Swindon. Uplands is rated as 'outstanding' by Ofsted and was the winner of both the TES Alternative Provision of the Year as well as Overall School of the Year in June 2015.
- 3.10 The proposed Brunel Autistic Free School will provide a curriculum for 50 boys and girls aged between 11 and 19, with autism as their primary Special Educational Need, who live in Swindon and its surrounding areas.

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- 3.11 The expected growth of the Brunel Free School will be phased over 4 years commencing at 20 in September 2017 and reaching a maximum of 50 in September 2021. There will be the capacity for further growth to a total of 70 places, after September 2021, should additional capacity across Swindon be required for ASC students.

SchoolsCompany

- 3.12 SchoolsCompany is an educational consultancy, school management and training company and an academy sponsor through the SchoolsCompany Trust.
- 3.13 The proposal is to establish an 11 to 16 aged alternative provision for 50 pupils offering a skill based curriculum and therapeutic services as an alternative pathway to mainstream education.

Great Western Academy Primary (New College)

- 3.14 Great Western Academy submitted a successful application for a secondary free school to open for September 2018 in Tadpole Farm. The Swindon School Place Planning update identified a need for an additional primary school in North Swindon (Tadpole Farm) for 2018.
- 3.15 The application in wave 12 is to provide a primary school with nursery adjacent to the approved secondary school.

White Horse Federation (WHF)

- 3.16 The White Horse Federation has notified the Local Authority of their intention to submit a free school application to the Department for Education in September 2016 (wave 12). The proposal is to establish a new setting that will offer places for secondary aged children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health difficulties.
- 3.17 The setting will also offer residential and respite facilities in order to further reduce the number of Swindon children attending settings in other Local Authority areas by offering the relevant provision within the town.
- 3.18 Included within the application is a proposal similar to the Oakfield Project with a registered alternative provision to support pupils who find it difficult to access mainstream secondary education.

Summary

- 3.19 The information above provides a brief summary of the proposals. All six applications meet either a basic need for places or a gap in the education offer in Swindon. Therefore, the recommendation above is to provide continual support to the providers through the application process.

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4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 Alternative options for school provision have been considered with the School Place Planning study.
- 4.2 In some new areas the location of a new school will be determined through negotiation with the relevant land owner or developer.

5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 Government capital grant allocations for capital spending on schools have been significantly reduced in recent years and are highly unlikely to be sufficient to meet the needs of existing schools and the requirement to fund new ones. Any shortfall will result in the Council entering into additional borrowing to support identified needs as has been the case over recent years. Options for expansion of schools should, therefore, consider all possible options in order to try to minimise the effect on the revenue budget of increased debt.
- 5.2 All capital proposals will affect the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) although DfE are recognising pupil growth in annual grant settlements albeit on a lagged basis for mainstream pupils. This means that the LA has to top slice the DSG each year in relation to “pre-opening start-up costs”, “trigger” funding (the increased revenue funding provided to schools that have an in-year increase in pupil numbers over a certain threshold) and “set-up” costs (the provision of furniture and equipment for additional classrooms). As the number of new and growing schools increase, the amount of growth funding required increases and reduces the amount of funding that is available to be distributed to established schools.
- 5.3 As a consequence of the DfE’s school funding reform programme, the Local Authority need to consult formally with each sector of the Schools Forum to seek agreement to the policies by which funding is allocated and the levels of funding proposed in advance of each financial year.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.4 The Council has a responsibility to ensure that there are sufficient school places available. The Education and Inspections Act 2006 requires Local Authorities to promote choice and diversity when carrying out their strategic duties in relation to the provision of new school places.
- 5.5 Human rights considerations have been taken into account fully in compiling this report. It is considered that the recommendations of this report are compatible with Convention rights.

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

- 5.6 Implications relating to sustainability and health are included within the school site selection criteria.

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.7 A DIA for the School Place Planning Strategy was attached to February 2016 Cabinet report. No further implications have been identified.

6. Consultees

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

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 Swindon School Place Planning Study Update 2015

8. Appendices

- 8.1 None

9. Key Decision/Decision in Cabinet Work Programme and Forward Plan

- 9.1 This is a Key Decision and is included in the Cabinet Work Programme and Forward Plan for March 2016