

AGENDA

Meeting: Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee
Place: Council Chamber - County Hall, Trowbridge BA14 8JN
Date: Tuesday 10 April 2018
Time: 10.00 am

Please direct any enquiries on this Agenda to Libby Johnstone, of Democratic Services, County Hall, Bythesea Road, Trowbridge, direct line 01225 718214 or email libby.johnstone@wiltshire.gov.uk

Press enquiries to Communications on direct lines (01225) 713114/713115.

This Agenda and all the documents referred to within it are available on the Council's website at www.wiltshire.gov.uk

Membership:

Cllr Ian Blair-Pilling	Cllr Jon Hubbard
Cllr Christine Crisp	Cllr Simon Jacobs
Cllr Matthew Dean	Cllr Gordon King
Cllr Stewart Dobson	Cllr Jacqui Lay
Cllr Howard Greenman	Cllr Andy Phillips
Cllr David Halik	Cllr John Walsh
Cllr Alan Hill (Vice Chairman)	Cllr Graham Wright (Chairman)
Cllr Ruth Hopkinson	

Substitutes:

Cllr Clare Cape	Cllr Gavin Grant
Cllr Ernie Clark	Cllr George Jeans
Cllr Anna Cuthbert	Cllr David Jenkins
Cllr Brian Dalton	Cllr Pip Ridout
Cllr Christopher Devine	Cllr Ricky Rogers
Cllr Peter Fuller	Cllr Roy While

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PART I

Items to be considered when the meeting is open to the public

1 **Apologies**

To receive details of any apologies or substitutions for the meeting.

2 **Declarations of Interest**

To receive any declarations of disclosable interests or dispensations granted by the Standards Committee.

3 **Chairman's Announcements**

To receive any announcements through the Chairman.

4 **Public Participation**

The Council welcomes contributions from members of the public.

Statements

If you would like to make a statement at this meeting on any item on this agenda, please register to do so at least 10 minutes prior to the meeting. Up to 3 speakers are permitted to speak for up to 3 minutes each on any agenda item. Please contact the officer named on the front of the agenda for any further clarification.

Questions

Questions may be asked without notice if the Chairman decides that the matter is urgent.

5 **Call-in of Executive Decision: 'Outdoor Education' (Pages 5 - 54)**

To consider a call-in request in respect to the Cabinet decision relating to Outdoor Education taken on 27 March 2018 and published on 28 March 2018.

The decision of Cabinet was as follows:

- 1) *Cabinet notes the outcomes of the outdoor education review and key decisions required at this stage.*
- 2) *Cabinet resolves to close both Braeside and Oxenwood outdoor education sites from the 31st August 2018.*
- 3) *Commence consultation with staff in line with the Councils HR Policies.*
- 4) *Engage with Wiltshire Schools and key stakeholders on the development of a sustainable plan for the Councils future role in outdoor education in Wiltshire.*

5) Continues to support the broader benefits of outdoor education, and supports schools to access appropriate services.

The call-in of this decision was requested by Councillors Jon Hubbard, Ross Henning, Brian Mathew, Hayley Spencer, Chris Hurst, Ruth Hopkinson, Clare Cape, Sarah Gibson, Pat Aves and Ian Thorn.

A report from the Head of Democracy is attached.

6 Date of Next Meeting

To confirm the date of the next meeting as 5 June 2018.

PART II

Items during consideration of which it is recommended that the public should be excluded because of the likelihood that exempt information would be disclosed.

Wiltshire Council

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

10 April 2018

Call-In with respect to the Cabinet decision relating to Outdoor Education taken on 27th March and published on 28th March 2018

Purpose of report

1. A call-in with respect to the above Cabinet decision has been received by the Designated Scrutiny Officer. The call-in request is attached at **Appendix 1**.
2. This report sets out the background and process for the Management Committee in considering, and either rejecting the call-in, or referring the decision back to the decision maker for reconsideration.

Background

3. The Cabinet decision was taken under Part 2 (i.e. closed session) on 27th March 2018 and was published on 28th March 2018. Cabinet's resolution was to approve the recommendations contained in the report of the Corporate Director for Children and Education, attached at **Appendix 2**. The recommendations were as follows:
 1. *Cabinet notes the outcomes of the outdoor education review and key decisions required at this stage.*
 2. *Cabinet resolves to close both Braeside and Oxenwood outdoor education sites from the 31st August 2018.*
 3. *Commence consultation with staff in line with the Councils HR Policies.*
 4. *Engage with Wiltshire Schools and key stakeholders on the development of a sustainable plan for the Councils future role in outdoor education in Wiltshire.*
 5. *Continues to support the broader benefits of outdoor education, and supports schools to access appropriate services.*
4. An appendix to the Cabinet report was a report from the Traded Services for Schools Scrutiny Task Group regarding the review of Outdoor Education. This is attached at **Appendix 3** and the Executive response to it is attached at **Appendix 4**.
5. Under the council's Constitution, a group of no less than 10 non-executive councillors are able to request that a decision is called-in, within 5 working days of the publication of the decision. Upon receipt of a request to call-in,

the designated scrutiny officer must call a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee within 5 days to consider the call-in.

6. The Designated Scrutiny Officer received a request to call this decision in on 5th April 2018, as detailed in Appendix 1, sent by (1) Cllr Jon Hubbard with supporting signatories from:

- | | |
|--------------------|------------------|
| (2) Ross Henning | (7) Clare Cape |
| (3) Brian Matthew | (8) Sarah Gibson |
| (4) Hayley Spencer | (9) Pat Aves |
| (5) Chris Hurst | (10) Ian Thorn |
| (6) Ruth Hopkinson | |

7. The provision for a call-in of an executive decision is set out in the [Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules](#) in Part 8 of the Wiltshire Council Constitution (part 8). It is designed to be used in exceptional circumstances where members have evidence which suggests that the Executive did not take the decision in accordance with the principles of decision-making as set out in Article 13.2 of [Part 2](#) of the Constitution.

8. The specific principles, identified by the call-in signatories, as having not been followed, and the supporting justification as to why, are provided below:

Principle of decision making	Comments describing how this principle has not been followed by the decision maker (as appropriate)
to produce action that is proportionate to the desired outcome	Whilst this decision will, in theory, save the council a relatively small amount of money, the impact on children and young people in the county will be significant
to ensure open, fair and honest administration	The council is committed to open and transparent decision making, but this decision was taken in a secret session of the cabinet, with absolutely no papers published in the public realm, not even the Scrutiny Task Group Report. There was no consultation with service users or staff in advance of the decision being made.
to be clear over desired outcomes and aims	
to record the options considered and discarded	The cabinet report was not clear in how all alternative options had been considered – and indeed not all options, such as a Management

	Takeover, had been considered.
to state the reasons for the action	
to consult interested parties where appropriate and practicable	No consultation with service users, schools, parents or staff took place in advance of the decision being made
to consult appropriate officers and to seek their professional advice	Whilst Officers at County Hall were consulted no opportunity was given for staff at the centres to contribute towards the decision
to show due respect for human rights, and to provide equality of opportunity	Staff at the centres were given no opportunity to contribute or comment on a decision which will, potentially, significantly impact on their lives and careers.
to obtain best value and operate efficiently, effectively and economically	
to serve Wiltshire communities and to work in partnership with other agencies having the same aim	
to promote the economic, social, and environmental well-being of the county	
to determine issues at the lowest level commensurate with their importance	
to keep and sustain what is useful in the traditions of the authority and to reject any practices or services retained purely out of sentiment.	The council runs a number of projects to support the county's young people including the Gifted and Talented Programme. The closure of these centres, which in themselves are a cherished and valued asset of the people of Wiltshire, will potentially put these programmes at risk.

9. The call-in request further clarifies in the section on action already taken to resolve the matter, including representations to the decision maker:

“On the day following the decision (Wednesday 28th March) I wrote to the Cabinet Member setting out my concerns regarding the Gifted and Talented Programme, stating my concerns and saying I was considering a Call-In as an option.

As of the time of writing this Call-In request (Thursday 5th April) I have not even received an acknowledgement of my request from the Cabinet Member, let alone a response.”

10. Further comments were also included as follows:

“I would like to see the Cabinet reconsider this decision, following listening to the feedback of parents, children/young people and schools.

I would also like to see serious consideration given to working with staff to look at how a separate organisation could be established to run the centres.”

Purpose of the meeting

11. The purpose of this meeting is for the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee (‘the Committee’) to consider the evidence presented by the call-in signatories that the principles of decision making, as outlined in the Constitution, have not been followed and provide the opportunity for the relevant Cabinet Member to outline the details of, and reasons for, the decision.
12. The options for the Committee are either to refer the decision back to the Cabinet Member for reconsideration in the light of the outcome of the debate at the meeting, or to reject the call-in and allow the decision to be implemented with immediate effect.

Format for the meeting

13. Call-ins are only used in exceptional circumstances in Wiltshire Council and are therefore an unusual occurrence. As such, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, the format for the meeting is as outlined below.
14. When the meeting begins the Chairman will:
- Invite any members of the public who have registered to speak, to do so. (Up to 3 speakers are permitted to speak for up to 3 minutes on the agenda item)
 - Ask a representative of the councillors who requested the call-in to outline their concerns and reasons for these.
 - Ask the Cabinet Member (and their supporting colleagues) to briefly respond to the points raised.

15. Members of the Committee will then discuss the call-in request and the evidence presented and invite the Cabinet Member and the councillors who requested the call-in to respond to any questions asked by the Committee.
16. The Chairman will invite, in turn, the Cabinet Member and then the representative of the councillors who requested the call-in, to sum up any final comments.
17. Based on the evidence from the Cabinet Member and the councillors who requested the call-in, the Committee will then decide in accordance with the options set out in paragraph 11.
18. In either case, reasons will be given by the Committee for its decision.

Next steps following the meeting of the management committee

19. Following the meeting, the relevant Cabinet Member, Corporate and Associate Directors and call-in signatories will be informed of the outcome of the meeting, and minutes published.
20. If the Committee decides that the decision does not need to be reconsidered, then it can be implemented immediately.
21. If the Committee refers the decision back to the decision-maker, then it will be reconsidered in light of comments made by the Committee within a further 5 working days. The decision-maker can decide whether to amend the original decision, or not, before adopting a final decision.
22. Once a final decision has been made there is no further right of review under the overview and scrutiny rules.
23. In the event of any additional recommendations being made by the Committee then these will be treated in the same way as any other recommendations made by overview and scrutiny, and referred to the relevant Cabinet Member or the Executive generally.

Paul Kelly, Head of Democracy (and Designated Scrutiny Officer), 01225 713049, paul.kelly@wiltshire.gov.uk

Report author: Henry Powell, Scrutiny Lead, 01225 718052, henry.powell@wiltshire.gov.uk

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Call-in request form

Appendix 2 – Cabinet report – Outdoor Education – 27th March 2018

Appendix 3 – Report of the Traded Services for Schools Scrutiny Task Group on Outdoor Education (considered by Cabinet on 27th March 2018)

Appendix 4 – Response to Scrutiny Task Group Report (considered by Cabinet
on 27th March 2018)

Background Papers

None

1. Decision to be called in:

Decision title: Outdoor Education

Decision reference no. (cabinet member decisions):

Or

Decision minute no. and meeting date (cabinet committee decisions):

Meeting held 27 March 2018 – Minute item 215

2. Name of councillor requesting the call-in: Cllr Jon Hubbard

Signed (not required if sent by email):

3. Names of at least 9 co-signatories:

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Ross Henning | 7. Sarah Gibson |
| 2. Brian Matthew | 8. Pat Aves |
| 3. Hayley Spencer | 9. Ian Thorn |
| 4. Chris Hurst | 10. Optional |
| 5. Ruth Hopkinson | 11. Optional |
| 6. Clare Cape | 12. Optional |

4. Which of the principles of decision making in [Part 8 of the Constitution – Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules](#) have not been applied?

NB. Call-in is an extraordinary power intended for use only when the principles of decision making have not been followed. It is not intended to be used to appeal a decision that is simply disagreed with. It is therefore important that as much information as possible is included in the table below.

Principle of decision making	Comments describing how this principle has not been followed by the decision maker (as appropriate)
to produce action that is proportionate to the desired outcome	Whilst this decision will, in theory, save the council a relatively small amount of money, the impact on children and young people in the county will be significant
to ensure open, fair and honest administration	The council is committed to open and transparent decision making, but this decision was taken in a secret session of the cabinet, with absolutely no papers published in the public realm, not even the Scrutiny Task Group Report. There was no consultation with service users or staff in advance of the decision being made.
to be clear over desired outcomes and aims	
to record the options considered and discarded	The cabinet report was not clear in how all alternative options had been considered – and indeed not all options, such as a Management Takeover, had been considered.
to state the reasons for the action	
to consult interested parties where appropriate and practicable	No consultation with service users, schools, parents or staff took place in advance of the decision being made
to consult appropriate officers and to seek their professional advice	Whilst Officers at County Hall were consulted no opportunity was given for staff at the centres to contribute towards the decision
to show due respect for human rights, and to	Staff at the centres were given no opportunity to contribute or comment on a decision which

provide equality of opportunity	will, potentially, significantly impact on their lives and carrers.
to obtain best value and operate efficiently, effectively and economically	
to serve Wiltshire communities and to work in partnership with other agencies having the same aim	
to promote the economic, social, and environmental well-being of the county	
to determine issues at the lowest level commensurate with their importance	
to keep and sustain what is useful in the traditions of the authority and to reject any practices or services retained purely out of sentiment.	The council runs a number of projects to support the county's young people including the Gifted and Talented Programme. The closure of these centres, which in themselves are a cherished and valued asset of the people of Wiltshire, will potentially put these programmes at risk.

5. Please use the space below to describe the action already taken to resolve the matter, including representations made to the decision maker

On the day following the decision (Wednesday 28th March) I wrote to the Cabinet Member setting out my concerns regarding the Gifted and Talented Programme, stating my concerns and saying I was considering a Call-In as an option.

As of the time of writing this Call-In request (Thursday 5th April) I have not even received an acknowledgement of my request from the Cabinet Member, let alone a response.

6. Please use the space below to add any further comments. You may wish to consider:

- The outcome you would like to see as a result of this decision being called in
- Any further information that O&S Management Committee might consider when assessing this call-in. NB. This will be at the discretion of the Chairman.

I would like to see the Cabinet reconsider this decision, following listening to the feedback of parents, children/young people and schools.

I would also like to see serious consideration given to working with staff to look at how a separate organisation could be established to run the centres.

7. Notes

The call-in request must be sent either by email or as a signed paper copy to the Designated Scrutiny Officer: Paul Kelly, Head of Democracy, paul.kelly@wiltshire.gov.uk, Wiltshire Council, County Hall, Bythesea Road, Trowbridge, Wiltshire, BA14 8JN

For further information or advice please contact a member of the Scrutiny team via 01225 713335 or committee@wiltshire.gov.uk

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

27 March 2018

Subject: Review of Outdoor Education provision in Wiltshire

Cabinet member: Councillor Laura Mayes – Children, Education and Skills

Key Decision: Yes

Executive Summary

Wiltshire Council operates outdoor education centres at Braeside, Devizes with 90 beds and Oxenwood near Marlborough, with 38 beds. Both sites offer a range of outdoor education activities, residential courses and some off-site sessions.

Outdoor education is a non-statutory function and given ongoing losses, high maintenance and capital costs of the sites combined with increasing competition from commercial outdoor education providers and recruitment difficulties a review of the Council's outdoor education provision has been undertaken.

The benefits of outdoor education are well documented and include physical benefits, social skills such as teamwork and leadership, and improvements in educational attainment. Nationally access to outdoor education has become more widely available from the commercial sector, with both small independent operators and larger international providers offering outdoor education and adventure activity opportunities. Many Wiltshire schools already access these commercially provided services.

Historically many local authorities have owned and operated their own outdoor activity centres to provide for the benefits of outdoor education; but increasing funding pressures and the changing relationship between schools and the local authority are resulting in councils having to consider alternatives to and savings from non-statutory functions such as outdoor education.

The outdoor education review has considered the impact and benefits of the council run services and whether they are necessary to ensure positive outcomes for children in Wiltshire. Given the significant budget pressures the Council face we also need to mitigate future capital risk for the Council which will be potentially over £1.412m to keep these centres open. Given the need to make investments for some of our most vulnerable residents in statutory settings the recommendations identified within this review are required to ensure we are focusing the council's limited resources into areas of most need.

Proposals

It is proposed that Wiltshire Council –

- I. Cabinet notes the outcomes of the outdoor education review and key decisions required at this stage.
- II. Cabinet resolves to close both Braeside and Oxenwood outdoor education sites from the 31st August 2018.
- III. Commence consultation with staff in line with the Councils HR Policies.
- IV. Engage with Wiltshire Schools and key stakeholders on the development of a sustainable plan for the Councils future role in outdoor education in Wiltshire.
- V. Continues to support the broader benefits of outdoor education, and supports schools to access appropriate services.

Reason for Proposals

A review of the Councils two outdoor education sites, Braeside and Oxenwood has been considering the impact and benefits of Outdoor Education for local children and whether the council run services that are non-statutory are necessary to ensure positive outcomes for children in Wiltshire.

Terence Herbert – Corporate Director, Children and Education

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

27 March 2018

Subject: Review of Outdoor Education provision in Wiltshire

Cabinet member: Councillor Laura Mayes – Children, Education and Skills

Key Decision: Yes

Purpose of Report

1. To:
 - I. Inform Cabinet of the outcomes of the outdoor education review and key decisions required at this stage.
 - II. Seek a Cabinet decision on whether to close both Braeside and Oxenwood outdoor education sites from the 31st August 2018.
 - III. Commence consultation with effected staff in line with the Councils HR Policy.
 - IV. Engage with Wiltshire schools and key stakeholders on the development of a sustainable plan for the Councils future role in outdoor education in Wiltshire.
 - V. Continue support of the benefits of outdoor education, and support schools to access appropriate services.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

2. The proposals are relevant to the Council's priorities and objectives as laid down in the Business Plan, specifically the proposal supports the following outcomes:
 - Strong communities and particularly the ambition of communities where everyone can achieve their part.
 - Protecting the vulnerable and schools that help all pupils achieve.

Background

- 3.1 The Council currently own and operate two outdoor education centres; Braeside and Oxenwood. Both offer a similar range of activities and courses on a residential and non-residential basis. The centres are mainly used by Wiltshire schools, predominantly primary schools, with additional business generated from youth groups and a small number of schools outside of Wiltshire.
- 3.2 The centres do not provide statutory services but are available to schools on a fully traded basis, charging for services and competing in an open market. Schools may choose to buy council services or opt to use alternative commercial providers for residential trips and outdoor education. There is a well-established and competitively priced commercial outdoor education market in Wiltshire and the surrounding areas that many Wiltshire schools use.

Braeside Education and Conference Centre

- 3.3 Braeside is a 4.5-acre site located in Devizes offering a range of outdoor education activities, with 90 beds for residential courses. Conference facilities are also available and used by Wiltshire Council staff.
- 3.4 In addition to general outdoor activities for children the centre provides courses for Able, Gifted, Talented and Enrichment (AGT&E) students. These courses are used by 104 (17/18) Wiltshire schools and delivered as bi-annual programmes, from April to August and October to March each year.

Oxenwood Outdoor Education Centre

- 3.4 Oxenwood is a 1.4-acre site in Oxenwood, near Marlborough. The centre is significantly smaller in acreage, with only 38 beds and offers a similar range of outdoor activities to Braeside. There are no conference facilities at this site, but additional income has been generated through off-site themed and activity days hosted at schools.

4. Main Considerations for the Council

- 4.1 The review of outdoor education to date has explored the following.
 - Use of the centres and customer experience.
 - The income and expenditure of both centres.
 - Capital costs to maintain the buildings.
 - Impacts on children and educational attainment.
 - Alternative delivery options and configurations to ensure commercial sustainability.

Centre Use

- 4.2 The centres offer a range of activities from short course to residential programmes, both are predominantly used by primary schools but each differ slightly in their customer base. Braeside attracts more non-Wiltshire schools, and Oxenwood has a smaller customer base but delivers more themed and activity days at the centre and off-site at schools. The highest sales at both centres are for 3 days and 2 night programmes. A breakdown of centre use is included at Appendix 1.
- 4.3 Braeside was used by 51 Wiltshire schools in 2016/17 and 52 schools in 17/18 for residential courses. For non-residential activities, this was 88 in 2016/17 and 70 in 2017/18. During the same period Oxenwood was used by 25 Wiltshire schools for residential programmes and 11 for non-residential programmes. Some schools use centres for both residential and day courses and will be included in both sets of figures.
- 4.4 The highest return is from residential sales and these have been calculated as occupancy rates, calculated on the number of times a bed has been occupied over a 48-week period, for 5 days per week, to provide a baseline. On this basis occupancy rates for 2017/2018 were on average 29% for Braeside and 14.7% for Oxenwood. It should be noted that the context for the average occupancy rates is that the use of the sites is very seasonal with peak use over the summer months and very limited use over the autumn and winter.
- 4.5 There are site operational restrictions that impact on income and attendances levels. For example, at Oxenwood, due to space restrictions it is not possible to have single day use combined with residential activities. At the larger capacity Braeside ensuring appropriate segregation of the sexes potentially limits total capacity. Bookings at the centres are also impacted by their location, with Braeside being in the centre of the County and Oxenwood on the extremity.
- 4.6 The most notable difference in services offered by the two sites is the Able, Gifted and Talented (AG&T) programme run by Braeside. In 2016/17 112 Wiltshire schools accessed 1060 places on these courses, in 2017/18 this was 104 schools with 981 children attending. AG&T courses are curriculum based and are delivered by external tutors, and enrichment courses are mostly facilitated by Braeside staff and largely focused on outdoor activities such as off-road biking, wood crafts and water sports. Courses are generally half day or full day sessions with a small number of residential courses.

Income & Expenditure (Revenue)

- 4.7 The outturn figures for the last two years based on actual figures for 2015/2016 and 2016/2017, show deficits after the application of corporate support recharges. Please also note the comments regarding property maintenance costs and potential capital requirements. A breakdown of outturn figures for 2017/2018 is included at Appendix 2.

Property Considerations

- 4.8 The revenue operating costs for the centres are significant. The age, type and general conditions of both properties means that aspects such as reactive repairs and maintenance, energy performance and utilities, cleaning etc. all cost more when compared to more modern and fit-for-purpose buildings. On average over the last 3 years, the operating costs for each site are; Braeside £85k and Oxenwood £60k.
- 4.9 A condition survey was carried out on both properties by CIPFA in 2012. The surveys identified capital works required to maintain the buildings in the short, medium and long term, up to a 25-year period. All the works identified are required to maintain the buildings to the current required standards. No consideration was given to improving or upgrading the facilities or the service offer. The works are simply to keep the buildings functioning and safe in their current make-up, to continue in operation.
- 4.10 The outstanding work required between now and 2022 and estimates of the costs is attached Appendix 3. The advice of the Strategic Asset and Facilities Management team is that given the age and condition of both the buildings the repair figure of £1.412m across both sites should be viewed as the minimum spend required.
- 4.11 Both outdoor education sites require significant capital investment to continue operation. However, to make the sites attractive and turn them into viable commercial propositions, additional capital monies above the minimum £1.412m identified costs would need to be dedicated to significant modernisation of the buildings to improve the service offer. Private sector operators are offering significantly better accommodation standards and a far superior range of facilities than users currently experience at both sites.
- 4.12 It is not possible to give an estimate of the cost of modernising each site to provide for a commercially competitive service offer. Again, due to the age and type of the buildings, significant refurbishments will attract additional cost as the works would be more extensive and complex than similar works on a more modern building. A specification for improved service facilities has not been developed and therefore prohibits an assessment of cost.
- 4.13 Estimates of property values are not included in this paper. Each site requires significant due diligence to ascertain the council's options in terms of disposal, re-use or sale. If Members resolve to terminate the service at these sites, work will be undertaken to establish the conditions under which the sites were acquired, the legal implications of covenants and other potential restrictions, and the planning potential for future use or development. Following this work an estimate of value can be obtained and will be used in consideration to decide the most appropriate disposal option for each site and how this could potentially contribute to the Council's Business Plan.

Staffing and specialist activities

- 4.14 The outdoor education centres experience significant issues with recruitment of suitably qualified instructors. The seasonal nature of the demand and the availability of instructors with specialist skills, contracted on zero hours to minimise costs potentially limits the range of activities that can be provided and consequently impacting income generation. This combined with the site restrictions and equipment available is presenting considerable operational problems for the centre management and is impacting on sales. This is particularly the case at the less used and smaller Oxenwood site.
- 4.15 In comparison to the larger private sector operators the range of activities provided by Oxenwood and Braeside can look limited. Due to space restrictions at Oxenwood they are unable to provide some of the more adventurous activities such as 'zip' wires, etc. The current offer at both sites is more curriculum focussed and tailored to the needs of the individual school.
- 4.16 Currently the sites have no dedicated marketing resource or identified marketing budget. To develop sales and the range of activities additional staffing time will need to be factored into any increased marketing and consequent usage.

Impacts on Children

- 4.17 The benefits of outdoor learning and activities for children are well documented. In addition to the contribution they can make to a healthy lifestyle, evidence suggests developments in social skills, team building and relationships can be derived from outdoor education and activities.
- 4.18 Research indicates that Ofsted recognises the importance of 'learning outside the classroom' and studies into the impacts of high quality residential courses report improvements in educational attainment. A positive experience of a residential trip in school can be a child's most remembered experience.

A review of the market place has been carried out to identify what similar services are available in the south west region and to understand the options for schools booking outdoor education courses and residential trips.

- 4.19 There are a significant number of outdoor education centres in the counties surrounding Wiltshire and on the south west coast. These range from council owned centres, single centre organisations operated commercially or not-for-profit, and centres that are part of a national or international chain. Research has identified several outdoor education centres in surrounding counties Dorset (9), Somerset (5), Gloucestershire (4), Oxfordshire (1), Berkshire (1), Hampshire (9).
- 4.20 Outdoor education provision is also made from the Wiltshire Outdoor Learning Team (WOLT) who are a not for profit organisation that run non-

residential outdoor education courses on multiple sites across Wiltshire to suit customer needs.

- 4.21 In addition, PGL a well-established commercial provider of outdoor education with 24 sites across the UK, France and Spain run a centre in Liddington, Swindon, with a capacity for up to 1000 children on a 150-acre site. This venue offers high quality accommodation and a very wide range of activities at a competitive price.
- 4.22 The Able, Gifted and Talented (AG&T) Programme is a service valued by schools. The programme is currently delivered at Braeside Education and Conference Centre by external facilitators. Alternative providers of this type of service are available in the region. The off-site services offered by Oxenwood and AG&T style activities could potentially be managed from an alternative Council venue.

Alternative delivery options

- 4.23 The review has considered a range of alternative delivery models and structures for outdoor education. These are covered in more detail with costing where appropriate at Appendix 5. Other Local Authorities have moved outdoor education into Trusts or Community Interest Companies; this has the benefit of allowing applications for external grant funding but does leave the underlying issue of asset ownership, maintenance and associated capital investment needs potentially remaining with the local authority.
- 4.24 Initial discussions have been held with a small number of private sector organisations to explore the possibility of sale or partnership. Feedback to date has indicated that due to the limited bed capacity at both sites private sector companies view both Oxenwood and Braeside as not commercially viable.
- 4.25 Discussions have also been held with charitable organisations regarding the possibilities of these organisations taking on the sites. Community First is the only organisation to have expressed an interest in the Oxenwood site only. Community First have written to the Council with an expression of interest for this site to be a potential Community Asset Transfer. However, they are not prepared to take on the capital and maintenance costs associated with the site and to date there has been no business case submitted. On this basis, the outline proposal is not considered viable.

Commercial viability

- 4.26 The review has considered the commercial options, opportunities and threats associated with outdoor education. The key to maintaining a commercially viable service is funding the repairs and ensuring the sustainability of the sites in the longer term.
- 4.27 To fund repairs to the buildings, and ensure both centres are generating sufficient income to cover all costs, potential price increases have been

calculated, based on residential programmes of 3 days and 2 nights, these being the most popular courses, representing the highest sales. To ensure full cost recovery, prices would need to be increased by 27% at Braeside and 41% at Oxenwood. The impacts of this have been analysed and are included at Appendix 5.

- 4.28 Based on research into prices for similar services in the southwest region a price increase of this nature would place Wiltshire Council services in the top quartile of the most expensive outdoor education facilities.
- 4.29 An alternative to increasing prices is to increase occupancy levels, providing sufficient growth in the number of places sold each year to cover all costs. Details of the required increase in sales are included at Appendix 5, highlighting the need to increase occupancy levels by sales of an additional 1661 nights per annum at Braeside and 542 nights per annum at Oxenwood.
- 4.30 An alternative approach to recovering the costs of capital would be to cap price increases at 10% and recover the remainder through increased occupancy. This requires Braeside to increase nights occupied by 15% and Oxenwood by 5%, combined with a £7.20 and £6.60 per night price increase for each site respectively.
- 4.31 Increased sales to recover costs have been explored. As previously mentioned this has highlighted a requirement for additional expenditure at both centres to enhance facilities and provide a competitively viable standard of accommodation. Requirements include improved shower and toilet facilities, sleeping accommodation, equipment for activities. Added to this would be the costs for additional marketing and staffing to realise the increased occupancy.
- 4.32 Whilst potential for increased sales at Braeside exist the site at Oxenwood is significantly constricted and unable to develop activities due the lack of space. The centre uses 1.4 acres and has access to additional outdoor spaces via an understanding with a local landowner who allows use of woods nearby for outdoor activities. This is a key issue, restricting the development of activities and income generation. In addition, the inability at Oxenwood to combine day and residential activities further limits commercial development.
- 4.33 In addition to the above property costs, provision of a replacement mini bus for the Oxenwood site will have to be factored into longer term planning on the operation.

5. Overview and Scrutiny Engagement

- 5.1 Two rapid scrutiny exercises on Traded Services and Outdoor Education were conducted on 13th September and 18th October 2017, following which a Traded Services for Schools task group was established.

- 5.2 The task group met on 7th February 2018 to consider outdoor education and subsequently carried out site visits to Oxenwood and Braeside on 27th February 2018. A report from the Task Group is included at Appendix 6.

Safeguarding Considerations

6. The outdoor education centres provide outdoor education for all children including those in vulnerable groups. However, a decision for the Council to cease all or some of its outdoor education services will have no safeguarding impact.

Public Health Implications

7. The outdoor education centres provide outdoor activities for children, contributing to a healthy lifestyle. Access to these activities will remain available through the various facilities within Wiltshire and in neighbouring counties.

Procurement Implications

8. There are no procurement implications.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

9. A full Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed. Closure of one or both sites will result in limiting access to Council owned outdoor education facilities and activities across the county. This may have a particularly detrimental effect for disadvantaged communities and ethnic minorities who may not get the chance to experience outdoor education benefits.

10. Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

- 10.1 There are no environmental or climate change impacts.

11. Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken

11. Outdoor education, particularly residential trips, is important to the social and educational attainment of children. Opportunities and risks of this report have been considered in some detail.
1. If the decision is to continue provision of outdoor education sites then funding for capital costs identified in Appendix 3, would be required. Failure to invest in the repairs required at one or both the sites may result in unsafe services, unplanned closure and an inability to satisfy bookings.
 2. Funding for immediate property repairs identified would be required.

3. The new pricing and occupancy model's necessary to recover costs would potentially make the centres uncompetitive and financially non-viable presenting a financial risk to the authority.

12. Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks

	Risk	Action to mitigate the risk
1.	Negative feedback from customers	Engagement and consultation with all major stakeholders through established routes.
2.	Inability to honour future bookings	Providing plenty of warning to schools so that they can arrange alternative provision and potential negotiation with other providers to transfer any existing bookings/provide support for local schools.
3.	Redundancy risks to staff	Opportunities to transfer into new roles to be fully explored.

13. Financial Implications

- 13.1 This report presents the financial position of the council's outdoor education centres including projected capital spend, and the impact on the financial viability of the centres. The options are outlined in the paper and appendices.
- 13.2 The services are currently operated as traded services and are required to deliver a balanced budget including a contribution to corporate support costs. As outlined in the report these corporate support costs are estimates and do not reflect the true total cost of running the services, particularly in relation to property maintenance costs. Outturn figures for 2015-16 and 2016-17 and projected position for 2017/18 (Appendix 2) show that centres made a small revenue loss in the first two years and a small surplus at Braeside in 2017/18 in each year against the agreed budget meaning that the Council is subsidising the services from its revenue budget. That subsidy is greater when the true cost of maintaining the facilities is taken in to account (see paragraph 4.8).
- 13.3 The main customers for the centres are Wiltshire schools and trips are paid for from school delegated budgets and/or contributions from parents. This financing of the school's trips and experiences would continue regardless of the provider of outdoor education services.
- 13.4 Required capital investment has been estimated at £1.412m.
- 13.5 It has been assumed in the model that capital and financing costs would need to be fully repaid by the services over a 10-year period. To meet the

costs of capital work and to remain financially viable the services would need to significantly increase prices to schools and other groups and/or increase occupancy levels above those current experienced. Increasing occupancy will require additional investment in staffing and other facilities over and above the costs shown here.

- 13.6 Although capital costs can be avoided through the proposal to close the centres, there are costs associated with the proposed action as there will be redundancy costs if the centres are closed.

Redundancy and pension strain costs estimates are available if required. This risk is identified in the report and actions have been proposed to minimise the numbers and costs of redundancies through redeployment etc.

14. Legal Implications

- 14.1 As the service provided is a non-statutory (discretionary) service then there is no legal prohibition on closure of one or both sites. However, if closure of the service is the preferred option then this will need to be carefully managed as there likely to be redundancy issues to consider.
- 14.2 Similarly, there may be a public concern at the loss of a local service/employment opportunities that may need to be managed. Subsequent work regarding property disposal will need to consider restrictive covenants and potential options of transfer including possible referral to the Secretary of State.

16. Conclusions

- 16.1 In conclusion, the review so far has identified the benefits of outdoor education, recognising its contribution to educational attainment and development of social skills. Given the alternative options available, it is not necessary for the Council to deliver these services.
- 16.3 It should be noted that both sites are part of local communities and outdoor education experiences engender a considerable emotional attachment; parents with children at school now attended these facilities and now their children are visiting the centres. For many local children, a visit to Braeside or Oxenwood was their first experience of outdoor activities and being away from their parents for the first time.
- 16.4 However, in view of the non-statutory nature of the service alongside the ongoing revenue risks and very significant capital funding requirements of £1.412m the review recommends closure of the Braeside and Oxenwood centres. This action will avoid ongoing loss of revenue resources and avoid significant capital expenditure. Following the Cabinet decision an exit plan based on a closure date of August 31st, 2018 will be developed.

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March 2018

Background Papers

The following documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report:
'None'

Appendices

- Appendix 1 Centre Use
- Appendix 2 Income and Expenditure
- Appendix 3 Property Costs
- Appendix 4 Benchmark Data
- Appendix 5 Options and associated costs considered
- Appendix 6 Scrutiny task force report

CENTRE USE

Braeside

2017/18	Residential	Non-residential
Wiltshire primary school /Academies	52	70
Non- Wiltshire Primary School /Academies	28	11
Wiltshire secondary schools / Academies	0	1
Non-Wiltshire Secondary Schools/Academies	0	0
Youth Organisations	0	4
Colleges	0	0
Private Hire Groups	1	4
Coast & Countryside Leader	0	2

Residential Use (Bed Occupancy) 2017/2018												
	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
2 Days 1 Night		30	21	70								45
3 Days 2 night	206		430	270		217	282	224	39	84	134	426
4 Days 3 Night					25	54			22		27	
5 Days 4 Night					15			41				
One day medical needs	3	1	1			1		1		2	2	
Superstrings day pupils					25							
14 night RSY group					90							
TOTAL	209	453	452	340	155	272	282	266	61	86	163	471

Day Use (Headcount) 2017/2018												
	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
AGT&E	27	108	158	198	0		17	111	34	172	156	0
1 Day Courses	90		173	62	0	88	61	29				90
TOTAL	117	108	331	260	0	88	78	140	34	172	156	90

Conference & Room Bookings (Headcount) 2017/2018												
	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Catered	41	88	77	0	0	48	107	248	39	86	115	130
Room Only	110	41	72	203	0	39	93	93	40	86	93	150

Oxenwood

Oxenwood - Customers Using Centre 2017/2018		
	Residential	Non-Residential
Wiltshire Primary Schools/Academies	24	8
Non-Wiltshire Primary Schools/Academies	9	10
Wiltshire Secondary Schools/Academies	1	3
Non-Wiltshire Secondary Schools/Academies	2	1
Youth Organisations	14	14
Colleges	0	1
Private Hire Groups	3	4

Oxenwood Residential Use (Bed Occupancy) 2017/2018												
	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
2 Days 1 Night	178	174	57	0	0	86	0	0	0	0	26	88
3 Days 2 Night	142	302	566	196	0	188	170	370	66	50	144	158
4 Days 3 Night	0	0	57	84	0	0	54	0	0	0	0	0
5 Days 4 Night	0	0	0	0	0	84	0	0	92	80	0	0
TOTAL	320	476	680	280	0	358	224	370	158	130	170	246

Oxenwood Day Use (Headcount) 2017/2018												
	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Theme days	7	0										
Holiday groups	27				95						21	
Summer School				162	54							
Birthday Parties	12			20			13					
Inspire NEETs	19	24	15				5	3	6		12	10
Tuition Service	9	6	2	0	0	2	2	2	2	9	9	6
Youth Activities	16	64	6	51	22	46		32				
Themed Days			58	440		28	38	120		90		116
Activity days		54	292				196			48		18
Teacher Training											11	8
TOTAL	90	148	373	673	171	76	254	157	8	147	53	158

INCOME & EXPENDITURE (REVENUE)

	2015 / 2016 Outturn Deficit	2016 / 2017 Outturn Deficit	2017/18 Outturn Deficit
Braeside	27,003	26,562	-2,226
Oxenwood	1,459	9,617	26,112

Braeside Budget Actuals (Outturn) 2017/2018

Income and Expenditure Statement - Braeside			
Braeside			
Budget 2017-18		Forecasted actuals 2017-18	
	£		£
Expenditure		Expenditure	
Pay	311,400	Pay	302,726
Non Pay	107,330	Non Pay	93,775
Total Direct Expenditure	418,730	Total Direct Expenditure	396,501
Income	0	Income	0
Subscription (Right Choice, Wiltshire Learning Trust, etc)	0	Subscription (Right Choice, Wiltshire Learning Trust, etc)	0
Pay as you go income	-468,600	Pay as you go income	-513,257
Other income relating to traded activities	0	Other income relating to traded activities	
Total Traded Income	-468,600	Total Traded Income	-513,257
Net Surplus/Deficit before CSR	-49,870	Net Surplus/Deficit before CSR	-116,756
Corporate Support Overheads	114,530	Corporate Support Overheads	114,530
Net Surplus/Deficit	64,660	Net Surplus/Deficit	-2,226

Oxenwood Budget Actuals (Outturn) 2017/2018

Income and Expenditure Statement - Oxenwood			
Oxenwood			
Budget 2017-18		Forecasted actuals 2017-18	
	£		£
Expenditure		Expenditure	
Pay	134,500	Pay	157,880
Non Pay	36,500	Non Pay	23,293
Total Direct Expenditure	171,000	Total Direct Expenditure	181,173
Income		Income	
Subscription (Right Choice, Wiltshire Learning Trust, etc		Subscription (Right Choice, Wiltshire Learning Trust, etc	
Pay as you go income	-221,200	Pay as you go income	-187,311
Other income relating to traded activities		Other income relating to traded activities	
total Traded Income	-221,200	total Traded Income	-187,311
Net Surplus/Deficit before CSR	-50,200	Net Surplus/Deficit before CSR	-6,138
Corporate Support Overheads	32,250	Corporate Support Overheads	32,250
Net Surplus/Deficit	-17,950	Net Surplus/Deficit	26,112

PROPERTY COSTS (CAPITAL)

Estimated costs based on Condition Survey (2012) – outstanding works to be completed by 2022

Braeside

Works	Estimated Costs	Totals
Roof Replacement*	450,000	
Electrical	108,000	
Mechanical	137,000	
Sanitary Services	38,000	
Ceilings	16,000	
External Areas	10,000	
External walls, windows and doors	89,000	
Fixed Furniture	23,000	
Floors and stairs	133,000	
Internal walls and doors	58,000	
Redecorations	25,000	
Total		1,087,000

Oxenwood

Works	Estimated Costs	Totals
Replace Pratten building	90,000	
Electrical	22,000	
Mechanical	36,000	
Sanitary Services	24,000	
Ceilings	7,000	
External Areas	9,000	
External walls, windows and doors	50,000	
Fixed Furniture	6,000	
Floors and stairs	35,000	
Internal walls and doors	26,000	
Redecorations	20,000	
Total		325,000

BENCHMARK DATA

Site	Acres	Beds	Camping	Costs based on 12 children and 2 adults				
				Jul: 3 days & 2 nights		Oct: 3 days & 2 nights		Jul: 5 days
				Weekend	Weekdays	Weekend	Weekdays	
Braeside	4.5	90		£138	£144	£138	£144	£256
Oxenwood	1.5	38		£132	£132	£132	£132	£233
Mill on the Brue, Somerset	25	87	45	n/a	£189	£156	£156	£351
Plas Pencilli, Brecon Beacons	17	100		£172	£172	£172	£172	£328
Dean Field Study Centre, Forest of Dean (*1)		72		n/a	£148	n/a	£148	£242
Carey Outdoor Education Centre, Dorset (*2)	14	25	130	n/a	£95	n/a	£95	£150
Kilve Court, Somerset	40	114		£149	£149	£149	£149	£294
The Outdoor Centre, Somerset		76		£147	£147	£147	£147	£235
Charterhouse Centre, Somerset (*3)		63		£156	£156	£156	£156	£240
Great Wood, Somerset		74		£140	£140	£140	£140	£235
PGL, Liddington – Wiltshire (*4)	150	1000		£79	£249	£119	£149	£339
JCA, Shropshire & Hampshire (*4)		500/540		£114	£104	£114	£104	£177

(*1) Small site using surroundings for activities.

(*2) Weekends used for Duke of Edinburgh.

(*3) Small site using 70-acre nature reserve adjacent. Higher risk activities / more staff required so higher costs.

(*4) Prices exclude VAT.

Research based on 2017 prices.

Options and alternative delivery configurations

The review has considered the options for the sites and the alternative delivery configurations for outdoor education, including costs where appropriate or available.

Option 1: Retain and operate

- 15.2 Retention of the centres will require significant capital investment in the properties as outlined in the report, Capital repairs will be in the region of £1.412m. The Council could choose to make this investment at nil return but given the financial pressures this is not considered to be a viable option. Consequently, this option would require increases to prices and/or occupancy rates to finance the work required and move centres to a position of actual cost recovery. Commercially this is not a viable option.
- 15.3 Potential price increases have been modelled based on property costs identified by our in-house team. All increases have been calculated against residential prices only. Price increases have been modelled on a 10-year return of capital spend only, without interest or finance costs, and do not account for future cost pressures or requirement to generate a surplus.
- 15.5 The required growth in sales to increase occupancy and recover all costs has been explored, given the site restrictions more could be possibly achieved with off peak pricing and weekend school holiday use.

Recover all property costs through price increase				
	Increase per Night (£)		Revised Price per Course (£)	
	Braeside	Oxenwood	Braeside	Oxenwood
Scenario 1: Immediate work only	£12.82	£3.06	£170.00	£139.00
Scenario 2: All works	£23.16	£8.32	£191.00	£149.00
% increase in course price.	Braeside	Oxenwood		
Scenario 1: Immediate work only	18%	5%		
Scenario 2: All works	33%	13%		
Recover all property costs through occupancy increase				

	Increase in number of nights		Increase in number of courses to be sold (based on 3 day/2 night courses)	
	Braeside	Oxenwood	Braeside	Oxenwood
Scenario 1: Immediate work only	1,120	158	560	79
Scenario 2: All works	2,023	430	1,011	215
% increase in nights occupied	Braeside	Oxenwood		
Scenario 1: Immediate work only	18%	5%		
Scenario 2: All works	32%	13%		
Cap price increases at 10% and recover remainder through increased occupancy				
	Increase per Night (£)		Revised Price per Course	
	Braeside	Oxenwood	Braeside	Oxenwood
Scenario 1: Immediate work only	£7.20	£6.60	£158.40	£145.20
Scenario 2: All works	£7.20	£6.60	£158.40	£145.20
	Increase in number of nights		Increase in number of courses to be sold	
	Braeside	Oxenwood	Braeside	Oxenwood
Scenario 1: Immediate work only	446	-	188	-
Scenario 2: All works	1,267	81	599	40
% increase in nights occupied	Braeside	Oxenwood		
Scenario 1: Immediate work only	7%	0%		
Scenario 2: All works	20%	2%		

Analysis

Provision of the 'immediate work only option' will not provide the quality of accommodation and experience required to compete with private sector providers.

Estimated borrowing to complete all capital works will increase prices for example at Braeside to at least £183 for a 3-day visit. Higher than all but one of the sample comparative group. Figures above do not include any additional marketing costs or sensitivity analysis for the price increases.

Option 2: Transfer centres and/or operations to a third party

15.5 Discussions with private sector organisations have confirmed no interest in the Outdoor Education centres. The view of the private sector is that the current size of the centres restricts opportunities development and growth and they have been described as commercially non-viable. Private sector

operators ideal site is 50+ acres of woods and lakes with accommodation for 700/800 young people.

- 15.6 Engagement with the voluntary sector has resulted in Community First expressing an interest in Oxenwood only if the centre is made over as a Community Asset Transfer and capital costs are covered by the Council. This is not seen as a viable proposal at this stage.

Option 3: Close the Centres

- 15.7 Closure of both centres is an option as outdoor education is a non-statutory activity and research indicates a wide range of alternative provision competitively priced in the surrounding areas that is accessible by Wiltshire schools.
- 15.8 Potential risks of this option include negative public feedback with significant emotional connection to the venues, many local people have visited the sites.
- 15.9 Bookings are taken some way in advance and these would need to be considered. It is suggested that if this option is chosen then there would need to be a run off period for bookings. This would see potential closure of the sites in August 2018.

Option 4: Close one site only

- 15.10 Close one site and leave one open to ensure the continued provision of Outdoor Education services in Wiltshire.
- 15.11 Given the capacity and the site restrictions the commercial and logical approach to this is to close Oxenwood, the smaller of the sites. Oxenwood has such limited ability to increase income due to the space the centre occupies. It is also limited in the range of activities it can offer given a small land footprint and its scale suffers acutely with securing adequate specialist staffing resources.
- 15.12 Scaling down would mean the Council still provides a residential outdoor education offer and the consequence may be to drive more income towards Braeside. The 'off site' activities from Oxenwood potentially could be managed from and relocated to Braeside.
- 15.13 This option is not risk free as Braeside will need to increase income and a robust long-term business plan would need to be developed and closely monitored to ensure delivery. To mitigate this, it is suggested that income and expenditure targets could be set for 2 years with a later review scheduled to assess impact of the business plan and the longer-term viability for Braeside. This option would enable centre staff to develop proposals for marketing, investment, increased usage and possible refurbishment through capital borrowing.
- 15.15 The opportunities to grow the programme and income at Braeside exist at school holiday times and providing bespoke and 'pay as you go' activity camps during the school holidays.

- 15.16 There are opportunities to develop activities targeted at special education needs and or children that are struggling at school. An example of this could be to consider year 7 'catch up needs' that are emerging. Wiltshire schools are offering tailored clubs to develop skills and attainment in year 7 pupils that have fallen behind. Braeside could develop an offer to run these sessions for schools as an incentive to the young people. Sessions could potentially be funded through DFE support (year 7 catch up grant is currently £411k across Wiltshire) alternatively, Pupil Premium could be used. This approach supports the Councils objectives for improving educational attainment in Wiltshire.
- 15.17 This option provides potential opportunities to transfer staff displaced from the closure of Oxenwood and minimise redundancy, closure and exit costs.

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Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

27 March 2018

Report of the Traded Services for Schools Task Group on Outdoor Education

Purpose

1. To present the findings of the Traded Services for Schools Task Group regarding the review of Outdoor Education undertaken by the Council and the evidence presented to Cabinet.
2. It should be noted that this report has been written to be included with a Part II Cabinet report and, as such, included information which was provided confidentially. Therefore, this report should be reviewed before it is made public.

Background

3. During the 13 June 2017 meeting of the Children's Select Committee, Cllr Laura Mayes, Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Skills asked if the Committee would consider looking into Traded Services for Schools.
4. Two Rapid Scrutiny exercises were undertaken on 13 September and 18 October 2017. The findings from these two meetings were respectively reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Select Committee on 26 September 2017 (access report [here](#)) and Children's Select Committee on 31 October 2017 (access report [here](#)).
5. The committees agreed the establishment and commencement of the Traded Services for Schools Task Group (thereafter referred to as "the task group"), to complete its work within 9 months, and asked the members of the task group to perform a separate scrutiny exercise looking at Outdoor Education.

Membership

6. The opportunity to take part in the Rapid Scrutiny exercise was offered to all non-executive members of the council. The membership of the two Rapid Scrutiny exercises transferred to the task group:

Mr John Hawkins, Chairman of the Task Group
Cllr Trevor Carbin
Cllr Anna Cuthbert
Cllr Jon Hubbard
Cllr Tony Jackson

7. Prior to the start of the task group Cllr Anna Cuthbert had to resign her membership of the task group due to conflicting work commitments. Members of the task group wished to thank Cllr Anna Cuthbert for her valuable contribution to the Rapid Scrutiny exercise she had chaired.

Terms of Reference

8. The following terms of reference were agreed by the task group at its inaugural meeting on 7 February 2018, and will be presented to Children’s Select Committee on 17 April 2018 for approval:

I. To review the proposed developments for traded services to schools, considering the outcomes of the service review of traded services (commenced in October 2016), with a particular focus on the following areas:

- a) The model for the centralised trading unit and the proposed traded services team structure and appointments to ensure sustainability and quality of service;
- b) The cost of services that are currently provided against projected costs to ensure value for money;
- c) The plans for marketing to ensure continuous take-up;
- d) The current policy;
- e) How traded services will be future-proofed.

II. To review and comment on the Cabinet report regarding the proposals for the future of outdoor education in Wiltshire, with particular focus on the evidence-based analysis that led to the options presented within the report. Comments from the task group will be presented to Cabinet at the same meeting at which the report is considered (currently scheduled for 27 March 2018).

Evidence gathering

9. The task group met on 7 February 2018 to consider the draft report of the findings of the traded services’ review of Outdoor Education, to be presented to Cabinet on 27 March 2018.
10. The task group resolved to undertake site visits of the two council-owned outdoor education centres, and consequently visited Braeside and Oxenwood (thereafter named “the centres”) on 27 February 2018.
11. The task group is grateful to the following witnesses who contributed to its review of Outdoor Education:

Keith Browning	Centre Manager, Braeside Education & Conference Centre
Nick Cave	Interim Traded Services Director
David Clarke	Head of School Effectiveness Commissioning, Performance and School Effectiveness
Tom Davies	Deputy Centre Manager, Oxenwood
Cllr Laura Mayes	Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Skills
Yousaf Mirza	Head of Education, Braeside Education & Conference Centre

Mal Munday	Head of Service, Support and Safeguarding, Early Help
Ed Plank	Centre Manager, Oxenwood
Alan Stubbersfield	Interim Director Education & Skills AM, Education and Skills
Cllr Philip Whalley	Portfolio Holder for Education and Skills
Elizabeth Williams	Head of Finance Care, Finance & Procurement

12. The Task Group also considered the evidence and information provided for the two Rapid Scrutiny exercises, as well as the reports presenting the findings for the two meetings. The task group would also like to thank the following witnesses who contributed to these exercises:

Grant Davis	Strategic Financial Support Manager.
Michael Hudson	Associate Director for Finance

Key findings regarding the draft Cabinet report

13. The meeting of the task group on 7 February 2018 was focused on the report to be presented to Cabinet on 27 March 2018.

14. It was accepted that this was a draft report and that further information may be added by the time the report was presented to Cabinet. Where appropriate the task group has indicated the information it believed should be included to enable Cabinet to make a fully informed decision based on strong evidence. These were circulated to the report's author and Cabinet Member prior to the publication of the Cabinet's agenda.

15. It should be noted that the report the task group considered **did not include a recommended option for Cabinet or any details of the covenants on the centres.**

16. Following the 7 February 2018 meeting it was noted by members of the task group that the budget papers, in the "Summary of Savings and Income Proposals (page 6 of 10) listed savings of £0.135m through "proposal to be brought to Cabinet to consider review of Outdoor Education Centres", however the budget papers included no further details on how these savings would be achieved.

Overall

17. The costs and risks for each option should be more detailed and presented in a single table, which would make the advantages and risks of each option more apparent.

18. Further details on costs to be included (known costs or estimates) for Options 3 and 4 are listed in paragraphs 24 and 25 of this report.

Option 1: retain and operate

19. The parameters of the modelling should be clearly stated, as the task group was informed that the modelling was "based on 48 weeks per year and excluding weekends".

20. The price increases in the report had been calculated against residential prices only and been modelled on a 10-year return of capital spend only (without interest or finance cost). They did not account for future cost pressures or requirement to generate a surplus. The modelling should take into account the forecasted yearly maintenance costs for the centres, and any other cost pressures, and should also calculate the occupancy and price increase needed to achieve at least cost recovery.

Option 2: transfer centres and / or operations to a third party

21. It was accepted that, as there had not yet been firm interest by a third party in taking on the management of the centres and / or operations, it had not been possible to assess or cost option 2.

22. However, Community First had expressed an interest in Oxenwood with the condition that it was as a Community Asset Transfer.

23. Should there be any confirmed interest from a third party then the potential costs and risks associated with this option should be detailed in the Cabinet report.

Option 3: close both centres

24. The task group concluded that it was crucial for the following information to be included in the Cabinet report:

- a. an estimate of the potential costs, and risks, associated with the covenants on the centres;
- b. costs of redundancies and pensions, especially as the options for re-deployment of the contracted members of staff affected had not yet been fully explored and some of the “Zero Hours Contract” members of staff may be entitled to redundancy due to their length of service.
- c. any other predictable exit costs (e.g. cancelling bookings, etc.).
- d. potential costs and risks (both “physical” and reputational) of closure where the buildings would no longer be used but would remain in the council’s ownership.

Option 4: Close one site only (Oxenwood)

25. The task group felt that the same information should be in the report for this option as for Option 3:

- a. an estimate of the potential costs, and risks, associated with the covenants on the centre;
- b. costs of redundancies and pensions, especially as the options for re-deployment for the contracted members of staff affected had not yet been fully explored and some of the “Zero Hours Contract” members of staff may be entitled to redundancy due to their length of service.
- c. any other predictable exit costs (e.g. cancelling bookings, etc.).

- d. potential costs and risks (both “physical” and reputational) of closure where the building would no longer be used but would remain in the council’s ownership.

Key findings regarding the options proposed within the Cabinet report

26. At the Rapid Scrutiny meeting on 13 September 2017, the draft scope for the service’s review of outdoor education in Wiltshire was presented as follows by the Traded Services team:

“The review should be designed to establish the future of outdoor education in Wiltshire, and as such should be broad in nature to include:

- How outdoor education can best contribute to council aims and specific targets such as increasing educational attainment of “free School Meal” pupils and improving readiness for school by supporting early years provision.
- Review of current utilisation including downtime during school holidays and winter months, actual costs and prices, and capacity for growth.
- Risks and potential learning from private sector competition including service offers, utilisation and benchmarking of costs.
- Research on approach taken by other councils to avoid pitfalls and utilise learning.
- Potential to attract business from a wider market to increase sales through a national marketing strategy.
- Options for different models such as charitable trust, Community Interest Company, partnership, or closing council run facilities and brokering provision from other providers. This will require soft market testing to establish market interest.”

Option 1: retain and operate

27. It was noted that operational profit could be achieved, at least at Braeside for 2017-18, even with the current provisions of activities and accommodation.

28. Based on the evidence from the service’s review of Outdoor Education that the task group received, it could not conclude that the Council had adequately assessed whether this option (retain and operate) could be commercially viable.

29. It was recognised by the task group that there could be a significant cost, especially in officers’ time, in assessing the viability of this option.

30. However, the task group regretted that the Council had not undertaken, or at least established feasibility in terms of cost and officers’ time of undertaking, the research listed below to assess the viability of Option 1 (retain and operate).

a. Staffing analysis:

The task group was informed that the centres had “historically” been aligned to two distinct services within the council, with distinct line management, and operated individually. There were also concerns raised over the sustainability of using “Zero Hours contracts”.

- i. To establish whether efficiency savings could be achieved by realigning the two centres to a single line of management within the council.
 - ii. To explore whether any savings could be realised through the sharing of contracted staff members between the two centres.
 - iii. To analyse the difference in cost should staff be moved from “Zero Hours contracts” to annualised hours contracts.

- b. Market analysis:
 - i. why are the centres used (feedback from **all** current customers), what is it the centres provide / offer which meant they were chosen;
 - ii. survey of “non-schools” customers who had previously booked but did not book in 2017-18; establish why and what (if anything) they are now using;
 - iii. survey of Wiltshire schools not using the centres in 2017-18; why are they not using the centres, what are they using instead, what would make them use the centres. This would also be an “advertising” opportunity of the fact that the centres are suitable for both primary and secondary schools, although it is anticipated that there may be a low return from schools therefore should only be undertaken if the cost was minimal.
 - iv. Researching Unique Selling Points for both centres - not competing with “high thrill” activities but specialising in activities that the sites can support, considering their limitations.
 - v. Further analyse specialising in provision for vulnerable children and young people and any other customers “matching” the centres’ Unique Selling Points. This would include research on cost in terms of training for or recruitment of “specialised” staff members, as well as research in potential partnership with organisations such as the Wiltshire Outdoor Learning Team which specialised in working with young people with challenging behaviour. The task group was aware of the analysis undertaken by Richard Williams in December 2015 to consider the viability of increasing Oxenwood’s booking by 25% for vulnerable children and this should be taken into consideration, bearing in mind it was now 3 years old.
 - vi. Research on approach taken by other councils to provide or support outdoor education to avoid pitfalls and utilise learning.

- c. Advertising analysis:
 - i. Research cost and value of regional and national advertising campaigns.
 - ii. Research cost and value of increased on-line presence: a professionally designed website for the centres, social medias, etc. It was noted that both centres were advertised on “Right Choice for schools” (traded services’ online platform).
 - iii. Research in potential to increase sales by attracting business from a wider market.

- d. Investment analysis:
 - i. What investment(s) in buildings, equipment, staff training, etc. based on the market and advertising analysis would be required to enable the centres to become commercially viable. The investment in buildings would be informed by the condition survey which was carried out on both properties by CIPFA in 2012. The surveys identified capital works required to maintain the buildings in the short, medium and long term, up to a 25-year period.

- ii. The value of the investment would have to be recovered by the centres and would require further modelling of recovery through increase in price and / or occupancy.
 - iii. Establish the cost and work required to regain a Quality Mark accreditation for Oxenwood (“*The Quality Mark for schools was developed in 1996, and updated in 2007, to provide a framework that would promote, support and celebrate the improvement of literacy, language and mathematics, sometimes also referred to as ‘basic’ or ‘functional’ skills*” – source Quality Mark alliance website) and any other accreditation(s) which could increase occupancy by providing nationally recognised assurance of quality.
 - iv. To establish a very clear financial picture for the centres; this would include true cost of the centres (for example maintenance, staffing costs, running costs, capital works, marketing budgets, and breakdown of corporate re-charge).
- e. Land
- i. To further explore the possibility of renting or acquiring land adjacent to the building at Oxenwood to remove the issue of being a split site and children having to cross a road to access the playing field; bearing in mind this could enable the council to rent or sale the land currently used as a playing field. This would also address the issue of “good will” access to nearby woods, which were unavailable during the pheasant shooting season (1 October - 1 February, *source Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust*).
 - ii. To explore options to consolidate or formalise access to adjacent lands and woods at Braeside to guarantee that the activities advertised can be accessed.

Option 2: transfer centres and / or operations to a third party

31. The task group was informed that initial discussions had been held with **a small number** of private sector organisations to explore the possibility of sale or partnership and that feedback to date had indicated that, due to the limited bed capacity at both sites, private sector companies view both Oxenwood and Braeside as commercially unviable within their business model.
32. The task group was also informed that discussions had been held with charitable organisations regarding the possibilities of these organisations taking on the sites and Community First had been the only organisation to have expressed an interest in the Oxenwood site, though only as a potential Community Asset Transfer.
33. The task group appreciated that some of these options presented a financial risk as the council would still be liable for capital costs associated with the centres.
34. However, the task group was informed that members of staff at the centres were interested in pursuing the option of a Community Interest Company or similar set-up which could enable them to run the centres without subsidies from the council.

Option 3: close both centres

35. It was accepted that the provision of Outdoor education was a non-statutory activity, currently corporately subsidised.
36. However, the benefits to children, as detailed in the report, should also be taken into consideration. Some of the benefits identified by the Outdoor education - Aspects of good practice - September 2004 OFSTED report included "*Outdoor education gives depth to the curriculum and makes an important contribution to students' physical, personal and social education*" and "*Students generally make good progress in outdoor education, both at school and outdoor centres. They develop their physical skills in new and challenging situations as well as exercising important social skills such as teamwork and leadership*".
37. The task group was informed that there were alternatives available to Wiltshire Schools, however there was no consultation with Wiltshire Schools currently using the centres to ensure that they would be able to access those alternative (either because of travelling distance, difference of activities on offer or increased cost).
38. Based on the evidence available the task group could not be convinced that a decision to close both centres would not be premature, and could have a higher cost in the immediate future than retaining the centres.
39. The main reason for this was that the task group had not received evidence that due diligence in terms of the true costs, and potential risks, of closure had been undertaken, especially as there were covenants for both centres and there had been no indications that there would be interest in purchasing the centres for a different use (if that were possible given the covenants).
40. Additionally, no alternatives were identified for the relocation of the Able, Gifted and Talented (AG&T) Programme or the off-site services offered by Oxenwood and there were no details given or options listed for the potential redeployment of staff from the centres therefore increasing the risk of redundancy costs.

Option 4: Close one site only (Oxenwood)

41. Having been informed of the limitations faced by Oxenwood, mostly due to the small size of the site (1.4 acres), and consequent difficulties in combining day and residential activities which further limited commercial development, in contrast to the stated opportunities to grow the programme and income at Braeside during the school holiday times, the task group understood the logic for this option.
42. It was noted within the report that this option could enable the transfer of staff, and potentially bookings, from Oxenwood to Braeside, therefore reducing redundancy and exit costs and that the 'off site' activities from Oxenwood could potentially be managed from Braeside, although the latter was not evidenced and could prove problematic in terms of staffing for activities leaders as the centres tend to have similar busy (March to June and September) and quiet periods (August, December and January).
43. The task group reached the same conclusions for this option as it did for Option 3 (closing both centres) in so far as it had not received evidence confirming that the

true costs, and potential risks, of closure had been identified, paragraphs 38 and 39 refer, although this option would not affect the AG&T programme.

Conclusions

44. Based on the evidence it has received so far, the task group cannot conclude that the Council's proposed scope for the outdoor education review (paragraph 26 refers) had been adequately addressed.
45. With regards to the draft Cabinet report it considered on 7 February 2018, the task group concluded that there was insufficient evidence within the draft report for Cabinet to make an evidence-based decision on **any of the four options**. Of course, this situation may have changed when the Cabinet report is finalised.

Recommendations

46. Based on its key findings on the draft Cabinet report, and should this information not be included in the Cabinet report for consideration on 27 March 2018, the task group would recommend, that Cabinet defer its decision until evidence can be presented of due diligence on the covenants and of the true costs of options 3 (close both centres) and 4 (close one centre);
47. Should Cabinet be minded to defer its decision, the task group would recommend that consideration is given to undertaking the following:
 - a. the investigative work listed in paragraph 30 of this report with regards to option 1 (retain and operate);
 - b. research of the cost and viability of members of staff from the centres running the centres as a Community Interest Company or any other suitable set up, without subsidies from the council;
 - c. contacting a higher number of private sector organisations to explore the possibility of sale or partnership.
48. The task group appreciated that there would be a cost to the Council associated with the deferral of a decision by Cabinet on 27 March 2018 and that it could also pressurise achieving the £135,000 savings approved within the 2018-19 budget. This would need to be balanced against the, currently, unknown costs of closure of one or both centre(s).
49. Should Cabinet be minded to approve the closure of one or both centre(s) at its 27 March 2018 meeting, the task group, based on its consideration of the draft Cabinet report on 7 February 2018, and should this information not be included in the finalised report to Cabinet, would therefore recommend that:

Cabinet should ensure that, prior to any closure:

- a. due diligence for the following has been completed and it is evidenced that closure of one or both centre(s) would be a **true saving** to the council:
 - i. ascertain the council's options in terms of disposal, re-use or sale of the sites, especially considering the covenants;

- ii. ascertain the cost of redundancy and the options for redeployment for the staff members;
 - b. the following have been identified to ensure the impact of the closure of the centre(s) is minimalised in the short-term future for current users:
 - i. a suitable provider (venue) for the Able, Gifted and Talented Programme;
 - ii. an alternative venue for the off-site services offered by Oxenwood;
 - c. a council's outdoor education policy has been developed to ensure that access to outdoor education for Wiltshire Schools and their pupils remains available.
-

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Appendices

None

Background documents

Agendas and all supporting documents provided for the 13 September and 18 October 2017 Rapid Scrutiny exercises
Agenda and all supporting documents provided for the 7 February 2018 meeting of the task group
OFSTED report - Aspects of good practice - September 2004

Supplementary Appendix
Review of Outdoor Education Cabinet Report, 27th March 2018

Response to Overview and Scrutiny Committee Outdoor Education task force report

A report on the task groups findings is included at Appendix 6 within the Outdoor Education Cabinet report. The task group accepted that the report considered was a draft report and that further information may be added by the time the report was presented to Cabinet.

In recognition of the work and review undertaken by the Scrutiny task force this supplementary appendix considers and responds to the key aspects and findings of the outdoor education task force.

Response to key findings and comments from Overview and Scrutiny task force report

Option 1: retain and operate	Response
<p>However, the task group regretted that the Council had not undertaken, or at least established feasibility in terms of cost and officers' time of undertaking, the research listed below to assess the viability of Option 1 (retain and operate).</p>	<p>Costs: The cost of this model is clearly indicated in the outdoor education Cabinet report. Significant officer time has been spent on this review, this has included officer time spent considering the feasibility of retaining the sites.</p>
<p>a. Staffing analysis:</p>	
<p>The task group was informed that the centres had "historically" been aligned to two distinct services within the council, with distinct line management, and operated individually. There were also concerns raised over the sustainability of using "Zero Hours contracts".</p>	<p>Zero hours contracts are a common way of staffing this type and style of operation where instructors and employees with specialist skills are required for short and seasonal periods of time. Given the confines of current employment law and the costs of permanent staff this is a practical and pragmatic solution.</p>
<p>i. To establish whether efficiency savings could be achieved by realigning the two centres to a single line of management within the council.</p>	<p>This is an option that has been considered and although some cost savings could be achieved this requires a balance with the centres locations and the practicalities of travel. Please note a supervisory role will still be required at each site.</p>
<p>ii. To explore whether any savings could be realised through the sharing of contracted staff members between the two centres.</p>	<p>This has been considered and while a practical solution it does present some transport problems.</p>
<p>iii. To analyse the difference in cost should staff be moved from "Zero Hours contracts" to annualised hours contracts.</p>	<p>For some outdoor education staff, this approach is taken. Many of the specialist employees have other work commitments or are students, etc.</p>
<p>b. Market analysis:</p>	
<p>i. why are the centres used (feedback from all current customers), what is it the centres provide / offer which meant they were chosen;</p>	<p>Officer based market analysis has been completed and the headline views from this and feedback from staff etc has been included in the Cabinet report.</p>
<p>ii. survey of "non-schools" customers who had previously booked but did not book in 2017-18;</p>	<p>Key reasons indicated from customers for not using the sites include –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location.

<p>establish why and what (if anything) they are now using;</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Range of activities on offer. • Style of activities on offer. • Standard of accommodation. • Better marketing from commercial providers attracting potential customers away. • Previous experience from teachers leading them to selecting commercial providers.
<p>iii. survey of Wiltshire schools not using the centres in 2017-18; why are they not using the centres, what are they using instead, what would make them use the centres. This would also be an “advertising” opportunity of the fact that the centres are suitable for both primary and secondary schools, although it is anticipated that there may be a low return from schools therefore should only be undertaken if the cost was minimal.</p>	<p>See above.</p>
<p>iv. Researching Unique Selling Points for both centres - not competing with “high thrill” activities but specialising in activities that the sites can support, considering their limitations.</p>	<p>The equipment and space is not available for zip wires, high thrill activities, etc. This point is covered in the Cabinet report. It is also recognised that the offer from Braeside and Oxenwood is curriculum based. The staff make a very good job of exploiting their unique selling points and within the resources and equipment they have, do a good job of selling the services.</p>
<p>v. Further analyse specialising in provision for vulnerable children and young people and any other customers “matching” the centres’ Unique Selling Points. This would include research on cost in terms of training for or recruitment of “specialised” staff members, as well as research in potential partnership with organisations such as the Wiltshire Outdoor Learning Team which specialised in working with young people with challenging behaviour. The task group was aware of the analysis undertaken by Richard Williams in December 2015 to consider the viability of increasing Oxenwood’s booking by 25% for vulnerable children and this should be taken into consideration, bearing in mind it was now 3 years old.</p>	<p>The Cabinet report recognises that for this option, growth areas could be Specialist Education Needs, they are potentially an untapped market. The December 2015 report does though suggest this is a difficult proposition to follow through and it will require training, and investment to deliver. The review group view was that whilst this was potential additional income with the required investment it was not likely to be significant.</p>
<p>vi. Research on approach taken by other councils to provide or support outdoor education to avoid pitfalls and utilise learning.</p>	<p>Extensive soundings of other Councils approach and learning has been incorporated into the review. This has been from experience of alternative models such as Trusts and from other local authorities.</p>
<p>c. Advertising analysis:</p>	
<p>i. Research cost and value of regional and national advertising campaigns.</p>	<p>The Cabinet report highlights the need for further investment in marketing to undertake</p>

	research and analysis and campaigns. These costs would be significant, particularly for any national advertising campaign.
ii. Research cost and value of increased on-line presence: a professionally designed website for the centres, social medias, etc. It was noted that both centres were advertised on “Right Choice for schools” (traded services’ online platform).	This has been provided for through the new Right Choice schools trading website which provides a single, professional sales point for services to schools from Wiltshire Council.
iii. Research in potential to increase sales by attracting business from a wider market.	See above. Increased marketing activity is taking place across all traded services to schools.
d. Investment analysis:	
i. What investment(s) in buildings, equipment, staff training, etc. based on the market and advertising analysis would be required to enable the centres to become commercially viable. The investment in buildings would be informed by the condition survey which was carried out on both properties by CIPFA in 2012. The surveys identified capital works required to maintain the buildings in the short, medium and long term, up to a 25-year period.	This information has been considered by officers. Estimates have been supplied of potential improvements to the accommodation, for both sites these are a minimum £750k covering roof replacement and decorations. It should be noted that this figure does not provide for any additional equipment or accommodation space which is key to increasing income. In addition, because of the open-ended nature of refurbishments and improvements these figures were not included in the Cabinet report.
ii. The value of the investment would have to be recovered by the centres and would require further modelling of recovery through increase in price and / or occupancy.	Considered within the Cabinet report.
iii. Establish the cost and work required to regain a Quality Mark accreditation for Oxenwood (“The Quality Mark for schools was developed in 1996, and updated in 2007, to provide a framework that would promote, support and celebrate the improvement of literacy, language and mathematics, sometimes also referred to as ‘basic’ or ‘functional’ skills” – source Quality Mark alliance website) and any other accreditation(s) which could increase occupancy by providing nationally recognised assurance of quality.	This will cost approx. £750 plus staff time.
iv. To establish a very clear financial picture for the centres; this would include true cost of the centres (for example maintenance, staffing costs, running costs, capital works, marketing budgets, and breakdown of corporate re-charge).	Full costs as described have been provided in the Cabinet report and were provided to the Scrutiny task force.
e. Land	
i. To further explore the possibility of renting or acquiring land adjacent to the building at	The option of formally acquiring any land at either site has not been explored. To officer’s

<p>Oxenwood to remove the issue of being a split site and children having to cross a road to access the playing field; bearing in mind this could enable the council to rent or sale the land currently used as a playing field. This would also address the issue of “good will” access to nearby woods, which were unavailable during the pheasant shooting season (1 October - 1 February, source Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust).</p>	<p>knowledge adjacent land is not for sale. If the land were for sale its purchase adds to the capital costs and makes any business case for the sites unviable.</p>
<p>ii. To explore options to consolidate or formalise access to adjacent lands and woods at Braeside to guarantee that the activities advertised can be accessed.</p>	<p>See above.</p>
<p>Option 2: transfer centres and / or operations to a third party</p>	
<p>1. The task group was informed that initial discussions had been held with a small number of private sector organisations to explore the possibility of sale or partnership and that feedback to date had indicated that, due to the limited bed capacity at both sites, private sector companies view both Oxenwood and Braeside as commercially unviable within their business model.</p>	<p>Costs: To date there has been no confirmed interest in either site from a third party. For a third-party model with either the private or voluntary sector to be viable there would have to be no costs to the council, revenue or capital. Commercial operators are looking for venues that can offer 500 to 700 beds.</p>
<p>2. The task group was also informed that discussions had been held with charitable organisations regarding the possibilities of these organisations taking on the sites and Community First had been the only organisation to have expressed an interest in the Oxenwood site, though only as a potential Community Asset Transfer.</p>	<p>Community First have yet to come forward with a proposition for Oxenwood.</p>
<p>3. The task group appreciated that some of these options presented a financial risk as the council would still be liable for capital costs associated with the centres.</p>	
<p>4. However, the task group was informed that members of staff at the centres were interested in pursuing the option of a Community Interest Company or similar set-up which could enable them to run the centres without subsidies from the council.</p>	<p>This suggestion cannot be explored until the Cabinet has made its decision on the centres future. It should be noted; a Community Interest Company or social enterprise would have to cover full operational, maintenance and capital repair costs.</p>
<p>Option 3: close both centres</p>	

<p>5. It was accepted that the provision of Outdoor education was a non-statutory activity, currently corporately subsidised.</p>	<p>Costs: The costs of closure will be – £20k to make the sites secure. Redundancy costs have been considered but have not been included in the Cabinet report.</p>
<p>6. However, the benefits to children, as detailed in the report, should also be taken into consideration. Some of the benefits identified by the Outdoor education -Aspects of good practice - September 2004 OFSTED report included “Outdoor education gives depth to the curriculum and makes an important contribution to students’ physical, personal and social education” and “Students generally make good progress in outdoor education, both at school and outdoor centres. They develop their physical skills in new and challenging situations as well as exercising important social skills such as teamwork and leadership”.</p>	<p>The review and Cabinet report noted the benefits of outdoor education.</p>
<p>7. The task group was informed that there were alternatives available to Wiltshire Schools, however there was no consultation with Wiltshire Schools currently using the centres to ensure that they would be able to access those alternative (either because of travelling distance, difference of activities on offer or increased cost).</p>	<p>There is alternative provision available from a range of commercial providers at a competitive price. The users of the sites are primary schools and they have been made aware of the review through a presentation at Primary Heads Forum. This action, if communicated to schools would assume the sites were closing the review was tasked with exploring the options.</p>
<p>8. Based on the evidence available the task group could not be convinced that a decision to close both centres would not be premature, and could have a higher cost in the immediate future than retaining the centres.</p>	<p>Closure of the centres will save –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £135k pa Business Rates (in base budget assumptions) • Avoid revenue ongoing losses and Council subsidy • Avoid a capital funding risk of at least £1.4m
<p>9. The main reason for this was that the task group had not received evidence that due diligence in terms of the true costs, and potential risks, of closure had been undertaken, especially as there were covenants for both centres and there had been no indications that there would be interest in purchasing the centres for a different use (if that were possible given the covenants).</p>	<p>True current costs for 2017/18 and income have been provided in the Cabinet report for both centres and have been made available for Scrutiny task force. As Cabinet has not made any decision yet there has been no marketing of the properties/sites to gauge any level of value or market interest either with or without covenants.</p>
<p>10. Additionally, no alternatives were identified for the relocation of the Able, Gifted and Talented (AG&T) Programme or the off-site services offered by Oxenwood and there were no details given or options listed for the potential redeployment of staff from the centres therefore increasing the risk of redundancy costs.</p>	<p>There are alternatives for the AG&T programme. There are other providers and schools fulfil this requirement through many routes. An alternative could be to transfer this service to another traded services team or a teaching school if the Cabinet decision is to close the sites.</p>

<p>Option 4: Close one site only (Oxenwood)</p>	<p>Costs: This option has not been costed. If agreed by Cabinet a detailed project plan and business case would be produced. Headline costs are –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £10k closure costs. • Reduced redundancy costs. • Reduced business rates savings. The base budget contains a saving requirement of £135k
<p>11. Having been informed of the limitations faced by Oxenwood, mostly due to the small size of the site (1.4 acres), and consequent difficulties in combining day and residential activities which further limited commercial development, in contrast to the stated opportunities to grow the programme and income at Braeside during the school holiday times, the task group understood the logic for this option.</p>	
<p>12. It was noted within the report that this option could enable the transfer of staff, and potentially bookings, from Oxenwood to Braeside, therefore reducing redundancy and exit costs and that the 'off site' activities from Oxenwood could potentially be managed from Braeside, although the latter was not evidenced and could prove problematic in terms of staffing for activities leaders as the centres tend to have similar busy (March to June and September) and quiet periods (August, December and January).</p>	<p>The Cabinet report recognises the staffing issues at peak times. This option does not wholly solve the issue of recruitment and retention, seasonal difficulties and pressures.</p>
<p>13. The task group reached the same conclusions for this option as it did for Option 3 (closing both centres) in so far as it had not received evidence confirming that the true costs, and potential risks, of closure had been identified, paragraphs 38 and 39 refer, although this option would not affect the AG&T programme.</p>	<p>True current costs for 2017/18 and income have been provided in the Cabinet report for both centres.</p>

Terence Herbert - Director Children's Services