

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>

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