

**Children's Services Scrutiny Committee – 25 July 2007**

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**ACADEMY TASK GROUP INTERIM REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To highlight those issues concerning the academy project which the task group regards as requiring urgent consideration by the Cabinet Member for Education & Youth Development.

**Action Required of the Committee**

2. The Committee is asked to endorse the task group's recommendation that the issues listed at paragraph 10(a) – (g) be given urgent consideration by the Cabinet Member for Education & Youth Development to ensure that they inform the early stages of the project's feasibility phase.

**Background**

3. The Children's Services Scrutiny Committee commissioned a task group in March 2007 to carry out a scrutiny exercise to evaluate the benefits and risks of the academy project, including matters such as its impact on all surrounding schools and 6<sup>th</sup> forms, its admissions' policies and how it will work with the local community and facilitate community use of its premises.
4. Since then, as part of its early evidence gathering, the task group has held discussions with the sponsor of the academy – Wellington College and Castledown School. Subsequent to this, the task group was presented with a detailed report from the Assistant Director (Schools) on the processes and procedures to be followed by all partners involved in the academy project as it progresses through its feasibility phase.
5. This report clarified that the main responsibility of Wiltshire County Council (WCC) during the feasibility phase of the project is to appoint and oversee the work of a project manager/technical adviser to lead on the procurement of the new academy buildings. In parallel Wellington College's main responsibility will be to appoint an overall project manager and to set up a project steering group that will be tasked with:
  - developing and agreeing the education vision and design brief including the curriculum model
  - develop and agree staffing and organisational policies
  - develop and implement the consultation plan including publicity
  - establish the Academy Trust

## Matters Requiring Urgent Consideration

6. The task group welcomes the establishment of the academy and hopes that it will become a model project on which future similar developments can be based.
7. The task group will continue to gather the evidence required for it to submit well-founded recommendations regarding the academy project at the end of its work, and it is intended that the Committee should receive the task group's final report on the 8<sup>th</sup> November.
8. With the feasibility phase of the academy project set to last approximately 9 months (commencing in July 2007 and concluding in March/April 2008 – see Table 1 below), and with this being the most formative phase of the project, the task group is hopeful that by submitting its final report and recommendations in November, this will be in good time to influence the final outcome of this phase.

Table 1

	Stage	Timescale	Approx. Timeline
Stage 0	Preparing for an academy project	Preparation of a Project Initiation Document – 2 weeks	Complete in July 07
Stage 1	Outline Business Case	12-16 weeks	Complete in Sept 07
Stage 2	Initial Engagement & Shortlist of Contractors	4 weeks	Complete in Nov 07
Stage 3	Invitation to Tender and Evaluation of Tenders	16-20 weeks	Complete in Dec 07
Stage 4	Final Business Case and Contract Signature	16 weeks	By April / May 08

9. In the meantime, the task group's early work has led it to conclude that a number of urgent issues should be brought to the attention of the Cabinet Member for Education & Youth Development in order that she may be able to influence early decisions and developments from the start and during the first few months of the feasibility phase.
10. These urgent issues are:

(a) Key Risks to the County Council

The task group has been given an initial indication of the key risks associated with the delivery of the academy which directly relate to the council's role in the project. From this, the task group understands that the council will be responsible for risks including contractual, financial, planning, and resources.

(i) Staff Resource & Financial Risks

Whilst some Department for Children, Schools & Families (DCSF) funding will be made available for project management and professional advice (£200,000 - £400,000) it is understood that there will still be a need to identify and allocate other staff resources from within the council to assist with the academy project. The task group has been advised that internal governance arrangements for the project should be established to formalise these resource matters.

The task group has noted that the project does not currently appear in the Corporate Capital Programme and therefore suggests that representatives from the Department for Children & Education (DCE) urgently meet with representatives from the Department of Resources (DoR) to agree appropriate project and financial mechanisms. In doing so, the task group would like to also see consideration being given to clarify the following resources required (these resources are listed as requirements of the National Framework contract model proscribed by the DCSF for the delivery of academy schools):

- Project Director
- Project Manager – Education
- Project Manager – Technical
- Project Assistant
- Education Specialist
- Admin Support
- Design and Property support, Quantity Surveyor, etc
- Procurement Team

In noting that £200,000 - £400,000 is on offer from the DCSF to cover these project management costs, the task group considers this to be a total mismatch of funding for the duties, time and expertise required. Based on the experience of the funding of the North Wiltshire PFI Schools project (where professional fees for consultancy and advice were over £750,000), and mindful of the complexities involved with the procurement of a new school, the task group does not consider that the DCSF funding will be sufficient to recruit a fully qualified and experienced project manager/technical adviser for the length of time required, and cover all of the associated support/advice costs. In particular, the task group would like clarification as to whether further DCSF funding will be made available to resource project management costs which may be incurred beyond the feasibility phase.

(ii) Establishment of the Design Group

The task group understands that a Design Group, made up of representatives from Wellington College, WCC, Castledown School and the DCSF, will be established to oversee the responsibilities and processes to be carried out in parallel by WCC

and Wellington College (as described at paragraph 5 above). The task group considers that a clear programme of action should be agreed between WCC and Wellington College as a matter of urgency for the establishment of this Design Group in order that it is in place to oversee the appointment of the project manager/technical adviser for the council as quickly as possible.

(b) The Design & Build of the Academy will be Managed Through a National Framework Contract Model and Directed by Partnership for Schools – a Non-Departmental Public Body Owned by the DCSF

With the council being responsible for the design, build and delivery of the academy, the task group queries whether or not there is any scope within this for innovation, particularly with regard to the architectural design of the new buildings. This issue is raised in the context of the Committee's findings from its recent tour of the North Wiltshire PFI Schools, where teaching staff, pupils and members recorded concerns about building design, functionality and barriers to community use.

(c) The Need for an Academy Designed to Suit the Needs of the Local Community

Mindful of those concerns (as in (b) above), the task group would like further reassurance that, as WCC's main role is to procure the school buildings, there will also be sufficient opportunity to influence the education vision, curriculum model and all other aspects that are assigned as responsibilities of Wellington College, to help ensure that the academy is shaped with the needs of local children (including those with special educational needs) and the local community in mind.

(d) The Academy's Impact on Surrounding Schools / 6<sup>th</sup> Forms in Both Wiltshire and Hampshire

The task group is concerned that whilst a degree of collaboration / communication exists between Castledown School and those schools surrounding it which are likely to feel the impact of the new academy, this collaboration / communication could be improved by paying less regard to the administrative boundary between Wiltshire and Hampshire.

In particular the task group has yet to be reassured that the academy's new 6<sup>th</sup> form will be set up to work collaboratively with other nearby 6<sup>th</sup> form colleges and schools, especially that of the new Andover College. The task group considers that in order to meet the needs of the local learning community, it is imperative that all the relevant authorities and institutions work together on this matter, including WCC, Hampshire County Council, the Wiltshire Association of Secondary Headteachers, the Wiltshire & Swindon Learning &

Skills Council (LSC), the Hampshire & Isle of Wight LSC, Cricklade College and Sparsholt College.

(e) Will the Academy be Big Enough?

The task group, Wellington College, Castledown School and the Assistant Director (Schools) have expressed concern at the DCSF decision to restrict the size of the Academy to 5 forms of entry of 150 pupils, and at the LSC's decision to restrict the size of the 6<sup>th</sup> Form to 200. Concern has also been registered by Cricklade College and Sparsholt College to the task group on this latter point.

The task group considers that it is essential that more analysis needs to be undertaken regarding anticipated demand for places by service family children, children from Wiltshire and children from Hampshire, in order that a convincing case can be put to the DCSF and the LSC to fund an academy with sufficient capacity to meet demand. The difficulties recently encountered in expanding the PFI schools some years after first construction are relevant here.

(f) Admissions

The task group notes that the council will be consulted on the sponsor's draft admissions policies. However, it would like the DCE to be more proactive than simply responding to this consultation, and to actually advise the Project Steering Group on how best to shape the admissions policies. The task group considers this to be of particular significance, with academies elsewhere being oversubscribed, and with a need to ensure that places are prioritised for children from the local community. The wide experience of the council's admissions team is likely to be valuable in achieving this objective.

Likewise, the task group would want to see the DCE not only being consulted on the academy's draft admissions appeals process, but also proactively advising on how this should be formulated.

The task group will be pursuing information during its work on how existing state boarding schools manage issues such as child protection, where the school is also required to promote community use of its premises.

(g) Governing Body

With the development of staff and organisational policies and the establishment of the Academy Trust being the responsibilities of Wellington College during the feasibility phase, the task group would like the Cabinet Member to secure reassurance that there will be an appropriate balance of sponsor and local community representation on the Governing Body.

Further to discussions regarding the need to recruit a military governor not just for the academy but also for Castledown School currently, the task group welcomes the news that the Deputy Commander of the Tidworth Garrison has agreed to join the school's Governing Body. The task group views this as beneficial, not only as this achieves the military representation Castledown School has been keen to recruit, but also because this representative will be able to assist in providing better information about the anticipated number of service families returning to Tidworth and the surrounding area, which has an impact on the roll numbers of all schools in that area.

## **Conclusion**

11. The task group will continue to evaluate the academy project as it progresses through its feasibility phase focusing on those issues relevant to its terms of reference, and reporting to the 8<sup>th</sup> November Children's Services Scrutiny Committee with its final findings and recommendations.
12. In the meantime, the Committee is asked to support the task group's recommendation that issues listed at paragraph 10 (a) – (g) be given urgent consideration by the Cabinet Member for Education & Youth Development and acted upon accordingly.

**Tony Deane**  
**Academy Task Group – Chairman**

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Karen Linaker  
Academy Task Group Support Officer  
01225 713056