

Committee:	Cabinet
Date:	8 July 2008
Title of Report:	Hastings Secondary Schools
By:	Director of Children's Services
Purpose of Report:	To seek Cabinet's approval to move to the next stage in exploring the possibility of establishing two academies in Hastings.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that East Sussex County Council move to the next stage of exploring the possibility of two academies in Hastings by preparing an Expression of Interest for submission to the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families; and to do so as a co-sponsor with the University of Brighton (as the lead sponsor) and British Telecom (as co-sponsor).

1. Financial Appraisal

- 1.1 A full financial appraisal will be developed as part of the process of exploring academy status and will be reported to Cabinet for approval.
- 1.2 Children's Services Department will incur cost in conducting the exploratory work, which will be funded from existing resources.

2. Supporting Information

- 2.1 Introduction: East Sussex County Council (the County Council) has put in place arrangements to establish a formal federation with three Hastings schools: The Grove, Filsham Valley and Hillcrest. All three of these schools currently achieve fewer than 30% 5 A* - C including English and Mathematics at Key Stage 4, and as such are below government 'floor targets' and are included in the 638 schools in England subject to the 'National Challenge' announced by the government this month. As part of the federation arrangements, a lead partner organisation, Ninestiles Plus, has been appointed to bring about rapid and sustainable improvement in a range of outcomes, including attendance, behaviour and attainment, and to do so over a three-year period 2008-2011. This will require the County Council to put in place successor arrangements as part of a clear strategy so that, after the contract period is complete, a pattern of organisation emerges that will ensure continuity and continued improvement for the schools and the communities they serve. In order to achieve this, approval is sought to explore the possibility of establishing two academies with the same sponsors governed by a single trust as the preferred solution to the long-term needs of the schools.
- 2.2 Rationale: The required outcome of the project is a set of permanent arrangements that will provide sufficient long-term secondary school provision in Hastings for the communities currently served by the three schools, with the capacity to raise standards and achieve other positive outcomes. The rationale for the project is based on its capacity to provide:
 - Successor arrangements that will build on the work of the proposed Hastings federation.
 - A pattern of provision that will meet the demographic needs of the area, taking into account the overall balance of supply and demand for secondary school places in the area.
 - A secure platform for achieving higher standards of attainment and the other required outcomes set out in "Every Child Matters."
 - A basis to improve post-16 participation in the context of the wider opportunities offered in the government's 14-19 reforms and progression, where appropriate, to higher education.

- Improvements to the educational, skills and training infrastructure as a key part of the regeneration strategy for the borough.

2.3 One of the keys to this strategy is the need to consider the demographic trends in Hastings. Forecasts show that secondary school numbers will reach 5399 in 2012-13 against a net capacity of 6014, a surplus of 615. The largest surpluses in individual schools will be in Filsham Valley (141 places), Hillcrest (362 places), and The Grove (527 places), while the total numbers in all three schools is forecast at 2460 – sufficient for two eight form entry schools. It is proposed therefore to explore the possibility of two (rather than three) academies as the basis for long-term viable secondary school provision in Hastings. It is important to emphasise that the two academies would be new schools and that all three existing schools would close: it is not a question of simply choosing one of the three to close.

2.4 Timescale and process: The timescale and process for establishing an academy follow a prescribed pattern. In essence there are five phases: Brokerage (identification of sponsors), Expression of Interest (EOI), Feasibility, Funding Agreement and Implementation. It is estimated that the timescale for the development of the academy, from brokerage (April 2008) to opening (September 2011), will be 39 months. **Appendix 1** sets out the detail.

2.5 Sponsorship Arrangements: Sponsoring an academy is a significant commitment. Guidance from the Department of Children, Schools and Families indicates that lead sponsors take on full responsibility for setting up the new academy. This includes:

- Setting the strategic direction for the school, including its vision and values, and ethos
- Taking the leadership role on the governing body
- Setting goals and standards
- Determining academic, curriculum and admissions strategy
- Recruiting and managing top staff

2.6 The key to successful sponsoring arrangements is to identify sponsors who have the strengths and qualities that will enhance the educational offer to parents and students. Initial discussions have been held with two potential sponsors: the University of Brighton, who have established educational opportunities in Hastings for a wide range of students (as lead sponsor); and British Telecom, an international company with a wide spectrum of business and customer services (as co-sponsor). In addition, it is proposed that the local authority also acts as a co-sponsor. It is believed that this combination of a public, higher education, sponsor combined with the business strengths of a major private sector company, combined with the educational expertise and democratic accountability of the local authority will offer a powerful sponsorship for the proposed academies. **Appendix 2** sets out the basis of discussions with the proposed sponsors. The governance arrangements for the trust should also allow for significant involvement of other local stakeholders as plans develop.

3.0 Conclusion and Reason for Recommendation

3.1 Moving to the next stage does not commit the County Council nor the sponsors to the establishment of academies in Hastings. It provides the opportunity to explore the issues in more detail and, if Cabinet approves the Expression of Interest, to test out the proposals it contains in a detailed feasibility study (including public consultation) before a final decision is taken. The recommendation is made because it provides the basis for considering a clear long-term strategy for sustainable improvement for the mixed sex schools in Hastings.

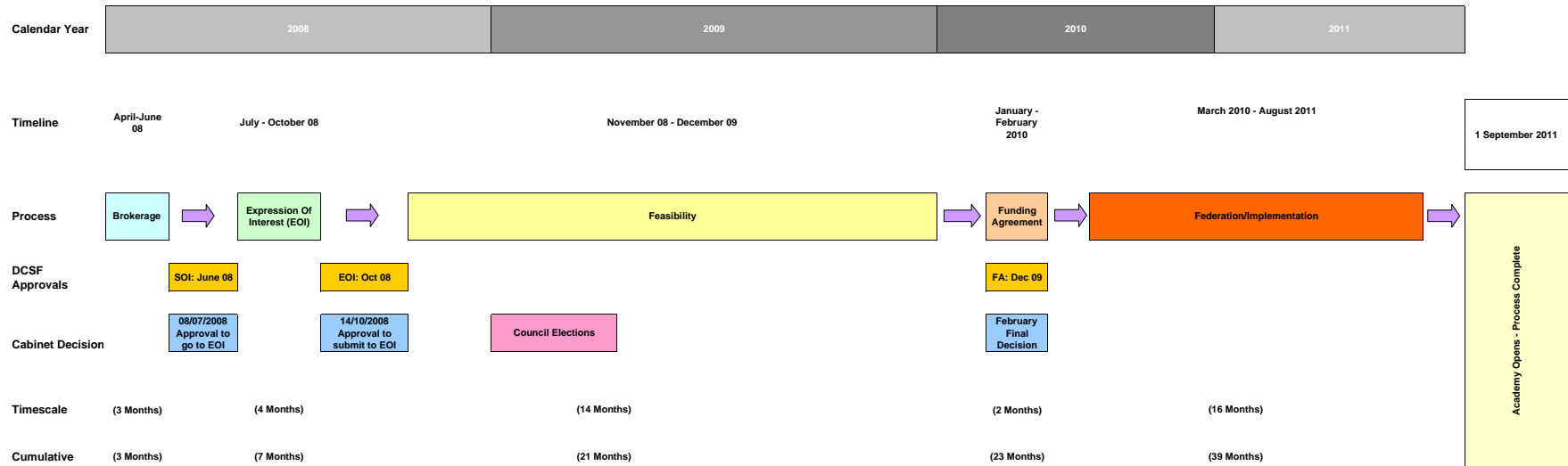
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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: Education Act 2002; School Governance Regulations 2007; Academies, Trusts and Higher Education: Prospectus Department for Children, Schools and Families and Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills 2007.

ACADEMY PROGRAMME - INDICATIVE TIMESCALE AND PROCESS (dates may change)



Definition

Brokerage

Brokerage is the stage within which potential sponsors are identified in discussion with the Office of the Schools Commissioner (OSC), within the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). The OSC will support the development of partnerships between Sponsors and Local Authorities (LA) to enable them and the DCSF to assess whether a new Academy is the right solution for their needs. At the end of this stage, the OSC will issue the statement of intent (SOI).

Expression of Interest

Once established, the Sponsor and LA will work together to prepare a formal Expression of Interest (EOI) for Ministerial consideration at the DCSF. The EOI will clearly demonstrate the need for a new Academy in the area proposed and provide more details about the proposed Academy eg the age range and pupil numbers. The DCSF will provide detailed guidance on the form that the Expression of Interest should take.

Feasibility

The feasibility stage begins once the Secretary of State agrees support for an Academy project, following submission of the Expression of Interest. It lasts for approximately 6 - 18 months, depending on the complexity of individual projects. During this stage, the project team prepares detailed plans, including an educational vision and model, and an outline building design, and formally consults with the local community. Once detailed plans for the new Academy and core documents (e.g. Memorandum and Articles for the new Company) are complete, they need to be submitted to the Department for Children Schools and Families. At this stage the Secretary of State must, by law, also formally consult the Local Authority in whose area the Academy is based and any other Local Authority if it is likely that a significant proportion of the pupils who might attend the new Academy live there.

Funding Agreement

Once the Secretary of State is content with the proposals, the Funding Agreement is signed by the Academy Trust and Secretary of State. This document contains all the formal information necessary for the opening and funding of the new Academy and is a binding contract between the Secretary of State and the Academy Trust for an Academy to open on a specified date.

Implementation

Once the Secretary of State has signed the Funding Agreement, the process of implementation can begin, putting in place the sponsor's vision for the Academy. It is during this phase that any new build can begin, although the opening of the academy is not dependent on its completion.

HASTINGS ACADEMIES

POSITION STATEMENT

PURPOSE

1. The purpose of this paper is to set out a clear position statement on the basis of which the sponsorship and partnering arrangements for the proposed academies can be secured.

BACKGROUND

2. East Sussex County Council (the County Council) has initiated arrangements to establish a formal federation with three Hastings schools: The Grove, Filsham Valley and Hillcrest. As part of these arrangements, a lead partner organisation has been appointed to bring about rapid and sustainable improvement to levels of pupil attainment. Ninestiles Plus, under the leadership of Sir Dexter Hutt, has been contracted to bring about improvements in a range of outcomes, including attendance, behaviour and attainment, and to do so over a three year period 2008-2011 through the formal federation of the schools under the Education Act 2002 and the School Governance Regulations 2007. This will require the County Council to put in place successor arrangements as part of a clear strategy so that, after the contract period is complete, a pattern of organisation emerges that will ensure continuity and continued improvement for the schools and the communities they serve.
3. All three of these schools currently achieve less than the 30% A* - C including English and Mathematics government 'floor target' at Key Stage 4. They are therefore part of the 638 schools in England subject to the recently announced 'National Challenge.' The County Council is required to produce a plan by the end of July to demonstrate how these schools will be above 'floor targets' by 2011, and a strategic plan for their confirmed improvement after that. In order to achieve this, the possibility of two academies within a single trust is to be explored as the preferred solution to the long-term needs of the schools.
4. The project is a key element in the Children's Services department's wider strategy to promote school improvement. This is a key issue for Hastings, which has some of the most deprived wards in the county and where the need to improve outcomes is pressing. By virtue of securing the improvement of educational attainment, and other specific related outcomes, the project will contribute to the wider regeneration of the area and to the local economy, particularly in improving aspiration and progression to vocational or higher education routes.
5. At the same time, the County Council needs to plan for demographic change. As a commissioning authority, the County Council has to plan not just the number but also the type of places in order to discharge its statutory responsibility to promote diversity. On current assumptions, it is considered that 16 forms of entry would be required by 2011, sufficient to justify two secondary schools, and that these schools should be provided as academies within a single trust with the same sponsors.

RATIONALE

Outcome

6. The required outcome of the project is a set of permanent arrangements that will provide sufficient long-term secondary school provision in Hastings for the communities currently served by the three schools, with the capacity to raise standards and achieve other positive outcomes.
7. In particular, the provision will be planned to:
 - Meet demographic demands.
 - Improve standards of attainment for all the children and young people attending the schools.
 - Provide a secure platform for the achievement of the outcomes in “Every Child Matters.”
 - Ensure progression routes 14-19 and beyond to higher education.
 - Promote diversity and choice of provision.
8. The planned point of delivery for the academies is September 2011.

Justification

9. The rationale for the project, partly set out in the background section above, is based on its capacity to provide:
 - Successor arrangements that will build on the work of the proposed Hastings federation as part of a holistic approach to raising standards.
 - A pattern of provision that will meet the demographic needs of the area, taking into account the overall balance of supply and demand for secondary school places across the borough.
 - A secure platform for achieving higher standards of attainment and the other required outcomes set out in “Every Child Matters.”
 - A basis to improve post-16 participation in the context of the wider opportunities offered in the government’s 14-19 reforms and progression, where appropriate, to higher education.
 - Improvements to the educational, skills and training infrastructure as a key part of the regeneration strategy for the borough.

Benefits

10. The expected benefits include:
 - Access to the expertise and experience of a lead sponsor and co-sponsors that will significantly enhance the schools’ capacity to raise standards and improve the quality of education for students.
 - Continued benefits of federation in terms of staffing, resources and improved standards of attainment.
 - Enhancement to the physical infrastructure of the schools either in new build or remodelled accommodation.
 - A more diverse pattern of secondary school provision and hence more choice for parents.

- Improved 14-19 links that deliver relevant options and progression routes for students.
- Higher participation post-16, lower drop-out rates and fewer NEETs (young people “Not in Education, Employment or Training”).
- Greater progression to higher education.

TIMESCALE AND PROCESS

11. The timescale and process for establishing an academy follow a prescribed pattern. In essence there are five phases:

- Brokerage, leading to Statement of Intent (SOI).
- Expression of Interest (EOI).
- Feasibility.
- Funding Agreement.
- Implementation.

It is estimated that the timescale for the development of the academy, from brokerage (April 2008) to opening (September 2011) will be 39 months.

12. Substantial support is available from the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) for the academy process. At the Brokerage stage, advice and support is provided by the Office of the Schools Commissioner, and after the Statement of Intent is issued, this is followed by consultancy support for the sponsor in order to complete the Expression of Interest. The sponsors are supported during the feasibility study through the appointment of a Project Management Company by the DCSF; the company is responsible for working closely with the sponsor to ensure that effective expression is given to the sponsor’s vision and values, managing the study, including public consultations, and producing the document set that has to be submitted to the Secretary of State. The local authority is responsible for the statutory consultation on the closure of the predecessor schools and for the managing the design process where new build forms part of the proposal.

13. The process is rigorous and the timescales allow for the close partnership working between the authority, the sponsor and other partners, and the wide range of stakeholders who will have a legitimate and vested interest in the proposals.

14. **Appendix 1** sets out the timescale and process, with key decision making points.

SPONSORSHIP AND PARTNERING ARRANGEMENTS

15. Sponsoring an academy is a significant commitment. Guidance from the DCSF indicates that lead sponsors take on full responsibility for setting up the new academy. This includes:

- Setting the strategic direction for the school, including its vision and values, and ethos.
- Taking the leadership role on the governing body.
- Setting goals and standards.
- Determining academic, curriculum and admissions strategy.

Appendix 2

- Recruiting and managing top staff.
16. One of the key issues on which sponsors play an active role is the governance of the academy. Academies are set up as charitable companies and the sponsors appoint the majority of governors. Their membership has to include a parent governor, a local authority appointee and generally the Principal ex officio. The size, constitution and membership of the governing body are generally at the discretion of the sponsor.
17. The governing body is accountable to the Secretary of State through the requirements of the funding agreement. The academy governors are responsible for :
- Appointing the principal.
 - Employing the staff.
 - Administering the finances.
 - Authorising appointments and any changes to terms and conditions.
 - Approving the curriculum, personnel policies and procedures.
18. Experience has shown that the governance arrangements for academies are the focus of considerable attention, particularly during the consultation process.
19. The key to successful sponsoring arrangements is to identify sponsors who have the strengths and qualities that will enhance the educational offer to parents and students. Initial discussions have been held with two potential sponsors: the University of Brighton, who have established educational opportunities in Hastings for a wide range of students (as lead sponsor); and British Telecom (BT), an international company with a wide spectrum of business and customer services (as co-sponsor). In addition, it is proposed that the local authority also acts as a co-sponsor. It is believed that this combination of a public, higher education, sponsor combined with the business strengths of a major private sector company, combined with the educational expertise and democratic accountability of the County Council will offer powerful sponsorship for the proposed academies.
20. Access to a lead public sector sponsor in higher education will provide major educational benefits to the proposed academies, including:
- Creation of a strong educational vision.
 - Contribution to robust governance and leadership.
 - Ongoing professional development for staff.
 - Ongoing mentoring support for students.
 - Development of curriculum specialisms.
 - Raising student aspirations.
21. The involvement of a major private sector sponsor with wide-ranging corporate expertise will provide major benefits, including:
- Access to business expertise across a wide range of corporate and business disciplines.
 - Development of role models and mentoring opportunities.
 - Access to work experience opportunities.
 - Development of curriculum specialisms.
 - Access to corporate resources and facilities.
 - Access to innovative thinking, including technical and research facilities.

22. The development of the Expression of Interest will provide the opportunity to identify and articulate the respective roles and responsibilities of the lead sponsor and co-sponsors in more detail.
23. The sponsors also make a commitment to establish an endowment fund for the academy, for the educational benefit of the students.

OTHER KEY INFORMATION

24. The provision of academies will have major implications for the pattern of secondary school provision requiring linkages with key partners in 14-19 (including Hastings College of Arts and Technology and the Learning and Skills Council), the Hastings Excellence Cluster, the Local Strategic Partnership, other secondary schools in Hastings and Rother, special education providers and feeder primary schools.
25. The project will depend critically on political and corporate decision making, requiring engagement with County Council Members at Cabinet and local level on a regular basis; with the University's Board of Governors; and at Board level within BT.
26. The project will also depend on advice and support from across the Children's Services department (particularly in supporting the formulation of the vision and values, ethos and operation of the academies; the implications for service provision; and the planning and design of new build); and corporately (particularly in assessing the legal, resource, human resource (HR) and land and property implications).
27. The project will also require a clear communications strategy, particularly given the need to inform, engage and consult on the proposals.