

AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET

Decision making session **Lead Portfolio Holder (Children, Young People and Families) Decision Making Session**

Date of Decision **25 March 2011**

Report Title **The Priors School, Priors Marston**

Summary
 This report updates the Cabinet on the proposal to establish a free school in Priors Hardwick and suggests a response to the Secretary of State

For further information please contact: Mark Gore
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Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Budget and Policy Framework? No

Background papers

CONSULTATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN:- Details to be specified

Other Committees

Local Member(s) Cllr Bob Stevens: *I am unable to support the recommendation as written. As ward member I have supported this school since its inception and admire the way that it has survived against all the odds. Free school status has already been granted and this letter would not achieve anything. The school have worked hard to complete all the qualifications required for free school status, have had the support of both their present and previous MP and is in line with the governments policy on free schools. A majority of the village also are in favour of the school including the land owner, Lord Spencer.*

Cllr John Appleton

Other Elected Members CYP&F O&S Chair and Vice Chair
 Cllr June Tandy
 Cllr John Ross

CYP&F O&S Spokespersons
 Cllr Peter Balaam
 Cllr Carolyn Robbins

- | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Cabinet Member | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Cllr Heather Timms (Decision Maker) |
| Chief Executive | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Legal | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Fay Ford: 'No comments' |
| Finance | <input type="checkbox"/> | David Clarke, Strategic Director of Resources: "No comments" |
| Other Chief Officers | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| District Councils | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Health Authority | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Police | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Other Bodies/Individuals | <input type="checkbox"/> | |

FINAL DECISION

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS:

Details to be specified

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| Further consideration by this Committee | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| To Council | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| To Cabinet | |
| To an O & S Committee | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| To an Area Committee | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Further Consultation | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**Portfolio Holder (Children, Young People and Families)
Decision Making Session**

25 March 2011

The Priors School, Priors Marston

**Report of Strategic Director for Children,
Young People and Families**

Recommendations:

That the Portfolio Holder:

1. Note the progress in establishing the Priors Marston Free School.
2. Authorise the Strategic Director, Children Young People and Families, to write to the Secretary of State drawing his attention to concerns about the process of consultation in relation to the establishment of Free Schools.
3. Draw the Secretary of State's attention to the potential impact on existing provision of the proposal.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Priors School in Priors Marston was established in 1996 as an independent primary school. The school is managed by local people as an educational charity. Children from the villages of Priors Marston and Priors Hardwick are able to access the school free of charge whilst children from elsewhere are charged fees.
- 1.2 In October 2010, the Secretary of State for Education invited groups interested in setting up Free Schools to start developing proposals. The Priors School developed and submitted a Business Case during the late autumn and on 31 January 2011, The Secretary of State, wrote to them to confirm his approval of that business case and his agreement to move to the next stage of the process, the development of a funding agreement between the secretary of state and the promoter.
- 1.3 Free schools are school which are proposed by groups of parents, teachers, community or faith groups. Once established they secure 'academy' status i.e. they are state funded independent schools.

2. Background

- 2.1 In the mid 1990s, Warwickshire County Council undertook a complete review of educational provision. This resulted in a change to the age of secondary transfer and the establishment of primary schools or in some cases separate infant and junior schools. Wherever possible, all through primary schools were introduced to remove the need for transition and so aid continuity of schooling.
- 2.2 In 1996, following a period of consultation, Priors Marston First School was closed. Until this time, children from the villages of Priors Marston and Priors Hardwick, choosing to access state education had transferred to Napton Primary school in the neighbouring village of Napton on the Hill at the end of Year 3.
- 2.3 At the time, the existing Napton Primary School was replaced by the new St Lawrence C of E Primary School. The priority area of the new school was extended to cover the parishes of Priors Marston and Priors Hardwick at Key Stages 1 and 2.
- 2.4 The St Lawrence C of E Primary School was built to ensure sufficient places for all children living within the priority area. Unlike some parts of the county the Southam area does not appear to be experiencing a rise in the birth-rate and existing pupil forecasts and data from the PCT show that the school is still of sufficient size to provide for children in the area, now and in the future.

A table showing current and forecast is attached at **Appendix A**.

3. The Consultation Process

- 3.1 In order to establish a free school promoters must produce a business case for consideration by the Secretary of State. This must show how promoters meet the following criteria:
- Suitability to establish / run a school.
 - Clear educational aims and objectives and sufficient capacity and capability to implement these.
 - Evidence of demand.
 - Financial viability.
 - Suitable premises.
 - Leadership and management.
 - Ability and willingness to meet the terms of the funding agreement or grant agreement.
- 3.2 The Department for Education encourages promoters of free schools to discuss their plans with the local authority and with others who might be affected by the proposal including neighbouring schools, other admissions authorities and neighbouring local authorities.

The promoters have invited comments on their proposal and have held meetings with the local community and with neighbouring schools. Representatives of the promoters have also met with officers within the Children's Directorate. However, no formal consultation document setting out the promoter's plans has been produced as part of the consultation process which could form the basis of a report to the Council.

At the request of the Department for Education, officers wrote expressing concern that the additional places which the free school would provide are not needed according to our pupil forecasts for the area, and more seriously that the opening of a new state funded school could impact adversely on existing provision in the area and in particular St Lawrence Church of England Primary School in Napton. It was however made clear to the Department that this was not the response from the County Council which would follow consideration by elected members once the details of the proposal were clear.

- 3.3 The Authority was sent a summary of the business case in January which is intended to set out formally the proposal. A copy is attached at **Appendix B**. That Business Case has been approved by the Secretary of State.

4. The Response to the Business Case

- 4.1 The Business Case appears to include sufficient information to meet the criteria set out in paragraph 3.1 above. Clearly as a group who have run a small school with no public funding they can give evidence of their suitability and capacity to run a school and their educational objectives. The financial viability of the school is dependent on their assessment of demand. There appears to be evidence of demand for places at the school were it to become state funded. Clearly a school of a maximum of 70 pupils will have very high unit costs. Nevertheless, the delivery of a high equality curriculum with sustained improvement in outcomes will be challenging.
- 4.2 A major concern at this stage for the Authority is the potential impact of the new school on existing provision, in particular the St Lawrence Church of England (Voluntary Aided) Primary School. The Governors of that school have expressed their strong opposition to the proposal to the promoters and to the Secretary of State. It is reported that other schools from both Warwickshire and Northamptonshire expressed concern at the meeting with the promoters.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 The Government's policy in relation to Free Schools is to enhance the diversity of provision and to meet the demands of parents or communities. The Business Case prepared by the promoters indicates that there is demand from within the Priors Hardwick area. It is a concern however that the process of consultation is not as robust as would be expected in relation to other statutory proposals and that a formal response from the County Council has only been sought very late in the process. The Authority may wish to draw these concerns to the attention of the Secretary of State. It is suggested too that concerns about the impact of the proposal on existing provision should be drawn to the attention of the promoters and the Secretary of State.

6. Recommendation

That the Cabinet authorise the Strategic Director, Children Young People and Families, to write to the Secretary of State drawing his attention to concerns about the process of consultation in relation to the establishment of Free Schools and drawing his attention to the potential impact on existing provision.

MARION DAVIS
Strategic Director for Children, Young People and Families

Saltisford Office Park
Ansell Way
Warwick

25th March 2011

Appendix A

Data from PCT showing children living within Priors Marston and Priors Hardwick.

Pupils in Area	Academic Entry Year								Grand Total	
	Age 31 08 09	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13		2013/14
0									6	6
1								11		11
2						10				10
3						11				11
4					7					7
5				11						11
6			6							6
7	8									8
Grand Total	8	6	11	7	11	10	11	6		70

The Priors Free School Business Case – Executive Summary

Prepared by: Priors Free School Group

January 2011



Age range: 4 – 11

Opening date: September 2011, or before

Location: The Priors School
School Lane
Priors Marston
Warwickshire
CV47 7RR

Local authority: Warwickshire

Lead contact: David Adams
The Old Vicarage
Priors Marston
Warwickshire
CV47 7RT
Tel.: 01327 261631 – W
Tel.: 01327 262626 – H
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1 Executive summary

Purpose

- 1.1 This document presents the executive summary of the business case for Stage 4 approval of the proposed Priors Free School (working title). Over the following pages, we explain the background and context to our business case, describe our vision, ethos and curriculum for The Priors Free School, and explain how the school will be staffed and governed. In later sections, we demonstrate the school's financial viability, the evidence we have gathered of demand for the school and provide a detailed analysis of what we believe is required in terms of capital investment in buildings, ICT and equipment to enable us to deliver our vision for The Priors Free School. We further provide information on the consultation we have undertaken to date, and explain the key milestones leading up to our planned opening on 01/09/2011 or before.

Outline of The Priors Free School Proposal

- 1.2 The Priors School was established in 1996 as an independent community primary school, managed by local people as an educational charity with the aim of ensuring that the children of the rural villages of Priors Marston and Priors Hardwick receive an excellent and free primary school education within a safe and caring local environment. Parents from outside the villages currently pay fees.
- 1.3 We teach the national curriculum plus additional subjects, achieve good SATS results and educationally every single child leaving our school has gone to the school of their parents' choice, be it in the state or independent sector.
- 1.4 We have received no state funding for the past 14 years, relying on fundraising and strict cost controls. We have added a Nursery, Playgroup and 3rd classroom to our Primary School due to increased demand.
- 1.5 The success of the school is underpinned by our experienced Trustees, significant local parental support and many volunteer helpers from within our villages.
- 1.6 We now wish to convert to a Free School. This will enable us to offer a free education for every child within our local area with an open admissions policy, restricted only by the physical capacity of the school buildings. Currently we could accommodate approximately 30 more pupils and still maintain our policy of small class sizes limited to a maximum of 20.
- 1.7 100% of our existing parents support our application to become a Free School. Our promotion work to date has resulted in 24 prospective parents registering as being interested in sending 34 children to our proposed new Free School.
- 1.8 Our teaching staff support us and within our local communities the most recent village survey recorded that 98% of residents considered the continuation of our primary school as 'important' or 'very important' to the future well being of our villages.
- 1.9 We have demonstrated over the last 14 years that we can manage a viable school despite extremely challenging financial circumstances and still produce enviable educational outcomes.

The Priors Free School Business Case

- 1.10 We are therefore confident of having both the local support and proven financial management to become an 'Outstanding' new Free School, with the declared aim of offering even better educational facilities and results within our area with an open admissions policy.
- 1.11 Additionally, we are currently holding discussions to negotiate appropriate leases to have exclusive midweek use of excellent sports facilities within our village which are managed by The Priors Sports and Social Club.
- 1.12 We are now looking forward with great optimism and excitement to becoming a successful new Free School as soon as possible.

Educational vision and ethos

- 1.13 By converting The Priors School to The Priors Free School our vision is to extend, improve and update our established educational services to be a model of outstanding primary education. This will benefit more children from within the area and in particular parents/carers from outside our two villages who we know would like their children to attend our school but who are currently unable to afford the fees.
- 1.14 Whilst not being a faith school, we would continue to provide a Christian-based ethos within our school. Maintaining a maximum of 20 pupils per class will continue to be a key objective.
- 1.15 We currently have the ability to increase the number of pupils by approximately 30 to around 60 in total in three classes. The Trustees consider that this will both improve the social balance of children to provide better opportunities for enhancing educational interchange and stimulation between pupils and also to provide sufficient numbers for developing more team based activities.

The curriculum and organisation of learning

- 1.16 We aim to provide a broad and balanced curriculum that meets the interests, abilities and special needs of every individual pupil. Teachers take into account the different learning styles of our children to ensure that their full potential is met. Our Free School will continue to follow a combination of IPC (International Primary Curriculum) and the National Curriculum in small class sizes and will embrace all faiths. We do and will continue to place great emphasis on respect, discipline and helping others.

School Organisation

- 1.17 The Priors Free School will be organised into classes as follows, with there being a maximum of 20 pupils per class for classes 1, 2 and 3:
- Reception and early years;
 - Class 1 – Years 1-2;
 - Class 2 – Years 3-4; and
 - Class 3 – Years 5-6.

The Priors Free School Business Case

- 1.18 The School will follow Warwickshire County Council's termly calendar with holidays and INSET days aligned.

Governance

- 1.19 As an existing school, we propose that our existing governance structure will apply to the Free School, with the addition of two elected Staff Trustees and the inclusion of the Head Teacher as an *ex-officio* trustee. We recognise that as a Free School, our Trustees will act as Trustees under Charity Law, as Governors under Education Law and as Directors under Company Law. The Priors Free School's governing body will be comprised of the following Trustees:

- Eight Priors Free School Trust Trustees (including the Chair);
- Two Parent Trustees;
- The Head Teacher (*ex officio*); and
- The local Vicar (*ex officio*).

Staffing structure

- 1.20 The existing staffing structure, which comprises two classroom teachers and a teaching Head Teacher, will be retained. As our pupil numbers grow in the coming years, we plan to recruit a teaching assistant and later an additional classroom teacher. We expect our Head Teacher's teaching time to reduce as our school grows.

Admissions and promoting the school

- 1.21 The Priors Free School will open with a Published Admission Number (PAN) of 10 children in Reception, giving a theoretical maximum roll of 70 pupils. However, in reality we expect some reduction in numbers across each year group, and we have therefore prepared our forecasts on the basis of the School being 'full' with 60 pupils on roll. There are currently 30 pupils on roll therefore we are seeking approximately a further 30 pupils over a four to five year period, i.e. some six or seven additional pupils starting in each of those years. We expect there to be 49 pupils on roll from September 2011, with 10 entering in Reception, and nine further pupils 'infilling' across Years 1 to 6. We expect the school to grow to 60 pupils by September 2014.

- 1.22 An ongoing programme of promotion and consultation is raising awareness of the plans for The Priors Free School and is generating interest in places for September 2011 entry. This includes appearance in the local and national media. Furthermore, we are advertising our proposed new Free School within our area from early February 2011, with an open day on 15 February 2011. We are aware that this open day may take place before the business case is approved, and the proposed Free School is a reality.

Evidence of demand

- 1.23 We have identified strong initial demand for the Free School locally, even though we have not started our main marketing campaign. All current parents have expressed their support for our proposals, and parents of 34 additional potential children have expressed an interest in sending their children to the School. Across Warwickshire, there is predicted to be a fall in surplus school places in the next five years, from 11% to 3%. Demographic trends indicate that the population of Warwickshire will continue to grow by 19% by 2033,

The Priors Free School Business Case

with an additional 8,600 people aged 5 – 14 (ONS data). Similar trends are evident in Northamptonshire and Oxfordshire.

- 1.24 We therefore feel confident that we will achieve the expansion in pupil numbers forecast.

Financial planning and viability

- 1.25 Our five year budget forecast anticipates an increasing number of children within the school and improved educational facilities with the financial ability to produce a monetary surplus each year for future school investment.

- 1.26 The Priors School has been managed by the local community for the past 14 years without any Government or Local Authority funding, starting in 1996 with 12 children, and with over 50 pupils on roll at times. The Trustees and local community have managed to fundraise sufficiently to meet the rising costs associated with an expanding school and inflation. Volunteers carry out many of the ongoing operational tasks. The school management has considerable experience of operating on an extremely tight budget where every proposed item of expenditure is robustly scrutinised, and thus is confident of continuing to manage the finances of the school successfully with the added benefit of state funding. This will allow us to upgrade and expand existing educational resources whilst being able to offer free education on an open admissions basis throughout our local area, and to cater for children entitled to free school meals, which we have been unable to provide to date.

- 1.27 We have based our income on the figures provided by DfE in its 'ready reckoner' and our budgeted costs are based on our audited management accounts plus indicated additional costs associated with conversion to a Free School.

- 1.28 We are forecasting costs rising from year one as a Free School through to year five, but carefully managed to produce a surplus each year. Local charitable fundraising will continue to take place to provide additional income to support the school to provide extended services provision beyond the 'core' provision funded by the DfE.

- 1.29 Based on our forecasted growth in pupil numbers, we therefore expect that The Priors Free School will operate with a budgetary surplus each year.

Site, buildings and equipment

- 1.30 The Priors School is situated in School Lane, Priors Marston, Warwickshire, CV47 7RR, at the end of a quiet *cul de sac*.

- 1.31 The existing fenced site and premises have been operational as a village school since 1847. The school has been expanded and upgraded by both the Local Education Authority in the 1960s and more recently by The Priors School Educational Charity and now comprises three dedicated classrooms, a school hall, ICT suite, playground and playing field.

- 1.32 To convert to a Free School we have been working with Partnerships for Schools (PfS) to develop options for capital funding improvements to the buildings and educational facilities to enable us to deliver an outstanding school.

Case for required capital investment

- 1.33 Four options have been considered. Our preferred option is to replace the existing 1960s extension (which is now nearing the end of its useful life, being flat-roofed, poorly insulated, and with an inefficient heating system) with a new building to provide enhanced teaching space and other facilities on approximately the same footprint. The Trustees believe this is the most cost-effective and 'environmentally friendly' solution to provide excellent educational facilities for the medium and longer term. We recognise that this option will require temporary classroom provision during the construction phase.
- 1.34 The forecast cost for our preferred option will provide for the buildings, ICT, furniture, fittings and equipment, abnormals, new heating system and outdoor classrooms. We expect all necessary works to be completed by September 2012.

Consultation

- 1.35 From November 2010 onwards, three questionnaires have been circulated to existing parents, the local community and prospective parents. Responses so far have been overwhelmingly in favour of converting to a Free School. Consultation is ongoing and being supplemented by national and local TV, radio and media coverage, plus local advertisements informing people of our intentions and inviting them to an open day at our school in February. Progress reports are given every month in our village parish news, delivered free to local residents.
- 1.36 We have arranged and are arranging further meetings for parents, the local community, prospective parents, pupils, local councillors, Head Teachers and governors from other local schools (primary and secondary), Parish Councillors, District Councillors, Warwickshire County Council, Northamptonshire County Council, Oxfordshire County Council and our local MP to have the opportunity to hear about and discuss our ideas.

Milestone plan

- 1.37 As an existing school, we already have our site, buildings, staff and governing body in place to enable us to convert smoothly into a Free School. Additionally, all the necessary policies and procedures are in place to run a school. We expect to be able to transfer many of our current policies and procedures to the Free School with appropriate amendments and updates. We expect to open as The Priors Free School on 01/09/2011 or before.
- 1.38 The key milestones (based on opening on 01/09/2011) are as follows:
- Approval of the business case – target date 21/01/2011;
 - Set up of Free School Trust – 27/01/2011;
 - Confirmation of capital allocated to develop the School's buildings – target date 21/01/2011;
 - Signature by The Priors Free School Trust of the Funding Agreement – target date 27/01/2011. Counter-signature by the Secretary of State expected by 17/02/2011;
 - Admissions process 28/02/2011 – 18/04/2011 (dependent on Funding Agreement being signed);

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- Transfer (TUPE) of staff to the Free School – target date 31/08/2011 or before;
- Land transfer completed 31/08/2011 or before; and
- Opening of The Priors Free School – target date 01/09/2011, or before.

Our successful future

- 1.39 We passionately believe that The Priors Free School is key to the ongoing sustainability of our community. When established and fully subscribed, our school will be a beacon of outstanding practice, superbly lead by an exceptional Head Teacher (already appointed) and supported by a highly capable staff team. We will be equipped with excellent facilities, the latest ICT equipment and we will deliver a highly innovative, varied and exciting curriculum which will provide our pupils with an outstanding education, giving them an excellent basis on which to continue their education in Key Stage 3 in the state or private sectors.
- 1.40 To allow us to start on the journey of taking our school to the next level, we ask that this business case be approved so that we can start the work required to ready us for our formal opening in September 2011, or before.