

AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET

Name of Committee **Rugby Area Committee**
Date of Committee **7th March 2007**
Report Title **Bishop Wulstan School, Rugby**

Summary This paper provides an opportunity for the Area Committee to consider the proposal to close Bishop Wulstan School and the responses to the consultation received from other stakeholders. The report asks for any comments that the Area Committee wishes to make to Cabinet.

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Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Budget and Policy Framework? [please identify relevant plan/budget provision] No

Background papers

- School Organisation Framework document 2005/10
- Cabinet reports 12.1.06, 9.3.06, 13.7.06, 12.10.06, 2.11.06, 23.11.06 and 9.2.07
- Rugby Area Committee report 21.9.06

CONSULTATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN (re 8.3.07 CABINET REPORT):

Details to be specified

Other Committees

Local Member(s) Cllr John Vereker – Caldecott
Cllr Ian Smith – Caldecott

Other Elected Members Spokespersons for information:
Cllr Helen McCarthy
Cllr Richard Grant
Cllr Jill Dill-Russell
Cllr John Whitehouse

- Cabinet Member Cllr John Burton
- Other Cabinet Members consulted Cllr Izzi Seccombe
- Chief Executive
- Legal Richard Freeth
- Finance Oliver Winters on behalf of David Clarke, Strategic Director of Resources
- Other Strategic Directors
- District Councils
- Health Authority
- Police
- Other Bodies/Individuals All stakeholders

FINAL DECISION **NO**

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS:

Details to be specified

- Further consideration by this Committee
- To Council
- To Cabinet 8th March 2007
- To an O & S Committee
- To an Area Committee
- Further Consultation

Rugby Area Committee – 7th March 2007

Bishop Wulstan School, Rugby

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

Recommendation:

That the Area Committee consider:

- (1) the proposal to close Bishop Wulstan School and the responses to the consultation received from stakeholders, and
- (2) any comments it wishes to make to Cabinet.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 At its meeting on 9th February, Cabinet agreed to carry out formal consultation on proposals to close Bishop Wulstan School with effect from 31st August 2007.
- 1.2 Formal consultations with stakeholders were conducted from 14th February to 7th March.

2. Background

- 2.1 Bishop Wulstan School is a Catholic 11-16 secondary school in Rugby where there is a selective system of education. In February 2006 the County Council consulted upon proposals to close Bishop Wulstan School but, following the consultation, withdrew the proposal to allow the Archdiocese to explore alternative proposals to secure Catholic provision in Rugby. However, since that time the Archdiocese's two proposals have been turned down by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). The first proposal, submitted in July 2006, to establish an Academy failed because the DfES decided it did not meet its criteria. The second proposal was to create a federation of Catholic schools in Rugby and to close Bishop Wulstan and establish a new 'fresh start' secondary school. This too was rejected by the DfES, stating that on the basis of forecast pupil numbers the school would not be viable or represent a responsible use of public funding. The DfES went on to say that:

“Given the present position there appears to be a strong case for Bishop Wulstan to be closed as soon as possible.”

- 2.2 In deciding the way forward now it is important to recognise this background. The decision in February 2006 to consult on the closure of the school was the result of concern about very low standards and low levels of subscription, both of which threaten the school’s viability and its capacity to raise levels of attainment and achievement. The County Council agreed not to proceed with these proposals in order to give the Catholic school authorities the time and opportunity to develop alternative proposals which have since been rejected. The concerns, however, about standards and viability and the capacity to improve standards at the school remain; and these concerns are clearly echoed in the letter from the Minister at the DfES.

3. The proposal

The Cabinet of the County Council has agreed to consult on a proposal to cease to maintain (to close) Bishop Wulstan Catholic School with effect from 31st August 2007.

4. Consultation

- 4.1 A consultation paper setting out the proposals was sent to:

- all parents/carers of pupils currently at Bishop Wulstan
- all parents/carers of pupils who have expressed a preference to attend Bishop Wulstan School from September 2007
- the governing body and all staff at Bishop Wulstan School
- all schools in the Rugby area
- the Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham and the Catholic Diocese of Northampton
- all Rugby Borough councillors
- all Parish Councils in East Warwickshire
- all admission authorities
- other Diocesan Education Authorities,
- the Learning and Skills Council
- teacher associations and trade unions
- neighbouring local authorities.

- 4.2 Copies of all the responses received to date have been placed in the Members’ Group Rooms. Given the need to bring this matter to as early a resolution as possible in the interests of pupils and staff, not all responses will have been received at the time this report is published. A further supplementary report summarising responses to the consultation will be circulated to Members prior to the Area Committee meeting.

5. The process – What happens next?

5.1 Publication of Statutory Notices

The next step is dependent upon Cabinet's view of the proposal in the light of responses to the consultation. If Cabinet decides not to proceed with the closure of Bishop Wulstan, this process will stop. However, given the timing of events and the comments of the Minister at the DfES, the consultation would need to have identified a clear and viable alternative to secure the education of pupils at the school.

If the proposal is adopted, it would be necessary to publish statutory notices at the school and in the local press for a six-week period, beginning on 16th March and running to 27th April. This would give a further opportunity for interested parties to comment on or object to the proposals.

5.2 Final decision

If there were no objections it is intended that the matter could be determined by the Cabinet at its meeting on 10th May, subject to confirmation by the County Council.

If there were to be objections to the closure, the matter would be considered by the Cabinet or the Warwickshire School Organisation Committee* in May 2007.

* This part of the process is subject to the determination by the DfES of the exact date in May 2007 when the abolition of School Organisation Committees is enacted as part of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. The impact of this legislation is to pass the decision-making role of the SOC to the Cabinet. At matters stand, the SOC is a body independent of the County Council which includes representatives of the Council, the Church authorities, schools and the Learning & Skills Council. If the groups represented on the SOC are unable to reach unanimous agreement, the matter would be referred to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator. He aims to give a final decision within eight working weeks.

6. Recommendation

The Area Committee is asked to consider the proposal and the responses to the consultation and any comments it wishes to make to Cabinet.

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26th February 2007