

**REPORT TO** Executive Board

**DATE:** 15 December 2011

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director, Children and Enterprise

**PORTFOLIO:** Children Young People and Families

**SUBJECT:** Sandymoor Free School Proposal

**WARDS:** Runcorn

**1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 This report provides an update on the proposed development of a Free School at Sandymoor.

**2.0 RECOMMENDED: That Executive Board**

- 1) consider and agree a response to the Sandymoor Free School Proposal; and
- 2) consider whether Local Authority services could be sold to the Free School on a full cost recovery basis.

**3.0 BACKGROUND**

3.1 An application to establish a non-denominational, 11-18 mixed secondary School on Sandymoor was submitted to the DFE for consideration in May 2011. The application is for a school which would have a maximum intake of 900 and open in 2012. On 10<sup>th</sup> October 2011 the DFE notified the authority that following a full assessment and interview the Secretary of State had approved the Sandymoor Free School application to proceed to the next stage of the process .

3.2 The proposed annual admission number at Year 7 is 120 and for post 16 150 per year. It is, however, proposed that the school limits numbers in the years as detailed below:

<b>Year 7</b>	<b>Numbers</b>	<b>Year 12</b>	<b>Numbers</b>
2012	80	2014	75
2013	90	2015	75
2014	100	2016	150

- 3.3 The Free School will be non-selective, will abide by the Schools Admission Code and will follow the National Curriculum. It will have four specialisms; Science, Technology, Enterprise and Sport.
- 3.4 There are a range of documents on the Sandymoor Free School Website which outline the vision, the curriculum and how it will be delivered, the admissions code and age range and the proposed location. On 1<sup>st</sup> November the Free School launched a consultation exercise asking the following questions:
- Should a funding agreement be entered into so that we are able to set up this school?
  - Should the school have a specialism?
  - Does the educational vision meet the expectations of a science and sports focused secondary school?
  - Do you think that the educational plan will deliver the results that you aspire to for your child?
  - Is the admissions policy clear, fair and unambiguous?
  - Do you think the age range of students is appropriate?
  - Are you happy with the school being sited within Sandymoor?
- 3.5 Those responding to the consultation are asked to provide their name and address.
- 3.6 The next stage in the process is the statutory consultation to help shape the direction and ethos of the school. This will either be launched in December/January and is likely to run for 10 weeks. The proposers of the Free School intend to seek the views of the Local Authority, schools and other stakeholders
- 3.7 In addition , the Secretary of State has a duty to consider the impact any new school will have on the existing schools in the area. The Local Authority will be contacted by the DFE. The DFE will then consider the views and contextual information provided prior to entering into a Funding Agreement with the Free School.
- 3.8 It is intended that the Free School be accommodated in temporary classrooms in the first few years until a permanent build can be completed on Sandymoor in 2014.
- 3.9 Should the Free School be approved by the DFE the proposers wish to work in partnership with the authority and the primary and secondary schools. They have also asked whether they can purchase a range of services back from the Authority.
- 3.10 Appendix A provides a summary of the impact the Free School will have on the current provision in Halton.

## 4.0 IMPLICATIONS

### 4.1 Pupil Numbers

As part of the case made for a new school the proposers have referred to over subscription in terms of quality secondary school places and the removal of partner primary status. The oversubscription refers to Warrington Secondary provision not Halton and the removal of the links between Halton primary and Warrington secondary schools due to lack of capacity in Warrington.

The Halton January 2011 census provides details of the pupil numbers in Runcorn schools for each year group. The table below assumes all pupils in each year group will transfer from Halton primary schools to secondary schools. In 2011 there are a total of 726 pupils, however of these at least 42 have applied for school places in other authorities.

There are four mainstream secondary schools in Runcorn offering a total of 790 places.

<b>School</b>	<b>PAN</b>
St Chad's Catholic and Church of England	190
The Grange	180
Ormiston Bolingbroke	180
The Heath	240
<b>Total</b>	<b>790</b>

There are therefore sufficient secondary places in Runcorn for both current and future Runcorn pupils up to 2015. The proposed places for the Free School are surplus to the borough's requirements. The chart below shows the estimated over capacity. The real over capacity is likely to be higher than estimated when considered alongside the out borough drift.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Pupil Numbers</b>	<b>Proposed Capacity</b>	<b>Surplus Places</b>
2012	728	910	182
2013	734	910	176
2014	697	910	213
2015	785	910	125

In any future year if a small number of additional places were required consultation would be undertaken with the current schools to increase their PAN on a temporary basis. This is considered to be a more flexible and cost effective way of responding to a single year group when the numbers are higher than previous years or the prediction for future years.

#### 4.2 Admissions

A number of parents have already contacted the Admissions team to ask advice on completing their application form and applying for a place at the Free School. The DFE have acknowledged that for 2012 it will not be possible for applications for the Free School to be administered as part of the co-ordinated secondary admissions process. This makes administering admissions for 2012 very difficult for both parents and the admissions team. It will also have an impact on the numbers and planning in Runcorn Secondary schools. However, applications for the Free School will need to be managed through the co-ordinated admissions process in 2013. The DFE have also suggested that the Local Authority might wish to provide advice to the Free School on how to advertise their school places in the area.

The Free School are interested commissioning the authority to manage any admissions appeals they may have.

#### 4.3 Land and Buildings

A Meeting has taken place between the representatives of the Free School Steering Group and the Homes and Communities Agency on the proposed site for the Free School. At this meeting they discussed Wharford Farm but decided that it presented too many problems. They also discussed reverting the reserved primary school site to housing and using the land at the East side of the green to combine both primary (reserved for a later date), secondary and sixth form. They believe this represents the best option as it will enable sharing of resources and allow them to deliver value for money. They are now looking at the site in terms of its potential to deliver an all through school.

In terms of buildings it is proposed that the Free school be located in temporary buildings for the first 2 years until a new building is finished. It is planned that the new build will be completed by 2014. To allay parents fears about the quality of temporary classrooms the website has a short video by Portacabin showing the quality and versatility of current mobiles.

There has already been significant capital investment in the existing Runcorn Schools.

- Over £10 million has been invested in St Chad's Catholic and Church of England High School and Specialist Language College. Through BSF it was intended to increase this investment to improve and expand provision adding a further 50 places per year group. Without BSF funding the increase in numbers is unlikely to be possible.
- The Grange School an All Through PFI school is currently being built at a costs of just below £30 million. The building work is scheduled for completion in April 2013.
- Ormiston Bolingbroke Academy have secured capital funding of over £5 million to improve and develop their existing facilities.
- We understand that a bid has been submitted by The Heath Academy under the School Priority Building Scheme to access PFI to rebuild the current school.

#### 4.4 Post-16 Provision

There are already a number of post-16 providers offering provision in Runcorn. These include:

- Riverside College;
- St Chad's Catholic and Church of England High School and Specialist College; and
- Ormiston Bolingbroke.

In addition, The Heath Academy are looking to develop a post-16 Free School for Runcorn Students.

Any additional provision could impact on the sustainability of the existing providers.

## 5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The development of a Free School is likely to have a significant impact on both schools and the local authority funding levels. The Free School aims to try and recruit up to 80 pupils in September 2012. If it is successful in doing this and these are pupils that would normally have attended Halton schools the annual loss based on an estimated secondary per pupil average of £5,200 could be in the region of £416,000 in year 1. Once the school is full 5 years at 120 would equate to approximately £3,120,000. Both Ormiston Bolingbroke and The Grange are both operating

5.2 significantly below their capacity any further loss may impact on their future sustainability and would certainly mean they would have to look to reduce staffing. As a PFI school this would be a particular issue for The Grange as all its Facilities Management costs are fixed irrespective of the number of pupils.

The Free School would also receive a LACSEG allocation. The Local Authority Spend Equivalent Grant is funding deducted from the central budgets managed by the local authority on behalf of schools. Academies and Free schools receive this grant to fund the services they previously received from the Local Authority that they will not need to secure for themselves. As many of these services support a services staffed by centrally employed staff it may mean that staffing levels will need to be reviewed in each service.

## **6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

### **6.1 Children & Young People in Halton**

The establishment of a Free School in Sandymoor could impact on the pupil and staffing levels of other secondary schools in Runcorn.

### **6.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

### **6.3 A Healthy Halton**

N/A

### **6.4 A Safer Halton**

N/A.

### **6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal**

N/A

## **7.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 Approval of the Free School at Sandymoor will impact on the pupil numbers of a number of Runcorn secondary schools. This in turn will impact on their staffing and future funding levels.

## **8.0 REASON(S) FOR DECISION**

8.1 This report seeks to gain the views of Executive Board to the proposal to establish a Free School on Sandymoor so that a response can be made to the statutory consultation.

**9.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED**

9.1 N/A

**10.0 IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

10.1 The Free School are looking to open in September 2012.

**11.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

11.1 The Free School will be a non-selective secondary school.

**12.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

<b>Document</b>	<b>Place of Inspection</b>	<b>Contact Officer</b>
Letter from DFE October 2011	Floor 1 Eccleston Block, Grosvenor House, Runcorn	Ann McIntyre – Operational Director Children's Organisation and Provision