

CABINET – 15 DECEMBER 2009

**REVIEW OF SCHOOLS ORGANISATION IN MELTON MOWBRAY AND
THE VALE OF BELVOIR - REVISED PROPOSALS TO CONSULT ON
THE FUTURE OF KING EDWARD VII SCHOOL, MELTON MOWBRAY**

**SUBMISSION FROM THE CHAIR OF GOVERNORS, KING EDWARD
VII SCHOOL**

**King Edward VII School – Briefing Paper for Leicestershire County Council Cabinet 15
December**

Background

1. A month ago officers prepared a proposal for Cabinet that sought to resolve two problems in secondary education in Melton and Belvoir:
 - Surplus school places or more accurately the uneven demand for school places between the three schools in Melton town
 - Governance arrangements for post 16 education in Melton and Belvoir.
2. They proposed that consultation should be undertaken on a number of future options of which the preferred option was:

"The preferred option is a change to the lower age range of King Edward VII School so that the School no longer provides education for Key Stage 3 and 4 pupils aged 11-16 but retains post-16 students, who would be located in the new Post-16 Centre. As the sixth form at King Edward VII would provide all post-16 education in the Partnership, the preferred option would require the age ranges of the other schools to be altered to 11-16. In addition some expansion of other secondary schools in the Partnership will be required to accommodate parental preferences."

3. Council officers did very little prior consultation or discussion in Melton to prepare the ground for the announcement of this proposal. There were some discussions 'in confidence' between council officers and some Governors from Long Field and John Ferneley, however because these were confidential it was not possible for those in the know to consult others in an open way. This has had the effect of undermining our confidence in the way that County Council officers are approaching the future of secondary education in Melton Mowbray.

4. The first that staff, students or parents of King Edward VII heard of the proposal was after the committee report had been finalised. It came as a real shock, particularly after the school had made a very positive start to the new school year following good GCSE results in the previous summer. Understandably there was anger and bewilderment that the County Council could put forward such a proposal in such a way at such a time.
5. Parents, governors, staff and students worked together to make a positive case for the continuation of the school. We put forward an alternative proposal that was essentially the officers preferred option but with the addition of a small KS3 and KS4 unit at KEVII. Following extensive lobbying Cabinet agreed that officers should take a close look at the potential viability of this option and report back to the next meeting.
6. We met council officers and presented them with a detailed model curriculum for the school that KEVII will be in September 2010. This model has been presented to KEVII parents at a meeting and was acknowledged as offering a good selection of study options at KS4. We only learned when the cabinet paper was published that officers had not accepted our proposal. We have received from them no explanation. We have not seen the analysis on which their rejection is based. We continue to believe that we could provide a viable high quality education for KS3 and KS4 pupils but at this stage officers are not persuaded.

Current Proposals

7. We were, however, surprised that the original preferred option had also been rejected without even being subject to consultation. It has been replaced by a revised preferred option that is based on two secondary schools working in partnership to provide post 16 education in Melton and Belvoir. Although this proposal was put forward by Long Field School and John Ferneley College they were careful to state that they were not seeking to prejudge which two schools should run this arrangement. In discussions the two schools have repeated this assurance that nothing should be pre-judged.
8. Officers however, have interpreted the Long Field/JFC proposal as being based on those two schools forming the partnership. They have repeated this interpretation in statements to the press and on radio. Hence officers whether deliberately or not have engaged in market shaping. They have made public statements about the likely outcome of future consultations that could influence parent, student and staff choices. This could make any subsequent consultation process vulnerable to legal challenge.
9. There have been some discussions within the Melton Partnership since the last Cabinet meeting. While at present there is no consensus on a way forward there is strong agreement that:

- However secondary education in Melton and Belvoir is organised in the future its success will depend on effective partnership working between all of the providers;
- Post 16 education should be built upon the existing provision at King Edward VII. The expertise and experience of the school and its staff is recognised by all partners.
- The partners will continue to work together to develop a solution that will be viable in the long term.

10. But, there are some major risks with the proposal put forward by Long Field and JFC that make this option a much bigger risk than original preferred option of changing the age range of KEVII to 16-19:

- The two schools do not have the confidence of other key partners particularly Belvoir School and Brooksby Melton College whose collaboration will be necessary to make any post 16 arrangement in Melton successful.
- KEVII recruits students from other schools, for example Vale of Catmose at Oakham, into the current sixth form. A partnership based on two schools that are currently working toward their first GCSE examinations will not be attractive to such external students.
- The current staff at KEVII, who it is agreed are key to the success of any post 16 centre in Melton will not be attracted to posts at the other schools and are likely to seek alternative employment elsewhere. If this does occur it will damage the quality of post 16 education in Melton for years ahead.

11. There is a willingness among the partner schools to continue discussions during the period of consultation to explore whether it is possible to develop a model for the future of secondary education in Melton and Belvoir that all partners can support. To facilitate this Cabinet should add the original preferred model of changing the age range at KEVII to the list of options under consideration. This is the preferred model of Belvoir School and one that with appropriate safeguards could attract wider support across the partnership.

Important safeguards

12. There are two groups of people who are vulnerable in this situation:

- Pupils currently at KEVII whose education will be disrupted either if they have to transfer to another school or because staffing instability impairs the quality of education that they receive. It is essential that effective action is taken at the earliest opportunity to work with these pupils and their parents to secure their future at KEVII in a way that meets their needs and protects their interests. This must start early in the new year, it cannot wait until the outcome of the consultation process is known.

- Staff at KEVII who face an uncertain future. There is a strong desire across the Partnership that they should remain working in education in Melton but at present no specific proposals that will safeguard their jobs. Again concrete proposals that will retain effective staff at KEVII and within the Melton partnership will be necessary early in the new year.

Conditions for a Decision in March

13. When the County Council decided on its model for the reorganisation of secondary education in Melton and Belvoir in 2007 it chose a model based on four 11-19 schools with a single post 16 centre that would be run in partnership. This was the clear preference of parents and the wider community. When the decision was made there was no partnership model in place and it has proved difficult to develop one subsequently. Pupil numbers have not turned out as anticipated by the County Council and there is continuing uncertainty over the financial viability of the model.
14. This time around it is essential that the decisions that are made are viable and sustainable. Whatever options are finally considered by Cabinet in March should be subject to a rigorous analysis that includes
 - a. Governance arrangements particularly for the partnership, including the range of institutions that are included in the partnership and how
 - b. Curriculum models
 - c. Staffing models including leadership roles, responsibilities and accountabilities
 - d. Financial analysis including an analysis of any transition costs and capital costs of building alterations or extensions
 - e. How the proposed arrangement will work to improve standards.
15. This analysis should be undertaken for all of the options that are eventually put forward for consideration by Cabinet in March. These analyses should be published in advance and subject to scrutiny by LCC Scrutiny Committee, PIB and the Governing Bodies of each of the schools concerned.
16. We propose that whatever decision Cabinet makes in March about the future arrangements that a written partnership agreement signed by the parties who will be responsible to implementing the decision be agreed in advance and that this is made a condition of approval.
17. If Cabinet does finally decide to adopt a two school model for Melton as proposed by Long Field and JFC that it should also agree a transparent process based on explicit criteria for deciding which schools should form the basis for the future partnership. We believe that popularity of a school with

parents of year 6 pupils is on its own not a sufficient basis for deciding the future of post 16 education in Melton. It is important to recognise that while choice of secondary school at year 7 will be led by parents, choice of course and school or college at post 16 is mainly made by students themselves. So we propose that any choice of which schools should continue to serve Melton Mowbray should be based on the following criteria in addition to parent popularity:

- a. Track record of delivery at KS4 and post 16
- b. Approach to inclusive education
- c. Experience and expertise of staff
- d. Vision for the future of post 16 education in Melton and Belvoir
- e. Geographical location in the town
- f. Size and suitability of school buildings.
- g. Established partnership links with other providers, universities, community organisations etc.

Conclusion

18. The Governing Body of KEVII believes that it would be wrong to reject the model that was adopted in 2007 after it has been operating for less than one school term. This was to be a long term change and to abandon it at the first signs of difficulty will erode confidence in the ability of the County Council to make long term decisions about the future of education in other areas of the County.
19. We believe in parental choice. Parents very clearly chose a three school model in 2007. Fewer parents and children have chosen KEVII at year 7 than we would have hoped. But they chose other schools in the knowledge that the experience and expertise of KEVII would continue to be available to the partnership and that the existing excellence of the sixth form would continue to be available to all.
20. At present there is little basis for making a choice apart from geographical convenience and the welcome that schools offer to parents. Long Field and John Ferneley are just coming to the end of their first term of delivering KS4. There is no publicly available information about the comparative performance of the three schools in external examinations that will enable parents to make an informed choice. When these data are available will be the appropriate time to consider whether or not patterns of parental choice across Melton will change as the community becomes more familiar with the new secondary school arrangements. Public perceptions are very slow to change, there are still people in Melton who continue to think of KEVII as 'the grammar school' – a status that was changed some forty years ago. In the autumn of 2011 the first sets of GCSE results will be become available and this will be an appropriate time to start evaluating whether the reorganisation has

achieved its primary objective of raising standards and the impact that the performance of the different schools has on parental choices.

21. Now is not the right time to conduct further consultations on the secondary education system in Melton and Belvoir. It would be like digging up a newly planted tree to see whether its roots are growing.

22. However if a decision is made to proceed to consultation

- a. The original preferred option of changing the age range of KEVII to 16-19 should be added to the list of options for consultation and that consideration should be made to retaining it as the council's preferred option.
- b. Cabinet should require the partnership arrangements for any future option to be specified in advance of a final decision.
- c. The cabinet decision should be based on a combination of public responses to the consultation and a rigorous analysis of each option to determine the robustness of its governance arrangements, financial and curriculum viability and the extent to which it will raise standards
- d. If it is decided to adopt a two school option for Melton then the decision as to which schools should be made transparently on the basis of explicit criteria.
- e. Arrangements must be put in hand from early January to support staff and students at KEVII through what will be a difficult transition period.

David Davies

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