

Committee(s)	Dated:
Education Board	25 June 2015
Subject: Update on Free Schools progress	Public
Report of: Director of Community and Children's Services	For Decision

Summary

The purpose of this report is to

- Inform Members of the progress made since the City's successful application to open Primary Free Schools, one in Southwark and one in Islington.
- To allocate a Member to support each of the Free School projects to the 'opening' date of each school.

Following the submission of applications by the City in October 2014, to the Department of Education (DfE) to open two free schools, the City was informed by the DfE that it had been successful in March 2015 in progressing to the pre-opening stage.

This was followed by representatives attending a 'kick off' meeting on April 9th 2015, officially setting the pre-opening path to become successful free schools, agreeing roles and responsibilities and setting key priorities for the future. For this meeting officers were required to produce a Project Plan in advance of the key tasks to be undertaken, along with milestones, up until the opening dates for each school.

These Project Plans have subsequently been signed off, and at recent meeting held on Monday 15th June with the DfE there was a review of progress made to date, the outcome of which was very positive and show the two schools to be on target.

The proposed sites for both these schools will need capital development and the City is working closely with colleagues from the Education Funding Agency (EFA) and officers from each of the respective local authorities to secure the appropriate level of funding, and site acquisition. There is a risk that the school buildings will not be ready in the first year of opening and the City is exploring what alternative arrangements can be put in place during this period.

In terms of project management arrangements, each of the schools has its own project board which meets on a monthly basis and reports quarterly into a programme board chaired by the Director of Community and Children's Services.

Depending to continued sufficient progress being made against these plans, the Secretary of State for Education will agree to funding agreement with the City to open these schools at a point still to be decided. The envisage dates for the opening of these schools are September 2016 for the school in Southwark and September 2017 for the school in Islington. The agreement with the DfE is for both schools to have two Forms of Entry, starting with Reception places and filling each year group in subsequent years.

Although progress against the project plans is on target for each of these schools, the DfE has risen in each of the meetings the governance arrangements the City has in place across its academies, which will need to be addressed in terms of both its present academies, and the expansion as this goes forward. To ensure appropriate regular members involvement and advice it is requested that a member is allocated to each of the Free School projects.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- Note the contents of the report
- To allocate a Member to support each of the Free School projects to the 'opening' date of each school

Main Report

Background

1. The City as part of its Education Strategy seeks to expand the number of academies it sponsors. In conjunction with requests from other authorities, namely Southwark and Islington, the City made applications under the Free Schools route to open a primary school in Southwark in September 2016, and a Primary school in Islington in September 2017, to meet the growing demand in primary school places in these areas. The City was informed in March 2015 that both these applications have been successful in progressing to the pre-opening stage.

Current Position

2. Representatives attending a 'kick off' meeting on April 9th 2015, officially setting the pre-opening path to become a successful free school, agreeing roles and responsibilities and setting key priorities for the future. For this meeting officers were required to produce a Project Plan in advance of the key tasks to be undertaken, along with milestones, up until the opening dates for each school.
3. Progress against each of the actions in the project plan to date have been completed on time with the exception of providing scanned copies of DBS checks for members of one of the interim governing body members. In terms of specific progress made to date;
 - a. The Project Plans for both schools have been agreed
 - b. The Marketing Plans for both schools have been agreed
 - c. Recruitment timelines for the appointment of the Principal Designate for both schools have been agreed
 - d. Draft Admissions Policies for both schools have been submitted and are awaiting feedback
 - e. Interim governing body membership for both schools have been agreed and are in place

4. In terms of next steps, a Section 10 consultation, a statutory requirement under the Academies Act 2010 to consult such persons as deemed appropriate when wishing to open a school, will need to be carried out over the coming months. The primary purpose of the consultation, and the report to be produced from this, is to inform the City in reaching its decision to enter into a funding agreement with the Department of Education.
5. In terms of where the schools will be based, the proposed sites for the two schools are the previous Gallywall Primary School site in Southwark, and the previous Richard Cloudesley Special School site in Islington, although we have no confirmation at this stage from the Education Funding Agency (EFA) that these sites will be approved.
6. Both the sites will need extensive capital build programmes. The Gallywall site is an existing Victoria primary school site and will need to be refurbished as well as some new development of the site. The Richard Cloudesley site will require a demolition of the existing building and complete new build of the site. The City is working closely with colleagues from the EFA and officers from each of the respective local authorities to secure the appropriate level of funding, and site acquisition arrangements.
7. With the aggressive time scales in terms of having a capital programme completed by the opening dates of each school, the City has interviewed for Project Management and Design Teams for the capital programme with a view to appoint by the end of the month, although at this point the level of funding available has not been confirmed. Even if the City continues to make its present level of progress on the capital builds there is a risk that the schools will not be ready for children in the first year of opening and the City is exploring options for these children to attend school in this first year. The City has raised this risk with the DfE and EFA, as well as requested a temporary accommodation budget is built into the EFA capital funding should this need arise.
8. For the Islington site there are additional pressures in that the original application made to the DfE was for a one Form of Entry but the DfE only agreed the application if the City accepted the condition that it was a 2FE school. Islington has also stipulated the school have a nursery and 2 year old places on what is quite a confined site which will be challenging, particularly with regards to having sufficient outside space. Officers will be exploring with the DfE/EFA if there is capital funding available for the nursery provision, as this cannot be taken from the capital allocation for the school, and is likely to require an additional application being made. Should this not prove successful officers will seek capital funding for Islington if this is to go ahead.
9. In all conversations the City's has had with the DfE since the interview meeting in March and subsequently, the DfE has raised the governance arrangements the City has for its academies. At the meetings held on Monday 15th June 2015, one of the outcomes of that meeting was "Once you have had a think about the type of MATs you want to set up, my colleague should be able to talk through possibilities for any overarching structure". This will need to be addressed in terms of both its present academies, and the expansion as this goes forward

Implications

10. A delay in the capital builds being ready will require alternative accommodation for reception classes in the first year. Officers are exploring how this can be provided in existing family of City schools.

Conclusion

11. The City is making sufficient progress through the 'pre-opening' stage of its two Free School applications, both in terms of delivering a school and the capital programmes. There is some risk due to the aggressive time scales that the buildings will not be completed to a point where children can start in these schools by the date they are due to open. With this in mind officers are exploring alternative arrangements as well as requesting temporary accommodation funding from the EFA should this arise. There is a question about the overarching governance arrangements for the City's academies which will need to be addressed in terms of both its present academies, and the expansion as this goes forward. To ensure appropriate regular members involvement and advice it is requested that a member is allocated to each of the Free School projects.

Appendices

- None

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