



## Notes of Meeting: East of England and North East London Advisory Board

**Date of meeting – 23 September 2021**

### Attendance

Attendance data is published annually on the GOV.UK website.

AB members who sent their apologies for the meeting have, where possible, been consulted on all projects before the meeting. Their views are reflected in the discussion at the meeting (where appropriate). This excludes items where that member declared a conflict of interest.

### Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) chair

- Sue Baldwin (RSC)

### Advisory Board (AB) members

- Tom Canning (AB)
- Caroline Derbyshire (AB)
- Diane Rochford (AB)
- Al Kingsley (AB)
- Karen Kerridge (AB)
- Duncan Ramsey (AB)
- Andrew Aalders-Dunthorne (AB)
- Brian Conway (AB)

### Apologies

- None

### DfE senior civil servants

- ESFA representative
- Alan Parnum (Deputy Director)

## **Representations received**

- No representations were made for any items discussed at this meeting.

## **General Discussion Points**

### **AB member reflections**

- The Note of Meeting for the July AB meeting were discussed and agreed.
- The RSC and Board took time for reflections on the forthcoming Advisory Board elections.

### **RSC update on the sixth-form provision projects taken to July AB**

- The RSC brought the Board's attention to two projects from the previous July AB meeting, which were invited for discussion before being taken to ministers for approval. Both projects involved the opening of 2 sixth-form provisions in Cambridgeshire. These were:
  - Eastern Learning Alliance to increase the age range from 11-16 to 11-19 and add a sixth form provision in Chesterton Community College, Cambridge, Cambridgeshire.
  - The Cam Academy Trust to increase the age range from 11-16 to 11-19 and add a sixth form provision in Cambourne Village College, South Cambridgeshire.
- Further details can be found below in the 'decisions taken between AB meetings' section.

## Free School Presumption – Sponsor Approval

Points discussed in relation to a free school's sponsor status.

**Project:** To approve the LA's recommendation for The Eveleigh Link Academy Trust to sponsor Wickford Presumption Free School, **Chelmsford, Essex**.

### **AB discussion:**

- The AB heard about the background of the LA's recommendation to approve Eveleigh Link to sponsor the new Wickford free school in Essex, which is due to open in September 2022.
- The Board also heard that the department looked into Eveleigh Link, who have established a strong central team, HR and finance team, pupil premium lead and family support officers to work at the school. The trust are ready to recruit, and the department engaged with ECC throughout the selection process.
- The AB and RSC expressed no concerns, and the AB fully supported the RSC's decision to approve the application.

**RSC decision:** Approve.

**Conflicts:** None.

**Further actions required:** Project Lead to inform Essex County Council of RSC's decision.

## Significant Changes

Points discussed in relation to significant changes applications.

**Project:** Sabres Educational Trust to increase the number of school places from 500 to 600 in IES Breckland, **West Suffolk, Suffolk.**

### **AB discussion:**

- The AB heard that Sabres Educational Trust are seeking approval to expand IES Breckland, which opened in 2012 and is currently oversubscribed, due to nearby housing developments.
- The AB heard that surrounding academies have also expanded to cope with the need, and the LA have been monitoring this as part of their wider school improvement strategy. The LA have funded the expansion to the building.
- The AB also heard that the expansion will not have a negative impact on the trust's capacity, and the change should take place from September 2022.
- The Board was content with this approach and had no objections, the RSC approved this application.

**RSC decision:** Approve.

**Conflicts:** None.

**Further actions required:** Trust to be informed of RSC's decision.

**Project:** East Anglian Schools Trust Ltd to increase the number of school places from 900 to 1050 in Bungay High School, **East Suffolk, Suffolk.**

### **AB discussion:**

- The AB heard that Bungay High School is Ofsted rated 'good' and has above average results. The trust are requesting permission to expand the school due to increasing demand from a new housing development.
- The AB also heard that Suffolk council have provided funding to support the expansion required for the building. The department has no financial concerns with the trust, or concerns with the trusts capacity if they were to expand. If the expansion was not approved, this would mean that there would not be sufficient school places in the area.
- The Board was content with this approach and had no objections, the RSC approved this application.

**RSC decision:** Approve.

**Conflicts:** None.

**Further actions required:** Trust to be informed of RSC's decision.

**Project:** Seckford Education Trust to merge SET Maidstone Infant School, East Suffolk and SET Causton Junior School, **East Suffolk, Suffolk.**

**AB discussion:**

- The AB heard about the trust's application to merge an Ofsted rated 'good' infant school with a 'good' rated junior school. The two sites currently operate as a shared school on different sites 5 minutes apart. The schools share their governance and the head teacher. The merge would mean that some building work would be needed to accommodate reception and SEN classes.
- The AB heard that the ESFA have no concerns, as costs of building works can be recovered from trust reserves and the sale of site.
- The change will mean a seamless transition for pupils and a greater opportunity to broaden curriculum
- The trust consulted for 7 weeks, with the majority of responses in support of the merge. Those that opposed the merge have responded to by the trust.
- The department have no concerns and recommend the approval of the merger, closure of the old school and sale of the building back to LA.
- The AB raised that the trust would lose out on some funding if they are to merge. The trust has addressed this in their previous financial calculations, and find they are still left with savings per year.
- The AB also raised concerns with the move of the SEN unit. The Board were assured that the long-term benefit of moving the SEN unit would mean pupils can remain within the unit without the need to later transition. The trust has taken on the same architect to build the unit using a similar design and layout. The SEND coordinator can also make better use of their time without the need to travel between the two schools.
- The Board had no further questions and the RSC decided to approve this application and the AB supported this decision.

**RSC decision:** Approve.

**Conflicts:** None.

**Further actions required:** Trust to be informed of RSC's decision.

## Decisions taken between AB meetings

List of decisions taken by the RSC outside of AB meetings.

### Projects:

- Eastern Learning Alliance to increase the age range from 11-16 to 11-19 and add a sixth form provision in Chesterton Community College, **Cambridge, Cambridgeshire**.
- The Cam Academy Trust to increase the age range from 11-16 to 11-19 and add a sixth form provision in Cambourne Village College, **South Cambridgeshire, Cambridgeshire**.

### Update:

- The AB heard that their queries from the last AB were considered along with two other matters:
  - What the impact would be on current local providers if the two sixth forms were to open,
  - Assurance that the quality of the curriculum offered would be of high quality,
  - Whether the Eastern Learning Alliance trust had fully explored utilising post-16 provision at another school within the trust,
  - The future relationship with the Castle Special School and the connection with this application,
  - To seek further details on how the Eastern Learning Alliance trust has responded to queries during the consultation period.
- The AB also heard of the outcome of a post-16 review of places conducted by Cambridgeshire LA which concluded in September 2020. The LA produced a publicly available report which highlighted an additional 2500+ post-16 places for pupils between 2020 and 2029 of which 861 are in the same district as Chesterton.
- The AB heard of the impact on current local providers:
  - The majority of Chesterton pupils wishing to study at post-16 attend either Long Road Sixth Form College or Hills Road Sixth Form College. Therefore, there will be some impact initially on places within these establishments until the pupil numbers increase as forecast by the LA.
  - There will be no reported impact at Cambridgeshire Regional College and minimal impact on those secondary schools who also have a sixth form as the share of the forecast pupils disperses.
  - All applications with relevance to post-16 are reviewed by colleagues in the ESFA Further Education Directorate. Their view is that this application could have some impact on local providers.
- The AB then heard about the quality of curriculum offer:
  - Chesterton, as an 11-16 provider, is judged as Outstanding by Ofsted. The experience of staff at KS5 within the trust's staffing structure was considered. The trust provided details of a high number of existing staff who are able to teach KS5. In addition, the trust could draw on expertise from Athena Sixth

Form College, Norfolk, and Impington Village College, Cambridge, both of whom have existing sixth form provision.

- This new sixth form provision would offer local pupils and from the North of Cambridge, including those who are disadvantaged, the choice to travel to and study in a smaller setting. This would offer those pupils the opportunity to continue academic study who may not have otherwise chosen this option.
- The AB heard whether trust had explored using current post-16 provision:
  - The department looked at the Impington International College offer and, at the time of our enquiry, the school were full to capacity and were oversubscribed for September 2021.
- On the other matters raised the AB heard that:
  - the relationship with the Castle Special School centred on utilising and adapting some additional space at Chesterton for post-16 pupils from the Castle Special School due to their capacity constraints. This would enable more pupils to access the main school. The LA expressed their support in this regard due to a need to provide more spaces for pupils requiring this specialist provision.
  - the trust were able to provide a 97-page consultation document and corresponding letters which included detailed responses by the trust to questions and queries raised by local post-16 providers and parents in relation to this application.
- The RSC thanked the AB for their questions and sector representation which allowed the department to further explore the proposed changes. In conclusion, the RSC recognised that this was finely balanced decision for the Minister but in weighing the arguments, was content to recommend the Minister to approve.

**Project:** Heartlands Community Trust to increase the number of school places from 104 to 125 in The Grove School, **Haringey**.

**Update:**

- The trust sent in a significant change application to increase the capacity by 21 places at the school, which caters for pupils aged 5-19 with a primary diagnosis of autism.
- The RSC and AB heard that this change was requested due to increase in demand in the local area, particularly for special school places.
- The RSC and AB also heard that there were no objections following consultation and the LA were fully supportive of this expansion.
- Following receipt of the background to the project, the AB expressed no concerns and the RSC decided to approve this project.

**RSC decision:** Approve.

**Conflicts:** None.

**Further actions required:** Trust to be informed of RSC's decision.

**Project:** South East Essex Academy Trust to increase the age range from 3-11 to 2-11 in Prince Avenue Academy and Nursery, **Southend-on-Sea**.

**Update:**

- The trust sent in a significant change application to increase the age range of the school to provide 32 places for 2 years olds.
- The RSC heard that this change was requested due to an identified need highlighted through the LA's sufficiency audit. The trust had also applied and secured capital funding for the expansion back in 2019 but construction was delayed due to Covid.
- The RSC also heard that there were no objections following consultation, the LA were fully supportive of this change and that this would not negatively impact on neighbouring provision.
- Following receipt of the background to the project, the RSC expressed no concerns and decided to approve this project.

**RSC decision:** Approve.

**Conflicts:** None.

**Further actions required:** Trust to be informed of RSC's decision.