



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

Date of meeting – 21 October 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)
- Karen Kerridge (AB)
- Duncan Ramsey (AB)
- Andrew Aalders-Dunthorne (AB)
- Brian Conway (AB)

Guests

- Tim Coulson (CEO of Unity Schools Partnership)

Apologies

- Al Kingsley (AB)

DfE senior civil servants

- ESFA representative
- Alan Parnum (Deputy Director)

Representations received

Representations were received for item 3.1, Mulberry Schools Trust to sponsor Wood Wharf Free School Presumption, Tower Hamlets.

These representations were shared in advance of the meeting with all attendees and considered alongside their corresponding item.

General Discussion Points

AB member reflections

- The Note of Meeting for the September AB meeting were discussed and agreed.
- The RSC asked if the Board agreed with the note from the last meeting around the decision made on the two sixth forms, and Board members confirmed the decision was made based upon a rigorous and robust process.

Presentation from Tim Coulson (CEO of Unity Schools Partnership)

- The Board heard a short presentation from Tim Coulson giving an update on developments at the trust.
- Tim Coulson left the meeting after his presentation was finished. The RSC and AB members thanked him for his time.

Converter Academy Orders

Points discussed in relation to school conversion.

Project: Spaldwick Community Primary School, **Huntingdonshire, Cambridgeshire** – to convert and join ACES Academies Trust.

AB discussion:

- The Board heard that the request for Spaldwick to convert and join ACES Academy Trust would help to formalise their existing relationship, and that Spaldwick currently acts as a feeder school for the trust. The LA also commented positively in regard to the relationship between Spaldwick and ACES currently.
- The Board also heard of the benefits to Spaldwick through joining ACES which include the sharing of various functions as well as financial support. Whilst still maintaining their small school feel.
- 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: RSC office to send out Academy order to governing body, Director of Children's Services and Director of Education. Project Lead to inform trust of RSC's decision.

Project: Ken Stimpson Community School, **Peterborough** – to convert and join The Four Cs Academy Trust.

AB discussion:

- The AB heard how Ken Stimpson is one of the last remaining LA maintained secondary schools in the area. The Four Cs trust have a track record of school improvement, and both schools are already working together to help raise overall standards at the school and achieve academic success.
- The AB also heard that the trust would benefit from the autism hub at Ken Stimpson. While the trust has two free schools in preopening, it has sufficient capacity to support the conversion of Ken Stimpson.
- The Board brought the trusts' governance structure to attention and highlighted there is an overlap of members and trustees which needs to be reviewed against DfE guidance. The RSC assured the board that this would be followed up with the trust.

RSC decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: RSC office to send out Academy order to governing body, Director of Children's Services and Director of Education. Project Lead to inform trust of RSC's decision and to follow up with the trust around their governance structure.

Free School Presumption – Sponsor Approval

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

Project: Mulberry Schools Trust to sponsor Wood Wharf Free School Presumption, **Tower Hamlets**.

AB discussion:

- The AB heard that the LA identified a need for a school in the area due to new housing development.
- The AB heard about the process undertaken by the LA who ran the competition. The consultation ran from February to March 2021 and there were two representations received following the consultation, one from a trust in favour of the new school and who considered they should operate it, and another which expressed concerns that the new school would be inclusive and accessible to all families regardless of religion or belief. A representation was also received regarding this item prior to the AB meeting and shared with attendees.
- The Board heard that the LA received 12 applications and 5 trusts were shortlisted and interviewed. The DfE observed both the shortlisting and interview panel sessions. Mulberry Schools Trust (MST) scored the highest in this exercise.
- Mulberry have a strong track record of performance and school improvement and have the capacity to open a new school. They understand the local community and put an emphasis on supporting students with social inequalities. Mulberry also have strong experience and governance. The trusts' finances are strong, and they have previous experience opening a free school successfully.
- The Board also heard about any risks identified with Mulberry's application, which included consideration of no previous primary experience. However, the board noted that the trust is in the process of taking on a 'Good' primary school this academic year which will be a capacity giver to the trust. MST was also previously approved by the DfE to open a primary free school through the central applications route and as a strong trust will be able to develop as needed to expand to a new phase with high quality standards.
- The RSC addressed the representation received prior to the meeting, and highlighted changing demographic trends in the borough, the review of primary places and the background regarding previous pipeline free schools approved through the central route. Selection of the new school provider through a competition had enabled all interested trusts the opportunity to apply through an open and transparent process.
- The AB discussed the capacity at Mulberry in terms of the range of projects they are involved in. It was confirmed that overall, the trust had the capacity to take on this project as they have strong capacity at several levels in their trust.
- The RSC assured the Board that they would continue to work with the LA to manage the project and monitor the basic need, as well as further conversations regarding the representation.

RSC decision: Approve

Conflicts: Tom Canning did not receive the papers and was not part of this discussion.

Further actions required: The trust and the LA to be informed of the decision, and to follow up with the LA on the representation received.

Significant Change

Points discussed in relation to significant changes applications.

Project: The Kemnal Academies Trust to increase the age range from 4-11 to 2-11 in Heybridge Primary School, **Maldon, Essex**, to incorporate an existing private nursery on site.

AB discussion:

- The AB heard about the request from Kemnal Academies Trust to extend the age range of Heybridge Primary School to accommodate an existing nursery located on the school site. The school is judged Outstanding by Ofsted, and approval of the change would mean a seamless transition for children moving from the nursery to reception. There are no financial risks with this change.
- 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: The trust is to be informed of the outcome.

Project: The Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies Trust to increase the age range from 4-11 to 2 ½-11 in Thomas Bullock Church of England Primary Academy, **Breckland, Norfolk**, to add a nursery provision.

AB discussion:

- The Board heard about the request to extend the age range of Thomas Bullock CofE Primary Academy to add a nursery provision. The school is judged as 'Good' by Ofsted and would help with the issue of children leaving the village to receive nursery care.
- 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: The trust is to be informed of the decision.

Project: Boudica Schools Trust to increase the number of school places from 1767 to 2017 and increase the PAN from 280 to 330 in Sprowston Community Academy, **Broadland, Norfolk.**

AB discussion:

- The AB heard about the request to increase the number of school places at Sprowston Community Academy. This change was at the request of Norfolk County Council, due to new housing in the area meaning a higher demand for school places. The increase in PAN would be phased over 5 years and would mean there would be education available within walking distance of these new developments. This expansion would manage the rise in need until new schools are built. The LA funded the expansion to the school building.
- The AB heard about school performance concerns, and that the pace of school improvement has been interrupted due to Covid.
- The AB heard that if this change was not approved there would not be sufficient school places in the area.
- The Board expressed support of this change and highlighted that there are few other options in the area. The RSC decided to approve this application.

RSC decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: The trust to be informed of the outcome, and the RSC office to monitor the process closely.