

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL –RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TO BE TAKEN BY:

Roger Gough,
Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform

DECISION NO:

14/00039

For publication

Subject: Proposed Closure of Chaucer Technology School

Decision:

As Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform I agree to:

- (i) Issue a public notice to close Chaucer Technology School for all year groups except the current Year 10 from 31 August 2014 and to close the school permanently from 31 August 2015.

And, following the issuing of the Public Notice and subject to consideration of objections:

- (ii) Close the School for all year groups except the current Year 10 from 31 August 2014 and;
(iii) close the school permanently for all year groups from 31 August 2015.

Should objections, not already considered by the cabinet member when taking this decision, be received during the notice period a separate decision will be required in order to continue the proposal and allow for proper consideration of the points raised.

1. Reason(s) for decision:

- 1.1 The very significant drop in pupil numbers, reflecting loss of parental confidence in the school, and the serious budget deficit coupled with future pupil number projections in the Canterbury area suggest closure of Chaucer Technology School as the most viable option.
- 1.2 The consultation period ran from 25 February to 8th April 2014 with a public meeting being held on 17 March 2014.
- 1.3 In reaching this decision I have taken into account:
- the views expressed by those attending the public consultation meeting on 17 March 2014, and those put in writing in response to the consultation;
 - the views of the Local Member;
 - the Equalities Impact Assessment and comments received regarding this; and
 - the views of the Education Cabinet Committee which are set out below

2. Financial Implications:

- 2.1 The national changes to school funding that were implemented in April 2013 reduced all local authority funding formulas to a very limited number of factors (10 in our case) and moved the funding to the position where more than 90% of a school budget is now based upon pupil numbers compared to an average of 71% in 2012/13. The significant decline in pupil numbers at Chaucer Technology School has therefore resulted in a corresponding decline in its revenue funding. More than ever before the financial viability of a school hinges on its pupil numbers.
- 2.2 The budget for Chaucer Technology School (excluding Post 16) is £3.7m in 2013/14 and

that falls to £2.7m in 2014/15 because of the reduction in pupil numbers. If closure was not being considered we would face a major issue in 2015/16 where the budget for the school is likely to fall below £1m. The school is currently forecast to end 2013/14 with a deficit of over £0.3m (revenue and capital) which is expected to grow to over £0.6m in 2014/15 rising to more than £2m in 2015/16. This, coupled with the continuing fall in the roll, is not a financially viable position for any school. That level of funding and deficit would not allow the school to deliver the required curriculum and quality of education.

- 2.3 In January 2013 the Acting Principal of Chaucer Technology School took appropriate action to address the budget pressures through a significant reduction in staffing. This is likely to have brought the budget back under control on the basis of what was known about pupil numbers at that time. What could not have been anticipated when those savings measures were implemented was the scale of the continuing fall in the roll which has now resulted in an untenable financial position.

Revenue

- 2.4 The financial implications of closure are set out below. Most of the costs will have to be met from the Schools Block of the DSG (Dedicated Schools Grant) so the majority of additional costs (most of which are one-off in nature) will not fall to KCC but it will put some pressure on our DSG funding in 2014/15 and 2015/16. The DSG will have to absorb the one-off cost of the deficit left when the school closes. We are currently developing a model budget to take the school through to closure in August 2015 so a definitive figure is not available. However, with all the changes taking place from September 2014 we anticipate being able to reduce the projected 2015/16 deficit so the likely cost will be in the region of £1.5m.
- 2.5 It should be noted that had the school proceeded with the planned Academy conversion proposed by the DfE in 2013, we would still have incurred the cost of the deficit. Schools converting under the sponsored Academy model leave their deficit behind with the local authority. The Schools Block of the DSG will also have to meet some one-off costs that will be incurred by those schools taking on the current Chaucer Technology School pupils from September 2014. This is still to be quantified with the schools concerned but we anticipate the cost will be in the region of £1m. The schools will get additional funding in future years for those pupils through the normal formula budget process. There will be costs in respect of staffing, primarily redundancy payments as well as some additional cost on Home to School Transport. Again, it is unlikely that these costs can be quantified until later. There will also be costs relating to closing of parts of the site during the academic year 2014/15 and securing the site following closure in August 2015.

Capital

- 2.6 As with revenue there will be a capital deficit to be absorbed but this is much smaller than the revenue and may be less than £0.1m at the point of closure. The major capital issue relates to the future of the 22 acre site. At this stage there are no plans for the site as our focus is on providing support for the existing pupils and staff through to closure in August 2015. There are clearly a range of options that can be explored as to the future use of the site but until options are developed it is not possible to quantify the scale of any potential costs or receipts.

3 Human Resources Implications

- 3.1 A 30 day formal consultation period for staff commenced on 24 March 2014. This was opened with a consultation meeting attended by staff, Trade Unions, LA Representative, the Executive Principal and HR. Staff were provided with a copy of the indicative Redundancy Timeline, Public Consultation document on the proposal to close the Chaucer Technology School and a Question and Answer sheet in response to queries that had been raised at earlier staff meetings. As part of the consultation process formal one to one meetings with staff have started and will be completed by 4 April 2014. Responses to the formal consultation process are to be received by 24 April 2014.
- 3.2 A number of staff have been selected to cover the curriculum for Year 11 in 2014/2015, subject to the proposal for closure being approved. They will therefore have their redundancy deferred. A retention allowance will be paid to ensure that Year 11 students receive continuity of education and secure the best possible outcomes with their GCSE courses. A number of the remaining staff members have secured alternative employment and others are being supported in looking for other positions. Those that do not secure other posts will be made redundant on 31 August 2014, subject to the proposal being agreed.

4. Property Implications

- 4.1 The Chaucer school site will remain operational until August 2015. It will then revert to the Local Authority's ownership and will be held for educational purposes within KCC's Property portfolio. Further analysis of future need will be undertaken to inform whether any part of the site can be disposed of or made available for alternative use.
- 4.2 Work will be undertaken to ensure the site can operate safely until final closure in August 2015.
- 4.3 Consultation is taking place with other users of the site to inform decisions around longer term use.

5. Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:

14 March 2014

The Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform in his verbal update explained the proposal to the Committee. The Committee agreed to discuss the proposal fully at its meeting on 22 April 2014.

22 April 2014

At its meeting the majority (8/13 Members) voted to; endorse the decision set out in the report to be taken by the Cabinet Member for Education and Health; and made a recommendation for consideration set out in para (ii) to:

- (i) Issue a public notice to close Chaucer Technology School for all year groups except the current Year 10 from 31 August 2014 and to close the school permanently from 31 August 2015.
- (ii) Retain the Chaucer Technology School site for additional educational use. Further analysis of future need will be undertaken to inform whether any part of the site can be disposed of or made available for alternative use.

And, following the issuing of the Public Notice and subject to consideration of objections:

- (iii) Close the School for all year groups except the current Year 10 from 31 August 2014 and to close the school permanently from 31 August 2015.

Should objections, not already considered by the cabinet member when taking this decision, be received during the notice period a separate decision will be required in order to continue the proposal and to allow for proper consideration of the points raised.

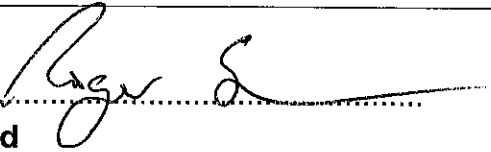
6. Any alternatives considered:

- 6.1 The decline in pupil numbers and the corresponding reduction in funding available to the school will make it impossible to sustain the improvements recognised in recent monitoring visits by HMI and the Local Authority.
- 6.2 The school was inspected by Ofsted in March 2013 and was judged to be 'inadequate' and requiring 'special measures'. The Local Authority commissioned the Swale Academies Trust in July 2013 to assume responsibility for leading the improvements at the school. Recent GCSE results show that there has been an improvement in attainment. Her Majesty's School Inspectors and the Local Authority have recognised that the school has been improving well and making good progress under the leadership of the Swale Academies Trust over recent months and these improvements are projected to continue.
- 6.3 However there is a significant risk to school standards and pupil outcomes if the school remains open. As the number of pupils and the level of funding reduce, further cuts in staffing will be required, which in turn will result in severe restrictions on curriculum delivery and the quality of education. The school is not viable in the future.

Any interest declared when the decision was taken and any dispensation granted by the Proper Officer:

None

Signed



Date

23/4/14