A majority of respondents support the establishment of an Academy to replace **Charles Burrell and Rosemary Musker High Schools** with an Academy on three sites within the Thetford community. A total of 93 respondents (57.4%) were in favour of the proposal with 69 against (42.6%) and 2 who gave no view. Main issues include: the operation of a three-site campus and student movement; perceived difficulties of integrating the two schools communities; concerns about the suitability of the Forum site.

This report is an urgent item because the timetable for the closure of these schools is extremely tight to achieve opening of the Academies in September. Notices need to be published on April 16 for 6 weeks and Cabinet Scrutiny Panel does not meet until 20 April.

Cabinet is recommended to agree to the publication of statutory notices for all these proposals on 16 April.
Cabinet will therefore need to consider the issues identified above bearing in mind the following points:

a) The general response to the consultation was strongly supportive, with over 90% of respondents in favour of the proposal to close Oriel Specialist Mathematics and Computing College to enable the establishment of an Academy. The proposal is supported by the school’s governing body and Great Yarmouth Borough Council.

b) Levels of student achievement are low and are not improving. There is an urgent need for radical action to improve from their current levels and the Ormiston Trust has an excellent record of establishing successful academies. It has the skills, expertise and resources to develop a curriculum and a combination of traditional, innovative and enterprising approaches to learning to raise students’ motivation and commitment to learning. It will be supported by strategic and education partners who also bring particular expertise and experience to support the school’s specialisms and its wider development. There is increasing national evidence that, on average, standards are rising faster in academies than in other schools.

c) The Sponsor intends that the Academy would introduce new approaches to learning, including a three session day and innovative teaching methods, that would provide a new focus and driving force for raising standards and improvement. A strong emphasis would be placed on strategies to develop the core skills of reading and numeracy as well as the social skills of teamwork and leadership.

d) The Sponsor is committed to the use of new technologies, including digital media, in order to best prepare students to be able to access the developing technologies in a rapidly changing society. The development of the digital media curriculum would build on the work being taken forward by the Sponsor at the proposed Eastside Academy in Birmingham. The Eastside Academy will be the UK’s first digital media and creative arts academy and will be developed to offer an exciting 21st Century curriculum, with the backing of major organisations in the digital arts and media field.

e) The Academy at Oriel would also develop the existing strong links with Gresham’s School to broaden opportunities within the creative and performing arts. The Sponsor intends that the Academy would offer a curriculum that readily engages and motivates students by encouraging them to learn from project activities, often taken from real life.

f) The investment of resources in the Academy would come direct from central government rather than through the County Council, and would not be otherwise available to other Norfolk schools.

5. Charles Burrell High and Rosemary Musker High Schools, Thetford

5.1 Thetford currently has two 11-18, mixed non-selective secondary schools. They share a small, but growing, sixth form called the Thomas Paine Sixth Form. Charles Burrell, has 659 on roll of whom 117 attend the Sixth Form. In 2008 the percentage of pupils at Charles Burrell gaining 5 A*-C grades including English and maths was 17%, this rose to 19% in 2009 with a value-added score of 982.6. Rosemary Musker has 780
on roll, of whom 83 are in the Sixth Form. In 2008, 43% of pupils gained 5 A*-C grades including English and maths, but this fell to 32% in 2009, but has a value-added score of 1003. Both schools are National Challenge schools. Charles Burrell has been a school of concern for many years, though with successful LA interventions and good leadership. Rosemary Musker remains an underachieving school. It was in Special Measures for two years. The governing bodies of both schools have a successful track record of working together to secure improved standards for all Thetford youngsters aged 11-19. Following the resignation of the headteacher of Rosemary Musker, governors agreed that the headteacher of Charles Burrell would assume an executive leadership position across both schools while the plans for the Academy are finalised. Both schools retain separate governance and budgets.

5.2 An Expression of Interest for a single Academy to replace Charles Burrell and Rosemary Musker High Schools in Thetford was submitted to the DCSF on 26th January and ministers gave their formal agreement to go on to the feasibility stage on 3rd February.

The Thetford Academy would have:

- Room for 1,650 11-16 year olds (annual admission limit 330)
- Room for 400 16 -19 year olds
- Inspiring new facilities by 2013 on three sites that local people can also use:
  - A new building where Charles Burrell is now
  - Improved buildings where Rosemary Musker is now
  - A new 14-19, sixth form and lifelong learning centre, the Thetford Forum, on the bus station and Anchor Hotel site in the town centre
  - Improved sports and technical facilities
- Wymondham College as lead sponsor and Easton College, West Suffolk College and Norfolk County Council as its co-Sponsors.
- Breckland District Council, Thetford Town Council and other local schools as partners.

5.3 Members are asked to note that

- The proposals have the support of both governing bodies
- The Academy’s specialisms would be in English and mathematics
- The Academy proposal has the support of Moving Thetford Forward, a partnership between Breckland District Council, Norfolk County Council, Thetford Town Council and a wide range of other local organisations.
- The land assembly process is moving forward steadily. See section 6.4

The consultation process

5.4 This was the statutory consultation process with regard to the closure of the school in order to replace it with an Academy. The consultation asked respondents if they supported the proposal, or not and to give reasons for their view. The consultation document is attached as appendix D.

The consultation ran from 10 February to 24 March 2010. In all, around 4500 documents were distributed. These were made available to all parents of pupil attending the school, and all schools in Locality 11. Other parties consulted included:
• Charles Burrell and Rosemary Musker High Schools
• The governing bodies, teachers and other staff of other schools that may be affected
• Trade unions
• The Diocesan Boards of Education
• The Learning and Skills Council
• Local MPs and Councillors
• Breckland District Council
• Thetford Town Council
• Suffolk County Council and neighbouring Suffolk schools

Public drop-in sessions were held on the afternoon of 9 March at Charles Burrell and on 10 March at Rosemary Musker. On 2 March there were evening meetings at both schools to explain the proposal and answer questions. About 25 people were present at the meeting at Charles Burrell, and around 60 at Rosemary Musker. The issues raised included:

• How much movement there would be between the sites for students, and how it would be organised
• What benefits there would be for students
• The differing views of staff at the two schools
• The school day and the proposed “third session”
• Parental choice with a single academy
• Concerns about disruption caused by the changes

5.5 165 responses were made to the questionnaire as follows:
• 94 (57.7%) in favour
• 69 (42.3%) not in favour
• 2 gave no view

Within these responses there was some difference of view between pupils, parents and staff of the two schools. More respondents connected with Rosemary Musker were against the proposal than for while most of the respondents from Charles Burrell were in favour. Those against included staff Union members.

5.6 The main reasons given for closing the schools were:
• An academy would provide a consistent and improved quality of education across the town
• There would be improved facilities and opportunities for young people locally, so that more could study in Thetford post 16
• Young people would be motivated and inspired to have a more positive attitude to education and stay on longer
• The partnership between the present schools, local authorities other agencies and businesses would support community cohesion across Thetford and break down barriers between communities
• It would help to redress the differences in perceptions about the existing schools

5.7 The main reasons given against closing the school were:
• Concerns about how a three-site campus would work, including the amount of student travel between sites and the impact on local traffic, particularly at the Forum site, and parking
• Doubts that an academy would benefit students and raise standards despite the investment in resources
• It will not be possible to create a single organisation from two contrasting schools on three sites
• Concerns that bringing the schools together would affect pupil behaviour and impact on other students’ learning
• Potential disruption to children’s education during a period of change
• Parents would no longer have a choice of schools in Thetford

Other issues raised:

• Doubts that the town centre site for the Forum is appropriate for a vocational and community learning centre, which would be better sited further out near one of the industrial estates, with easier access and dedicated parking, both of which would be very difficult in the town centre

Commentary

5.8 As proposer, the County Council has to show how it has taken the views expressed during the consultation into account when deciding whether to issue public notices. Cabinet will therefore need to consider the issues identified above bearing in mind the following points:

a) The general response to the consultation was in favour of the proposal to close Charles Burrell and Rosemary Musker High Schools in order to establish an Academy in Thetford. The proposal is supported by the governing bodies of both schools, and the Moving Thetford Forward Board.

b) The proposal would seek to address the longstanding problem of educational underachievement in Thetford, linked to the significant social disadvantage experienced by some communities in the town. The sponsors are committed to ensuring that the new opportunities that will come from the growth of the town are matched by an outstanding and transforming Academy.

c) The sponsors all have excellent track records as educational providers, combining complementary expertise in academic and vocational learning across the 11 to 19 age range.

d) The three site academy is integral to the sponsors’ vision for the “learning town” with the Forum site strategically located in the town centre adjacent to Thetford Grammar School. It would bring the learning of the Academy into the heart of the town and an accessible and attractive location for lifelong learning by adult members of the community. It is recognised that the multi-site nature of the Academy would bring some challenges, but the experience of all the sponsors is of management and leadership of large complex organisations often on several sites.

e) In the initial transitional period Year 7 to 9 students in particular will be supported on their “home” site. Travel for students will be kept to a minimum and will only be
planned where there are clear advantages in terms of the quality of provision for specific activities. The cost of transport between sites will be factored into the operating costs. Travel between the sites is already commonplace in Thetford and will increasingly be a part of the delivery of Diplomas as schools everywhere share the course provision. The Academy would be able to organise such movement better by co-ordinating the teaching day across the sites.

f) The sponsors envisage an ethos of positive behaviour and attitudes in all aspects of Academy life. There will be a strong system of pastoral support based on four “houses” with Student and Family Support Workers and tutors. Assertive mentoring will take place across the Academy so that each student has a designated and trusted adult to offer support and guidance throughout their time at the Academy. Peer mentoring will take place within the houses so that students are fully engaged in supporting each other in school.

g) The sponsors have already had meetings with other Children’s Services professionals in the town to ensure that full use is made of the opportunity to redesign services around the children and families in Thetford. This fully joined up commitment to delivering the Every Child Matters outcomes in the town is made practical and feasible by the move to one Academy, ultimately working in close collaboration with the primary schools in Thetford.

h) The creation of a single organisation to replace the two schools would mean that applications for admissions would be to the Academy as a whole, rather than to one of the sites. However, the sponsors expect that the Academy would take into account the relative nearness of each site to students’ homes and the preferences of families when allocating students to one of the “home” sites. The details of how this will be done will be considered further during feasibility. In practice, the Academy would be able to offer students significantly greater choice of courses, learning opportunities and activities at all stages of their secondary education than is available at present.

6. Next steps

6.1 The closure of a school has to go through five stages:

i. Consultation.

ii. Decision to publish the closure notice and the publication of the closure notice. The notices will be published in the local press (it is proposed that this should be on 16th April 2010) and sent to the school’s governing body, the Norwich Church of England Diocese, the Roman Catholic Bishop, the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families and to any person requesting the information.

iii. Representation – a six-week period when representations can be made to the Local Authority.

iv. Final Decisions: these will be made by Cabinet on 14th June 2010 after the representation period ends and would need to be conditional on the Ministerial decision to establish an Academy. The statutory guidelines make it clear to decision makers that there is a “presumption of closure” for schools which are proposed to be replaced by Academies.

v. Implementation: All of these Academies would open on their existing sites in September 2010 with new buildings in King’s Lynn complete by 2014, and in Costessey by 2015, both of these funded within the initial Building Schools for the
Future (BSF) project. The Gorleston and Thetford schemes will be batched together within the national academies framework funding route with completion envisaged by 2014.

7. Resource implications

7.1 Finance: Revenue funding for Academies goes directly to them as a grant from DCSF. The capital costs of the Academies in King’s Lynn and Costessey would both come from Norfolk’s initial BSF project. The funding for the Thetford and Gorleston academies, if agreed by DCSF and PfS, would be found from within the national academies framework (the funding route for the existing Open Academy and City Academy, Norwich).

7.2 Property: Work on the feasibility of the site for an Academy in King’s Lynn is progressing well with the assistance of the NORA project team at the Borough Council. The use of the site for an Academy has meant a review of the feasibility studies carried out by the College of West Anglia. In particular the utilities diversion scheme is being reviewed to see if any alterations to that scheme are needed in relation to an Academy.

7.3 This feasibility work will influence the final site boundary required to build out the Academy. For this reason legal searches have been commenced but registration of the land into one title, currently owned by the Borough Council and Morston Assets, is yet to be finalised. Heads of Terms are agreed in principle pending the outcome of the feasibility study review.

7.4 Thetford: The key land issue is the “third” site – the new town centre “Forum” site. The majority is in the ownership of Breckland Council. It is therefore envisaged that completion of acquisition will be achieved by September 2010. The Children’s Services Capital Priorities Group has agreed budget allowances to be made for the costs of land acquisition.

7.5 The Academies proposed for Costessey and Gorleston would both be located on the present sites with significant upgrading and some rebuilding of the existing accommodation.

7.6 If the schools were to close and Academies, the land would transfer to the relevant Academy Trust on a long lease basis.

8. Other Implications

8.1 Legal Implications

The Head of Law had no further comments to add to the report.

8.2 Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)

Consideration of equal opportunities issues is an integral part of the decision-making process for school organisation. An assessment of the equalities issues in these proposals indicates that the have the potential to make a significant contribution to equalities issues, and choice and diversity of provision.
8.3 Impact on Children and Young People in Norfolk

These proposals, in their different ways, are fundamentally based on the premise that the creation of a new arrangements would offer young people a better quality of educational provision than exists at present and arrangements that are sustainable in the long term. The Academy proposals are exciting opportunities that will offer greater choice and diversity for children and young people in the area and greater opportunities for better outcomes for children across several strands of the Every Child Matters agenda. Significant capital investment into imaginative campuses would be make significant contributions to re-generation in these areas. All these proposals focus in particular on raising standards of achievement, better attendance and in promoting economic well-being. The secondary proposals sit within plans for new, imaginative provision for 14-19 learners which should lead to improvement in staying on rates, attendance and higher aspirations.

8.4 Any Other implications

Officers have considered all the implications which members should be aware of. Apart from those listed in the report (above), there are no other implications to take into account.

9. Section 17 – Crime and Disorder Act

It is not anticipated that the recommendations of this report will have any direct or immediate impact on the reduction of crime and disorder. However, the quality of education, of wider services for children and families and the location and design of school buildings are known to influence some aspects of behaviour. The development of new Academies in King’s Lynn, Thetford, Costessey and Gorleston should be a significant contributor to the safer communities agenda and it is intended that the new Academy would continue with and further develop the current safer schools partnership with the police.

10. Risk Implications/Assessment

The risk implications of the Academy developments:

- Ministers could decide not to sign a Funding Agreement to establish any of the Academies. This would mean a loss of the potential benefits of the academies and the opportunity for transforming learning and outcomes for pupils.
- The timescales for completing all the stages of preparation for submitting proposals to Ministers are extremely demanding, but achievable. Inability of the sponsors, supported by the project management companies, to meet all the requirements of the feasibility stage in order to Any decisions not to agree to proposals or delayed starts to their opening could have a negative impact on the schools leaving them more vulnerable to adverse inspection judgements.
- Failure to achieve the land assembly required for academies in King’s Lynn and Thetford. If this were to happen, academies could still be established using the existing sites, although they would then lose significant strategic benefits associated with the new sites and diminish the transformational and community impacts intended.
The academies not delivering their aspirations for transformed teaching and learning and significantly improved outcomes for young people. The demonstrable quality and successful experience of all the academy sponsors and their partners would be a strong safeguard against this.

11. Overview & Scrutiny Panel Comments

11.1 Members of the Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel commented as follows:

- A view was expressed that the consultation documents did not present a sufficiently balanced view of the merits of academies. There was no guarantee that the ambitions of the sponsors would be achieved.
- Members highlighted the fact that when a school with a budget deficit closed to be replaced by an academy, the deficit was written off against the Dedicated Schools Grant, thus reducing the overall funding available to other Norfolk schools. However, when there was a budget surplus, these funds went to the new academy.
- Members questioned why the process was moving so quickly. The Cabinet Member emphasised that if the Council did not move quickly to advance the Building Schools for the Future (BSF), the funding may not be available later.

11.2 The consultation documents set out the vision of the sponsors for their academy proposals and the improvements they hope to achieve for young people in these areas. The overall Academy strategy has been previously agreed by Cabinet as a key element in Norfolk's drive for school improvement and to improve outcomes for secondary students in key areas of underperformance and the County Council is a co-sponsor, or a strategic partner, for each of the four proposed academies. The consultation process encouraged parents, staff, governors and other members of the public, as well as statutory consultees, to say whether they agreed with the proposals or not, to give their reasons for those views and to make any other comments on these aims. A wide range of views have been expressed, both positive and negative, on all the proposals, and they are described above.

11.3 Costessey and Oriel High Schools are both currently working, with the support of the Local Authority, to contain significant budget deficits. Financial delegation has been withdrawn from the Governing Body of Oriel and a senior Local Authority officer now chairs the Governing Body’s finance committee. A budget recovery programme has been agreed with staff reductions planned and underway. A change in the financial management and governance has also been agreed with the governors now actively involved with day to day decision making.

12. Alternative Options

Members could decide not to publish statutory notices. The implications of this would be:

- The loss of the opportunities to transform these low-performing schools with the support of sponsors who bring significant educational, managerial and community development expertise.
• The need to find other methods of bringing about significant and sustainable school improvement
• Continuing challenge from DCSF and the Office of the School Adjudicator to identify structural changes that will address the issues facing the schools.
• We would not be able to take advantage of very significant resources that might not be available in the foreseeable future to make a significant beneficial impact on the lives of many Norfolk young people

13. Conclusion

13.1 All the consultations for the closure of these schools to enable them to be replaced by Academies have indicated that parents and the local communities are in support of the proposal to close the schools so that Academies can be established. All these projects have sponsors who can bring significant skills and expertise to bear on the development of the Academies, raising standards of attainment and achievement. The cases for closure are strong in relation to the potential for raising standards, and supporting the Every Child Matters Outcomes.

13.2 Members should bear in mind that the statutory guidance on school closures states that, where closure is proposed to enable Academies to be established, there should be a presumption in favour of approval. That approval, however, would need to be conditional on the Secretary of State making an agreement for a new Academy. Taking all of the available views into account, the Director of Children’s Services strongly recommends the publishing of notices to close all five schools to enable them to be replaced by Academies.

14. Action Required

14.1 Members are asked to:

a) Consider the responses to the consultation for the closure of The Park High School, King’s Lynn and agree that statutory notices be published on 16 April 2010.

b) Consider the responses to the consultation for the closure of Costessey High School and agree that statutory notices be published on 16 April 2010.

c) Consider the responses to the consultation for the closure of Oriel Specialist Mathematics and Computing College and agree that statutory notices be published on 16 April 2010.

d) Consider the responses to the consultation for the closure of Charles Burrell and Rosemary Musker High Schools, Thetford and agree that statutory notices be published on 16 April 2010.

15. Background Papers

DCSF Statutory Guidance on School Organisation Proposals
Consultation documents and reports to CSOSP on 16 September, 11 November 2009 and 11 March 2010
Reports to Cabinet on 7 December 2009 and 4 January 2010
DCSF – Guidance on Academies Expression of Interest

Officer Contact

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If you need this report in large print, audio, Braille, alternative format or in a different language please contact Yvonne Bickers on 0344 800 8020 or 0344 800 8011 (textphone) and we will do our best to help.