

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: New Communities Portfolio Holder

19 May 2011

AUTHOR/S: Executive Director, Operational Services / Corporate Manager, Planning and New Communities

EDUCATIONAL PROVISION IN GAMLINGAY

Purpose

1. To agree the Council's formal response to Cambridgeshire County Council's consultation on the future of Gamlingay Village College.
2. This is a key decision as it is likely to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area of the District.

Recommendations and Reasons.

3. That the New Communities Portfolio Holder formally responds to Cambridgeshire County Council's consultation on the future of Gamlingay Village College, expressing support for Option One and seeking recognition of the important role that the village college performs for the wider community.

Background

4. Cambridgeshire County Council has decided to review the educational provision it makes for children and young people living in the catchment area of Gamlingay Village College and Gamlingay First School.
5. Although in Cambridgeshire, Gamlingay Village College forms part of a model which exists in Bedfordshire (i.e. first, middle and upper schools). It is a Foundation middle school for pupils aged 9-13 years old (Years 5-8) with a capacity of 248 places serving a catchment area comprising East H, Gamlingay, Hatley St George and Tetworth. It feeds into Stratton Upper School in Biggleswade.
6. The two key reasons for the review are:
 - a) The need to respond to a number of specific challenges faced by Gamlingay Village College since it was judged to require special measures by OFSTED (Office for standards in Education) in Spring 2011.
 - b) The need to explore whether a change from the three tier education system (first, middle and upper schools) that currently exists in Gamlingay to the two tier system of primary and secondary schools to be found in the rest of Cambridgeshire would help address these challenges.
7. Cambridgeshire County Council issued a consultation paper on April 6th 2011 listing three options for the school's future.
8. The consultation period runs until 25 May 2011 and a decision on the future of Gamlingay Village College will be made by The County Council's Cabinet on 14 June 2011.

9. In September 2010, South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) awarded a dual use grant of £200,000 to Gamlingay Village College towards improvements at the fitness centre and development of a Multi-Use Games Area. The unpaid balance of this grant has been placed on hold pending a decision on the future of the village college; the grant will be reconsidered by SCDC Cabinet on 7 July 2011.

Options

10. Three options are being proposed by Cambridgeshire County Council, full details of which are included in **Appendix 1**.

Option 1

- (a) Retain the current three-tier structure of Gamlingay First School and Gamlingay Village College, feeding into Stratton Upper School, in Biggleswade.
- (b) Establish very close working links between the First School and the Village College for the primary year groups; and with Stratton Upper for the secondary year groups.
- (c) Develop formal federation proposals, aimed at improving educational performance and cost-effectiveness. This could include the possibility of a hard federation with Stratton Upper School.

Option 2

- (a) Establish Gamlingay First School as an all-through primary school.
- (b) Close Gamlingay Village College.
- (c) Include Gamlingay in the catchment area of one of the neighbouring Cambridgeshire secondary schools which has surplus capacity.
- (d) Provide for students to continue their post-16 education in Cambridgeshire.

Option 3

- (a) Establish Gamlingay First School as an all-through primary school.
- (b) Close Gamlingay Village College.
- (c) Include Gamlingay in the catchment area of the proposed new secondary school which is aimed to be established in Cambourne to open in September 2013.

11. The County Council's preference is option two which involves closing Gamlingay Village College, expanding Gamlingay first school to become an all-through primary school and including Gamlingay within the catchment of Bassingbourn. The earliest this could be implemented would be September 2012.

Considerations and Implications

12. The County Council's consultation document set out the advantages and disadvantages of each of the options (see appendix 1) which consider the impact on the pupils, management and teaching arrangements, parent preferences, available accommodation and timescales.
13. Whilst the overriding function of a village college is for educational purposes and as such it is recommended that it is left to the County Council to make a judgement on this aspect informed by the comments of consultees, the consultation paper does not

appear to recognise the important role that the village college performs for the wider community.

14. Across our district, village colleges play such an important role acting as community hubs for a wide range of community activities, during the day as well as at evenings and weekends. Gamlingay Village College also forms part of a network of dual use sports centres which serve the district and provide an opportunity for a wide range of formal and informal sports activities such as Fitness for Health/GP referrals. When the dual use policy was formulated, one of the main considerations was that the existing pattern of educational provision also provided a good geographical coverage. The demise of the village college would create a significant geographical gap in coverage of SCDC supported recreational and community facilities, and would put in jeopardy SCDC's previous investment.
15. As such the loss of the college is likely to have a considerable impact on the local community, and it is disappointing to see that County Council's preferred option does not include the retention of Gamlingay Village College.
16. The alternatives (Bassingbourn and Cambourne) are some distance from Gamlingay. In a rural district such as South Cambridgeshire, public transport links to a Village College will be critical to enable all members of the public to access those facilities as well as school children.
17. There is currently a bus service between Gamlingay and Cambourne (18/18A bus). Although this is one of the services whose subsidy that the County Council proposes to withdraw, it is looking to pool all supported transport funds (includes for example NHS transport subsidies) to make better use of those funds and enable supported transport to carry fare paying passengers for work, shopping etc. There are no bus services to Bassingbourn.
18. As such, if children were to go to Cambourne rather than Bassingbourn this may help sustain a bus route between Cambourne and Gamlingay not only for schoolchildren but for the wider community which would be useful given the wider range of services and facilities in Cambourne which could also more effectively serve the residents of Gamlingay.
19. This benefit clearly will need to be balanced against the other factors referred to in the consultation paper such as when the proposed secondary school will be ready at Cambourne, accepting that there is current capacity at Bassingbourn. SCDC wishes to ensure that a strategic decision is made which brings as many benefits as possible to the community of Gamlingay including for its children and young people.

20. Financial	Unspent balances to be reviewed in July once future of Gamlingay Village college is known. Cambridgeshire County Council has underwritten costs to date.
Legal	Agreements for the continuation of community use of the facilities needs to be established with Cambridgeshire County Council.
Staffing	Considerable officer time has been spent on this project.
Risk Management	Cambridgeshire County Council will be reviewing this as part of the project.
Equality and Diversity	Ensuring equitable opportunities will be an important consideration in selecting a preferred option.
Equality Impact Assessment	No

completed	
Climate Change	Minimising need for travel and ensuring linked journeys are an important consideration in this matter.

Consultations

21. This Council is a consultee on this proposal, as such all interested parties will respond direct to the County Council.
22. The view of the local members have been sought:

Cllr Bridget Smith comments that 'it is extremely disturbing that Gamlingay Village College has been allowed to deteriorate educationally to the extent that it has. However, I am hopeful that the current consultation will deliver a solution that will guarantee the very best educational outcomes for the children of Gamlingay who deserve, as much as any South Cambridgeshire child, schooling of the highest quality'.

Cllr Sebastian Kindersley wholeheartedly supports the retention of Gamlingay Village College in Gamlingay.

SCDC has not carried out any specific consultation with Children and Young People on this proposal but would expect the County Council to do so.

Effect on Strategic Aims

Village colleges play such an important role in our communities, they help the District Council and its partners to provide accessible services within a rural district and provide a range of facilities and activities including sports centres supporting the development of healthy and active communities..

Conclusions / Summary

23. That the PortfolioHolder formally responds to Cambridgeshire County Council's consultation on the future of Gamlingay, expressing concern at the proposed closure of Gamlingay Village College, given the adverse impact this will have on the wider community. The preference is to see it retained (Option one) If however Gamlingay Village College is to close, it is suggested that further consideration is given to the potential advantages of children attending the future secondary school at Cambourne.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report: .

- Cabinet Report – 9 September 2010
- New Communities Report 13 July 2010

Appendix 1: Education Provision in Gamlingay 11 April 2011

Contact Officer: Jane Green – Head of New Communities
Telephone: (01954) 713164.