

Option Appraisal

APPENDIX A

The benefits and challenges of each of the options will be considered in this section against the appraisal criteria outlined in section 4.

- **Option 1** - Do nothing and continue with the current position
- **Option 2** - The LA to encourage all schools to convert to Academy status through a variety of existing sponsors
- **Option 3** - The LA to encourage all schools to convert to academy status through a Trust who is supportive of LCC's strategic priorities
- **Option 4** - To encourage schools to stay in the maintained sector with the LA.

Option 1, Do nothing and maintaining our current position

This option proposes that LCC confirms that the decision for conversion to an Academy remains with the Governing Body and that LCC is neutral on this decision. Where Governing Bodies vote to consult on Academy conversion and require a sponsor, LCC asks that they consider a sponsor who has a proven track record of success in school improvement, such as CfBT. - This model means that it is likely that a wide range of academy sponsors will emerge across Lincolnshire

Benefits:

- **Sustainable :**
- The LA is seen to be continuing to support its approach to freedom and empowerment of schools.
- Decision-making at a local level enables Governing Bodies to consider what is in the best interest of their communities
- **Affordable:**
- To the extent that schools do not transfer, LA budgetary position is maintained and there is minimised impact on existing contracts or LCC staffing
- **Enable high Performance**
- Schools have control over the nature and speed of the change leading to greater confidence and the ability to minimise disruption

Challenges

- **Sustainable**
- LA is not actively considering its statutory responsibilities or seeking to champion quality, diversity or choice
- This approach would not be in line with the Coalition Government's aspirations for all schools to become Academies
- Sponsors may not be willing to support small/ vulnerable schools as they may consider that they are a high business risk
- LA could therefore be left with small vulnerable schools, without a support infrastructure or funding to drive improvement, which could lead to serious risk of closure. This would not support quality/access/ diversity / choice of education opportunities
- Small vulnerable schools would be at risk of closure and, whilst such closures may be seen to the responsibility of Central Government and Academy Trusts, the LA would retain responsibility for transport costs and the reputational risk
- Schools could join Trusts where there is insufficient professional support - this atomisation of the schools system places the whole infrastructural support for Lincolnshire at serious risk, especially for schools in rural areas. Members will

want to see good schools with strong support services to enable pupils of Lincolnshire to achieve their potential

- **Affordable**

- The rate of transfer is unpredictable and so the financial impact cannot be effectively managed
- There is an anxiety that there will be limited success in trading support services as many services may only be needed on infrequent occasions, rendering them difficult to run on a commercial basis. In addition, schools prefer to have their own expertise so, over a short period of time, they may add to their own payroll, rather than buy services from the Authority. This pushes up the cost of both existing school support costs and the costs of the LA fulfilling its continuing obligations to all schools

- **Enable High Performance**

- This approach would not be in line with the Coalition Government's aspirations for all schools to become Academies
- To the extent that Academies are shown to improve standards this can be seen as not doing sufficient to fulfil the Council's position in driving up standards and championing excellence
- Does not provide leadership
- The LA cannot gain assurance that sponsors have a reliable track record of schools support and intervention
- There may not be a strong partnership with the LA undermining the LAs ability to fulfil its continuing role
- The LA would be seen to be inefficiently managing a collection of expensive, high risk schools, (due to the school's asset management or low performance), in contrast to Academies, which could be seen as effectively managing a significant number of schools, creating better performance at lower costs and relatively low risk. It would be challenging for LCC to fulfil its statutory obligations in relation to access to education opportunities if this situation were to arise

Option 2 - The LA encourages all schools to convert to Academy status through a variety of existing sponsors

This option proposes that LCC states explicitly that it wishes all schools to convert to academy status, either on their own or with a sponsor/partner of their choice. The Authority cannot force schools to convert as the decision is with the school Governing Body, except where there are performance reasons.

This model would see a wide range of academy sponsors, including all existing academy sponsors/trusts and new entrants to the market including those from outside Lincolnshire perhaps operating at a national scale.

Benefits

- **Sustainable**

- This approach gives some steer from the LA while recognising local autonomy
- Decision-making at a local level enables Governing Bodies to consider what is in the best interest of their communities
- LA goes some way to actively fulfilling its obligations and role as champion in relation to quality recognising that Academies increase attainment

- **Affordable**
- As schools convert at a quicker rate than under option 1 the LA could relatively quickly reduce school support services and make considerable savings, as we would not be required to fund a school support infrastructure. However this gap in terms of a school improvement infrastructure would jeopardise LCC's ability and duty to promote quality of provision
- **Enable High Performance**
- This approach would be in line with the Coalition Government's aspirations for all schools to become Academies.
- Responsibility for provision becomes more transparently the responsibility of Central Government

Challenges

- **Sustainable**
- Academy sponsors may not be willing to take small / vulnerable schools into their Trust as they could be considered high business risk.
- This means that the LA could be left with small vulnerable schools, without a support infrastructure or funding to drive improvement, which could lead to serious risk of closure – This would not secure access to education opportunities
- Small vulnerable schools would be at risk of closure and, whilst such closures may be seen to the responsibility of Central Government and Academy Trusts, the LA would retain responsibility for transport costs and the reputational risk
- Schools could join Trusts where there is insufficient professional support - this atomisation of the schools system places the whole infrastructural support for Lincolnshire at serious risk, especially for schools in rural areas. Members will want to see good schools with strong support services to enable pupils of Lincolnshire to achieve their potential.
- **Affordable**
- There is anxiety that there may be limited success in trading support services as many services may only be needed on infrequent occasions, rendering them difficult to run on a commercial basis. In addition, schools prefer to have their own expertise so, over a short period of time, they will add to their own payroll, rather than buy services from the Authority. This pushes up the cost of both existing school support costs and the costs of the LA fulfilling its continuing obligations to all schools
- **Enable High Performance**
- The potential impact on small/ vulnerable schools could limit parental choice especially in rural areas and have wider impact on the school community
- Whilst the approach goes some way to recognise the Council's responsibilities in relation to standards and the role of Academies in raising them it does not in itself address the Council's obligations and role as champion of access, diversity and choice.
- Even on standards conversion to a number of Trusts threatens to atomise the support services and undermine the ability to maintain or drive up standards across the board and narrow the gap
- Concerns that the new admission arrangements and the increasing vulnerability of small schools may not achieve our ambitions to narrow the gap and ensure that our most vulnerable pupils attend the best performing schools

Option 3 - The LA to encourage all schools to convert to academy status through a Trust who is supportive of LCC's strategic priorities.

If schools need advice on a Trust/Sponsor, the Council would encourage schools to choose a sponsor who supports LCC's strategic priorities including a commitment to support small/ vulnerable schools. CfBT is the only provider currently who has confirmed this commitment to date but the Council would not express any preference between CfBT and any other provider who had confirmed a similar commitment and had evidenced its ability to deliver.

Benefits

- **Sustainable**
- The existing successful strategic relationship between CfBT and the Authority could enable an infrastructure of school support services to continue to be available for Lincolnshire schools.
- Through a single provider or limited number of providers, the LA may be able to sustain an approach to schools which recognises the value and importance of small rural schools and the need to allocate resources and support across the system
- **Affordable**
- Although not material to the LA's statutory functions, it is a welcome consideration that LCC would be able to re-negotiate the existing school improvement contract to mitigate financial risk to LCC.
- An infrastructure of school support could be better maintained through an ability to manage the costs of school support within a changing funding mechanism
- **Enable High Performance**
- This approach would be in line with the Coalition Government's aspirations for all schools to become Academies
- A greater degree of sharing of accountability between central and local government is possible with responsibility for provision being the responsibility of Central Government but with the LA in an influential role to affect local issues such as choice, diversity and access
- Our strategic relationship with CfBT has demonstrated that integrated working with wider Children's Services and school improvement is a powerful model for improving educational attainment
- The Authority could offer schools a Sponsor who has an established strategic partnership with the Authority and who has a proven track record of supporting and improving schools across the County– this existing relationship means reduced disruption to schools and continues to offer parental choice

Challenges

- **Sustainable**
- The LA may be challenged for not recommending alternative sponsors or exploring other options for rural locations, based on the localities bill/free school agenda. However currently the LA has not received a commitment from any other Sponsors that they would continue to support small/ rural schools- This is important in enabling the LA to fulfil its statutory duties
- Schools may not choose to work with a sponsor with these characteristics which may lead to option 2 being implemented in reality with the above challenges and benefits potentially realised

- **Affordable**
- As schools convert at a quicker rate than under option 1 the LA will need to agree how to fund a sustainable infrastructure of school support services for its maintained schools
- **Enable High Performance**
- The schools may not favour selected Trusts/ Sponsors by the Authority and continue to seek their own sponsor/convert on their own without a Sponsor

Option 4 - To encourage schools to stay in the maintained sector with the LA

The final option is for LCC to encourage schools to stay in the maintained sector

Benefits

- **Sustainable**
- The LA is seen to be continuing to support its approach freedom and empowerment of schools
- Insofar as the LA is convinced that the existing situation provides quality, diversity and choice it is consistent with its obligation and its new role as champion
- **Affordable**
- If successful, LA budgets and support services could be maintained subject to academy funding consultation and its impact on LCC revenue budgets
- Existing contracts and LCC staffing may be maintained subject to academy funding consultation and its impact on LCC revenue budgets
- **Enable High Performance**
- If successful there would be minimal disruption

Challenges

- **Sustainable**
- This approach would not be in line with the Coalition Government's aspirations for all schools to become Academies
- As it is against the prevailing tide of opinion and development the LA will lose influence with schools as they do decide to convert in any event
- Schools will convert in any event
- LA could be left with small vulnerable schools, without a support infrastructure or funding to drive improvement, which could lead to serious risk of closure This would not support access/ diversity / choice
- Small vulnerable schools would be at risk of closure and, whilst such closures may be seen to the responsibility of Central Government and Academy Trusts, the LA would retain responsibility for transport costs and the reputational risk.
- **Affordable**
- If not successful, existing LA support services will become unviable due to the reduced number of schools, leading to a lack of school support infrastructure for maintained or vulnerable schools (subject to academy funding)
- The rate of transfer is unpredictable and so the financial impact cannot be effectively managed
- There is anxiety about the possible limited success in trading support services as many services may only be needed on infrequent occasions, rendering them difficult to run on a commercial basis. In addition, schools prefer to have their own expertise so, over a short period of time, they will add to their own payroll, rather than buy services from the Authority. This pushes up the cost of both

existing school support costs and the costs of the LA fulfilling its continuing obligations to all schools

- The exact methodology for funding academies is currently subject to consultation so scenario planning is based on current system.
- **Enable High Performance**
- This option is counter to the Coalition Government's aspirations for an autonomous schools system
- To the extent that Academies are shown to improve standards this can be seen as not doing sufficient to fulfil the Council's position in driving up standards and championing excellence
- Does not provide leadership in what is an environment in which schools are being strongly encouraged to convert
- If unsuccessful the LA cannot gain assurance that sponsors have a reliable track record of schools support and intervention
- If unsuccessful there may not be a strong partnership with the LA undermining the LAs ability to fulfil its continuing role
- If not successful, the LA would be seen to be inefficiently managing a collection of expensive, high risk schools, (due to the school's asset management or low performance), in contrast to Academies, which could be seen as effectively managing a significant number of schools, creating better performance at lower costs and relatively low risk. This would not promote access, diversity or choice