

CONSULTATION RESPONSES – SUMMARY AND RESPONSES

Written (email) Consultation responses from formal consultation period (June July 2016)

Parent Responses 12 Staff Responses 16 Community Responses 4

The main points raised have been summarised into 9 topic areas and a response given. The full individual consultation responses have been shared with the relevant governing body for their consideration in their governing body's decision making process.

Also published alongside these responses are the Questions and Answers and the PowerPoint presentation from the Consultation meetings held in June/July. Please note that the slides were updated in the light of comments from the first session at Mullion.

Governing Bodies have agreed to have a further period of consultation and have postponed the proposed target date for any conversions from December 1st to February 1st 2017. Individual governing bodies will communicate the arrangements for their consultations for their schools.

The Articles of Association, Scheme of Delegation and Funding model will be published towards the end of September once governing bodies have had the opportunity to provide further feedback on the latest drafts.

1. Consultation Process:

Comments:

- The process felt rushed, more information was required and the potential drawbacks/risks were not explained.
- Request for further consultation with full, unbiased information and with clarity about how parent's voices can be heard (and by when).
- The focus needs to be on: 'is this the right direction for our school?'
- It feels like the decision was made long ago before any consultation took place.

Response: Governing Bodies have agreed to have a further period of consultation and have postponed the proposed target date for any conversions from December 1st to February 1st 2017. Individual governing bodies will communicate the arrangements for consultations for their schools. Governors had to have a proposal to bring to stakeholders in order for consultation to take place and the suggestions and comments that have arisen have helped to shape the proposal. It is recognised that fuller documentation would have been helpful.

Governors are reviewing the Articles of Association, Scheme of Delegation and Funding model and these will be published prior to the further period of consultation.

Some of the potential risks whilst not clearly explained at the first consultation meeting were explained at the subsequent meetings. These are included at the foot of this document.

2. Educational Benefits; Size of MAT; Consideration of Other Models

Comments:

- Co-operation between schools is a positive thing but why can we not just continue as the co-operative Trust
- Shouldn't we build on the exemplary practice of the Co-operative Trust – why do we need MAT status?
- Have we investigated all of the other possibilities? What other models were considered?
- It would seem far more appropriate to form a MAT with like-minded, small secondary schools in the county, with similar values, who are not in direct competition.
- How can we ascertain if the proposals offered are not based on assumption and subjective preferences of the proposed MAT Members and MAT Board?
- What other benefits are there from becoming a MAT?
- What happens to the two schools who decided not to join the MAT?
- What evidence is there that a MAT will work in a rural setting?
- Has a feasibility study been commissioned to ensure the proposed 'Academy' model is appropriate and will add value and not in any way undermine the quality of education we currently receive?

The aim of the MAT is to protect all that has been achieved through the Co-operative Trust in a time when the government's clear and accelerating agenda is that all schools will be in MATs.

There has been much discussion and exploration of different models in co-operative heads' meetings and governors' meetings: whether we could remain as we are; whether to join with an established MAT; whether we could set up a number of smaller MATs. Believing that doing nothing was not really an option and in order to continue to work together effectively and to have sufficient numbers to bring about economies of scale, the heads and governors set about devising a co-operative MAT that would work effectively for us; one that kept our co-operative values and ethos at its heart. Various models were explored to inform the shape of the suggested MAT and advice taken from the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Schools Co-operative Society.

In terms of evidence of whether academies bring educational benefits, Ofsted reports show that there are successful academies and unsuccessful academies just as there are successful maintained schools and unsuccessful maintained schools. Given the relatively short time span that MATs have been in place, there are yet to be longitudinal studies of the impact. However, there are studies which show that working in partnership does bring benefits. We know this from our experience as a Co-operative Trust. This is what we are seeking to sustain into the future and to build on our partnership. In a MAT there is an obligation to ensure that all of our schools provide a quality education for all pupils and to support each other to raise standards. Having the central team to manage infrastructure, heads are freed up to focus more on teaching and learning.

We will continue to work with the two schools who have decided not to join the MAT as we do with other schools in the local area. All schools belong to a number of partnerships and this will continue to be the case.

In terms of feasibility (school improvement capacity, finance, leadership structures etc) the proposed model has been rigorously scrutinised by the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Regional Headteacher Board. The Regional Schools Commissioner's remit is to bring about school improvement and if suggested models do not meet the required criteria on any aspect they are turned down.

3. Philosophical disagreement:

Comments:

- **It is morally wrong to privatise education; the diminished involvement of the Local Authority breaks the link between local democracy and education**
- **If the funding is a key benefit from academisation shouldn't we protest to government about the unfairness of it rather than convert to academy status?**

Response: Whilst agreeing with this view, the Government's Education Policy for academisation has been underway for several years and has accelerated in recent years. The direction of travel is clear.

Governors and Heads felt the need to seize the initiative and devise our own unique MAT or risk being made part of someone else's MAT risking what we have achieved so far in the Co-operative Trust.

4. Changes to Political Situation and Education Policy:

Comments:

- **Are we doing this because we 'think' everyone else is?**
- **What is the situation with viability of the Local Authority? How many do they need to be viable?**
- **What is the new government's policy going to be?**
- **Hasn't the government done a u-turn on academisation?**
- **Isn't academisation still a matter of choice for good and outstanding schools?**

Response:

The latest figure from the Local Authority is that they expect all except 56 of its schools to be academies by the beginning of 2017. This is the latest update on this figure. The government is cutting the additional school improvement funding county receive with the expectation that teaching schools will do this work. This is further diminishing what the Local Authority can provide for its schools.

The work of the Regional Schools Commissioner on behalf of the government indicates that there is no slowing down on the academisation programme. The Local Authority invited schools who had yet to form MATs to a meeting with the RSC who gave a strong message about the need to do so. Good and outstanding schools do have a notional choice in that the government is not passing legislation to force them to convert – however, if we wait we will become increasingly isolated as more schools join MATs and we may not be allowed to set up our own model but may have to join an existing one and not have the opportunity to shape it as we do now. Also, there was a proviso in the 'non u-turn' from the government in that LAs that could no longer effectively support schools would have all their schools academised.

5. Concerns re loss of identity, independence and voice:

Comments:

- **will 'formalised' co-operation destroy the unique ethos and atmosphere of our school?**
- **will the 'family feel' of the school disappear if we are in a MAT of this size? Will Helston dominate?**
- **There have to be real plans in place to ensure that distinctiveness is not eroded gradually**

- **What impact will joining a multi-academy trust have on the day-to-day running of the school both for the children and their teachers?**
- **Cooperative values do not work in a pyramid, business structure. There will be, inevitably, some with far less voice.**
- **Will parents and governors lose their voice with the layers of expensive bureaucracy?**
- **How do we ensure future Trustees honour our schools and the co-operative values?**

One of the clear strengths of the Trust is the variety of schools in it. This MAT has been devised by the current heads and governors of the existing Trust in order to keep all that is good in the current Co-operative Trust. The schools will keep their own ethos; the headteacher will be in charge of the day to day running of the school continuing to make decisions about teaching and learning, the curriculum etc. The Scheme of Delegation shows who is responsible for what aspect. The heads and governors will continue to make decisions about the distinctive nature of their school.

The 'formalised' co-operation is about the obligation of the MAT to provide support to each other. No-one will be left to struggle alone. We all have a responsibility towards each other and for all children in the area. It is about ensuring all of our schools succeed.

There are successful Co-operative MATs who have found ways to ensure stakeholder voice is heard. All Trustee committees have representation on them from the Hubs. Parents continue to be involved in the life of their schools and to be members of the local governing body. The Trustees are unpaid and are currently Governors in schools across our Co-operative Trust – no school has more than one elected Trustee to ensure a breadth of voice and that no one school voice dominates.

The Articles of Association govern the way new Trustees are found to ensure the right people are in these positions of responsibility.

6. Finances:

Comments:

- **More clarity needed regarding the Finances of the Proposed MAT.**
- **Concern about costly layers of bureaucracy and salaries that could be better spent in schools.**
- **Financial decisions being taken by those who are distant from the school. Whilst the Forum will represent views of schools upwards in the model, the distribution of money will be the decision of the Trustees and should they choose to make a rationalisation of costs per school then some schools who may feel protected within the Hub organisation will not have real representation as to what might happen to them.**
- **Concerns about how contracts are governed.**

Response: The Financial model showing comparative costs will be published later this month prior to a further period of consultation. This will demonstrate how we can make our money go further for the education of our children. Further money is available to MATs from the Education Funding Agency (EFA) for the buildings estate. The Condition Improvement Fund is automatically allocated to MATs of our size without having to bid for it.

The CEO and Hub Leader roles are funded from the money that is currently allocated to County. The CEO post is a requirement of any MAT as the single point of contact with the Regional Schools' Commissioner. The leadership posts were advertised to the Trust Head Teachers. The Chairs and Vice

Chairs group and a sub group with advice from HR were involved in the appointment of the CEO post. The Hub Leaders were interviewed and appointed by a panel of the Shadow Trust Board with a Diocesan representative.

The MAT will have a finance committee with representation from the Hubs on it. The decisions about how the top slice is spent will be made here. Schools will decide how to allocate their budgets supported by the finance team. The overall budget has to be signed off by the Trustees as they are ultimately held to account for the financial practices of the MAT. The MAT is accountable for the success of all its schools – making sure schools have the resources they need to be successful is vital. The awarding of any contracts are subject to the usual rules of procurement.

7. Staffing and employment:

Comments:

- **concerns about revisions to terms and conditions of employment**
- **anxiety about contracts and job security**
- **loss of staff areas of responsibility**
- **Concern that new staff to the MAT have a clause written into their contract so that they can be moved between schools. Whilst this may provide flexibility, and may suit some situations, if it becomes the "norm" then gone is the stability and consistency which drives a school's success.**
- **How will an Academy management model work within a wide disparate rural area?**

Response: Staff TUPE across into the new MAT with their existing pay and conditions. There will need to be harmonisation of pay policies at some point to ensure fairness. However, it is not the intention to bring any detriment – the MAT wants to be the employer of choice. In terms of job roles and areas of responsibility, we value the work staff undertake and will always seek to provide opportunity for colleagues rather than diminish their role.

Each school reviews its staffing structure annually to ensure it can balance its budget. This practice will continue at school level. Where schools need to make cuts, there is the possibility that redeployment could be offered.

The movement of staff will be considered carefully. Stability and consistency are important and each decision would be taken on a case by case basis bearing in mind the needs of both schools and the staff involved.

There are other MATs in Cornwall which operate across a wider geographical spread than the one we propose. They have a variety of central services such as our model. However our model will incorporate s three hubs to link a smaller number of schools together to help with management of the Trust.

8. Land:

Comments:

- **concern that the land will be transferred to the Trust and taken from the community**
- **concern that with a change in CEO in the future the land could be sold off**

Response: The land has already transferred to the Co-operative Trust when the schools became foundation trust schools. The land would transfer to the Multi-Academy Trust on the same basis. The land must be used for educational purposes. Any sale of school fields are subject to approval of the Secretary of State for Education and fiercely contested by Sports England and other bodies. Any future CEO would be bound by the same rules and by the Articles of Association which govern the work of the MAT.

9. Other Feedback:

- With the intention of the Government to make schools into academies, for the co-operative trust to convert to an academy trust would seem a very good idea to ensure delivery of education in the area smoothly during the transition.
- Always put the needs of children at the centre of every decision
- One of the ways in which the proposals are “ambitious” is through the sheer number and range of schools involved. This is both a risk and a strength of what is being pursued. Experience elsewhere has taught that investing in high quality governance is vital.
- I believe that these proposals are a good way forward and that they represent a very positive investment in the future of education in this part of Cornwall. The proposals are ambitious and put outcomes for children at the heart of that ambition. The proposals use the government’s academies program to draw out some timely and important opportunities for the children we serve, in particular the proposals:
 - respect the local character and context of schools while drawing on a wider resource around challenge and rigour for standards
 - achieve economies that will give small schools the confidence they need to flourish
 - create opportunities for the progression of staff within the group
 - treat the education economy as a common treasury rather than a focus of competition between providers

What are the risks?

- There is no requirement for academies to have a qualified member of the teaching staff in every class room.
- Academies can choose their own curriculum which means that the offer could narrow or become skewed
- Academies are able to change term dates. This can cause serious issues for working parents with children in more than one school on a childcare basis, and that families may not be able take holidays together. The timings of the school day (and week) can also be radically altered and could cause additional issues.
- Some Academies have a bad record of changing admissions policies and excluding some local children from entering.
- Some Academies have a poor record, and a negative impact, on the provision of Special Education Needs support and advice.
- Current Leaders and Trustees can move on – how are the things we value ensured over time?

HOWEVER ...

- Maintained schools do employ unqualified staff and train them on the job (Graduate Teacher programmes; Salaried School Direct) However, we want the best for pupils and so would always seek to employ the best teachers.
- All schools can make choices over their curriculum – there are more freedoms than people realise
- Governors of maintained schools can change school times – they have to consult but it can be done already
- As Foundation Trust schools we can already alter out admissions policies and have chosen not to use this freedom
- There are schools and academies with great practices and poor practices – The Trust schools are inclusive and would continue to be so
- The Articles of Association for the Multi Academy Trust put safeguards in place re the recruitment and elections of future Leaders and Trustees