

Meeting:	Education Consultative Forum
Date:	3 July 2006
Subject:	Voluntary Aided Hindu primary school
Responsible Officer:	Lorraine O'Reilly, Executive Director, People First
Contact Officer:	Geoff Wingrove, Director of Strategic Services Department, (0208 424 1513)
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Janet Mote (People First)
Key Decision:	No – information only
Status:	Public

Section 1: Summary

In January 2006, the Education Consultative Forum received an information report about the proposed new voluntary aided Hindu primary school. The Government has allocated £9.8million Targeted Capital Fund monies to establish the school. This will be the first state Hindu school in the country.

I-Foundation, the promoters of the new school, have concluded their informal consultation on education issues, and plan to publish statutory notices by the end of June 2006. I-Foundation will make a presentation to the Education Consultative Forum, and will be able to answer any questions. The I-Foundation consultation paper is attached, together with a covering letter.

Decision Required

FOR INFORMATION ONLY

That the Education Consultative Forum notes the report.

Reason for report

This report is for information only.

In May 2005 Cabinet decided to submit a bid to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) for allocation from the Targeted Capital Fund to create a new voluntary aided school in Harrow.

The Targeted Capital Fund allocations were announced on 12 October 2005, and £9,852,943 capital funding has been allocated for 2005-08.

The promoter has started the statutory process to consult about the new school. Informal consultation on education issues concluded on 16 June, with a view to statutory notices being published by the end of June.

Currently the location proposed by I-Foundation for the school is Pinner Park Farm, George V Avenue, Middx HA6 4SU. Part of the I-Foundation's proposal will incorporate an Eco-Education Centre. Planning consents would be required.

June Cabinet will consider a report to authorise officers to open negotiations with I-Foundation about a site for the proposed school.

Benefits

1. The proposed school will meet the aspirations of a large community in Harrow
2. The impact of additional school places will be incremental on existing provision as admissions would be on a year by year basis and the school may attract pupils who go out borough or attend independent schools
3. The proposed school will provide some balance to the diverse needs of Harrow's faith community for educational provision
4. Will give Harrow a national profile

Cost of Proposals

The 90%/10% DfES/Governor liability has been revised with the DfES providing up to 100% funding in future. This includes the purchase of the site. The Targeted Capital Fund allocation to create the new school will be made direct to the promoter.

The revenue funding for the new school would be contained within the Dedicated Schools Grant. The Dedicated Schools Grant is set by the Government. If the new school draws its pupils from within the existing Harrow schools' population then the majority of the revenue funding for the new school would be redistributed from other Harrow schools. If the new school draws its pupils from outside of the existing Harrow schools' population then the majority of the funding would be provided by an increase in the Dedicated Schools Grant.

Risks

1. The new school will draw pupils from existing provision over a period of time and the full impact will not be known for some time.
2. This will add further pressure to achieving the Council's target of 10% surplus capacity across the primary school sector. However, the school will be one form of entry and will fill on an incremental year-by-year basis, so this pressure will be kept to a minimum.
3. The new school may have an impact on the linked school admissions policy to high school.
4. Any potential health and safety risks will be considered at the appropriate time.
5. Any site for the new school will be subject to site acquisition negotiations and the need for planning consents. If these are unsuccessful, or there are delays, this could jeopardise the DfES funding allocation.

Implications if recommendations rejected

No recommendations - for information only

Section 2: Report

In 2005 the Government made it possible for promoters of voluntary aided schools to bid through the local education authority for the creation of a new voluntary aided school where there is a clear local demand. The bid is to the Department for Education and Skills for allocation from the Targeted Capital Fund.

Harrow has the largest percentage Hindu population in its area of any local authority in the country, and there is currently no voluntary aided Hindu school in Harrow or nationally. Hindu faith organisations have been in informal contact with the Council since 2003 exploring the possibility of such provision, but were unable to proceed to any formal position. The promoters represented a strong wish from a large section of the community to establish a Hindu school in Harrow.

The Council received excellent submissions from two different promoters, the Sai School of Harrow and the I-Foundation, wanting to establish a voluntary aided Hindu primary school in Harrow. At the May 2005 Cabinet meeting, the Council decided to submit the bid from I-Foundation. I-Foundation is working in affiliation with the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, which has been running a private Hindu school in Hertfordshire for the last 20 years.

On 12 October 2005 Ruth Kelly, Secretary of State for Education and Skills, announced the successful bids for Targeted Capital Fund money 2005-08. Harrow's bid for a new faith school was successful, and the project has been allocated capital funding to establish the school. The Education Consultative Forum received an information report at its meeting in January 2006.

As Members will be aware, finding sites for new developments in Harrow is always problematic and identifying locations which meet all user requirements, planning constraints and are affordable is extremely challenging. I-Foundation's informal discussions have identified the possibility of the school being an integral part of a package for Pinner Park Farm, which if the scheme were viable and received the appropriate planning consent would guarantee the retention of the open areas of this sensitive Green Belt area as open land accessible to the public. It would also safeguard the restoration and the future of the listed buildings on the site. In its current thinking I-Foundation view any school on this site as a low-key environmentally friendly building occupying a part of the previously developed area. While this indicates a sensitive approach to the site development, it does raise significant issues of planning policy which will involve agreement of the GLA and Government Office for London. At this stage there can be no guarantees that planning consent will be forthcoming.

The School will provide for children from Nursery through to Year 7. In order to minimise impact on local schools, the School will intake one year at a time with effect from September 2008.

I-Foundation plans to create a flagship institution, which will deliver a high standard of academic, moral and spiritual education, preparing students to become individuals of good character, behaviour and competence. The school will combine a grounding of Hindu teachings and lifestyle, and will also promote understanding and co-operation with other cultures.

The new School will deliver the national curriculum. The admissions criteria will not be selective, and children of other faiths will be able to apply for a place. I-Foundation considers community cohesion and community related issues are crucially important for the School to be accepted as an integral part of the Harrow community, and to avoid potential exclusion and isolation. The School would welcome creating as diverse a student population as possible.

Harrow already has 10 voluntary aided faith schools. All of these schools are a well-established part of the Harrow school system making a very positive contribution to education in Harrow.

The I-Foundation has identified the Pinner Park Farm site in its review of possible locations. For information the Pinner Park farm site is an agricultural tenancy extending to 232 acres (94 hectares). Over recent years there have been ongoing issues of viability and planning enforcement with the tenants, which are to be expected with small agricultural holdings on the urban fringe which are no longer economically viable. Any development of this site would be subject to the Council being satisfied that (a) it is acceptable in planning terms (b) it provides a guaranteed long term future for the land compatible with its green belt designation and (c) it provides public benefit through increased public access and usage and an environmental and ecological education resource. If Cabinet at its June meeting authorises officers to open negotiations with I-Foundation about a site for the proposed school, there would be a report back to Cabinet on the negotiations. In respect of the Pinner Park Farm site, all of these issues would be tested over the coming months prior to any final recommendation to Cabinet.

Consultation

I-Foundation commenced a period of consultation with local stakeholders on education issues during May and June, with a view to publishing a Statutory Notice by the end of June 2006. Consultation Papers were distributed widely early in May within Harrow and neighbouring areas. The distribution has included: all Harrow community and voluntary aided school Headteachers and Chairs of Governors; community groups; neighbouring local authorities; diocesan authorities; Harrow's MPs and elected Members; unions and professional associations. A series of meetings have been held, including forums for the public and for potential parents and Hindu community organisations. Meetings

have also been held with representative stakeholder groups (e.g. Headteachers and Governors), and I-Foundation offered to meet with stakeholders as may be requested.

Members should appreciate that the consultation initiated by the I- Foundation in line with Statutory requirements relates only to the Educational issues, not the planning considerations. If and when the I-Foundation submits a planning application the Council will initiate a formal planning consultation process.

Financial Implications

The revenue funding for the new school would be contained within the Dedicated Schools Grant. The Dedicated Schools Grant is a specific grant set by the Government. If the new school draws its pupils from within the existing Harrow schools' population then the majority of the revenue funding for the new school would be redistributed from other Harrow schools. If the new school draws its pupils from outside of the existing Harrow schools' population then the majority of the funding would be provided by an increase in the Dedicated Schools Grant.

Legal Implications

There are separate and distinct issues arising out of the Council's position as local education authority, landowner and local planning authority. The legal implications addressed in this report focus on the Council's position as local education authority.

The promoters of a new school must issue statutory notices which the current terms of their grant requires by 29 June 2006. The School Organisation Committee will then determine whether to allow the proposal, having considered both Harrow's School Organisation Plan, and any responses to the statutory notices. If the Committee cannot agree or refuses the proposal, the Committee must, at the promoter's request, refer the proposal to the independent School Adjudicator. The statutory notice should set out how the school is going to promote inclusiveness and service the local community, however the School Organisation Committee can only consider the proposals and evaluate them on the basis of the proposals for the primary school. The School Organisation Committee cannot take into account any of the plans for the use of the site which are not directly related to the proposed school.

Section 28a of the School Standard and Framework Act 1998 as amended by the Education Act 1998 sets out the procedure to be followed once the period for consultation set out in the statutory notice has expired.

The School Organisation Committee must consider the proposals and may accept, reject or amend the proposals and accept them subject to a prescribed event taking place by a specific date. Such events may include the grant of planning permission, the acquisition of a site, or the entering into a private financial transaction. However where the proposals require capital funding the

School Organisation Committee or Adjudicator must satisfy themselves that adequate finances are available for the proposals to be implemented, such information should include clear information on the capital cost of the proposal and evidence on how the cost are to be met.

The School Organisation Committee cannot give conditional proposal subject to capital funding being put in place. If they are not satisfied that adequate financial resources are available they must reject the proposals. It is, however, acceptable to approve a proposal that includes funding from central government that is agreed 'in principle' subject to the decision of the School Organisation Committee.

If the School Organisation Committee accepts the proposals subject to a prescribed event and the date passes without the event taking place the proposals will be treated as rejected and the I-Foundation would be required to submit fresh proposals that would require the service of a fresh statutory notice.

If and when the I-Foundation submits a planning application the Council will initiate a formal planning consultation process.

Equalities Impact

This new school will help to balance the diverse needs of Harrow's faith community for educational provision. Faith schools do not currently reflect all the significant faith communities in Harrow. There are six Roman Catholic, one Jewish and one Church of England primary schools currently in Harrow, and two Roman Catholic high schools and a Roman Catholic sixth form college. There is no VA Hindu school in Harrow or the surrounding area.

Section 17 Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Considerations

The focus of the new school on community cohesion is fully consistent with the statutory obligation on the Council to do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area.

Section 3: Supporting Information/ Background Documents

Consultation Paper for the proposed Krishna-Avanti Primary School in Harrow (I-Foundation May 2006)

January 2006 Education Consultative Forum report.

Any person wishing to inspect the background papers should telephone 020 8420 9270