

**Meeting: Executive**  
**Date: 8 December 2009**  
**Subject: The Future of Special Schooling in the East of Central Bedfordshire**

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**Response of the Children, Families & Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

1. At its meeting of 1 December 2009, the Children, Families and Learning Overview & Scrutiny Committee (CFL OSC) considered the report of the Deputy Director of Children, Families and Learning and Assistant Director of Children's Specialist Services, which sought Members comments on the responses to the consultation of special schooling that was initiated by the Executive, with a view towards supporting the preferred option of merging Sunnyside and Hitchmead schools.
2. Members of the Committee debated the matter at length and also heard from a number of witnesses (via correspondence and in person) regarding concerns over the proposed merger. The concerns raised and the issues discussed are summarised below:-
  - 2.1 There was some concern regarding the validity of the survey and whether it contained an element of bias;
  - 2.2 The lack of sufficient financial analysis to make an informed decision, particularly regarding the cost of the adaptation works required at Hitchmead school to accommodate the merger;
  - 2.3 The lack of any detail regarding how the best features of both schools would be retained in any merger and what the vision, values, leadership and governance would look like in any new school created; and
  - 2.4 The Council's position regarding the provision of a new build school to replace both Sunnyside and Hitchmead.
3. In response to the concerns raised, the Deputy Director of Children, Families and Learning explained that the survey had been based upon a model used by other authorities and there was absolutely no intention of bias. He also confirmed that officers could only prepare detailed financial and school organisation information, and an implementation plan, should the Executive be minded to approve the merger on 8 December and should this happen, the Council would then enter into a further 6 week consultation period regarding the approved option.
4. In conclusion, whilst the Committee supported Option A of the report i.e. the proposed merger of Sunnyside and Hitchmead schools, it did so subject to a number of conditions and these are outlined in the resolutions below.

## **RESOLVED**

- (i) That whilst the Committee wholeheartedly supports the merger of Sunnyside and Hitchmead schools, it calls upon the Executive to consider seriously the urgent and pressing need for a new build facility to replace both, such consideration to include the urgent investigation and identification of sufficient capital resources to do so;**
- (ii) That notwithstanding resolution (i) above, the Committee calls upon the Deputy Director of Children, Families and Learning to submit a written response to the Executive addressing the questions raised by both witnesses (Tim Walker, Head Teacher, Hitchmead School and Stephen Court, member of the public), so that Members of the Executive can make an informed decision regarding the proposals; and**
- (iii) That, should the Executive approve the merger, the CFL OSC receives a further report following the 6 week consultation period, which will provide Members with the detailed financial implications of the initiative and an implementation plan.**