

Committee	North Northamptonshire Joint Delivery Committee 13th April 2017	Item 9	Page 1 of 3
Councils affected	All	13 th April 2017	
Report Title	MERGER OF TRESHAM AND BEDFORD FE COLLEGES.		

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To ask the Joint Committee if it wishes to respond to a consultation on the merger of Tresham and Bedford FE colleges

2. INFORMATION

- 2.1 Members will be aware that, following Tresham's OFSTED inspection in autumn 2016, and in advance of the Area Based Review of colleges in the wider SEMLEP area, Tresham College was obliged by its regulator, the FE Commissioner, to consider a merger with another college to both address its financial difficulties and the educational challenges identified by OFSTED.
- 2.2 Tresham considered merging with either Northampton or Bedford Colleges and its Board expressed a preference to merge with Bedford College, after a competitive process to assess the competing merits of these alternatives. Bedford College have endorsed this merger as well. A formal consultation is required now to seek views on that merger, and the consultation document is attached as **Appendix A** to this report.
- 2.3 If it were to proceed, the merger would take place in August 2017. Tresham College is a member of the Joint Delivery Committee and the new college can be invited to take its place after August.

3. CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

- 3.1 The consultation document sets out the case for a merger and is attached. It poses a series of questions. The consultation period ends on 5th May 2017.
- 3.2 Opinions were informally sought on the prospect of a merger in late 2016, and at that point, some broad tests were communicated to Tresham about what a merger should achieve. These were:-
 - A new college should be financially robust, academically sound, locally rooted, and engaged with local businesses and schools in designing and delivering its courses

- A new college and all its campuses should be readily and easily accessible by public transport for students across the combined catchment area
- There should be no diminution of campuses across North Northamptonshire as a result of a merger – i.e. the opportunity to close a campus to save money should not be entertained
- The new college should be willing and able to work in partnership with the Councils on apprenticeships, development of HE opportunities and wider community engagement, and in support of shared economic development objectives

3.3 These principles were, we understand, part of the assessment that the Tresham Board itself carried out when considering who to partner with, and many of the points above are reflected in the consultation document.

3.4 The following proposed answers to the consultation questions are submitted for the Joint Committee to consider.

Q1 Do you support the proposal for a merger between Bedford College and Tresham College?

Yes. In terms of the tests that would apply to the benefits of a merger, given Bedford's financial and academic strengths, the merged college stands a good chance of benefitting from this platform, the campuses of the merged colleges will be accessible by public transport across the proposed catchment area; there are no risks to existing campuses, and some proposals to strengthen what is available in some localities. We particularly welcome the intention to retain the Tresham brand across North Northamptonshire, where it is recognised and trusted.

Q2 Do you support aims to maintain and widen the range of opportunities for students and to expand our employer focused provision and services?

Yes, as employers, providers of apprenticeships and as local public sector organisations, the members of the Joint Committee fully support these objectives. The Councils would like to work closely with the new college on expanding HE and FE provision, developing more apprenticeship offers for local people. Some Councils particularly wish to work with the new college to design employment pathways to take people from college courses and apprenticeships into guaranteed jobs in the health sector and construction sector and are willing to broker arrangements with those two sectors to help make it happen. We also would like to see a closer working relationship and alignment between the

college and local schools, to improve the profile and reach of various educational and training offers, in order to help improve skills in the locality.

We would also like to see the new college expand its reach into the wider community, around adult skills, and would be prepared to support the college in this endeavour.

Q3 Do you support the aim of sharing good practice across our campuses to improve the student and customer experience.

Yes; this is the principal benefit of a merger; there are some things that Tresham does well which can benefit the Bedford campuses and vice versa.

4. RECOMMENDATION

That the Joint Delivery Committee agrees the comments above and the overall support for the merger of Bedford and Tresham Colleges.