

## BOROUGH OF KETTERING

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<b>Report Originator</b>	<b>Strategic Management Team</b>	<i>Fwd Plan Ref No:</i>	
<b>Wards Affected</b>	ALL	12 <sup>th</sup> April 2017	
<b>Title</b>	<b>MERGER OF TRESHAM AND BEDFORD FE COLLEGES.</b>		

**Portfolio Holder: Cllr Lloyd Bunday**

### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To consider the Council's response 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.

### **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 5<sup>th</sup> May 2017.
- 3.2 The Council's opinion on the prospect of a merger was sought when it was first mooted, and at that early point, the Council laid out its own tests for the best merger. 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

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- 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 Borough Council 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 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 the Council 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 an employer, as a provider of apprenticeships and as a local authority, KBC fully supports these objectives. The Borough Council would like to work closely with the new college on expanding HE and FE provision, developing more apprenticeship offers for local people. The Borough Council particularly wants 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 is 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

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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. CONSULTATION AND CUSTOMER IMPACT**

4.1 The Council is the consultee.

#### **5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 The Council's headline economic regeneration policy objectives are:-

- Better town centres
- Higher grade, higher density jobs
- A better educational offer.

This merger has the capacity to make a positive impact on these.

5.2. Tresham College is a member of the Joint Delivery Committee and the new college will be invited to take its place after August.

#### **6. FINANCIAL RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 None directly. The Council still holds a sum of approximately £100,000 for investment in educational initiatives.

#### **7. RECOMMENDATION**

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