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**Report to:** Radcliffe Cabinet

**From:** Paul Cooke, Strategic Lead (Education)

**Date:** 1<sup>st</sup> February 2023

## **Star Academy Radcliffe**

This paper provides background to current position with regards the delivery of the new secondary school in Radcliffe.

The DfE has previously approved the application from Star Academy to establish the new school. DfE is responsible for the procurement, design and delivery of the new school building, that will then be transferred to Star Academy. The Council has responsibility to provide the site for the new school, and to meet certain financial obligations in relation to site remediation, planning conditions, and highways works.

Because of the importance of the new school to Radcliffe, and its links to the wider Strategic Regeneration Framework, the Council has taken a pro-active role in the delivery of the new school, including measures to remove barriers to delivery of the construction project.

The Council has consistently set out the need for the new school to open in September 2024. Both Star and DfE have committed to working to this timeframe.

The Department for Education is responsible for the design and delivery of the new school building, and, as with other Free Schools, is procuring this through its own framework arrangements. It is now clear that DfE has experienced some significant challenges in delivering its school building programme, with a number of Free Schools being delayed.

For the Star Academy Radcliffe, the DfE initially invited expressions of interest from contractors on its framework early in the autumn term 2022. Subsequently a single contractor was selected to develop detailed design and submit a formal tender. The Council engaged in pre planning application discussions with that contractor so as to expedite delivery of the project.

A provisional project plan indicated practical completion of the main school building in August 2024, enabling the school to open to its first cohort in September 2024.

The DfE has subsequently confirmed that because of inflationary pressures it was unable to accept the tender, and intended to re-procure the scheme, and this would delay completion of the project beyond the 2024 opening date.

Whilst these delays mean that it will not be possible to open the school in September 2024 in its new building, the Council has reiterated the importance of the school being available to admit its first cohort of students in 2024. This can be achieved through the provision of a temporary solution, that can accommodate students from September, until the permanent build is complete.

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The DfE has been asked to commit to the school opening in 2024 so that Star can plan now to have a presence in Radcliffe in advance of 2024, working with our primary school leaders to develop pathways and the curriculum, and to begin engagement with families about transition from primary.

Primary school leaders from all Radcliffe primary schools and academies have come together to play a key role as community leaders, in delivering on the ambitions of the Radcliffe Communities and People's Plan. However, critical to the plan's success, is the connectivity with secondary provision, developing a curriculum that supports skills and broadens participation, developing links into post-16 provision and beyond. Without a clear commitment to the new secondary school opening in 2024 there will remain gaps, and opportunities will be missed for a further cohort of children and young people.

Radcliffe Primary school leaders and Star are place leaders supporting the delivery of the People and Communities Plan. We need to continue to build this momentum with Star on the ground in Radcliffe, getting ready for a first year of intake in Sept 2024.

The Council has been acutely aware, even before the current procurement difficulties, that the project timescales for delivery of the new school by September 2024 were challenging, and therefore has consistently pressed the DfE to consider the implications of delay.

There was a recognition and acceptance by the Council, Star and DfE that a delay of a matter of weeks beyond September 2024 could be accommodated through the delivery of an enrichment programme for students by Star. However, for a delay any longer than several weeks would require a more substantive solution including temporary accommodation.

Star has confirmed its commitment to September 2024 opening with the use of temporary accommodation in this way.

The Council is committing the land for the new school, including the additional land for drop off and collection, and is also meeting extensive costs for site remediation, and costs in relation to the provision of the road serving the school. The Council is also actively engaged in removing other barriers to delivery through pro-active pre-application planning and highways discussions. It has also now committed to working with the DfE to support the provision of temporary accommodation.

The Council is therefore doing all within its gift to support the timely delivery of the scheme, to enable the school to open in 2024.

DfE has indicated that it hopes to confirm the outcome of deliberations in respect of the capital new build, and the provision of temporary accommodation by the end of January, to enable confirmation that the school will formally open in September 2024.

A verbal update will be provided at the meeting of the Radcliffe Cabinet on the 1<sup>st</sup> February.

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