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Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

27 September 2017

**Name of Cabinet Member:**

Cabinet Member for Education and Skills – Councillor K Maton

**Director Approving Submission of the report:**

Director of Education, Libraries & Adult Learning

**Ward(s) affected:**

Henley

**Title:**

**Response to petition opposing the closure of The Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School Farm**

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**Is this a key decision?**

No

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**Executive Summary:**

A petition containing 55 signatures was submitted to the City Council on 24th July 2017 and is supported by Cllr Faye Abbott. The petition outlines residents' concerns in relation to the closure of The Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School farm. In addition, there were also 1,336 signatures from an online petition hosted on a different website. Coventry City Council does not accept signatures hosted on a site other than the Council's website, although the number of signatures in this case is significant.

The petitioners request that the Council, The Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School and The Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School Board of Governors rethink their position regarding the closure of the school farm.

This report provides a response to the petitions and details action being taken to address the issues highlighted.

**Recommendations:**

The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills is recommended to:-

- 1) Note that the decision has already been taken by the Romero Multi-Academy Company (MAC) and The Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School, and that the local authority does not have any jurisdiction regarding this decision.

- 2) Ask Council officers to explore with providers in Coventry and Warwickshire options for how Coventry children with an interest in vocational land-based/agriculture/horticulture learning could pursue this. Council officers will also discuss these with The Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School. Officers will report back to the Cabinet member on the outcome of this work. This could also include investigating whether there are examples from other urban areas about addressing this issue.

**List of Appendices included:**

None

**Background papers:**

None

**Other useful documents**

None

**Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?**

No

**Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?**

No

**Will this report go to Council?**

No

**Report title: Response to petition opposing the closure of The Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School Farm**

**1. Context (or background)**

- 1.1 The Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School has run a school farm on the school site for nearly 20 years. The school farm enables the school to offer agricultural courses and after school clubs.
- 1.2 The Romero Multi-Academy Company (MAC) and The Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School have taken the decision to close the farm.
- 1.3 This decision to close the farm has been taken because demand for agricultural subjects at the school has fallen and so it is no longer possible for the school to include this in their curriculum offer. The school wants to be able to cater for an increasing demand for maths and science subjects and to raise standards. There is also a £70,000 deficit to the school from running the farm.
- 1.4 In the short term agricultural courses will continue for students who are due to take exams in the 2017/2018 academic year. Currently there are 17 pupils out of 1,200 plus pupils who utilise the school farm for curriculum-based learning.
- 1.5 The school will be working with a number of organisations including animal sanctuaries, other school farms, as well as the local community to re-home the animals. Farm staff were offered alternative roles in the school.
- 1.6 The petitioners request that the Council, The Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School and The Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School board of Governors rethink their position regarding the closure of the school farm.
- 1.7 The hand-written petition states the following: "We the undersigned call on Coventry City Council, Cardinal Wiseman School and the Cardinal Wiseman School Board of Governors to rethink their position and to save the Cardinal Wiseman School Farm. The farm is an excellent chance for local children to interact with farm animals who would normally not have that chance. Children have been inspired to go into animal husbandry and formal education." This petition has been signed by 55 people.
- 1.8 The on-line petition states the following: "To: Cardinal Wiseman School Board and Kevin Maton. Some kids never see farm animals. It's good educationally and give them life skills too. Animals are therapeutic and teach kids how to care and nurture a dependent creature. Why would anyone think it needs to go? Prince Charles himself gave very good reviews of this farm. Stand together and fight. Save the Farm." The on-line petition states that it has been signed by 1,336 people.

**2. Options considered and recommended proposal**

- 2.1 The decision has already been taken by the Romero Multi-Academy Company (MAC) and The Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School, and that the local authority does not have any jurisdiction regarding this decision.
- 2.2 The Council is interested in a broad curriculum and the proposal is that Council officers explore with providers in Coventry and Warwickshire options for how Coventry children with

an interest in vocational land-based/agriculture/horticulture learning could pursue this. Council officers will also discuss these with The Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School.

- 2.3** Officers will report back to the Cabinet member on the outcome of this work. This could also include investigating whether there are examples from other urban areas about addressing this issue.

### **3. Results of consultation undertaken**

- 3.1** The decision has already been taken by the Romero Multi-Academy Company (MAC) and The Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School Governors and so it was not the role of Coventry City Council to consult on this decision.

### **4. Timetable for implementing this decision**

- 4.1** The decision to close the farm has already been taken. Work regarding vocational land-based/agriculture/horticulture learning will take place in the Autumn term (2017/18).

### **5. Comments from Director of Finance and Corporate Services**

#### **5.1 Financial implications**

There are no financial implications for the Council as a result of this report.

#### **5.2 Legal implications**

There are no legal implications for the Council as a result of this report.

### **6. Other implications**

#### **6.1 How will this contribute to the Council Plan ([www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/))?**

Not applicable for this report.

#### **6.2 How is risk being managed?**

Not applicable for this report.

#### **6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?**

Not applicable for this report.

#### **6.4 Equalities / EIA**

Not applicable for this report.

#### **6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment**

Not applicable for this report.

## 6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

Not applicable for this report.

### Report author(s):

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