

**Report to Witham Local Committee**  
**Proposed Merger of Braintree College & Colchester Institute**

Agenda Item 7b

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<b>Background Papers:</b>	LSC Consultation Document dated 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2009
<b>Financial Implications:</b>	None identified
<b>Equalities Implications:</b>	None identified
<b>Legal Implications:</b>	None for the Council
<b>Options:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To oppose the proposed merger of the Braintree College with Colchester Institute and suggest alternative suitable arrangements which would secure the long term future of Braintree College;</li> <li>2. To support the proposed merger and endorse the rationale detailed in the LSC Consultation Document dated 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009.</li> </ol>
<b>Risks:</b>	1. Merger of the two Colleges was one of four options considered by the Braintree College Corporation and LSC Essex as a future direction for the College. Other options were for status quo (which involved developmental change), formal collaboration, or closure of Braintree College.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

1. The Learning and Skills Council, East of England Regional Council has agreed that the proposal (Initial Outline Proposal) for the merger of Braintree College and Colchester Institute should be subject to formal consultation. The District Council is one of the consultees in that process.
2. The Consultation Document(s), dated 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 identifies a number of headline benefits of the proposed merger which include improved education opportunities for the 14-19 age group in Braintree, greater choice for learners, an increase in the financial stability of Braintree College provision and an increase in opportunities for new capital investment in current Braintree College facilities.
3. The main rationale for the merger of the two colleges is presented in the document as being the creation of additional positive benefits for local learners in terms of greater choice, higher quality, better progression, raised success levels, better travel to learn propositions and closer employer engagement.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

1. That Witham Local Committee supports the proposed merger of Braintree College and Colchester Institute, and that Cllr Nigel Harley, Cabinet Member for Enterprise & Culture, be authorised to consider all responses from the Local Committees and respond accordingly to the consultation on behalf of the District Council.

## BACKGROUND:

1. In December 2006, Braintree College had a poor OfSTED (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) report with inadequate grades given across the board except in the Quality of Provision. The subsequent reinspection resulted in satisfactory grades but even so, the college experienced a steep fall in enrolments for 2007/8. At the same time, greater competition for learners was developing locally due to the creation of a new school sixth form, and a new 11-18 academy. It was within this context that a decision to consider its strategic options was made by College Governors.
2. In January 2008, Braintree College Corporation and LSC Essex appointed external consultants to undertake a review. Four options were considered as part of this process:
  - 1 Status quo (but potentially involving developmental change)
  - 2 Formal collaboration – federation/shared services
  - 3 Merger with a local institution/partner to be identified
  - 4 Closure.

The Strategic Options Review Report concluded:

***'Our detailed analysis and scoring of the four options would suggest that Option Three (Merger with a local institution/partner to be identified) should be the preferred option. Therefore we recommend that the College Corporation should give serious consideration to exploring the possibility of a merger with one or more partners.'***

1. Subsequently, the college agreed to undertake the formal process of identifying a suitable merger partner. This process had three distinct stages, over a four month period, led by the Governors. As a result of this process, Colchester Institute was selected as the preferred merger partner.
2. Colchester Institute is a large general college of further and higher education with a main campus in Colchester, two further sites at Clacton, a learning centre in Dovercourt, and an engineering training centre at Stanway. Colchester Institute draws learners from Colchester and Tendring, but also serves a broader geographical area which in part overlaps with Braintree College. On the main Colchester site, the Institute is currently undertaking a major redevelopment programme. This programme will provide new build accommodation adjoining existing good quality space and result in the demolition of older accommodation.
3. Both colleges emphasise strongly that the proposed merger is driven by current and future needs of learners, employers and the wider community. Braintree College and Colchester Institute both serve their respective local areas but also operate more broadly, serving in some cases rural and dispersed communities, and meeting a variety of learner needs. Braintree and Colchester are both centres of population growth and this is projected to continue. They are areas of relative affluence with levels of employment and economic activity above both regional and national benchmarks (although there are some pockets of deprivation). High quality and dynamic further education is needed to meet increasing demographic and skills demands in both districts.
4. The Learning and Skills Council Essex are now formally consulting on the merger proposed between Braintree College and the Colchester Institute. Consultation is for a period of six weeks with a closing date for comments on 26th May 2009. All responses will be acknowledged by Learning and Skills Council Essex and copied to the two colleges. The Learning and Skills Council, East of England Regional Council will consider the results of the consultation alongside the outcomes of the due diligence report.
5. If the merger proposal is accepted by the Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills, the necessary Order will be made with a view to the dissolution of Braintree College taking place on 1st January 2010.