

Meeting date: 9 July 2019
Report to: Solihull School Forum
Subject/report title: Update on the SEND School Place Commissioning Strategy
Report from: Director of Children's Services
Report author/lead contact officer: Ann Pearson



Schools affected:

All Schools | All Primary | All Secondary | All Special | All Primary and Secondary Maintained Schools Only | Academy Schools Only | Early Years Settings | PRUs | Other (specify |

Type of Report For information
Forum Voting Not a voting matter - for information item
Public/private report: Public
Exempt by virtue of paragraph: N/A

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To update School Forum on the priorities identified in the SEND School Place Commissioning Strategy for the development of new specialist school places in Solihull.

2. Decision(s) recommended

2.1 To note the report

3. What is the issue?

3.1 The SEND School Place Commissioning Strategy sets a baseline for specialist provision across Solihull and considers a range of factors that are driving a need for change over the short to medium term. The strategy provides information regarding the current and future SEND population in Solihull and draws conclusions regarding the potential need to make changes to specialist provision. The strategy will be reviewed annually.

3.2 This commissioning strategy is only one strand of a wider project that is committed to

improving the Council's services to children and young people with SEND. The other two strands include mainstream inclusion, with a real focus around supporting mainstream schools and removing the barriers to inclusion and the EHCP process with a focus around statutory deadlines and parental preference.

- 3.3 The future demographic forecasts show that between January 2018 and January 2023 the number of EHCPs for Solihull pupils is forecast to grow by 656.
- 3.4 Forecasts indicate that an increasing number of Solihull pupils with an EHCP will require special school or independent school places which will incur significant additional cost to the High Needs budget. This situation is unaffordable within existing and forecast levels of High Needs grant.
- 3.5 A forecast overspend in the High Needs budget should not prevent the Council from investing in new provision or specialist places. For every child placed outside of Solihull, in independent provision, at least two pupils can be educated in provision in Solihull. Using a spend-to-save model; the Council must endeavour to fund the revenue required for the creation of new provision in Solihull, through the reduction of placements outside of the Borough.
- 3.6 Over the last three years we have invested significant resource into developing SEND provision in Solihull, including:-
- Opened 2 primary Autism additionally resourced provisions (24 places)
 - Opened a secondary Autism additionally resource provision (30 places)
 - Opened a primary SEMH assessment centre (8 places)
 - Increased special school places by 14%
 - Opened 2 early years provisions for children with complex needs linked to Merstone and Reynalds Cross Special Schools
 - Physically relocated the sixth form of Forest Oak School to Solihull College (based at Woodlands Campus but still delivered by Forest Oak).
- 3.7 The future key priorities for provision development identified within the commissioning strategy are:
- Develop a bid to establish a Special Free School with a focus around Autism
 - Create Autism enhanced provision in secondary schools across the Borough
 - Development of Post-16 Autism and Social Emotional & Mental Health (SEMH) provision.
 - Evaluate the post-16 Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) pilot at Solihull College with a view to creating an equivalent provision in South Solihull.
 - Expand Reception and KS1 Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD) places at Reynalds Cross and Merstone Schools.

- Develop SEMH additional resource provision in the primary phase (North Solihull as a priority)

4. What options have been considered and what is the evidence telling us about them?

- 4.1 On 11th March 2019 the bid for a special free school in Solihull was approved by the secretary of state and will now move to the next stage of the process. It is hoped that post 16 Autism provision can now be developed locally supported by the development of the Special Free School. Early indications are that the school will be located on one site, in a new modular build with a potential opening date of September 2023.
- 4.2 In light of the success of the pilot project to relocate Forest Oak sixth form to Solihull College (Woodlands Campus). The relocation of the sixth form at Hazel Oak School to Solihull College (Solihull Campus) has now been approved from September 2019.
- 4.3 The demand for SLD places in the Borough is currently exceeding the supply of places in our two SLD special schools, both at reception intake and across older year groups. This situation is the same across all neighbouring Councils. Additional reception places have been added at Reynolds Cross School in September 2018 and an increase in reception places is planned at Merstone from September 2019. This increase in places is putting significant pressure on accommodation at both schools, which will require further capital investment to meet this growing demand.
- 4.4 We are seeking to rapidly create at least two additionally resourced provisions (ARP), located in North Solihull, with a focus around SEMH. Potential accommodation has been identified and is now subject to feasibility and work is underway to identify the most appropriate cohort of children that these provisions could support. The new provisions will seek to create between 8 and 14 places each depending on the nature of the needs of the children.
- 4.5 SEMH ARP provision is part of the Council's wider plan to support the closure of Auckland Education Centre, alongside the development of the SEMH High Needs Team. Auckland currently provides education for some of the most vulnerable children in Solihull. Analysis of the pupil cohort has demonstrated that the majority of pupils in this provision have unmet SEMH needs that have resulted in a crisis in the child's education and has meant that primary age pupils are permanently excluded or at risk of permanent exclusion.
- 4.6 In addition to ARP proposals for North Solihull we are looking to create further ARP provision in South Solihull with an aim of targeting gaps in current provision that means pupils travelling outside of the Borough to high cost independent placements which also incur significant travel costs.
- 4.7 As part of the consultation process on the SEND School Place Commissioning Strategy, expressions of interest were sought from schools that would be interested in setting up ARP provision. Work is underway to develop this work stream further.

5. Reasons for recommending preferred option

- 5.1 The approved SEND School Place Commissioning Strategy is used as a basis for

working with schools to identify the most appropriate way to add specialist school places and where appropriate review or expand specialist provision within the Borough.

- 5.2 Development of 'in-house' specialist provision is a key strand within the Children's Services wider strategy for managing the increase in demand for specialist provision within the High Needs grant paid to the Council. Without the creation of additional provision, the Council will continue to rely on high cost independent provision located outside of Solihull, putting further strain on both the High Needs and transport budgets.

6. Implications and Considerations

6.1 Delivery of the Council's priorities:

How will the options/proposals in this report contribute to the delivery of Council Priorities (*select which priority/priorities and also specify which key programme/s*):

- Improve Health and Wellbeing -
- Managed Growth -
- Build Stronger Communities -
- Deliver Value -

6.2 Implications for children and young people, vulnerable groups and particular communities:

- 6.3 The development of specialist provision in Solihull will mean that a far larger number of pupils can have their educational needs met closer to home and within their local community. Development of 'in-house' provision will mean a significant reduction in travel time for some of Solihull's most vulnerable children.

6.4 Consultation and Scrutiny:

- 6.5 The SEND School Place Commissioning Strategy was subject to extensive consultation with families and schools prior to its approval in January 2019.

- 6.5.1 The Children's Services, Education and Skills Scrutiny Board also considered the strategy at their meeting on 15 January 2019. One of their recommendations was to support the aim to deliver more local places.

6.6 Financial implications:

- 6.7 The Government has provided a grant to Councils to support the expansion of specialist provision. For Solihull this equates to circa £1.3m over a 3 year period (2018/19 to 2020/21) to support the creation and redesign of specialist provision in the Borough, in line with identified priorities. The level of funding provided is insufficient to develop places in new-build facilities, so the use of existing buildings in and around school sites is key to achieving new provision.

- 6.8 The budget pressure in the High Needs Block is set out in other papers on the agenda. As such, the development of lower cost internal provision is critical to reducing expenditure longer term in the High Needs Block.
- 6.9 Legal implications:
- 6.9.1 The expansion of special school and ARP places are subject to legal statutory processes.
- 6.10 Risk implications:
- 6.11 One of the key risks is that additional specialist provision cannot be added in time to meet the growth in demand that is forecast. This will increase the Council's reliance on out of Borough high cost provision and its associated travel cost.
- 6.12 In addition there are risks such a proposed cost of individual proposals exceeding the resources available.
- 6.13 Statutory Equality Duty:
- 6.13.1 None as a direct result of this report.
- 7. List of appendices referred to**
- 7.1 None
- 8. Background papers used to compile this report**
- 8.1 None
- 9. List of other relevant documents**
- 9.1 None