
Meeting of the Cabinet – 1st October 2014

Report of the Acting Director of Children's Services

Demographic Growth Funding – The creation of a new SEN Post 16 facility

Purpose of Report

1. To seek approval of the Cabinet to create a new Post 16 facility for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities through the refurbishment of an existing building on the former Pensnett School site.
2. To seek approval of the Cabinet to develop a master plan for the former Pensnett School site.
3. To seek approval of the Cabinet to commence a series of consultation events about the proposals.

Background

Creating a New SEN Post 16 Facility

4. There is currently a shortfall of places for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities so that they can continue their education and learning in Dudley. As a result of this shortfall, many young people have to travel out of borough to acquire a suitable place. This in turn puts more pressure on revenue budgets and does not allow the young people to continue their education and learning in their local communities; adding to isolation and transition challenges when they return to their local communities from their education placements.
5. This new facility would provide a cost effective local solution, reducing the number of young people who have to travel significant distances out of borough for high cost residential provision.
6. The current needs analysis shows a growing cohort of learners with learning difficulties and disabilities needs in both special and mainstream schools. The largest group currently within the Not within Education, Employment or Training (NEET) register is learners with learning difficulties and disabilities. This provision will help to target our focus on those young people with autistic spectrum disorder and behavioural needs.

7. In recognising this gap in current provision the former Director of Children's Services approved a bid that was submitted to the Education Funding Agency (EFA) for the demographic growth capital fund.
8. The project proposed at the time was to provide additional post 16 provision by developing Shouster's house which is a vacant building; (adjacent to Pens Meadow Special School) for post 16 provision for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities. This building was to be leased to Dudley MBC and this had been agreed in principle beforehand. The proposal also addressed an issue raised in a previous Ofsted inspection where it was identified that there was insufficient space available at the school for the number of students on roll. The bid which was successful was for the value of £592,000 to create 40 additional places. The capital grant was to be expended by March 2015. However, since the submission of the bid (summer 2013), Shouster's House is no longer an option for consideration.

Developing a Master Plan for the Former Pensnett School site

9. In light of this significant development, the LA has identified another suitable building in which a post 16 facility could be developed; namely the former neighbourhood building on the closed Pensnett School site. An initial desk-top option appraisal of the site has been conducted and it would be possible to provide the new facilities on this site. A copy of an indicative layout is attached as Appendix 1. A copy of the whole site plan is attached at Appendix 2.
10. The former Pensnett School closed in August 2010 with the last cohort of young people leaving in 2012. The site is quite extensive having a gross area of almost 48,000m² and consisting of a number of buildings that have been added to the Campus over the years. The main school building, science block, design technology block and neighbourhood centre are vacant and remain unused. The site is secured by utilising 24 hour security at an on-going cost to the Directorate of Children's Services. The sports hall which was built utilising Big Lottery capital funding is still in use by the local community.
11. The former Neighbourhood building and old gymnasium (which are physically linked) once refurbished would provide an ideal Post 16 facility that would be run and managed by Pens Meadow Special School. The sports hall could also be utilised once again by Pens Meadow School, continuing to be available for use by the local community. This area of the Pensnett site could become a thriving Post 16 facility delivering education and training for some of our most vulnerable young people.
12. A number of uses for the site have been explored, including the relocation of other education provision to the site. As the site is a former school site, in order to use the site for alternate purposes or to dispose of the site, the Council would have to seek permission from the Secretary of State for Education. Similarly, an

exercise has been undertaken with colleagues from other Council directorates to ascertain the viability of transferring the Sports Hall facility to another directorate but this was not deemed viable. There are no viable options available to the Council at present that would utilise the existing buildings.

13. The latest condition survey of all of the buildings on the site was carried out in 2009 indicating a condition backlog of almost £1.5million (about £1.7million at today's date), to include work to roofing, windows and doors, structural repairs, boilers and heating system and electrical works. The existing buildings are not generally accessible for people with physical disabilities especially as this is not a level site.
14. As part of this first phase of development of the site it is therefore proposed to demolish the former main school building that fronts Tiled House Lane and the linked science block. This will clear the way ready for any future site development as well as save the Council money on security costs and on-going periodic maintenance costs (to address broken windows, patch any leaks to the roof and grounds maintenance.) At some point in the future the Cabinet could consider the use of the remainder of the site.

Consultation Events for the proposed changes to the Pensnett site

15. A series of consultation events are being planned to inform the local community and other stakeholders of proposals for the site. Subject to approval from Cabinet these events will commence during mid October and will provide stakeholders with the opportunity to express their views and opinions on the proposals. The consultation events will include formal consultation by means of a document published containing details of the proposals; a series of meetings with key stakeholders, including community engagement events where members of the public will be invited along to view and discuss the proposals for an SEN post 16 provision.

Finance

Capital

16. The Directorate of Children's Services has secured a capital grant from the Education Funding Agency of £1,000,000 to be utilised for the work outlined in this report. This capital grant has to be spent by August 2015.

The Directorate of Children's Services had also committed £270,000 of the 14-19 / Special Education Needs Targeted Capital Funding grant towards this project.

Revenue

The revenue costs for running and managing the provision will be met by Pens Meadow Special School from their delegated budget share, operating on a split school site arrangement. All special school students are categorised as high needs and are therefore funded through the post-16 funding allocation from the Education Funding Agency, which is currently £10,000 per place. In addition, dependant upon each student's category of need, the School will also receive top up funding from the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant. A provisional revenue budget plan has been prepared which will be fine tuned as the precise number of students and category of need is determined in 2015.

Law

17. The Council may establish and maintain schools under the Education and Children Acts and can do anything incidental thereto, conducive thereto, or which facilitates the discharge of this function under section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972.

Equality Impact

18. The new Post 16 unit for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities will provide a new fit for purpose facility so that they can continue their education and learning in Dudley. It will also ensure that families can remain together throughout the placement and eliminates the need to reintegrate into the local area at the end of a three year programme. Thus providing a local, more cost effective solution.

Recommendation

19. It is recommended that:
 - a. Cabinet approves the proposal to provide a new Post 16 facility for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities through the refurbishment of an existing building on the former Pensnett School site;
 - b. Cabinet approves the proposal to develop a master plan for the entire former Pensnett School site, including demolition of the main school building that fronts Tiled House Lane;
 - c. Cabinet approves the proposal to commence the series of Consultation events.



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