

**AGENDA ITEM – EMS
Consultation**

REPORT TO CABINET

DATE August 2024

**REPORT OF SENIOR
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET INFORMATION ITEM

Children and Young People - Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Lisa Evans

Consultation relating to Enhanced Mainstream Schools

Summary

The purpose of this report is to advise cabinet of a consultation that will be launched in September 2024 relating to the proposal to change Enhanced Mainstream Schools in Stockton-on-Tees to Additionally Resourced Provision and SEN Units, increasing the capacity within the Borough for school places for children with SEND and ensuring provision meets the needs of children locally.

Recommended that the report be noted.

Detail

1. There is a need to improve outcomes for children with special educational needs across the borough and respond to the increasing demand for specialist support at the earliest opportunity. This fits with the council's vision of providing earlier intervention to reduce demand for expensive placements which are often out of Borough and aligns with the overarching strategy of SEND locally and the priority areas in the Delivering Better Value Action Plan.
2. The proposal to introduce a model of additional resourced provisions and SEND Unit would align with the Department for Education Guidance and allow for clear registration of the provision with benefits to schools and families. It would allow parents to request these schools in line with the duties in the Children and Families Act 2014 and would give parents additional choice of school placements, as opposed to current options of mainstream or special schools.

3. The proposal aims to rationalise existing provision to provide more access to specialist support for children in mainstream schools and will exist alongside the comprehensive CPD package being offered free of charge to all mainstream schools and settings from September 2025 to support upskilling of teaching and support staff. This is possible owing to investment in this area from the grant funding in place from Delivering Better Value.
4. The proposals are also intended to help prevent children from having to seek specialist placements out of the area. Presently, if they do need specialist placements, these are predominately being sought via independent special schools out of the area at high cost to the council owing to a lack of special school places both locally and regionally.
5. The proposal aims to provide support for earlier support and intervention by specialist services; resources such as Occupational Therapy, Speech and Language Therapy, Educational Psychology advice, specialist teaching assistants. The model would ensure each ARP is able to offer advice, support, guidance and challenge to schools.
6. Where children's needs cannot be met in SEND Units and ARPs there would be a need for a place in a special school, the introduction of ARP and SEND units will ensure that we are able to manage the flow of children into specialist provision and that special schools have the right number of places with the children who needs these placements most.
7. Any remodelling of provision would not impact on any child already in a placement. Every child would be able to remain in their present school until the natural end of the key stage. Any new provision and any changes to the designation of a provision, would begin with new children admitted from September 2025. Transitional arrangements would secure a phasing in of this new provision to ensure minimal impact to current children.
8. There is a recognised interdependency with Community Transport Services as a result of the proposals, however, it is anticipated that keeping children locally within their locality wherever possible, will reduce the demand on community transport service and where additional services may be required, this would be supported within the borough.
9. Expenditure associated with the provision of services detailed in this report is met via the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). DSG is currently a ringfenced grant used to fund Schools, High Needs, Early Years Provision and Central School spend.
10. As detailed in the report to Cabinet on the 16th May 2024 the authority is part of the Governments Delivering Better Value Programme (DBV). As part of this programme the Authority produced a DSG Management Plan showing estimated costs across the medium term. Based on the unmitigated figures produced the authority identified an estimated aggregated deficit of £34.8m by the end of 2027/28. The changes proposed within the report form part of the mitigating actions to reduce this deficit.
11. As noted in section 4 the proposal is to help prevent the authority having to place children in high-cost independent specialist placements.
12. As an example, the average cost of an independent specialist placement in 2024/25 is £64,000 per annum. Detailed costings are currently being drawn up based on the type of future SEND provision required such as Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH).

13. Any transport requirements that arise from changes identified within this and future reports will be incorporated as part of the Community Transport Transformational Review that is currently ongoing.

Consultation and Engagement

14. A thirty-day consultation will launch on 9th September 2024 to include parents, schools and key stakeholders.
15. The proposal has been coproduced by a working group with key services within the council and Stockton Parent Carer Forum have been engaged in the proposals.
16. Parents and Carers will have an opportunity to meet with senior members of the SEND Services to discuss the proposal and open day listening events have been arranged during consultation period.

Next Steps

17. Following consultation, a decision will be required by cabinet on the proposed model and the financial implications.

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