

CABINET MEMBER PUBLIC HEALTH & EDUCATION – 7 MARCH 2018

Report on the proposed allocation of funding to be received from the government's Special Provision Fund

Report by Director of Children's Services

Introduction

1. Local authorities must ensure there are sufficient good school places for all pupils, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The need for SEND provision has grown in Oxfordshire in recent years related to the rising school population, and planned housing growth will ensure that the requirement continues to grow. Based on expected population growth, between 2017 and 2022 the number of children and young people with Education Health & Care Plans (EHCPs) is forecast to grow by more than 200. Not all of these pupils will attend special schools, but recent years have seen an increased reliance on high cost places in Independent and Non-Maintained Special Schools (INMSS), at a significantly higher cost than places in maintained special schools. To ensure that the needs of all children can be appropriately met, it is necessary to expand the county's special schools faster than population growth, to provide more local school places and reduce expenditure on INMSS places.
2. The Government has committed £215 million of capital funding to help local authorities create new school places and improve existing facilities for children and young people with SEND. The formula for the allocations to local authorities is based principally on projected population growth for children and young people age 2-18 between the years 2018/19 and 2020/21. Oxfordshire's share of the Special Provision Fund is £2,454,466, which will be paid to the council in three equal payments, between 2018 and 2020.
3. Before receiving this funding, the council must:
 - i. Work with education providers to agree how the capital can best be targeted.

Oxfordshire County Council has established a High Needs Review Steering Group to keep the provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) under review. This Steering Group includes representatives from the county's special and mainstream schools, and is one key mechanism through which education providers have been consulted. Through working with the Steering Group, as well as directly with schools, a draft plan for how this funding will be invested has been developed.

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- ii. Consult with parents and carers of children with SEN and disabilities and young people with SEN and disabilities.

An open consultation was held between 25 January and 22 February 2018 to allow all those with an interest in provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities to feed back their views on the proposed plan

- iii. Publish a plan on their local offer page showing how they intend to invest their funding.

To qualify for the funding, the plan must be published no later than 14 March 2018.

Identification of projects for the use of this funding

4. Several factors have been considered when assessing how best to utilise the Special Provision Fund capital grant in Oxfordshire:

- Investment proposals need to support one of Oxfordshire's key priorities to improve the educational progress of vulnerable learners.
- Ensuring the investment is targeted at areas of need in terms of the type of need, sufficiency and quality of provision.
- Utilising the grant to achieve maximum impact from investment and make a lasting difference.
- Maximising opportunities to combine with other capital funding to secure wider investment benefits.
- Only considering realistic investment proposals which are deliverable over the required time period.

5. Based on this, and drawing upon ongoing work with Oxfordshire's special schools to identify needs and opportunities for investment, it is proposed to split the Special Provision Funding across two projects:

- Bardwell School, Bicester
- John Watson School, Wheatley (Secondary site)

Both projects have previously been identified by the council as a priority for investment to create additional SEND capacity.

6. The funding due to be received from the Special Provision Fund will be joined up with Section 106 (S106) 'developer contributions' which have been secured from housing developments to increase special school capacity, as well as with funding already identified in the county council's Capital Programme to support the provision of additional SEND places in Oxfordshire.

Project 1: Bardwell School, Bicester (Ofsted Good)

7. Bardwell School accommodates pupils aged 2-19 who have Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD), Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD), Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD) and also pupils on the Autistic Spectrum. There is large-scale housing growth in this area (Cherwell Local Plan; 9,764 new homes in Bicester 2014-2031) which will lead to significant growth in pupil numbers, including the need for SEND places.
8. The first phase of increasing SEND places in Bicester has recently been approved: this will provide 16 additional places by adapting the former Bicester Children's Centre for use by Bardwell School, and this is expected to complete for Easter 2018.
9. An Option Appraisal has been undertaken to explore the potential to provide further capacity and address suitability issues. The Option Appraisal concluded that expanding Bardwell School on the existing site is possible through an extension to provide a new hall (the existing school hall is undersized), kitchen and one classroom, and through internal alterations to convert the existing hall and kitchen to provide a new classroom and hygiene facilities. The project will provide 16 additional pupil places. It is proposed that this project be partly funded from the Special Provision Fund, to supplement funding already secured from Section 106 agreements.

Project 2: John Watson School, Wheatley (Ofsted Good)

10. John Watson Special School provides for children aged 2-19 who have a range of special educational needs including moderate learning difficulties (MLD), severe learning difficulties (SLD), autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) and speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). Some pupils have profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). The school operates on a split site with primary and secondary facilities collocated with mainstream schools in Wheatley.
11. For the Primary Site, funding has previously been identified to provide additional pupil places and address the suitability of provision and work is ongoing to identify the preferred design solution.
12. For the Secondary Site, an Option Appraisal has identified how the John Watson Secondary site could be developed to address the current shortfall of 2 classrooms and associated ancillary accommodation, and replace the sixth form accommodation currently provided in an aged prefabricated 'temporary' classroom unit. The Option Appraisal identified a preferred solution of building 4 classrooms, staffroom and ancillary facilities; this will provide 16 additional pupil places. It is proposed that this project be partly funded from the Special Provision Fund, to supplement funding already secured from Section 106 agreements.

Consultation

13. Before receiving the funding, local authorities must consult on how the funding should be spent. In addition to consulting schools via the High Needs Block Steering Group, an online consultation was open to all parties with an interest in SEND provision, conducted via the county council's consultation website. The consultation was advertised on the Local Offer Page of the council's website, in School News, by direct email to SEND provision serving Oxfordshire, via social media, SENCO newsletter and direct mailing to parent support groups in Oxfordshire. The consultation ran from 25 January to 22 February 2018.
14. The consultation attracted 34 responses. 14 identified themselves as parents/carers of children or young people with SEND; 15 identified themselves as representing schools or organisations providing services for SEND; 5 "other" respondents were past or present teachers, governors, or professionals working in SEND.
15. 76% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal to expand Bardwell School, with 12% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing; 59% agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal to expand John Watson School with 15% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. There was, therefore, broad agreement with the proposed use of this funding.
16. Reasons for disagreeing with one or both projects were given as:
 - i. Need elsewhere – specifically west Oxfordshire, Abingdon and Didcot;
 - ii. Need for more provision for Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (3 respondents).
17. Other comments submitted:
 - i. Support for the need for more places in Bicester (4 respondents) and for Bardwell's hall to be extended (6 respondents);
 - ii. There is a need for more provision for Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs (2 respondents) or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (3 respondents);
 - iii. There is a need for more support for mainstream schools to support inclusion (1 respondent);
 - iv. There is a need to speed up the process of completing Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCPs) (2 respondents);
 - v. Provision needs to be close to home (1 respondent).
18. In response to the objections and comments, it is noted that the Special Provision Fund is only one strand of the county council's investment programme into SEND provision. Other strands include new resource bases to increase the geographic coverage of support; planned new schools focused

on SEMH and ASD; and other expansions already funded, including at Abingdon. The projects already confirmed are itemised on the Special Provision Fund Capital Plan (Annex 1); other projects will be added as they are confirmed. Other elements of Oxfordshire's High Needs Review programme are focused on identifying better support for mainstream inclusion and speeding up the creation of EHCPs.

Special Provision Fund Capital Plan

19. To qualify for the funding, local authorities must publish a Special Provision Fund Capital Plan on their local offer page by 14 March 2018. The proposed plan is attached as Annex 1.
20. As well as the projects proposed for funding specifically from the Special Provision Fund, the plan also includes other planned investment in Oxfordshire's SEND provision from 2017/18 onwards. This includes projects confirmed as of February 2018; as other projects currently at the investigation stage are confirmed, they will be added to the plan.

Financial and Staff Implications

21. The Special Provision Fund cannot be used for revenue expenditure or for maintenance of existing buildings. The proposed projects will provide accommodation for four additional classes (32 places), with the resulting staffing and other costs associated. The revenue costs of these classes will be covered by High Needs Block funding, which currently pays £17,600 per place in a maintained special school. If sufficient places are not created in Oxfordshire's special schools to meet the needs of the county's growing population, places would need to be commissioned from other providers, outside of Oxfordshire or in the independent and non-maintained sector, at significantly higher cost.

Equalities Implications

22. The proposed investment in special school accommodation will increase accessibility to local high-quality education provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, and therefore provides a positive equalities impact.

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet Member is RECOMMENDED to approve the immediate publication of the plan to secure Oxfordshire's Special Provision Fund allocation.

LUCY BUTLER

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Background papers:

Annex 1: Special Provision Fund Capital Plan

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February 2018