

EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 5 FEBRUARY 2020

Update on Alternative Provision commissioning arrangements

Report by Head of Learner Engagement

RECOMMENDATION

The Education Scrutiny Committee is RECOMMENDED to consider and note this report.

Introduction

1. This Committee last received a report on plans to commission a range of alternative provision for Oxfordshire with effect from September 2021.
2. Since September 2019 further discussions have been initiated to secure effective alternative provision at Meadowbrook College for the interim period to September 2021.
3. A full programme of work is underway for the tendering of longer-term commissioned alternative education places.
4. Oxfordshire County Council is obliged, under the terms of the statutory Department for Education (DfE) guidance 'Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England. Statutory guidance for those with legal responsibilities in relation to exclusion' to provide full time alternative educational provision for all children permanently excluded from school from day 6 of that permanent exclusion. It is also advisable to offer preventative alternative educational provision to prevent permanent exclusions from schools and to support effective reintegration for those children not in education. Interim educational provision should be available for Looked After Children in need of immediate education and children with Education, Health & Care plans between provision.

Commissioning Process

3. The commissioning of alternative provision will help to deliver the vision in the OCC Learner Engagement Strategy¹ to:
 - assess and manage the financial implications for the Local Authority in meeting the increased and varied demand for alternative provision

¹ *Learner Engagement Strategy for Oxfordshire*, March 2019

ESC8

- ensure good quality, value for money alternative provision is in place so that OCC can meet its statutory responsibilities.
 - robustly monitor providers to demonstrate improved outcomes for young people requiring alternative provision.
4. The work is managed through an Alternative Provision Project Group, chaired by the Head of Children’s Commissioning and sponsored by the Deputy Director for Education. The Board meets monthly to manage a programme of work that includes three distinct but connected projects:
- Project 1: Contract management of existing arrangements with Meadowbrook College.
 - Project 2: Buying additional county-wide alternative provision places on top of existing arrangements.
 - Project 3: Tendering for county-wide AP services effective from 2021.
5. A full and extensive engagement exercise has already taken place with a wide range of stakeholders. A full report will be produced in March 2020 but some of the themes that have emerged to date from the engagement exercise include:
- Provision needed in local areas
 - AP to be co-located in mainstream schools
 - Support and advice needed for primary schools
 - Training for parents needed
 - AP has to be affordable for schools to access
 - There were 380 respondents to the stakeholder survey including Headteachers, Assistant Headteachers, Governors, SENCOs and teachers as well as CAMHS staff and other professionals. Surveys were also sent to children using AP in the current and previous academic year and their parents/carers. There were 42 respondents; twenty-five of the children completing surveys did so during in-depth interviews. A survey for providers of Alternative Provision is currently open.
6. Work is continuing on determining the optimum commissioning approach, looking at best practice examples from local authorities who have recently been out to tender for alternative provision in their areas.

Timescales

7. The timetable for tendering for county-wide AP services effective from 2021 is as follows:

Activity	Date
Stakeholder engagement	October 2019 – March 2020
Specification	October 2019 – March 2020
Stakeholder consultation event	March 2020

Tender period	April – June 2020
Contract award	September - November 2020
Contract mobilisation	November 2020 – August 2021
Contract operational	September 2021

Financial and Staff Implications

6. The project team will continue to monitor the impact of any changes on existing staff groups alongside the TUPE guidance. In addition, work is underway with Property Services on estate management issues.
7. The available budget for Alternative Provision is £2.96m consisting of £1.06m top sliced from the High Needs DSG block funding by the ESFA to fund commissioned places within Oxfordshire and top-up funding and additional bespoke provision equates to £1.9m.
8. The Alternative Provision budget is funded by the High Needs DSG block which is facing considerable pressure. The outcome of the recommissioning exercise will need to be contained within the available budget by seeking value for money options.

Equalities Implications

9. A full Equalities Impact Assessment will be carried out as part of the commissioning process to ensure that the needs of all groups of children are able to be met appropriately.
10. Legal, Corporate policies and priorities, risk management and climate and sustainability issues have all been considered in this report and for this wider recommissioning project.

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Background papers: Nil

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