



Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

***Tuesday, 16 December 2025 at 3.00 pm or on the rise of
Cabinet whichever is later
Room 1 - County Hall, New Road, Oxford OX1 1ND***

If you wish to view proceedings, please click on this [Live Stream Link](#).
However, that will not allow you to participate in the meeting.

Items for Decision

The items for decision under individual Cabinet Members' delegated powers are listed overleaf, with indicative timings, and the related reports are attached. Decisions taken will become effective at the end of the working day on 19 December 2025 unless called in by that date for review by the appropriate Scrutiny Committee.

Copies of the reports are circulated (by e-mail) to all members of the County Council.

These proceedings are open to the public

Martin Reeves
Chief Executive

December 2025

Committee Officer:

Email:

committeesdemocraticservices@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Note: Date of next meeting: 27 January 2026

<p>If you have any special requirements (such as a large print version of these papers or special access facilities) please contact the officer named on the front page, but please give as much notice as possible before the meeting.</p>
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Items for Decision

1. Declarations of Interest

See guidance below.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting (Pages 1 - 2)

To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on *16 September 2025* to be signed by the Chair as a correct record.

3. Questions from County Councillors

Any county councillor may, by giving notice to the Proper Officer by 9 am three working days before the meeting, ask a question on an item on the agenda.

The number of questions which may be asked by any councillor at any one meeting is limited to two (or one question with notice and a supplementary question at the meeting) and the time for questions will be limited to 30 minutes in total. As with questions at Council, any questions which remain unanswered at the end of this item will receive a written response.

Questions submitted prior to the agenda being despatched are shown below and will be the subject of a response from the appropriate Cabinet Member or such other councillor or officer as is determined by the Cabinet Member and shall not be the subject of further debate at this meeting. Questions received after the despatch of the agenda, but before the deadline, will be shown on the Schedule of Addenda circulated at the meeting, together with any written response which is available at that time.

4. Petitions and Public Address

Members of the public who wish to speak on an item on the agenda at this meeting, or present a petition, can attend the meeting in person or 'virtually' through an online connection.

Requests to present a petition must be submitted no later than 9am ten working days before the meeting.

Requests to speak must be submitted no later than 9am three working days before the meeting.

Requests should be submitted to committeesdemocraticservices@oxfordshire.gov.uk

If you are speaking 'virtually', you may submit a written statement of your presentation to ensure that if the technology fails, then your views can still be taken into account. A written copy of your statement can be provided no later than 9am on the day of the meeting. Written submissions should be no longer than 1 A4 sheet.

5. Cross Regional Block Contract

Cabinet Member: Children and Young People

Forward Plan Ref: 2025/179

Contact: Alison Walker, Commissioning Officer Promote and Prevent

Alison.walker@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Report by Director of Children's Services Lisa Lyons (CMDCEYP5)

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet Member is RECOMMENDED to:

- a) Approve the re-tendering of the Cross Regional Project partnership
- b) Approve the council's plan to expand growth in Oxfordshire by raising the number of block placements from 17 by an additional 8, reaching a maximum total of 25 placements throughout the ten-year contract period (structured as 5+2+1+1+1 years).

Councillors declaring interests

General duty

You must declare any disclosable pecuniary interests when the meeting reaches the item on the agenda headed 'Declarations of Interest' or as soon as it becomes apparent to you.

What is a disclosable pecuniary interest?

Disclosable pecuniary interests relate to your employment; sponsorship (i.e. payment for expenses incurred by you in carrying out your duties as a councillor or towards your election expenses); contracts; land in the Council's area; licenses for land in the Council's area; corporate tenancies; and securities. These declarations must be recorded in each councillor's Register of Interests which is publicly available on the Council's website.

Disclosable pecuniary interests that must be declared are not only those of the member her or himself but also those member's spouse, civil partner or person they are living with as husband or wife or as if they were civil partners.

Declaring an interest

Where any matter disclosed in your Register of Interests is being considered at a meeting, you must declare that you have an interest. You should also disclose the nature as well as the existence of the interest. If you have a disclosable pecuniary interest, after having declared it at the meeting you must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

Members' Code of Conduct and public perception

Even if you do not have a disclosable pecuniary interest in a matter, the Members' Code of Conduct says that a member 'must serve only the public interest and must never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person including yourself' and that 'you must not place yourself in situations where your honesty and integrity may be questioned'.

Members Code – Other registrable interests

Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to the financial interest or wellbeing of one of your other registerable interests then you must declare an interest. You must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and you must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

Wellbeing can be described as a condition of contentedness, healthiness and happiness; anything that could be said to affect a person's quality of life, either positively or negatively, is likely to affect their wellbeing.

Other registrable interests include:

- a) Any unpaid directorships

- b) Any body of which you are a member or are in a position of general control or management and to which you are nominated or appointed by your authority.
- c) Any body (i) exercising functions of a public nature (ii) directed to charitable purposes or (iii) one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union) of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management.

Members Code – Non-registrable interests

Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to your financial interest or wellbeing (and does not fall under disclosable pecuniary interests), or the financial interest or wellbeing of a relative or close associate, you must declare the interest.

Where a matter arises at a meeting which affects your own financial interest or wellbeing, a financial interest or wellbeing of a relative or close associate or a financial interest or wellbeing of a body included under other registrable interests, then you must declare the interest.

In order to determine whether you can remain in the meeting after disclosing your interest the following test should be applied:

Where a matter affects the financial interest or well-being:

- a) to a greater extent than it affects the financial interests of the majority of inhabitants of the ward affected by the decision and;
- b) a reasonable member of the public knowing all the facts would believe that it would affect your view of the wider public interest.

You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting. Otherwise you must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation.

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DELEGATED DECISIONS BY CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Tuesday, 16 September 2025 commencing at 3.00 pm and finishing at 3.18 pm.

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Sean Gaul – in the Chair

Other Members: Councillor James Plumb

Officers: Rebecca Lanchbury – Commissioning Manager, Start Well
Jack Nicholson – Democratic Services Officer
Alison Walker – Commissioning Officer, Promote & Prevent

The Cabinet Member considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting and agreed as set out below. Copies of the agenda and reports are attached to the signed Minutes.

5 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

(Agenda No. 1)

There were no declarations of interest.

6 QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

(Agenda No. 2)

There were no questions from County Councillors.

7 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS

(Agenda No. 3)

There were none.

8 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

(Agenda No. 4)

The Cabinet Member approved the minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2025 and resumed on 19 August 2025 as an accurate record of proceedings.

9 SOUTH CENTRAL INDEPENDENT FOSTERING AGENCY FRAMEWORK

(Agenda No. 5)

The Commissioning Officer for Promote & Prevent introduced this item.

Firstly, the Cabinet Member asked the officers what age parents had to be to benefit from the service. The officers said most beneficiaries were 18 years old or younger, although sometimes those who were older could be eligible, and in any event the criterion was whether the parent could care for the child in the community.

Secondly, the Cabinet Member asked the officers about Enhanced Placements. The officers clarified that Enhanced Placements were for children who had more complex needs and required additional support, for instance, because of a medical diagnosis.

Thirdly, the Cabinet Member said that he approved of the report and the Council's objectives, especially with respect to paragraph 7, maintaining 'service continuity, market stability, and placement quality and sufficiency for vulnerable young people'; and paragraph 12, 'two of the key priorities set out by the Start Well Commissioning Team' and 'three of the priorities set out in the Council's Corporate Plan' as detailed in the report.

Fourthly, the Cabinet Member asked the officers what would happen after March 2027. The officers said that they would report to South Central after the decision had been taken with respect to renewal for one year. During that year, there would be discussion with the provider about what happened thereafter, and re-tendering remained an option. The Cabinet Member further asked about the impact of the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) on that decision. Officers said that fostering services would remain a statutory obligation. The Cabinet Member encouraged them to think about LGR in terms of their future delivery.

The Cabinet Member said that he understood the risk associated with taking no action with respect to the Framework and asked the Shadow Cabinet Member if he had any questions. The Shadow Cabinet Member did not have any questions.

RESOLVED to approve the option to extend the South Central Independent Fostering Agency (SC-IFA) Framework for an extended period of 1 year (1st April 2026- 31st March 2027).

..... in the Chair

Date of signing 200

DELEGATED DECISIONS BY CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

16 December 2025

Cross Regional Block Contract

Report by Director of Childrens Services Lisa Lyons

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet Member is RECOMMENDED to

- a) Approve the re-tendering of the Cross Regional Project partnership.
- b) Approve the council's plan to expand growth in Oxfordshire by raising the number of block placements from 17 by an additional 8, reaching a maximum total of 25 placements throughout the ten-year contract period (structured as 5+2+1+1+1 years).

Executive Summary

1. This partnership is formed by Oxfordshire County Council (the council), Buckinghamshire Council, Milton Keynes Council, Hertfordshire County Council, Bedford Borough Council, and Reading Council. Oxfordshire County Council will take the lead in commissioning and procurement activities. The re-tendering process is to be aligned with the conclusion of the current service, which is scheduled to end on 31 July 2027
2. This report summarises the council's plans to re-tender the Cross Regional Project (CRP), which delivers therapeutic residential care and educational services for children aged 11–17 with complex needs, operating across 11 homes in partner counties (refer to Annexe 1), offering 36 placements. It reviews the current contract, examines alignment with strategic priorities, highlights development opportunities, presents financial and risk considerations, and sets out the joint procurement approach to be led by Oxfordshire County Council. The initiative ensures an adequate provision of high-quality local and regional placements.
3. Services are delivered within each participating council's area, with placements arranged by local authorities ideally within 20 miles of the council centre or as near as possible to keep children close to their previous home. A registered special school, commissioned under a block contract, provides education for pupils aged 11–17—including those without EHCPs—across Key Stages 3 to 5. Off-site satellite

provision is offered for students living more than 45 minutes away, and all education is tailored to each child's Personal Education Plan (PEP).

4. The school in High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, has capacity for 36 pupils and is fully utilised. A new site may be established if demand justifies expanding provision under the contract.

5. The contract commenced on August 1, 2019, with an initial term of five years and included an option to extend for an additional three years. It is currently in its second extension year and is scheduled to conclude on July 31, 2027. The contract in existence commenced with an initial 26 placements, with further capacity to increase up to a maximum of 36 (see Annex 2) placements across the four authorities and the ability to buy and sell beds between areas to meet increased/decreased demand.

6. As more placements are anticipated, facilities must be suitable for both current and future needs. If all Consortium partners agree, local authorities can provide buildings to the provider at the standard block rate, with lease agreements managed separately from the service contract.

7. The Cross Regional Contract offers the council and other partners compliant, cost-effective placements, helping to avoid expensive and non-compliant SPOT arrangements. By re-tendering the CRP contract, the council ensures continuity for the 36 current placements, thereby minimising disruption to young people's care and education.

8. The new contract will initiate with 36 placements and is expected to expand to incorporate up to 24 additional beds, as well as two new local authorities joining the partnership. Growth forecasts from other partners have received approval through their respective governance processes (refer to Annex 2).

Business Need

9. The council must ensure there is sufficient local accommodation for children in its care (Sufficiency Duty). Re-tendering the CRP contract will maintain a compliant process for purchasing residential, educational, and therapeutic placements. Regional commissioning has provided flexibility, value, and quality, which would be challenging to achieve through individual arrangements.

10. High occupancy rates are maintained by effectively matching children between authorities, optimising resource utilisation to minimise vacancies. This approach also allows for the buying and selling of beds among partner authorities to reduce risk. Current usage data (refer to Annex 4 & Annex 5) supports the decision to re-tender the service, with consideration given to future growth and potential expansion into neighbouring counties.

11. The recent usage rate for Oxfordshire has dropped because one of its vacant beds was sold to Hertfordshire, leading to an increase in Hertfordshire's usage. The bed was sold at the usual rate plus a 5% administration fee. In the future, partners plan to make sales directly with each other, which will remove the 5% administration fee and streamline the process.

12. Occupancy levels are tracked weekly; brokerage officers meet with the regional service manager from the current provider on a weekly basis to minimise the number of hours/days a placement remains vacant.

13. The intention is to decrease the current number of SPOT purchased residential placements to enable more children to remain closer to their communities. It should be noted that not all SPOT placements encompass care, accommodation, and education at a registered special school; the majority pertain to care and support with accommodation, while the young person attends a mainstream educational setting.

14. Of the 75 SPOT placements (Annex 6) we have procured, only four are within the current CRP boundary. The average cost per placement, per week is £7,641 versus the CRP placement rate of £5,520.

Financial Implications

15. The Cross Regional Project contract supports the DFE's aim for smarter regional purchasing and is set at £5,520.35 per week per placement (see Annex 7), covering care, education, and therapy. In comparison, the current provider charges £5,900 per week for SPOT placements with care only. Some placements may also qualify for health and education funding.

16. For comparison, the average weekly cost of an equivalent like for like SPOT placement made by Oxfordshire is £7,383.50 (see Annex 7).

17. The overall contract price is £26,668,257 to the end of Year 7 (see Annex 8), with year 8 costs yet to be determined. For year 8, there will be an annual uplift using the same price review method (see Annex 9) used for years 6-7, although the overhead uplift percentage may be adjusted.

18. Oxfordshire will retain responsibility for contract management, encompassing both fixed and variable expenditures related to oversight and quality improvement initiatives. These expenses will be distributed among the established partner authorities, while new partners—Bedford Borough Council and Reading Council—will incur a nominal charge until they elect to procure placements.

Comments checked by:

Jane Billington, Strategic Finance Business Partner,
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Legal Implications

19. The council's powers and duties to engage in these activities are set out at Part III of the National Assistance Act 1948, the Care Act 2014, the Children and Families Act 2017 and the Children Act 1989.

20. The new CRP contract will be procured via an above threshold competitive flexible procedure tender under the procurement act PA2023 to ensure full compliance, transparency and best value for money.

21. The council will continue to serve as the Lead Partner for the management of the Cross Regional Project contract. As a Platinum contract, strategic oversight is provided by the Hub's Strategic Contract Manager, while operational management responsibilities are undertaken by the Quality and Improvement Team.

22. A separate partnering agreement will need to be in place between the purchasing partners to regulate the management of the service contract permitting the transfer of placements between them so as to maximise occupancy and to ensure the service contract is running as efficiently as possible.

Comments checked by:

Jonathan Pool, Solicitor (contracts), Jonathan.pool@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Staff Implications

23. The Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (TUPE) will be applicable to this contract. Accordingly, formal notification has been provided to the incumbent service provider, and it has been requested that all relevant employee information and associated obligations under TUPE are disclosed and managed in accordance with statutory requirements. This ensures that employees affected by the transfer are afforded the necessary protections, and that the process is conducted transparently and in full compliance with employment legislation.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

24. The Cross Regional Project is dedicated to providing inclusive services that promote equality and diversity for all children and young people, regardless of protected characteristics. All partners foster respect and ensure services recognise individual strengths across diverse backgrounds. Children are supported to understand their rights and challenge discrimination, while carers and staff receive training on equality, diversity, and relevant legislation.

Sustainability Implications

25. The evaluation process will include mandatory disclosure from providers to answer questions regarding their environmental management, carbon emission reduction, circular economy and biodiversity. At present a Climate / Environmental Policy is not required by providers. All successful providers will need to self-certify that their organisation has had no prior convictions of breaching environmental legislation, or had any notice served upon it within the last 3 years by any environmental regulator or authority.

Commissioning and Procurement Requirements

26. To meet growing demand and lower the number of children placed more than 20 miles from home—a figure where OCC ranks as the UK's second highest—we plan to re-tender the CRP service while keeping the current 36-bed capacity. Our

objective is to increase placements for all partner organisations over the 10-year duration of the contract.

27. Accordingly, Oxfordshire will maintain the 17 block placements already procured and will have the option to acquire up to 8 further placements throughout the duration of the contract.

28. Some risks are expected (see Annex 10) given the market conditions and can be managed within the permitted timeframe for the implementation of re-tender and the mobilisation timeframe of 12 months.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

29. The re-tender of the Cross Regional Project contract will incorporate two of the key priorities set out by the Start Well Commissioning Team and aligns with seven of the priorities set out in the Oxfordshire's Children and Young People's Plan.

Priorities of the Start Well Commissioning Team:

- To increase number of children placed in county.
- Improve access to services to reduce inequalities.

Priorities of the Oxfordshire's Children and Young People's Plan:

Live Well: Young Lives:

- Keeping children and young people safe from harm
- Providing help and support across the system at the earliest opportunity
- Improving the experience of good mental health and emotional wellbeing of children and young people

Achieve well:

- Improve school experience.
- Improve school attendance.
- Narrow the disadvantage gap across all key stages, while continuing to support positive outcomes for all.
- Ensure preparedness and support for all young people on their journey to meaningful employment, education, and training.

30. To achieve these priorities and align with the Sufficiency Strategy 2020-2025, the council will work collaboratively with partner local authorities to ensure providers offer a diverse range of appropriate services for children from Oxfordshire and other participating areas. This includes maintaining access to services, educational continuity, and support networks.

Background papers: Nil

Lisa Lyons, Director of Childrens Services

Contact Officers:

Allison walker: Commissioning Officer Start Well

alison.walker@oxfordshire.gov.uk

December 2025

Annexes

- Annex 1: Homes, Counties, and Ofsted Ratings
- Annex 2: Number of Current Purchased Placements
- Annex 3: Growth of existing and prospective new LAs
- Annex 4: Occupancy Data for 2024-2025
- Annex 5: Occupancy Data for 2024-2025 (additional 2 beds purchased by Oxfordshire)
- Annex 6: Areas of SPOT placements
- Annex 7: A sample of SPOT residential placements with education for Oxfordshire young people (like for like)
- Annex 8: Placement costs for the contract term and two of the three extension years
- Annex 9: Method to apply for annual uplift.
- Annex 10: Risks

Annex 1: Homes, Counties, and Ofsted Ratings

Home	County	Ofsted Rating
Beckfield	Milton Keynes	Good
New Days	Hemel Hempstead, Herts	Good
Hythe House	Maidenhead, Berkshire	Good
Old Rectory	Aylesbury, Bucks	Good
Woodacre	Yarnton, Oxfordshire	Good
The Pines	St Albans, Herts	Good
Fairlands	Princes Risborough, Bucks	Good
Holly Hill House	High Wycombe, Bucks	Good
Austen House	St Albans, Herts	Good
Wren Cottage	Bedfordshire	Good
Beresford House	Chalfont St Peter, Bucks	Good

Annex 2: Number of Current Purchased Placements

Local Authority	No. of purchased placements per area
Oxfordshire	17
Buckinghamshire	6

Hertfordshire	11
Milton Keynes	2
Total	36

Annex 3: Growth of existing and prospective new LAs

Local Authority	No. of current purchased placements per area	No. of proposed placement growth per LA (lifetime of contract)
Oxfordshire	17	8
Buckinghamshire	6	2
Hertfordshire	11	4
Milton Keynes	2	6
Reading	0	2
Bedford	0	2
	36	24

Annex 4: Occupancy Data for 2024-2025

	Oxon	Bucks	Herts	MK	Total
Placements Allocated	15	6	11	2	34
Average of placements used	14.5	6	11	2	33.5
Percentage	96.67	100	100	100	99.17

Annex 5: Occupancy Data for 2024-2025 (additional 2 beds purchased by Oxfordshire)

	Oxon	Bucks	Herts	MK	Total
Placements Allocated	17	6	11	2	36
Average of placements used	14.7	6	12.17	2	34.33
Percentage	83.33	100	110.67	100	98.48

Annex 6: Areas of SPOT placements

LA area	Number of children
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Cambridgeshire	2
Berkshire	4
Birmingham	3
Buckinghamshire	1
Cheshire	3
Cumbria	2
Derbyshire	5
Dumfriesshire	1
Essex	4
Gloucestershire	3
Greater Manchester	4
Hampshire	1
Herefordshire	1
Kent	1
Lancashire	3
Leicestershire	5
Lincolnshire	1
London	5
Merseyside	1
Middlesex	1
Milton Keynes	1
Northamptonshire	6
North-West Wales	1
Nottingham	1
Oxfordshire	2
Peterborough	1
Perthshire	1
Staffordshire	2
Warwickshire	2
West Midlands	2
West Sussex	1
West Yorkshire	1
Wiltshire	2
Wolverhampton	1
Grand Total	75

Annex 7: A sample of SPOT residential placements with education for Oxfordshire young people (like for like)

	Amount	Provider/Area
1	6,695.00	Witherslack Carnforth
2	7,269.00	Witherslack Rugby
3	7,637.00	SENAD Wales
4	7,933.00	Witherslack Oxfordshire

	7,383.50	Average
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Annex 8: Placement costs for the contract term and two of the three extension years

OCC	1/8/19-31/7/20	1/08/20-31/07/21	01/8/21-31/07/22	01/08/22-31/07/23	01/08/23-31/07/24	01/08/24-29/03/25	30/03/25-31/07/25	01/08/25-31/07/26
							2 Extra beds added	
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 6	Year 7
Weekly placement price	4,212.81	4,343.45	4,473.76	4,607.97	4,746.21	5,220.83	5,220.83	5,520.35
Number of placements	15.00	15.00	15.00	15.00	15.00	15.00	17.00	17.00
Total cost	3,294,839	3,397,012	3,498,928	3,603,893	3,712,011	2,693,948	1,574,498	4,893,128

Annex 9: Method to apply for annual uplift.

Contract Costs Breakdown	Percentage uplift to be applied proportionally to Contract price
Staff (Operational Staff and Management & Administration Staff) (71%)	National Living Wage increase, so long as this update does not exceed the pay increase figure recommended by Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC).
Training Costs, Transport, Equipment & Supplies, Premises, Resident Activities and Allowances, Therapy & Psychiatrist (22%)	Consumer Price Inflation including occupiers housing costs (CPIH) as per the latest ONS update on the review date
Overheads (7%)	3% uplift to be applied.

Annex 10 Risks

Risk	Impact	Probability	Mitigation
Increased SPOT Placements if the contract is not re-tendered.	4	5	If the contract is not re-tendered, there may be an increase in SPOT purchasing, which is non-compliant and incurs higher costs. We ensure that there is a re-tender to reduce the cost of SPOT purchases.

Incumbent does not apply or is not successful with their bid, which will require a mobilisation period for a new provider.	4	5	We have included a 12-month mobilisation period in the ITT process.
Lack of vacant properties ready for use for a new provider.	4	4	There is a 12-month mobilisation time that should enable the provider to work proactively to source the 36 placements at the beginning of the contract.
Lengthy Ofsted registration processes due to recently introduced priority matrix	4	4	There is a 12-month mobilisation period to offset some of the timeframe for registration to take place.
Recruiting staff in the current market for increased growth reflected within the contract.	4	4	There is a 12-month mobilisation period for a provider to manage the recruitment of staff/additional staff. TUPE will apply.
Meeting growth needs with up to 28 placements	2	2	The growth is indicative and can be phased in during the full contract term (10 years) to enable a provider to source additional accommodation and a suitable site for a second special school.

		Probability				
		Remote 1	Unlikely 2	Possible 3	Probable 4	Highly Probable 5
Impact	5 Catastrophic	5	10	15	20	25
	4 Major	4	8	12	16	20
	3 Moderate	3	6	9	12	15
	2 Minor	2	4	6	8	10
	1 Insignificant	1	2	3	4	5