

Division(s):

EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – ALTERNATIVE PROVISION

Report by Deborah Bell – Head of Service Learner Engagement

RECOMMENDATION

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

Introduction

1. Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) currently has the majority of its Alternative Provision (AP) delivered through Meadowbrook College. Meadowbrook College became an academy since 2015 and was Oxfordshire's maintained Pupil Referral Unit prior to that. With the changing needs of Oxfordshire children, it is now necessary to formally recommission services.
2. 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 review and recommissioning of alternative provision will help to deliver the vision in the new 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
 - 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 Board, 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:

¹ *Learner Engagement Strategy for Oxfordshire, March 2019*

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- Defining the *existing* scope and nature of AP within Oxfordshire and modelling what type and quantity of provision will be needed going forward.
- Agreeing with internal and external stakeholders (including young people and parents) what alternative provision will be commissioned for Oxfordshire.
- Developing the provider market through market engagement events.
- Determine the best way to procure, contract manage and monitor alternative provision so that Oxfordshire commissions a sufficiency of alternative provision to meet needs now and in the future.
- Comply with the Council's contract procedure rules and ensure all contracts with external alternative education providers including non-maintained schools are procured through a suitable procurement process and within a defined financial envelope.
- Communicate the scope and nature of AP within Oxfordshire to all schools and settings (academy, maintained, special, mainstream etc.)

Timescales

5. Formal notice was served on Meadowbrook on 24th July 2019. The notice period is two years so it is expected that new contract(s) will be in place and fully operational from 31st August 2021. This can be earlier with the agreement of the existing provider.

Financial and Staff Implications

6. The impact of any changes on existing staff groups will be considered alongside the TUPE guidance.
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.

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Background papers: Nil

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August 2019