

**SCHOOL ORGANISATION COMMITTEE OF CABINET
11th JANUARY 2024**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY SHEET – PART I

Title of Report:

Proposal to Increase the Number of Specialist Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) School Places at Usworth Colliery Primary School

Author(s):

Director of Children's Services

Purpose of Report:

The purpose of this report is to seek a decision on the Council's proposal to increase the number of specialist ASD school places at Usworth Colliery Primary School from 12 places to 26 places.

Description of Decision:

School Organisation Committee of Cabinet is asked to:

Note the responses to the statutory and pre-publication consultations and consider the statutory proposal which is to:

Increase the capacity of the existing Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision at Usworth Colliery Primary School from 12 places to 26 places with effect from 11th January 2024.

Under the provisions of the relevant Regulations, the Authority may approve published proposals with or without modification or may reject them.

The Committee is requested to approve the proposal as detailed above.

Is the decision consistent with the Budget/Policy Framework? Yes

If not, Council approval is required to change the Budget/Policy Framework

Reason for the Decision

The proposal will increase the number of local SEN school places in an area where there is a defined deficit in capacity. It will enable children who require additional support to access a school place in their home locality while subsequently reducing waiting times at other special school settings.

Alternative options to be considered and recommended to be rejected:

Retain the existing number of local special school places – This will result in an ongoing projected deficit in appropriate provision for residents, will lead to ongoing

oversubscription at other local SEN settings or will require young people to travel out of area to access suitable school places.

Impacts analysed;

Equality Privacy Sustainability Crime and Disorder

Is the Decision consistent with the Council's co-operative values? Yes

Is this a "Key Decision" as defined in the Constitution? Yes

Is it included in the 28 day Notice of Decisions? Yes

PROPOSAL TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF SPECIALIST AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD) SCHOOL PLACES AT USWORTH COLLIERY PRIMARY SCHOOL

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to seek a decision on the Council's proposal to increase the number of specialist ASD school places at Usworth Colliery Primary School from 12 places to 26 places.

2. Description of Decision

2.1 School Organisation Committee of Cabinet is asked to:

Note the responses to the statutory and pre-publication consultations and consider the statutory proposal which is to:

Increase the capacity of the existing Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision at Usworth Colliery Primary School from 12 places to 26 places with effect from 11th January 2024.

Under the provisions of the relevant Regulations, the Authority may approve published proposals with or without modification or may reject them.

The Committee is requested to approve the proposal as detailed above.

3. Current Position

3.1 Usworth Colliery Primary School is a Local Authority maintained primary school in the Washington Planning Area. As well as a mainstream primary school provision the school also offers 12 specialist school places for children with special educational needs who are also in receipt of an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) via a SEN Unit.

3.2 The unit is currently oversubscribed with 20 children currently identified against the 12 places on offer at the unit.

3.3 Capital works to improve the facilities for the children currently on roll at the unit were completed in Summer 2023. The works, as well as creating a more bespoke setting for the currently placed pupils, also resulted in an increase in the wider capacity of the unit. This has provided the opportunity to increase the commissioned number of pupils at the Unit from 12 to 26 pupils.

4.0 Outcomes

The Council's proposal will result in the following outcomes:

4.1 Increased Capacity Within the Local SEN Sector

The proposal will add an additional 14 primary school places to Sunderland's current SEN offer. Given the proposal aims to ensure SEN places are available in localities in the first instance it is anticipated that children accessing provision would be from Washington with children from other planning areas accessing places as appropriate.

4.2 Increased Appropriateness of SEN Placements

The ongoing diversification of the range of SEN provision in Sunderland will ensure that there are multiple levels of placements for local children. The creation of additional resourced units provides greater opportunity for those children who can thrive in a mainstream environment but who need additional support to do so, while those who require a special school place are more likely to be accommodated quicker due to the increased local capacity across the wider SEN sector.

4.3 Increased Efficiencies in Commissioning

A consequence of increasing local access to SEN provision is that pupils do not have to travel as far to access central, citywide or out of area provisions. Being able to provide local facilities therefore reduces commissioning costs such as home to school transport costs and the costs associated with out of area placements.

5.0 Proposal Amendment

5.1 In July 2023 Cabinet agreed to commence consultation on a proposal to increase the capacity of the current Autism unit at Usworth Colliery AND to establish a second unit at the school for children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) requirements.

5.2 The increasing complexity of needs presented by children recently placed at the ASD unit at Usworth Colliery Primary School led to re-consideration of that proposal. Children accessing the unit are demonstrating a higher level of need year-on-year than the cohorts that proceeded them, with the school providing increased levels of staff and physical resource to effectively deliver the cohorts' required levels of support. With that consideration in mind it was not felt practical to effectively accommodate a further SEN primary need within the same school.

5.3 Therefore, following further discussion with the leadership at Usworth Colliery Primary School and after consideration of the responses received during the Council's pre-publication consultation exercise, the decision was taken to amend the Council's proposal. That amendment removed the establishment of a SEMH unit and instead focused on the expansion of the existing ASD provision.

5.4 The Council has commenced discussions with alternative settings in the area to find a more appropriate alternative location to accommodate a specific SEMH unit and will bring a further proposal to Cabinet in the future.

6.0 Consultation

6.1 In July 2023 Cabinet approved a proposal to commence the School Organisation processes required for the development of the Council's proposal.

6.2 An informal (pre-publication) consultation upon the proposals took place during the following dates:

- 18th September 2023 – 3rd November 2023

6.3 Consultees recommended in the relevant statutory guidance were consulted via a Consultation Document that was made widely available on the Council's website and was circulated to relevant consultees. The pre-publication consultation outcomes are attached at Appendix 1.

6.4 The consultation received 33 responses. Of these:

- 84% of responses agreed to the question 'Do you agree with the proposal to establish a specialist unit at Usworth Colliery Primary School for children aged 4 to 11 with additional social, emotional, and mental health support requirements?'
- 84% of responses agreed to the question 'Do you agree with the proposal to increase the number of specialist school places at Usworth Colliery Primary School for children aged 4 - 11 with ASD and/or social, emotional and mental health requirements?'

6.5 As noted in section 5 of this paper the Council's proposal was amended to reflect the changing requirements of pupils accessing the existing provision and the feedback received during the pre-publication process.

6.6 The Council published notification of the statutory proposal to increase the SEN capacity at Usworth Colliery Primary School on 15th November 2023. The statutory notice period ended 13th December 2023. The statutory notice was published in the following places:

- Sunderland City Council's website
- Usworth Colliery Primary School's website
- The Sunderland Echo

6.7 In addition to the publication of notices the following groups were consulted with as part of this process:

- Parents of pupils attending the school
- Current staff

6.8 The Council received 0 responses to the notice. The statutory notice and the full proposal document are attached at Appendix 2 and Appendix 3.

6.9 There were no objections to the proposals.

7.0 Next Steps

7.1 Required capital works were completed in Summer 2023. While intended to increase the quality of resource available to the cohort already attending the Unit the works resulted in an increase in capacity that is sufficient to accommodate the additional 14 pupils that will be placed subject to the approval of this proposal.

7.2 Placements will commence immediately should the proposal be approved with the unit currently operating a waiting list for places.

8. Reasons for the Decision

8.1 The proposal will increase the number of local SEN school places in an area where there is a defined deficit in capacity. It will enable children who require additional support to access a school place in their home locality while subsequently reducing waiting times at other special school settings.

9. Alternative Options

9.1 Retain the existing number of local special school places – This will result in an ongoing projected deficit in appropriate provision for residents, will lead to ongoing oversubscription at other local SEN settings or will require young people to travel out of area to access suitable school places.

10. Impact Analysis

Equalities Analysis – The proposal is not projected to disadvantage any individual, social group or organisation. The Equalities Assessment is attached as Appendix 4.

11. Other Relevant Considerations / Consultations

11.1 Co-operative values – At Annual Council in May 2015, it was resolved that the following statement be included in the Constitution to reflect the values of the “Co-operative Council”.

“Sunderland City Council is a co-operative council and in being so will act ethically in all its actions while adhering to and actively promoting its co-operative values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. These values will underpin its decision making and actions.”

11.2 Financial implications

The average cost of EHCP 'Top Ups' for 14 ASD places in the proposed resourced provision would be £5,440 per place per year giving a total estimated funding requirement of £0.076m per year which would be met from the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant. This reflects an estimated total saving of £69,173 per place per year when compared to the cost of an independent or out of area placement. Total annual potential cost avoidance to the High Needs Block as a result of the proposals above would be £0.968m.

No further capital works are required to develop Usworth Colliery Primary School's provision. Required works carried out in Summer 2023 were £0.313m and were funded from local S106 funding agreements.

11.3 Legal Implications

Throughout the process, from informal consultation to the publication of the statutory proposals, the Council has complied with the requirements of the applicable legislation (the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013) and has also adhered to the Department for Education's 2023 Statutory Guidance 'Making Significant Changes ('Prescribed Alterations') to Maintained Schools'.

12. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Pre-Publication Consultation Outcomes

Appendix 2 – Statutory Notice

Appendix 3 – Full Proposal Document

Appendix 4 – Equalities Assessment

