

SCHOOL ORGANISATION COMMITTEE OF CABINET

Held on THURSDAY 11 JANUARY 2024 at 11.00am in Committee Room 1, City Hall, Sunderland

MINUTES

Present: -

Councillor Williams in the Chair

Councillors Chequer and Price.

In Attendance: -

Julienne Collinson (representing the Assistant Director of Law and Governance), Alan Rowan (Retained Education Functions Lead, Children's Services) and Gillian Kelly (Democratic Services).

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G Miller and Stewart.

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

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report requesting a decision on the proposal to increase the number of specialist ASD school places at Usworth Colliery Primary School from 12 to 26 places.

Usworth Colliery Primary School was a maintained primary school in the Washington area which as well as a mainstream primary school provision, also offered 12 specialist school places for children with special educational needs who were in receipt of an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

The unit was currently oversubscribed and recent capital works to improve facilities for children currently on roll had resulted in an increase to the wider capacity of the unit and an opportunity to increase the commissioned number of places at the unit.

The proposal to increase the number of places at the unit would result in increased capacity within the local SEN sector, increased appropriateness of SEN placements and increased efficiencies in commissioning.

The Cabinet approved a proposal to commence the School Organisation processes required to increase the capacity of the current Autism Unit in July 2023 and a pre-publication consultation was carried out between 18 September and 3 November 2023. Consultation was also carried out with parents and current staff and the consultation had received 33 responses with the majority being in favour of increasing the number of places in the Autism Unit.

Notification of the statutory proposals was published on 15 November and the statutory notice period ended on 13 December 2023. There were no responses to the notice.

The Retained Education Functions Lead advised that if agreed, it was proposed that the additional placements would come into effect immediately.

The Chair referred to some of the consultation responses and the comments around Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) provision. The Retained Education Functions Lead advised that Children's Services were aiming to establish a unit for SEMH in Washington and it had been planned to change the Thrive unit at Usworth Colliery to a permanently commissioned provision and those responses had related to that element of the proposal. The increasing complexity of needs presented by children recently placed in the ASD unit at the school and the consultation responses received had led the proposal to be amended to remove the SEMH unit and instead focus on the expansion of the existing ASD provision.

The Chair commented that it was good to see locally based provision and that the Council was willing to talk to any school who was interested in hosting additional provision. The Retained Education Functions Lead highlighted that discussions were taking place with a number of schools and further proposals for specialised provision would be coming forward in future months.

Having considered the report, the statutory proposals and representations made, the Committee: -

1. RESOLVED that the statutory proposal 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 11 January 2024 be approved.

Proposal to Establish a Resourced Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) Unit at Hudson Road Primary School

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report requesting approval for a proposal to establish a 16-place unit for children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs at Hudson Road Primary School.

The number of children requiring additional support due to a special educational need had increased and there was an identified need to increase the range and quantity of high-quality SEN provisions in local areas.

The Council was proposing to create an SEN provision at Hudson Road Primary School for pupils with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs to make provision more accessible for a wider range of families. The unit would complement the mainstream offer at the school with children accessing both the mainstream resource and a specific SEN resource.

The proposal would result in increased capacity within the local SEN sector, increased appropriateness of SEN placements and increased efficiencies in commissioning.

The Cabinet approved the commencement of the School Organisation processes required to develop the proposal in July 2023 and a pre-publication consultation was carried out between 8 September and 3 November 2023. Consultation was also carried out with parents and current staff and the consultation had received 47 responses with 100% being in favour of the creation of a resourced provision for children with SEMH needs.

Notification of the statutory proposal was published on 15 November and the statutory notice period ended on 13 December 2023. There were no responses to the notice.

The Retained Education Functions Lead advised that if agreed, it was proposed that the Council immediately begin the procurement processes required to provide the necessary resources for the delivery of the unit. Together for Children would also include Hudson Road as a placement destination for children with an EHCP identifying SEMH as a primary requirement from September 2024.

Councillor Chequer asked if students would come from the immediate local area or from across the city and queried if there was a perception of high need in that area. She also asked if neuro-diverse children would fall into SEN/SEMH category or would provision be allocated on a needs basis.

The Retained Education Functions Lead highlighted that there was currently no SEMH unit in the primary sector so in theory the provision was city wide. Following the pattern which was being established for ASD units, these had started off as city wide and would eventually become localised. This was a phased approach but predominantly based on local provision. He noted that whatever was the primary aim of an EHCP would direct the provision, so this was needs based.

The Committee having fully considered the proposal it was: -

2. RESOLVED that approval be given to the proposal to develop a 16 place Special Educational Needs (SEN) unit at Hudson Road Primary School for primary aged pupils with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs with effect from 1 September 2024.

(Signed) L WILLIAMS
Chair