

**SCHOOL ORGANISATION COMMITTEE OF CABINET
21st MARCH 2024**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY SHEET – PART I

Title of Report:

Establishment of a resourced Autism Spectrum Disorder Unit at Mill Hill Primary School

Author(s):

Director of Children's Services

Purpose of Report:

The purpose of this report is to seek approval to implement the Council's proposal to establish a 16-place unit for children with needs associated with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) at Mill Hill Primary School.

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:

Develop a 16 place Special Educational Needs (SEN) unit at Mill Hill Primary School for primary aged pupils with Autism Spectrum Disorder needs with effect from 1st September 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 contribute to the sufficiency of SEN school places across the city. This will increase the number of high quality, local SEN places, reduce waiting times for special schools, allow Sunderland based children to access appropriate provision within their localities and create efficiencies in the wider cost of delivering a SEN infrastructure in Sunderland.

Alternative options to be considered and recommended to be rejected:

Retain the existing number of SEN places. A deficit in local, specialist places will remain resulting in children either not being expediently placed in an appropriate school setting or being placed in a setting that requires travel outside their locality and will result in greater cost pressure on the Council.

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

ESTABLISHMENT OF A RESOURCED AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER UNIT AT MILL HILL PRIMARY SCHOOL

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to seek approval to implement the Council's proposal to establish a 16-place unit for children with needs associated with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) at Mill Hill Primary School.

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:

Develop a 16 place Special Educational Needs (SEN) unit at Mill Hill Primary School for primary aged pupils with Autism Spectrum Disorder needs with effect from 1st September 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 The number of children who require additional support due to a special educational need has increased in Sunderland. More children are now attending mainstream schools who require significant additional interventions to support them in their school place. This at times can exceed what a mainstream school has the resources to offer.
- 3.2 There is an identified need to increase the range and quantity of high-quality SEN provisions in local areas. This ensures children for whom a mainstream school place is appropriate to them can continue to access that within their own locality while also ensuring schools have the correct resources to meet increasing demand from pupils with additional SEN needs.
- 3.3 The Council proposes that, to make provision more accessible for a wider range of families, it will create a SEN provision at Mill Hill Primary School for pupils with ASD needs. This will allow children who require a greater level of support from within the locality to access an appropriate school place with bespoke support.
- 3.4 The unit will complement the mainstream offer at the school with children on roll accessing both the mainstream resource and educational offer and a SEN offer from within a specific resource.
- 3.5 The proposal will ensure additional facilities are available to meet educational, sensory needs, provide access to specialist equipment (where required) and, by

creating a local SEN offer, will reduce the time children are required to travel to access a special school place.

4. Outcomes

4.1 The proposal would secure the following outcomes:

4.2 Increased Capacity Within the Local SEN Sector

The proposal will provide an additional 16 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 South Sunderland with children from other planning areas accessing places as appropriate.

4.3 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, 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.

4.4 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 Consultation

5.1 In January 2024 Cabinet approved a proposal to commence the School Organisation processes required for the development of the Council's proposal.

5.2 An informal (pre-publication) consultation on the proposals took place between 10th November 2023 – 22nd December 2023. The pre-publication consultation outcomes are attached at Appendix 1.

5.3 Consultees recommended in the relevant statutory guidance were consulted via a survey that was made widely available on the Council's website and the website of Mill Hill Primary School.

The consultation received 53 responses. Of these: -

- 91% of responses to the question 'Do you agree with the proposal to create a resourced provision for primary aged children with special educational needs relating to Autism at Mill Hill Primary School?' supported the Council's proposal.

5.4 The Council published notification of the statutory proposal for the development of an ASD unit at Mill Hill Primary School on 25th January 2024. The statutory notice period ended 22nd February 2024. The statutory notice was published in the following places:

- Sunderland City Council's website
- Mill Hill Primary School's website
- The Sunderland Echo

5.5 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

5.6 The Council received no responses to the notice. The statutory notice and the full proposal document are attached at Appendix 2 and Appendix 3.

5.7 There were therefore no objections to the proposal.

6.0 Next Steps

6.1 Subject to approval of the proposals contained within this paper the Council will commence procurement processes required to provide necessary resources, teaching bases and support spaces to facilitate the delivery of the Unit.

6.2 Together for Children will also include Mill Hill Primary School as a placement destination for children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) identifying ASD as a primary requirement from September 2024.

7. Reasons for the Decision

7.1 The proposal will contribute to the sufficiency of SEN school places across the city. This will increase the number of high quality, local SEN places, reduce waiting times for special schools, allow Sunderland based children to access appropriate provision within their localities and create efficiencies in the wider cost of delivering a SEN infrastructure in Sunderland.

8. Alternative Options

8.1 Retain the existing number of SEN places. A deficit in local, specialist places will remain resulting in children either not being expediently placed in an appropriate school setting or being placed in a setting that requires travel outside their locality and will result in greater cost pressure on the Council.

9. 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.

10. Other Relevant Considerations / Consultations

10.1 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.”

10.2 Financial implications

The average cost of EHCP ‘Top Ups’ for 16 ASD places in the proposed resourced provision would be £5,440 per place per year giving a total estimated funding requirement of £0.087m 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 potential cost avoidance to the High Needs Block as a result of the proposals above would be £1.106m.

In January 2024 Cabinet approved capital works required to develop the provision at Mill Hill Primary School. That approval is subject to the outcomes of this meeting. Costs have been initially estimated at £0.65m based on similar programmes procured in recent years. This is subject to review following the development and procurement of an appropriate capital scheme. This will be funded from within the current approved capital programme.

10.3 Legal Implications

Throughout the process, from informal consultation to the publication of the statutory proposal, 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’.

11. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Pre-Publication Consultation Outcomes

Appendix 2 – Statutory Notice

Appendix 3 – Full Proposal Document

Appendix 4 – Equalities Assessment