

**Open Report on behalf of the Executive Director of Children's Services**

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| Report to: | <b>Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee</b>                 |
| Date:      | <b>7 September 2012</b>   |
| Subject:   | <b>Special School and Mainstream Unit Provision Strategy update</b> |

**Summary:**

This report provides the Scrutiny Committee with the opportunity to consider an update on the Special School and Mainstream Unit Provision Strategy.

**Actions Required:**

For the Committee to note the contents of this report and make recommendations if required.

**1. Background**

Since the adoption of the Special School and Mainstream Unit Provision Strategy in 2011 The County Council have been and continue to be proactive in supporting initiatives to successfully implement it. These include:

The reconfiguration of provision in Lincoln City through the development of the St Francis and St Christophers sites in preparation for the closure of Queens Park School in 2013. The building work on both sites is nearing completion and individual arrangements in accordance with the associated complex legal arrangements for the current Queen's Park School learners have been agreed with parents and carers enabling them to have their child educated on the site and in the School of their choice. The transfer of staff to the new builds has been successfully completed and has required only one redundancy (The Clerk to The Governors). The appointment of Allan Lacey (current Headteacher of Queens Park School) to the substantive Headship of St Christopher's School from January 2013 will provide continuity to the process and ensure that the school is well placed to develop to accommodate the wider range of need. The development of Designated Specialist Unit (DSU) at the Witham and City Academies is well advanced with the Witham provision being open in 2011 and the City in 2013. This provision will enhance that already available in the City. It is hoped that in due course this will enable inclusive opportunities for those learners for whom it is appropriate and in facilitating joint working between special and mainstream.

The Local Authority is currently negotiating with St Georges and Holbeach Academies to develop DSU provision in the North Kesteven and South Holland Districts. Once developed this will then serve to enhance the opportunities for inclusive practice, reduce the need for learners to travel excessive distances and to access appropriate provision in their locality and over time may reduce the current high demand for special school places. Both Academies are very receptive to working in partnership with the Local Authority though some challenges exist with the Education Funding Agency in respect to this change of specification and as a consequence there is currently a delay in moving this initiative forward. There are some further complexities in regard to parental preference and choice and the current legislative framework regarding Special Educational Needs provision for individual learners.

Elsewhere in the County investment by the Local Authority is improving opportunities for the development of more generic provision which is enabling learners to have their needs met in their locality and is also enhancing the quality of the accommodation and resources on offer. Specifically investment on the Ambergate and Sandon School sites in Grantham has significantly enhanced this provision and is enabling the two Schools to work flexibly in meeting the individual needs of the learners. Sandon School is now the main provider of Education for learners in public care and whom have severe and complex learning difficulties, working closely with the Beacon Centre (Residential Children's Home) to enable the children to have their needs met in Lincolnshire rather than out of the County. This partnership will be further enhanced by the redevelopment of the Beacon Centre, this will include shared facilities with Sandon School and specialist learning provision for 14 - 19 year olds. There is a significant pressure for Special School Placements at the Ambergate School. Officers are in the process of ascertaining what further measures can be undertaken to address the identified pressure.

East Lindsey has been a particular focus for the development of more generic provision with the Federation of St Bernard's and St Lawrence Special Schools. The federating of the Schools accompanied by significant levels of support from staff within the service area of Additional and Complex Needs working in partnership with colleagues from CFBT Education Services and the leadership of the Headteacher has resulted in greatly improved provision serving both primary and secondary aged learners. The Schools are catering for learners with a wider range of complex needs and are developing further greater opportunities for post 16 learners enabling them to learn and be supported in their local area. The realignment of the residential provision in the Special Schools has been undertaken with the planned closure of the residential provision at St Lawrence School in April 2013. The proposals for the redevelopment of the accommodation to create much needed teaching space are being developed.

The now established provision at Warren Wood and the Aegir Community Federated Special Schools in Gainsborough is meeting need in that part of the County and has reduced the need for learners to be placed in out of county provision and has accommodated learners within their own locality.

A key element of the Special School and Mainstream Unit Provision Strategy has been the development of appropriate provision for Learners with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities. This initiative was discussed and reported at the Scrutiny Committee earlier this year and the strategy for this element of work was adopted by the Local authority in July 2012. The progress made today has thus far been good with excellent examples of partnership working between services, special schools, colleges and specialist providers which will lead to the development of enhanced provision being available for learners 16 - 25. This has been supported by 'pump - priming' resources made available by the Local Authority. The recent agreement to continue 'pump - priming' for a further two years, coupled with a further £500,000 of DFE funding awarded means that the Local Authority will be well placed to provide educational and Activity based provision for those learners with the most complex needs at FE Colleges enabling them to remain within their locality and community where ever possible.

The recently introduced funding formulae for Special Schools has been successfully implemented and is in the second year of a three year implementation programme. The DFE introduction of a new national funding formulae from 2013 will require a review of the funding arrangements, however the model developed and adopted by the Local Authority is not dissimilar to the national model and so it is anticipated that the required changes can be managed without too much disruption to schools, however the requirements of the Education Funding Agency in relation to their procedures and protocols and verification processes are onerous for officer time in meeting the imposed Education Funding agency deadlines.

## **2. Conclusion**

The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee is invited to note and comment on the progress made on the implementation of the Special School and Mainstream Unit Provision Strategy and make any recommendations if required.

## **3. Consultation**

### **a) Policy Proofing Actions Required**

All policy previously agreed.

## **4. Background Papers**

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

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