

Building Communities of Specialist Provision Capital Programme

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Building Communities of Specialist Provision Strategy was approved by the Executive, with the purpose of creating a special school system which enabled all children and young people with SEND (requiring a place in a specialist setting) access to a high quality educational provision with enhanced all needs facilities, as close to home as possible.
- 1.2 The strategy increases special school capacity by over 500 places and ensures all settings can meet all needs, avoiding the necessity of excessive journeys for students to attend schools established to meet their designated need.
- 1.3 Pupils will be afforded the opportunity to access a specialist education in a setting with state of the art facilities, specifically designed with special school leaders input and appropriate to meet all needs. Children and young people will benefit from purpose-built, modern teaching spaces, enhanced external environments and an integrated health provision, in a school within their local community.
- 1.4 The benefits brought about to SEND children and their families by this strategy are significant: reduced travel time as places will be available at local special schools, vastly improved facilities in a local school that can meet all needs and access to health interventions without having to leave school for appointments.
- 1.5 Lincolnshire County Council is committed to improving the lives of all children and young people and believes the improvements set out in this strategy will have a wholly positive impact on the education, health and emotional well-being of our special school students and their families.

2. Capital Programme

- 2.1 It is important to note the complexity and magnitude of this programme and appreciate the aspirations of Lincolnshire County Council and its commitment to such a transformational scheme. Embarking on a capital programme which seeks to enhance and improve thirteen school sites over five years whilst transforming the special school system to add much needed capacity, eradicate excessive journeys and reduce unnecessary out of county placements is ambitious and trail-blazing.
- 2.2 As the capital programme has progressed from initial estimates to live, on-site schemes, it has been necessary to review the requirements of each scheme to ensure the Council is providing the best possible solution for schools and value for money.
- 2.3 As referenced in paragraph 1.31 of this report, the whole life costs of the programme have risen to £86.794m from £56.556m based on actual scheme costs for those which have entered main works contracts and forecast scheme costs on those still to be confirmed post-feasibility. It should also be mentioned that the Lincoln City area new school site has been added to this programme following the Council's unsuccessful free school application adding c. £12.000m to the programme. Lincolnshire submitted a strong and sound business case for a new free school and was disappointed to find this application was not

selected due to the Local Authority's prudent financial management of its High Needs spending and all needs SEND vision.

- 2.4 Since the strategy was approved, Lincolnshire County Council has successfully accessed further investment for the programme, with a revised grant allocation of £71.194m so all special schools in the programme can access improved capital solutions and enhanced facilities beyond that of the Council's initial ambitions. The largest proportion of this earmarked funding is made up of secured Government grants, such as Basic Need, Conditions capital and DfE Special Provision funding (£69.724m).
- 2.5 In addition, the Council has agreed to commit £15.600m to address the funding gap, which is largely contributed by the Lincoln City area new school site being added to this programme after the authority's free school application to create an additional 111 places was unsuccessful, as referenced in paragraph 2.3. After such a disappointing decision by the Department for Education, this allocation is evidence of the Council's unwavering dedication to improving the lives of children and young people with SEND through this strategy.
- 2.6 It must be noted that some schemes have presented particular challenges due to their poor existing condition and this additional funding will allow the Council to address these issues, thereby ensuring these sites are sustainable and have increased longevity.
- 2.7 In addition, increased costs have arisen due to the current global pandemic, with market uncertainty and rising welfare costs in the construction industry.
- 2.8 The increased planned spending will support further development of the schools external grounds including sensory spaces and physical activity areas, providing an enriched learning environment for children and young people with SEND, supporting their physical and emotional wellbeing.
- 2.9 In addition, greater focus has been placed on improving traffic and transport areas within each school. Many settings have limited parking facilities and restricted space for school transport to drop off and collect pupils in. This has had a detrimental impact on access for local residents and the additional funding will be utilised to improve access and parking arrangements.
- 2.10 Each school will also benefit from improved health and therapy provision with the inclusion of a therapy suite, intervention rooms which can be utilised by therapists during the school day, dedicated offices for visiting professionals and medical intervention rooms for clinical services to be provided.

3. Strategic Impact

- 3.1 In acknowledging the additional cost of the capital programme and enlarged scope to ensure the best possible provision is available to Lincolnshire's children with SEND, the Council must consider this within the context of the ever-increasing cost pressures within the High Needs allocation.
- 3.2 Children's Services strongly believes this capital infrastructure investment will not only achieve greater outcomes for Lincolnshire pupils, but also be an important financial decision in managing the pressures within the High Needs block by way of reducing expenditure relating to some expensive and unnecessary out of county specialist placements. On occasion, Lincolnshire families are presented with the difficult option of out of county placements due to the lack of capacity in local special schools. This is both unfair on children and families and expensive to the Council, when needs could be met in a more

local provision. It is important for Lincolnshire to continue securing value for money within these demand-led budgets and within the finite funding resource available. By enabling pupils requiring specialist support to go to their nearest suitable school, the Local Authority will be able to achieve operational efficiencies, improved pupils wellbeing and reduce expenditure through its delivery of home to school transport arrangements.

- 3.3 The financial impact of investing now at a capital level will have a positive impact on the Council's financial position long-term. Both the High Need's block allocation and Home to School Transport budget will continue to be subject to increased financial pressure if the strategy's additional school places are not realised, potentially costing the Council up to c. £20m per annum (based on current home to school transport and Out of County educational placement commissioning arrangements) if the strategy was not implemented in full.
- 3.4 Beyond the financial impact to the Council, it is important to consider the reasons why the strategy was approved in the first instance. The Council is committed to enabling children and young people with SEND the opportunity to access an integrated all needs education system which provides excellent education, health and care interventions in their local community. Our strategic vision remains to establish an integrated school system where children and young people get the right health, care and education, in the right place, at the right time, as close to home as possible, where children feel they belong, are respected, hopeful and optimistic about their future.
- 3.5 The strategy was collaboratively developed to ensuring a sufficient supply of special school places for children and young people with SEND, local special schools which can meet the needs of all pupils in their local community, a reduction in the travelling time for pupils with SEND by enabling them to attend a special school as close to home as possible and for our children and young people with SEN to be educated locally, bringing value and a sense of belonging to their local communities. Only by ensuring that the capital programme is fully completed can the Local Authority be confident it will achieve its strategic vision.

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