



**Open Report on behalf of Heather Sandy, Executive Director, Children's Services**

Report to:	<b>Lincolnshire Schools Forum</b>
Date:	<b>22 April 2021</b>
Subject:	<b>Programme Update - Building Communities of Specialist Provision; Together in Lincolnshire</b>

**Summary:**

The purpose of this report is to provide Schools Forum with an update on the implementation of the Building Communities of Specialist Provision Strategy, approved by Executive on 6 November 2018. The report summarises the progress made within the Capital Programme and in all supporting system areas.

**Recommendation(s):**

School's Forum is asked to note the contents of this report for information.

**1. Background**

- 1.1 The Building Communities of Specialist Provision Strategy was developed in response to the Department for Education (DfE) requirement of all Local Authorities (LA) to review provision for pupils with SEND in order to ensure that there are sufficient good school places which meet the changing needs of pupils with SEND. The review required LA's to work in close collaboration with special schools and parent and carer groups to co-produce a strategic plan which delivers sustainable, good quality provision to meet current and future needs.
- 1.2 In November 2018, the Executive granted approval to implement the Building Communities of Specialist Provision Strategy. Implementation commenced in January 2019 and will take place over the next five years with the final school changes being made in September 2024.
- 1.3 Once fully implemented, the strategy will make significant changes to the existing special education provision, creating an integrated and sustainable school system where pupils can attend their nearest special school, confident that their education and health needs can be fully met.
- 1.4 In order to achieve this ambition, the strategy will provide a locality-based, sector-wide approach to special education which will enable all special schools to meet the wide range of needs of pupils within their local community. The allocated capital investment will be utilised to improve premises

and facilities, enabling each school to offer places to pupils from within their local communities with a wider range of needs.

- 1.5 All special schools have committed to making significant changes to the type of need catered for and expansion where this has been identified and these are outlined in the strategy. All 14 Special Schools will be able to meet “all needs” once fully implemented.

## **2. Progress Update**

### **2.1 Capital Programme Funding Profile**

- 2.1.1 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. Building requirements have evolved over this period and the council has been presented with the opportunity to further enhance the programme's scope through increased investment potential.
- 2.1.2 The projected cost of the programme has 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.
- 2.1.3 Since the strategy was approved, LCC has successfully accessed further investment for the programme, with a revised grant allocation of £69.724m so all special schools in the programme can access improved capital solutions and enhanced facilities. In addition, the Full Council in February 2021 agreed to fund £15.600m through the Council's capital programme to address the funding gap left after the authority's free school application to create an additional 111 places in the Lincoln City area was unsuccessful. After such a disappointing decision by the DfE, this allocation is evidence of the council's unwavering dedication to improving the lives of children and young people with SEND through this strategy.
- 2.1.4 It must be noted that some schemes have presented particular challenges due to their existing condition and this additional funding will allow the council to address these issues, thereby ensuring these sites are sustainable and have increased longevity. In addition, increased costs have arisen due to the current global pandemic, with market uncertainty and rising welfare costs in the construction industry.
- 2.1.5 The increased funding allocation 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.
- 2.1.6 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 a detrimental impact on access for local residents and the additional funding will be utilised to improve access and parking arrangements.
- 2.1.7 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.

### **2.2 Capital Build Programme**

Please see appendix A for the Capital Build Programme Timeline, including detail of pre-construction and construction completion dates.

### 2.2.1 **Boston Endeavour Academy (formerly The John Fielding School)**

The first scheme within the capital build programme, the Boston Endeavour Academy commenced construction in March 2020. Good progress has been made despite the impact of Covid-19 upon construction and some supply chain issues. The scheme has a completion date of August 2021 and is due to open to students from September 2021.

The £13.2m new-build academy will accommodate 140 children and young people with SEND from the Boston area. With state-of-the-art facilities, this new school will have 16 purpose built classrooms to meet all needs and specialist teaching spaces for science, technology, ICT and art. It will also benefit from a hydrotherapy pool, sensory and soft playrooms and dedicated therapy spaces. Outside, there will be hard and soft-surfaced play areas, as well as a sensory garden and wildlife areas.

### 2.2.2 **The Willoughby Academy, Bourne**

In line with projected need, The Willoughby Academy will expand by an additional 68 school places on the existing site. The additional capacity will be achieved by building a new block and remodelling of some existing spaces. The new build accommodation block will provide 6 classrooms, hall, specialist secondary teaching spaces including science and technology, as well as small group spaces and hygiene facilities. The existing school will undergo some remodelling work to provide therapy spaces and a medical inspection room to ensure the school can offer, in conjunction with health providers, a robust health offer to all children and young people with SEND in the local area.

Following approval in August 2020, construction commenced in November 2020 and the scheme is due for completion by January 2022. Minor delays to construction have been brought about due to Covid-19 restrictions and an extension for further archaeological enabling works.

### 2.2.3 **The Eresby School, Spilsby**

The Eresby School is subject to remodelling and development to provide improved facilities to enable it to deliver all needs education and an additional 20 special school places. This will be achieved by the construction of a new block and remodelling of some existing spaces. The new build accommodation block will provide enhanced facilities including 5 classrooms, hall, ICT and science spaces as well as small group rooms, hygiene facilities and staff and meeting spaces. The existing school will also undergo extensive remodelling work to provide a design/technology and art room, a physiotherapy space, a visiting professional/therapy space, a parents' room, a hygiene suite, a disabled WC and staff/administration spaces.

Following Executive approval in October 2020, construction commenced in January 2021 and the scheme is due for completion by January 2022.

### 2.2.4 **St Bernard's School, Louth**

In line with projected need, St Bernard's School will be subject to an expansion to enable around 100 pupils to be educated on the existing site. This will be achieved by the construction of a new teaching block and some internal remodelling to existing spaces. The proposed new block will provide additional facilities including 6 classrooms, hall, specialist secondary teaching spaces including science and technology, as well as small group spaces, therapy and hygiene facilities.

Construction commenced in March 2021 and the scheme should be completed by September 2022.

#### **2.2.5 Lincoln St Christopher's School**

Lincolnshire's application for a new special free school submitted to the DfE in October 2018 was unsuccessful. An extensive options appraisal was undertaken to review the alternatives available to the LA, as demand analysis indicated the need for an additional 111 special school places for Lincoln city and the surrounding area. This report concluded that the most suitable option to ensure Lincoln City has sufficient special school places was to expand the current LA maintained St Christopher's School over two sites, with a new capacity of 333 overall. In order to ensure adequate space and facilities for this number of pupils, it would be necessary to develop a new primary facility on a second site (the former Usher School site, Skellingthorpe Road) with a capacity of 130 and provide extensive remodelling and development to the existing St Christopher's School to create a secondary provision with a capacity of 203.

All statutory processes were subsequently followed with Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee recommending the revised proposal in January 2020. Executive Council approval for the revised proposal was granted in February 2020.

These schemes are in the pre-construction phase with pre-planning engagement and submission of the planning application completed in March 2021 for both sites. It is intended that the Primary School will be open for all needs students in Spring Term 2022 with the secondary school open for Autumn term 2023.

#### **2.2.6 The Priory School, Spalding**

The development of the Priory School is linked to the Community Inclusive Trust delivered scheme at The Garth School. Once both developments are completed, the two schools will amalgamate to form one all needs school with an additional 49 places across both sites.

This scheme is currently in pre-construction phase: the design phase is complete, and the planning application is due to be submitted in April 2021. A completion date for the building programme is forecast for September 2022.

The expanded facility will comprise 13 classrooms which, where possible, will have a designated area of outside space directly off the classroom. The externals will provide outdoor learning in the form of a sensory garden, horticulture, hard surfaced playing court and large grass playing field for sport. There will also be sufficient onsite parking for staff, visitors and a secure drop off and pick-up zone for all school transport.

#### **2.2.7 St Lawrence School, Horncastle**

In line with projected need, the St Lawrence School will expand on its existing site, providing an additional 70 school places.

Pre-construction surveys have identified that the school has significant site issues, with much of the allocated budget potentially being utilised to remedy condition rather than enhancing facilities to ensure the school can meet all need. As a result, a full options analysis has been undertaken to ensure the scheme offers best value for the Lincolnshire pound. The revised approach will be subject to council approval.

Proposed dates will be issued once a design approach has been confirmed. The aim is for the works to be completed by April 2023.

#### **2.2.8 St Francis Special School, Lincoln**

St Francis Special School will be subject to remodelling and re-development to meet a capacity of 155 and provide additional facilities to enable it to deliver all needs education.

This project is at an early stage and a procurement report is in development to consider options to provide facilities to meet requirements on the existing site.

#### **2.2.9 Gosberton House Academy, Gosberton**

Gosberton House Academy will be subject to remodelling and development to provide improved facilities to enable it to deliver all needs education.

This is the final scheme in the capital build programme and, as a result, pre-construction work has not yet commenced.

#### **2.2.10 Community Inclusive Trust (CIT) Self Delivery Projects**

The following schemes have received Condition Improvement Funding (CIF) from the Department for Education and are subject to self-delivery by the Trust. The LA has made additional financial contributions to the self-delivery projects to ensure their completion. Project Managers from Corporate Property and Children's Services regularly meet with the CIT team to monitor scheme progress.

#### **2.2.11 Ambergate Sports College / The Sandon School, Grantham**

Projected need dictates a requirement for a minimum of 229 places in the Grantham area with The Sandon School and Ambergate Sports College becoming one school operating over two sites.

The Ambergate Sports College scheme is complete and was formally opened in September 2020 by Richard Whitehead MBE.

During the design phase CIT identified that the 2 sites would not be sufficient to deliver the 229 places required. Opportunities to enable the school to affectively deliver education for 229 pupils have been reviewed and a preferred option has been presented to the Trust, with the agreed outcome likely to be implemented by April 2023.

#### **2.2.12 The Garth School, Spalding**

In line with the approved strategy, these two schools will become one, operating over two sites with a capacity of 177.

The Garth School project has been self-delivered by CIT and completed at the end of last year.

### **3 Special School Reorganisation**

#### **3.1 Special School Reorganisation Policy**

##### **3.1.1** The Special School Reorganisation policy (Appendix B) has been developed by the LA in collaboration with the SEND Alliance Project Board and key advisors from the sector, to

provide a formalised approach to the revenue funding of special school reorganisations in supporting the LA's statutory duty to provide sufficient school places. It seeks to address situations when, as part of its strategic planning of school places, the LA asks a school / academy to expand and take in additional pupils above their agreed capacity temporarily or expand permanently.

3.1.2 The policy was formally approved by LCC's Directorate Leadership Team on 16 December 2020 and will ensure consistency across the sector regarding funding allocations.

3.1.3 The policy outlines place planning priorities and the process required by each school in preparation for opening as an all needs school. It has been necessary to introduce a phased expansion across all schools in the programme to effectively manage transition and the release of new school places, in order to avoid the risks associated with a short-term over-supply of places. Implementation of the policy requires collaboration between LA Officers from key departments and special school leaders to ensure effective financial planning and sufficiency of places.

*"The LA SEND team working with the special school will agree the phasing of a school reorganisation to its new capacity level at the outset, which will form part of the indicative funding agreement between the two parties.....The funding agreement will enable a special school to build these indicative funding levels into their medium term finance plans to correspond to the increased cost of providing more places."*

*Lincolnshire County Council, Policy on funding arrangements for special school reorganisations, December 2020.*

3.1.4 The policy also sets out the funding allocation for all new spaces, including the loose furniture and equipment allocation which will be funded from the allocation earmarked in the Dedicated Schools Grant reserves.

3.1.5 The policy is now live and is being rolled out to plan the expansion of the first three schools in the programme; Boston Endeavour Academy, The Willoughby Academy and The Eresby School.

### **3.2 Special School Reorganisation Revenue Budget**

3.2.1 Funding has been earmarked to support the implementation of the strategy in special schools to provide All Needs education to pupils with SEND in their local communities. A £2.000m commitment was approved by the Schools Forum in October 2018.

3.2.2 The £2.000m commitment will fund the fixtures and fittings for the 60 new classroom spaces (£0.570m) in accordance with the special schools reorganisation policy, and other new building space through the SEND capital programme (c.£0.700m), such as installation of new sensory and soft play rooms, medical intervention spaces and specialist teaching facilities. A further commitment of £0.143m has been agreed to support workforce development for the sector that is to be rolled out to mainstream schools also.

3.2.3 LAs receive lagged funding through its High needs block for special school places, therefore the LA will consider a blended approach to funding the growth in special schools through remaining earmarked funding and High Needs block funding during this growth period.

- 3.2.4 During 2020/21, £38,100 has been transferred to CIT for new classroom spaces in line with the Special School Reorganisation policy.
- 3.2.5 As the programme is still in the implementation phase and no school has fully opened as all needs yet, it is projected that the majority of the spending will take place from 2021/22 onwards.

## **4 Strategic Support Systems**

### **3.1 Specialist Community Led Panels**

4.1.1 The Design workstream was tasked with creating a mechanism for sector-led challenge to ensure that Lincolnshire children have access to the right education, health and care at the right time, in the right place as close to home as possible.

4.1.2 A model of delivery has been approved, namely the development of Specialist Community Led Panels for each locality to meet the needs of children and young people requiring a special school place at the right time as close to home as possible.

4.1.3 The panels will seek to identify a local special school place for the following cohort, through solution-focused discussion and peer challenge:

- A child/young person (CYP) has a Lincolnshire Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and is attending a Lincolnshire special school and special school considers they can no longer meet need.
- The CYP is transferring in from another Local Authority with an EHCP and requires a Lincolnshire special school or the child has an EHCP from mainstream and needs special school – in both cases following the special school consultation they cannot meet need.
- The CYP's needs are such that the local authority agrees an 'exceptional special school placement' is required as per paragraph 1.29, The Code of Practice 2015. Following the consultation, the special school state that they cannot meet need.
- A CYP with an EHCP in a mainstream which has been identified as requiring a specialist placement as part of their EHCP annual review and on consultation of the nearest special school they respond they cannot meet need.
- A CYP has been identified as suitable for transition from special school to mainstream, in line with LCC Transition Protocol and the proposed nearest mainstream through consultation states that they cannot meet need.

4.1.4 In February 2021, Children's Services Directorate Leadership Team approved the prototype for Specialist Community Led Panels be trialled from Term 5 2021, with a review to be conducted during the 2021 summer holidays. The panels will then be rolled out countywide from September 2021 to support the place allocation of children and young people with SEND within this cohort.

### **4.2 Health**

4.2.1 The Health workstream has successfully developed robust partnership working across the Local Authority, Health Trusts and Clinical Commissioning Groups to ensure an effective health offer can be provided to all special schools. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between schools and health providers, which sets out clear expectations around

provision has been approved and is ready to be launched in advance of the first all needs school opening in September 2021.

- 4.2.2 For children and young people who are long-term ventilated or have extremely complex medical needs, there is an agreed principle between LCC and NHS Lincolnshire Clinical Commissioning Group that their needs should be in line with the councils strategic position and that every effort will be made to ensure these pupils can be educated at the local special school.

#### **4.3 Specialist Equipment Contract**

- 4.3.1 In order to ensure the most effective use of specialist medical and therapy equipment, all special schools have joined the Lincolnshire Community Equipment Services contractual arrangements held by the Local Authority. This was unanimously approved at the Special School Project Board in July 2020.

#### **4.4 Workforce Development**

- 4.4.1 The Workforce Development workstream has designed the concept of a SEND Learning Platform: a sector-led approach to professional development which will ensure all pupils with SEND can access a quality education facilitated by skilled and knowledgeable staff.
- 4.4.2 This tiered learning platform will be sited on an existing LCC online portal (Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership) to provide appropriately targeted access to a wide range of learning resources and training which will be available to all special school staff, both teaching and non-teaching. This is to ensure a culture of SEND awareness and inclusion is embedded in all aspects of school life.
- 4.4.3 Acknowledging the excellent array of training and professional development already commissioned by LCC, the high quality offer of our teaching schools and also that which is available from our partnership providers, the SEND Learning Platform will bring together, into in one place, the high quality training already available and utilise the skills and expertise of the Lincolnshire SEND Alliance to develop training provision where gaps have been identified. It will utilise a wide range of learning methods (e-learning, online resources and face to face training) to ensure equity and ease of access, in a geographically vast county.
- 4.4.4 The workforce development model will be implemented in a phased approach:
- PHASE 1: By September 2021, in line with the immediate purpose of the project, ensuring the workforce within special schools is equipped and trained effectively to support the move to all through, all need.
  - PHASE 2: By September 2022, the content of the platform will be made available to all mainstream schools and to parent/carers.
- 4.4.5 The SEND Learning Platform was approved by Directorate Leadership Team in September 2020 and has subsequently been approved by the SEND Alliance Project Board. LCC is currently developing the commissioning and contractual arrangement for the learning platform.

## 5. Conclusion

- 5.1 Despite the unexpected challenges which have impacted the implementation of this multi-faceted and complex strategy, significant progress has been made across all aspects of the programme including securing an additional £15.600m of Council capital funding to fulfil the programme. New and creative ways of working have been developed and the strategy is still on course for full implementation by 2024.
- 5.2 The capital building programme has continued to progress despite the extensive impact of Covid-19, global uncertainty in the construction industry and a significant increase in health and safety requirements on building sites. Twelve of the fourteen schools are actively engaged in the pre-construction phase of their planned development in accordance with the projected timeline for the programme. Boston Endeavour Academy, Willoughby Academy, The Eresby School and St Bernard's School are live construction sites with completion expected in the next 12 months. Whilst some delays have been inevitable as the LA, schools and our construction partners adapted to new ways of working, the programme is on track to be implemented in five years from approval as set out in the original strategy.
- 5.3 In order for all schools to be all needs operational, the support systems of workforce workstreams have made significant progress in the last 12 months; an approved Special Schools Reorganisation Policy and Health Memorandum of Understanding with both documents ready to be launched in each school as they begin to meet all needs, a workforce development model has been approved and is due to be implemented to benefit staff in special schools by September 2021 and a prototype of the Specialist Community Led Panels being held in May and July 2021 with a view to countywide roll-out from September 2021. In addition, all special schools joined up to the Lincolnshire Community Equipment Services contract. This progress has been made against a backdrop of Covid-19 uncertainty and in an environment where priority had to be given to educating children in a safe and secure environment amidst a global pandemic.

## 6. Consultation

### a) Risks and Impact Analysis

- 6.1 It is important to note the complexity and magnitude of this programme and appreciate the aspirations of LCC and the SEND Alliance and their 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.
- 6.2 Ambitious programmes, particularly those which involve expansive capital schemes, are always accompanied by an element of inherent risk but this programme has established a sound governance structure to monitor and manage risk, with effective early warning systems in place. Deliverability within the revised budget is a significant risk which is being monitored through existing governance arrangements.
- 6.3 The increase of over 500 special school places undeniably asserts further pressure on the long-term sustainability of an already stretched High Needs block. 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 cost avoidance measures to reduce the requirement on expensive out of county specialist placements, which many LAs across the country are overspending on. It is important for Lincolnshire to continue securing value for money within these demand-led budgets and within the finite funding resource we have available.

- 6.4 Delivering such a complex programme in a time of a global pandemic and Brexit has placed additional pressures on an already high risk scheme. Rising costs due to Covid-19 has already placed a further financial burden on the LA, which is being managed through the LA Covid-19 grant.
- 6.5 Uncertainty and low confidence has been evident in the construction industry due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly within the supply chain. Schools have experienced unprecedented challenges as they have been required to provide quality education to children in their home settings and at school and are now working to ensure all children can access their education in a Covid secure environment. The priority for the LA and Special Schools during this pandemic has been the safety and well-being of the most vulnerable communities and this has inevitably affected agencies capacity to drive forward this programme.
- 6.6 The design of the strategy requires all school facilities to be equitable, in order to meet all needs. There is significant disparity between settings with few schools already in a position to meet all needs whilst the majority have chronic condition issues and undersized sites. The strategy requires all schools to be able to meet all needs and therefore they must all have equitable premises, facilities and resources. The strive for equality places significant risk on affordability within the existing budget as all schemes are starting from a very difference position in terms of facilities and resources.
- 6.7 The majority of school buildings are in poor structural condition and require significant investment before they can be deemed ready for development. The need to address condition issues has placed a financial risk on the scheme which could not have been accounted for before detailed surveys had been undertaken.
- 6.8 The construction programme is a collection of fourteen interdependent capital projects. It is highly complex because each project is unique and requires a different property solution, whilst delivering the overarching objectives of the strategy.
- 6.9 Each scheme and school is entirely dependent upon each other, with the strategic model being developed so that all must provide an equitable offer and be equally committed to delivering the strategy. If one school breaks rank, the collaboration could fail. With a mixed economy of Academies and Maintained schools joined together to implement all needs education, though all with a varying range of need and requirements, it is a precarious programme to bring to fruition.
- 6.10 However, implementation of the capital build programme has continued with the same impetus and drive as it did in pre-lockdown, though it has been inevitable that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought about delays on the construction schemes.

- 6.11 Decision making for the strategy based on a foundation of sound governance with multiple opportunities for scrutiny and challenge. This council led programme has robust project management with strong key stakeholder involvement, spanning both Children's Services and Corporate Property directorates. As a result of this robust project governance, it has been possible to highlight rising costs as an early warning, enabling all parties to seek a viable resolution in a timely manner
- 6.12 All capital schemes are subject to scrutiny by Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee prior to approval by the Council Leader, before main works contracts can be progressed. This ensures all schemes are subject to enhanced scrutiny considering suitability and value for money.
- 6.13 The SEND Strategy Governance Board, chaired by the Deputy Leader of LCC and Executive Portfolio Holder, reviews each scheme on a bi-monthly basis to monitor progress and any emerging risk issues.
- 6.14 As a collaboratively developed strategy, the SEND Alliance Project Board has oversight of strategic implementation. It provides the rigorous review of the programme, strategic leadership and is accountable for risk management and monitoring progress.
- 6.15 Corporate Property also undertake rigorous and regular reviews of the Capital Programme with Monthly Programme Board with Assistant Director, monthly individual Project Review Board, fortnightly Project 'core team' meeting with Head of Service and fortnightly technical team meeting with Head of Service.

## **Appendices**

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report

Appendix A Special Schools Outline Summary Timeline April 2021

Appendix B Lincolnshire County Council, Policy on funding arrangements for special school reorganisations, December 2020.

## **Background Papers**

Building Communities of Specialist Provision: Together in Lincolnshire Strategy

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