

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET - JUNE 24th 2010

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

IMPROVING SPECIAL SCHOOL PROVISION ON WIRRAL – PROPOSALS FOR THE CO-LOCATION OF A MERGED MEADOWSIDE AND FOXFIELD SCHOOL AND A NEW CLARE MOUNT SPECIALIST SPORTS COLLEGE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In April 2009 Cabinet gave approval to the merging of Meadowside and Foxfield special schools and their replacement with a new build single special school built on split sites. A new 11-16 provision would be co-located with a local mainstream secondary school and a new 16-19 provision would be co-located with a local further education college – Wirral Metropolitan College.

The re-building of Clare Mount Specialist Sports College is included in the first phase of the authority's Building Schools for the Future Programme.

This report identifies the progress made so far in implementing these proposals and makes recommendations for future action specifically in relation to consulting on potential sites for co-locating the two new schools. Approval of the recommendations will facilitate the scheme remaining within the time scales for the next stage of Wirral's Building Schools for the Future Programme (BSF) – the Readiness to Deliver documentation due later this year.

1. Background

- 1.1 Meadowside and Foxfield are Wirral's two secondary special schools for young people, who experience complex learning difficulties (CLD). CLD describes a range of learning difficulties and disabilities including severe to profound learning difficulties, autism and physical, sensory, motor and medical difficulties. They, therefore, represent some of the most vulnerable young people on Wirral and a group, who will require considerable support during both their school and adult years.
- 1.2 Between them the schools provide for approximately 200 pupils, 65 of whom are in the sixth form. Whilst both schools are well regarded by OFSTED and the local authority the buildings, which they occupy, are not conducive to providing the modern educational facilities the pupils deserve. Also, because of the small size of each sixth form, both schools find it difficult to provide the range of educational and vocational experience demanded by the 14 – 19 curriculum. Hence the decision to merge the two schools and accommodate them in new and purpose built premises.
- 1.3 The proposal to provide split facilities, each co-located with mainstream provision was guided by two main principles 1) the promotion of inclusion and 2) the creation of a developmental pathway for learners through school and into further education, training and, where possible, work. Co-location with Wirral Metropolitan College is particularly key to the latter.
- 1.4 Clare Mount Sports College is the authority's secondary special school for young people with moderate learning difficulties. It is designated for 190 pupils though currently has 204 on role. This is due to increasing numbers remaining on in the sixth form. The authority is working with the school and local college provision to address

this issue.

- 1.5 Over recent years the authority has been working with Clare Mount to seek a re-profiling of its pupil population. This is allied to an increase in resource based provision for pupils with moderate learning difficulties in four of our local mainstream secondary schools, thereby enhancing parental choice, and a desire to reduce significantly the authority's reliance on out of authority provision for some of our more complex youngsters, particularly those with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). It is intended that in the future Clare Mount will provide approximately 100 places for the most vulnerable pupils with moderate learning difficulties and 50 places for pupils with ASD, who previously would have been educated out of authority.
- 1.6 The school building at Clare Mount has been identified as one of the worst of Wirral's secondary school stock and is no longer fit for purpose. Building Schools for the Future (BSF) gives the opportunity to remedy this. Again the authority would wish for any new Clare Mount school to be co-located with a mainstream secondary school. This is partly to do with the criteria laid down within BSF but is more to do with the aspirations for the pupils themselves. The vast majority of Clare Mount's pupils, both now and in the future, will be expected to fully integrate within mainstream society upon leaving school. Co-location will offer opportunities through enhanced inclusion for the pupils to develop the skills they will need in this transition.
- 1.7 For co-location to be effective and for it to achieve the aims set it was needed to be ensured that any mainstream secondary school, which was to be involved would have to do so voluntarily and to share the values and aspirations of the project. To achieve this and in close collaboration with the head teachers and governors of Foxfield, Meadowside and Clare Mount all head teachers of Wirral's mainstream secondary schools were invited to submit expressions of interest in one of the two new special schools being co-located with their own. In all five such expressions of interest were received, which was later reduced to four. These were then considered by a panel consisting of officers of the Children and Young People's Department, the head teachers and chairs of governors of the three special schools and an advisor from the council's planning department. Following this it was to decide to further explore the co-location of Clare Mount with Wallasey School and Meadowside/Foxfield with Woodchurch High.
- 1.8 Further discussions have taken place with the head teachers and governors of all the schools involved and these have now reached the point where this a need to consult more widely, especially with parents/carers, staff and local residents before progressing the projects further.
- 1.9 Discussions regarding the co-location of a 16-19 CLD provision, co-located with Wirral Metropolitan College are still ongoing.

2. Risk Assessment

- 2.1 The most significant risk to both projects, as they are both intended to be funded via the authority's BSF programme, is the withdrawal of central government funding. Work is about to begin on the first stage of the submission/approval process with Partnerships for Schools, which is the production of Readiness to Deliver Document, for which the council has allocated development funding. Progress will be dependent upon the time taken locally to secure agreements and on national timescales and any changes in the BSF programme. Without BSF funding it is difficult to see how these major schemes could be funded.

BSF funding for new projects is currently frozen pending review. The outcomes of this review will guide future action but it is important at this stage that momentum is not lost.

- 2.2 There are further risks associated with obtaining the necessary planning permissions on both sites though current advice is that these are not insurmountable. Before addressing these issues, however, it seems prudent to assess whether there is broad support from key stakeholders for the project through public consultation.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 The costs associated with the recommendations of this report are contained within current budgets.

4. Staffing Implications

- 4.1 Whilst there may be staffing implications associated with the reconfiguring of the pupil profile at Clare Mount Specialist Sports College there are none associated directly arising from this report.

5. Equal Opportunities Implications/Health Impact Assessment

- 5.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

6. Community Safety Implications

- 6.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

7. Local Agenda 21 Implications

- 7.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

8. Planning Implications

- 8.1 The Woodchurch site may have implications regarding the use of green belt and the maintenance of playing fields. The Wallasey site is identified as lying on a flood plane and issues would need to be resolved with the Environment Agency. Early advice from the planning department would indicate that these issues are not insurmountable.

9. Anti-poverty Implications

- 9.1 The free meals schools index for pupils at all three of the special schools involved in these projects is significantly higher than both the local and national averages. The creation of new build 21st Century co-located schools has the potential to enable pupils to overcome many of the disadvantages they face.

10. Social Inclusion Implications

- 10.01 All three of the special schools work hard to provide inclusion opportunities for their students but are often impeded by the logistics involved. Co-location would greatly enhance the opportunities for inclusion.

11. Local Member Support Implications

11.01 Clare Mount, Foxfield and Meadowside Schools accept pupils from across the borough. Wallasey School and Woodchurch High lie within the wards of Leasowe and Moreton East and Upton respectively.

12. Background Papers

12.01 Improving Primary and Secondary Special School Provision for Pupils with Complex Learning Difficulties 23rd April 2009

RECOMMENDATIONS

That

- (1) Cabinet approve the conducting of a public consultation regarding the potential co-location of an 11-16 new build CLD school on the site of Woodchurch High School, as part of the merger of Meadowside and Foxfield schools, and the potential co-location of a new build Clare Mount school on the site of Wallasey School and approve any subsequent development of the projects through outline scoping and design and addressing of any planning issues.

Howard Cooper
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