

REPORT OF THE INTERIM DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

COMMISSIONING HIGH NEEDS PLACES

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides the background to the upcoming evaluation of high needs places commissioning in Wirral with an overview of the timescale and scope.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Stage 1 National Funding Formula consultation provided early indications that strategic consideration would need to be given to high needs place commissioning in Wirral.
- 2.2 The National Funding Formula has been delayed until 2018-19, however the evaluation of high needs places in Wirral remains essential in order to achieve a sustainable High Needs budget and meet the current and future needs of Wirral's children. There has been a substantial change in the children educated in Wirral special schools and bases, in particular, an increase in referrals for some types of need, such as autism.
- 2.3 The Stage 2 National Funding Formula consultation includes an expectation from the Department for Education (DfE) that all Local Authorities would conduct an evaluation of provision for children and young people with SEN and disabilities, in line with the Children and Families Act 2014.
- 2.4 To this end, the DfE have provided a High Needs Review grant to all LAs. Wirral has been awarded £132k in 2016-2017 which has been carried forward to 2017-2018.
- 2.5 The aim of the High Needs evaluation project is to assess whether the current provision is meeting the needs of Wirral's children, in the right locations, and in an efficient manner, and to enable a strategic view of provision with children with SEN in the context of anticipated trends and the available resources, informing options for change.

3.0 Evaluation of SEN provision

- 3.1 The initial phase will involve a data gathering project, to be co-ordinated by the Senior Officer for Admissions and School Place Planning, examining statistical information from a variety of sources. In order to release time from existing staff and support the project, a temporary 12 month appointment will be made for a Band E administrator.
- 3.2 The range of aspects to be considered include data on SEN locally, trends and likely future changes; evidence on how the current pattern of provision meets young people's needs, including mainstream and special schools and other providers.
- 3.3 The number of places in schools, bases and units was reported to Schools Forum on 28th September 2016.

The table overleaf summarises the number of places in schools, units and bases (as at September 2017), and the number of pupils attending schools between 2007 and January 2017.

Schools	Learning Difficulty	Places	2007	2017
Clare Mount School	Moderate	216	201	217
Elleray Park School	Complex	110	61	111
Foxfield School	Complex	133	138	132
Gilbrook School	Behavioural, emotional and social	55	52	54
Hayfield School	Moderate & Communication	120	120	120
Kilgarth School (boys)	Behavioural, emotional and social	55	51	53
Meadowside School	Complex	75	64	57
Orrets Meadow School	Specific	70	63	72
Stanley School	Complex	120	85	121
The Observatory School	Behavioural, emotional and social	55	44	58
Emslie Morgan Academy	Alternative Provision	80	53	96
Wirral Hospital School	Physical & Mental Health	80	51	74
Units and Bases				
Bebington High Sports College	Moderate	25		16
Hilbre High School	Moderate & Aspergers	30		22
Oldershaw Academy	Moderate	20		11
Woodchurch High School	Aspergers	15		14
Townfield Primary	Hearing Impairment	10		10
New Brighton Primary	Language & Moderate	22		22
The Priors CE Primary	Language	10		10
Devonshire Park Primary	Language & Social/Communication	26		25
Bidston Village CE Primary	Moderate	24		23
Woodslee Primary	Social/communication	8		6
Fender Primary	Social/communication	16		16
Eastway Primary	Social/communication	16		16
Riverside Primary	Social, emotional and mental health	8		8
St Michael and All Angels Catholic Primary	Social, emotional and mental health	8		8

- 3.4 An interim report will be produced which will then inform a phase of pre-consultation on options for transformation, involving maintained and non-maintained schools, colleges, independent special schools, Wirral Hospital School and the Pupil Referral Unit and other partners who provide special educational provision for Wirral pupils. This phase will include parents and other stakeholders with the aim of co-designing the vision for high needs provision for Wirral. The lead for this phase of the project will be the Senior Manager for Special Educational Needs.
- 3.5 The outcome of the pre-consultation phase will then be reported to Council's Cabinet, identifying the preferred option(s) to proceed to formal consultation. These will be carried out according to the statutory requirements set out by the Department for Education.

- 3.6 The timescale for the first phase is to commence in May 2017, with the interim report due in October. Pre-consultation with partners will take place during Autumn term, with the intention of submitting a report requesting permission to consult (if required) to Council's Cabinet in January 2018. This timescale will enable the LA to agree the future of specialist provision, including location and size, with relevant schools and other providers from September 2018, which is the first year of the High Needs National Funding Formula.
- 3.7 There may be changes identified that do not require a formal consultation. For example, this might include commissioning additional or different types of places in existing bases within mainstream schools. This kind of change will be implemented at the appropriate time.
- 3.8 The High Needs evaluation project will require the participation and support of all involved schools and partners to collectively examine historic and best practice, and thresholds for young people accessing specialist provision. It will include social care and health, the voluntary and community sector, looking at how we can work with children and young people and their families to achieve the best outcomes within the resources available.
- 3.9 Reports will be made to Schools Forum as the High Needs commissioning evaluation progresses. The view of Schools Forum members will be welcomed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. That the Forum notes the report.**

Deborah Gornick
Interim Director of Children's Services

9.6 Strategic planning

If they have not already done so, having reviewed their provision for children and young people with SEN and disabilities, local authorities should develop and publish strategic plans that set out how such provision should be made, using the high needs funding they expect to receive in future, in a way that works for parents and young people. They need to make sure the pattern of provision is suitable to meet changing needs, that parents and young people find it attractive, and that it will be affordable within future allocations.

These plans should cover the special educational provision offered by early years providers, mainstream and special schools (including academies, and non-maintained and independent special schools), and the range of post-16 institutions (including further education and sixth form colleges, and special post-16 institutions) and the way in which those mainstream and special schools and other institutions access the training and workforce development relating to SEN and disabilities they need. They should be developed in consultation with neighbouring authorities, particularly where children with SEN and disabilities from one local authority area receive their special provision in another.

Such strategic plans might include, for example:

- measures to support mainstream schools in meeting the SEN of a wider range of pupils, for example through workforce training or clear routes to access specialist expertise
- changes to the focus of existing specialist places, to cater for different or more complex needs
- the creation or expansion of specialist provision attached to mainstream schools (special units or resourced provision)
- identification of the need to create or expand special schools
- strategic engagement with specialist providers in the non-maintained and independent sector, to make sure that the places they are offering reflect the changing needs of children and young people

Many local authorities have carried out such reviews and planning recently or are currently consulting with providers, parents and young people, to explore the extent to which special provision needs to be adjusted. In sections 9.7 and 9.8 below we set out the financial support that is available so that all local authorities can take forward their reviews and preparation of strategic plans.

9.7 High needs strategic planning fund

We have allocated £23 million of additional funding in 2016-17, to increase local authorities' capacity to undertake this strategic review and planning activity. We intend that this high needs strategic planning fund will be used both to fund high-quality collaborative review and planning of special provision (where appropriate, jointly with neighbouring authorities) and, particularly where such review and planning work has already been undertaken along the lines envisaged, to help implement the outcomes of the reviews.

The funding has already been distributed to local authorities, as it is anticipated that most authorities will wish to start or develop their review and planning as soon as possible, if they have not already done so. As the funding will not be ring-fenced they will be able to carry

forward the funding for spending in 2017 to 18. We will not only expect a review to be carried out (if one has not already been done) but also, to encourage transparency and engagement with local communities on these issues, for the outcome to be published. And we will of course expect the review to lead to changes that are deliverable in practice and implemented effectively, with support from the local community of parents, schools and other institutions.

We have published details of the level of allocations of this [strategic planning fund](#). Also on that webpage we have published a benchmarking tool so that local authorities can compare their high needs spending with that of other local authorities, and seek out good practice in organising special provision elsewhere. We will develop this benchmarking tool and other guidance material in response to feedback and demand from local authorities.