

Wiltshire Council

Children's Select Committee

Date: 5 September 2017

Special Schools – Going Forward

Purpose of Report

1. To provide Children's Select Committee with an overview of the work undertaken since January 2016 on securing appropriate and adequate special school provision for children and young people in Wiltshire.

Background

2. The local authority retains strategic responsibility for commissioning and securing provision to meet children and young people's identified special education needs. The local authority will also retain responsibility for the oversight and management of the High Needs Block (HNB) of the Dedicated Schools Grant.
3. The local authority has been in active discussion with Wiltshire's special schools since January 2016 regarding the potential to re-shape provision, including the potential for a Multi-Academy Trust involving a number of special schools working together, to better enable the needs of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities to be met.
4. During this time, special schools were asked to consider a number of potential options to better secure the future of special schools. Special schools set out a proposal to form a Special School Collaborative Partnership (SSCP) with the potential for each special school to join a Multi-Academy Trust that also involved mainstream schools.
5. As a number of concerns and questions remained for both parties, the local authority proposed – at a meeting held in late January – to set up a joint steering group, supported by a specialist SEN consultant (who would be appointed for a period of 3 months and paid for by a Department for Education grant). The agreed terms of reference are listed below.

Working in partnership, the local authority and special schools wish to secure the best possible special school provision, and achieve the best possible outcomes for all children and young people with special educational needs (including those in mainstream and early years provision), within the available resources of the high needs block.

The purpose of the WASSPP¹ Steering Group is to make proposals which will enable the development of a dynamic, fit for purpose and sustainable model of special school provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in Wiltshire and which will support the delivery of the SEND Strategy.

6. This work has now concluded and the rest of this paper draws out key findings and summarises the consultant's recommendations.

Main Considerations for the Council

7. The SEN consultant has produced a detailed report set out under Context and Challenges, Conclusions & Recommendations. The local authority accepts the main key findings and the data analysis on future need and most of the recommendations.

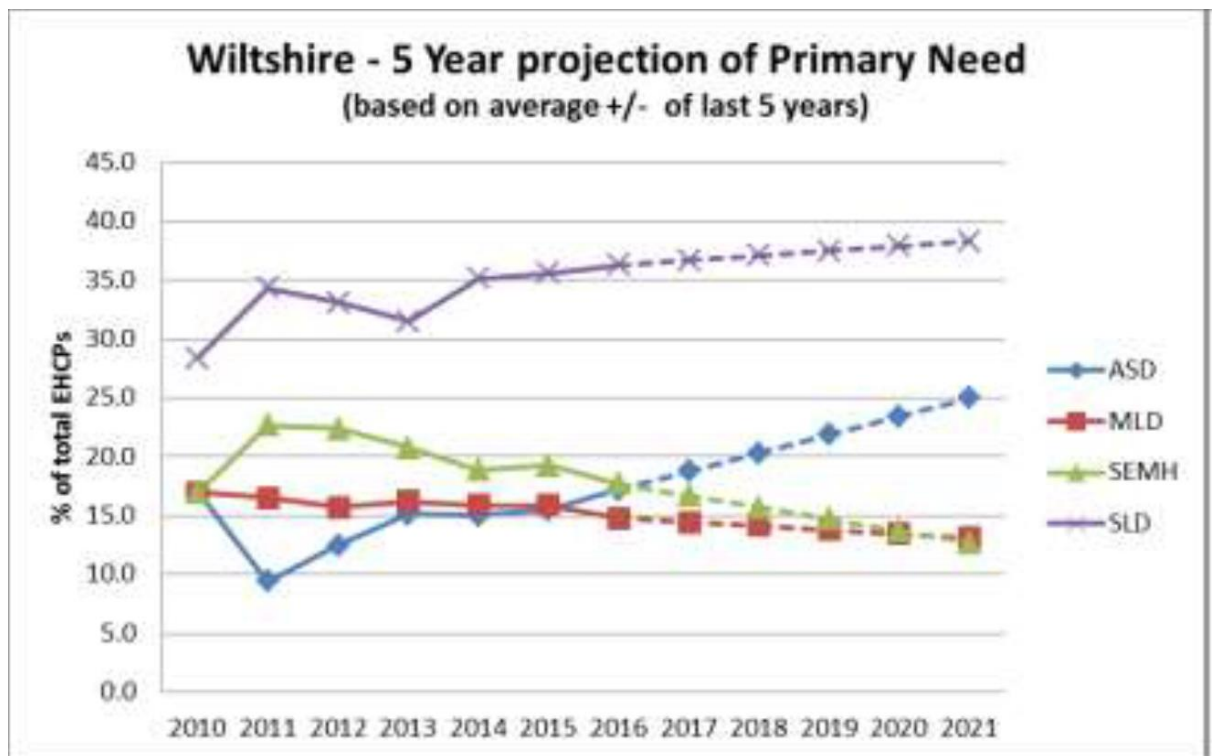
Context & Challenges

8. Introduction of the Children and Families Act 2014 – increased expectation from both the Department of Education and from parent carers.
9. The extent of the pressures on Wiltshire's High Needs Block is acknowledged, in particular that the HNB funding is not census driven (as it is in the mainstream schools' block of funding).
10. Pressures on local authority transport budget because of SEN travel costs. Some children have to travel significant distances to attend a school that can meet their educational needs.
11. Current special school places under intense pressure (apart from provision for children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs at Downlands where numbers have fallen), birth rate between 2005 -11 rose, and may be rising again.
12. Estate – some special schools on very constricted sites, others with unused facilities. All special schools have been assessed as requiring capital investment

¹ Wiltshire Special School Partnership Proposal

to secure building condition. Local authority no longer has access to capital to support this work.

13. High Independent Special School/ Post 16 provision spend driven by gaps in local provision and geographical positioning of local provision. For post 16 provision, significant progress has been made in increasing local education places through an effective partnership with Wiltshire College but some children with very significant special educational needs remain in independent special school provision once they reach 16 or 18.
14. Educational outcomes are not as good as they should be for children with SEN.
15. Impact of core and proposed housing strategy & military rebasing is such that by early 2020s there will be potentially an additional 580 Education, Health and Care Plans issued.
16. The full impact of the reforms has yet to reach a peak – Wiltshire can expect an additional 189 Education, Health and Care Plans per annum for the next three years (total of 567) as this works through the system.
17. An additional 1,000 Education, Health and Care Plans could (barring any other changes) yield demand for an additional 120 – 180 special school places.
18. Financial contributions related to housing developments (from S106 contributions and the Community Infrastructure Levy) has focussed on mainstream education rather than specialist education – difficulties associated with amassing enough demand in individual housing developments. Viability issues connected with establishing small schools.
19. Primary categorisation of SEN need is changing



20. Options for reducing spend within the High Needs Block are limited, with long lead in times. We do not currently have the right pattern of provision to meet the changing needs of children and this is driving unaffordable cost into the system.

Conclusions drawn:

21. There are no easy ways to deal with the projected overspend in the High Needs Block. Any re-organisation of special schools into some form of Multi-Academy Trust would not, of itself, provide an effective mechanism for achieving savings, especially not in the short term.
22. The number of Statements of SEN/EHCPs in Wiltshire has historically been relatively low but this is now changing rapidly as there is increasing identification of children with SEN at an earlier age (which is positive but does carry a cost) and some young adults now continue to have Education, Health and Care Plans up to the age of 25 following the SEND reforms. Funding allocated by central government within the High Needs Block has not kept pace with this changing pattern which is leading to a growth in demand for special school places.
23. High Needs Funding for children with special educational needs who are educated in mainstream schools is not always being allocated earlier enough to

have maximum impact (Named Pupil Allowances and Enhanced Learning Provision in secondary schools).

24. Analysis shows that if the current commissioning process and settings do not change then there will be no reduction in High Needs Block expenditure for at least the next 10 years.
25. Opportunities for reducing expenditure in the future are very limited in scope and would not (even if approved now) have any appreciable effect for 3-4 years.
26. There is available space at some of the special schools which has not been maximised. At others, it is severely restricted.
27. The current number, location and designation of special school places are not aligned to either current or future needs. Current provision needs to be reconfigured and new provision is required.

Summary of recommendations contained within the report:

Short Term

28. A number of improvements to current policy and practice have been identified and these are being addressed either internally, or in partnership with the special schools (through a working group set up post WASSPP).

Medium Term

29. A number of suggestions, including reviewing out of area placements to identify lessons for in county provision, have been identified and – as above – are being worked on.
30. The report suggests that to meet the growing demand for provision for children with severe learning disability (SLD) provision, the LA should consult on changing the designation of Rowdeford from Moderate Learning Disability to SLD, or SLD/MLD.
31. Develop a mechanism for increased collaboration/ support for Resource Bases (attached to mainstream schools) from Special Schools.

Longer Term:

32. New provision is required. Existing provision does not, and will not, meet need.
'The current number, location and designation of special school places are not aligned to either current or future needs. Existing provision needs to

be reconfigured to meet current demand, and new provision is required to meet future demand.’ WASSP report, May 2017

33. The most viable route for securing funding for new schools is via a free school application(s). To achieve this, it is likely that the council will need a strategic partner – an existing Multi-Academy Trust with capacity and a track record.

34. If agreed as a direction of travel, it is necessary to start carrying out the ground work for a Free School capital bid in Wave 13 (thought to be the last such opportunity) immediately . The deadline for submission is expected to be before November 2017.

Safeguarding Considerations

24. Safeguarding is fundamental to all provision and support in Wiltshire for children and young people with SEND including both internally and externally. Excellence in safeguarding practice continues to be at the heart of everything we do.

Public Health Implications

25. There are no specific public health implications arising from this work.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

26. Minimising the environmental impact of SEN school transport is a factor being considered together with making best use of vehicles and minimising travelling distances and times.

Equalities Impact

27. At the heart of all this work is the requirement to reducing barriers, improving inclusion and life chances for children and young people with SEND and their families. There is no proposal in this paper with a negative equalities impact.

Risk Management and Financial Implications

28. There are significant financial implications for the local authority if the right specialist provision is not secured. Proposals to secure the right provision will detail these risks.

Legal Implications

29. At this stage there are no legal implications, however due consideration will be given to any legal implications arising from any firm proposals made to secure the right provision.

Conclusions

30. Children's Select Committee is asked to note the progress of this work. Officers will continue to work closely with the Lead Member for Children's Services, and her Portfolio Holders, to develop firm proposals to address the need to secure appropriate and adequate special school provision for children and young people in Wiltshire.

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Background Papers

The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report:

WASSPP Report v0_13

Appendices

None