

Draft consultation communications plan

Project Details	
Project number	N/A
Project name	Ash Field Academy Residential
Project lead	Clare Nagle

Version	Date	Author	Amendment Details
V1	15.07.22	Sophie Bower-Scott	Initial draft comms plan
V2	24.08.22	Clare Nagle	Amends to draft plan
V3	25.08.22	Sophie Bower-Scott	Amends to draft plan

1. Purpose, aims and objectives

1. To consult and seek views on the proposal to reduce and eventually cease Council funding of the Ash Field Academy Residential facilities from the High Needs Block funding over a 3 year period.
2. To canvass the input of stakeholders into the proposals ahead of presenting a further report and recommendations for executive agreement.
3. To share the proposals and methodology for reducing and eventually ceasing Council funding of the provision and to determine: stakeholder impact and support.

2. Communication risks and challenges

2.1 Risks

- There is a political risk that this is seen as a funding cut for a school who provide specialist education and respite opportunities to pupils with complex physical disabilities and special educational needs within the City.
- There is a financial risk if the Council do not undertake this exercise the High Needs Block will continue to increase.
- There is a financial risk of the school going into financial deficit if the proposal is progressed, unless changes are made to the operation and/or funding of their residential facility - this could include closure of the facility
- There is a financial risk that the Council may see an increase in demand for respite provision delivered outside of the school if pupils are unable to access the residential facility currently offered through the school

2.2 Challenges

- Gaining support and understanding from the school, parents and pupils, and the general public for the need to remove funding.
- Pupils who are not currently eligible for respite provision could become eligible if their access to the school's provision is reduced or removed. This coupled with the need to provide alternative respite arrangements for any pupils already assessed as eligible for respite services would require the Council to increase capacity in its current respite offering.
- The review into the funding of Ash Field Academy's residential provision coincides with a review of their per pupil funding rates and decommissioning of an assistive technology service that the school was being funded to provide.

3. Audience

3.1 See stakeholder profile in section 4

3.2 The focus would be on Ash Field Academy.

3.3 Key messages:

- Nationally, there has been increased demands in High Needs funding with local authorities increasingly under pressure, as a result of recent government policy changes the local authority may not use funds from its resources to fund any overspends in the High Needs Block.

- Locally, there has been increase demand on special school places between 9% - 11.5%. Furthermore, the number of pupils up to the age of 25 with Education Health and Care Plans has increased by 12% - 13.%.
- The residential provision at Ash Field Academy currently receives £407,000 per annum from the Council's High Needs Block budget. This budget should only be used for educational provision. The High Needs Block budget is over-spending by over £6 million each year; it was overspent by £6.1m for 2021/22 and is forecast to be overspent again by £5.7m in 2022/23 despite receiving an increase of £6.4m in additional funding.
- The residential provision at Ash Field Academy is only accessed by Ash Field Academy students. Only 8% of Ash Field Academy's students currently access the residential provision.
- The equitability of SEND educational provision across Leicester's SEND population is a key concern.
- Whilst the residential provision at Ash Field Academy is rated "outstanding" by Ofsted and is of huge benefit to the students who access it, it is not universally accessible to all.

4. Communication methods:

4.1 A questionnaire will be available online through the consultation hub. The questionnaire will pose specific questions relating to the strategy document (see below)

4.2 Specific engagement with key stakeholders including Ash Field Academy staff, Parents, Unions, CLASS, Schools Forum, School Governors, Parent Carer Forum and SENDIASS

Audience	Direct Comms	Virtual Meeting	Social Media	Schools Extranet	Partner Comms	LCC website	Citizen space	Members bulletin
Parents/ carers of special school pupils	✓					✓	✓	
Ash Field Academy Staff	✓					✓	✓	
Trade Unions	✓					✓	✓	

City Mayor / executive	✓	✓					✓	✓
Ward councillors	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓
Special schools (via CLASS - City of Leicester Association of Special Schools)	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	
Parent Carer Forum	✓	✓				✓	✓	
Schools Forum	✓	✓				✓	✓	
Other stakeholders (list required) • SENDIASS • School Governors	✓ ✓	✓				✓	✓	
Media (Leicester Mercury)	✓					✓	✓	
SEND Staff Social Care & Education Staff	✓ ✓					✓	✓	
LCC staff						✓	✓	
Leicester Residents						✓	✓	

5. Consultation Milestones

Deadline	Activity	Lead
12/09/22	Inform school staff	
12/09/22	Inform parents/pupils	
12/09/22	Inform councilors	
12/09/22	Inform Unions, Schools Forum	
19/09/22	Consultation go live	
TBC – Sept/Oct	Briefing for School Governors	
TBC – Sept/Oct	Meeting with Parents	
12/12/22	Consultation ends	
12/12/22 – 06/02/23	Analysis of consultation feedback	Sophie Bower-Scott
09/02/23	Lead Members’ Briefing	
02/03/23	City Mayor’s Briefing	
21/03/23	Report to Children’s Scrutiny Commission	
03/23	Confirm final decision with school	

Draft consultation text for Professionals (amendments to be made for Public/Parent and Carers)

INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This consultation is being undertaken as a result of government policy changes to the High Needs (funding) Block (HNB) whereby the local authority may not fund any part of the overspend with the HNB from its general resource.
- 1.2 Council officers carried out a review of Ash Field Academy's residential provision during the first half of 2022, visiting the academy and speaking with pupils, staff and governors, as well as inviting feedback from parents, in order to fully appreciate the provision's impact.

BACKGROUND/CURRENT FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

National Context

- 2.1 Pressures on the high needs budget is a recognized national issue, which is well documented across local government. The pressure on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) has led to more and larger overspends in recent years. Latest figures from the Department for Education (DfE) show that there are now 354,000 children with an education, health and care plan (EHCP) in England, an increase of 11% in 2018 alone
- 2.2 Local authorities' budget data for 2019-20 recorded that at the end of 2018-19, about half of all authorities experienced an overspend, amounting to over £250m in all, while others were still carrying forward surpluses. The national net position was an overspend of £40m, and authorities were forecasting that there would be a net overspend of £230m at the end of 2019-20.
- 2.3 The DSG is a specific grant, and the conditions of grant make clear that it can only be spent on the Schools Budget, and not on other aspects of local government expenditure. But where there is an overspend on the DSG, local authorities could decide to fund that from general resources.

Local Context

- 2.4 Forecast overspend in the HNB for 2019/20 is now £6m. From 2020/21 the DfE have provided additional HNB funding from 2020/21 nationally and for Leicester the increase is 13% or £6m. This will *only* address the existing funding shortfall of £6m with no residual amount left for further growth.

- 2.5 No allowance has been made in the additional DfE funding for growth in subsequent years and DfE representatives have indicated that there is unlikely to be any further increase in the foreseeable future. Current growth forecast figures demonstrate, that we are likely to see increase in pupils across the SEMH and ASD spectrum leading to a circa £5 million funding pressure.
- 2.6 Direct costs for places charged to the HNB have increased by 9%, 8% and 11.5% in the years 2016/17, 17/18 and 18/19 and forecast to be 6% in 2019/20. This translates to £3.1m, £3m, £4.7m and £2.5m. Numbers of pupils up to the age of 25 with EHC plans have increased over the same period by 12%, 15% and 13.8% which illustrates the significant variation in unit costs of the increasing numbers of pupils with a plan.

Government policy changes

- 2.7 The continued and on-going pressures on the dedicated schools grant (DSG) has been acknowledged by the government, and to address this matter a consultation to review of the current policy was launched to consult on changing the conditions and regulations applying to the (DSG).
- 2.8 The consultation took place from 11 October 2019 to 15 November 2019, via government software to clarify that local authorities are expected to carry forward any deficits they may have on their DSG accounts, and the deficit does not have to be covered by their general reserves.
- 2.9 Leicester City Council was notified on the 30th January 2020, of the published outcome which can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-changing-the-dedicated-schools-grant>. In summary is the local authority may not fund any part of the overspend from its general resources, unless it applies for and receives permission from the Secretary of State to do so and any proposed deficit require a clear plan to bring the DSG budget level.

PROPOSAL

Summary and Scope

- 3.1 We propose to reduce and eventually cease High Needs Block (HNB) funding for the Ash Field Academy residential provision over a 3-year period. This would see the HNB funding for the residential provision reduced by £200,000 in April 2023, a further £100,000 in April 2024, a further £100,000 in April 2025, and stopped by April 2026.

- 3.2 The proposals are intended to ensure equitability of SEND provision for pupils across Leicester City, and would deliver a reduction in the significant overspend of the Council's High Needs Block grant. Reducing this overspend is essential to ensuring the sustainability of SEND provision across the City.
- 3.3 It should be noted at this stage there has been no decision regarding closure of the residential facility. The Consultation seeks to provide feedback to the Council on the current funding model for the residential provision and the proposal to reduce and eventually cease this funding over a 3-year period. Whilst the Council proposes to stop funding the residential provision at Ash Field Academy, this is yet to be decided and may or may not impact the future running of the facility.

IMPACT OF PROPOSALS

- 4.1 The approach outlined above is designed to provide fair and equitable funding of opportunities for our population of over 1000 children with SEND.
- 4.2 The consultation process will allow Ash Field Academy, parents, pupils, and other interested stakeholders to respond and challenge these proposals and provide evidence of any modifications required. We will consult directly with special schools and Schools' Forum as well as other stakeholders.
- 4.3 The proposal will reduce the High Needs Block overspend by £400,000 per annum by 2026 and help to ensure sustainability of SEND provision across the City,

TIMING

- 5.1 The consultation will launch on 19th September 2022 and close on 12th December 2022.
- 5.2 A decision is expected to be made by the end of March 2023, and the school will be informed of the outcome in April 2023.

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 6.1 A full EIA will be carried out following once the consultation has closed and responses are analysed.