

Cabinet

Report Title:	Developing Specialist Education Placements in Suffolk – Recommendations from the Policy Development Panel
Meeting Date:	29 January 2019
Lead Councillor(s):	Councillor Gordon Jones, Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Education and Skills and Councillor Chris Chambers, Deputy Cabinet Member for Education
Local Councillor(s):	All Councillors
Director:	Sue Cook, Executive Director of People’s Services
Assistant Director or Head of Service:	Judith Mobbs, Assistant Director for Inclusion & Skills
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Brief summary of report and context

1. Suffolk County Council has a statutory obligation to provide a suitable education placement for every child of school age and for young people with SEND up to the age of 25 years where appropriate to their needs.
2. In September 2018 Suffolk County Council Cabinet considered the issues relating to the supply and demand for specialist education placements as set out in the education section of the SEND Sufficiency Plan. This identified a significant undersupply of local specialist education placements across Suffolk to meet both current and projected future increased demand.
3. Demand data from education, health and care sources indicated a projected rise of 18% in the number of children and young people with SEND between 2018 and 2020, with a likely continuing increase in demand of a similar magnitude beyond this timeframe.
4. An analysis of current supply data indicated a lack of specialist placements in Suffolk to meet both current and future demand and a low number of specialist placements compared with other similar local authorities. This means Suffolk has difficulty in meeting its statutory obligations and too many children are having to wait a considerable time for specialist education or being placed too far from home. This impacts children’s progress, isolates children from their communities, and in some cases is not good value for money.
5. Cabinet agreed that urgent action was required to develop a plan to address the current and future need for new specialist placements. A set of principles for the future development of new specialist provision was agreed and an overarching model for the development of the new offer. It was agreed that the new approach would be to provide additional specialist places through a

combination of specialist units attached to mainstream schools and new local special schools with only a small minority of children and young people being placed in independent specialist provision for high cost low incidence needs.

6. Cabinet also supported the proposal to establish a cross-party Policy Development Panel (PDP) with immediate effect to develop the policy principles that would sit within the overarching decisions taken at Cabinet.
7. Under the chairmanship of Cllr Chris Chambers, the PDP has undertaken an extensive piece of work and has now reported to the Cabinet Member. This Cabinet Paper provides a copy of the PDP report and sets out the response from the Cabinet Member to the recommendations from the PDP.
8. The PDP has recommended to the Cabinet Member the following:
 - the establishment of a pathway framework for specialist provision in Suffolk that draws on the national Code of Practice for SEND and provides a clear approach to the future development, planning and access of the local specialist education offer for all practitioners and service users
 - the creation of a significant number of new specialist SEND education places through establishing specialist units attached to mainstream schools and new special schools with an in-principle commitment to capital funds to deliver these.
9. The Cabinet Member welcomes the extensive work undertaken by the PDP and in response to their recommendations has set in motion the necessary investment appraisal process to progress the recommendations regarding capital investment with a view to bringing a proposal based on the PDP's report to Cabinet in early 2019 for an investment decision, accompanied by recommendations from the Capital Strategy Group.

What is Cabinet being asked to decide?

10. To thank the PDP members for their commitment and focus on developing a detailed set of recommendations in relation to the future of Specialist Education in Suffolk
11. To note the response of the Cabinet Member to the recommendations set out in the report from the PDP
12. To note, when considering the Council's Capital Programme, the potential need for an additional/new capital investment of up to £45.1m over the next five years to develop new specialist education placements, starting in 2019/20 financial year, subject to the full report setting out the financial implications and outcomes of the investment appraisal, to be considered by Cabinet in early 2019.

Reason for recommendation

13. Suffolk cannot currently provide sufficient specialist education placements to meet the current and future projected needs of the resident population of

children and young people with SEND. Urgent action is needed to address this under supply.

14. The PDP members have undertaken an extensive programme of visits and discussions and having weighed up the alternatives based on the evidence available. The Cabinet Member believes that the proposals recommended by the PDP are the best way to meet the needs of Suffolk residents going forward.
15. The Cabinet Member welcomes the recommendations of the PDP and is committed to taking these forward with a view to bringing a full report to Cabinet in early 2019, to include adopting a framework pathway for specialist education in Suffolk and an investment proposal for the development of new specialist education placements.

What are the key issues to consider?

16. Suffolk County Council has a statutory responsibility to provide an appropriate education placement for all children and young people with SEND resident in Suffolk up to the age of 18 years and where appropriate to age 25 years. While most children and young people with SEND can make good educational progress in mainstream schools, there are a significant minority who need a specialist education placement.
17. Suffolk currently has insufficient specialist education placements available both in terms of volume and type to meet the current and future needs of our residents. Given the time it takes to develop new specialist provision, the Council needs to act as soon as possible to address this shortfall and avert a more challenging situation in the future.
18. All indications are that future demand for specialist placements will increase as the overall numbers of children with SEND grows as a proportion of the school population. The SEND Sufficiency Analysis indicates particularly high growth in demand in places for children with moderate learning difficulties (MLD) and autism as their primary need.
19. The lack of available local specialist placements results in children with SEND having long waits for suitable education provision. This impacts on their progress and means that many children whose needs could be met locally are attending independent specialist schools a long distance from their homes and at additional cost. This does not sit well with what families tell us they want for their children – which is suitable education provision close to their own communities.
20. Cabinet has already taken the decision to adopt a set of principles for the future development of specialist placements in Suffolk and to develop the offer of specialist unit-based provision linked to local mainstream schools alongside new special school provision. This was identified by Cabinet in September as the best way to address the shortfall in placements, deliver on the preferences expressed by parents and providers and achieve best value for money in growth of the offer.

What are the resource and risk implications?

21. To develop the required number of new specialist placements will need a significant capital investment programme from the Council over the next five years. The PDP has estimated the cost of this to be up to £45.1m. A full

investment appraisal is needed before Cabinet can commit to a firm investment programme.

22. Failure to develop the proposed new specialist places will increase pressure on mainstream and existing specialist schools, and further increase the Council's dependence on the independent specialist sector. The limited availability of independent placements is pushing costs up as local authorities compete for limited availability. If no action is taken, this situation will accelerate the rate of overspend within the high needs block of the dedicated schools' grant resulting in a further increased deficit balance going forward.
23. This continued reliance upon independent placements, which are generally located further away from a child's home, is also significantly impacting upon the specialist transport budget which is funded from the Council's core budget as part of school transport funds, a budget which is also under extreme pressure. Creating more placements locally will reduce transport costs significantly.
24. An Equality Impact Assessment was completed in August 2018 and included as Appendix C in the report which went to Cabinet on 11 September 2018: [https://committeeminutes.suffolk.gov.uk/DocSetPage.aspx?MeetingTitle=\(11-09-2018\),%20The%20Cabinet](https://committeeminutes.suffolk.gov.uk/DocSetPage.aspx?MeetingTitle=(11-09-2018),%20The%20Cabinet)

What are the timescales associated with this decision?

25. This matter will return to Cabinet in early 2019 for an investment decision with a view to opening the first new specialist units, where existing accommodation can be adapted for use, from September 2020, with new build facilities following after.

Alternative options

26. The alternative would be not to progress the recommendations from the PDP. Given the escalation of demand for specialist education provision action is needed to develop more new placements. The PDP has worked closely with providers to gain a good understanding of the sector and its challenges, and this proposal is based on that work. If the recommendations were not taken forward this would be detrimental to children and young people with SEND and would create an escalating cost risk for the Council in terms of recurrent funding for independent placements and transport costs.

Who will be affected by this decision?

27. Children and young people with Special Education Needs and/or Disabilities and their families. If Suffolk can develop a better specialist education offer it is envisaged that children will have less time to wait before an appropriate specialist placement can be secured, and if closer to home, this will strengthen their roots in their local community enabling them to build strong local networks as they move towards adulthood.
28. All education and training providers, both mainstream and specialist, maintained and independent. This new approach will provide new opportunities for local schools and other providers to develop their specialist education offer and increase expertise within Suffolk. It will also impact on the amount of specialist places and residential placements we commission from the independent sector, with the aim to reduce our dependence on them

29. Health services, if the Council grows its specialist local education offer and changes the pattern of this it will be necessary for health commissioners and providers to consider these changes as part of their future plans for provision of health services to children and young people with SEND.
30. Social Care Services, the greater availability of specialist education placements in Suffolk will reduce the number of looked after children whose needs cannot be met locally this means more of our children in care living in our Suffolk community. This will be particularly beneficial for adult social care services as young people will have already established themselves within their local community rather than requiring reintegration after a period in residential education away from Suffolk.

Main body of report

Establishment of the Policy Development Panel for Specialist Education

31. The PDP for Specialist Education was established in late September 2018 following the decisions taken by Cabinet. Cllr Chris Chambers, the deputy Cabinet Member for Education was appointed to Chair the PDP. The following members were also appointed to the Panel: Councillor Jack Abbot, Councillor Elfriede Bramley-Crawshaw, Councillor Stephen Burroughes, Councillor Rachel Hood and Councillor Colin Spence.
32. The scope of the PDP was agreed at its first meeting to be: to make recommendations regarding:
 - The future policy for Suffolk regarding the designation of specialist school places
 - The future role of specialist education units in Suffolk (their focus in terms of profile and age and how we create an environment that supports their growth alongside mainstream provision)
 - The future policy for the development of existing and new special schools in Suffolk given the context of the other policy decisions made
 - The future policy for developing additional specialist places in early years and post-16 provision
 - Suffolk's future policy regarding developing a regional specialism in low incidence high cost education provision
33. The Panel met together on five occasions to plan their work, consider evidence gathered and develop their recommendations as set out in their report – Appendix A. Outside of these panel meetings, members participated in an extensive programme of visits to a wide range of education settings both within and outside of Suffolk and held discussions with key individuals and groups of stakeholders. The evidence from this programme of field work was gathered together to inform the collective development of the recommendations reached by the panel. A list of activities undertaken by the panel is provided within the PDP report.

Report from the PDP for Specialist Education

34. The Cabinet member wishes to formally thank all the members of the PDP for their excellent work on this complex and challenging issue and welcomes the recommendations made within the report which is attached to this Cabinet Paper (Appendix A).
35. The Cabinet Member will seek to progress the recommendations made by the PDP and will be bringing a paper to Cabinet in early 2019 with the following purpose:
 - To recommend that Cabinet adopt the Specialist Education Pathway Framework proposed by the PDP within their first recommendation.
 - To recommend to Cabinet a capital investment programme for the development of a substantial number of new specialist education placements in line with recommendation 2 in the PDP report.
36. The Cabinet Member has already initiated the investment appraisal process regarding the proposals for capital investment so that recommendations from Capital Strategy Group can be available to inform Cabinet's decision.
37. Cabinet are asked to note this potential additional/new commitment for Capital from 2019/20 financial year onwards in light of the other decisions being made within this January meeting.
38. Should agreement to proceed with this investment be given by Cabinet in early 2019, it is likely that the capital commitment in financial year 2019/20 will be modest, as this will relate to refurbishment and adaption of existing facilities as opposed to new build investment which, given planning permission and other considerations, is not expected to commence until 2020/21.

Next Steps

39. Officers will undertake the detailed investment appraisal to enable the Capital Strategy Group to provide recommendations regarding the investment decision to Cabinet for consideration in early 2019.

Sources of further information

- a) Cabinet Paper September 2018
- b) Sufficiency Education Chapters and Consultation September 2018
- c) Suffolk SEND Strategy May 2017
- d) SEND Code of Practice 2014