
Meeting: Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date: 21 December 2010
Subject: The Future of Special Schooling in the South of Central Bedfordshire
Proposal to publish Statutory Notices to discontinue the Dyslexia Provision at Priory Middle School

Report of: Cllr Mrs Anita Lewis, Portfolio Holder Children's Services

Summary: The report outlines the amended options for special educational needs provisions that are subject to statutory consultations and therefore do not fall within the remit of delegations to the Director of Children's Services or the budget consultation process. These are the future of special schooling in the South of Central Bedfordshire and the dyslexia unit in Priory Middle School

The report sets out the proposal to publish statutory notices to discontinue the dyslexia provision at Priory Middle School.

Contact Officer: Edwina Grant, Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Children's Services
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Council

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

The provision of effective and efficient local services for Special Education Needs forms a key element in the Central Bedfordshire Children's Services. It aligns with priorities and programmes on Early Intervention and on transforming learning and transforming the Council's relationship with schools. It will support the cross cutting responsibilities for Health that will be determined by the anticipated new responsibilities for the Council in making arrangements for the new Health and Wellbeing Boards.

The proposal relates to the Council's Key Priority:

- Educating, protecting and providing opportunities for children and young people.

Financial:

The most significant medium to long-term financial impact will be in reduction of 'Out of Authority' and agency provision for Central Bedfordshire children. The proposed model of Area Special School, alongside that already available at Ivel Valley School and Maythorn in Biggleswade, could provide an opportunity to bring 3 pupils who are currently placed in out of Authority placements back to local provision, and negate the possibility of other pupils with similar needs being placed out of Authority in the future.

Options 2 and 3 could deliver savings of £91,465 and £197,032 respectively. There will need to be an alteration of the lump sum of the delegated school formula via the School Forum to reflect the increased size and split site nature of both Option 2 and Option 3. A proportion of these savings could contribute to any revisions to the funding formula. Subject to the Council's Asset Management Policy, future consideration could be given to the disposal of one site, and possible future use of capital finance to extend the buildings on another site to create a two-sited school.

Discontinuation of the current dyslexia provision as set out in the report could deliver a full year saving of £58,000.

Legal:

Any change to the statutory operation of a school or designated provision within a school requires formal consultation on published proposals within due process. Additionally, parents may seek to challenge the position of the council on individual cases by application to the SEN and Disability Tribunal (SENDIST). The proposed discontinuation of the dyslexia provision at Priory Middle School will require the publication of statutory notices for a 6 week period. Any options taken forward regarding the future delivery of special schooling will require a consultation with stakeholders. The responses to this would form a further report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to the Executive in January where a decision will be taken as to whether to publish statutory notices for a further 6 week period.

Risk Management:

The SEN "Improvement Test" which is a professionally based quality test, will be applied against any proposed changes. Council officers will need to work closely with the schools to ensure clear communication retains the confidence of parents throughout the proposed consultation and any resulting changes.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

Council officers will work closely with head teachers to involve staff throughout the proposed consultation process in order that staff experience and expertise can be retained to support pupils and their families. The proposed changes to a larger school could allow for better career progression for all staff than is available in a small school.

Equalities/Human Rights:

An on going Equality Impact Assessment is being developed and will draw on the SEN Improvement Test.

Community Safety:

N/A

Sustainability:

The development of local provision to meet local need, matched to analysis and understanding of the changing demographic, is the best way to ensure sustainability.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

- 1. The Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 23 November preferred option for the delivery of Area Special Schooling in Dunstable/Houghton Regis was to merge Glenwood, Hillcrest and Weatherfield schools through the closure of two and the prescribed alteration of one across all three sites initially or the closure of all three schools and the opening of one new school across three or two sites. The Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to recommend to the Executive that the statutory consultation on this proposal should commence.**
- 2. The Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee is asked to recommend to the Executive that statutory consultation should commence on the discontinuation of the dyslexia provision at Priory Middle School.**

Introduction

1. This paper sets out a proposal for consultation in the Spring regarding the option(s) for the development of the agreed model of Area Special School for the South of Central Bedfordshire.
2. If the Executive decides to initiate this consultation, then a further report outlining the responses will be brought to the Executive for consideration. Subject to consultation the planned date of any change would be April 2012.
3. This paper also sets out a proposal for the publication of statutory notices in the Spring for the discontinuation of the dyslexia provision at Priory Middle School to take effect from 1 September 2011. This will also be brought to the Executive for consideration on 11th January.

Background and Context

4. On 6 June 2008, the Central Bedfordshire Transition Task Force considered and adopted the recommendations of the Review of Special Needs carried out by the former Bedfordshire County Council. This included the recommendation to develop Area Special Schools in the Central Bedfordshire area. It was also recommended that specialist provision for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) should not form part of the Area Special School brief.

5. In March 2009, the School Forum agreed the changes to the funding formula for special schools in order to target funding appropriately to the increasingly complex needs of the pupils. The Review of Special Needs identified that mainstream schools had developed their knowledge and expertise in meeting a broader range of needs, and an increasing number of parents have chosen mainstream education for their child, even when they met the admissions guidance for a special school.
6. On 23 June 2009, the Executive agreed to initiate a consultation on the options for the future of special schooling in the East of Central Bedfordshire. On 8 December 2009 the Executive considered the responses to the consultation and supported the proposed merger of Hitchmead and Sunnyside schools to create an Area Special School. Statutory proposals led to the decision to cease to maintain Hitchmead Foundation Special School from 31 August 2010.
7. Related proposals to make a prescribed alteration to Sunnyside Community Special School to become an Area Special School for pupils with complex needs aged 3-19 across the two existing sites from 1 September 2010 were approved by the Executive on 8 April 2010.
8. On 1 September 2010 the new Ivel Valley Area Special School opened across the two sites.
9. In March 2010, the Executive agreed the Education Vision for Central Bedfordshire, with specific reference to Inclusion and Special Needs. This included reducing out-of-authority specialist placements by re-allocating resources to make provision to meet needs locally; developing the concept of Area Special Schools with a broader role for delivering services to mainstream schools; championing the needs of all pupils (including underperforming and vulnerable groups); and supporting federations, trusts and partnerships in developing locally delivered targeted services to support prevention, early identification and effective interventions.
10. The implementation of the Vision is currently being implemented through four area reviews, the first of which commenced in April 2010 in the Dunstable and Houghton Regis area and on which the Committee have received verbal updates. As part of this work, a project group was formed of Council officers and nominated representatives of schools in Dunstable and Houghton Regis. This group is undertaking the early work of analysis of inputs to the review, including data related to SEN and inclusion, of current provision and of the impact of service challenges and new policies developed by the coalition Government.
11. Headteachers of the special schools in this area have been working with Governors and officers to consider the advantages and disadvantages of possible options.

Out of Authority Specialist School Provision

12. 22 children and young people are currently placed in specialist residential schools out of Central Bedfordshire and 2 in non-residential specialist schools.

13. The cost of this external provision ranges from £31,000k to £187,000 for each child, although one particularly complex case costs £300,000 per annum. Some of these costs are shared between Children's Services and the Primary Care Trust (PCT).
14. For the very small numbers of the most complex children and young people, those with very severe learning difficulties, Autism and extreme challenging behaviour, local provision may not be a cheaper option. However, in general, the outcomes for children and young people should be better if they are able to receive appropriate education and care locally to Central Bedfordshire as their families are able to remain involved.
15. For a very small number of children who require a very specialist environment that cannot be efficiently replicated locally, provision in a neighbouring Council may be identified, for example a school with a total sign language environment for those profoundly deaf children that require it. All statements of Special Educational Needs for pupils currently in "out of Authority placements" are reviewed annually. At the time of the annual review, consideration is given as to whether their needs can now be met within Central Bedfordshire.

Area Special Schools

16. Ivel Valley now provides the agreed model of special schooling in the East of Central Bedfordshire across two sites. Ivel Valley school is co-located with the Maythorn residential provision for children with disabilities, which has resulted in the Council being able to meet the needs of some very vulnerable learners who might otherwise have been placed out of Authority.
17. Exploration of whether the integrated approach to the most complex pupils with Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD), ASD and very challenging behaviour currently available between Maythorn and Ivel Valley School could be replicated using the Kingfisher site adjacent to Hillcrest School is ongoing.
18. The area review of Dunstable and Houghton Regis involves Glenwood (Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD) and Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD) 3-11 years), Hillcrest (SLD/PMLD 11-19 years) and Weatherfield (Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) 7-16).
19. As of November 2010 the numbers in these schools are:

Glenwood:	75 including (2 Luton and 1 Bedford Borough)
Hillcrest:	64 (including 9 Luton and 1 Bedford Borough)
Weatherfield:	93 (including 4 Luton, 1 Bucks, 1 Bedford Borough and 2 Herts)
Total:	232

Note: pupil numbers fluctuate and an accurate number on roll will be available on the day of the meeting.

20. 27 Central Bedfordshire pupils are currently attending Grange School (MLD) in Kempston, and 31 attending St John's School (SLD/PMLD) in Kempston, most of whom live geographically closer to Kempston than to Central Bedfordshire special schools. There are 29 Central Bedfordshire pupils at Ridgeway School for children with physical disabilities in Kempston.
21. All 3 of the Dunstable/Houghton Regis special schools have had significantly higher numbers on roll in previous years, mainly prior to Luton developing their own special school provision for pupils with severe learning difficulties.
22. There is an expected increase in the pupil population in the Dunstable and Houghton Regis area to 2031 (plan period) of approximately 48% per age group, based on the latest housing figures. As Area Special Schools will serve catchments beyond the immediate area, housing increases in other areas of Central Bedfordshire will need to be taken into account.
23. Currently 0.85% of pupils aged 3-19 attend special schools, both in and outside of Central Bedfordshire. If the raising of the participation age is implemented, this will have implications for the continued provision for learners who currently attend Oak Bank and Weatherfield schools and leave at 16. As the population increases, an increase will be required in the amount of local provision available in special schools.
24. As set out in the Education Vision, potential models of delivery for education 14-19 and up to 25 for learners who have learning difficulties and disabilities are being considered. Special Schools are now represented on the 14-19 Strategy Group and are working with colleges and Upper Schools to support transition and ensure the delivery of a range of appropriate courses that meet the needs and aspirations of the most vulnerable students. If this approach is successful, more post school learners will be maintained in local provision that meets their needs.

Proposed options for the delivery of Area Special Schooling in Dunstable/Houghton Regis

25. A number of early options were identified, and advantages and disadvantages of these options considered by the special school head teacher group. These were considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 23 November 2010. Further work has been undertaken with the three special schools to agree and amend the advantages and disadvantages of the options.

(a) Option 1:

For the three Special Schools to decide to form a partnership under 1 Governing Body – this is broadly the maintenance of the status quo with some changes to leadership and governance.

The schools would still retain their DfE number, would have separate budgets and would be inspected separately. Federated schools can consider Academy status when DfE open up the route to Academy for non outstanding schools and special schools or if an Ofsted rated outstanding school is in the Federation.

Savings would be minimal.

Advantages:

- The governing body would be taking account of the interests of all of the schools and their pupils.
- This could provide some flexibility for school organisation and delivery of the curriculum.
- The governing body would be able to move money from one school to another to meet priorities.

Disadvantages:

- This may not achieve anything more than is already possible with the existing configuration.
- This would not deliver the proposed model of Area Special School.
- There would be no saving in the “lump sum” element of the delegated budget as set out in the School Funding Formula.
- Although there are no costs or efficiencies on this model, no change could lead to the Weatherfield School becoming non- viable in the future if more pupils with these needs are educated successfully in mainstream provision.

This option is not considered by any of the special schools to be a viable option. Due to the intended retirement of one of the headteachers in April 2012, the headteachers and governors of Glenwood and Hillcrest Schools are in agreement that in order to deliver a high quality sustainable model of special schooling in the future, they would need to come together under one leadership team

(b) Option 2:

To merge Glenwood and Hillcrest into an all age Area Special School through the closure of one school and the prescribed alteration of the other under one headteacher across the two sites **or** the closure of both and opening of a new school across both sites. Legislation requires that competition would be held to open a new school. This option retains Weatherfield as an MLD School.

Advantages

- As most pupils currently transition from Glenwood to Hillcrest it is anticipated that this might be welcomed by stakeholders
- This would achieve an Area Special School in the South of Central Bedfordshire, providing for the mixture of very complex needs and equivalent to Ivel Valley School.

- Due to existing expertise at Glenwood and Hillcrest schools, this would provide the specialist ASD provision currently lacking for Central Bedfordshire pupils with MLD and complex ASD. Pupils with Special Educational Needs who are assessed as requiring this type of provision currently travel to a Bedford Borough School.
- This option could provide a first step towards one Area Special School in this geographical area that would make provision for the South and West of Central Bedfordshire.

Disadvantages

- Closing both schools and opening as one may invoke more opposition if the intent is misunderstood. A clear communication strategy that is led and supported by the affected schools would be required which means that these schools would need to support this option.
- This option is not designed to resolve the lack of post 16 provision for pupils with MLD, although they could transfer if appropriate to the newly merged school at 16.
- This option would not achieve the aim of moving away from separately designated schools for SLD and MLD to a model of Area Special Schools as in the case of Ivel Valley Area Special School.
- This option could create difficulties with admissions as some pupils could meet the admissions guidance for both an Area Special School and an MLD School. There is a risk that some parents from the east of Central Bedfordshire may opt for the MLD school instead of the local provision at Ivel Valley School. This could increase transport costs.
- The viability of a stand alone MLD schools would be an issue.
- This model would not provide an equitable model across Central Bedfordshire.

(c) Option 3:

To merge the 3 schools through the closure of two and the prescribed alteration of 1 across all 3 sites initially **or** the closure of all 3 schools and the opening of one new school across 3 or 2 sites. It would be necessary to undertake a competition to open a new school.

Advantages

- This would achieve the agreed model of Area Special School, and is likely to provide the best basis for long term sustainability and service provision.
- This would be consistent with the Members' decision regarding Ivel Valley Area Special School and provide an equivalent model to that in the east of Central Bedfordshire.

- Due to the existing expertise at Glenwood and Hillcrest schools, this would provide the specialist Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) provision currently lacking for Central Bedfordshire pupils with MLD and complex ASD. Pupils with Special Educational Needs who are assessed as requiring this type of provision currently travel to a Bedford Borough School.
- For those pupils currently attending Weatherfield School for whom it is appropriate, there would be access to school-based provision post 16.
- There would be increased access to a diverse range of specialist resources for all pupils across the 3 sites as appropriate to need and age.
- This would provide a substantive centre for professionals from health and other services to support future provision for children with complex needs.
- The size and designation of the school would provide a model for dispersed leadership that would provide for the growth of future leaders in SEN.
- The size of school would provide an economy of scale that would support recruitment and retention of high quality staff, and provide career development. It would put the school in a strong position for considering future development as a Teaching School.
- This could provide an integrated model for coordinating specialist peripatetic services and outreach to support the most vulnerable children wherever they are receiving education as part of an extended role for special schools. Glenwood School is already the school identified for Outreach in this area of Central Bedfordshire.
- This would provide focussed professional development for all staff working with the most vulnerable children 0-19 and post 19 that supports continuity and progression and aids transition into the next stage of their lives.
- Subject to the Council's Asset management Policy, future consideration could be given to the disposal of one site and a possible future use of capital finance to extend the buildings on another site to create a two sited school (primary/secondary). That would reflect the model in the East Of the Council. It should be noted that should the Special Schools become an academy or form a Trust, then the schools would have ownership of the land.

Disadvantages

- More objections are possible from parent groups and governing bodies if one or more of the school are not in agreement to this strategy, or if the intent of this option is misunderstood.

Dyslexia Provision

26. Central Bedfordshire currently has 1 middle school provision for Dyslexia at Priory Middle School. There are currently 3 pupils in the provision at Priory Middle School, two of whom leave in July 2011. The provision is funded for 7 pupils.
27. When the pupils leave, this arrangement completes guarantees given by the legacy Council that pupils could continue in this provision. Provision is already being made across all schools and the Council has offered training to both teachers and teaching assistants in the accredited Dyslexia training course available through University of Northampton and delivered locally. This course is now funded by Central Government.
28. The Council has provided support and training in delivering proven models of literacy intervention. It is therefore proposed that statutory notices are published to formally discontinue this provision, which currently costs £57,960 per annum. It is also proposed that the school may wish to sell their expertise to Trusts, Federations and Partnerships. This is would be for the governing body of the school to determine and would not be part of a commission from the Council.

Conclusion/Next steps

29. Members are asked to consider this report and recommendation for the establishment of an Area Special School for the South Bedfordshire area and make additional recommendations to the Executive.
30. Members are asked to consider recommending to the Executive the discontinuation of the provision for pupils with dyslexia at Priory Middle School.

Background Papers: (open to public inspection)

Central Bedfordshire Transition Task Force Group on SEN, Children's Services 2008/2009.

Location of papers: Priory House, Chicksands