

Cabinet

27 July 2021

SEND Capital Strategy: Expansion of Beaucroft School

For Decision

Portfolio Holder: Cllr A Parry, Children, Education, Skills and Early Help

Local Councillor(s): Cllr S Bartlett, Cllr D Morgan

Executive Director: T Leavy, Executive Director of People - Children

Report Author: Vik Verma

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Report Status: Public

Recommendations:

That Cabinet:

1. Support the use of the former Wimborne First School site, in School Lane Wimborne, to increase the capacity of Beaucroft School to create additional specialist provision for Dorset children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).
2. Approve the budget allocation as set out in Appendix 3 to enable the project to be delivered and delegate authority to the Executive Director for People – Children to enter into a construction contract at the appropriate time, in line with an existing delegation, subject to the outcome of the formal consultation process and provided the project is within the set budget level.
3. Agree to the commencement of the required 4 week formal consultation period, in consultation with the Governors of Beaucroft School to formally expand the capacity of the Beaucroft Foundation School by more than 10% or 20 places, at the appropriate time.

4. Note that a report will be brought back to Cabinet for a decision on the formal expansion of the school following the consultation process.
5. Agree to lease the former Wimborne First School site to the Governors of Beaucroft School for use as post 16 provision on terms to be agreed by the Executive Director of Place, noting that further legal advice is being sought on this matter.

Reason for Recommendations:

To support the delivery of this project as part of the Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Capital Strategy 2020 – 2025 which was approved by Dorset Council Cabinet at its meeting on 8th December 2020.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The SEND Capital Strategy 2020 -2025 was agreed by Cabinet on 8th December 2020 and committed to future capital funding to a programme of work to deliver increased SEND specialist provision across the county. This was to support the mitigation of the deficit on the High Needs Block and support more children being educated locally in their communities.
- 1.2 The proposal to refurbish the former Wimborne First School premises to use as part of an expanded Beaucroft School forms part of the SEND Capital Strategy and supports the need to provide additional places within the SEND sector, with this particular project focussed on post 16 provision, but benefitting increases across multiple year groups. The project has the full support of Beaucroft School as indicated in their letter attached as Appendix 1.
- 1.3 This paper outlines the proposed work required to make the accommodation suitable for use as a special school, which could provide the school with up to 80 additional places. It also seeks agreement to use the premises for this purpose along with a budget allocation to enable this project to proceed.
- 1.4 The project specifically looks at adapting one of the blocks of accommodation on the site to specifically cater for students with complex needs. This block would be able to accommodate up to 24 of the additional 80 places and has been specifically targeted to this need as the post 16 cohort are those predominately being educated in independent placements. Such placements continue to add pressure to the High Needs

Block, which in certain cases could be supported for more appropriately with more local provision.

2. Financial Implications

- 2.1 At their meeting on 6th April 2021 Cabinet agreed a funding commitment of between £35m and £40m to support the implementation of the SEND Capital Strategy, subject to feasibility studies and further planning and individual projects such as this would be brought forward for approval. Noting the funding already agreed for the project at St Mary's which is known as the Dorset Centre of Excellence (Shaftesbury), this is the first project being brought forward to seek funding from this capital allocation.

The estimated cost of works, and therefore budget allocation required to undertake the proposed works at the School Lane premises to make them suitable for use as Beaucroft College is set out in Appendix 3.

3. Well-being and Health Implications

- 3.1 The provision of good quality SEND local education provision is essential for health and wellbeing of children, young people, and families.

4. Climate implications

- 4.1 It is anticipated that through the delivery of this project it will enable suitable places to be located more locally which will avoid the significant travel implications some pupils currently have to undertake.
- 4.2 As with all property related work climate change implications are always considered and will be addressed where possible.

5. Other Implications

- 5.1 As this project will allow Beaucroft School to increase its capacity by approximately 80 additional places there will be a requirement under the Statutory Department for Education Guidance – 'Making significant changes ('prescribed alterations') to maintained schools October 2018' – to undertake a full consultation as the proposal to expand the School will increase numbers by more than 10% or by more than 20 places.
- 5.2 The guidance requires the Local Authority, as the proposer and decision maker, to initiate a 4 week consultation through the publication of a notice

- to expand numbers, followed by a formal decision through Cabinet to agree the expansion subject to the responses to and outcome of the consultation. The notice will identify and detail the reasons for the change, the extent of the change and the timelines as to when the additional places will be made available. This process can commence once agreement to progress with this project is given.
- 5.3 Revenue costs for the running of the school will be paid from the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). It is anticipated that space made available will be filled by students who otherwise would attend Specialist Post 16 institutions (at an average cost of £55,700 compared to an average cost of a place at Beaucroft of £18,200)
- 5.4 Special Schools may not be funded for post 19 pupils from the DSG. Post 19 pupils may undertake further education, training, a supported internship, or an apprenticeship as an adult learner if it supports the outcomes set out in their Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Schools are not legally set up to provide education for adult learners and therefore cannot supply education to this age group.
- 5.5 As a LA Maintained Foundation School, having previously been a Grant Maintained (GM) School, the Governors of Beaucroft School own the main site in Colehill. It was transferred from Dorset County Council to the Education Assets Board when the school obtained GM status. When GM Schools were abolished under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, along with the Education Assets Board, the school became a Foundation School, with the Governors taking ownership of the school site. It is intended that the site will be leased to the Governors for the school to use it for post 16 provision, however, guidance is being sought from Legal Services as to whether this is the appropriate arrangement due to the status of the school. Legislation may dictate it has to be through the freehold transfer of the site to the Governors.

6. Risk Assessment

- 6.1 Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:
Current Risk: Low
Residual Risk: Low

7. Equalities Impact Assessment

- 7.1 This proposal will increase the number of Special School places available to Dorset pupils, with the intention of reducing the number having to be placed outside the Council area.

8. Appendices

Appendix 1: Letter of support from Beaucroft School.

Appendix 2: Site of former Wimborne First School, School Lane Wimborne.

Appendix 3: Expansion of Beaucroft School – Scheme detail (Exempt Business)

9. Background Papers

- Cabinet – 8 December 2020 – Agenda item 19 Provision for Dorset Children (Exempt Business)
- Cabinet – 6 April 2021 – Agenda Item 7 Capital programme 2021/22

Footnote:

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.

Letter of support from Beaucroft School

Beaucroft Foundation School Specialists in Education



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12th July 2021

Dear Sir/Madam

Beaucroft College is a very exciting prospect. After years of discussion, we are delighted that a feasibility study has been completed and we thank the Local Authority for their vision and commitment to addressing the increasing demand for SEND places in Dorset.

The rationale is clear. There has been a graduated increase in demand for places evidenced by historic admissions panels and volume of direct consultations. Disconcertingly, the vast majority of these referrals are wholly appropriate, and are children who would thrive in our establishment if we had the physical space to accommodate them. Our outreach casework in mainstream schools reinforces this evidence of need. Local Authority data indicates a significant increase in demand for quality, local Post 16 SEND places. Currently, many of these young people are accessing expensive, out of county placements as local Post 16 provisions, such as Beaucroft, are at capacity.

The strategic principle is invest to save. Naturally, a preferable, local, outstanding Post 16 provision is essential for the young people and their families, as well as being a long term, cost effective solution.

We believe the town centre location of the Wimbome First School site is an excellent, one-off opportunity to base our Post 16 provision. A fundamental aim for our students is to participate and contribute to the local community in a relevant and meaningful way. Our very successful community café will thrive with a permanent base in the heart of the community. A shop, workshop and horticultural enterprise will also contribute to enhancing social value and create a community resource the whole town can be proud of.

Beaucroft School has always enjoyed positive relationships within the town and this opportunity will extend these links through further work experience and community links.

Ultimately, we believe these young people deserve every opportunity to thrive and fulfil their potential by playing a meaningful role in their local community. We trust this letter reflects our passion and commitment to this wonderful venture.

Yours faithfully

Diane Makariou / Joe Barnett

Co-Head Teachers



South Central
Teaching School Hub



Site of former Wimborne First School, School Lane Wimborne.

1. Land ownership

- 1.1 The area outlined in red on the plan below is in the ownership of Dorset Council and until June 2020 was occupied by Wimborne First School. The site has been vacant since then with some occasional use being made of the Hall and immediate surrounding area by QE Leisure Centre to run classes from on a temporary basis, due to Covid limitations on their main site. The site has also been used occasionally by Dorset Police for training purposes.
- 1.2 It is proposed to use the whole of the area outlined in red, with the exception of the area occupied by Wimborne Kindergarten on the playing field, for the Beaucroft College proposal.

Aerial Photograph of Site

