

Cabinet

29 July 2025

Urgent Item - SEND Capital Programme For Decision

Cabinet Members:

Cllr C Sutton, Children's Services, Education & Skills
Cllr S Clifford, Finance & Capital Strategy

Local Councillor(s): Cllr R Tarr

Executive Director:

P Dempsey, Executive Director of People - Children

Report author and job title: Paul Scothern, Service Manager Property & Capital Commissioning, Children's Services

Email: paul.scothern@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Report status: Part Exempt

Executive summary (maximum of 500 words)

1. A SEND Capital Strategy Implementation Plan report was presented to Cabinet at their meeting on 6th September 2022. This plan set out 10 capital projects to be undertaken, using both the funding allocated by DC to support the SEND programme as well as Department for Education (DfE) grant funding, under the heading of High Need Provision Capital Allocation (HNPCA).
- 1.1 One of the recommendations from that report gave delegated authority to the Executive Director for Place, in consultation with the Executive Director for People – Children's to enter construction contracts at the appropriate time for projects which were part of that Implementation Plan, provided the project was within the budget level set by the Cabinet paper.
- 1.2 Due to additional grant funding being allocated to the Council by the DfE through the HNPCA the budget available to support the SEND Capital programme has increased. It was realised too late to include an item in the forward plan and too late to include a regular item on the Cabinet agenda that additional projects which have been added to the programme are not covered by the 2022 Cabinet delegation.

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- 1.3 The Council's Constitution enables urgent items to be added to the Cabinet agenda without the usual public notice but only with the agreement of the Chair of the relevant scrutiny committee.
- 1.4 Officers have consulted with the Chair of the People and Health Scrutiny Committee. Whilst expressing her dissatisfaction, she has agreed to this report being brought to Cabinet at short notice in view of the impact upon children if the works do not take place over the summer. She asked for it to be recorded that she does not expect there to be any further repetition and will not agree to further requests for late reports to be added to agendas.
- 1.5 Details of the specific scheme is commercially sensitive and so is contained in a confidential Appendix within the meaning of paragraph 3 of schedule 12 A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Place, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance & Capital Strategy and the S151 Officer to enter into a construction contract for the project set out in Appendix B.
- 2.2 That authority be delegated to the Executive Director of Place, in consultation with the Executive Director People – Children's to enter construction contracts at the appropriate time provided the project forms part of the SEND Capital Programme and the project cost is contained within the overall programme budget.

3. Reason for the recommendation(s)

- 3.1 To ensure no further delays are incurred for the project set out in Appendix B and to ensure the appropriate delegation is in place for future projects which form part of the SEND Capital programme.

4. Background

- 4.1 At their meeting on 6 April 2021 Cabinet agreed a funding commitment of up to £40m to support the implementation of the Send Capital Strategy, subject to further feasibilities and planning.
- 4.2 Further planning work was subsequently undertaken, and a SEND Capital Strategy Implementation Plan report was presented to Cabinet at their meeting on 6 September 2022. This plan set out 10 capital projects to be

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undertaken, using both the funding allocated by DC to support the SEND programme as well as DfE grant funding, under the heading of High Need Provision Capital Allocation (HNPCA), which at that time stood at £7m. These projects would help to increase capacity within the SEND sector and look to reduce the need for high-cost independent placements, which in turn would help reduce the pressure on High Needs Block funding.

- 4.3 Those projects formed the initial scope of the SEND capital programme, and the delivery of those projects was overseen by the SEND Programme Delivery Group, which is an officer group initially chaired by the Executive Director of Place and now chaired by the Corporate Director for Education & Learning. The group oversee the sign off and approval of projects to support the delegation given to the Executive Director of Place to enter into construction contracts, and a Gateway approval process is used to ensure appropriate sign off at the relevant stages of a project.
- 4.4 In January 2024, following an invitation by the DfE, a bid for additional HNPCA funding was submitted by the Council referencing 6 specific projects, including the one set out in Appendix B.
- 4.5 The Council were notified on 1 May 2024 that it would be allocated additional funding to support 4 of the 6 projects submitted, which still included the one set out in Appendix B. The additional funding was added to the SEND Capital programme budget, and progression of the projects has been overseen by the SEND Programme Delivery Group.

5 Alternative options considered

- 5.1 If Cabinet support the recommendations outlined in paragraph 2.1 the project outlined in Appendix B can be progressed and will be able to provide improved SEND provision in the Autumn term.
- 5.2 If support is not given to the recommendation in paragraph 2.1 this project will need to be halted and will likely need to be delayed by a year. This will have significant implications for the Institution outlined in Appendix B as they will have already planned their staffing levels and curriculum based on the project being completed, so not progressing with the project will impact on some of the most vulnerable young people who would be attending this site.

6 Legal considerations

- 6.1 Appropriate procurement route has been followed in relation to this project.

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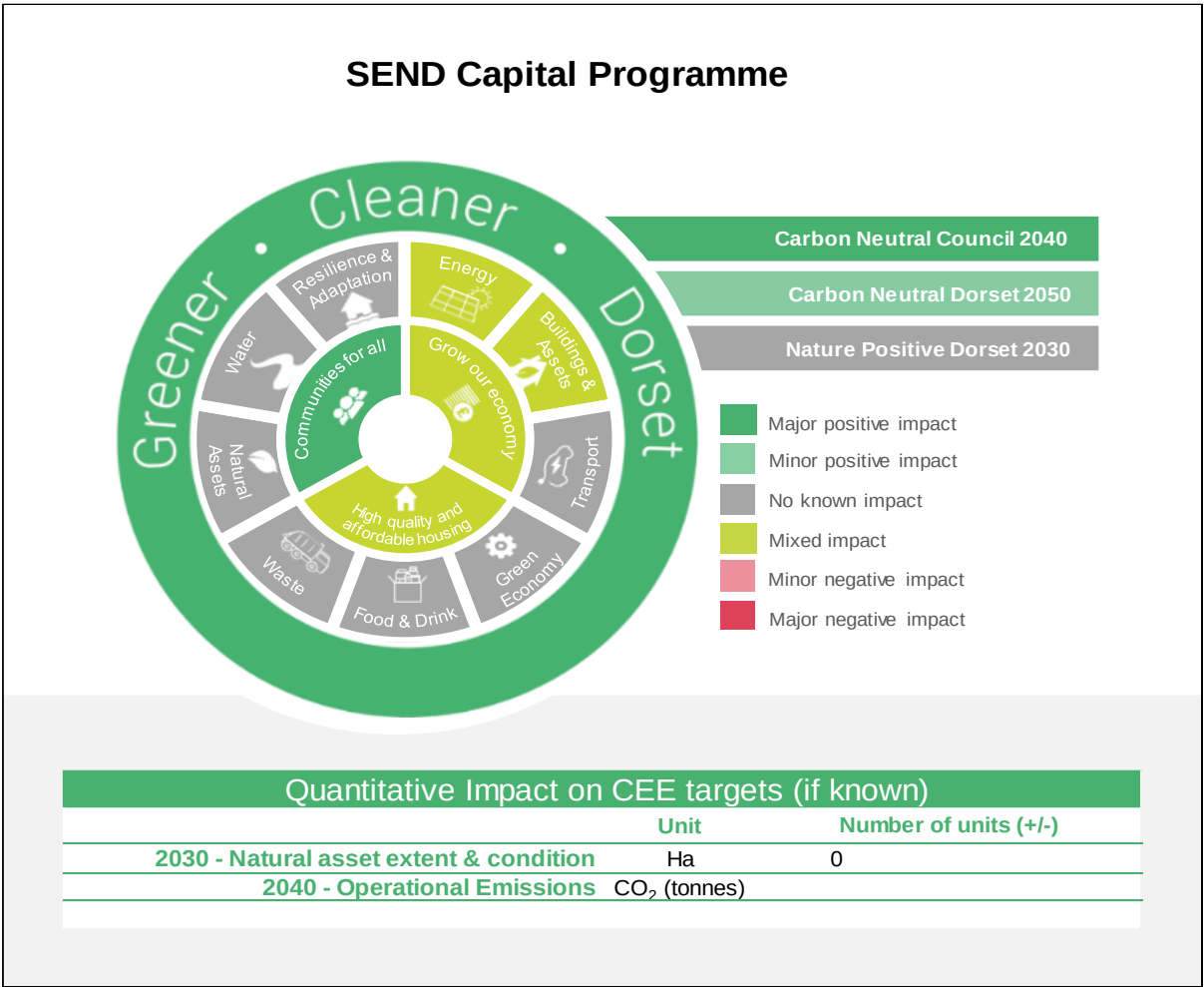
7. Financial implications

7.1 If the project does not progress this year it will require to be re-tendered in due course with the associated costs, and it is likely that there will be an increase in the project costs, which will have an impact on the level of funding available in the overall SEND capital programme.

8. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

8.1 The Dorset Council Natural Environment, Climate and Ecological decision wheel is a tool used to identify the climate and ecological implications of the project.

The results of using the tool in consideration of approving this project are presented below.



The results show a combination of neutral and mixed impacts. The scheme has been designed to carefully considered the environmental impact, although mitigation measures are limited as the project involves refurbishing an existing building.

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For further information see Appendix A for supporting tables for the Decision Wheel.

9. Well-being and health implications

- 9.1 This project forms part of the SEND Capital programme which is increasing local capacity in the SEND sector. Local provision reduces the need for long commutes, which can be stressful for children with SEND and their families.
- 9.2 Being educated closer to home helps children remain within their communities, enhancing their sense of belonging and stability.

10. Other implications

- 10.1 None

11. Risk implications

- 11.1 HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: High

Residual Risk: Low

- 11.2 Funding is in place for this project which was named with the application to the DfE for additional funding. However, a high risk is identified currently as the project is unable to progress. If agreement is given to progress with it the residual risk will be low as the project can proceed.

12. Equalities

- 12.1 Progression of these projects will increase the number of SEND places available to Dorset pupils, with the intention of reducing the number having to be placed outside the Council area and in independent special schools. An equalities impact assessment was completed as part of the original SEND Capital Strategy.

13. Appendices

Appendix A - Climate Emergency Wheel supporting tables.

Appendix B - Project details (Exempt)

14. Background papers

- 14.1 Cabinet 6 September 2022 - SEND Capital Strategy Implementation Plan

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15 Report sign-off

- 15.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)