

Special Cabinet – Meeting held on Monday, 3rd June, 2024.

Present:- Councillors Smith (Chair), Chahal (Vice-Chair), Bedi, Kelly, Manku (from 6.10pm), Shah, Shaik and Wright

Also present:- Councillor Dhillon

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor E. Ahmed

PART 1

10. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

11. New classrooms, land appropriation and car park extension for Arbour Vale School

The Lead Member for Education and Children’s Services introduced a report on proposals for new SEND special school provision to accommodate up to 38, eleven-year-old Slough pupils from September 2024. She highlighted that children were the first priority for the administration and the proposal before Cabinet had been a collaborative effort from across the Council given the complexity and challenges of the project.

The report contained a Part II appendix which was considered and noted during Part I of the meeting without disclosing any of the exempt information. The Leader stated in order to progress the project to provide the new classrooms as quickly as possible the Chair of the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee had agreed that call-in would be waived and the decisions taken by Cabinet could be implemented immediately after the meeting.

The key aspects of the proposal were summarised. The use of SEND capital grant to expand the school would allow for more cost effective and appropriate provision to be made for pupils who had Educational Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) requiring ‘special’ school education. Arbour Vale School had no spare capacity to accommodate these pupils although the school was named as the parents’ preference.

Due to current parking pressures and the planned extra staff and pupils at the school it was necessary to increase parking provision. This was considered by Cabinet in 2017, but not progressed. The need had become greater with the increased size of the school and could be facilitated by land currently held in the HRA being leased on a long lease on standard academy lease terms.

(Councillor Manku joined the meeting)

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The Council had a duty to ensure every resident pupil including those with SEND were offered a suitable school place that met their needs. It was stated that delivering the additional capacity at Arbour Vale School was the best option for placing the pupils in a Slough school and would keep them within the local community, avoiding an out of borough placement. It would also significantly reduce pressure on the High Needs Block and reduce transport costs for the Council if the placement was outside of Slough. In response to a question about place planning in the longer term, the Director of Education commented that SEND place planning indicated a new school would be required to meet projected demand for special school provision in the future, but this would take several years to deliver and it would be necessary to add capacity to existing schools in the meantime.

The Cabinet was informed that the delivery aspects of the new classroom project presented considerable challenges and risks, both in financial and programme terms. Members noted the risks of proceeding or pausing and retendering as set out in the report. Lead Members asked what further steps could be taken to manage the risks including any controls or governance processes to ensure key milestones were met and the project be delivered within the available funding. In response Officers reported that additional project management support would be brought in and a strong project team was in place.

After due consideration the Cabinet agreed that the priority was to put in place the best possible provision for the pupils concerned whilst taking robust action manage the project risks. The recommendations were therefore agreed.

Resolved –

- (a) Agreed that the Council commissions the design and construction of a 4-classroom block at Arbour Vale School on its behalf to open 1st September 2024 or as soon thereafter as possible;
- (b) Agreed that a budget of up to £1.70m be approved for the project to be funded via DfE capital grant for expansion of SEND provision;
- (c) Agreed to waive the Council's internal Contract Procurement rules and approve the direct award for the construction contract to Lansdowne Green SIPS;
- (d) Delegated authority to the Executive Director of Education in consultation with the Monitoring Officer and Lead Member for Education and Children's Services, to finalise and enter into all necessary legal documents, for the timely delivery of the project;
- (e) Approved the disposal of 3,904m² of land as shown in Appendix 2 to the report and being land adjacent to Arbour Vale School at nil value to the Orchard Hill College Academy Trust (OHCAT) on a standard academy lease;

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- (f) Approved a budget of £2.4m for delivery of the construction of a car park on land to be leased, to be funded via DfE capital grant for expansion of SEND provision;
- (g) Delegated authority to the Executive Director of Regeneration, Housing and Environment, in consultation with the Monitoring Officer and Lead Member for Education and Children's Services, to award contract and enter into all necessary legal documents for the timely delivery of the car park project;
- (h) Approved an increase in the GF Capital Programme for 2024/25 of £4.805m comprising unspent Special School Expansion grant resources carried forward from 2023/24 (£1.504m) and additional grant funding allocated to SBC through the High Needs Provision Capital Allocation 2024/25 of £3.301m, to align the budget with the wider SEND expansion capital programme. Future allocations within the SEND expansion programme will be subject to appropriate governance.

12. Exclusion of Press and Public

All business was conducted in Part I of the meeting without disclosing any of the exempt information, therefore it was not necessary to exclude the press and public.

13. New classrooms, land appropriation and car park extension for Arbour Vale School - Appendix

Resolved – That the Part II Appendix be noted.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.01 pm and closed at 6.27 pm)