

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Agenda
Item No.

Report of Corporate Director for People
Simon Leftley

to
Cabinet

on
18 March 2014

Report prepared by:
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Accommodation proposal for Seabrook College

Executive Councillors J Courtenay and A Moring,
People Scrutiny Committee and Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee.

Part 1 Agenda Item

1. Purpose of Report

To update Cabinet on the current challenges around the Seabrook College accommodation and present a carefully considered, costed option for accommodation changes which will enable the on-going improvement of this important statutory function.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet notes the challenges and agrees action needs to be taken to improve outcomes for this vulnerable group of young people including the proposed accommodation changes.
- 2.2 That the Council acquires the Crown College building on a leasehold basis and makes a provision in the budget for the estimated rent and running costs of £100k p.a. to include rent of no more than £50k p.a. which will be funded from the Schools Revenue Budget. Seabrook College will meet the capital costs of any necessary improvements, alterations and set up costs. Officers seek to secure an option to purchase or a right of pre-emption in the lease.
- 2.3 That the Council agrees terms for a lease with Eastwood School to enable the expansion of the nurture provision there and makes a provision for the estimated rent and running costs of £40k p.a. to include no more than £20k p.a. initial rent funded from the Schools Revenue Budget. Seabrook College will fund any necessary adaptations and improvements to make the available space fit for purpose.
- 2.4 That once the Shoebury Centre at the Renown is vacated it is declared surplus and considered for demolition (subject to Secretary of State's approval) pending

disposal and/or the redevelopment of the wider area (including Friars Library and Community Centre).

- 2.5 That Seabrook College continues to operate out of Priory School as its main base.
- 2.6 That the accommodation at Stock Road is maintained for the foreseeable future for vocational courses and reviewed in the longer term.
- 2.7 That agreement to the detailed terms of any leasing arrangements be delegated to the Head of Finance and Resources in consultation with the Executive Councillors for People and Corporate Services.

3. Background

- 3.1 Seabrook College opened in September 2013, formed from a federation of the former Renown Centre for Learning (Pupil Referral Unit) and Priory School. Seabrook's vision is to secure outstanding educational provision for vulnerable pupils with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties.
- 3.2 The opening of the College concluded a long and difficult period in the history of the two establishments. During 2012 and 2013, both headteachers, at different times and for different reasons, had been suspended from duties and subsequently left the employment of the Council. Priory School was inspected and judged to require special measures and The Renown became increasingly vulnerable to failing an inspection due to the slow rate of pupil progress. Interim leadership for both establishments provided some breathing space within which to determine the next strategic steps for this very important aspect of the Council's educational provision.
- 3.3 The College has been focused on school improvement and on the re-structure of the new staff team. This focus on quality and improvement has contributed to the positive outcomes of recent inspections. Accommodation has been a recurring issue on account of the increasing demand for places from the mainstream schools.
- 3.4. The key issue is that the accommodation from which the federated college now operates is presenting serious challenges for the success of the school. On review, an opportunity is available to create a much improved and fit-for-purpose environment for the school, manage the current accommodation issues and release other land for alternative development.

3.5 The Business

Seabrook College is Southend's principal provision for children and young people with social, emotional and behavioural needs. Some children have these needs lifelong, requiring specialist therapeutic support alongside education; others have a short term crisis leading to an inability to engage in formal mainstream education; many children are somewhere in between. Seabrook provides for all of them, through a programme of Educational Pathways, some short-term, some long-term, some through joint work with the mainstream school. Sitting within the College are other key provisions for vulnerable children

and young people including the primary Nurture Bases, the Virtual School and Home Tuition for sick children. A developing aspect of the College's work is outreach for behaviour support, with a significant demand especially in the primary sector.

The Council has a statutory duty to provide education for excluded pupils, sick children and other pupils for whom a mainstream placement may not be appropriate; these are obviously vulnerable groups with specific needs.

Part of the Council's behaviour support strategy is to reduce the number of permanent exclusions that are costly, in providing education, so preventative work supports mainstream schools and helps to improve standards. The preventative programmes offered by Seabrook (pathways) allow pupils to stay on roll and reintegrate to schools reducing costs overall.

3.6 Accommodation

Accommodation is currently provided on three sites:

- The Prittlewell Centre (formerly Priory School) owned by the Council
- The Shoeburyness Centre (formerly The Renown Centre for Learning) owned by the Council
- The Vocational Centre on Stock Road leased by the school until October 2014

N.B. Nurture provision is located at Thorpedene Primary School, Eastwood Primary School and a small number of classes within central Southend schools.

Whilst it would be of enormous benefit to have all provision (with the exception of primary), located on one site, it is recognised that this is not a feasible option as it would be most likely to require the construction of a new school. However, the need to find more suitable permanent accommodation is pressing for the following key reasons:

1. The Vocational Centre at Stock Road is ideal for practical subjects such as car mechanics. Although some works have been done to address heating and sanitary facilities, it is an industrial unit, not a training or education establishment.
2. The Shoeburyness Centre has no outdoor play provision – something identified as needing to be addressed following the recent Ofsted inspection and is unsuitable for the wide age range of pupils on site (this has been addressed by moving some KS4 students to Stock Road)
3. The Prittlewell Centre is fit for purpose but not large enough to accommodate the entire and growing cohorts of Key Stage 3 and 4 pupils

3.7 Current risks

- The outcomes of future Ofsted inspections may be compromised on account of the shortcomings in accommodation
- The College is turning young people away referred by mainstream schools, due to lack of capacity
- The youngest children are not being provided for in suitable accommodation, compounding already acquired negative views about school and its place in their lives.

3.8 Opportunities

- Seabrook College is making good progress and on its way to becoming the flagship provision envisaged one year ago. The recent Ofsted inspection of The Shoeburyness Centre acknowledged the quality of leadership and governance and the monitoring inspection of the Prittlewell Centre concluded that satisfactory progress was being made.
- To provide the improved provision through Seabrook College searches have been made for alternative accommodation and opportunities at Eastwood Primary School, which is an Academy, and Crown College in North Road that is in private ownership. Some initial discussions with the proprietors of these buildings have given an indication to support the Council in using premises for Seabrook College.
- There are cost involved in this:
 - Accommodation at Eastwood Primary - annual rent of up to £20k plus running costs of c.£20k p.a. and some capital improvement costs.
 - Crown College - Lease of up to £50k per annum plus c. £50k p.a. running costs and capital set up costs. It may be possible to negotiate an option for the Council to purchase the land and buildings as part of the lease negotiations and it is recommended that the delegations at 2.7 extend to cover this.

3.9 In order to sustain the improvement, provide an outstanding service to vulnerable children and young people and strengthen the partnership with Southend's schools, it is therefore proposed that the following changes are made to the accommodation for Seabrook College:

1. Primary Provision – re-located to Eastwood Primary School
2. Key Stage 3 Provision – located at the Prittlewell Centre
3. Key Stage 4 Provision – located on the Crown College site
4. The Vocational Centre retained until a suitable vocational partner can be found

4 Other Options

Continuing with the existing accommodation has been considered. Whilst with investment, the accommodation could be improved, this will not resolve all the issues and meet the current service needs of the school efficiently.

Options for alternative sites for primary and secondary have been considered but discounted either because they were deemed non-viable on account of space and/or cost and/or availability.

Should the Priory Day Centre be released as a potential development site in the future, then it is possible that Priory could be expanded there if there is a case to do so at that time.

5. Corporate Implications

5.1 Contribution to Council's Vision & Corporate Priorities

Seabrook makes a significant contribution to reducing the inequalities and life chances of some of the most vulnerable children in Southend and the recommendations are aligned with the Council's aspiration to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and adults.

The Council also aspires to deliver strong, relevant and targeted services that meet the needs of our community and the recommendations are at the core of this aim.

Benefits

- The Shoeburyness Centre (Renown) will be vacated, making it available for disposal (the value of the receipt is estimated at £100K as a contribution to the development value of that site)
- Primary aged pupils will be in suitable accommodation learning good habits connected with being in school (the exact cost of re-furbishing Eastwood is pending, provisionally estimated at c.£20 to £30k)
- Improved management of secondary provision with more flexibility for the curriculum and deployment of staff.

5.2 Financial Implications

Seabrook College currently has two separate school budgets that are funded through School Grant from the Education Funding Agency to an element of the grant known as the High Needs Block. Both are funded by the number of places and a top-up according to the needs of the pupil concerned.

The proposals would mean the Shoeburyness Centre (former Renown) would not be needed for Education purposes and could be released for alternative uses or sold as part of the redevelopment of the area. The Centre is adjacent to Friars Library, Community Centre and car park. Together the assets provide a

valuable potential future redevelopment opportunity. Once the Centre is declared surplus, its disposal will support the Council's wider property rationalisation and could be used to support new housing development. The overall site, with the Shoeburyness Centre, has been internally valued at 575K to 625K having regard to the affordable housing contributions. The site of the Centre accounts for circa £100K of this value.

Whilst there will be a saving on the occupational premises costs at the Shoeburyness Centre, the proposal means that the additional rents and premises costs will create a revenue pressure on the Schools Revenue Budget which would need to be met from the High Needs block (subject to the approval of the Schools Forum).

However, the changing levels of funding in schools may mean that this funding will be reduced in the future and the additional (up to) £50,000 + running costs for Crown and (up to) £20,000 + running costs for Eastwood would be at the expense of other special schools and met from the Schools Revenue Budget.

The costs attaching to the Vocational Centre in Stock Road are currently being met from the Seabrook College budget and the previous head teacher of Priors School took on the lease there. If further premises are required in the longer term there could be additional revenue cost for this too which would again create a pressure on the Schools Revenue Budget.

Feasibility works have already been undertaken by Property Services for the Eastwood proposal and the cost of the feasibility work will need to be met by Seabrook College. Minor works are needed to provide necessary separation and facilities at the school and the capital costs will be met by Seabrook College.

The Crown building is already usable and any alterations could be undertaken over a period of time by Seabrook and through the revenue budget once occupied.

The Crown building is available to lease or to buy. The recommendation here is to lease it to give medium term flexibility to respond to potentially changing school needs and recognising that a more permanent, single site opportunity may present itself in due course however there would be benefits in securing an option or a right of pre-emption for the Council to purchase the land and buildings if possible as part of the lease negotiation. Purchasing the property in the longer term may provide the Council with increased flexibility and a tangible asset for future use/development/sale/leasing at a later date. There will also not be a contractual dilapidations liability at the end of the lease.

The cost of the rent (up to £50k p.a.) would be greater than the cost of financing the borrowing (£c.35k p.a.) to fund the purchase. However, the schools revenue budget should not meet the cost of borrowing for what is essentially a Council asset. Put another way, community schools do not pay a rent for being in their schools which are in Council ownership.

6. Background Papers

None

7. Appendices

None

