

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICE

CORPORATE DIRECTOR MEETING WITH EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

30 May 2023

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek Executive Member approval to consult on a proposal to establish a new special school provision for Autistic children (with or without diagnosis) aged 11-19 at the site of the former Woodfield Community Primary School.

2 SUMMARY

- 2.1 Woodfield Community Primary School closed on 31 December 2022 following completion of the required statutory process. There is a desire to continue to use the site for education purposes. This report considers what that use might be and recommends that a consultation be undertaken on a proposal to establish a new provision for young people with autism using the vacated site and buildings.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In May 2022 the Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills gave approval for consultation on a proposal to close Woodfield Community Primary School in Harrogate from 31 December 2022. The consultation was undertaken in June and July 2022.

The Executive meeting on 19 July 2022 considered the outcome of the consultation. It was agreed to publish statutory proposals in September providing the required period for further representations to be made.

On 25 October 2022 the Executive considered the responses to the statutory proposal and resolved to proceed with the closure of the school which then formally closed on 31 December 2022.

The vacated buildings have been secured and are not currently in use for any purpose. There are ongoing costs associated with maintaining an empty building.

- 3.2 The North Yorkshire Council SEN Capital programme was approved by the Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills on 18 April 2023.

This programme contained proposals to deploy £20.5 million of resource, to enable the Council to address shortfalls in the sufficiency of its specialist provision and ensure that provision matches more effectively with the needs of young people in North Yorkshire requiring access to specialist provision. As part of the programme, officers identified two major developmental priorities, SEMH provision in the north of the county, and secondary autism provision in a central area of the county

The former of these two developmental priorities should be addressed by the development of the free special school in Northallerton, which was approved by the DfE in March 2023. In terms of the secondary autism provision, a resource of £3.5 million has been earmarked to develop a provision – but the capital programme did

not include any specific recommendation about where the facility would be developed.

The Council has the potential to deploy the former Woodfield CP School as a site that could support this development. This report evaluates that opportunity and makes a recommendation to progress to a consultative stage.

4 DETAILS OF THE PROPOSAL

4.1 Need for mainstream places

The sufficiency of places in alternative schools after the closure of Woodfield School was a factor that was considered throughout the statutory process. An analysis of the sufficiency of places in the local area using pupil forecasts to 2032 formed part of the consultation documents and was also included within the subsequent statutory proposals. It was discussed in reports that there was/is capacity within other schools in the local area, although not in every year group in every school

Prior to closure Woodfield School had been accommodating a reducing number of pupils and therefore playing a reduced role in providing capacity. There were only 36 pupils of mainstream school age on roll at Woodfield School in July 2022, with an additional nine nursery aged children.

Before considering alternative educational uses it is important to understand the likelihood of the Council needing to re-establish primary phase mainstream provision at the Woodfield site in the future. This is because the Council has a statutory duty to ensure sufficiency of school places in a local area. To consider this question it is necessary to review three elements of data:

- The change in local school rolls and the future projections, including an assessment of impacts from housing (Appendix 1)
- The demand for local Reception places in September 2023
- The NHS GP registration data for local pre-school age children

Total rolls

The table at Appendix 1 shows that numbers in local primary schools have been falling in recent times.

Analysis looking at Woodfield and its four nearest neighboring schools (Bilton Grange, Grove Road, Richard Taylor, and St Robert's) shows that total rolls have fallen by 107 pupils (1286 -1179), so 8.3%, between 15/16 and 22/23. The table also projects a further fall in 23/24 and continuing down to a total of 1033 pupils in 32/33 reflecting a declining birth rate.

Widening the analysis to include a further six schools on the lower part of the appendix 1 table also shows a significant fall in rolls between 15/16 and 22/23 from 1549 to 1492 pupils. The future downward trend is also notable for this larger group.

Taking the overall result for all 11 schools shows that numbers have fallen from 2835 pupils in 15/16 to 2671 pupils in the current year. Casting forward for the remaining 10 schools shows a prediction that the total number will fall further to 2317 pupils (excluding housing impacts) in 10 years' time.

The bottom rows in the table show an allowance for additional pupils from housing based on the Council's standard methodology of one additional primary aged child

from every four new dwellings. Using officers' expectations of development trajectories there has been a total allowance for 174 additional pupils by 28/29, this being from a total of 695 dwellings that have planning approval. As the table shows the additional pupils expected in this specific part of Harrogate will not compensate for the underlying downward demographic trend and so, overall, officers are still predicting a fall in pupil rolls for the short and medium term.

Demand for Reception places

On national offer day in April 2023 the allocation of places to start in the Reception year in September was completed. This was locally significant as it was the first allocation year following the closure of Woodfield School. Results have shown that despite the reduction in available places there has been no real incidence of local oversubscription with only two schools full to their admission number. Therefore, most local schools are expected to have surplus places available at the start of the coming academic year.

| School | Admission Number 2023/24 | Places allocated for 2023 entry | Reception October 22 |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|
| Bilton Grange Primary | 48 | 34 | 37 |
| Grove Road CP | 40 | 37 | 41 |
| Richard Taylor CE Primary | 39 | 39 | 36 |
| St Robert's Catholic Primary | 40 | 33 | 31 |
| Starbeck Primary | 30 | 29 | 41 |
| Willow Tree Primary | 75 | 45 | 51 |
| New Park Primary | 45 | 28 | 25 |
| Coppice Valley Primary | 30 | 30 | 30 |
| St Joseph's Catholic Primary | 30 | 25 | 25 |
| St Peter's CE Primary | 41 | 31 | 30 |
| Total | 418 | 331 | 347 |

Please note these figures were correct as at national offer day. Although they are subject to change, they do provide a good indication of current demand.

NHS GP registration data

The GP registration data, which is now provided to the Council bi-annually by the DfE, is an important tool in predicting the demand for places in future Reception years, which then fuel the numbers in later school years.

Analysis of the cohort data for the most local area (catchments of Bilton Grange and Grove Road including the former Woodfield CP area) does not indicate an increase in demand for local Reception places in the next three years to 26/27, and indeed are lower than the cohort for September 2023 entry which, as explained above, has resulted in a surplus of Reception places:

| Entry Year to Reception | Local cohort from GP registration data (total children) |
|-------------------------|---|
| 2026/27 | 158 |
| 2025/26 | 166 |
| 2024/25 | 162 |
| 2023/24 | 173 |
| 2022/23 | 161 |

| | |
|---------|-----|
| 2021/22 | 181 |
| 2020/21 | 171 |

The clear conclusion from the whole data analysis shown above is that there is no short to medium term need to re-establish additional mainstream places in Woodfield or the immediate area around it. Even taking a longer term view it would appear highly unlikely, based on current data, that a need would arise in the next ten years. Officers must reference that the length of future forecasting can impact on reliability, especially where housing impacts are concerned, and that forecasts would need to be reviewed in light of any further housing approvals.

4.2 Potential SEND use - Autism provision

Officers consider that the Council's current range of provision needs to be extended to cater more effectively for young people with a primary need of autism who require specialist support to maximise their potential. Those who require a more formal secondary curriculum and associated academic accreditation routes would benefit most from the proposed development.

In recent years, since 2016, the number of children and young people with identified SEND and an EHCP has increased by over 110% in North Yorkshire. The latest position is that there are over 4500 children with EHCPs. The growth in numbers of autistic children and other communication and interaction needs is the single largest area of growth and the Local Authority has a duty to have a range of provision to meet those needs including mainstream schools, resource bases and special schools.

Currently there are 432 children with the primary need of autism accessing existing North Yorkshire special schools. Significantly however, there are 77 children with the same primary need in high cost independent and non-maintained special schools in addition to 51 attending other Local Authority special schools. This is through a combination of existing specialist provision having limited capacity and the educational offer largely catering for children who are autistic and who require a semi formal curriculum.

Within North Yorkshire there are a significant number of children who need a formal curriculum, delivered by autism specialists in a small, low stress environment. By reducing the social and environmental demands, children who are autistic can achieve success, both academically and emotionally. The site at Woodfield offers the opportunity to create this provision and give this group of children access to suitable peer groups and academic challenge in order to reach their aspirations.

This would provide children and families with a more local offer of provision, than is currently unavailable without significant travel, and/or requiring high-cost provision from the independent and non-maintained special sector.

In terms of the business case, analysis of the trends in new independent sector placements has been carried out. It has identified that over the course of the last four years 95% of new placements related to young people with a primary need of autism or SEMH. The financial implications for the Local Authority budget are that independent day sector placements typically cost £65k to £70k, whereas the average cost of a special school placement is circa £23k. The assessment being that the majority of the independent sector placements could have been supported in

academy or maintained special schools if there was sufficient capacity and schools with the appropriate designation to meet the needs of the pupils.

However, the need for additional capacity is also about ensuring that the Local Authority can provide access on a reasonably local basis for more families and meet the council's obligations of providing sufficient provision that delivers good value for money and value for children. These factors strengthen further the case for a new specialist secondary provision for children who are autistic.

The planning assumption is that the new provision would ultimately operate with a capacity of around 80 pupils and would serve an age range of 11 to 19.

Woodfield School site and alternatives

In terms of a geographic location, the local authority has identified a need for a location in a central area – between the A1 corridor and the Ripon, Knaresborough, Harrogate area because this maximises the reach across the county, recognising that no provision can cover the full county area, and locates the provision close to an area where a significant proportion of the pupil population resides.

Currently there do not appear to be any realistic alternative options available for the secondary autism provision in the preferred geographic location without seeking to access sites on the open market.

Officers' assessment is that the former Woodfield School site could form an effective base for this new provision using a combination of the existing school buildings and some additional new accommodation. However, the precise build requirements and timeline for developing any additional new buildings would be subject to a detailed feasibility study.

The Woodfield School site has some significant benefits in terms of its suitability as a site for a new specialist provision in terms of:

Large site, with significant outdoor learning environment area

- Site previously operated as a school site, although requirements for a special school would be different to a mainstream provision
- The existing school buildings have a layout that could potentially be used as the basis for opening the school in a phased way up to the 80 places described
- The site layout lends itself to adding additional accommodation to enable the provision to expand to its ultimate full capacity
- The deployment of the site as a school would satisfy the desire to continue educational use and ensure it does not stand empty for an extended period

Consequently, it is viewed that the Council should consult on a proposal that the former Woodfield CP School site should be utilised as a base for a new special school provision.

It should be noted that the proposals do not propose any change to the activities that are accommodated in the block to the front of the Woodfield site including the Community Library and the Children's Centre.

4.3 Process

The feedback to the consultation (if approved) would be considered by the Council's Executive. The indicative date for that review is 22 August 2023. Should the Executive approve moving forward to establish a new special school then this would be done by following the requirements set out by the DfE in their January 2023 statutory guidance 'The free school presumption – guidance for local authorities and new school proposers'. The overall process should enable the Council to identify a suitable Academy Trust to be the delivery partner who would have the appropriate experience and skill set to operate a successful provision for this specialism in this part of the county. The following section sets out the required Stage One steps to invite proposals, followed by the assessment process at Stage Two, together with indicative dates for each. The target opening date is September 2024, which is rightly ambitious, and certainly the earliest date at which the new provision could open. This target date will be kept under review as the proposal moves forward.

4.4 Timescale

Suggested key dates are shown below:

| Activity | Key timetable dates |
|---|---|
| Approval to consult | 30 May 2023 |
| Consultation period (6 terms weeks) | 12 June – 24 July 2023 |
| Consultation review and approval to publish statutory proposals | 22 August 2023 |
| | Stage 1 – Invitation for Proposals |
| Launch of process: National and local announcements by DfE and NYCC – Competition should be 6 to 8 weeks minimum | 11 September 2023 |
| Deadline for receipt of proposals | 30 October 2023 |
| | Stage 2 – Assessment |
| Assessment of proposals and selection of preferred proposers (shortlist) | w/c 6 November 2023 |
| Assessment Panel Interviews (if considered to be a required part of the process) | w/c 20 November 2023 |
| Recommendation to CYPS Executive Members and confirmation of preferred sponsor. | 12 December 2023 |
| Proposals are sent to the Regional Director (RD) | 20 December 2023 |
| The RD will consider the LA assessments and recommendations and decide on the successful proposer There is no specified timescale for this part of the process. | Stage 3 - Decision by RD (for the Secretary of State) |
| | Pre-opening period |
| All implementation activity, staff recruitment etc | From notification of RD decision - 31 August 2024 |
| | Opening |
| Target opening date | 1 September 2024 |

5 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 5.1 Section 4 above sets out why there is greater need to establish SEND provision than there is to retain the empty site with the intention of re-establishing mainstream provision at some uncertain point in the future. That section also sets out why autism is considered the specialism with the highest need. Finally, comments in section 4 confirm there is no other readily available site in the central area that could be considered as a viable alternative to the Woodfield site.

6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are capital costs associated with providing additional accommodation on site to complement the existing buildings and allow the proposed new special school to achieve its full capacity. As stated at Section 4.2 an amount of £3.5m has been allocated in the SEND Capital Programme although Local Authority officers are cognisant that pressures currently being experienced within the construction sector could impact upon the precise design and capacity that the Local Authority is able to take forward.
- 6.2 There would be pre and post opening revenue costs associated with establishing new provision. However, the introduction of local additional specialist places in the maintained sector would provide an overall saving to the High Needs Block through savings on higher cost placements in the independent sector.
- 6.3 Whilst paragraph 4.2 sets out the differential between average costs of independent school places and local special school provision being between £42k and £47k per place further, more precise, analysis will be undertaken and presented to the Executive prior to any final decisions being taken.

7 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Should it be determined to pursue opening of new provision then officers would ensure compliance with all legal aspects by carefully following the requirements set out by the DfE in their January 2023 statutory guidance 'The free school presumption – guidance for local authorities and new school proposers'.

8 EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 If consultation is approved then a full Equalities Impact Assessment would be presented to Executive at the point at which they would consider the consultation feedback. The foreseeable headline of the assessment would be that a new special school would have a positive impact for children with a protected characteristic.

9 CLIMATE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 If consultation is approved then a full Climate Impact Assessment would be presented to Executive at the point at which they would consider the consultation feedback. The foreseeable headlines of the assessment would be that a new centrally located special school would have a negative impact through emissions from the running of buildings, but a positive impact through reductions in emissions from travel.

10 CONCLUSIONS/ REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

10.1 There is no short-term need for additional mainstream places but the need for additional special school places is high and immediate. There is little value in holding the Woodfield site empty with a view to re-establishing mainstream provision at some uncertain point in the future when specialist provision could potentially be established in a short timescale in the existing buildings. The Woodfield site offers a real opportunity to transform the provision for autism in the central area of the county and it is recommended that consultation would now be appropriate.

11 RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 That the Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills provide approval to consult on proposals that the Council should establish a new 11-19 special school for autism on the site of the former Woodfield Community Primary School.

Stuart Carlton

CORPORATE DIRECTOR – CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE’S SERVICE.

Report prepared by Andrew Dixon, Strategic Planning Manager and Chris Reynolds, Head of SEND Strategic Planning

Action AgreedExecutive Member

Date: 30 May 2023

Action RequestedCorporate Director

Date: 30 May 2023

Appendix 1 – Mainstream school rolls and future projections

Background documents:

Executive report – Woodfield CP School closure – 25 October 2022

CYPS Executive Members report – SEND Capital Programme – 18 April 2023

Appendix 1 - Pupil forecasts to 32/33 including potential impacts of new housing

| | | | | | | | | | Forecast based on January 2023 census NOR | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Schools | 15/16 | 16/17 | 17/18 | 18/19 | 19/20 | 20/21 | 21/22 | 22/23 | 23/24 | 24/25 | 25/26 | 26/27 | 27/28 | 28/29 | 32/33 |
| Bilton Grange Primary | 312 | 318 | 313 | 317 | 313 | 304 | 323 | 315 | 305 | 296 | 289 | 285 | 284 | 267 | 265 |
| Grove Road CP | 290 | 283 | 289 | 296 | 295 | 303 | 292 | 303 | 295 | 290 | 288 | 287 | 286 | 282 | 272 |
| Richard Taylor CE Primary | 274 | 279 | 273 | 277 | 278 | 271 | 276 | 277 | 275 | 272 | 269 | 261 | 256 | 252 | 241 |
| St. Robert's Catholic Primary | 279 | 267 | 270 | 276 | 271 | 277 | 283 | 284 | 278 | 274 | 273 | 270 | 267 | 262 | 255 |
| Woodfield Primary | 131 | 140 | 141 | 89 | 80 | 50 | 37 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total 1 | 1286 | 1287 | 1286 | 1255 | 1237 | 1205 | 1211 | 1179 | 1153 | 1132 | 1119 | 1103 | 1093 | 1063 | 1033 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Starbeck Primary | 232 | 220 | 187 | 192 | 190 | 180 | 207 | 211 | 209 | 217 | 222 | 232 | 233 | 233 | 220 |
| Willow Tree Primary | 478 | 480 | 522 | 534 | 504 | 485 | 449 | 438 | 411 | 382 | 362 | 354 | 319 | 318 | 307 |
| New Park Primary | 170 | 178 | 159 | 153 | 162 | 172 | 164 | 165 | 168 | 176 | 187 | 188 | 188 | 179 | 183 |
| Coppice Valley Primary | 181 | 179 | 198 | 200 | 193 | 196 | 199 | 205 | 204 | 205 | 203 | 205 | 203 | 200 | 191 |
| St Joseph's Catholic Primary | 208 | 207 | 200 | 203 | 200 | 202 | 194 | 201 | 195 | 188 | 184 | 180 | 174 | 169 | 162 |
| St Peter's CE | 280 | 274 | 276 | 284 | 278 | 263 | 281 | 272 | 262 | 254 | 244 | 237 | 234 | 225 | 221 |
| Total 2 | 1549 | 1538 | 1542 | 1566 | 1527 | 1498 | 1494 | 1492 | 1449 | 1422 | 1402 | 1396 | 1351 | 1324 | 1284 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | 2835 | 2825 | 2828 | 2821 | 2764 | 2703 | 2705 | 2671 | 2602 | 2554 | 2521 | 2499 | 2444 | 2387 | 2317 |
| Approximate pupil yield from housing | | | | | | | | | 30 | 60 | 90 | 120 | 150 | 174 | 174 |
| Total 3 | 2835 | 2825 | 2828 | 2821 | 2764 | 2703 | 2705 | 2671 | 2632 | 2614 | 2611 | 2619 | 2594 | 2561 | 2491 |