



RECORD OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The following is a record of the decisions taken at the meeting of **CABINET** held on **Wednesday 21 April 2021**. The decisions will come into force and may be implemented from **Tuesday 4 May 2021** unless the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or its Committees object to any such decision and call it in.

Proposal to amalgamate Ox Close Primary and Oxclose Nursery Schools into one primary school in a replacement new build on the Durham Road site of the former Tudhoe Grange Comprehensive School from 1 September 2024 [Key Decision: CYPS/03/2021]

Summary

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services which sought approval to amalgamate Ox Close Primary and Oxclose Nursery Schools into one primary school in a replacement new build on the Durham Road site of the former Tudhoe Grange Comprehensive School from 1 September 2024, taking account of the Local Authority's duties as prescribed in the Education and Inspections Act 2006 to secure sufficient places and to ensure good outcomes for all children and young people in the local area.

Ox Close Primary and Oxclose Nursery Schools formed the Ox Close Federation in November 2018. Amalgamating the two schools into a single primary school is a logical progression from the federation arrangement. Funding for a new build primary school to replace the current schools was agreed by Council in the Medium Term Financial Plan at its meeting on 26 February 2021. As well as amalgamating the schools on a single site, the proposal also provides the opportunity to expand the number of places to meet the growth in demand for primary places in the Spennymoor area.

Following an options appraisal into a number of potential sites for the new build, the site of the former Tudhoe Grange Comprehensive School on Durham Road, Spennymoor, was identified as the proposed option. An initial consultation was carried out on the proposals between 2 November and 13 December 2020 with Governors, staff, parents, and the wider community.

118 responses were received to that consultation, 49 in support of the proposal and 69 not in support of it. Information on the consultation process was included within the report.

Following completion of the initial consultation process, the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services approved the issuing of a statutory notice proposing to amalgamate Ox Close Primary and Oxclose Nursery Schools into one primary school in a replacement new build on the Durham Road site of the former Tudhoe Grange Comprehensive School from 1 September 2024. During the 4 week statutory representation period, 32 responses were received, 21 in support of the proposal, 10 not in support of the proposal, and 1 who supported the amalgamation but not the proposed location and size of the new build if the amalgamation was agreed. The report outlined the factors that must be considered by Cabinet, as the decision maker, as part of the statutory process.

Decision

The Cabinet agreed to amalgamate Ox Close Primary and Oxclose Nursery Schools into one primary school in a replacement new build on the Durham Road site of the former Tudhoe Grange Comprehensive School from 1 September 2024.

High Needs Block Funding for SEND and Inclusion Support

Summary

The Cabinet considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services and the Interim Corporate Director of Resources which provided an update on spend and pressures on the High Needs Block (HNB) of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), which supports Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and inclusion support services for children and young people. The report outlined the 2020/21 forecast financial outturn position, along with the latest five-year financial plan and project updates, which collectively aim to ensure HNB spending is maintained within budget and the accumulated deficit in the HNB is recovered between 2020/21-2024/25.

There are enduring pressures on the High Needs Block (HNB) of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) which provides funding for SEND and inclusion support services for children and young people in County Durham. There have been insufficient resources to support children and young people with SEND and inclusion needs in recent years. This position is continuing and is replicated in other local authorities.

It is linked to a combination of factors to include rising demand for service provision that meets the increasingly complex needs of children and young people, and the SEND Reforms (2014) that increased support to include individuals from birth up to 25 years of age.

Despite some previous support from the Council's own resources, spending pressures have resulted in a growing deficit in County Durham's DSG account and the cumulative deficit for Durham's HNB stood at £5.7 million at the end of 2019/20. Whilst there was an increase in the HNB allocation in 2019/20 and continued work on the HNB sustainability programme, the latest forecast indicates that expenditure will exceed HNB grant by £1.8 million in 2020-21. This is a slight reduction on the previous forecast and will increase the cumulative deficit position on the HNB reserve from £5.7 million to £7.5 million at the end of 2020/21.

Through successful delivery of the HNB Sustainability Plan it is aimed to ensure that services are delivered within budget in accordance with the HNB five-year financial plan, and this is supported through the SEND transformation work that is either planned or underway. Key elements of this work relate to areas which were subject to consultation and reported previously to Cabinet. The report provided an update on each of the areas of work, highlighting where progress has been made, planned next steps and identifying where some areas of work continue to be disrupted as a result of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. The report proposed that the SEND and Inclusion Resources Board continues to oversee the implementation of the work programme to deliver the proposed changes, the five-year plan and any impact from the coronavirus outbreak.

Decision

The Cabinet:

- a) noted the updated assumptions and forecast position for HNB spend in 2020/21;
- b) agreed to the updated five-year financial plan for 2020/21-2024/25 which includes a deficit recovery plan for previous HNB overspend;
- c) agreed to the five-year plan being regularly reviewed and updated, including allowing for any impacts from the coronavirus outbreak and subsequent recovery period which may be protracted in relation to SEND support needs; and
- d) noted the update on the Investment Support Fund and progress on the transformation projects outlined in the report and proposed next steps.

Health Protection Assurance Annual Report

Summary

The Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Public Health which provided an update on health protection assurance arrangements in County Durham.

The implementation of the health protection action plan is overseen by the Health Protection Assurance and Development Group (HPADG). The direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic is covered in reports from the Health Protection Assurance Board (HPAB). The report picked up on the indirect effects of COVID-19 as to the impact on relevant work programmes. HPADG meets quarterly and seeks assurance on five main strands of health protection activity:

- (a) Screening programmes
- (b) Immunisation programmes
- (c) Outbreaks and communicable diseases
- (d) Strategic regulation interventions
- (e) Preparedness and response to incidents and emergencies

Key achievements overseen by HPADG to date include:

- (a) Improvement in flu vaccination uptake amongst eligible groups
- (b) Extension of Durham County Council flu vaccination to all staff, with much improved uptake on the previous year
- (c) Sustained delivery of national immunisations programmes
- (d) Sustained delivery of the Antenatal and Newborn Screening programme.

All but the Antenatal and Newborn screening programmes have been impacted by the pandemic. The restoration of affected screening programmes was started prior to the second wave and will have been affected by successive waves.

Decision

The Cabinet:

- (a) Noted the content of the report;
- (b) Noted that performance in County Durham for all childhood immunisation programmes exceeds both standards and national averages;
- (c) Noted that the report provided broad assurance that effective processes are in place for each of the key strands of health protection activity;

- (d) Supported the need for further assurance in relation to flu and COVID-19 vaccination;
- (e) Supported the need for assurance on the transfer of Clinical Commissioning Group and Public Health England functions including health protection and screening and immunisation programmes and emergency response;
- (f) Supported further identification and response to emerging health protection priorities and be updated accordingly.

Workforce Strategy 2021 – 2023

Summary

The Cabinet considered a report of the Interim Corporate Director of Resources which sought approval to adopt the Council's Workforce Strategy for the period 2021 – 2023.

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly had a major impact on how public services are delivered and this will have a major influence on the future operating model as a Council. The Council will continue to embrace new technology, as well as respond to national shortages in particular professions, whilst planning to address the impact of an ageing workforce. With the development of the Council's new vision and priorities 2035 and the approach to transformation and improvements, there is a need to have a Workforce Strategy which aligns the management and deployment of the workforce for the future. The development of the Workforce Strategy and associated delivery plan will provide a focus on what the Council needs to do to build the workforce for the future, providing a "home" for all strategic workforce initiatives, all of which will enable the council to drive cultural change across the workforce.

Decision

The Cabinet approved the adoption of the new Workforce Strategy.

Helen Lynch
Head of Legal & Democratic Services
23 April 2021