

# **Children & Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

## **Developments on the Pears site**

17 November 2020

### **Recommendation(s)**

That the Committee note and comment upon the progress on the Pears project and the next steps prior to opening the school in September 2021

#### **1. Executive Summary**

1.1 The purchase of the Pears Centre was approved by Council in July 2019. Following due diligence, the acquisition of the Pears Centre was completed in December 2019. The key objectives of the project are:

- Reduction in forecast High Needs Block overspend
- Reduced placements and reduced spend on independent specialist provision
- Keeping learners in-County
- Reduced numbers of children in residential placements

1.2 A project board comprising of three strategic directors oversees the project. Below this sits three workstream leads and subject matter experts. The three workstreams are education, multi-agency offer and property.

1.3 The education workstream focuses on the delivery of the free school presumption competition from specification to contract award. The multi-agency offer workstream is developing the service model to achieve the intended minimisation of out of county social care residential placements. The property workstream is overseeing maintenance of the site and making the necessary changes for the new school and social care provision.

1.4 Issues were discovered as part of the due diligence process during the acquisition. These were resolved but resulted in the completion date being pushed back to December 2019. The resultant adjustments to the programme mean the planned opening of the school will take place in September 2021.

1.5 The following report details the progress of each of the workstreams and confirms that the project is on target to open the new special school at the beginning of the autumn term in September 2021 and that the project is progressing consistent with the agreed aims and objectives set out in paragraph 1.1.

#### **2. Financial Implications**

- 2.1 The financial business case was primarily based on projected savings reducing the call on the Dedicated Schools Grant (High Needs Block). As such the delivery of the new special school on the Pears site is identified as a key project within the SEND & Inclusion Change Programme. The new special school will deliver annual revenue savings of £1.770m in education (provision and transport) with further revenue savings in social care from the consequent reduction in residential care placements.
- 2.2 Officers have identified that additional capital resources will be required to ensure the school is of the appropriate standard. These are being costed and will be requested through the Capital investment Fund. Additional capital funding for the school will be separated from additional capital for the new multi-agency approach (see below).

### **3. Environmental Implications**

- 3.1 Any adaptations that have environmental implications (eg. additional car parking) will go through the proper procedures (such as applications for planning permission) prior to works.

### **4. Supporting Information**

#### **Establishing a new special school**

- 4.1 In September 2020, Thrive Education Partnership were approved by the Department for Education as the sponsoring multi-academy trust. This followed a free school presumption competition run by the local authority, with a recommendation to appoint the trust.
- 4.2 As set out in the original business case, the school will support 80 learners with autism (ASD) and/or social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, with behaviours that challenge. The population of the school will be built over three years.
- 4.3 The local authority is working with the trust to make preparations for the September 2021 intake. The school is commissioned to avoid placements in independent specialist provision.

#### **Developing the multi-agency model**

- 4.4 The social care workstream has worked through a number of options proposed in the original business case. In January to February extensive market engagement was carried out with over 30 providers. There was positive dialogue with providers. However, concerns were raised about the appropriateness of the residential provision which has led to a focus on developing a more preventative social care, health and education model.
- 4.5 Feedback from Ofsted at this time included that the site as configured did not provide a suitable community environment for children and young people to

live. For example, a number of concerns were raised around the suitability of the bungalows which were felt to be more like a hospital/institution rather than a community home where children could “invite friends for tea”. However, recent dialogue with Ofsted has centred around using the areas for a maximum stay of 72 hours as a preventative measure for crisis situations (rather than for residential care) and indications are that this would be more favourably considered.

- 4.6 A multi-agency workshop was held in March 2020 to discuss other service models consistent with the objectives of the business case. The outcome of this workshop was overwhelming support for an integrated multi-agency provision which could provide an intensive, edge of care, multi-agency service for children and young people from Warwickshire with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs and/or autism (ASD), with behaviours that challenge on the Pears site and making use of the on-site bungalows and administration centre
- 4.7 In July, and in line with above, the project board approved a new approach to the use of bungalows and administration centre. It is considered that the approach remains consistent with the original objectives. The key change is that the site will not be used as a destination for any young person and will merely form part of their journey. The ongoing intention is to support the child or young person through community services.
- 4.8 Plans are now developing for a multi-disciplinary team from social care, CAMHS and education to provide a ‘one team’ approach operating from the buildings at the Pears Centre. The provision will not form part of the new special school but will build links with the school and some students could be supported by both.
- 4.9 This multi-agency service will:
- prevent young people being admitted to hospital;
  - provide a step-down service for young people leaving hospital
  - offering crisis support and short stay accommodation (max 72 hours) as part of a co-ordinated community-based support plan.
  - Support children and young people with SEMH and / or autism move towards accessing appropriate education and community-based support i.e. reduce the use of specialist 1:1 services.
- 4.10 The model being developed is a holistic integrated service offer, using the learning from Transforming Care which saw Warwickshire significantly reduce the number of young people in inpatient settings. It will improve the offer for social, emotional and mental health needs that require joint working across education, health and social care.
- 4.11 A workstream of social care, health, education and commissioning colleagues are now taking this forward.

## **Property**

- 4.12 There are a number of strands to the property workstream including maintenance, the hydrotherapy pool, the external configuring of the site and the internal reconfiguration. The procurement process to appoint a supplier to undertake necessary renovations to the site is underway.
- 4.13 As a local authority asset, the Council is now managing and maintaining the site. For security, a number of guardians are living on the site (also providing an income stream whilst the education and social care provision is developed).
- 4.14 Externally, the Pears site is being divided into three sections: the school and its external facilities (including the grassed pitch and a multi-use games area), the hydrotherapy pool and the multi-agency area to include the administration building and five bungalows. The Property Work Stream team working on the master plan have ensured appropriate fencing and car parking (see Appendix A).
- 4.15 As anticipated, the special school will cater for different needs than the previous school and therefore will require internal reconfiguration in some parts. All potential changes have been identified and will be discussed with the successful trust prior to works taking place.
- 4.16 Once the multi-agency model is finalised, the requirements for any reconfiguration or changes to access to buildings will be identified and follow the statutory planning processes.
- 4.17 The hydrotherapy pool is a purpose-built facility designed for users with physical disabilities and therefore not required for the cohort of young people using the new special school. The local authority is seeking a permanent arrangement with the neighbouring special school which will allow them use of the pool. Some issues in the design of the pool and repairs must be addressed prior to concluding this arrangement.

## **Working with Coventry**

- 4.18 Strategic Directors are to meet with counterparts in Coventry in December to share Warwickshire's plans for the site. The facility is required to deliver the benefits for Warwickshire residents (financial and non-financial) set out in the original business case. However, it is appropriate to explore collaborative use of the space with neighbouring authorities.

## **5. Timescales associated with the decision and next steps**

5.1 The following next steps are planned:

September 2020	Decision on Sponsoring Trust (completed)
October 2020 – January 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working with the sponsoring trust to prepare the school for opening (finance &amp; property)</li> <li>Development of multi-agency approach with revised plan</li> <li>Revised capital funding proposals</li> <li>Planning permissions</li> </ul>
February – July 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working with the sponsoring trust to prepare the school for opening (learners &amp; recruitment)</li> <li>Works on the site</li> </ul>
August 2021	Handover of school to the sponsoring trust
September 2021	School to open

## Appendices

Appendix 1: Pears Site Plan

## Background Papers

None

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The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication:

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Other members: Councillors Dahmash, P Williams, Chilvers, Skinner and C Davies