

Forward Plan reference number: Not applicable

Report title: White Bridge Primary School SEND Provision, Loughton, Epping Forest	
Report to: Tom Walker, Executive Director, Economy, Investment and Public Health	
Report author: Ralph Holloway – Head of SEND Strategy & Innovation	
Date: 16 th October 2023	For: Decision
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County Divisions affected: Epping Forest	

Confidential Appendix

This report has a confidential appendix which is not for publication as it includes exempt information falling within paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended.

1. Everyone's Essex

- 1.1 Essex County Council are required to ensure that every child wanting one has access to a school place.
- 1.2 In executing these responsibilities, the Council also seeks to add value to the educational offer that can be made to parents and carers within a local area, to ensure that learners receive the best possible outcomes from their time in formal education.
- 1.3 The primary 'Grow' model has now been in place since December 2011 and has evolved from the original project-based model into well-established provisions.
- 1.4 SEMH (Social Emotional and Mental Health) Enhanced Provisions are for children and young people who need targeted support for their social, emotional and mental health developmental needs. The children and young people who attend Enhanced Provisions are supported to learn by experiencing safe, stable, and consistent care from adults within a structured, small class environment.
- 1.5 The number of pupils with higher need SEMH (those who may be expected to require a special school place) in Essex Pupil Referral Units has increased and reduces the ability to support schools with short-term interventions for pupils who should be able to return successfully to mainstream education. As a consequence of increased pressure in PRU places there is a significant over-

spend on the alternative provision budget as more individual packages of education need to be purchased.

- 1.6 The aim of the provision at White Bridge Primary is to provide a new stand alone, 8 place primary 'Grow' provision for pupils with challenging social, emotional and mental health needs to reduce the need for special school placements and independent school placements, thus reducing the cost of spend on SEND placements.
- 1.7 Investing in new permanent accommodation for the School will deliver on key commitments set out in Everyone's Essex – Our plan for levelling up the county: 2021-2025. This will include:
 - a) Supporting high quality education outcomes. The new build accommodation will provide pupils with greater opportunity to gain further skills and certification, thus enabling them greater opportunities upon leaving education. Current and future pupils attending the school will benefit from purpose-built accommodation that caters for their needs and enables the school to continue teaching the pupils as well as preparing them for their adult life beyond statutory education.
- 1.8 The project will provide a new building which incorporates initiatives and technologies that aspire to ensure the building achieves ECC commitment to Net Zero carbon in operation.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Agree to the construction of a new stand alone, 8 place primary 'Grow' provision at White Bridge Primary School in Loughton for pupils with challenging social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs by July 2024.
- 2.2 Agree the capital budget for construction and associated project fees as per the profile stated in the Confidential Appendix.
- 2.3 Agree that Tom Walker (Executive Director, Economy Investment and Public Health, EI&PH) delegates to Ben Finlayson (Director of Property, Investment and Delivery) the authority to enter into a construction contract with TJ Evers once he is content that the following conditions have been met:
 - a. A satisfactory planning permission or certificate of lawful use has been granted.
 - b. The construction costs are within the agreed budget and represent value for money.
 - c. Arrangements are in place for the end user(s) of the building to be provided with collateral warranties by the principal contractors.

3. Background and Proposal

- 3.1. There has been a steady increase in the number of children and young people who have SEMH needs in schools both nationally and within Essex. Over the

last 3 years, there has been an overall increase of 15% of pupils with SEMH identified as their primary need at SEN Support and EHCP.

- 3.1. The number of pupils with higher need SEMH (those who may be expected to require a special school place) in Essex PRUs has increased and reduces the ability to support schools with short-term interventions for pupils who should be able to return successfully to mainstream education.
- 3.2. It is proposed to locate a new standalone single storey building to the northwest of the White Bridge Primary School plantroom as this was the site of a former relocatable classroom that was removed recently.
- 3.3. The proposed accommodation in the new building has been determined in discussion with the Academy Trust, and includes two equal sized teaching spaces, staff/meeting/admin office space, a central multi-function area, a kitchen/practical bay, a 'calm' space, toilet provision and plant room.
- 3.4. Externally, it is proposed to construct new hard-paved informal and social areas.
- 3.5. This bespoke building will be managed by White Bridge Primary school, and they will provide the service on behalf of and funded by Essex County Council
- 3.6. This benefits the pupils and the local community, supporting the pupils local to their primary school. It offers a proven solution for Essex strategically as it continues to build on the primary GROW model in place since 2011, as a project-based model into well-established provisions
- 3.7. The project will provide the school with an improved and modern learning environment for the pupils to learn and develop their skill base in comfortable and purpose-built surroundings and will increase the number of children able to access a facility like this in the locality.
- 3.8. The proposals at White Bridge Primary School meets ECC's Strategic Aim of helping people in Essex prosper by enabling vulnerable children to fulfil their potential.
- 3.9. Contractors on the Essex Construction Framework were invited to participate in a mini competition to select a contractor to undertake preconstruction works and then, subject to the outcome of these works, undertake the Works. These responses were evaluated, and winning bidder was TJ Evers Ltd. An officer decision was taken in March 2023 to enter into a Pre-Construction Agreement with TJ Evers to undertake the pre-construction works which were design and planning matters. This agreement does not oblige ECC to enter into a works contract with TJ Evers only to complete the pre-construction phase. These pre-construction works have now been completed. A final cost for the works has now been identified and ECC are happy that the construction costs identified are within the agreed budget and represent value for money. These costs are set out in the Confidential Appendix to this report.

- 3.10. It is proposed that ECC enter into a construction contract with TJ Evers Ltd for the construction works at White Bridge Primary School at the value set out in the Confidential Appendix.
- 3.11. The building falls within the Permitted Development criteria, and this is confirmed by the issue of a 'Lawful Development Certificate' granted by Epping Forest District Council, and the external hard landscape by a planning application to Essex Planning Authority.
- 3.12. No statutory process is required for the new build works at White Bridge Primary School. The proposal does not affect the number of children attending the school.
- 3.13. White Bridge Primary School will work with ECC to ensure as many journeys as possible are by public transport or foot/bicycle. Essex schools work closely with the travel training teams to prepare children and young people to successfully overcome any barriers to travelling independently to school. Independent travel is seen as a vital part of preparing young people for adulthood.
- 3.14. The Project Delivery Timescales are as follows:

Milestone Description	Target Date
Contract Award (subject to conditions being met)	November 2023
Start on site (subject to conditions being met)	December 2023
Works complete	July 2024

4. Links to our Strategic Ambitions

- 4.1 This report links to the following aims in the Essex Vision:
- Provide an equal foundation for every child.
 - Develop our County sustainably.
 - Share prosperity with everyone.
- 4.2 This report links to the following strategic priorities in the emerging Organisational Strategy 'Everyone's Essex':
- A strong, inclusive and sustainable economy
 - A high-quality environment
 - Health wellbeing and independence for all ages
 - A good place for children and families to grow.

5 Options

5.1 Option 1 – do nothing.

Without enhanced primary provision, SEMH pupils will experience a number of problems, to identify just a few:

- Primary pupils will potentially not be able to remain in mainstream schools and may require places in Pupil Referral Units (PRU's). Such places are under extreme pressure across Essex.
- Permanent exclusions, particularly in key stage 2 increase for pupils with SEMH needs.
- Mainstream schools cannot increase their resilience to supporting students with the challenges of pupils with SEMH.

5.2 Option 2 – approve the recommended proposal to invest in new build accommodation and provide a permanent provision for primary age pupils with SEMH needs.

Investing in new build accommodation at White Bridge Primary School in order to provide an enhanced provision for primary age pupils with SEMH needs will allow ECC to meet need locally, in a quality setting and far more cost effectively.

A significant benefit in proceeding with this provision is that the pressure on Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) is reduced despite increased numbers of students with SEMH needs, as their needs are met through this facility.

The SEMH provisions are part of a continuum of provision from mainstream education through to enhanced provision, alternative provision (the Essex pupil referral units) and the Essex SEMH special schools. It is essential that these provisions work together effectively and that decisions taken regarding the appropriateness of provision for individual pupils are taken collectively.

This is therefore the recommended option.

6 Issues for consideration

6.1 Financial implications

6.1.1 Please see the confidential financial appendix for detailed financial information.

6.2 Legal implications

6.2.1 The recommended option will support ECC meeting its duty to ensure that there is a sufficient supply of school places under section 14 of the Education Act 1996 as the recommended option will provide additional space so that the school can accept its published admission number.

7 Equality and Diversity Considerations

7.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty applies to the Council when it makes decisions. The duty requires us to have regard to the need to:

- (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act. In summary, the Act makes discrimination etc. on the grounds of a protected characteristic unlawful.
- (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- (c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

7.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, gender, and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).

7.3 The equality impact assessment indicates that the proposals in this report will not have a disproportionately adverse impact on any people with a particular characteristic.

8 List of Appendices

8.1 Appendix 1 – Equality Impact Assessment

8.2 Appendix 2 – Confidential Appendix

9 List of Background papers

9.1 None

I approve the above recommendations set out above for the reasons set out in the report.	Date 13.11.23
Tom Walker, Executive Director, Economy, Investment and Public Health	

In consultation with:

Role	Date
Executive Director, Corporate Services (S151 Officer)	09.11.23
Daniel Tooke on behalf of Nicole Wood	

