Executive Summary

Consideration of the proposal to establish a Special Support Centre (SSC) for children with social communication difficulties in line with the County Council’s policy on Special Educational Needs and Inclusion. The proposal is for a Special Support Centre to be located at The Littlehampton Academy to serve Education Area Partnership B.

Conclusions

Public consultation has shown support for the establishment of the Special Support Centre. This will not require the publication of statutory notices.

Recommendations

To agree to the establishment of a new Special Support Centre providing 8 places for pupils with social and communication difficulties at The Littlehampton Academy opening on 1st September 2010. The number of places is planned to increase to 12 places when a new building is made available in September 2012.

1. Background

1.1 There are currently 250 pupils in West Sussex Schools’ Partnership Area B identified with the need for special provision for Autism. 16 of these pupils are in primary SSCs attached to mainstream Primary Schools. West Sussex designation for these SSCs is ‘Social Communication’. 94 pupils are being educated in mainstream schools and 140 are being educated in alternative provision. The cost of alternative provision is extremely high. There is one SSC for pupils on the autistic spectrum in Area C, at Secondary Level, which cannot provide places for all pupils requiring such a placement in West
Sussex. There is therefore insufficient provision for places at Secondary Level within mainstream settings.

1.2 The trend over the next 3 years for pupils on the autistic spectrum, indicates an increase in the provision that will be necessary in mainstream settings, plus the demand for additional support and training for school staff, that will be required to maintain the 94 pupils in their current settings.

2. **Discussion**

2.1 There has been much discussion in the County Council about the need to increase the capacity for special educational needs within mainstream settings and thereby decreasing Out of County placements. This approach is both more conducive to supporting families within their local communities and more cost effective. There is a clear demand from parents as evidenced by this consultation including feedback from the Parents Forum (representing parents of children and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities in West Sussex) and the Sussex Autistic Society.

2.2 Setting up the relevant governance arrangements has been an issue as WSCC are providing the capital and revenue funding and working in partnership with the Academy that is no longer a Local Authority school. In order to ensure appropriate accountability, a Client Relations Agreement between the Local Authority and The Woodard Academy Trust will be put in place to ensure that service levels are clearly defined and can be monitored. The Academy will employ the staff directly and admissions will be via statements of special educational need put in place by the Local Authority. The new building will form part of the land assets of the Academy.

2.3 The DCSF have been supportive of the process throughout and will be advised of the Cabinet Member decision in due course. This is the first time nationally that an Academy has worked in partnership with a Local Authority to provide a SSC.

3. **Proposals**

The proposal is to provide 8 places for pupils on the Autistic Spectrum, in a Secondary SSC based at The Littlehampton Academy in September 2010. In order to do this WSCC needs to make provision on The Littlehampton Academy site in a building that is fit for purpose to house the Secondary SSC from September 2010 until the new building is available in the summer of 2012. A capital allocation of £50,000 has been set aside to refurbish part of the existing school for this interim period. A further allocation of £800,000 is proposed to provide a state of the art facility as part of the overall rebuilding and refurbishment of the Academy. The SSC when opened in the summer 2012 will take up to 12 pupils.
4. **Consultation**

4.1 A number of meetings were held with the Woodard Academy Trust to seek initial agreement to the partnership proposal. With this agreement in place, an initial confidential briefing was given (before consultation began on 9th October 2009) to the Cabinet Member, County Local Committee Members, the Chief Executive of Arun District Council, the Teaching Associations and Unions, and the local MPs, Nick Herbert, Nick Gibb, Tim Loughton and Peter Bottomley. A consultation letter was drafted and sent by the Academy to all staff, pupils/parents and governors. This included the date of a public drop in session held at the Academy on 21 October 2009 at 6pm (10 parents attended). The consultation letter was copied by WSCC and sent with a covering letter to the following stakeholders:

- Neighbouring Local Authorities
- The Dioceses of Chichester, and of Arundel and Brighton
- The Learning and Skills Council
- The Primary Care Trust
- Unions and Teaching Associations
- Arun District Council
- Littlehampton Town Council
- The Local MPs
- Local Members
- All maintained schools in Education Area Partnership B
- Sussex Autistic Society
- West Sussex Parents Forum
- All libraries in Education Area Partnership B

The consultation letter is attached as Appendix 1.

4.2 The consultation closed on Monday 9th November but late responses were considered because of the postal strike and specific requests to respond later than the deadline. Six written responses were received via email and letter. These were from Littlehampton Town Council, Unison, The Diocese of Chichester, a parent from the West Sussex Parents Forum, the Sussex Autistic Society and East Sussex County Council. 10 parents attended the public drop in session, two of whom had children attending Durrington Middle SSC, and one further parent telephoned and spoke to the Principal of the Academy. All were in support.

4.3 The responses gave their full support with the exception of the response from Unison that just noted the contents of the letter. The Sussex Autistic Society and the West Sussex Parents Forum specifically offered to advise on the design process. The representative from the Forum commented that there were many gaps in provision for children with social and communication needs in the area and although this provision was welcomed she described it as ‘only a start’.

4.4 The Diocese of Chichester praised The Academy’s commitment to partnership working and described the proposal as an ‘invaluable development for some of the most vulnerable children on the south coast’. The Littlehampton Town Council also welcomed the proposal and asked if the SSC could work with the local Citizens Advice Bureau. Officers have written to the Clerk of the Town
Council for more details of how they envisage this working and will feed this back to The Academy and the Project Board.

5. **Resources Implications and Value for Money**

5.1 The initial costing for refurbishment has been assessed and agreed as £50,000. A state of the art facility can then be created as part of the major redevelopment of the Academy campus due to complete in 2012. The proposed capital budget is £800,000. West Sussex County Council will be paying for all capital costs, following the agreement of the Schools Forum on December 7 to support this project through prudential borrowing, and the Academy have offered to provide technical support as required for the provision of the IT infrastructure.

5.2 The revenue budget is part of the Dedicated Schools Grant and is initially £104,000 for the first year but this will go up when the numbers of placements made by the SEN Team are increased in 2012. The Schools Forum have agreed to the funding towards the development of SSCs and the running costs will come from this source. Funding is available from April 2010 in order that staff can be appointed prior to the centre opening. Adverts for the teacher in charge and other staff will be placed early in the Spring term 2010.

5.3 This project supports the County Strategy by providing better support for the care, safeguarding and education of children with special educational needs. SSC provision should help to reduce the number of out of county placements that can be prohibitively expensive (with some placements for children with the most complex needs costing up to £200,000 per year).

6. **Risk Management Implications**

6.1 Risks are identified in the Academies Terms of Reference and include the possibility that there may not be adequate accommodation for September 2010 because of unforeseen problems with the refurbishment. There may also be issues appointing suitable staff/management and the scheme is subject to DCSF support. These risks have a medium to low likelihood of affecting the project. Although the impact of the risks would be high, affecting the timescales or the ability to deliver, they will be managed through the Project Board, which meets regularly to monitor progress and address issues that arise.

6.2 A client relations agreement is being drafted by Legal Services which details the nature of the partnership between the Local Authority and the Academy. This will ensure a high standard of provision is maintained as part of the obligation of the Woodard Academy Trust.

7. **Customer Focus Appraisal**

A customer focus appraisal is attached to this decision as Appendix 2.
8. **Crime and Disorder Act Implications**

   There are no foreseeable crime and disorder implications associated with this proposal.

9. **Human Rights Act Implications**

   There are no foreseeable Human Rights Act implications associated with this proposal.

**Appendices**

- **Appendix 1** - Consultation Letter
- **Appendix 2** - Customer Focus Appraisal

**Background Papers**

There are no background papers.

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