

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 20 July 2017

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – People

PORTFOLIO: Children, Young People and Families

SUBJECT: Development of Vocational Alternative Provision

WARD(S): Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 This report seeks permission to extend the range of vocational education on offered by The Bridge School through the development of a skills base in a unit at Astmoor.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1) Approval is given to the capital project to develop a skills base at Astmoor;**
- 2) This approval is subject to the agreement of the terms of the lease and support from Halton secondary schools; and**
- 3) The Operational Director Economy, Enterprise and Property and the Operational Director Legal and Democratic Services be given the authority to agree the terms of the lease.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The demand for good quality skills based vocational alternative provision has been increasing in recent years, however, there is insufficient provision in Halton and neighbouring Local Authorities to meet this need. The Bridge School currently offer alternative provision, however, the limitations of the current site mean it is not possible to increase this provision nor to expand the curriculum offer.

3.2 A unit used in previous years by Riverside College has now become available. A feasibility report has been undertaken to ascertain the suitability of the site and the costs of any works required to provide a vocational teaching and learning skills base managed by The Bridge school. The report confirmed that subject to the appropriate works the site could be appropriately adapted. The estimated level of capital investment needed is £360,000. This sum includes both the costs of refurbishment and the costs of additional specialist teaching resources.

3.3 The skills base would form part of the provision offered by The Bridge. The aim of the skills base would be to support students who are either Permanently Excluded, on roll at The Bridge School through the In Year Fair Access Protocol, or have gained placements through Referral from Halton high schools. Referral will be based on how the provision could meet the needs of the student and will be prioritised based on prior school intervention and evaluation of SEN.

- 3.4 The provision will be under the management of The Bridge School and will fall under the Ofsted framework of evaluation. It will aim to provide a range of curriculum options which could include Construction, Vehicle Maintenance, Hair & Beauty, and a second phase development of Catering, other skills based curriculum options will be explored.
- 3.5 Classes will initially be for 8 students for each curriculum area. It is projected that provision will be available in half day sessions; 2 sessions per day. This would allow a maximum (initially) of 32 students per session, and therefore 64 per day, if placements were maximised. The curriculum pathways will be accredited and be able to contribute to Progress 8. Placements will be for the duration of the accredited pathway and will be routinely reviewed in collaboration with the referring school, parents and students.
- 3.6 The shortage of provision means that the LA and schools are unable to meet the needs and provide an appropriate quality assured curriculum for some of our most vulnerable learners. Secondary schools in the borough have indicated their support for the proposed provision. The revenue costs of this provision will therefore be met from schools through buy back. As there is a shortage of provision in neighbouring authorities should there be any spare capacity to maximise occupancy and ensure sustainability the offer will be made to schools, with pupils with the appropriate profile, in other neighbouring authorities
- 3.7 Although initial estimates anticipate the daily rate will be an increase to that currently paid by schools for access to an Engagement Placement through The Bridge School, this provision offers students access to a broader skills based curriculum which will better meet student need. To support schools the offer will be flexible enough allow the purchase half day placements.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Local Authority is required to hold a list of all students accessing Alternative Provision. Schools are also asked to indicate the quality of this provision. Feedback from the schools and The Bridge is that a number of providers can no longer provide quality sustainable provision.
- 4.2 In many cases vulnerable learners are asked to travel either out of the borough to access provision or travel to other providers within the borough. The establishment of a local skills based provision should reduce the need for this increased travel and provide a more stable and consistent offer for students.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The capital project will be funded from a combination of £160,000 Basic Need and £200,000 schools capital reserve.
- 5.2 The running costs of provision will form part of The Bridge School budget and will be need to be met from buy back from Halton schools and schools in other neighbouring authorities.

6.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Through the establishment of the skills based centre there will be less pupils educated at home, the number of exclusions will reduce and pupil outcomes will improve. In 2015/2016 the total number of exclusions for the academic year was 25. Up to the end of June 2017 this figure has increased to 48. By increasing alternative provision along with the work that is being undertaken to review support for schools with children and young people with challenging behaviour and the revision to the In Year Fair Access Protocol, it is anticipated that there will be a reduction in the number of children and young people excluded in Halton.

7.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

7.1 Children and Young People in Halton

Improved outcomes for vulnerable learners and those at risk of exclusion.

7.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton

Skills based training will improve the employment prospects for students and reduce the risk of them becoming NEET.

7.3 A Healthy Halton

N/A

7.4 A Safer Halton

N/A

7.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

N/A

8.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 8.1 There very limited vocational provision in the borough with an increasingly academic curriculum more students could be at risk of becoming disengaged which could lead to further increases both fixed term and permanent exclusions.
- 8.2 There is insufficient buy back to meet the costs of the skills base. Schools have indicated that this is a gap in provision and that they would wish to purchase places. Interest has also been shown in accessing provision in other neighbouring authorities.

9.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 9.1 The skills base will allow Halton to more appropriately meet the needs of our some of most vulnerable learners.

10.0 REASON(S) FOR DECISION

- 10.1 To agree capital funding for the development of a vocational skills base at Astmoor.

11.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

11.1 Expand the Bridge School on its current site. This is not possible due to the limitation of the current site.

12.0 IMPLEMENTATION DATE

12.1 July 2017

13.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

13.1 None under the meaning of the Act.