

**REPORT TO:** Executive Board

**DATE:** 12<sup>th</sup> December 2024

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Executive Director – Children’s Services

**PORTFOLIO:** Children and Young People

**SUBJECT:** High Needs Provision Capital Allocations –  
Proposed Expansion of Special Educational  
Needs & Disability Provision: Statutory  
Consultation feedback – Key Decision

**WARD(S)** Borough wide

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 This report provides a summary of the responses received during the representation period for the statutory consultation to expand the number of Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) places available at Ashley School in Widnes, to meet need for children and young people with a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), taking the total number of places available at the school site from 112 to 152.
- 1.2 The report also requests the Executive Board’s approval to use any remaining balance from within the High Needs Provision Capital Funding to support further expansion of SEND provision within Halton, in discussion with relevant schools/educational settings as appropriate to meet identified SEND need.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDED: That**

- 1. the Board approves the expansion of Ashley School in Widnes for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder to become a 152 place school through the provision of four additional classrooms (subject to planning permission).**
- 2. The Board approves the use of any remaining balance from within the High Needs Provision Capital funding to support further expansion of SEND provision within Halton.**

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- 3.1 At the Executive Board meeting on the 12<sup>th</sup> September 2024 it was agreed that a statutory consultation could be undertaken on a proposal to increase the SEND provision at Ashley School in

Widnes, taking the total number of places available for age 11-19 students at the School from 112 to 152, through a proposal to build four additional classrooms at the school.

- 3.2 A statutory notice was published on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2024 with a four week consultation period which closed on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2024. The consultation was advertised in the local newspaper, on the Council's website, as well as available to view on the Council's Local Offer for SEND. It was also distributed to schools and educational settings, along with the link to the feedback form. Copies were shared with parents, staff and governors of the school, trade unions, neighbouring authorities, Diocesan authorities, NHS Cheshire and Merseyside, parent carer representatives, local MP's and local Elected Members. All respondents were given the opportunity to complete the on-line feedback form.
- 3.3 As statutorily required, Local Authority Officers held two meetings at Ashley School on Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> October 2024, the first with staff and governors, and the second with parents/carers, to outline the proposals regarding the expansion, and advise attendees on how to respond to the consultation.
- 3.4 At the close of the consultation 12 responses were received. Of the responses received, 8 agreed to the proposal and 4 disagreed – please see Appendix A detailing the responses received together with the Council's response to the 4 comments made disagreeing with the proposal. On the basis that the majority of the small number of total responses received were in support of the proposal, the School and the Local Authority would wish to progress with the expansion.
- 3.5 It is likely there will be a balance remaining within the High Needs Provision Capital funding should approval be given by the Board to the expansion at Ashley School. Officers have been in discussion with a number of other schools in Halton, to determine a priority of need to meet further demand for additional SEND places in borough, and would wish to prioritise and then progress with those smaller scale capital projects, subject to available funding, so that the Local Authority fully utilises the funding provided.

#### 4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The consultation on proposals to expand existing provision, which if supported, would lead to a proposed programme of expansion/capital works, that would ensure that the Council can continue to offer and expand its in-borough special educational needs provision wherever possible, will help to reduce expensive out-borough placement and associated transport costs, thereby supporting priorities within Halton's SEND Strategy and SEND Sufficiency Strategy, and meet need more locally within Halton.

4.2 The Council has a duty under the Department for Education and Department for Health's "Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years" (2015) to support high quality provision to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND, with a focus on inclusive practice and removing barriers to learning. Through the offer of more localised specialist provision, the local authority can further build on its existing provision and continue to demonstrate the fulfilment of its duties in accordance with the code.

## 5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 Any capital works proposed will be funded from the High Need Provision Capital Allocation Grant allocated to the Council by the Department for Education.

5.2 Should the initial overall value of the project proposed exceed the amount of capital funding available, then the project will be value engineered to be met within budget. This has already been discussed with the school.

5.3 By investing in additional SEND provision in-borough the Council will reduce its High Needs expenditure, which is currently funded through the High Needs block of the Dedicated Schools Grant, a significant amount of which is currently spent on out of borough provision. It is important that preventative action is taken now to help reduce financial costs to the Council in the future, and by retaining Halton resident pupils at local provision, this will help drive down placement and travel costs for the Council longer term.

5.4 Circa £1.8M has been set aside for any proposed capital works at Ashley School (based on an initial feasibility study), but these costs are subject to procurement processes and will be value engineered in agreement with the school to meet the capital funding available.

5.5 Any remaining balance will be used to support further (smaller) capital projects at Halton's schools to enhance SEND provision.

## 6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

### 6.1 **Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence**

The proposal to expand Ashley School ensures that those children and young people with additional needs, whose needs can be met by the school are, in accordance with the SEND Code of Practice, helped in receiving successful preparation for adulthood, which includes preparation for independent living and employment.

6.2 **Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy**

None.

6.3 **Supporting Children, Young People and Families**

Providing additional places at Ashley School will expand the offer in Halton of high quality provision to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND, evidences Halton's commitment to support the child or young person, and the child's parents, in order to facilitate the development of the child or young person. It also helps them achieve the best possible educational and other outcomes, preparing them effectively for adulthood, as set out in the Department for Education and Department of Health SEND Code of Practice.

6.4 **Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need**

None

6.5 **Working Towards a Greener Future**

None

6.6 **Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community**

By expanding existing provision at Ashley School, it is intended that more Halton resident pupils will have access to local specialist provision, and will therefore remain within the community, rather than having to attend out-borough specialist provision.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 The demand for specialist support for children and young people with SEND is increasing. By continuing to expand existing provision, and creating additional places, children and young people can receive the support they need within the borough which in turn will help to reduce expenditure within the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant.

7.2 The Council has been allocated this funding from the Department for Education, as they also recognised a need for additional specialist places and provision in Halton, and through the proposed expansion of Ashley School, the Council will be able to demonstrate expenditure against need.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 The High Needs Provision Capital Allocation provides capital funding to deliver new places, supporting learning in specialist

provision and allows Halton resident pupils to be educated in-borough where possible. The Equality Act 2010 is continually referenced throughout the SEND Code of Practice and ensures that Local Authorities and schools fulfil their obligations in this regard.

**9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 Through the introduction of additional local provision, there will be a reduction in the number of children and young people needing out of borough provision, which in turn will help reduce fuel costs/emissions. Any new build undertaken, would comply with the latest legislation and guidance and support energy efficiency in new buildings.

**10.0 REASON(S) FOR DECISION**

10.1 The Council is required to demonstrate appropriate identification of need against spend from the High Needs Capital Allocation Grant.

10.2 To deliver and implement the High Needs Provision Capital Funding programme.

**11.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED**

None.

**12.0 IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

It is intended that the additional provision, if approved, could be offered from September 2026.

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

<b>Document</b>	<b>Place of Inspection</b>	<b>Contact Officer</b>
Department for Education High Needs Provision Capital Allocations guidance (March 2024).	Children’s Services Directorate	Martin West
Department for Education Making significant changes (‘Prescribed alterations’) to maintained schools” January 2023 guidance.	Children’s Services Directorate	Martin West

Department for Education and Department for Health's "Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years" (2015)	Children's Services Directorate	Martin West
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