

To: EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND LEARNING
Date: 03 May 2024

Special Resource Provisions (SRP) Design Development and Enabling Works
Executive Director: People

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To obtain the approval to forward fund the next stage of the Sandhurst and Edgbarrow Secondary Schools SRP Design Development and enabling works, in anticipation that the Council will receive the Safety Valve grant funding of £4m.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1. That the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning approve the forward funding of £0.175m for the approved Sandhurst and Edgbarrow special resource provisions from a recently received Department for Education capital grant for high needs provision, to enable work to continue pending confirmation of the outcome of the Council's Safety Valve capital grant allocation.

3. Reasons for Recommendation(s)

- 3.1. The Council are still awaiting confirmation of the outcome of its Safety Valve Capital Grant application of £4m, submitted to the Department for Education in early January 2024. To ensure there is no impact to our delivery programme to provide additional in-Borough places to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), approval is being sought to forward fund £0.175m from the Council's High Needs Provision Capital Allocation of £2.155m announced in March 2024 by the DfE. This would be in addition to the £0.112m the Council has already committed for initial feasibility and design work on new SEND facilities at Sandhurst and Edgbarrow. Once the additional Safety Valve Capital Grant funding has been confirmed, the sums that have been forward funded will be made available to support other identified capital funding needs.
- 3.2. Having initially been informed by the DfE that a decision on the outcome of Safety Valve capital grant applications would be made by the end of the 2023/24 financial year, a response to repeated enquiries from the Council was received on 24 April, advising that a decision was hoped to be reached "in the next few weeks".

4. Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1. The Council stops preparatory work on new in-Borough provision it has committed to as part of its Safety Valve proposal that has been accepted by the Department for Education. This would mean large numbers of SEND pupils will continue to be sent out of Borough, which will have ongoing revenue implications to the Council.

5. Supporting Information

- 5.1. Sandhurst
Professional fees for the design and development being undertaken by Atkins are £40k. Enabling works are £60k, which need to be completed by mid-July 2024 to ensure the programme is not delayed and to ensure the provision is ready for the first cohort of 5 pupils for September 2024.

- 5.2. Edgbarrow
The detailed design development being undertaken by Atkins professional fees are £75k.

6. Background

- 6.1. The Council were invited by the DfE to apply for the Safety Valve capital grant in September 2023. Discussions with Safety Valve financial advisors led us to understand that an application for around £4m would be in line with the amount typically made available to authorities entering Safety Valve. Our highest priority capital scheme was the new SEMH school at the former All Saints site in Warfield, however these costs would be a lot higher than £4m. For that reason, the Council focused on SRPs at Sandhurst and Edgbarrow, with their Headteachers supportive of having a facility at their schools.
- 6.2. Atkins (the Council's partner for the design and management of construction schemes) were commissioned to undertake high level feasibilities, at a cost of £33k. To review options to create SRP's for Sandhurst and Edgbarrow, this was paid for by the Council.
- 6.3. The Sandhurst SRP can be accommodated with some reconfiguration in the existing school footprint. Edgbarrow will require a new building to extend the school. Total project cost for Sandhurst is £0.9m. Total project cost for Edgbarrow is £3.1m. Totalling £4m.
- 6.4. Outline timetables indicated that Sandhurst could be available to take pupils in September 2024 (with some enabling works to temporarily free up space while the more significant works were undertaken during the Autumn term) and Edgbarrow in December 2025. However, these timetables were only achievable if detailed design work were commissioned before the end of January 2024.
- 6.5. Executive Members agreed to the Council taking the funding risk on the early design work, with the Council's understanding that the Safety Valve capital grant would be approved before the end of the 2023/24 financial year, as had been indicated to us by the DfE. The cost of this to the end of April was £79k.
- 6.6. No orders have been placed with Atkins beyond the end of April, pending confirmation of the outcome of the Safety Valve capital grant application. Both schemes are therefore jeopardised if we do not get a decision from the DfE before the end of April. Without funding certainty, the construction contract for works needed at Sandhurst will not be able to be awarded in May, which is needed for a September 2024 opening.
- 6.7. With the difference in revenue cost between an external provision and an SRP being typically £25k per pupil per year, this has the potential to add a further £100k per annum to the High Needs Block costs, for which an alternative compensating cost reduction will need to be identified.

7. Consultation and Other Considerations

Legal Advice

- 7.1. There are no specific legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Financial Advice

- 7.2. The financial implications are set out in the body of the report. The proposal involves the use of high needs provision capital grant provided by the DfE. There is therefore no direct impact on the Council's own resources, however there would be an opportunity cost and

reduced funds to support other priority needs should the Council's Safety Valve Capital Grant application not be approved. Should this situation occur, the Council would need to carefully consider the case for funding the schemes at Sandhurst and Edgbarrow from other funding sources, potentially including external borrowing.

Other Consultation Responses

7.3. NA

Equalities Impact Assessment

7.4. N/A

Strategic Risk Management Issues

7.5. Until the DfE confirms sufficient additional Safety Valve Capital Grant will be awarded, which is the expectation based on discussions with DfE Safety Valve Advisers, there is a risk that alternative funding for any expenditure agreed and incurred will need to be identified and financed by the council. Against this, the level of the overspend on the Dedicated Schools Grant represents the most significant financial risk to the Council and its participation in the DfE's Safety Valve programme is intended to reduce expenditure over time to the level of grant funding provided, primarily by placing pupils locally and avoiding very expensive external provision.

Climate Change Implications

7.6. The recommendations in Section 2 will reduce CO2 emissions, by reducing the need of home to school transport, to neighbouring boroughs and beyond. All the new buildings/provisions will be designed and built in accordance with the current building regulations and comply to planning policy.

Health & Wellbeing Considerations

7.7. The Council's recently approved SEND strategy includes a focus on providing additional school places within Bracknell Forest, which would significantly reduce travelling time for children who require specialist places whose needs cannot currently be met within the Borough. In most instances this will have a positive impact on the health and well-being of those pupils.

8. Background Papers

None

Contact for further information

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