

Shropshire High Needs Strategic Planning Review

Discussion Document

Background

Shropshire Council has recently commissioned a review of the County's high needs provision for learners with Education Health and Care Plans ("EHCP's") or Statements of Special Educational Need. The review, which is being led by an external consultant is working to tight timescales that will culminate in a plan for the development of specialist provision to be published on the Council's website in March 2018.

This discussion document summarises the early findings of the review and is being shared in order to stimulate debate, feedback and dialogue. The Council recognises that this process MUST be shaped through co-production with a wide range of stakeholders including parents, carers, young people and education providers. No final decisions have been made and any feedback you provide will play a significant role in shaping the final development plan.

You are invited to submit your feedback via Survey Monkey here:

<http://shropshire.gov.uk/get-involved/high-needs-review-for-shropshire/>

Scope

Although the review process includes consideration of provision for the entire age range from 0-25 years, this document is focused on provision for those of school age. This is because there are established plans for early years provision, which are under implementation and post-16's provision for will be the focus of a separate discussion.

Known Gaps, Issues and Challenges

- The geography of the county is perhaps the single largest challenge, with so much of the population thinly spread across large areas. This presents unique challenges in ensuring access to appropriate specialist provision, with many of the most vulnerable learners spending significant time travelling.
- Some of the statistics for the county also suggest patchy inclusive practice, with a comparatively low number of pupils being identified as requiring SEN Support (the level of support below statutory EHC Plans) whilst there are comparatively high numbers with EHC Plans and Statements. This reinforces the need for training and support for all education providers, and for skill-sharing between the special and mainstream sectors.
- Existing specialist provision is either full or nearly full, with limited capacity to meet growing demand.

What are the County's Priority Needs?

Analysis has identified:

- **Significant growth** both in Speech Language & Communication Needs (**SLCN**) and Autistic Spectrum Disorders (**ASD**). Although most of these learners can flourish in mainstream schools, there are increasing number who struggle in mainstream classrooms. With the right support they are able to access the mainstream curriculum, but not without extra help and the right environment.
- In Shropshire (as nationally) there is a trend of **increasing complexity of need** – children are presenting with higher levels of need, or with complex combinations of need that have not been experienced before, even by experienced specialist staff. More and more learners cannot adequately be described by a single category of need and many have a range of overlapping factors that impact on their learning.

Potential Solutions – Initial Proposals

A number of proposals under four broad headings are presented below to address Shropshire's identified gaps and challenges. It must again be stressed that no decisions have been reached regarding the proposals and that the process is still at an exploratory stage.

A theme underpinning all of these proposals is to develop and build on **partnerships** particularly between mainstream and specialist providers in developing a comprehensive offer to meet the needs of a wider range of learners closer to their homes.

1. **Specialist Resourced Provision for primary aged learners with communication & interaction difficulties (including Autism Spectrum Conditions)**

There are growing numbers of learners who struggle to cope in mainstream classrooms due to sensory overload, social difficulties and high levels of anxiety BUT who are able to access the mainstream curriculum but require smaller group sizes, the right sensory environment and specialist staff who are able to cater for their needs. When appropriately supported these learners can significantly benefit from being integrated on a mainstream school site as they may be able to access the curriculum with mainstream peers for some aspects of their learning.

Based on practice in other areas there are established and effective models of provision located on mainstream primary school sites for between 8-12 learners with dedicated staffing and resources. Shropshire has a significant number of schools with falling rolls who would have spare physical capacity to accommodate such provision without huge capital expenditure – based on experience elsewhere it is estimated that such provision could be developed with capital expenditure of between £50-100k (subject to many dependencies). Such low cost provision could be established at a number of locations across the County

There are broadly two distinct options, either:

- a) **Mainstream–school led where the learners are on the roll of the host mainstream with the base managed and staffed by the host school**

The benefit of this is that it embodies an inclusive ethos and directly engages mainstream schools as key partners in delivery of specialist provision. The challenge can be that such provision may (particularly in the crucial early stages) be very fragile and may become isolated without easy access to specialist support.

Or:

- b) **A partnership model where the base is operated as a satellite of a special school but is located on a mainstream ‘host’ school site, where the pupils are on-roll and the base is managed and staffed by the special school.**

This model has the benefit of building on strong practice within the special school sector and the ‘Hub’ model is well-established in Shropshire and is operated successfully by both of the Counties special schools (Severndale and Woodlands) as well as by the Tuition, Medical and Behaviour Support Service (TMBSS). The model also addresses any concerns about the impact of such a provision on the statistics of the mainstream school hosting both in terms of attendance and attainment, which can be a major concern particularly for smaller schools where the impact of a small group of learners may be pronounced. These provisions would provide a primary age service to complement the secondary-age provision listed below.

2. **Additional ‘Hub’ Provision for secondary-aged learners with communication & interaction difficulties (including Autism Spectrum Conditions)**

In recent years the county has invested in development of the Kettlemere Centre, a specialist provision for secondary age children with special educational needs (SEN) in the area of Communication and Interaction (C&I) located in North West Shropshire. Although the development of this provision has seen a few setbacks with no new pupils admitted for the past two years, the Centre will now benefit from a renewed focus and commitment both from Lakelands Academy and Shropshire Council and is expected to start receiving new learners in the Spring term.

It is proposed that plans for further Hubs for secondary aged learners are revisited in southern and central parts of the county to ensure wider coverage. Views are sought as to the best management model for these hubs according to the same broad options as set out above under Proposal 1, i.e:

- a) **Mainstream–school led where the learners are on the roll of the mainstream school with the base managed and staffed by the host school.**

Or

- b) **A partnership model where the base is operated as a satellite of a special school but is located on a mainstream ‘host’ school site, where the learners are on-roll and the base is managed and staffed by the special school.**

3. Partnership Hubs for secondary-aged learners with Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD)

Currently there are many pupils with MLD attending Severndale Specialist Academy, who could significantly benefit from attending provision attached to mainstream and from being educated closer to home as part of their local community. These are pupils who are too cognitively able to be well-served by broad spectrum special schools, where they may struggle to form peer groups and to feel a sense of belonging. There is an established and successful Severndale satellite at Mary Webb School for this type of learner, which is a proven model that could be replicated elsewhere either or both in the South and / or North of the County. This would have the dual benefit of reducing journey times for a significant number of learners as well as freeing up capacity at Severndale for pupils with the most complex needs.

4. A new school for pupils with Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) difficulties / Autism Spectrum Conditions

Recent demand for places at Woodland's School (which is almost at capacity) has highlighted that there is sustained need for provision for learners whose needs are too complex and challenging to be adequately supported on mainstream school sites. Many of these learners may be categorised as having a primary need of either SEMH or ASC but their social communication difficulties and anxiety, leading to challenging 'breakthrough' behaviours that are difficult to manage in a mainstream school, will be a common factor.

It is proposed that Shropshire seeks to develop a new Special Free School for this category of need, with provision potentially starting at year 5 through until year 14 (sixth form) to be located in the south of the county. This would complement but not duplicate the Woodlands School provision at Wem.

Request for Expressions of Interest

If you represent a school or education provider that might be interested in being considered for one of the above options, then please notify the lead for the Strategic Review at the following email address: info@fwl.associates

It must be stressed that the process for selecting an appropriate lead school, sponsor academy or host site for any of the above proposals will be transparent and equitable and is not pre-determined. Given the relatively limited range of providers operating within Shropshire it may be that the above options could stimulate interest from providers from outside the county and this would be encouraged in order to extend the range of options available to commissioners.

Feedback

Please provide your feedback on the above options via the questionnaire on Survey Monkey here:

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