

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND LEARNING****DATE: 21 NOVEMBER 2012****REPORT OF: NICK WILSON, STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES****SUBJECT: A PROPOSAL TO REMOVE RESIDENTIAL PROVISION AT GOSDEN HOUSE SCHOOL FROM SEPTEMBER 2013****KEY ISSUE/DECISION:**

To determine whether to implement the proposal to remove residential provision at Gosden House Special School from September 2013.

INTRODUCTION:

1. The Local Authority consulted on a proposal to remove residential provision at Gosden House School from September 2013 between 18 June and 23 July 2012. Having considered the results of the consultation, the Cabinet Member for Children and Learning determined to publish a statutory notice indicating the Local Authority's intention to proceed with the proposal. A 6 week period for representations has been provided to consider any final views before a decision on this proposal is made. This report sets out the representations that the Local Authority has received during this period.

DETAILS:

2. Gosden House School (GHS) is a special school located in Bramley near Guildford. The school provides education for children with Learning Difficulties (LD) and specialises in cognition and learning. The school is funded for 116 places and is structured into three distinct departments that operate under a single ethos. (i) Primary department – 4 -11, mixed, (ii) Secondary department, 11-16, girls only and (iii) Residential department currently based on a 1-2 nightly 'residential experience' offered to secondary girls over a four nightly system. The school offers this experience to Key Stage 3 and 4 girls on a rolling basis. Year 6 boys currently have access to an extended day. Gosden House is an 'outstanding' school as judged by Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills).
3. Since September 2011, there has been a dialogue between Gosden House School and the Local Authority through a 'Working Group' (including Local Authority officers, the GHS Senior Management Team and Chair of Governors) to look at the funding and sustainability of Gosden House School as well as the future form and function the school could take in the future.
4. Over the last few years, Gosden House School has reduced the number of beds that are available at the school from 35 to 18 beds. The school still offers a 'residential experience' to 35-40 pupils but now only for one or two nights a week on a rolling 4 nightly system (the school previously offered residential provision

from Monday to Friday). The school took this decision because it meant that a proportion of their residential funding could be used for other purposes within the day school (e.g. additional teaching, administrative and therapy services). Given that a significant proportion of the residential funding that the school receives is no longer being used for the purpose that it was intended for, in February 2011 the Local Authority confirmed that funding for residential provision at Gosden House would reduce over a 3-year period (2011/12 – 2013/14) in line with the number of beds that the school is actually providing. This was a significant drop in funding for the school, but other LD schools do not have residential places and thus cannot support their day education costs in this way. The school would face a significant reduction in funding anyway from April 2013 as part of the Government's proposals on SEN funding from April 2013 e.g. to distribute a greater part of SEN funding on 'pupils not places' (albeit potentially subject to short term transitional arrangements).

5. This presented a significant challenge for the school. The Working Group has been looking at ways of putting the schools finances on a sustainable footing for the future and these discussions have included looking at options for the future organisation of the school in terms of the age range, special needs designation, gender and specialism. During these discussions, and following informal discussions with the Surrey Special Schools Council, the Local Authority indicated its intention to carry out a wider review of LD provision across the County in the next academic year before bringing forward any substantive changes to Gosden House in this respect.
6. Given the deficit budget that the school already has, and will continue to have, both the school and the Local Authority do not believe that the current position can remain until the outcome of the LD review. In light of the fact that none of the other LD special schools in Surrey (who have the same or similar pupil cohorts) offer residential provision, no children currently at Gosden House have residential provision defined as an educational need in their statements and that such a proposal allows the Local Authority to support the school with some transitional funding to enable them to get their budget on a more sustainable footing, the Working Group are of the view that the proposal to remove residential provision at the school is an appropriate way forward. The authority proposes to provide some transitional funding to the school over the period 2013/14-2014/15 in order to assist the school in managing the reduction in funding which will result from the changes, subject to agreement on a balanced budget thereafter. Transitional funding will not exceed the funding that the school would have received as an 18 place residential school. The Local Authority recognises that this process will need careful monitoring and support.
7. It has been recognised by all members of the Working Group throughout this process that this is a difficult proposal to consider. The care at the school is outstanding and parents and pupils at the school value the current residential provision. The Local Authority and the Senior Management of the school are confident that the school can continue to offer an outstanding education to pupils without residential provision in the future. With an extended curriculum offer at the school, children will still be able to access educational, social and play activities beyond the limits of the normal educational day.

Consultation

8. In order to understand the views of parents, pupils and other stakeholders, the Local Authority published a consultation document on the proposal to remove residential provision on the 18 June 2012. This was sent to all statutory consultees including neighbouring Local Authorities. Three consultation meetings took place on 25 and 28 June 2012 to hear the views of parents, pupils, staff and other interested parties. All parties were encouraged to return a consultation form so that the views could be captured as part of the consultation. The outcomes of this consultation were reported to the Cabinet Member in the meeting of 12 September 2012 and a decision was taken to publish statutory proposals to remove residential provision at Gosden House School. Notices have been displayed at the school and were published in the local press. The deadline for all representations was 9 November.
9. There have been 7 representations made to the Local Authority since the publication of the statutory notice. These representations have come from a parent governor, an ex member of staff, an ex governor/current teacher, a current teaching assistant, two parents of pupils at the school and a member of the public. There were relatively few formal representations made so these can be summarised individually as set out in the table below (mixture of summaries and direct quotes):

Respondent	Representation
Parent Governor	Current residential experience teaches important independent living skills, social skills, personal skills – often skills that they don't have the opportunity to learn elsewhere. These pupils don't have friends where they live, don't experience parties of sleepovers so residential offers them this. It is not care or respite; it offers children the opportunity to learn independent living skills in order to fit into society when they finish school. The removal of residential provision is for financial reasons but the school should be funded as a complex needs school. They should be given more money for more staff, more therapies. Previously the school has been advised that they should residential funding for these purposes. Its clearly a complex situation but if this funding issue was addressed the school would be able to retain its residential facility.
Member of the public	Children are becoming more complex. More children are being diagnosed with Autism but this covers a 'multitude of sins' and therefore concerns that children that do not fit neatly into this categorisation will be neglected. Concerns also raised that this would increase the number of tribunals that the Local Authority faces. ASD in girls is different and the Local Authority might find that it needs more places for older girls in the future making this decision non-sensical. This decision looks shortsighted.
Ex member of staff	"Special Children are a life time responsibility to their parents. The school offered the 2 night respite care to enable the parents and other siblings to have a short period of time together. I worked in year 6 for a long time and saw the relief that this gave the families. PLEASE retain this facility for the benefit of the whole family."
Ex Governor / Current	The standards and achievement of the residential facility is an exemplar and not a target for removal. Its a tribute to the

Teacher	support Surrey CC and its political leaders have given – the LA should be parading this as an example of outstanding practice for others to follow. A succession of outstanding reports from Ofsted is testament to the professional and loyal staff. It seems extraordinary that that LA should want to remove such provision. The residential part of the school runs a tight budget and provides value for money. The LA should expand the residential facility not remove it.
Current member of staff	LA should consider the wider picture rather than just undertaking a cost cutting exercise. The residential facility has saved the LA a fortune over the last thirty years. The school has grown and developed some very vulnerable young people resulting in less pressure on a whole host of other services that the County Council are responsible for e.g. social services and benefits. The school should be preserved as a residential school and should be a flagship institution to other special schools across the country. The family aspect of the school has value beyond money. The county's overall budget will not make the savings it thinks it will.
Parent	Daughter placed at the school in 2010 with 'complex needs' in yr7. Daughter had difficult settling until yr8 – boarding was the reason for her child settling. Resulted in better behaviour at school and at home. School reports have vastly improved and socially far more developed. Extended day would make journey times too long given where the pupil travels from and wouldn't meet the pupil's needs. Boarding offers parent valuable respite during the week.
Parent	Daughter has developed independent living and social skills not covered by the general school curriculum – will 'lose' her final year of boarding which risks losing the progress that has been made. Further concerns raised about any potential loss of the secondary department in the future – particularly around the loss of girls only provision. This proposal threatens the unique and special character that pupils and parents value and benefit from.

Response to the representations

10. Officers note the issues raised within the representations given above, but do not believe that they offer any further views to those already expressed in the consultation earlier in the year and those documented in the report on 12 September 2012.
11. Officers remain of the view that, given the schools likely budget deficit, and the many other financial pressures within the Surrey school system, the core function of the school to educate pupils is paramount. The current residential provision is viewed as an important part of the school but it does not meet any educational need as currently defined in children's statements. Maintaining residential provision at the school would make it difficult for the school to put its finances on a sustainable footing affecting other parts of the school that deliver that core function. Against a backdrop of funding cuts in education, phasing out residential provision would better target resources towards teaching and learning needs.

Financial and Value for Money Implications

12. If the school becomes a day school in the future, they will no longer be funded to provide residential places through the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). The school has historically been funded for 35 beds worth circa £440k through the Dedicated Schools Grant however the school were advised in February 2011 that funding for residential provision at Gosden House would reduce over a 3-year period (2011/12 – 2013/14) to 18 beds reducing this amount to £227k. Given the reductions in the school's budget, the school are currently carrying out a budget recovery plan exercise supported by transitional funding of up to £136k over three years from the Local Authority to build a balanced budget by 2015. Work on this plan is ongoing.
13. The vast majority of pupils currently at Gosden House School travel to the school in the morning and then home again in the afternoon at the end of school. Given that the extended day would be offered to a similarly small number of secondary pupils that currently have access to the residential programme (as well as Year 6 boys) there will be additional transport costs of the extended day but these are unlikely to be significant to the extent that they would justify the retention of residential provision at the school for this reason alone. Should this proposal proceed, the transportation team would work with the school year on year to plan journeys and journey routes for those children having an extended day in the most cost effective way and within an acceptable journey time.
14. There are no capital implications of this proposal.

Equalities implications

15. In terms of equality groups, this proposal will primarily affect secondary age girls. This proposal will not affect boys at the school because the secondary department and residential experience is only offered to girls (boys go on to other provision). The Local Authority does not believe that this proposal raises equality issues. Currently none of the children at the school require residential provision as part of the Statement of Educational Need. Furthermore, none of the other LD schools in Surrey that admit similar profiles of pupils have residential provision. In this sense, this proposal, if taken forward will put boys and girls with Learning Difficulties on an equal basis in the context of other Surrey LD provision.
16. It is recognised that some families will no longer enjoy the associated respite that the residential experience provides. However, the Local Authority is of the view that the purpose of this provision is not, and has never been, to provide respite provision to parents.

Risk management implications

17. This proposal could increase the number of non-maintained or independent sector (NMI) placements as a result of this provision being taken away. Officers recognise that this is a risk but typically the Local Authority would not expect to provide NMI placements to the type of pupils currently at Gosden House given their relatively moderate complexity of need and the quality and ranges of provision in Surrey currently.

18. There are further risk management issues to consider with respect to staff housing associated with the school. It is the Local Authority's view that should a decision be taken to remove residential provision at the school, and there is no requirement for staff to reside in accommodation for the 'better performance of their duties', the Local Authority reserves the right to either dispose of the properties or let them out. The Local Authority will work with the school to ensure staff with existing service occupancy agreements are treated fairly in the future and that those who express a wish to remain living in the accommodation have the opportunity to ask the Local Authority to let the property to them. This will likely be done through residential company letting to protect the Local Authority's interests in the asset.

Climate change/carbon emissions implications

19. The County Council attaches great importance to being environmentally aware and wishes to show leadership in cutting carbon emissions and tackling climate change. Whilst, the residential experience does result in fewer journeys to school, this is a relatively small cohort of pupils and steps will be taken with the school to minimise the number of journeys as a result of the extended day through multiple pick ups and efficient journey routes.

Legal implications/legislative requirements

20. Under The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2007, the Local Authority may propose an alteration to a community special school to remove residential provision (Schedule 4, Part 2, section 14). Schedule 5, Part 1 Information to be included in or provided in relation to proposals sets out the information required in the Consultation document. This proposal also complies with the recent DCSF Guidance – Planning and Developing Special Educational Provision: A guide for Local Authorities and Other Proposers. This requires that any Proposer must fulfill the guidance in paragraphs 21-24 and that the Decision Maker must have regard for paragraph 25.

Corporate Parenting/Looked After Children implications

21. This proposal has no implications for children in care.

Section 151 Officer Commentary

22. The s151 officer notes that the proposals involve a significant reduction in the budget of the school, which will require careful implementation and monitoring. The proposals are likely to lead to an increase in home to school transport costs, to be met from council funds. This cost cannot yet be identified. However, the present financial situation at the school is unsustainable and the proposals offer greater long term sustainability in the context of the new government method of funding special schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that the Cabinet Member determine to implement the proposal such that Gosden House will no longer provide residential provision at the school from 1 September 2013.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

The school is currently in deficit. Should nothing change, this deficit will significantly increase in the future. The current residential provision is viewed as an important part of the school but it does not meet any educational need as currently defined in children's statements. Maintaining residential provision at the school would make it difficult for the school to put its finances on a sustainable footing affecting its core function of educating pupils. The proposed extended day model will go some way to meeting the social/play/friendship needs raised by pupils and parents in the consultation. The Senior Management Team of Gosden House support this proposal.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

Officers will continue to support the school to manage the staffing implications of a decision to remove residential provision at the school as well as work through the property related issues 'tied' to the school as a residential school. From September 1 2013 no children will reside at the school and an extended day model will be in place (to be defined by the school).

Contact Officers:

Jane Barker, Joint Head of Special and Additional Needs, tel 01483 519094
Kieran Holliday, School Commissioning Officer, tel 020 8541 7383

Consulted:

Parents and Pupils at Gosden House School
Special Schools and Resource Centres in Surrey
Local Councillors (Borough/District and County Councillors)
Neighbouring Local Authorities

Informed:

School Commissioning
Estates
Finance
Legal Services

Sources/background papers:

- Consultation Paper – 'A proposal on the removal of residential provision at Gosden House School from September 2013'. (available on Surrey CC website – [Home > Learning > Schools > Education Consultation and Plans](#))

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