

Report to the Cabinet

Meeting to be held on Thursday, 19 January 2023

Report of the (Acting) Director of Education, Culture and Skills

Part I

Electoral Divisions affected:
Heysham; Lancaster Rural
East; Lancaster Rural North;
Morecambe Central;
Morecambe North; Morecambe
South;

Corporate Priorities:
Caring for the vulnerable;

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Sufficiency Strategy - Bleasdale School, Silverdale

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Brief Summary

This report relates to the residential element of Bleasdale School, Silverdale, which is an all through school for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties in the north of Lancashire.

On 6 October 2022, Cabinet gave approval for feasibility studies to be undertaken on four possible options with respect to the future use of the residential site of Bleasdale School, in an effort to try and avoid the under-utilisation of the facilities available and to optimise the efficient use of public funds.

One of the four options presented to Cabinet in October was to maintain the Bleasdale School provision in its existing form, including boarding provision. The situation changed in October 2022 and there are now no pupils in the residential facilities at Bleasdale School. It is not anticipated there will be any demand for residential provision at this site in the future. Cabinet is therefore asked to give consideration to closing the residential provision at this school, while the feasibility studies into the other three options are completed. It is anticipated there will be no change to the day school provision at Bleasdale School.



Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to:

- (i) Approve the proposal to carry out an informal consultation to remove the boarding provision at Bleasdale School.
- (ii) Subject to (i) above, authorise the Executive Director of Education and Children's Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, to review the outcomes of the informal consultation and whether to proceed with the formal consultation to remove the boarding provision at Bleasdale School.
- (iii) Note that, subject to (i) and (ii) above, Cabinet will be presented with the results of the formal consultation in due course and will be asked to make a final decision about whether to approve the permanent removal of boarding provision at Bleasdale School.

Detail

Bleasdale School is a residential school for children and young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties between the ages of 2 and 19 years. It is situated in Silverdale, which is a village in the north of the county very close to the Cumbrian border. The day school provision and boarding provision are on two sites, on either side of a road. While the two sites are distinct entities, pupils from the day school do access facilities contained within the boarding provision, including the hydrotherapy pool and rebound centre.

On 6 October 2022, Cabinet approved the undertaking of a feasibility study which would consider the following four options:

- maintain the current provision.
- dispose of the residential building.
- create a children's home managed by the local authority.
- create a children's home managed by a private provider.

The cost to the high needs block in respect of the residential element of Bleasdale School is £926,000 per annum.

There have been a number of long-standing difficulties with the recruitment and retention of residential staff at the school. One of the regulatory requirements of boarding provision is the appointment of a care manager and this year the school has only been able to fill this post through the secondment of a member staff who works in the day school. This member of staff is now required in school to keep all classes running, along with almost all other members of the residential staff, who either work part time in the day school, or who could be absorbed within the day school staff team.



The uncertainty in relation to the future of the boarding provision and the existing interim arrangements is having an adverse effect on staff morale and serving to compound difficulties with staff retention. It is anticipated that this situation, if not resolved soon, has the potential to increase sickness absence further.

In the week beginning 17 October 2022, it became apparent that the school was not able to staff the residential element of the school. Any staff, including those that had been seconded from the main day school, were needed to ensure there were sufficient staff to keep all classes running within the day school.

Pupils were last admitted to the residential provision at this school four years ago, and it is not anticipated there will be any further requirement for this provision now or in the future, based on current demand. Families are either tending to opt for their children to remain at home and taking up short breaks or utilising the 52-week residential provision.

For these reasons, the school made the decision it was no longer able to provide boarding provision. It should be noted that no pupil previously taking up the residential offer at Bleasdale School had educational needs that identified a requirement for boarding provision. Alternative arrangements were already in place for any pupil with additional social care needs and any decisions about the requirement to secure care provision for an individual pupil were independent of the decision to withdraw the school's residential offer.

The request to close the residential provision permanently has been led by Bleasdale School, with support from governors, due to the continued issues with staff recruitment and retention and the lack of demand for this type of provision. Bleasdale School will continue to operate as before in respect of its day-time educational provision and it is not anticipated that there will be any change to this provision if the boarding provision is removed.

It is anticipated that the removal of boarding provision from Bleasdale School would result in a reduction in hours for one member of staff and that all other staff members would not be affected adversely by this change.

The removal of boarding provision from a maintained school is a prescribed alteration and therefore a statutory process is required to proceed with this proposal. Cabinet is therefore being asked to approve a proposal to initiate an informal consultation, in relation to the removal of the boarding provision at Bleasdale School. Should approval be given, this would remove the first option presented to Cabinet in October 2022, which was to maintain the existing provision. The reason for seeking this approval in advance of the completion of the feasibility studies to consider all four options simultaneously is due to the following:

- 1) the situation has changed since the original report was written and there are no longer any residential pupils as the school is unable to offer boarding provision relating to long-standing issues with staff recruitment and retention.
- 2) it is anticipated that the removal of boarding provision will serve to stabilise the workforce at Bleasdale School.



- 3) it will offer a more efficient use of public resources as there will be a reduction in the amount of funding required by the school as the boarding provision will no longer be required.

Subject to approval to initiate the statutory processes required to remove the residential provision at Bleasdale School, Cabinet is also asked to authorise the Executive Director for Education and Skills, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, to review the outcomes of the informal consultation and whether to proceed with the formal consultation to remove the boarding provision at Bleasdale School. The formal consultation will be completed by May 2023 and will be carried out in line with the prescribed alteration procedures.

Cabinet would be provided with the results of any formal consultation in order to make the final decision about whether to approve the permanent removal of boarding provision at Bleasdale School.

Consultations

No consultations have yet been undertaken.

Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Risk management

The county council and partners across education, health and care are required to work together to plan for and meet the needs of children and young people who have special educational needs and disabilities, in line with the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice 2014, the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 and the Children Act 1989.

Financial

The £926,000 annual cost of this provision, quoted earlier in the report, is the cost to operate the residential element of Bleasdale School, Silverdale if it was fully staffed and all the residential places occupied.

The feasibility study will determine any expenditure/saving from the High Needs budget.

Human Resources

Staff have been consulted on the proposals so that any concerns raised can be addressed.

Property Asset Management

Subject to the outcome of the consultation and subsequent Cabinet decision, future use of the accommodation at Bleasdale School for boarding provision will be reviewed in line with the findings of the feasibility studies.



Legal

The county council has a legal duty to ensure adequate provision is made for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities.

Equality and Cohesion

This proposal impacts on both the age (young people) and disability protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010 and potentially also on staff at the school whose protected characteristics are not known at present. To meet the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty fuller consideration will be given to these aspects as part of any feasibility study or further development of this proposal so that any potential adverse impacts can be fully considered as part of the process.

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
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None

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A

