

North Somerset Council Decision

**Decision Of: Director of Children's Services and s151 Officer
With Advice From: Assistant Director (Placemaking and Growth)
and Head of Strategic Planning & Governance
Directorate: Children's Services**



Decision No: CS12 / 2021-22 Scheme

Subject: Special Provisions Fund ~ Mendip Green Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Resource Base

Key Decision: Yes

Reason: The resource base, whilst costing less than £500,000, will provide school places for pupils from more than one ward area

Background:

North Somerset was allocated a £260,161 Special Provision Fund grant in the 2019/20 financial year and £1,152,776 for 2021/22. This was to assist local authorities in investing in new places and improvements to facilities for pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans in mainstream and special schools, nurseries, colleges and other provisions.

The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Review noted a need for Resource Bases attached to mainstream schools to provide for high-functioning pupils with autism. The Education Excellence Partnership Board (EEPB) is overseeing the allocation of capital funds to assist with the creation of, initially, three new hubs. Permission was granted – see PC 49 (2018/19) - for the full allocation of £260,161 in 2019/20 to be assigned to cover the delivery of schemes as below:

- An allocation of £15,000 from the council's Basic Need Allocation (2019/20) to assist in providing 20 new places in Resource Bases for pupils with autism
- The creation of a 10-place Resource Base at Nailsea School, following the approval of the Regional Schools' Commissioner in June 2019 to support the delivery of a secondary-aged hub at this academy. This opened in September 2020. A budget of £141,000 was allocated to this scheme.
- The creation of a 5-place Resource Base at a primary school in the north of North Somerset. This project has not been progressed.
- The creation of a 5-place Resource Base at a primary school in Weston super Mare. A consultation took place in term 1 (2020), overseen by Mendip Green Primary School (part of the Extend Learning Academy Trust), to open a 10-place Resource base for high-functioning pupils with ASD to serve North Somerset's primary-aged population. The remaining £134,161 of capital funds is available for this project

Decision Sheet PC93 agreed to the payment of feasibility and council oversight work undertaken by the primary and secondary academies as part of the progression of changes on their sites. The work at Nailsea School should now be capitalised.

Mendip Green Primary School requires, with immediate effect, access to the remaining £134,161 to progress the physical changes necessary to deliver their Resource Base for September 2021 augmented by £49,339 from the 2021/22 Special Provisions Fund to cover increased costs following the receipt of recent market testing. As an academy, the school will be responsible for the delivery of their scheme, paid for from these funds. Any overspends will need to be met by the Trust.

The overall priced works are for a total of £183,500 and have been market tested and checked using NSC Quantity Surveyor resources.

Decision:

1. To agree that the Mendip Green Primary School ASD Resource Base scheme will be delivered by this academy, with professional support and oversight by Council officers – see Decision Sheet PC93 (2019)
2. That up to £134,161 will be allocated from the capital programme as previously agreed in PC49 (2018/19) to Mendip Green Primary School to deliver the capital changes needed to enable the Resource Base to open in September 2021
3. That £49,339 is added to the existing capital scheme budget and added to the Council's 2021/22 capital programme, to be funded from the Special Provisions Fund for 2021/22 year, taking the total budget to £183,500.

Reasons:

To enable the capital changes needed to create this Resource Base to be progressed.

The creation of this Resource Base will enable up to 10 primary-aged North Somerset pupils to be educated at a local specialist facility designed to meet their additional needs. It may negate the need for these pupils to be offered places at schools outside the district that will cost more in terms of placement and travel costs.

Options Considered:

Whilst not quantified, to not progress these projects using a government grant and continue to send pupils outside the district.

Financial Implications:

The changes proposed across both Mendip Green Primary and Nailsea School are funded from external grants from the DfE of Basic Need (£7,500) and Special Provisions Fund (£176,000) funding.

Costs:

There are no direct costs to the council for receiving the Special Provision Fund grant. The academy is aware of the budget available and should ensure construction work is covered fully by this grant and the basic need allocation. Any budget underspends will be retained by the Council whilst any overspends will be the responsibility of the Trust.

Basic Need has been allocated to these schemes to assist with the creation of 20 new school places overall.

Funding:

The council has been allocated £260,161 Special Provisions Fund and £21,269,649 Basic Need grants in the 2019/20 financial year. A further year’s allocation of the Special Provisions Fund of £1,152,776 was announced by the DfE in April 2021. Whilst future allocations cannot be relied upon and some of this fund has already been allocated to schemes in progress, there is currently £982,787 remaining that can be used to increase the availability of new SEND places across North Somerset, especially where this can contribute towards the availability of more local places to meet increasing demand and reduce the High Needs Block overspend

Funding Source	Amount
Special Provisions Fund 20_21	£126,661
Special Provisions Fund 21_22	£49,339
Basic Need Grant 2019_20	£7,500
TOTAL ALLOCATION	£183,500

Legal Powers and Implications:

The Children and Family Act 2014 requires local authorities to keep the provision for children and young people and SEND and disabilities under review (including sufficiency). In this context it is recommended that this fund is used to meet local need for specialist places.

The funding is not ring-fenced but must be used for capital expenditure only.

Climate Change and Environmental Implications:

The creation of local places not currently available in North Somerset will prevent some pupils from needing to travel to schools outside of North Somerset. For many this will reduce the carbon footprint with shorter journeys to school.

Consultation:

The council’s Education Provision in North Somerset ~ A Commissioning Strategy 2018 – 2021, approved by the Executive in September 2018 and the Education Provision in North Somerset ~ A Commissioning Strategy 2021 – 2024 approved by the Executive in June 2021, both following a public consultation, each support the provision of ASD Resource Bases.

Risk Management:

If the projects are not progressed the Special Provisions Fund allocation may be reclaimed.

If the council is unable to name a parental preference in its offer of a school place it may need to defend its position at a tribunal. Not having a local quality placement may result in additional placement and transport costs for non-local provisions.

Any overspends are the responsibility of the school or its Multi-Academy Trust, Extend Learning Academies Network (ELAN).

Equality Implications:

The aim of the creation of the Resource base is to provide a local provision for primary-aged pupils who require a specialist placement due to their special educational needs.

The Education Provision in North Somerset ~ A Commissioning Strategy 2021 – 2024 included, within its approval process, an EIA that is an overarching review for all new school place schemes across North Somerset.

Corporate Implications:

This use of funding supports the council’s key outcomes that are laid out in North Somerset’s Corporate Plan in relation to Health and Wellbeing.

North Somerset’s vision is to have an ‘Open, Fairer, Greener North Somerset.’ Schools and academies and other educational settings have a major impact on the lives of the pupils they serve. They also make a significant contribution to achieving the Council’s key priorities that are laid out in North Somerset’s Corporate Plan.

In terms of our strategic plans, this Resource Base would reduce inequalities and promote fairness and opportunity for high-functioning pupils with autism. Having a local base would reduce travel out of the district, protecting and enhancing our environment and helping to tackle the climate emergency.

Appendices:

None

Background Papers:

PC49 – 2018/19

PC93 – 2019/20

Education Provision in North Somerset ~ A Commissioning Strategy 2018 – 2021

<https://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2020-03/education%20provision%20in%20North%20Somerset%20-%20a%20commissioning%20strategy.pdf>

Signatories:

Decision Maker(s):



Signed:

Title: Director of Children’s Services

Date: 23.7.21

Signed:

Title: Section 151 Officer

Date: 23.7.21

With Advice From:

Signed:

Title: Assistant Director (Placemaking and Growth)

Date: 23.7.21

Signed:

Title: Head of Strategic Planning and Governance

Date: 23.7.21

Footnote: Details of changes made and agreed by the decision taker since publication of the proposed (pre-signed) decision notice, if applicable: