

Summary

This report refers to the public consultation carried out between Monday 17th September to Friday 19th October 2018 that sought views on proposals concerning:

1. A review of the capital requirements of special schools
2. A review of post-16 specialist capacity within the local area
3. The designation of special schools

Cabinet formally approved the proposals outlined in the consultation document on Tuesday 15 January 2019.

This report details the communication strategy and the creation and distribution of documents to support a broad and informative consultation. Plymouth City Council engaged with and consulted key stakeholders including elected members, families and relevant professionals.

A significant feature of our consultation was a focus on collaborative working with families, special school governing bodies and head teachers so that proposals respond to local need effectively and make a positive contribution to the Local Offer.

The responses received and comments in particular, provide clear evidence that our analysis of local demand was accurate and our rationale wholly appropriate. In addition to this, through the consultation survey, we have been able to identify additional aspects of provision that will enable us to more fully meet local need.

Approach

The consultation (see appendix 1) was active for 5 weeks (Monday 17 September to Friday 19 October 2018). There was a focus on engagement with a broad range of stakeholders including:

- Schools involved in special school re-designation consultation, head teachers, staff, governors, parents and pupils including the ACE MAT CEO
- All other schools including multi academy trust CEOs
- Local residents (via schools)
- All City Councillors
- Plymouth Members of Parliament
- Plymouth Association of Governors (PAG)
- Plymouth Learning Partnership (PLP)
- Plymouth Parent Carer Voice
- Youth Ascends

Consultation documents were published on the City Council website and emailed to stakeholders. Meetings were also arranged with specific stakeholder groups including special school governing bodies, families of pupils attending special schools and head teachers.

The consultation period served to engage with stakeholders in order to:

1. Ensure a clear understanding of current and proposed special school designations
2. Seek confirmation as regards the need to change special school designations
3. Offer an opportunity to comment on the current PAN of individual special schools
4. Offer an opportunity to comment on current post-16 provision for young people with special educational needs
5. Support positive local opportunities and relationships
6. Capture and respond to feedback that will inform the proposals

Consultation overview

The consultation proposed changes to the current designation categories of Plymouth special schools. Specifically, that the designation of all special schools is changed to 'complex needs' with each school being described through a general and a specific criteria (appendix 1).

The analysis of responses to the public consultation (appendix 2) identified three main stakeholders: special schools (governing bodies and staff); the families of pupils who attend special schools and professionals engaged with special schools who work for the local authority. The responses of each group described an interlinking set of priorities; however, the priorities identified by each group cannot not be considered to be the same.

Priorities for families included:

1. The likely impact on pupils currently in schools.
2. Sufficiency of funding to meet the complex needs outlined in each school description.
3. Sufficiency of places.

Priorities for special schools included:

1. The match between the proposed description of the school and the needs of pupils currently attending the school.
2. That designations were not based around a pupil's level of learning.

Priorities for professionals included:

1. That designations supported a fair and transparent process for entry into special schools in light of local authority processes.

This feedback has been recognised in both the revised set of special school general and specific criteria (appendix 3) and the implantation plan (appendix 4).

Review of capital requirements

A review of the condition and capacity of the special school buildings is underway. This includes work to ascertain the capacity of each school building in terms of the number of students that can be accommodated. The findings of this work will inform the SEND school capital investment programme which will be presented to the City Council Investment Board. The 'Strategic Investment and Capital Manager' is coordinating this work on behalf of the Education, Participation and Skills Department.

Review of post-16 specialist capacity

A significant number of responses to the consultation (see Appendix 1) related to post-16 provision for young people who were attending or have attended a special school. Analysis indicates that the current review of specialist post-16 provision is both timely and needed. Key priorities for respondents included:

1. An alternative to FE College provision for pupils who are not ready to make the transition from a special school. The majority of respondents described this as sixth form places in special schools that do not currently have them.
2. The design of 5 day post-16 programmes of study for all students.

In response, a task and finish group (September – November 2018) has made recommendations for pathways into employment and independence for two distinct groups of students: those with complex disability needs who will have on-going complex care needs as part of their pathway into supported independence; and those who require a supported, individualised vocational pathway into employment. An options appraisal is currently being evaluated.

Appendix

1. SEND Capacity and Designation Consultation papers
2. SEND Capacity and Designation Consultation Response Analysis
3. Revised designation descriptions
4. Implementation plan