

<b>Report to:</b>	<b>EXECUTIVE</b>
<b>Relevant Officer:</b>	Victoria Gent, Director of Children's Services
<b>Relevant Cabinet Member</b>	Councillor Gillian Campbell, Cabinet Member for Inclusion, Youth, Schools and Transience
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	5 December 2022

## **PROPOSED EXPANSION OF HIGHFURLONG SPECIAL SCHOOL**

**1.0 Purpose of the report:**

1.1 To seek approval to proceed with the development of The Meadow site at Highfurlong School - subject to Planning consent - to accommodate a two-storey extension and associated facilities to ensure sufficient local provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

**2.0 Recommendation(s):**

2.1 To approve the development, following a procurement process via the Procure NW Framework (£1m to £5m contract for partners).

2.2 To approve the budget of £4.8 million for phase one of this scheme.

**3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):**

3.1 A planning application has been submitted for approval to develop The Meadow on Garstang Road West to accommodate a two-storey extension with associated facilities to ensure sufficient local provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Design and feasibility work to RIBA Stage 4 and costings are being developed to enable a traditional construction scheme to be tendered via the Procure NW Framework (£1m to £5m contract for partners).

Highfurlong Special School reached a cohort of over 110 students in the summer term 2022, which is three times the number five years ago. The growing number of pupils in special schools is in part as a result of changes in legislation introduced in 2014, but also due to children surviving with more complex medical needs than historically was the case.

Despite additional building works being undertaken during that time to create extra space at the school, the capacity of the existing building is now over-stretched. An independent

school capacity report dated March 2022 found that Highfurlong’s building has a deficit of space equivalent to four classrooms when compared against current pupil numbers. The school has now saturated its existing footplate and is no longer able to effectively deliver complimentary curriculum activities such as design technology, music and life skills, despite winning the prestigious School of the Year award in 2021.

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to ensure sufficient suitable places are available for all pupils across the town. The proposed expansion at Highfurlong School would help to ensure that Blackpool Council can meet the needs of children with complex physical and medical disabilities.

3.2 Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.3 Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council’s approved budget? Yes

#### **4.0 Other alternative options to be considered:**

4.1 If additional provision is not provided the Council would have to rely on Out of borough SEND provision, including associated transport costs, which is both expensive and not always in the best interests of children and their families.

#### **5.0 Council priority:**

5.1 The relevant Council priority is: “Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience”.

#### **6.0 Background information**

6.1 Highfurlong Special School benefited from a single storey infill extension in the summer of 2021, which enabled it to continue to meet the needs of their increasing pupil numbers. The school has used its existing space as flexibly as possible and has now reached saturation point of their existing footplate due to the nature of the physical requirements and associated equipment of the current cohort.

6.2 Land known as “The Meadow” currently sits unused on the site due to significant level differences. Phase One will see the two-storey extension built, with a covered walkway created to link to the existing site via the top floor of the new building. The ground floor of the new building will comprise facilities for post-16 students, alongside a new kitchen that will serve the whole school (currently facilities are shared with Aspire Academy). There will also be a community café at the front of the school designed for post 19 students to gain valuable employment skills and increase the commercial viability of the venture through improved public access from the main road. The upper floor would comprise classrooms and

ancillary spaces for secondary aged pupils. Under the development proposals the existing building would house primary pupils.

6.3 Phase two would see the creation of a new fit-for-purpose hydrotherapy suite, with a music room, sensory unit and breakout rooms above. Should additional funding be identified in time, both phases would be delivered in tandem in order to benefit from cost efficiencies whilst contractors are on site.

6.4 Subject to relevant approvals and the tendering process, it is anticipated works would commence on site around May 2023 for completion by June 2024.

6.5 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? Yes

Appendix 3a is not for publication by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. It is considered on balance that the public interest would not be served by publishing information at this stage as this information would undermine the Council's position in future negotiations and could risk the scheme not being able to proceed.

## **7.0 List of Appendices:**

7.1 Appendix 3a – Financial considerations (exempt)

## **8.0 Financial considerations:**

8.1 See exempt information at Appendix 3a.

8.2 Children's Services has allowed a budget envelope of £4.8 million for phase one of the scheme, and costs will be contained within that budget. The scheme is being funded from a combination of education capital, including Basic Need, High Needs Provision Capital Allocations, and School Condition Allocations. Alongside other planned capital schemes, reliance is being made on known future allocations of Basic Need funding in 2023/24 and 2024/25, and of High Needs Provision Capital Allocations in 2023/24.

8.3 A bid for capital funding to deliver phase 2 of the scheme will be submitted as part of the Department for Education's Safety Valve programme. A separate report to Executive on this programme is planned for January 2023.

## **9.0 Legal considerations:**

9.1 A new access road will be required using land currently within the demise of the 125 year lease to Aspire Academy – subject to legal negotiation with Fylde Coast Academy Trust and all associated due diligence.

**10.0 Risk management considerations:**

10.1 Not progressing the proposed expansion would mean the local authority would be unable to meet its statutory duty to ensure that sufficient suitable places are available for all pupils across the town. This would create further pressure on the High Needs budget, as places would need to be secured in more costly independent special schools outside of Blackpool.

**11.0 Equalities considerations:**

11.1 Highfurlong Special School caters for the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities. The expansion scheme will ensure that the needs of more children can be appropriately met in local provision, reducing the need for lengthy transport journeys, and enabling children to be part of their local community.

**12.0 Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations:**

12.1 The scheme at Highfurlong Special School is being developed in line with Blackpool Council's Climate Change Declaration. The scheme will include the provision of air source heat pumps in lieu of conventional gas boilers. Provision will also be made for a number of solar panels to be installed. The scheme is also required to achieve a BREEAM rating of very good.

**13.0 Internal/external consultation undertaken:**

13.1 Statutory public planning consultation is being undertaken. Information on the proposed development was shared with parents of pupils at the end of summer term 2022, and school employees are being kept updated about progress with the plans. Community information sessions will be held during the course of the public consultation period.

**14.0 Background papers:**

14.1 Planning application 22/0725 is available on Blackpool Council's website at [Simple Search \(blackpool.gov.uk\)](https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Planning/22/0725)

**15.0 Key decision information:**

15.1 Is this a key decision? Yes

15.2 If so, Forward Plan reference number: 16/2022

15.3 If a key decision, is the decision required in less than five days? No

15.4 If **yes**, please describe the reason for urgency:

**16.0 Call-in information:**

16.1 Are there any grounds for urgency, which would cause this decision to be exempt from the call-in process?

No

16.2 If **yes**, please give reason:

**TO BE COMPLETED BY THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE**

**17.0 Scrutiny Committee Chairman (where appropriate):**

Date informed: 25 November 2022 Date approved:

**18.0 Declarations of interest (if applicable):**

18.1

**19.0 Summary of Discussion:**

19.1

**20.0 Executive decision:**

20.1

**21.0 Date of Decision:**

21.1

**22.0 Reason(s) for decision:**

22.1

**23.0 Date Decision published:**

23.1

**24.0 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:**

24.1

**25.0 Executive Members in attendance:**

25.1

**26.0 Call-in:**

26.1

**27.0 Notes:**

27.1