
THE DARLINGTON PUPIL REFERRAL UNIT (PRU) AND EDUCATION OTHER THAN AT SCHOOL SERVICE (EOTAS) – RELOCATION AND REFURBISHMENT OF BUILDINGS

Responsible Cabinet Member(s) - Councillor Chris McEwan, Children's Services Portfolio

Responsible Director(s) - Margaret Asquith, Director of Children's Services

Purpose of Report

1. This report proposes that the current Rise Carr Primary School site be refurbished to allow for the relocation of the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and Education other than at School (EOTAS) services. It also addresses some issues about the relocation, including community issues and costs.

Background

2. Currently, the Darlington PRU and EOTAS services work from three different premises - the main service operates from McMullen House on Yarm Road, and provides educational premises for young people in Key Stage 4 (aged 14-16) who are or who are likely to be permanently excluded from school, or for whom an alternative educational placement cannot be accessed. The Gladstone Street Annexe hosts a similar educational establishment for pupils in Key Stage 3, (aged 11-13). A third venue, the previous Eastbourne Nursery School site, provides premises for service staff who work with children and young people who cannot attend a mainstream school for a variety of reasons, e.g. those who are anxious school refusers, etc. It also hosts a small number of linked service staff who cannot be accommodated in the Town Hall or elsewhere. In addition to these three venues, other venues are accessed from time to time to provide one to one education for some young people who cannot access education in the three sites referred to above.
3. None of the above sites are wholly appropriate or suitable to meet the needs of these particular groups of young people or to deliver the PRU/EOTAS services for the following reasons:
 - (a) Firstly, because the PRU and EOTAS services are stretched across three or more sites, it is not possible to offer the quantity or quality of service to young people we would wish. The fragmentation of staffing leads to poor value for money and poorer outcomes for young people in terms of GCSE performance, attendance, behaviour and motivation, than the expenditure on staffing should allow; and
 - (b) The need for staff to cover three sites limits the curricular opportunities for young people and means that staff expertise cannot be focused efficiently.
4. The current level of funding for the service should be sufficient for the delivery of a quality PRU and EOTAS service but its capacity to deliver a quality service which will get a good

outcome when it is inspected by Ofsted is constrained by the premises' issues referred to above, and it is likely that if inspected under current arrangements, the services would fall into serious weaknesses or special measures as a result of the deficits created by the current premises arrangements.

5. Significantly, it is doubtful if we are providing an appropriate environment for this group of young people to 'get back on track' and feel the necessary sense of self worth, or develop high levels of self-esteem. None of the sites have the feel of a school; none allow the young people to have real ownership of the site, and allow them to feel it is 'their school'.
6. Under the current arrangements, we are treating many of our most vulnerable and needy young people less well than other young people in the Borough. The quality of the environment in which young people are educated can have a positive impact on their learning and their lives and it is particularly important that provision for this group of young people is of the best quality.
7. Rise Carr School is now surplus to school requirements following its closure in July. The two buildings at Rise Carr are listed buildings and cannot therefore be demolished. The existing buildings have limited value for redevelopment and it is likely it would take some considerable time to find occupiers for the buildings from the private sector, although local community representatives have expressed interest in the buildings. It is therefore considered appropriate to examine whether the school could be used for education purposes and as a result of the assessment it is considered the site could be used for the Pupil Referral Unit and the Education other than at School Service.
8. The Rise Carr site, if refurbished and adapted could provide a building which would allow for the services referred to above to be located on the same site, so that staff can be deployed as a single team, thus maximising use of their time and their specialisms. This would enable the authority to bring about an improvement in this service area and enable it to meet its statutory obligations and improve the quality of the provision for young people.
9. New premises would support improved outcomes for young people including:
 - (a) better GCSE performance
 - (b) improved attendance rates
 - (c) better behaviour and improved motivation
 - (d) better opportunities for joint agency working; and
 - (e) extended and recreational activities for young people, including positive activities for young people during school holidays, and before and after school.
10. There are significant performance and service implications arising from any decision to take action or no action. The key implications of taking no action are:
 - (a) The Joint Area Review will identify the provision as being inadequate, and it will remain as such until improvement is made; and

- (b) Ofsted inspection of the PRU – as a school the PRU is inspected as any other school. The limitations set out above in this paper arising from premises inadequacies are likely to result in the PRU falling into special measures. It is unlikely that it would fall into the less serious category of serious weaknesses as there is no apparent capacity to improve outside of the building issues being addressed.

Community Issues

11. It is important the community local to Rise Carr is enabled to view the relocation of the PRU to new premises positively. This is a process which will need to be managed.
12. Some communities do not welcome PRUs being established in their neighbourhoods. We can demonstrate that the current PRU based at McMullen House has had a good relationship with its local neighbours, and has developed as an asset to the community.
13. Since April 2001, there has only been one complaint, made to the school direct. This particular complaint related to a theft from a local garage. An investigation into the incident identified that the young person responsible was not currently a pupil at the PRU, but from another school. In addition to this, a window was broken by young people playing ball – this matter was immediately rectified and did not lead to a complaint.
14. As a part of the work on further developing good relationships with the community, the KS4 Co-ordinator personally visited all of the householders in the locality to ensure that they knew her, understood the standards of behaviour that were expected of the young people based in the centre and to establish such a relationship that they felt confident about bringing issues and concerns to her personal attention. This strategy has been very successful in helping create a positive relationship between the PRU and its ‘neighbours’.
15. Despite its accommodation problems, the PRU is a very positive establishment. It has a very active School Council; was recently awarded a School Achievement Award (and proudly received it, being one of only a handful of PRUs across the country which received it) and won the Investing in Children Award and the Healthy Schools Award. Of the 2004 cohort, only one pupil was NEET (not in education, employment or training) in the November 2004 survey. Young people in KS3 have achieved successes in the National Youth Achievement Awards and the Prince’s Trust Gold Award.
16. The local MP for Darlington was recently invited to speak to and engage in discussion with the young people at McMullen House and following on from this very positive meeting, he invited a group of the young people to the House of Commons. This visit was supported by GNER and local businesses, and led to a memorable day for the young people who conducted themselves in an exemplary manner, bringing credit to both themselves and to the Borough.
17. Young people at McMullen House have done carol singing and made hampers for the residents in the nearby home for the elderly and have recently been asked to take part in a gardening project in the home, which they are undertaking now as a part of their Prince’s Trust work.
18. Last year the community were invited into McMullen House for the World’s Biggest Coffee Morning and raised funds for charity from this event.

19. In very limited and disadvantageous circumstances, working with a dedicated staff team, these young people who have all failed in other, better resourced schools have achieved a creditable range of successes, and made a real contribution to the local community and to the Borough. It is anticipated that similar, tried and tested approaches to knowing and working with the local community as set out above would be a high priority in a relocation and the PRU will continue to be an asset to its local community. We therefore anticipate that the relocation of the PRU to the existing Rise Carr site can be successful for all parties, provided a positive and co-ordinated approach is taken.
20. As well as providing an essential quality resource in terms of the young people in the PRU, it is anticipated that the redesigned building will provide some resource for community groups to use when it is not required for education processes. Access to facilitate community use on this basis has been included in the design brief, and it is anticipated that some parts of the building will therefore be accessible for wider community use, in particular sport and meeting facilities. This will add value to the community and provide some resources 'on the doorstep' which currently are unavailable.
21. The two existing school buildings are not of sufficient size for all of the PRU and EOTAS services to be located within them and it is therefore proposed that an extension be built to link the two existing buildings which would then provide buildings of sufficient size to locate the whole of the services outlined in this report at the one site. The design of an extension has been discussed with appropriate planning officers and there are no insurmountable difficulties with a proposal to build an extension to link the two buildings. There are also considerable internal works to the existing two buildings that would be required to make them suitable for the curriculum that is provided by EOTAS and the PRU, and this would include new mechanical and electrical services including a new boiler house.
22. The cost of the work to bring the existing building up to an appropriate and acceptable standard is currently estimated at £1.6 million. There is a further cost of £20,000 for the school field, and an estimated cost of £100,000 for consideration of a Multi Agency Games Area (MUGA) on site which would also be available for community use. This estimate does not include loose teaching equipment, sports or office equipment which will be in the region of £250,000. Costs have been higher than some other school building projects as the building is listed, incurring a higher level spend per square metre. Total estimated costs therefore are in the region of £2million.
23. The capital cost of the scheme can be accommodated within the current capital MTFP by utilising unallocated resources. Clearly approving such a sizeable scheme will mean that there will be less resources available for other priorities. Members will be aware that significant sums are anticipated from the sale of surplus school sites which have not as yet been allocated to any schemes therefore, subject to the successful sale of the sites, sufficient resources will be available to meet the cost of this scheme and a number of other priorities. The land which would be made available by vacating McMullen House would also be reviewed and considered for disposal.

Outcome of Consultation

24. There has been no consultation process into this proposal at this stage.

Legal Implications

25. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

26. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

Council Policy Framework

27. The issues contained within this report are required to be considered by Council.

Conclusion

28. The closure of Rise Carr School offers an opportunity to meet the needs of young people who are not attending mainstream school, and the adaptation of the building will require capital investment. This proposal also offers the opportunity for wider community use out of school hours.

Recommendations

29. Members are requested to:
- (a) Approve the relocation of the Pupil Referral Unit to the old Rise Carr site, and
 - (b) Release capital funding of up to £2million.

Reasons

30. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons :-
- (a) To be able to deliver a quality PRU and EOTAS service from one site.
 - (b) To add value to the community and provide some resources 'on the doorstep' which currently are unavailable.

Margaret Asquith
Director of Children's Services

Background Papers

No Background papers were used in the preparation of this report.
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