

**CABINET
3 DECEMBER 2024**

DARLINGTON COLLEGE PRE-16 CENTRE

**Responsible Cabinet Member -
Councillor Nick Wallis, Children and Young People Portfolio**

**Responsible Director -
James Stroyan, Executive Director of People**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek Members' agreement to release £2.6 million pounds of DfE High Needs Capital Funding for the development of a Pre-16 alternative provision centre at Darlington College.

Summary

2. This report seeks Cabinet approval for the release of £2.6 million pounds of DfE High Needs Capital Funding for the development of a Pre-16 alternative provision centre at Darlington College. The centre will provide alternative provision for those young people who have disengaged, or are at risk of disengaging, from mainstream provision.

Recommendation

3. It is recommended that Members agree the release £2.6 million pounds of DfE High Needs Capital Funding for the development.

Reason

4. The recommendation is supported as there are a number of young people who have disengaged, or are at risk of disengaging, from mainstream provision. Often, these young people are placed in expensive alternative provision commissioned by mainstream schools. This provision, whilst engaging the young people, often do not provide the educational outcomes needed for that young person to move forward and become an economically active member of the community.

**James Stroyan,
Executive Director of People**

Background Papers

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

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Council Plan	These capital works will ensure children are learning in a safe high-quality environment to make sure they have the best start in life.
Addressing inequalities	This programme has no specific impact on protected groups.
Tackling Climate Change	All works undertaken will be designed and constructed with sustainability in mind and aim to reduce the carbon footprint, and re-use energy and environmental resources.
Efficient and effective use of resources	School's often have to purchase expensive alternative provision from private providers, having a large resource locally within Darlington College will provide better value for money and specific occupational pathways.
Health and Wellbeing	The capital strategy outlined in this report will continue the Council's drive to provide buildings that enhance young people's life chances and opportunities to thrive.
S17 Crime and Disorder	Capital investment to improve facilities and provide better building maintenance will contribute to the reduction of crime and disorder.
Wards Affected	All Darlington Wards
Groups Affected	Young people aged 14-16 educated in Darlington.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the budget and policy framework.
Key Decision	This is an executive decision
Urgent Decision	For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this does not represent an urgent matter.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	The proposed projects have no specific impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers. Although they will be able to access to provision if needed.

MAIN REPORT

Rationale

5. Alternative provision is commissioned by the secondary academies for young people who have disengaged, or are at risk of disengaging, from mainstream provision. This is done on an ad-hoc basis, often at significant expense. Currently there are 28 providers registered with DBC offering a range of subjects, including; outdoor education, sports, boxing training and hair and beauty. Some providers also offer maths and English provision. However, in some cases those providers do not offer a qualification-based curriculum that is recognised as part of school educational outcomes.
6. In developing a Pre-16 Centre at Darlington College, more young people will be able to access an alternative provision curriculum that counts towards school's educational outcomes and supports the young person's development. In addition, it is hoped that familiarity with the college life will encourage more young people to move through alternative provision on to the post-16 curriculum at the college.
7. Darlington College already has 95 pre-16 learners being taught in the college, so already have experience delivering to a pre-16 age group and the development of a dedicated pre-16 centre will complement the existing provision. It will also allow for delivery to more vulnerable or challenged young people who may not cope in the existing mainstream college provision.

Proposal

8. Darlington College have developed plans for a purpose built, 50 place, Pre-16 Academy located within the Darlington College Campus. It will be attached to the college but will have a separate and secure access for the young people attending the provision. The curriculum will consist of accredited qualifications, including maths and English with clear progression pathways into post-16. There will also be a separate recreation and break out space for the young people.
9. Curriculum areas will cover the more hands-on skills that will engage this cohort of young people who have disengaged, or at risk of disengaging. They will include; construction multi-skills, hair and beauty, health, social care and childcare.
10. A separate centre manager will oversee the provision, with staff providing support around mentoring, family liaison, pastoral care and progression.

Funding Implications

11. DBC currently has just under £3.7 million of DfE High Needs Capital Grant unallocated. This capital funding can be used to develop provision for special educational needs or alternative provision. The Darlington College 14-16 alternative provision centre proposal has been costed at £2.6m and will provide 50 places. As this is planned to be a vocational centre with a mix of workshops and classrooms it is difficult to get a comparative costing. However, the National Schools Delivery Cost benchmarking data indicates that the average cost for a secondary school rebuild or extension in 2022 was £4,322 per sqm. The proposed costs for the Darlington College 14-16 centre are £4,727 per sqm (£2.6m / 550

sqm). This is a 9.4% increase on 2022 costs which would be reasonable given the recent inflationary rises in construction. It should be noted that the college costs also include £443,000 of VAT which is excluded from school delivery costs.

12. The proposed cost per place for the centre to be staff adequately is £15,000 per place per year. Academies will be able to purchase places as needed, as they do now with other alternative provision providers. Consultation has already taken place with secondary heads, and to pump prime delivery Darlington schools have made a commitment to purchase 20 places up front in the first year, these are likely to increase in year 2. Schools can then purchase additional places on top as required.
13. There is no revenue cost to the Council and capital costs will be funded through a DfE grant.
14. The capital funding will be made available to Darlington College as a direct grant and the college will manage the project, therefore any cost overrun risks will fall to the college.