

**CABINET
6 MAY 2025**

RELEASE OF HIGH NEEDS CAPITAL – BEAUMONT HILL ACADEMY

**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 an additional £375,000 of High Needs Capital Funding for the refurbishment of Haughton Children's Centre and Block 3 Beaumont Hill Academy.

Summary

2. To date Cabinet has released £466,000 of High Needs Capital Funding. That amount was based on an initial estimate of costs from an outline feasibility study by Eddisons Building & Project Consultancy in 2023. A more detailed survey has now been completed by the RLB Group which has identified some significant costs that were not included in the original estimate, largely in relation to the Beaumont Hill remodelling. In addition, because of the time lapsed since the original survey in 2023, and Cabinet approved the funding on 5 March 2024, there has also been some inflationary costs of materials.

Recommendation

3. It is recommended that members agree to formally release £375,000 of High Needs Capital Funding for the provision of additional special education needs places at Beaumont Hill academy in line with the new SEND strategy.

Reasons

4. The recommendation is supported by the following reasons:-
 - (a) Release of the High Needs Capital funding will allow Beaumont Hill academy to refurbish Haughton Children's Centre to provide a sixth form centre for up to 30 pupils.
 - (b) Remodelling the space vacated by the sixth form pupils will create an addition 30-40 high needs places for secondary age pupils with special educational needs and reduce reliance on expensive out of borough placements.

**James Stroyan,
Group Director of People**

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report

Paul Richardson: Extension 6015

Council Plan	<p>CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE – supporting the best start in life, realising potential and raising aspirations</p> <p>Providing additional places in Beaumont Hill Academy will reduce the number of children with special educational needs having to go out of borough due to lack of spaces. This development will allow those pupils to learn locally with their peers and friendship group.</p>
Addressing inequalities	This development will ensure children with special educational needs have access to high quality local specialist provision.
Tackling Climate Change	All work 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	Providing more local high needs places in Beaumont Hill academy should reduce the requirement to place children with special educational needs in high-cost out of area independent provision. This in turn should reduce overall transport costs for those pupils.
Health and Wellbeing	Having a separate, purpose built sixth form centre will allow these 16-18 year olds to develop their independent living skills.
S17 Crime and Disorder	Not applicable
Wards Affected	Whilst this specific project is located in the Haughton and Springfield Ward children at Beaumont Hill Academy come from all over Darlington.
Groups Affected	This development will provide high needs places for young people of secondary and post 16 age with Education, Health and Care Plans
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the Council's budget or policy framework.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision.
Urgent Decision	This is an urgent decision. In order to complete this project for September 2025, contractors have to be appointed by the first week of June. Without certainty around funding the Education Village Academy Trust will not be able to proceed, and the council will need to make alternative arrangements for a number of children with special educational needs.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This development has the potential to impact on looked after children who have an Education, Health and Care Plan.

MAIN REPORT

Background

5. Cabinet previously agreed to pursue the transfer of Haughton Children's Centre to the Education Village Academy Trust, the parent trust of Beaumont Hill Academy, to develop a sixth form centre for pupils with special educational needs, this in turn would result in the creation of additional spaces in Beaumont Hill. The additional secondary places will also reduce the need to send EHCP pupils out to more expensive out of area independent settings.
6. The Department for Education (DfE) have given their agreement to the re-purposing of the Children's Centre (it was funding partially through Sure Start Grant and the DfE retained an interest). The trust has also consulted, and had permission from the DfE, to take on an additional site.
7. The original feasibility survey was undertaken by Eddisons in 2023 based on quarter 2 rates from 2023. However, the fact that Beaumont Hill is part of a PFI build introduced additional legal and cost complications unless the work at the school was undertaken through the PFI facilities management company. Therefore, the trust had no option but to contract Mitie to facilitate both developments, rather than have two separate contractors. Subsequent staffing changes at Mitie, and the need to undertake a second survey, has caused significant delay to reaching this point. The latest costs are as accurate as possible but subject to change pending final procurement quotations.

Financial Impact

8. This project will utilise funding from the High Needs Capital grant which is provided by the DfE. There is no draw on council funds. The project costs incorporate a small contingency, and any unspent funds will be allocated to alternative projects. The grant agreement issued to the trust will only be for final costs and will not exceed the amount authorised by Cabinet.
9. The latest schools benchmarking data shows the average gross cost for refurbishment of a SEN school to be £1,161 per square metre. The revised costs come out at £944/m² for Beaumont Hill and £591/m² for Haughton Children's Centre, therefore both projects still provide value for money, even with the increased costs.
10. Whilst it is difficult to compare the two estimates due to how they are presented, the main increase has been the costs at Beaumont Hill for the provision of services moving from an open plan area to partitioned classrooms. The costs for electrical, lighting, ventilation and fire protection rose from £55,000 in the original feasibility study to almost £213,000 in the detailed survey.
11. Haughton Children's Centre will be transferred to the Education Village Academy Trust on a standard academy lease, the lease will be subject to the trust completing the works, and any liability for increased costs will sit with the trust. Payment of the High Needs Capital funds will be to EVAT as a grant agreement.

Impact of Not Proceeding

12. This development is due to open in September 2025 and around 30 young people with Education, Health and Care Plans have been offered places at Beaumont Hill based on this. If the funding is not agreed and the project does not go ahead, alternative arrangements will have to be made for those young people.
13. If Cabinet approves the funding, that will give the trust the assurance that they can progress this project. They have been assured that as long as contractors are appointed by the first week in June, the works can be completed on time.