

24 August 2015

**Name of Cabinet Members:**

Cabinet Member for Business, Employment and Enterprise – Councillor Maton

**Director Approving Submission of the report:**

Executive Director of Place

**Ward(s) affected:**

Henley

**Title:**

Proposed Relocation of The Link Extended Learning Centre to the Watcombe Centre.

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**Is this a key decision?**

No

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**Executive Summary:**

The Link Extended Learning Centre (ELC) is a Key Stage 4 Pupil Referral Unit providing education for up to 40 Key Stage 4 students who have been permanently excluded from school or are at risk of permanent exclusion. The ELC is currently located at the former Chace Primary School in Willenhall. The building was constructed during the early 1950s and in part is of 'Hills' type construction. The former school premises have been used as the ELC and also housed the Performing Arts Service (PAS) since the school merged and relocated to Willenhall Community Primary School in 2007.

The Link ELC was inspected by Ofsted in May 2012 and found to require Special Measures. The Council had concerns regarding the effectiveness of the provision prior to the inspection and had already established a planning and monitoring group to provide enhanced support and challenge to the centre's leadership. In May 2014, with the full support of the Local Authority and all secondary headteachers, an application was made by headteachers to the DfE to establish a Free School for KS4 alternative provision but on a different site. The application was subsequently withdrawn and the Council is now faced (as statutory provider) with identifying a suitable location for this service, given that there is an urgent need to relocate the existing services from the Chace building which only has a short life remaining.

A number of alternative locations have been considered for relocation of the service and the Watcombe Centre is the preferred option which has been unoccupied since its vacation in 2014. The estimated cost of the refurbishment works is £100k, which would be met from within the 2015/16 Education Capital Programme. The target date for completion is 1st November 2015.

**Recommendations:**

**Cabinet Member for Business, Enterprise and Employment is requested to approve the following recommendations:**

1. To relocate the The Link ELC to the Watcombe Centre with effect from November 2015 and bring the Watcombe Centre into the Educational portfolio of buildings;
2. To refurbish/remodel the property at an estimated cost of £100k to be funded from the 2015/16 Education Capital Programme; and
3. Declare the The Link ELC site surplus to operational requirements and request officers to dispose of it.

**List of Appendices included:**

A site plan is referred to in the report.

**Other useful background papers:**

None

**Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?**

No

**Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?**

No

**Will this report go to Council?**

No

**Report title:**

**Proposed Relocation of the The Link Extended Learning Centre to the Watcombe Centre.**

**1. Context (or background)**

- 1.1 The Link Extended Learning Centre (ELC) is a Key Stage 4 Pupil Referral Unit providing education for up to 40 Key Stage 4 students who have been permanently excluded from school or are at risk of permanent exclusion.
- 1.2 The ELC is currently located at the former Chace Primary School in Willenhall. The building is currently shared with the Performing Arts Service (PAS). The building comprises of primarily single storey accommodation with part first floor accommodation and double storey height hall accommodation constructed approximately during the early 1950s and in part is of 'Hills' type construction. The existing concrete roof panels are corroding and have approximately 3-4 years before they are at risk of failing and the building will need to be vacated. The roof is now subject to annual inspection by a Structural Engineer to ensure that it remains fit for occupation.
- 1.3 The Link ELC was inspected by Ofsted in May 2012 and found to require Special Measures. The Council had concerns regarding the effectiveness of the provision prior to the inspection and had already established a planning and monitoring group to provide enhanced support and challenge to the centre's leadership. Following receipt of the Ofsted inspection report a Raising Achievement Plan (RAP) was put in place, setting out the measures that would be taken to bring about the required rapid improvement. This was approved by Ofsted in September 2012.
- 1.4 It was subsequently agreed that the ELC would be operated by the East and West Behaviour Partnerships as the preferred model of delivery which was supported by the DfE. Over the 2013/14 school year Headteachers in the East and West Behaviour Partnerships worked closely with the Local Authority (LA) on developing KS4 alternative provision that is led and managed by the Area Behaviour Partnerships.
- 1.5 In May 2014, with the full support of the LA and all secondary headteachers, the secondary headteachers applied to the DfE to establish a Free School for KS4 alternative provision on an alternative site. In August the DfE wrote asking for further work to be done on the application. The changes requested required a significant alternation to the composition of the members, directors and governors groups, and it was decided that these changes could not be made before the DfE deadline of 10th October. The application was therefore withdrawn and the Council is now faced (as statutory provider) with identifying a suitable location for this service, given that there is an urgent need to relocate the existing services from the Chace building in order to avoid recurrent expenditure on a building which has become time-expired.

**2. Options considered and recommended proposal**

- 2.1 A number of alternative sites have been identified as possible locations for the service:

Former Alice Stevens Special School, Whitley  
Former Wyken ELC, Tiverton Road, Wyken  
Watcombe Centre, Wood End.

- 2.2 Feasibility studies have been conducted on each of the three sites which have also been visited by the ELC's management team to establish whether any are suitable for service delivery.

- 2.3 Alice Stevens has recently been vacated with the relocation of the school to Ernesford Grange Secondary. The site is currently being considered for a potential co-located primary broad spectrum SEN school; consultants have been appointed to conduct a feasibility study. Appropriate sites for co-location are rare and therefore subject to the outcome of the feasibility study, it is currently anticipated that this will form the site of the second primary co-located broad spectrum SEN school. The site was visited by the ELC Leadership Team and was not considered a suitable location in any event. The building is in poor condition and would require significant investment to accommodate the ELC.
- 2.4 The former Wyken ELC is currently occupied by the Seva Free School under a short lease from the City Council before it moves to new premises in Walsgrave. The building formerly accommodated the Wyken ELC but was deemed to be deficient in space to enable the full curriculum to be delivered. The Wyken ELC was subsequently rebuilt on the Caludon Castle Secondary School site. The site has limited car parking and a forecast increase in demand for places would be difficult to accommodate. Once the Seva school has moved off site the premises will be declared as surplus to educational requirements.
- 2.5 In January 2014 Cabinet approved the relocation of the Day Centres for Adults with Learning Disabilities at Curriers Close and Watcombe Centre to Frank Walsh House. The Watcombe Centre was declared surplus to requirements and has been unoccupied since its vacation pending disposal. The Centre has been visited by the ELC Leadership Team and Management Board who have both identified this as their preferred option.
- 2.6 A feasibility study has therefore been undertaken in conjunction with the Head of Service and established that it would be possible to relocate the ELC to the Centre. No formal planning consent is required as it is not considered a 'change of use' in planning terms. Internal adaptation and refurbishment of parts of the building would be required. Access to the site is good (off a cul-de-sac), parking adequate and there is space within the site to extend the provision at a future date if required. The estimated cost of the refurbishment works is £100k, which would be met from within the 2015/16 Education Capital Programme. The target date for completion is 1st November 2015.
- 2.7 The options for consideration are therefore:

#### **Accept the proposal**

The Watcombe Centre is the preferred site to relocate the ELC service. The Watcombe Centre would be transferred into the education portfolio of buildings and the Chace site would be declared surplus to educational requirements and disposed of.

#### **Decline the proposal**

If the proposal is declined the ELC will need to revisit their search for a site as they are committed to delivering this service in the city. There is no suggestion that a more suitable and/or available site can be identified. In the meantime the existing building at Chace will remain a liability for the Council – it will continue to deteriorate and be subject to an annual condition survey. The cost of the survey and any necessary remedial works would continue to be met by the Council.

### **3. Results of consultation undertaken**

- 3.1 The proposed relocation of the ELC service to the Watcombe Centre was considered at the Henley Ward Forum on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July and was welcomed at that meeting. In addition a local ward councillor and members of the Moat House Trust (the successor body to the NDC) recently visited The Link celebration day to better understand the work of the ELC.

### **4. Timetable for implementing this decision**

- 4.1 The ELC wishes to transfer to its new premises for the start of the academic year in September but prior to then the City Council needs to undertake the necessary physical changes to the building to ensure that it is fit for purpose. The move is therefore anticipated to take place during the Autumn half-term (October 2015).

### **5. Comments from Executive Director of Resources**

#### 5.1 Financial implications

The refurbishment works are estimated to be in the order of £100k and will be funded from the 2015/16 Education Capital Programme.

Demolition works may be necessary to the existing Chace centre, prior to disposal, and these works will be funded from the Capital Programme for repairs and maintenance.

#### 5.2 Legal implications

The Council will appropriate the Watcombe Centre into education use and the Chace site will be declared surplus to requirements. Any subsequent disposal of the Chace site is required to secure best consideration under section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 in any disposal of property interests.

### **6. Other implications**

#### **6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / Local Area Agreement (or Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy)?**

The proposed relocation of The Link ELC reflects the clear and urgent requirement to ensure KS4 alternative provision is available beyond 2015 along with the desire of all Head Teachers of Secondary Schools and Academies and the Local Authority to reorganise the way that the needs of these students are met – effectively addressing issues of poor achievement, expectations and progression as highlighted in the Ofsted inspection report on existing provision.

#### **6.2 How is risk being managed?**

Officers will maintain and monitor a Risk Register to record, action and mitigate any financial and non-financial risks that the project may expose the Council to.

#### **6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?**

This new educational facility will mean improved energy consumption and reduced maintenance calls on Council budgets.

## **6.4 Equalities / EIA**

- 6.4.1 Public authority decision makers are under a duty to have due regard to 1) the need to eliminate discrimination, 2) advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not 3) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not (public sector equality duty - s 149(1) Equality Act 2010). The applicable protected characteristics are disability, gender reassignment; race, religion or belief, sex; sexual orientation, pregnancy or maternity.
- 6.4.2 Decision makers must be consciously thinking about these three aims as part of their decision making process with rigour and with an open mind. The duty is to have “due regard”, not to achieve a result but to have due regard to the need to achieve these goals. Consideration being given to the potential adverse impacts and the measures needed to minimise any discriminatory effects.
- 6.4.3 The relocation of the The Link ELC into newly refurbished accommodation will support the Council’s aims of improving the attainment of different groups of students, including boys and girls, different minority ethnic groups, transient students, Looked After Children, children living in poverty and students with Special Educational Needs. Recent Equality Impact Assessments on the work of Birth-11 and 11-19 Learning and Achievement Service have both concluded that the Service continues to have a positive equalities impact. The new facility will be Equality Act 2010 compliant.

## **6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment**

Coventry's schools currently account for 28% of the City's carbon footprint and this project will support the reduction of that level through vacating old school buildings and relocating to more modern, energy efficient facilities. The Carbon Reduction Commitment (CRC) Energy Efficiency Scheme as amended is a mandatory carbon emissions tax covering non-energy intensive users in both public and private sectors, and is a central part of the UK's strategy to deliver the emission reduction targets set in the Climate Change Act 2008. Emissions from schools (including PFI Schools) are now to be excluded in the total reported carbon emissions for their participating Local Authority, however it is important as a policy issue to ensure we are utilising more energy efficient and reduced carbon footprint buildings.

## **6.6 Implications for partner organisations?**

None

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