

Brighton and Hove City Council

For general release

Meeting: Children, Families and Schools Sub-Committee

Date: Monday 26 April 2004

Report of: Director, Children Families and Schools

Subject: Actions Required to New Post –16 Facility for Students With Severe and Complex Learning Difficulties.

Wards affected: All

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To inform Members of the actions required to establish the new facility.
- 1.2 To seek Members approval to the consultation arrangements and publication of statutory proposals to establish a new facility for post –16 students with severe and complex learning difficulties co-located with Varndean Sixth Form College on their site.
- 1.3 Following the conditional grant of the Brighton and Hove Council bid to the Targeted Capital Fund for the construction of this new facility, statutory notices must be published by 30th May 2004.
- 1.4 To seek authority for the Director of Children Families and Schools to commence negotiations with Varndean Sixth Form College for a lease of land to be used for the new SEN centre. (Policy and Resources Committee, on 31 March 2004, has already given authority in principle for any land transactions associated with this proposal.)

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the arrangements for consultation by the Director Children, Families and Schools (which will already have commenced by 26 April 2004) be endorsed
- 2.2 That the Director of Children, Families and Schools be authorised to publish statutory notices to establish the new facility, following the period of formative consultation with all stakeholders.

- 2.3 That the Director of Children Families and Schools be authorised to commence negotiations with Varndean Sixth Form College for a lease of land to be used for the new SEN centre.

3. Background

- 3.1 There has been a long held aspiration in Brighton and Hove to provide a purpose built, high quality facility for students with severe, profound and complex learning difficulties that would be inclusive in nature. Co-location at Varndean Sixth Form College will offer this inclusive experience while enhancing the experience of the mainstream post-16 students choosing the College.
- 3.2 The current accommodation for post-16 students with severe, profound and complex learning difficulties is inappropriate and fails to meet access standards under the Disability Discrimination Act. The two residential properties and demountable classroom with temporary planning permission could not economically be made compliant nor is there scope for accommodating all post-16 students together.
- 3.3 Success in bidding to the Targeted Capital Fund is welcome: there is a tight timetable to which the Council must adhere. The capital allocation is conditional upon obtaining planning permission and (if there are any public objections to the proposal) School Organisation Committee approval for the establishment of the new facility. A project team is working on building design and will be responsible for the necessary planning applications.
- 3.4 The new SEN centre is to be built on land in the ownership of Varndean Sixth Form College. The governors of Varndean Sixth Form College are only willing for the centre to be constructed on their land if the Council commit to an up-front payment for the lease of the land. In pure commercial terms there is little or no value to this land. However it is possible to negotiate a price for the land on the basis of an 'opportunity cost'. Without the land the SEN centre cannot be built.

4. Consultation

- 4.1 Intensive discussions are being held with the governors of the two special schools and of Varndean Sixth Form College, to determine the most efficient and effective structure of governance and management for the innovative new facility.
- 4.2 As part of the formative consultation, meetings for parents of students in the two schools for students with severe learning difficulties – Downs View School and Hillside School – will be held. There will be a consultation meeting for students, staff and parents at Varndean Sixth Form College. Other stakeholders will be consulted by correspondence.

- 4.3 The publication of statutory notices opens a six week representation period during which anyone may make objections to or comments on the proposals to the Director of Children, Families and Schools. If there are any objection which are not withdrawn before the end of the Representation period, the Local Education Authority (LEA) must comment on all the representations received within four weeks of the close of the representation period and place the matter before the School Organisation Committee for decision.
- 4.4 If there are no objections, the LEA may proceed to implementation without reference to the School Organisation Committee.