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| SUBJECT: | PROPOSAL TO CONSULT ON THE CLOSURE OF MOUNTON HOUSE SPECIAL SCHOOL |
| MEETING: | CABINET |
| DATE: | 6th MARCH 2019 |
| DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: | ALL |

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 Over the last two years, officers in the Children and Young People's Directorate have worked with colleagues across Monmouthshire schools and the within the authority to put in place effective provision to support our vulnerable learners. A particular facet of that work has been to focus on needs of children with challenging behaviour.
- 1.2 In a previous consultation exercise, Cabinet considered the future of Mounton House Special School as a part of the wider review. Ultimately, it was determined not to progress and to retain the status quo. Following further review the purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet's agreement to consult on the closure of Mounton House Special School.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

To agree to consult on the closure of Mounton House Special School.

3. KEY ISSUES:

Background

Mounton House Special School is a single sex boy's school with a designation of pupils with Social Emotional Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) aged 11 – 16. In recent times, Mounton House has been on an important recovery journey. It was placed in Significant Improvement by Estyn and categorised as a red i.e. a school requiring the highest levels of support. The school, its staff and partners have worked hard and were removed from that Estyn categorisation and have moved to the yellow category, indicating a requirement of a lower level of support.

Last year Cabinet agreed to consult on a series of reforms to Monmouthshire's Additional Learning Needs (ALN) provision. At the heart of these was the ambition was to recreate Mounton House Special School as a special school hub for pupils with SEBD and Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) across the county serving both boys and girls of all ages from seven to 16 (or potentially 19)

However, the capital costs associated with that transformation were far in excess of the cost envelope that had been identified in the business planning process. The final design

costs were c £6.4m compared to a prudential borrowing planning expectation of approximately £2m. We have continued to look at the provision of services for vulnerable learners since that decision and Mounton House has been a key part of our thoughts and considerations. The central question we have asked ourselves is how do we maximise the support that we make available to our vulnerable learners? In light of that question, we have re-reviewed the current provision in Mounton House; we have looked at three key areas:

Strategic

The needs of students are becoming increasingly complex; the broad heading of SEBD now covers a multitude of contributing conditions. We now better understand attachment disorder, the impact and consequences of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and the impact of childhood traumas and their impact on children and young people. Equally, developments in neuroscience are helping us to understand why children present and behave in certain ways. In addition to this, there are a growing number of students with ASD within Monmouthshire, for which suitable placements need to be found.

The provision in MHSS is, due to its current designation, too narrowly focused on boys alone and those children of a secondary age this means we are unable to meet the needs of many of our children with additional needs and vulnerabilities. We currently place all girls and younger pupils in out of county placements; these can be costly (both in terms of the placement and additional transportation costs). Furthermore, 'out of county' placements mean that children are educated away from their own community and friendship groups.

Financial:

Pupils attending Mounton House from other authorities pay a placement cost of £42,304 for a day placement and £71,739 for a residential placement, however, this does not recover the whole cost of running the school which has resulted in Monmouthshire County Council having to subsidise these places.

The financial cost of running Mounton House in the financial year 2018/19 is £1,559,952, allowing for reduced levels of recoupment the net cost to Monmouthshire County Council was £803,120. The low numbers of Monmouthshire pupils in the school means that the residual cost to the Authority for our own pupils is currently £114,731. In the next academic year this will rise to £232,238 in September 2019.

In order to compare these costs to other providers in the market place an annual placement in Headlands Special School is £45,000 and Tallocher, an independent school in Monmouthshire is c. £65,000.

Economic:

Over the last seven years, the number of pupils on roll in Mounton House have reduced significantly; in January 2015 there were 42 pupils on roll, today the current number on roll is 21. Of these, two are residential pupils and seven reside in Monmouthshire. None of the residential pupils are from Monmouthshire.

We anticipate that from September 2019 there will be 12 students on roll with four residing in Monmouthshire. There will not be any residential students.

The economic case asks us to consider whether this provides the authority with value for money.

Conclusion:

Looking across the three areas set out above there are clearly challenges for the school. However, it is critical to recognise that there is significant resource and expertise in Mounon House Special School that is without question. The challenge for the Children and Young People's Directorate is how to access that knowledge and resource so that it benefits as many of our young people as possible. The structure now does not easily allow the wider education or children's services community access to that expertise.

Based on the factors set out above and in discussions with senior colleagues and politicians we have resolved that the most appropriate route of action is to consult on the closure of MHSS. The consultation paper is attached in appendix 1 and includes timelines for the consultation period.

4. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

The consultation paper lays out four options, these are detailed in section 7.1. These are:

- i. Do nothing and maintain status quo.
- ii. Develop a commissioned agreement with an independent provider to deliver SEBD provision on behalf of the Local Authority.
- iii. To change the type of provision offered at Mounon House Special School to meet the requirements of the in county growing need.
- iv. To close Mounon House Special School to allow the Council an opportunity to develop more appropriate provision.

Option 4 is the preferred option.

5. REASONS:

The reasons that this request have been brought forward are set out above. The financial cost and the consequential costs for Monmouthshire pupils makes the provision financially unsustainable. The number of pupils attending the school from out of county has reduced as authorities either develop their own provision or look to provide support in their local schools. Full details of the decision are outlined in the consultation document.

6. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

These are outlined in section 9.5 of the consultation document.

7. WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS IMPLICATIONS (INCORPORATING EQUALITIES, SUSTAINABILITY, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

This is included in appendix 3 of the consultation document.

8. CONSULTEES:

Senior Leadership Team
Departmental Management Team
Employee services

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Pupil Data
Budgets
School Organisation Code

10. AUTHOR:

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