

OPEN

Children and Families Committee

11 November 2024

Proposed expansion of Springfield School onto satellite site at Cledford House, Middlewich and: -

Proposed Expansion of Springfield School - Wilmslow campus

Report of: Theresa Leavy, Executive Director of Childrens Services

Report Reference No: CF/32/24-25

Ward(s) Affected: All

Purpose of Report

- 1 To report on the outcomes of the public consultation as to whether Springfield School, Crewe should expand onto a satellite site formally known as Cledford House, Middlewich. The proposed expansion would provide additional places for 60 pupils between the ages of 4 – 11 from September 2026.
- 2 To report on the outcomes of the public consultation as to whether Springfield School - Wilmslow campus should expand by an additional 20 places for pupils between the ages of 4 -16 from September 2025
- 3 The report seeks approval for both proposed expansion schemes to increase capacity and help meet the Council's priority to increase opportunities for children, young adults, and adults with additional needs through the expansion of local Special Educational Needs and or Disabilities (SEND) provision allowing more children to attend a school within Cheshire East and their local community.
- 4 The report seeks approval for the procurement of a contract of works for both proposed expansion schemes and for each to be named as a scheme within the Children and Families capital programme.

Executive Summary

- 5 As a Strategic Commissioner of school places, Cheshire East Council has a statutory duty to ensure sufficiency of school places to meet the demand of the residents. Having the right educational placement for all children and young people is key to supporting children and young people to achieve their

potential and to develop the range of skills and experiences they need to equip them for adulthood.

- 6 This paper outlines a proposal to make use of an existing Cheshire East Council asset (Cledford House) as a satellite school site for the purpose of an expansion of Springfield School, Crewe. This expansion will provide a specialist setting for 60 pupils aged 4 – 11 with a range of Special Education Needs including Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC), Severe Learning difficulties (SLD) and Multiple Learning Difficulties (MLD).
- 7 In addition, the paper outlines a proposal to expand Springfield School - Wilmslow campus by an additional 20 places for pupils between the ages 4 to 16 increasing the overall capacity from the current 80 places to 100 places. Again, this proposal will make use of an existing Cheshire East asset, Dean Row Community Centre, which will provide the site for the additional accommodation and is located next to Springfield School – Wilmslow campus.
- 8 The proposals will contribute to the Council's priority to ensure that all children have a high quality, enjoyable education that enables them to achieve their full potential.
- 9 The expansions detailed in this report are key mitigations within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) management plan 2024/25 to 2030/31 and are integral to the plans of achieving financial sustainability in the future by increasing local specialist provision and becoming less reliant on the independent sector.
- 10 Cheshire East have been awarded £16.6m capital funding as part of the DfE Safety Valve programme. The capital bid included the schemes outlined in this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Families Committee is recommended to:

1. Approve the proposed expansion of Springfield School, Crewe onto the satellite site formally known as Cledford House, Middlewich to provide 60 places for pupils aged 4-11 from September 2026.
2. To approve Springfield school satellite – Middlewich (former Cledford House) as a named scheme within the Children and Families capital programme.
3. Approve the procurement of a contract of works and delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services to award a construction contract to facilitate the provision of additional places at Springfield School satellite – Middlewich (former Cledford House) together with any other agreements associated with or ancillary to the contract.
4. Approve the proposed expansion of Springfield School - Wilmslow campus to provide an additional 20 places for pupils aged 4-16 from September 2025.

5. To approve Springfield School - Wilmslow campus expansion as a named scheme within the Children and Families capital programme.
6. Approve the procurement of a contract of works and delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services to award a construction contract to facilitate the provision of additional places at Springfield School – Wilmslow campus (former Dean Row Community Centre) together with any other agreements associated with or ancillary to the contract.

Background

- 11 In 2023 the Council published online its updated Sufficiency Statement for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs. This document highlights the specialist provision necessary within the Borough and provides the evidence base for the associated SEN plan 2023 – 2026.
- 12 The Council's Sufficiency Statement has informed the need for additional specialist places in the Borough. An opportunity to provide for these additional placements at this new satellite site in Middlewich and the expansion of the existing Wilmslow campus has been identified.
- 13 Cheshire East currently has six special schools: Springfield School (including Springfield Wilmslow satellite campus); Park Lane School; Adelaide School; Adelaide Heath; Church Lawton School and Axis School, supporting 683 pupils (May 2024 census data) with an education health and care plan (EHCP).
- 14 Cheshire East has 155 mainstream schools and 300+ settings, the ratio for special school provision and overall schools is insufficient to meet growing SEND needs and this has been the case since Cheshire East Council came into existence in 2009.
- 15 The borough's special schools are currently at full capacity or operating above capacity; this has resulted in an over reliance on the independent sector. The cost of placements within the independent sector are considerably higher than special school placements.
- 16 The overall strategy being adopted by the Council is to increase local SEND provisions and enhance SEND support services to ensure needs are met in the most effective way across mainstream schools, mainstream schools with resource provisions, creating additional places in existing special schools and the provision of new special schools.
- 17 In January 2024, Cheshire East Children and Families Service, submitted its application for Safety Valve Capital Funding, this included 2 x 60 place SEND primary schools, 20 place expansion of Springfield School – Wilmslow campus, 1 x 14 place SEN unit and additional funding to support further resource provisions and SEN units within mainstream settings across the borough.

- 18 On 1 May 2024, the DfE confirmed that the majority of the application had been approved and the Council has been allocated an additional £16,574,250 of grant funding to support these proposals.
- 19 The location of both these school sites compliments the special schools we already have across the borough and will support the reduction in transport time for learners and associated costs. The challenges of long journey times for our most vulnerable learners are a real concern and we know that too many learners are travelling more than two hours to and from school each day which impacts significantly to their emotional wellbeing and to our overall budget pressures. Having an improved distribution of provisions across the borough will allow for learners wherever possible to attend a local school to meet their needs, with increased local community support allowing parents/carers to invest into their local SEN provision.
- 20 These proposals will provide additional specialist school placements which would mean children having a school place within their local area whilst helping the Council manage the overspend on its Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).
- 21 To date the Council has undertaken several schemes to meet the findings of its Sufficiency Statement including: -
- A new 48 place school “The Axis Academy” in Crewe
 - The expansion of Park Lane School, Macclesfield by 40 places.
 - The initial opening of the Springfield School - Wilmslow campus which created 80 places.
 - Two expansions at Springfield School, Crewe totalling an additional 104 places.
 - Establishment of several resource provision bases, including a new 14 place provision at Shavington Academy
- 22 The sufficiency statement updated in 2023 acknowledged the need for additional places and evidenced the increase in the number of pupils with an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP)
- 23 The opportunity to make use of both Cledford House and Dean Row Community Centre, for the purpose of SEND school accommodation has been considered and supported by the Council’s Asset Board.
- 24 Asset Management have undertaken a number of surveys on behalf of Children’s Services which have indicated that both buildings are structurally sound.

Consultation and Engagement

- 25 In accordance with the guidance issued by the Department for Education, “Making significant Changes (‘prescribed alterations’) to maintained schools” which came into force October 2024. Statutory guidance for proposers and decision makers: -

- The statutory publication notice in respect of expanding Springfield School, Crewe onto a satellite site formally known as at Cledford House was published in the Northwich Guardian on 12 September 2024.
- The statutory publication notice in respect of expanding Springfield Wilmslow Campus was published in the Manchester Weekly News – Wilmslow Edition on the 12 September 2024.

- 26 Both consultations ran for the same for 4-week period between 13 September 2024 and 11 October 2024. Committee Members are advised that this statutory process provides the opportunity for any person with an interest to submit representations, these can be objections as well as expressions of support for the proposals. Committee Members must take any views received into account when deciding whether to approve the proposal.
- 27 The consultations were notified to key stakeholders in both the Middlewich and Wilmslow areas including Ward Members, MP's, the Diocese and Parish Councils. Information was available on the County web page and local primary and secondary schools in both areas were emailed and provided with a letter for them to distribute to their parents and carers with information about the consultation and how they may feedback their views. Notification of the consultations and how to feed back their views was also published in the School Bulletin weeks beginning 9 and 23 September 2024.
- 28 The consultation documents provided information including the need for places, proposed alterations to the buildings and objectives of the proposal.
- 29 A copy of the consultation document for the Springfield satellite site at Cledford House is attached as Appendix 1. Copy of the Springfield Wilmslow proposal is attached as Appendix 2.
- 30 The statutory consultation closed on 11 October 2024.
- 31 During the consultation the authority received 6 responses regarding the Springfield satellite site, Cledford House proposal all of which supported the scheme. Appendix 3 gives a summary of the consultation feedback.
- 32 In respect of the Springfield Wilmslow campus proposal, the authority has received 64 responses, 39 responders supported the proposal, 22 responders did not support the proposal and a further 3 respondents had "no view". Appendix 4 gives a summary of the consultation feedback and any mitigation considered necessary regarding issues raised during the consultation period.
- 33 One of the key concerns raised by the responders who did not support the proposal was the loss of community facilities. Springfield School is very keen to work with community groups to address these concerns raised and allow community use of the premises outside of school hours. In addition to this there is also facilities at Oakenclough Family Hub that can be utilised by community groups.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 34 The recommendations are made based on the publication of a public notice and the outcomes of the subsequent statutory consultation period.
- 35 By delivering both schemes the Council will provide up to an additional 80 places across the 2 sites.
- 36 Both proposals will meet the Council's priority to increase opportunities for children and young people with additional needs through the expansion of local SEND provision allowing more children and young people to attend a school within Cheshire East and their local community.
- 37 Both proposals will also help the Council with its priority to ensure that all children have a high quality, enjoyable education that enables them to achieve their full potential through supporting the Council's sufficiency shortfall and the differing needs of its children as a result of a growing population.
- 38 The proposals have been included within the DSG management plan 2024/25 to 2030/31.
- 39 Children's Services has identified that it can fully fund the projects within its existing funding streams available as a result of the successful Safety Valve Capital bid application.
- 40 The service works closely with colleagues in the assets team to identify potential local sites to address the forecast need for specialist school places across the borough. The sites detailed in this paper offer options that officers feel are deliverable subject to statutory approvals.

Other Options Considered

- 41 The option to do nothing and not increase mainstream and special school provisions across the borough would result in a failure to meet our statutory duties as a commissioner of school places and incur increasing costs for out of borough SEN places.
- 42 The option to continue to place SEND learners in placements out of borough or in independent specialist provisions is not considered appropriate as this will result in a continuation of unaffordable financial pressures on the High Needs DSG budget.

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing and not increase mainstream and special school provisions across the borough	This would result in a failure to meet our statutory duties as a commissioner of school places and incur increasing costs for out of borough SEN places	High

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

43 Under section 14 of the Education Act 1996 local authorities have a statutory duty to ensure that there are sufficient schools for primary and secondary education in their areas.

44 Under the DfE guidance “Making significant changes (“prescribed alterations”) to maintained schools Statutory Guidance for proposers and decision - makers October 2024. Local Authorities can propose an enlargement of the premises of community, foundation, voluntary schools, and special schools. When proposing an alteration to a special school they must follow the statutory process as set out in the Prescribed Alterations Regulations if:

The proposed enlargement of the premises of the school is permanent (longer than three years) and would increase the capacity of the school by:

- 10% or
- 20 pupils (5 for all boarding special schools), (whichever is the smaller number).

The Schools Admission Code does not apply to special schools. For a special school, the ‘number of pupils ‘means the maximum number of pupils the school is set up to provide for (which is not necessarily the same as the number of pupils actually attending the school).

45 Where proposers seek to expand onto an additional site, they will need to ensure that the new provision is genuinely a change to an existing school and not in reality the establishment of a new school.

46 Judgements about whether a proposal represents a genuine expansion will need to be taken on a case-by-case basis, but proposers and decision makers will need to consider this non-exhaustive list of factors which are intended to expose the extent to which the new site is integrated with the existing site, and the extent to which it will serve the same community as the existing site. The more integration, the more likely the change is an expansion:

- **The reasons for the expansion**

- What is the rationale for this approach and this particular site?

- **Admission and curriculum arrangements**

- How will the new site be used (e.g. which age groups/pupils will it serve)?
- Will there be movement of pupils between sites?

- **Governance and administration**

- How will whole school activities be managed?
- Will staff be employed on contracts to work on both sites? How frequently will they do so?
- What governance, leadership and management arrangements will be put in place to oversee the new site (e.g. will the new site be governed by the same governing body and the same school leadership team)?

- **Physical characteristics of the school**

- How will facilities across the 2 sites be used (e.g. sharing of the facilities and resources available at the 2 sites, such as playing fields)?
- Is the new site in an area that is easily accessible to the community that the current school serves?

47 When exercising functions under the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools (England) Regulations 2013 local authorities, governing bodies and the Schools Adjudicator must follow the DfE guidance “Making significant changes (“prescribed alterations”) to maintained schools Statutory Guidance for proposers and decision - makers October 2024 unless there is good reason not to. The prescribed alterations statutory process consists of 5 stages -:

Stage	Action	Comments	Dates
Stage 1	Publication	Statutory proposal notice published	12 September 2024
Stage 2	Representation	Must be at least 4 weeks as in the regulations	13 September 2024 to 11 October 2024
Stage 3	Decision	The decision maker (LA) must make a decision on the proposal within 2 months of the end of the representation period or the decision defaults to the School Adjudicator (OSA)	Children and Families Committee 11 November 2024
Stage 4	Referral (if applicable)	If a decision has been made, any referral to the adjudicator must be made within 4 weeks of the decision. If the local authority has not decided a proposal within 2 months, it must refer the proposal to the Schools Adjudicator	Decision has been made within the 2 months
Stage 5	Implementation	Dependent on the Committee decision	Proposed January 2025

48 If a local authority fails to make a decision about a proposal within 2 months of the end of the Representation Period the local authority must forward the proposal, and any representations received, excluding those withdrawn in writing, to the Schools Adjudicator for a decision.

- 49 Committee members must have regard to the statutory guidance when making their decision. The statutory guidance provides that *Decision makers will need to be satisfied that the appropriate fair and open representation period has been carried out..... Decision makers should not simply take account of the numbers of people expressing a particular view. Instead, they should give the greatest weight to responses from those stakeholders likely to be most affected by a proposal – especially parents of children at the affected school(s).*
- 50 The local authority has a legal duty to ensure that any decision it makes is transparent and has been made applying the Wednesbury principles and it has a rationale for the decision made.
- 51 With regard to consultation there are guiding principles that must be followed if the consultation is to be fair. These are known as ‘the Gunning principles’:
- Proposals are still at a formative stage - A final decision has not yet been made, or predetermined, by the decision makers.
 - There is sufficient information to give ‘intelligent consideration’ - The information provided must relate to the consultation and must be available, accessible, and easily interpretable for consultees to provide an informed response.
 - There is adequate time for consideration and response - There must be sufficient opportunity for consultees to participate in the consultation.
 - ‘Conscientious consideration’ must be given to the consultation responses before a decision is made. Decision-makers should be able to provide evidence that they took consultation responses into account.
- 52 When issuing a decision, the decision maker can:
- (i) Reject the proposal.
 - (ii) Approve the proposal with modification.
 - (iii) Approve the proposal with modifications, having consulted whichever of the local authority and/or governing body that has not proposed the modification; or
 - (iv) Approve the proposal, with or without modification (having consulted on any modifications as mentioned above) subject to certain conditions (such as the granting of planning permission) being met.
- 53 It will be necessary to consider what steps if any have been taken or are needed to be taken in relation to the disposal of public open space and appropriation of land with the legal services and estates team.

- 54 Legal will work with the procurement team with a view to ensuring that the construction contracts are procured so as to comply with the provisions of The Public Contract Regulations via frameworks available to the Council and with a view to ensuring that the same represent best value for money.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 55 In January 2024, Cheshire East Children and Families Service, submitted its application for Safety Valve Capital Funding, this included 2 x 60 place SEND primary schools, 20 place expansion of Springfield (Wilmslow), 1 x 14 place SEN unit and additional funding to support further resource provisions and SEN units within mainstream settings across the borough. On 1 May 2024, the DfE confirmed that the majority of the application had been approved and the Council has been allocated an additional £16,574,250 of grant funding to support these proposals.
- 56 Children and Families Committee agreed to a budget allocation of up to £6,000,000 for the scheme “New Satellite Special School -1” at its meeting on the 3 June 2024.” Following approval by committee at its meeting on the 11 November 2024, this scheme will be named in the Children and Families capital programme as “Springfield school satellite – Middlewich (former Cledford House)”.
- 57 Children and Families Committee agreed to a budget allocation of up to £1,000,000 for the scheme “New SEN places – 1” at its meeting on the 3 June 2024”. Following approval by committee at its meeting on the 11 November 2024, this scheme will be named in the Children and Families capital programme as “Springfield Wilmslow campus expansion”.
- 58 Cheshire East revenue base budgets will not be impacted by the expansions. Any costs relating to the running of a Special school is managed within the school’s budget, mainly funded by their allocation of the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant.

Policy

- 59 As referred to in paragraph 34, the proposals will meet the Council’s priority to increase opportunities for children and young people with additional needs through the expansion of local SEND provision allowing more children to attend a school within Cheshire East and their local community.
- 60 As referred to in paragraph 7 the proposals will also help the Council with its priority to ensure that all children have a high quality, enjoyable education that enables them to achieve their full potential.
- 61 The proposals will allow more parents in Cheshire East to find a placement at an Ofsted rated “Outstanding” school.

- 62 By providing an additional 60 places on the former Cledford House and 20 places at Springfield Wilmslow, this will support the Council with its programme to provide more in borough specialist school placements keeping more children in their local area, reducing their travel time, and allowing them to build friendships with people who live close to them.
- 63 By providing more local school places within Cheshire East the scheme will allow for considerable savings as highlighted in above thus allowing the Council to make best use of its resources.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 64 Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) have been completed in respect of both proposals.
- Appendix 5 is the EIA in respect of the proposed Springfield School satellite site at Cledford House which concluded that the proposal would have an overall positive impact on several of the areas – specifically parents and carers and young people and a neutral impact on remaining factors,
 - Appendix 6 is the EIA in respect of Springfield Wilmslow expansion which concluded that the proposal would have an overall positive impact on several of the areas – specifically parents and carers and young people and a neutral impact on remaining factors,

Human Resources

- 65 There are no additional human resource implications for the Council, but the school are aware that the increase in numbers on roll and the use of a satellite site will require additional staffing costs which would be funded through their budget.
- 66 The current Headteacher would maintain overall responsibility for all Springfield sites, with a Head of school located at each site. Due to the current leadership team being established and experienced, the school feels confident with this model.

Risk Management

- 67 There are inherent risks associated with any construction project and attempts to mitigate any risks will be managed through regular project meetings and a risk register as the scheme develops.
- 68 At this stage the following risks have been identified in relation to the proposed use of the former Cledford House and the proposed expansion of Springfield Wilmslow campus.

Risk Management - Cledford House

- Programme – It is anticipated that the new premises Springfield satellite site Cledford House will be available for occupation by Springfield School in time for the September 2026 intake.
- Planning Permission – Planning Permission will be necessary for this proposal.
- Force Majeure – The global Covid pandemic has identified that there can be some risks that on impact cannot be mitigated against and will inevitably cause some delay, disruption, and any additional costs.

Risk Management- Springfield Wilmslow

- Programme- It is anticipated that the premises expansion of the Springfield Wilmslow campus will be ready for occupation by September 2025.
- Planning Permission – Planning Permission will be necessary to seek a change of use from E(f) Community Centre to F1(a) provision of education and for any potential new build. An added risk to planning is the current delays in achieving approvals.
- Force Majeure – The global Covid pandemic has identified that there can be some risks that on impact cannot be mitigated against and will inevitably cause some delay, disruption, and any additional costs.

Rural Communities

- 69 The proposals will create more specialist school placements within the administrative areas of Middlewich and Wilmslow which in turn will allow more parents from rural areas within the Borough to have access to provision.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

- 70 In accordance with the programme to provide more specialist school places within Cheshire East, these proposals will provide more spaces for children to learn and develop friendships with other local children.
- 71 The savings made from providing better value school places will allow for more efficient budgeting by the Service which in turn will reduce pressure on the ring-fenced High Needs budget.

Public Health

- 72 There are no direct implications for public health however by providing more places within Cheshire East the in accordance with 66 above there will be benefit to the children's mental wellbeing in developing relationships with other local children and by reducing the travel to schools will allow families to spend more time together.

Climate Change

- 73 Where possible systems that save on energy consumption will be considered, particularly for electricity.
- 74 The internal works required to update the Cledford House building and Dean Row Community Centre to make both buildings fit for purpose will include a comprehensive review of the impact on climate factors.
- 75 Significant changes will take place at both buildings, Cledford House and Dean Row Community Centre, which will require full compliance with the latest building regulations relating to such factors as insulation/heat loss and energy efficiencies. Such factors will be key considerations as the schemes are developed through to full handover.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	<p>Claire Williamson, Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration Claire.williamson@cheshireeast.gov.uk</p> <p>Joanne Prophet, School Organisation and Capital Manager Joanne.prophet@cheshireeast.gov.uk</p>
Appendices:	<p>Appendix 1- Consultation Document for Springfield satellite Site at Cledford House</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Consultation Document for Springfield Wilmslow</p> <p>Appendix 3 – Consultation Feedback Springfield satellite site – Cledford House</p> <p>Appendix 4 – Consultation Feedback Springfield Wilmslow campus</p> <p>Appendix 5 – Equality Impact Assessment - Springfield satellite site, Cledford House</p> <p>Appendix 6 Equality Impact Assessment- Springfield Wilmslow</p>
Background Papers:	<p>SEND Sufficiency statement 2023-2026</p> <p>Revised Dedicated Schools grant Management Plan 2024/25 to 2030/31 C&F Committee 29 April 24 CEC Report Template (cheshireeast.gov.uk)</p> <p>Children and Families Committee 03 June 2024, Children and Families Capital Programme https://moderngov.cheshireeast.gov.uk/ecminutes/documents/s117508/Capital%20Programme%20Report.pdf</p>

	<p>Safety Valve DSG Management Plan.pdf (cheshireeast.gov.uk)</p>
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[Making significant changes \(“prescribed alterations”\) to maintained schools Statutory Guidance for proposers and decision - makers October 2024](#)