



CABINET

Subject Heading:

Implementation of a 30 place Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND) Unit at The Royal Liberty School for pupils with Communication & Interaction (C&I) needs

Cabinet Member:

Councillor Oscar Ford, Cabinet Member for Children & Young People

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Policy context:

Havering's SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy emphasises the local authority's vision to ensure children, young people, and families have access to the same level of high-quality support and education, wherever they live in Havering. That children and young people with SEND can access the help and support they need to thrive and achieve within their local communities, that they can go to local education provision that meets their needs, access services and play an active role in the community close to where they live.

Financial summary:

The cost of Building works required to provide a SEND unit at Royal Liberty School has been estimated at £2.7m and this will be funded from within the High Needs Provision Capital Allocation (HNPCA).

SEND Units in Havering will be normally funded in accordance with a Place Led Funding approach that complies with the

Government's SEND Funding Reforms that came into effect in April 2018.

For each place in the SEND unit, The Royal Liberty School will receive £30,000 from Revenue grant funding (DSG). This is made up of £10,000 'place funding' and £20,000 (2025/26 rate) 'top-up funding'.

Is this a Key Decision?

Yes as expenditure arising from implementation of the recommendations is likely to exceed £500,000

When should this matter be reviewed?

September 2027

Reviewing OSC:

People

The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives

People - Supporting our residents to stay safe and well X
Place - A great place to live, work and enjoy
Resources - Enabling a resident-focused and resilient Council

SUMMARY

To support the implementation of a SEND Unit at The Royal Liberty School from September 2027.

School	SEND Unit	No of pupils
The Royal Liberty School	Communication & Interaction Needs (ASD – Autistic Spectrum Disorder and SLCN – Speech Language and Communication Needs)	30 (11-16 years)

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To allocate £2.7 from the High Needs Provision Capital Grant towards the payments as set out in the attached grant agreement.
2. To enter into the grant agreement in the form attached at Appendix 3.
3. To authorise Director of Starting Well to make changes to the grant agreement (including amendment to payment schedule and milestones) provided that the grant funding shall not exceed £2.7m.

REPORT DETAIL

1. The number of EHCPs is forecast to increase (as seen in the table below) for all four main SEND types with Communication and Interaction and Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs (SEMH) due to see the highest growth.

There is a need for additional SEND places in the borough to meet the growing need.

Academic year	Cognition and Learning	Communication and Interaction	SEMH	Sensory and/or Physical	Total
2024/25	600	1813	582	256	3252
2025/26	646	2165	718	295	3823
2026/27	692	2534	864	342	4432
2027/28	735	2914	1009	392	5050
2028/29	783	3305	1199	443	5730

Havering Borough wide SEND projections

2. Havering's SEND projections show that the number of secondary school pupils with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan is projected to increase with the highest increase in Communication and Interaction.

Havering Secondary SEND projections

Academic year	Cognition and Learning	Communication and Interaction	SEMH	Sensory and/or Physical	Total
2024/25	127	252	181	35	595
2025/26	136	297	216	33	682
2026/27	140	361	245	45	791
2027/28	158	458	278	49	944
2028/29	175	550	364	67	1156

3. There are currently five secondary schools (4 with SEND Units and 1 with a Specially Resourced Provision) totalling 84 places, of which 72 places cater for pupils with Communication and Interaction needs.
4. Given the increasing numbers of C&I pupils with needs which are not severe enough to require a place at a special school, there is a need for additional secondary SEND Units to support these children within a mainstream school setting.
5. The creation of this local specialist provision should reduce the need to place secondary pupils outside of Havering, therefore reducing the cost of out borough placements.
6. The Royal Liberty School is a secondary school, rated by Ofsted as “good” with 750 places across Year 7 to Year 11. The school caters for children with an age range of 11-16 years and is considered by the Local Authority as the most appropriate location for a SEND Unit to be sited.
7. The SEND Unit at The Royal Liberty School will meet the needs of pupils with an EHC plan with C&I needs which are not severe enough to require a place at a special school but who will require spending significant proportions of their time in the SEND Unit. The proposed SEND Unit will enable these pupils to have their additional needs met while accessing education at a secondary school through a flexible approach tailored and adapted to their needs.
8. The new facility will enable young people with C&I needs to have their needs met through a flexible approach, tailored and adapted to the needs of each individual pupil. It will be for pupils who will require specialist support to enable them to access a mainstream secondary curriculum. It is proposed that the children will split their time between the mainstream school and having bespoke support within the Unit
9. The DfE has approved the request to make a significant change to The Royal Liberty School by introducing a SEND Unit for up to 30 places with effect from 1 September 2024 – Appendix 1

REASONS AND OPTIONS

Reasons for the decision:

10. The decision to implement a 30-place SEND Unit at The Royal Liberty School is driven by the significant and growing demand for specialist provision for pupils with Communication & Interaction (C&I) needs, including those with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN), within Havering. Projections indicate a substantial increase in the number of children and young people requiring Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), particularly in the area of C&I, over the coming years.
11. The establishment of this unit will enable more pupils to access high-quality, tailored support within their local community, reducing the need for costly out-of-borough placements and supporting the Council's vision for inclusive education. The Royal Liberty School has been identified as the most appropriate location due to its capacity, suitability, and commitment to inclusive practice. This decision aligns with Havering's SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy, ensuring that children and young people with SEND can thrive and achieve in a mainstream setting with the specialist support they require.
12. SFAET have commissioned a feasibility study and cost plan which estimates the SEND unit will cost £2,681,424. The grant award is for this maximum estimated cost.

Other options considered:

13. In considering how best to meet the growing demand for secondary SEND provision for pupils with Communication & Interaction needs in Havering, a range of options were evaluated:
 - **Expanding existing SEND Units within other secondary schools:** This option was considered but rejected due to limitations in available space and the capacity of current facilities. Most existing units are already operating at or near their maximum numbers, and further expansion would not be sufficient to address projected demand across the borough.
 - **Establishing a new special school:** While this could provide specialist provision for pupils with more severe needs, and Havering is considering opening a new special school in Sep 2027, this is not sufficient and not appropriate for this cohort requiring support. Many pupils with C&I needs benefit from a mainstream environment with targeted support, rather than a segregated setting.
 - **Maintaining the status quo and continuing out-of-borough placements:** This approach was rejected due to the high cost implications and the impact on pupils and families, who would have to travel significant distances. It would also run counter to the Council's commitment to inclusive local education and reducing reliance on external placements.

14. After careful consideration, the creation of a dedicated SEND Unit at The Royal Liberty School was identified as the most cost-effective, inclusive and sustainable solution to meet current and future needs within the borough.

IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

Financial implications and risks:

Capital Implications

The estimated costs for delivering The Royal Liberty School SEND Unit is as follows:

School	SEND Unit	Cost
The Royal Liberty School	Communication and Interaction Needs – 30 place	£2,681,424

Funding by:

Unallocated SEND Capital grant (earmarked for this project) £2,681,424

The risk will be borne by the Academy. Clear contractual arrangements will be needed to ensure that both sides meet their obligations. Funding will be released to the school in line with clear delivery milestones. Details are included within the funding agreement – Appendix 3

Revenue Implications

SEND units in Havering are funded through a place led funding approach that aligns with the Government's SEND funding reforms introduced in April 2018. Revenue for placements comes from the local authority's DfE DSG High Needs allocation. Each agreed place is funded through a combination of 'place funding' and 'top-up funding', with the latter also met from the High Needs allocation.

For each place in the SEND unit, The Royal Liberty School will receive £30,000, comprising £10,000 place funding and £20,000 top-up funding (2025/26 rate).

The financial impact of creating additional local places is determined by the cost that would otherwise have been incurred if pupils required out-of-borough placements.

While a Unit place can be more costly than mainstream provision with individual support, it offers specialist expertise and tailored provision that improves outcomes and can reduce future demand for more intensive support. Crucially, the availability

of local places avoids the significantly higher costs associated with specialist settings outside the borough.

Comparative Costs and Savings

Provision	Per place	30 places cost	Cost saving
Royal Liberty SEN Unit Place cost	£30,000	£900,000	
Out of Borough Maintained Special School	£38,500	£1,155,000	£255,000
Non-maintained & Independent Special Schools	£64,080	£1,922,400	£1,022,400

Based on current placement averages, providing 30 local places at The Royal Liberty SEND Unit delivers substantial revenue mitigation compared with equivalent out-of-borough provision, with potential savings ranging from £255,000 to over £1 million depending on the alternative setting avoided.

Legal implications and risks:

Royal Liberty School is not a maintained school, but is managed and run by a Multi Academy Trust, SFAET Ltd.

The Local Authority's role, therefore, is limited to grant funding the building works to be commissioned by SFAET Ltd. The creation of the SEND unit at Royal Liberty has already been agreed by the DfE (Appendix 1) so there are no more governance steps which need to be taken.

The Local Authority has a duty under section 13 Education Act 1996 as follows:

"13General responsibility for education.

(1)A local authority shall (so far as their powers enable them to do so) contribute towards the spiritual, moral, mental and physical development of the community by securing that efficient primary education, and secondary education and, in the case of a local authority in England, further education, are available to meet the needs of the population of their area."

The grant funding of this SEND Unit will ensure that the Authority can meet its duties under this section.

The terms of the grant have been reviewed by the Council's legal team and are acceptable. The grant is ring fenced funding for the purposes of meeting SEND places as part of SEND Capital grant and will not be used by the Academy for any other purpose unconnected to the Project.

Grant drawdown is based on actual spend so the Council will only pay as much as the building costs up to the maximum amount. In the event the building costs more than provided for in the grant agreement, under the grant agreement the Council is

not bound to cover the excess, although it retains a discretion to do so. Any additional funding will be subject to a further decision.

The value of the grant is below the relevant threshold for the purposes of Procurement Act 2023 (PA23). The Trust is an exempted party for the purposes of PA 23 but when procuring must comply with its internal financial regulations. The Trust's financial regulations are published on its website and provide that when procuring, the Trust must adhere to best value principles.

For the reasons set out above, the Council may enter into the Grant funding arrangement.

Human Resources implications and risks:

The human resources implications for the Academy will be managed by the Trust. There is likely to be a need to recruit additional teaching and support staff and the Academy will undertake the recruitment and selection process in accordance with the Trust's policies and procedures

Equalities implications and risks:

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires the Council, when exercising its functions, to have due regard to:

- (i) The need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- (ii) The need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share protected characteristics and those who do not, and;
- (iii) Foster good relations between those who have protected characteristics and those who do not.

Note: 'Protected characteristics' are age, sex, race, disability, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnerships, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity and gender reassignment.

The Council is committed to all of the above in the provision, procurement and commissioning of its services, and the employment of its workforce. In addition, the Council is also committed to improving the quality of life and wellbeing for all Havering residents in respect of socio-economics and health determinants.

An EqHIA has been carried out and the proposal in this report has been assessed as having a positive impact on groups with a protected characteristic – Appendix 2

Health and Wellbeing implications and Risks

The new SEND Unit block with its classrooms, ancillary spaces and external areas will provide significantly better facilities for the SEND pupils and relevant staff. This

will positively impact the school experience for these pupils by improving the quality of the learning environment. There will be a change to the levels of staffing as the number of pupils will increase. The construction of the extension has been planned such that the children will be impacted as little as possible by the noise. This is fully considered within the contractor's programme. Construction traffic and general noise mitigation has been considered within the planning application and the appointed contractor will strictly adhere to these requirements. Moreover, the purpose of this building is to establish a calm and health-promoting environment for its users, recognising the crucial link with nature. The design, both inside and out, aims to incorporate natural elements, like using natural materials, and create special spaces such as quiet areas, sensory rooms, a soft play room, and a sensory garden. Additionally, the external spaces will feature soft landscaping to create outdoor retreat spaces and provide areas for outdoor learning. These outdoor elements are designed to enhance the overall well-being and experiences of the building's users

ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

New school buildings face significant environmental and climate-related risks, including overheating, flooding, water scarcity, and carbon emissions. These risks must be addressed through sustainable design, climate adaptation, and resilience planning.

To reduce risks and environmental impact, schools are expected to implement:

- Climate Action Plans: By 2025, all schools should have a plan covering decarbonisation, resilience, biodiversity, and climate education.
- Sustainable Design Features:
 - Passive cooling and natural ventilation
 - Rainwater harvesting and greywater systems
 - Solar panels and low-carbon heating
 - Green roofs and permeable surfaces to manage runoff

All these sustainable features will be explored in the new SEND Unit.

Appendix 1 – Significant change approval letter

Appendix 2 - Royal Liberty SEND Unit EHIA

Appendix 3 - Grant Agreement – SFAET LTD

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Cabinet, 10 December 2025

The Royal Liberty School – Feasibility Study for a SEND Unit
SEN Hub The Royal Liberty School Romford Cost Plan