

Our ref: SFF/30/5

Date: 30th June 2023

Dear parent/carer,

I am writing to update you on the Schools for the Future (SFF) Programme. As a new administration, we have pledged to be as open and honest as possible, so we felt it was important to share this news at the earliest opportunity.

The SFF programme has always focused on the move towards a two-tier educational system to improve educational outcomes for all children and young people. Alongside this, the programme included ambitious plans to create additional school capacity in line with the housing growth set out in the Local Plan.

When the new administration took over at Central Bedfordshire Council, we became aware that while work pushed ahead with the programme the full financial cost to the Council was not known and has not been included in the current Council budget calculations.

The current best estimate for delivery of the current Schools for the Future programme is a total of c£300 million. Of this total cost, only £48.5m has been included in the Council's four-year medium-term financial plan, or budget, and there are currently no plans in place for how the total cost of the programme is to be funded.

As a new administration, it would be wrong for us to continue with the current plans for the Schools for the Future programme that are not budgeted for without taking the time to thoroughly consider and plan for such a significant spend over the coming years.

We want to reassure you that we remain totally committed to the transition from a three to two tier education system but need to develop a budget to deliver this programme of work.

We will be taking the next few months to understand the full financial cost of the programme and develop a strategy to ensure future plans are affordable in the Council's budget (medium-term financial plan).

Unfortunately, the area that is most significantly affected by this decision is the Shefford and Stotfold area. This is a large area with your school one of the phase 2 schools that we need to review the approach. The six schools in phase 1 have already changed to two-tier.

Central Bedfordshire Council

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I would also like to take this time to reaffirm our commitment to the Council's wider investment in our school estate. The Council is investing over £140million in maintaining school buildings, adding more school places, building new schools and moving some schools to two-tier over the next four years (this includes the £48.5million mentioned above). Investment will continue but we need to understand the full financial cost of the proposed two-tier programme that is not currently in the Council's budget.

The brand new Houstone School in Houghton Regis is close to opening, the planned improvements to Sandy Secondary School will continue to be delivered and our New School Places programme will also continue to ensure that we have sufficient pupil places in Central Bedfordshire.

We are also committed to improving our provision for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and our work to increase specialist school places at pace remains a priority for us and is unaffected by today's decision.

We recognise that you and your school have already experienced setbacks with the Schools for the Future Programme and this announcement will cause further uncertainty. This is not a decision we have taken lightly, but it is the responsible thing to do.

We will continue to support your school as plans emerge and you can always find the latest status of your school within our plans at the Schools for the Future website: <https://www.schoolsforthefuture.co.uk/>

We will update you again in the autumn, it is our intention to be in a position to set out how the programme will move forward by then. If you have any queries please contact your school in the first instance.

Kind regards
Cllr Hayley Whitaker
Executive Member for Families, Education and Children

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